
SHORT STORIES

BY

O' HENRY



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THE LAST LEAF

Sue and Johnsy were two young women artists in New York. They both **dreamed** of painting a **masterpiece** one day. Sue was from the state of Maine, and Johnsy was from California. They **shared** a small, cheap studio apartment in Greenwich Village. It was on the top floor of an old building. Many young and poor artists had studios in that area in the 1890s.

Sue and Johnsy first met in a restaurant in Greenwich Village. They talked about art, their interests and their wishes for the future. They liked each other very much and became friends. They decided to live and work together in the same apartment. They moved to their small studio apartment in the month of May.

In November, Johnsy became very ill with **pneumonia**. This **disease** killed many people in the city in those years. Johnsy was so ill that she could hardly move. Sue looked after her and gave her medicines. Johnsy lay in her bed all the time. Through the window by her bed, she often looked at the side wall of the **brick** building next door.

A doctor came to see Johnsy regularly. He **examined** her and took her temperature each time. One morning, the doctor quietly spoke to Sue in the hallway.

‘The medicines are not helping your friend. She must have the **will**

to get better. That's her only chance to live. But she doesn't want to live. She thinks she is going to die very soon. She must have some hope. Doesn't she have any wishes or dreams for the future?'

'Well, she is an artist, you know. She wants to go to Italy and paint the **Bay** of Naples one day,' answered Sue. 'She told me that many times. It is her biggest dream. She says the painting will be her masterpiece.'

'Nonsense!' the doctor said. 'Painting can't help her. Isn't she in love with anyone? I mean doesn't she have a boyfriend or something like that on her mind?'

'No, Doctor. She doesn't have anyone or anything to think about. She loves painting. But she can't paint now, so she is very depressed,' Sue said and added, 'She wants to die.'

'I will do my best to make her well again. But she must have the hope to live. She must not want to die,' said the doctor and left the apartment.

The doctor's words made Sue very sad. She went to her room and cried there quietly. Then she stopped crying and took her drawing board and drawing pencils. She went into Johnsy's room with them. She did not want to look sad. So, she began to **whistle a cheerful** song. But Johnsy did not hear her.

She was lying in her bed, with her head toward the window. She was not moving. Sue thought she was asleep and stopped whistling. She arranged her drawing board and began to draw pictures for a story in a magazine.

While Sue was drawing, she heard a low sound coming from Johnsy's bed. She quickly went near her bed.

Johnsy was looking toward the window, and she was speaking to herself quietly. Sue listened carefully to Johnsy's words.

'Twelve,' Johnsy said in a low voice. Then, she said, 'eleven'; and then 'ten,' and 'nine'. A few seconds later, she said 'eight' and 'seven', at the same time. She was counting backwards.

Sue got very **curious** and looked out the window. 'What is she counting? There is nothing outside,' she thought to herself.

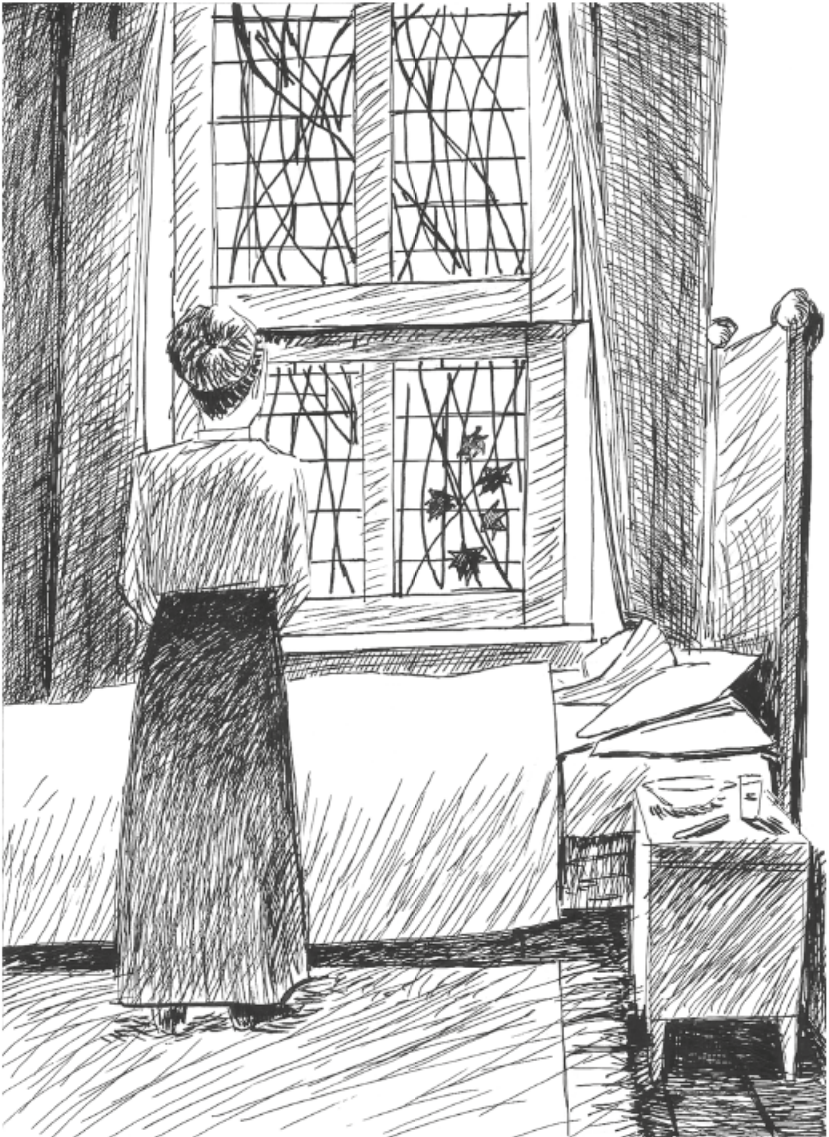
Out the window, one could see only a bare garden and the **blank** brick wall of the house six meters away. There was also an old **ivy** vine. It was **clinging** to the brick wall. Its branches were almost bare. They looked like the bones of a skeleton. And the roots of the ivy vine were **decaying**.

'What are you counting, dear?' Sue asked Johnsy.

'Six', Johnsy quietly said at that moment. Then she began to speak to Sue. She was still looking out the window as she spoke.

'More and more leaves are falling from the ivy vine out there. Just three days ago, it had a lot of leaves. There were about a hundred. It was very difficult to count them. I got a headache when I was counting. But now there are only six left,' she said in a low and sad voice. 'Oh, here goes another one. The poor ivy has just five leaves now. And very soon, it won't have any.'

The Last Leaf



The poor ivy has just five leaves now. And very soon, it won't have any.

'That's true,' said Sue. 'But why are you counting those leaves, dear?'

Johnsy was still looking at the ivy vine. She said, 'The last leaf will fall in a day or two. Then, I will die, too. I will not recover. Didn't the doctor tell you this?'

'Don't talk nonsense, please!' said Sue half angrily. 'Those are leaves. Trees lose their leaves every autumn. You are going to get well. The doctor said so. Now drink the chicken **broth** in your cup. You haven't finished it. And I will draw my pictures.'

'Why don't you draw in the other room?' asked Johnsy quietly.

'I want to be near you; that's why,' answered Sue. 'I must finish this drawing tonight. Tomorrow I will give it to the magazine editor, and he will pay me for it. Then I will buy some sweet wine and **beef chops**. We will have some good food. Now stop looking at those stupid leaves.'

Johnsy closed her eyes, and then said in a **whisper**, 'I must watch the last leaf. It will fall down very soon, and I will go with it, too. I want to die. I don't want to lie here and think all the time. I hope the last leaf falls today.'

'Please, stop thinking about death. Try to sleep now. I am going downstairs to Behrman's apartment. I want him to **model** for my drawing. He will be the model for the old man in my drawing. I will come back in a few minutes,' Sue said. Then she quickly went downstairs to Behrman's apartment.

Behrman was an old, unsuccessful painter. He was about sixty

The Last Leaf

and had a long beard. It was like the beard of Michael Angelo's *Moses* sculpture. Behrman dreamed of painting a masterpiece and becoming famous. But he only painted pictures for advertisements and didn't earn much money. He also **posed** for young and poor artists. Those artists could not pay the prices of professional models.

When Sue entered Old Behrman's workroom downstairs, he was sitting in the dark and drinking. There was a blank **canvas** on an **easel**. It was blank for many years because Behrman never began to paint on it.

Sue spoke to the old man about Johnsy's wish to die and the falling ivy vine leaves.

'Poor girl!' the old man cried out after listening to Sue. 'It is so foolish to think that you will die because the ivy leaves are falling!'

'Johnsy is very ill, Mr Behrman. She thinks about foolish things because she has a very high temperature,' Sue explained. 'She thinks she will die when the last leaf falls. And she is waiting for it to fall.'

'I must help her. She must not think like that,' said Behrman. 'She must have hope. And she will recover. Then I will paint a masterpiece and make a lot of money. We will go to Naples altogether. There, she can paint the bay. But tonight, I must pose for your drawing. Come on; let's go to your apartment.'

Sue and Behrman went upstairs. Johnsy was asleep in her room. Sue pulled down the shade of her window. Then she led Behrman to her workroom.

Behrman and Sue stood in front of the window in Sue's workroom.

They looked at the ivy vine outside for a while. Then they looked at each other sadly. They didn't say a word. Afterwards, Behrman sat on a **stool** and began to pose for Sue's drawing. Outside, there was a very bad storm with a very strong wind and heavy rain. The rain was mixed with snow.

When Sue finished drawing the old man figure, Behrman left. Sue continued to draw all night. She finished the drawing early in the morning. Then she slept for an hour. When she woke up, she went into Johnsy's room.

Johnsy was **awake** in her bed again. She was looking at the green shade on the window. 'Pull up the shade,' she said to Sue in a whisper.

Sue pulled the shade up. After the heavy rain and the strong wind, there was only one ivy leaf left clinging to the brick wall. This yellow leaf still had a green stem. It was hanging from a branch about six meters above the ground.

'It is the last leaf,' Johnsy said in a very low voice. 'It didn't fall in the storm last night. I am surprised. But it is going to fall today, and I will die at the same time.'

Sue put her face down on Sue's pillow and said, 'Don't say that, Johnsy, please. You want to die, but think of me. What will I do without you?'

Johnsy continued to **stare** at the leaf. The leaf stayed against the brick wall all day long. It was there at night, too. There was a strong storm and heavy rain again that night, but the leaf did not fall.

The Last Leaf

Johnsy woke up very early the next morning. She asked Sue to pull up the shade. The last leaf was still there! She looked at the leaf for a long time. Then she called Sue. Sue was heating some chicken broth over their small gas stove.

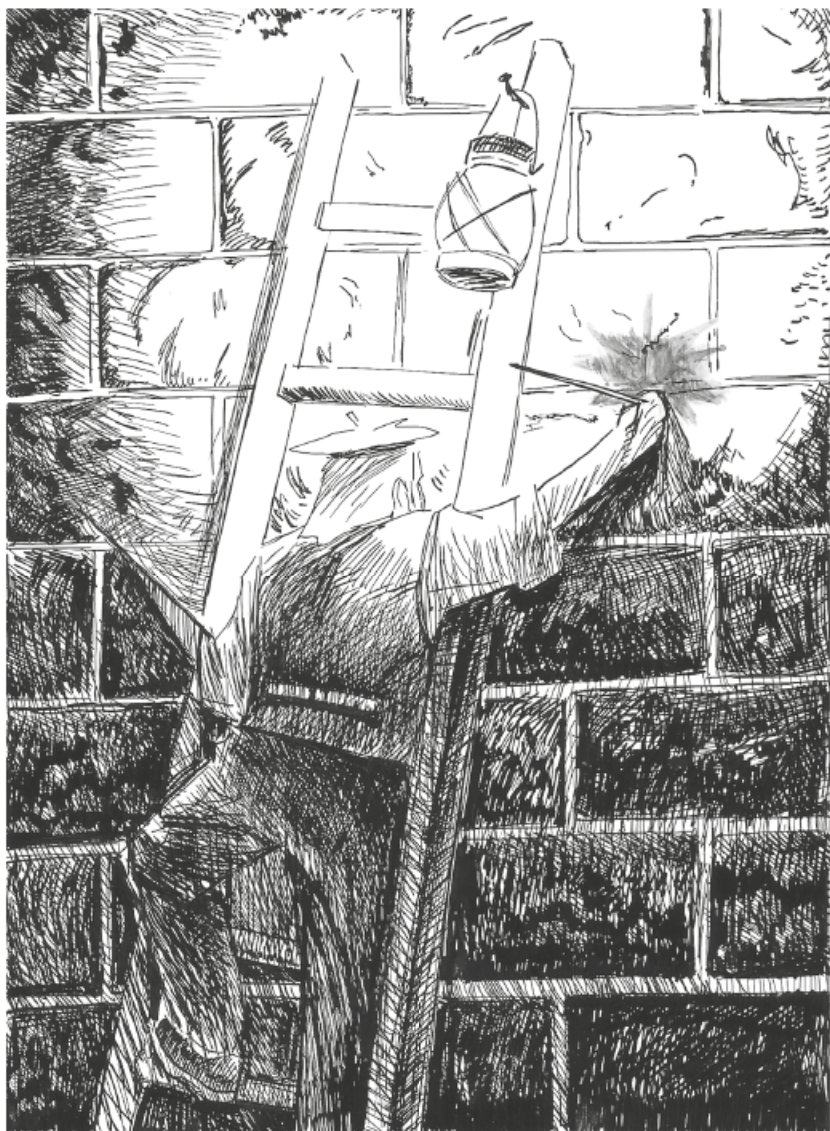
'I have been very foolish,' Johnsy said. 'I wanted to die, but the last leaf has not fallen. This teaches me a good lesson. It is wrong to want to die. Now, you can give me some broth and some milk. And please put up my pillows. I want to sit up in bed. I don't want to lie anymore. And please bring me my hand mirror.'

After looking at her face in the mirror, she smiled and said, 'Sue, my dear, one day, I will paint the Bay of Naples. I really want to do it.'

That afternoon, the doctor examined Johnsy again. He looked quite pleased. He called Sue to the hallway and said, 'Johnsy has a big chance now. With your help and care, she will recover soon.'

'Oh, I am so happy to hear this! I will do my best to help her get better,' Sue told the doctor.

'Now, I must go downstairs. I have another **patient** there,' said the doctor. 'He is an artist, too, I suppose. He is having a serious pneumonia **attack**. He is old and very weak. There is no hope for him, but I will send him to the hospital. He will be more comfortable there.'



He painted a leaf on the wall, just for you.

The Last Leaf

Sue was very sorry for old Behrman. She didn't tell Johnsy anything about him.

The next morning, the doctor examined Johnsy again. Then he stopped in the hallway and spoke to Sue.

'I have good news! Your friend is much better. She is recovering very fast, but she still needs to rest. Just take good care of her. She will be very well in a few days.'

Then he spoke to Sue about Behrman and left.

In the afternoon, Sue went in to Johnsy's room. She **kneeled** down beside her bed and put her arm around her shoulder.

'I want to tell you something,' she said. 'It's about Mr Behrman. The poor man died of pneumonia today in the hospital. He was ill for only two days. Just two days ago, a neighbour found him ill in his room and called the doctor.'

Johnsy did not say a word. She was shocked.

Behrman's shoes and clothes were very wet and icy cold. And someone found a ladder outside. It was against the brick wall. There was a **lantern** near it and some paint brushes on the ground. There was also a **palette** with green and yellow colours on it.

'Look out the window, my dear,' said Sue to Johnsy. 'The last ivy leaf is still there. It has not fallen down. It did not move when the wind was blowing. Do you know why? It is the masterpiece of Behrman! He painted a leaf on the wall, just for you. He painted it when the last leaf fell down on the stormy night. It was very cold and windy that night. And the poor old man got very sick.'

Now there were tears in both women's eyes.

ACTIVITIES

A. Look at the word search and find the names of the things in the pictures.



1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____



5. _____



6. _____

F	N	A	J	Z	L	M	L	I	S	V	H	I	Y	P
Y	V	K	J	E	E	P	X	T	W	K	F	A	P	U
P	I	O	L	G	S	V	W	I	G	F	Z	N	L	N
I	Y	B	D	H	A	R	A	B	O	F	W	J	H	E
E	W	C	C	C	E	J	D	V	S	G	N	W	H	T
H	T	O	R	B	W	A	M	E	C	W	R	C	V	T
Q	R	Y	Y	R	W	S	R	O	D	O	N	H	Z	E
C	C	B	J	K	V	A	I	D	I	Y	N	O	Z	L
V	O	T	L	O	O	T	S	J	T	U	H	P	F	A
U	W	N	K	C	U	P	B	R	U	S	N	S	B	P
L	I	G	M	R	S	E	S	D	W	C	W	Z	O	P
Y	P	R	V	S	U	R	D	C	H	R	D	L	F	E
N	R	E	T	N	A	L	X	J	B	U	Q	R	X	M
F	K	Q	O	L	P	S	T	A	S	Z	L	O	Q	Y
J	P	C	Z	K	M	V	B	P	U	L	S	N	Q	H

B. Look at the pictures and complete the sentences with the given words.



1. The flower is _____ing.



2. The ivy is _____ing
to a wall.



3. She is _____ing
for a painting.



4. She is _____ing
to the boy's ear.



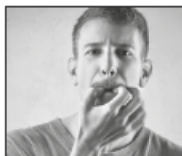
5. They are _____ing
a drink.



6. He is having a heart
_____.



7. She is _____ing
beside her child.



8. He is _____ing.



9. The dentist is _____ing
the _____'s
teeth.



10. He is _____ing
of a holiday.

kneel whistle examine attack
patient pose share decay
dream whisper cling

Short Stories by O'Henry

C. Match the words (1-8) with the definitions (a-h).

1. blank: ____	a. illness (with infection)
2. kneel: ____	b. to look at someone for a long time
3. stare: ____	c. not sleeping
4. disease: ____	d. happy; joyful
5. will: ____	e. the greatest work of an artist
6. cheerful: ____	f. with no writing, painting or drawing
7. masterpiece: ____	g. wish; strong desire
8. awake: ____	h. to put one or both knees down

D. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False).

1. When Johnsy first looked at the ivy vine, it had six leaves. ____
2. Sue and Johnsy were Behrman's next door neighbours. ____
3. Sue was drawing pictures for a story book. ____
4. Behrman was a poor artist. ____
5. Behrman painted a leaf picture on the brick wall. ____
6. The last ivy leaf never fell. ____
7. Behrman gave Johnsy the will to live. ____
8. Behrman died of pneumonia in his room. ____

GLOSSARY

Story 1 - The Last Leaf

attack (n) a sudden, short period of illness

attack (v)

awake (adj) not sleeping

awake (v)

bay (n) a part of the sea where the land curves in

blank (adj) without any writing, print or recorded sound

blank (n)

brick (n) a hard, rectangular block used for building walls, houses, etc

broth (n) a soup with meat or vegetables

canvas (n) a piece of cloth on which oil painting is done

cheerful (adj) behaving in a way that shows you are happy

cheer (n/v)

chop (n) a small piece of meat with a bone

chop (v)

cling (v) to hold someone or something tightly

curious (adj) wanting to know about something; eager

curiously (adv)

decay (v) to slowly become bad or weak because of natural causes

decay (n)

disease (n) an illness

dream (v) to think about something that you would like to happen or have

dream (n)

easel (n) a wooden frame on which you put a painting

examine (v) to look at something carefully; inspect

examination (n)

ivy (n) a dark green climbing plant that often grows up walls

knelt (v) to bend your legs towards the ground

lantern (n) a lamp with a metal container and a handle

masterpiece (n) the best work of an artist

model (v) to pose for an artist or sculptor

model (n)

palette (n) a thin board with curved edges that an artist uses to mix paints

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

O' Henry (1862-1910) was an American shorty story writer whose real name was William Sydney Porter.

In his early years, he took a number of different jobs from pharmacy to journalism and banking. However, he started writing as a hobby even when he was working in different positions. He was a very productive writer, completing one story a week. He particularly wrote about the life of ordinary people in New York City, where he lived during the final phase of his life. His stories are known for their surprise endings and element of coincidence.

Most of his stories were published in collections such as *Cabbages and Kings* (1904), *The Four Million* (1906), and *Heart of the West* (1907). In 1952, five of his stories were adapted for a film called *O' Henry's Full House*.

Sources

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