The Last Leaf - Summary

A firm friendship bloomed between two young artists, Sue and Johnsy, based on reciprocal trust and shared artistic inclinations. They shared a ‘studio’ in the strange old Greenwich Village. Everything was going well till Johnsy fell ill with pneumonia in the wintry November. The illness affected her so much that she remained all day in bed sure of death.

She lied down gloomily watching through her window the leaves fall off from a vine. The doctor did not have much hope of her recovery as she was utterly defeated by the sickness. When Johnsy confided to Sue that her passionate desire was to paint the Bay of Naples, Sue sat in the room sketching trying to draw her sorrow to her art. However, Johnsy was sure that death would come when the last leaf of the vine fell.

An old thwarted artist Behrman, who always declared that he would paint a masterpiece lived below Johnsy and Sue. Sue told him that her friend was dying and that Johnsy insisted that when the last leaf fell off of the vine outside her window, she would die. Even though Behrman derided the foolish notion, his protective attitude towards the two girls made him see Johnsy and the vine.

That night was horribly stormy, and icy rain spattered against the window. There was only one leaf left on the vine. Sue closed the window and pleaded to Johnsy to go to sleep because she did not want Johnsy to see the last leaf fall. Next morning, Johnsy was sure that the last leaf had fallen, and death beckoned her too, when they opened the window, they were astonished to see that there was still one leaf left.

Johnsy judged that the leaf stayed there to show her sinfulness in accepting death without a fight. that made her resolve to live. Her will to live made her recovery fully.

In the afternoon, the doctor came and told Sue that Behrman was dead. But before his death, Behrman had painted a masterpiece - the last leaf was Behrman’s masterpiece. He had painted the leaf after the last leaf had fallen off the vine. His final act- the last leaf on the wall gave Johnsy hope and life.