

## B1 原著扩展阅读 8 原著阅读实战训练

### THE LAST LEAF

by O. Henry

#### OVERVIEW

- **Author** O. Henry
- **Year Published** 1907
- **Type** Short Story
- **Genre** Fiction

#### AUTHORSHIP

- O. Henry
- 1862 - 1910
- O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter, an American short story writer who is known for his tales about the life of ordinary people, especially in New York. His stories generally expressed the effect of coincidence on character through humour, grim or irony. Above anything else, he is known for his surprise endings. Once his trademark, it finally cost him critical favour.

## **PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS**

### **Sue and Johnsy in New York City**

The story opens with an omniscient narrator's description of Greenwich Village as a part of New York with mixed-up streets that don't follow a formal grid. Many painters come there to live for the "good light ... at a low cost." Two of these painters are Sue and Johnsy, who come from Maine and California respectively. They met in a restaurant and there discovered their similar tastes in art, food, and clothes, so they "decided to live and work together." That happened in the spring.

### **Mr. Pneumonia Shows Up**

Toward winter, the narrator says, a visitor called "Mr. Pneumonia" comes to the Village. The disease touches many people with "icy fingers." He isn't nice; he makes Johnsy, the "weak little woman from California," sick. She takes to her bed, barely moving, and stares out the window at the house next door.

When the doctor comes, he tells Sue that Johnsy can live, but she doesn't seem to have the will to. He asks Sue if there's anything for Johnsy to live for. Sue says that Johnsy always wanted to go to Italy and paint the Bay of Naples. The doctor finds this silly and asks if there's a man in Johnsy's life who is "worth being troubled about." Sue replies, "A

man? Is a man worth—No, doctor. There is not a man." The doctor says that Sue should try to get Johnsy interested in the future. That will improve her chances of living.

## **The Leaves**

After briefly crying, Sue comes into Johnsy's room to paint. Johnsy is staring out the window at a tree that is losing its leaves, counting the remaining leaves. In the space of a few moments she counts down from a dozen to five leaves on the tree, saying, "They're falling faster now."

When the last leaf falls, Johnsy tells the puzzled Sue, she will die. Sue tells Johnsy she is being foolish, and that the doctor said her chances for getting well are very good.

Johnsy refuses Sue's offer of food and watches another leaf fall, leaving four behind. She says she wants to watch the last leaf fall before night; "Then I'll go, too." Sue implores her friend not to look out the window. She is going to paint.

Sue says she needs a male model for her painting and goes to talk to their neighbor, Mike Behrman. Behrman is an old painter who drinks too much and isn't very successful.

He always said he would paint a masterpiece someday, but he never got started. Meanwhile, he does modeling for other artists. He is very fond of Sue and Johnsy.

## **Behrman's Visit**

Sue can tell Behrman has been drinking. She tells him what Johnsy said. He's very upset and thinks it's foolish to die because of a leaf on a tree. Sue says Johnsy is sick and weak, and the sickness "has put these strange ideas into her mind." Behrman says he'll come and model for Sue. He says that someday he'll paint his masterpiece and take them away from here.

Behrman comes up to the floor where Sue and Johnsy live. Johnsy is asleep, and Sue covers the window. Then they go to another room and look fearfully out the window at the tree. They don't speak.

There is a huge storm that night, with snow and rain. Sue spends most of the night painting. Behrman leaves early in the morning, and Sue gets one hour's sleep.

## **In the Morning**

When Sue goes to Johnsy's room in the morning, Johnsy says she wants to see the tree.

Sue uncovers the window. Even with all the rain and snow, one leaf clings to the tree near the wall. It is dark green at the top but yellowing on the ends, and it hangs nearly 20 feet above the ground.

Johnsy is surprised that the leaf is there. Still, she says it will fall that day, and she will die. Sue presses her to be more positive but, the narrator

says, Johnsy's soul is "preparing to go on its far journey." Johnsy is feeling less tied to friendship and the earth with every moment.

Even as it grows dark, however, the two women can see the sole leaf on the tree. There is a driving rain beating against the window.

### **The Last Leaf**

When it is light again, Johnsy commands Sue to uncover the window so she can see if the leaf is gone. It is still there. Johnsy stares at the leaf for a long time. Then she calls Sue over and says it was wrong of her to want to die. Something has made the last leaf stay to show her how bad she was. She asks Sue to bring her mirror, and then she'll watch Sue cook. An hour later, she tells Sue she hopes to someday paint the Bay of Naples. In the afternoon, the doctor comes.

He is pleased that Johnsy is looking better. He tells Sue that he has another patient in the building, old Behrman, who also has pneumonia. Behrman is going to the hospital that day and is going to die. The following day, the doctor comes again and says Johnsy is much better.

That afternoon Sue goes to Johnsy's bed to tell her friend that Mr. Behrman has died of pneumonia. When someone found him in his room, his clothes and shoes were wet and as cold as ice. Everyone wondered where he'd been. Then they found a light, painting materials, and green and yellow paint. Sue points to the tree, which still has one last leaf

hanging from it. She asks Johnsy if she wondered why it never moved, even in the wind.

**The Last Leaf Plot Diagram**



- **Introduction**

1 Johnsy gets pneumonia.

- Rising Action

2 The doctor tells Sue that Johnsy needs something to live for.

3 Johnsy says she will die when the last leaf falls.

4 Sue tells Behrman about Johnsy's plan.

5 The next morning, after a storm, there is one leaf left.

6 The following morning, the last leaf is still there.

- Climax

7 Johnsy sees the last leaf and says she will live.

- Falling Action

8 The doctor tells Sue that Behrman is dying of pneumonia.

- Resolution

9 Sue tells Johnsy that Behrman painted the last leaf.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### • Sue

Sue has come to New York from Maine. She is a painter. While the reader doesn't know exactly what type of art Sue creates, it is clear that she is selling her art. Sue is very affectionate with her roommate, Johnsy, calling her "dear," suggesting they might be in love.

In any case, she takes tender care of Johnsy throughout her illness and worries a great deal. She is also patient with Behrman, an elderly neighbor who has a drinking problem.

### • Johnsy

Johnsy came to New York from California to be an artist. Throughout most of the story, Johnsy is sick, weak, and unreasonably superstitious, believing she will die when the last leaf falls from a tree.

However, in the end, she realizes that she was being foolish and regains her will to live.

### • Mike Behrman

Mike Behrman always wanted to be a great artist. Now in his 60s, he has not lived up to his potential. He always planned to paint a masterpiece, but he never got started, perhaps because of his drinking problem.

However, he is a kind-hearted man who is upset at the idea of Johnsy dying. He goes outside at night in a driving rain to paint the realistic-looking leaf that restores Johnsy's will to live.

### THEME

The idea that friendship makes **sacrifice** worthwhile is a major theme of "The Last Leaf." The self-sacrificing Sue toils to help her sick companion as the elderly Behrman paints in the rain and snow to save Johnsy's life. Both of them fearfully watch the clock, hoping for a miracle.

### FRIENDSHIP IS WORTH SACRIFICE

When Johnsy gets sick, Sue is ready to do anything to help her. She tries to keep Johnsy's spirits up by singing in her room. She coaxes her to eat. She takes time out for her own painting, but only so that she can sell her painting and earn money to help Johnsy. Finally, she pours her heart out to her elderly neighbor, Behrman.



Johnsy's illness and the idea of her death make Behrman angry. With Sue, he spends the night worrying, staring out the window. He may not have accomplished much in life, but he is a generous man.

He dreams of painting a masterpiece so that he may take his friends somewhere warmer. Finally, he decides to sacrifice his own health and life by going out into the bitter cold and rain to help his friend.

The concept of worth is touched on when the doctor asks if there is "anything worth [Johnsy's] being troubled about? A man?" Sue quickly responds, "Is a man worth—No, doctor." But Behrman turns out to be a man worth "being troubled about," though for his friendship and not as a romantic partner.

## **ART AND THE MASTERPIECE**

O. Henry begins his story not with pneumonia walking about Greenwich Village, but with a hypothetical painter walking the twisty streets. Next he tells of the many artists who live there. Then he introduces the reader to two specific artists, Sue and Johnsy, drawn to one another through art. Only after all the stage is set does he introduce the subject of pneumonia. That's because this isn't a story about pneumonia. It's a story about art, the people who create it, and the way it can—in this story—literally save a life.

The importance of art is threaded throughout the story. When the doctor asks Sue what might be "troubling" Johnsy, Sue mentions art. Johnsy, she says, always wanted to go to Italy and paint the Bay of Naples. The doctor dismisses this notion. To him, a man of science, art isn't an important enough reason to live.

He suggests romance or perhaps new clothing as better substitutes. But, to Johnsy, there is nothing more worth troubling over than art. She has come all the way from California to be an artist in New York. The author's way of signaling her hope has returned is to have her say "I want to paint the Bay of Naples."

Behrman has "always talked of painting a great picture, a masterpiece," despite his lack of success. As voiced by Sue, the leaf he paints to allow Johnsy to live another day is this "great masterpiece." It helps Johnsy live in order to paint again.