**THE LAST LEAF**

**By – 0. Henry**

William Sydney Porter, better known by his pen name O. Henry, was an American short story writer. His stories are known for their surprise endings. [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O._Henry)

[**Born**](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=o.+henry+born&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMdESy0620i9IzS_ISQVSRcX5eVZJ-UV5i1h58_UUMlLziioVQHwAsC8NMzQAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQ6BMoADAgegQIDxAG)**:**11 September 1862, [Greensboro, North Carolina, United States](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=Greensboro,+North+Carolina&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMVECs7KTy420xLKTrfQLUvMLclKBVFFxfp5VUn5R3iJWKfei1NS8YiAnX0fBL7-oJEPBObEoPyczLxEAlwhcpUsAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQmxMoATAgegQIDxAH)

[**Died**](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=o.+henry+died&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMdGSz0620i9IzS_ISdVPSU1OTSxOTYkvSC0qzs-zSslMTVnEypuvp5CRmldUqQDiAwC5HkcfPQAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQ6BMoADAhegQIDxAK)**:**5 June 1910, [New York, New York, United States](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=New+York+City&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMVHiBLGM4o0szLTks5Ot9AtS8wtyUvVTUpNTE4tTU-ILUouK8_OsUjJTUxax8vqllitE5hdlKzhnllQCADMIeX5IAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQmxMoATAhegQIDxAL)

[**Full name**](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=o.+henry+full+name&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMdGSzk620i9IzS_ISQVSRcX5eVZppTk5CnmJuamLWIXy9RQyUvOKKhXgggCwm-lnPgAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQ6BMoADAjegQIDxAO)**:**William Sydney Porter

[**Short stories**](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=o.+henry+short+stories&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMdFSySi30k_Oz8lJTS7JzM_TTywtycgvKrYqBpIlCsUl-UWZqcWLWMXy9RQyUvOKKhVQJACvs2hOSwAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQ6BMoADAkegQIDxAR)**:**[The Gift of the Magi](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=The+Gift+of+the+Magi&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMVGCsrJLtFQyyq30k_NzclKTSzLz8_QTS0sy8ouKrYqBZIlCcUl-UWZq8SJWkZCMVAX3zLQShfw0hRIg2zcxPRMA3lIjgFMAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQmxMoATAkegQIDxAS), [The Last Leaf](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHBD_enIN837IN837&q=The+Last+Leaf&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAOPgE-LQz9U3SCrJMVHiArHSTY2zjC20VDLKrfST83NyUpNLMvPz9BNLSzLyi4qtioFkiUJxSX5RZmrxIlbekIxUBZ_E4hIFn9TENABZNmcVTgAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj66aTYqdrkAhWLvI8KHa1-BMQQmxMoAjAkegQIDxAT),

**Introduction of the lesson- THE LAST LEAF**

The Last Leaf’ is a famous story of O. Henry. It is a sentimental story. Sue and Johnsy were two young artistic friends. They lived together. Once Johnsy fell ill. There was an ivy creeper outside the window. Its leaves were falling. Johnsy had a fancy that she would die when the last leaf on the ivy fell. She was worried. An old painter named Behrman lived downstairs. He considered the girls like his daughters. Sue told ofJohnsy’s fancy to Bohrman. He promised to help her. That night it was snowing. The last leaf also fell. But Behanan worked all night and painted a leaf on the wall. Next morning Johnsy was surprised to see that there was still a leaf on the ivy. Her will to live returned. Soon she recovered. But old Behrman caught pneumonia and died. Thus he sacrificed his own life in order to save Johnsy.

**Introduction (2)**

Art is a valuable asset and offers hope even in the most trying situations. It has the power to heal the human spirit. “The Last Leaf” depicts the value of art as it saves a precious young life. Although the artist sacrifices his own life in the process, his masterpiece immortalizes him.

**Theme**

The story is based on the theme that life is precious and faith and hope should never be lost. We come across many hindrances in life and they should be overcome by fighting back in high spirits. Depression can lead to disaster even when the situation is not bad. Another theme that runs through the story is that devoted friendship can be succour during times of crisis. A minor theme of the story is the importance of art in human lives. The old painter knowingly sacrifices his life in his urge to create a masterpiece.

**Theme (2)**

Very often, we find people having a negative attitude toward life. They lose interest in life and these causes suffering to people surrounding them. They are even ready to lose their life as life has lost all meaning for them. The story tells the need to have a positive attitude towards life so that we can make it as fruitful as possible. Sacrificing our life for the sake of others is also a theme in this story. Painter Behrman scarifies his life for Johnsy.

**TITLE**

The title “The Last Leaf” raises the curiosity of the reader regarding a happening or an event towards some kind of ‘end’. The word ‘last’ reflects the main idea of the story which is the last breath of Johnsy. The last leaf becomes the last hope of survival and keeps the reader hooked until the end. Throughout, the last ivy leaf remains the central point. In the early part of the story it remains associated with Johnsy’s ailment and depression while later on, it conveys the message of courage, hope and optimism. The last leaf saves Johnsy’s life and fulfils Behrman’s lifelong dream to paint a masterpiece. However, it also turns out to be his last masterpiece, too. Hence the title is very apt.

**Message**

The chief message that this story gives is the spirit of sacrifice we need to have in our life. The old artist, Behrman sacrificed his life so that Johnsy could live. In this process, he also achieved his ambition of painting a masterpiece.

The other message is that we should have a positive attitude in life. Johnsy was under depression and she felt her life was linked to the leaves on the ivy creeper. This prevented her from getting better from her illness. She was also causing harm to her friend, Sue. Had she adopted a positive attitude, Behrman would not have died. Our thinking and attitude affect the lives of other people too.

**Justification of the Title**

The leaves of the ivy creeper are falling fast. Johnsy, the sick girl, feels that she would die as soon as the last leaf would fall from the ivy creeper. One night, only one leaf remains on the ivy. It would fall the same night. The old artist, Behrman, decides to go out in the rain and paint an artificial leaf as soon as the last leaf fall. So, since Johnsy makes her life depends upon the last leaf, the title is appropriate. The last leaf on the ivy helps one person to survive but results in the death of another person.

***Character Sketches***

**Behrman:**Behrman is a 60-years-old painter. He lived on the ground floor of the house where Sue and Johnsy lived. He had a lifelong dream to paint a masterpiece. Sue told him about the condition of Johnsy. Johnsy felt that she would die, once the last leaf fell from the ivy creeper. Behrman thought of a plan to save Johnsy. He went out in the rainy and stormy night and painted a picture of a leaf on the ivy. Johnsy saw the leaf the next morning and got back her will to live. But Behrman died of pneumonia because he had been out all night in the cold. Thus Behrman made the supreme sacrifice of giving up his life for the sake of another person. He was a great soul. In this process, he achieved his ambition of painting a masterpiece.

**Johnsy:**Johnsy was a young artist who lived with her friend Sue. She fell ill very seriously and had pneumonia. She had the fancy idea that she would die once the last leaf on the ivy creeper, outside her window, would fall down. The leaves were falling down very fast as the weather was stormy. Only one leaf remained. She felt that the last leaf will fall in the night and she would die. But Behrman went out in the cold night and painted a leaf on the wall. Johnsy saw this leaf the next morning and got back her will to live. But her foolish attitudes lead to the death of Behrman. She was a weak-hearted woman.

**Sue:**Sue was a young artist who lived with Johnsy. She tried her best to feel Johnsy better and help in to get over her illness. But Johnsy would not listen to her. She was adamant. Sue sought the help of Behrman to solve the issue. Behrman solved the problem by painting a leaf on the wall. So we find that Sue is a true friend of Johnsy.

**Value Points**

* ‘The Last Leaf is a story of supreme sacrifice by an old artist Behrman.
* Sue and Johnsy are two young artists. They share a small flat.
* Johnsy suffers from pneumonia. She links her illness with the leaves of ivy creepers.
* She has made up her mind that with the fall of the last leaf of the ivy creeper, she would also die.
* Her illness is made worse by these negative thoughts. Medicines have no effect on her illness.
* Sue, her best friend suggests to her that she should stop thinking negatively.
* One night, it rains heavily and there was a storm also. Johnsy thinks that the last leaf would fall anytime and she would also die with the fall of that leaf.
* Johnsy peeps through the window to make herself sure that whether the last leaf fell or not. To her surprise, she finds that the last leaf was still on the creeper when she woke up in the morning.
* Sue tells Johnsy that the last leaf is quite green and healthy. It has not fallen.
* Now Johnsy smiles and starts recovering her health soon.
* Finally, sue discloses the truth of the last leaf. The last leaf on the ivy creeper is Behrman’s Masterpiece. He painted it last night when the last leaf fell from the ivy. He died of pneumonia the next morning.

**MESSAGE**

The story gives the message that the power of hope and optimism can help win the most difficult situations. Sue does not lose hope and keeps trying until the end to revive the desire to live in her friend Johnsy. Her optimism finally succeeds in reviving Johnsy’s interest in life and helps her recover from pneumonia.

Another message given by the story is that friends are our saviours. Sue keeps telling Johnsy that she has to live for her friend’s sake and her own life would be meaningless without Johnsy. She tends to her by talking about cheerful things, giving her food, calling in a doctor, and even seeking help from neighbours.

A latent message of the story is that sacrifice is a great virtue. Bauman sacrifices his life so that Johnsy gets over her depression. This sacrifice does not go in vain. Not only does Johnsy recover but Behrman also manages to create the masterpiece that he had yearned for all his life.