

- The Last Leaf Summary

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"The Last Leaf" is a poignant short story by O. Henry that revolves around two young artists, Sue and Johnsy, who live together in a small flat. Johnsy falls seriously ill with pneumonia during the cold month of November. Despite medical treatment, the doctor informs Sue that Johnsy has lost the will to live, and her chances of recovery are slim unless her spirit revives.

Sue tries to cheer Johnsy by engaging her in conversations about fashion and art, even bringing her drawing board into the sickroom. However, Johnsy becomes obsessed with the ivy creeper outside her window, which is shedding its leaves. She believes that she will die when the last leaf falls. Sue dismisses this as nonsense, but Johnsy remains fixated on the idea.

Behrman, an elderly artist living on the ground floor, dreams of painting a masterpiece. Upon learning about Johnsy's condition and her belief about the last leaf, he takes action. On a stormy night, when the last leaf is about to fall, Behrman paints a realistic leaf on the wall to give Johnsy hope. This painted leaf does not fall despite the harsh weather, which revives Johnsy's will to live.

Tragically, Behrman catches pneumonia from being out in the cold and dies. His final act of painting the last leaf becomes his masterpiece, symbolizing hope and sacrifice.

Key Words

- **Pneumonia:** A serious lung infection causing coughing, fever, and difficulty breathing.
- **Creepers:** A plant that grows along surfaces like walls or fences.
- **Revived:** To restore life, health, or strength.
- **Shivering:** Involuntary trembling due to cold or fear.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who are the main characters in "The Last Leaf"?
- What illness does Johnsy suffer from?
- What does Johnsy believe about the last leaf on the ivy creeper?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Describe how Sue tries to help Johnsy recover her will to live.
- Who is Behrman and what is his dream?
- Explain the significance of the last leaf in the story.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze the theme of hope and sacrifice in "The Last Leaf." Provide examples from the story.
- Discuss how O. Henry uses symbolism in the story.
- Write a short paragraph on the impact of Behrman's final act on Johnsy's recovery.

Answer Key

Level 1 – Easy

- The main characters are Sue, Johnsy, and Behrman.

- Johnsy suffers from pneumonia.
- Johnsy believes she will die when the last leaf on the ivy creeper falls.

Level 2 – Moderate

- Sue tries to distract Johnsy by talking about fashion and art, bringing her drawing board into the room, and whistling to lift her spirits.
- Behrman is an old painter who dreams of creating a masterpiece.
- The last leaf symbolizes hope and the will to live; its survival gives Johnsy the strength to fight her illness.

Level 3 – Challenging

- The story highlights hope as a powerful force for survival. Behrman's sacrifice in painting the last leaf shows selflessness and love, inspiring Johnsy to live.
- The last leaf is a symbol of hope and endurance. It represents the strength to survive against odds.
- Behrman's act of painting the leaf during a stormy night, risking his own health, ultimately saves Johnsy by restoring her hope.

Quick Reference

- **Author:** O. Henry
- **Setting:** A small flat in an old house during November
- **Main Characters:** Sue, Johnsy, Behrman
- **Theme:** Hope, sacrifice, friendship
- **Literary Devices:** Symbolism (last leaf), irony (Behrman's death)

Glossary

- **Pneumonia:** Lung infection causing breathing difficulties.
- **Creeper:** Plant growing along walls.
- **Revived:** Restored to life or health.

- **Shivering:** Trembling due to cold.

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