The Last Leaf

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In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called "places." These "places" make strange angles and curves. One Street crosses itself a time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back, without a cent having been paid on account!

**district**: an area of a country or town that has fixed borders that are used for official purposes, or that has a particular feature that makes it different from surrounding areas:

**suppose**: to think that something is likely to be true

**collector**: someone whose job is to collect tickets or money from people

**traversing**: to move or travel through an area

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a "colony."

**quaint**: attractive because of being unusual and especially old-fashioned

**prowling**: to move around quietly in a place trying not to be seen or heard, such as an animal does when hunting

**pewter**: a bluish-grey metal that is a mixture of tin and lead

**chafing**: to make or become damaged or sore by rubbing

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. "Johnsy" was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the table d'hôte of an Eighth Street "Delmonico's," and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

**chicory**: a European plant with blue flowers and leaves that are eaten in salads

**bishop**: a priest of high rank who is in charge of the priests of lower rank in a particular area

**congenial**: friendly and pleasant

**joint**: belonging to or shared between two or more people

That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown "places."

pneumonia: a serious illness in which one or both lungs become red and swollen and filled with liquid

stalked: to follow an animal or person as closely as possible without being seen or heard, usually in order to catch or kill them

ravage: to cause great damage to something

stride: to walk somewhere quickly with long steps

boldly: in a brave and confident way, without showing any fear

smite: to hit someone forcefully or to have a sudden powerful or damaging effect on someone

tread: to put your foot on something or to press something down with your foot

Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.

mite: a very small animal similar to a spider

zephyr: a light wind

duffer: a person who has little skill or is slow to learn

bedstead: the wooden or metal frame of an old-fashioned bed

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, grey eyebrow.

shaggy: having or covered with long, rough, and untidy hair, or (of hair) long, rough, and untidy

"She has one chance in - let us say, ten," he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. " And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-u on the side of the undertaker makes the entire pharmacopoeia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?"

undertaker: a person whose job is to prepare dead bodies that are going to be buried or cremated (= burned) and to organize funerals

pharmacopoeia: a list of drugs, together with information on their effects and instructions on how they should be used

"She - she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day." said Sue.

"Paint? - bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking twice - a man for instance?"

Bosh: nonsense

"A man?" said Sue, with a jew's-harp twang in her voice. "Is a man worth - but, no, doctor; there is nothing of the kind."

Jew's harp: a small musical instrument that is held between the teeth and played by hitting a metal strip with the finger

twang: to make a noise like that of a tight string being quickly pulled and released

"Well, it is the weakness, then," said the doctor. "I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one in ten."

filter: to appear or happen gradually or to a limited degree

accomplish: to finish something successfully or to achieve something

procession: a line of people who are all walking or travelling in the same direction, especially in a formal way as part of a religious ceremony or public celebration

curative: able to cure or cause to get better

After the doctor had gone Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. Then she swaggered into Johnsy's room with her drawing board, whistling ragtime.

swagger: to walk or behave in a way that shows that you are very confident and think that you are important

Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bedclothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking she was asleep.

She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story. Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to Literature.

Pave: to cover an area of ground with a hard, flat surface of pieces of stone, concrete, or bricks

As Sue was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle of the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy, she heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside.

Idaho: a state in the northwest of the US, whose capital city is Boise

Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting - counting backward.

"Twelve," she said, and little later "eleven"; and then "ten," and "nine"; and then "eight" and "seven", almost together.

Sue look solicitously out of the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks.

solicitously: /səˈlɪs.ɪ.təs.li/ in a way that shows you care about someone's comfort, safety, and how they feel

dreary: boring and making you feel unhappy

ivy: /ˈaɪ.vi/ an evergreen plant (= one that never loses its leaves) that often grows up trees or buildings

vine: the climbing plant that produces grapes as its fruit

gnarled: /nɑːld/ rough and twisted, especially because of old age or no protection from bad weather

crumbling: /ˈkrʌm.bəl/ to break, or cause something to break, into small pieces

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."

"Five what, dear? Tell your Sudie."

"Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"Oh, I never heard of such nonsense," complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. "What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so, you naughty girl. Don't be a goosey. Why, the doctor told me this morning that your chances for getting well real soon were - let's see exactly what he said - he said the chances were ten to one! Why, that's almost as good a chance as we have in New York when we ride on the street cars or walk past a new building. Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self."

magnificent: very good, beautiful, or deserving to be admired

scorn: /skɔːn/ a very strong feeling of no respect for someone or something that you think is stupid or has no value

broth: /brɒθ/ a thin soup, often with vegetables or rice in it

"You needn't get any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed out the window. "There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in by to-morrow. I need the light, or I would draw the shade down."

"Couldn't you draw in the other room?" asked Johnsy, coldly.

"I'd rather be here by you," said Sue. "Beside, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, and lying white and still as fallen statue, "because I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old hermit miner. I'll not be gone a minute. Don't try to move 'til I come back."

hermit: /ˈhɜː.mɪt/ a person who lives alone and apart from the rest of society, especially for religious reasons

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along with the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nothing except now and then a daub in the line of commerce or advertising. He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece. For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above.

satyr: /ˈsæt.ər/ a god in Greek literature who is half man and half goat

imp: a small evil spirit

wielded: to hold a weapon or tool and look as if you are going to use it

now and then: sometimes but not very often

daub: /dɔːb/ to spread a thick or sticky liquid on something or to cover something with a thick or sticky liquid, often quickly or carelessly

gin: a clear, strong alcoholic drink flavoured with juniper berries (= small fruits)

fierce: physically violent and frightening

scoffed: to laugh and talk about a person or idea in a way that shows that you think they are stupid or silly

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly lighted den below. In one corner was a blank canvas on an easel that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece. She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away, when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker.

den: the home of particular types of wild animal

Old Behrman, with his red eyes plainly streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings.

contempt: a strong feeling of disliking and having no respect for someone or something

derision: the situation in which someone or something is laughed at and considered stupid or of no value

"Vass!" he cried. "Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing. No, I will not bose as a model for your fool hermit-dunderhead. Vy do you allow dot silly pusiness to come in der brain of her? Ach, dot poor leetle Miss Yohnsy."

confounded: used to express anger

dunderhead: a stupid person

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue, "and the fever has left her mind morbid and full of strange fancies. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you do not care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you are a horrid old - old flibbertigibbet."

morbid: too interested in unpleasant subjects, especially death

fancies: the imagination

pose: to move into and stay in a particular position, in order to be photographed, painted, etc.

horrid: unpleasant or unkind

flibbertigibbet: a silly person who talks too much

"You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman. "Who said I will not bose? Go on. I come mit you. For half an hour I haf peen trying to say dot I am ready to bose. Gott! dis is not any blace in which one so goot as Miss Yohnsy shall lie sick. Some day I vill baint a masterpiece, and ve shall all go away. Gott! yes."

Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit miner on an upturned kettle for a rock.

motioned: to make a signal to someone, usually with your hand or head

mingle: to mix or combine, or be mixed or combined

persistent: lasting for a long time or difficult to get rid of

kettle: a container for boiling water, that has a lid, handle, and spout and is made from plastic or metal

When Sue awoke from an hour's sleep the next morning she found Johnsy with dull, wide-open eyes staring at the drawn green shade.

dull: not interesting or exciting in any way

"Pull it up; I want to see," she ordered, in a whisper.

Wearily Sue obeyed.

Wearily: in a way that shows that you are very tired

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last one on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from the branch some twenty feet above the ground.

gust: a sudden strong wind

serrated: having a row of sharp points along the edge

tinted: (of glass) with colour added

"It is the last one," said Johnsy. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"

worn: damaged because of continuous use

But Johnsy did not answer. The lonesomest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious, far journey. The fancy seemed to possess her more strongly as one by one the ties that bound her to friendship and to earth were loosed.

lonesomest: lonely

fancy: the imagination

The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.

wear: to become weaker, damaged, or thinner because of continuous use

twilight: /ˈtwaɪ.laɪt/ the period just before it becomes completely dark in the evening

pattered: to make the sound of a lot of things gently and repeatedly hitting a surface

eaves: the edge of a roof that sticks out over the walls

When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised.

Merciless: having or showing no mercy(kindness that makes you forgive someone, usually someone that you have authority over)

The ivy leaf was still there.

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove.

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring a me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and - no; bring me a hand-mirror first, and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

wicked: morally wrong and bad

And hour later she said:

"Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left.

"Even chances," said the doctor, taking Sue's thin, shaking hand in his. "With good nursing you'll win." And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is - some kind of an artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is an old, weak man, and the attack is acute. There is no hope for him; but he goes to the hospital to-day to be made more comfortable."

acute: If a bad situation is acute, it causes severe problems or damage

The next day the doctor said to Sue: "She's out of danger. You won. Nutrition and care now - that's all."

And that afternoon Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woollen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around her, pillows and all.

contentedly: in a happy and satisfied way

woollen: made of wool

scarf: a strip, square, or triangle of cloth, worn around the neck, head, or shoulders to keep you warm or to make you look attractive

"I have something to tell you, white mouse," she said. "Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia to-day in the hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colours mixed on it, and - look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece - he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

janitor: a person employed to take care of a large building, such as a school, and who deals with the cleaning, repairs, etc.

dreadful: causing fear, shock, or suffering

lantern: a light inside a container that has a handle for holding it or hanging it up, or the container itself

scattered: covering a wide area

fluttered: to make a series of quick delicate movements up and down or from side to side, or to cause something to do this

Kortfattat om den här berättelsen är att Sue och Johnsy var båda illustratör till magazin och de fick leva tillsammans eftersom de hade inga kända personer bredvid sig. Allt började när Johnsy fick en allvarlig sjukdom, och hon hade inte så stor chans att överleva. Om hon gav upp, så var det nästan omöjligt för henne att överleva. Johnsy kollade ut från fönstret och såg en murgrön växt tappande blad, och när alla bladen föll ner så kommer hon att dö. Hon verkade vara som om hon hade gett upp. Sue ville inte att Johnsy skulle dö av sjukdomen eftersom då skulle hon bli ensam och därför så försökte hon att få henne att inte tänka på att hon kommer att dö av sjukdomen. Men det hjälpte inte. När Sue träffade Behrman för att vara hennes modell, så berättade Sue för honom Johnsys sjukdom. Behrman hade en blandad personlighet och var också en konstnär åt andra personer, han var både en bra och dålig person, men framför allt skulle han skydda Sue och Johnsy. Han hjälpte Johnsy att överleva sjukdomen, och tände om hennes liv med sitt eget genom att måla ett nytt löv på murgröna växten. Själv, så dog han i sjukdomen eftersom han gjorde det på natten, när det var väldigt kallt.

En av huvudrollerna Behrman hade en blandad personlighet. Det betyder att han var både bra och dålig person på samma gång. I texten stod det ” He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along with the body of an imp.”, och det var att man kan se på utsidan att han var en del som Moses, en del som en satyr och en del som en smådjävel. Han var bra för att han pratade och tänkte på en mästerverk även om han hade inte gjort det på en lång tid, det gjorde att han hade en dröm. I texten så nämns det ”He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it.” och “He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece.” Han var också hjälpsam till andra personer som en modell. På texten så nämns det “He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional.” Han skulle också skydda Sue och Johnsy och på texten så står det ” For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above.”, det gjorde att han var mjuk i insidan. Han hade dåliga sida av sin personalitet också. Han var ibland häftig, våldsam och ibland oartig på utsidan, för att när han beskrevs på insidan att han var mjuk, så beskrevs han också att han var hård på utsidan. Det stod att när andra upptäckte att han skulle skydda Sue och Johnsy så blev han rasande och nekade till det.

I den här berättelsen är strukturen väldigt bra. Man upptäcker direkt att på slutet så finns det en vändning. Vändningen är då inget man kan gissa sig fram, trots att det finns några ledtrådar som finns innan vändningen i texten. I början så var det så att Johnsy fick sjukdomen och hon gav upp, det betydde då att hon kommer att dö av sjukdomen, men till slut blev det inte så. Till slut så dog Behrman av sjukdomen istället för Johnsy.

Det finns en sak i texten som är då bra skriven. Det är personifiering. Det är att man beskriver någontings rörelser som en person, och gör saker levande. I början av texten var det beskrivning om gatorna i en stadsdel som var väldigt konstiga och det fanns ingen som styrde över den platsen, och då användes det ”run” och ”broken”. Sjukdomen Pneumonia, beskrivs som om det var en person, och i texten fanns bland annat ”stalked”, ” touching one here and there with his icy fingers” , “Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman” och “the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer”. Allt det där beskrivande gör att sjukdomen ser väldigt kraftfullt och dödsfarligt ut.