

A photograph of a brick building with a fire escape, overlaid with a semi-transparent grey rectangle containing the text "THE LAST LEAF". The building is made of reddish-brown bricks and has several windows. A fire escape is attached to the side of the building. In the foreground, there is a green utility pole with a sign, and a bicycle is leaning against it. The text "THE LAST LEAF" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered within the grey rectangle.

THE  
LAST  
LEAF

## The last Leaf

In a little area west of Washington Square in New York City there are many little streets called "places". Artists soon discovered these "places" and began living there.

They liked the cheap rents and the old attics. This area became a colony of artists and it was called Greenwich Village.

Sue and Johnsy had their studio at the top of a brick building. Johnsy was Joanna's nickname and she was from California. Sue was from Maine. They met at an eating place and became best friends. In May they opened an artists' studio together.

In November a cold, invisible stranger came to the colony. Doctors called him Pneumonia. He touched a good number of artists with his cold finger, including Johnsy. Poor Johnsy, she was a thin, little woman and she lay quietly in her bed. She looked outside the window at the brick wall of the house in front of her.

One morning a busy doctor examined Johnsy and measured her temperature. Then he went into the hall and talked to Sue.

"She has about one chance in ten," he said as he looked at the thermometer. "She must WANT to live. Your friend doesn't want to get well. Does she think about anything special? Does she have a sweetheart?"

"No, she doesn't have a sweetheart. But she wants to paint the Bay of Naples one day."

"Well, I will do everything I can to help her. But when a patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession, then science and medicine can do very little."

The doctor left and Sue went to her room and cried a lot.

After a while she walked cheerfully into Johnsy's bedroom. She had her drawing paper and pencils in her hand. Johnsy lay in bed and did not move.

"She's probably sleeping," Sue thought and she began to draw a picture. She drew an Idaho cowboy with elegant riding trousers. It was an illustration for a magazine story. Young artists often draw illustrations for magazine stories to make some money.

Suddenly she heard a strange sound and went to Johnsy's bed. Her eyes were open now. She was looking out of the window and counting.

"Twelve," she said, and then, "eleven, ten, nine," and then "eight, seven."

Sue looked out of the window too. What was Johnsy counting? There was only the brick wall of a building with an old ivy vine on it. It was autumn and only a few leaves remained on the ivy vine.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," whispered Johnsy. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. There goes another one. There are only five now."

"Five what, dear?" asked Sue.

"Leaves on the ivy vine. When the last leaf falls I must go too. Didn't the doctor tell you?"

"Oh, what nonsense!" said Sue. "Don't be silly! You'll get well soon. Drink some hot soup now. I must finish this drawing and sell it to the magazine. I need money to buy good food for us."

"No, I don't want any soup," said Johnsy. She looked out of the window and said, "There goes another leaf. Now there are four. I want to see the last one fall, then I'll go too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, "close your eyes and don't look out of the window, please."

"Tell me when you finish drawing, Sue. I want to see the last leaf fall. I'm tired of waiting."

"Sleep a little now," said Sue. "I must go and call Behrman. I need a model for my drawing. I'll be back in a minute."

Old Behrman was a painter. He lived downstairs in the same building and he liked Sue and Johanna. He was about sixty years old, had a long white beard and drank too much. Old Behrman was not a good or successful artist. Sue found him in his dark little room. In one corner of the room there was an old white canvas with nothing on it.

"Johnsy is very ill with pneumonia. She doesn't want to get better. She has some strange ideas and wants to die when the last leaf on the ivy vine falls. I'm scared and don't know what to do."

Old Behrman started crying and then said with his German accent, "What nonsense! She wants to die because leaves fall off an ivy vine! What foolishness! Poor little Miss Johnsy."

Sue was sad and silent. Then she looked at Behrman and said, "I need a model for one of my drawings. Can you come upstairs?"

"Well, all right, I'll be your model this time. But one day I'll paint my masterpiece!"

They went upstairs and Johnsy was sleeping. Sue and Behrman went into the other room. They looked at the ivy vine fearfully. Then they looked at each other silently. Outside it was raining and it was very cold. Behrman sat down and Sue began drawing.

When Johnsy woke up the next morning she said, "Please pull the curtain, Sue."

Sue pulled the curtain and they both looked out of the window.

After the wind and rain of the night, there was still one ivy leaf on the brick wall. It was the last

one on the vine. The leaf was green and yellow.

"It is the last one," said Johnsy. "It did not fall during the night. It will fall today and I will die at the same time."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Sue. "Think of me. What will I do?"

But Johnsy did not answer. Her thoughts were far away.

The day passed and the last ivy leaf was still on the ivy vine. Then it started raining again and it was very windy.

The next morning Johnsy looked for the last ivy leaf. It was still on the vine. She looked at it for a long time. Then she called Sue.

"I was a bad girl, Sue," said Johnsy. "That last leaf showed me that I was bad. I wanted to die and that was very wrong. Please bring me some soup now and some milk too. No! First bring me a small mirror."

An hour later she said, "Sue, one day I will paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon and Sue spoke to him in the hall.

"Now she has five chances in ten. She must eat well and rest, and she'll get better. And now I must see another patient downstairs. I think his name is Behrman and he is an artist. He has pneumonia too. He is an old, weak man and there is no hope for him. He must go to the hospital today. He will be more comfortable there."

The next day the doctor came again.

"Johnsy is out of danger! Good food and good care that's all," he said to Sue.

And that afternoon Sue sat on Johnsy's bed and said, "I must tell you something, Johnsy. Mr Behrman died of pneumonia today in the hospital. The janitor found him a few days ago in his room. He was very ill. His shoes and clothes were wet and very cold. The janitor found a lantern, a ladder, some paint brushes and some green and yellow paints... Look out of the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the vine. It never moved when it was windy. Ah, Johnsy, it's Behrman's masterpiece. He painted it on the wall the night the last leaf fell."

- THE END -

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