

# THE LAST LEAF

By: O. Henry

## SUMMARY

It is all about the last leaf summary in short. The last leaf summary starts with two girls namely Sue and Johnsy lived together in a small flat. Both were artists. They resided on the third floor of an old house. Johnsy fell critically ill in November. She suffered from pneumonia and used to lie in her bed without moving. She continuously gazed out of the window. Sue, her friend, became very worried. She called the doctor. Although he came every day, yet Johnsy's condition showed no improvement. The doctor confirmed that Johnsy was not willing to live. As a result, the medicines were ineffective to cure her ill-health. Sue tried her greatest to make Johnsy take an interest in things around her. She talked about clothes and fashion. However, Johnsy was irresponsive. She continued to lie still on her bed. Sue brought her drawing-board into the room and began to paint. Suddenly Sue heard Johnsy whispering something. She speedily rushed to the bed and heard Johnsy counting backward. She speedily rushed to the bed and heard Johnsy counting backward. Looking out of the window, she was saying, "Twelve!" However, after some time she whispered "eleven", then "ten" and so on. She saw an old ivy creeper climbing half-way up the brick wall opposite to the window. Also, the creeper was shedding its leaves in the strong wind. Johnsy was very depressed. She created a thought that she would die when the last leaf fell. Moreover, she did not accept the soup offered to her. Later, in the last leaf summary, Sue tried to show affection towards Johnsy. Sue told her that she would not die. She kept the curtain open as she needed the light to complete her painting. She desired to fetch money for them by selling it. Sue pleaded Johnsy not to look out of the window. Also, she told Johnsy that she would not die. She has to live for her friends. Moreover, Sue would become lonely without Johnsy. But Johnsy was sure that she would die as soon as the last leaf falls. She added that she would sleep after the last leaf falls and would sleep forever. Sue was very worried about her friend's condition. She was helpless. Sue rushed to the ground floor to seek help from a 60-year-old painter. His name was Behrman. His lifelong dream was to paint a masterpiece. Unfortunately, it remained a dream only. Sue told the condition of his friend to Behrman. She refused to eat and continuously looked outside the window. She declares that she would not survive after the falling of the last leaf. He condemned Johnsy for being silly. However, he agrees to paint the last leaf for Johnsy so that she could recover. Johnsy woke up the next morning. To her surprise, the last leaf survived the storm and it was clinging to the creeper. It survived another storm in the evening too. This incident opened Johnsy's eyes. She apologized to her friend for being so irresponsive and depressed. She realized that it was a sin to think of death. Then, she combed, had soup, and a desire to live. The doctor arrived. He told about the improvement in her health. He added that she would recover soon as her desire to live was back. Sue went to see Behrman. He was only two days ill. However, he dies of pneumonia contracted while being out in the wet and cold. Sue tells this news to Johnsy. She tells her to look at the last leaf clinging to the creeper. She reveals the truth that it was the masterpiece of the old artist, Behrman. He always wanted to produce a masterpiece painting but had never succeeded in his attempt to produce the same. However, to help her recover from her depression, he spent considerable time painting with great realism a leaf on the wall. Thus, he himself dies of pneumonia contracted while being out in the wet and cold.

## NCERT QUESTIONS

Question 1.

What is Johnsy's illness? What can cure her, the medicine or the willingness to live?

Answer:

Johnsy, a young artist, was ill. She was suffering from pneumonia. But later on she suffered from a misconception that she would die as soon as the last leaf on the creeper would fall down. The medicine had no effect on her. Her willingness to live could cure her.

Question 2.

Do you think the feeling of depression Johnsy has is common among teenagers?

Answer:

Life has two aspects i.e. positive and negative. It depends upon us how we take it. Nowadays it is very common that teenagers are getting depressed because of cut-throat competition. On the other hand, a majority of teenagers who take life positively and faces difficulties boldly never lose hope and proceed further.

Question 3.

Behrman has a dream. What is it? Does it come true?

Answer:

Behrman had a dream to paint a masterpiece in his life. He kept waiting for the opportunity to give it a practical shape. Yes, he could materialize his dream when he painted the last leaf of the ivy creeper.

Question 4.

What is Behrman's masterpiece? What makes Sue say so?

Answer:

Behrman was a 60-year old artist who had a dream to paint a masterpiece. His painting of an ivy leaf was his masterpiece which saved the life of Johnsy. It was such a painting that it was not easy to make out whether the leaf was real or it was just a painting. When Behrman died painting this life-saving painting, Sue called it a masterpiece.

#### QUESTION BANK

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Question 8.

Who was Behrman?

Answer:

Behrman was a sixty year old painter whose only ambition was to paint a masterpiece. He lived in the same building as Sue and Johnsy, and sometimes acted as a model for their paintings.

Question 9.

What did Sue confide in Behrman?

Answer:

She told him about her worries about Johnsy, who refused to recover from her illness because of her belief that she was going to die the day the last leaf fell off the creeper outside her window.

Question 10.

What did Sue feel when she saw the last leaf on the creeper? Who was at the window with her?

Answer:

Sue felt extremely worried that the leaf would fall off by the next morning, and if Johnsy saw that, she would not survive. Behrman, an old painter and her neighbour, was at the window with her.

Question 11.

Why was Sue nervous to draw back the window curtains?

Answer:

She was worried that the last leaf on the creeper might have fallen off in the wind and snow the previous night, and that her friend Johnsy would consider it as a warning that she was also going to die soon.

Question 12.

How did the sight of the last leaf affect Johnsy?

Answer:

The sight of the last leaf clinging on to the creeper in spite of the wind and snow revived Johnsy and gave her the faith that she would survive. She realised how much she had troubled Sue by her gloom and depression, and also thought of the fact that it was a sin to want to die. ‘

Question 13.

How did the doctor react to Johnsy's recovery? What news did he give Sue?

Answer:

He declared that as Johnsy's will to live had been revived, she would recover soon. He informed Sue that their neighbour Behrman had fallen ill with pneumonia and that he did not expect him to survive.

Question 14.

How did Behrman die?

Answer:

He died of pneumonia. He had been out in the stormy night, painting a leaf on the creeper outside Johnsy's window. He came home soaked in the rain and fell ill there. The janitor found him there in the morning.

Question 15.

What did the presence of the paints and brushes near Behrman's bed signify?

Answer:

They signified that he had been out painting in the middle of the snowy, windy night.

Question 16.

Why had Behrman felt the need to paint the leaf on the creeper?

Answer:

Johnsy, his neighbour who had been suffering from pneumonia, had developed a strong belief that she would die the day the last leaf of the creeper outside her window fell. Behrman felt that he had to paint the leaf that night in order to save her life, as all the leaves had fallen off in the storm.

Question 17.

What impression do you get of Behrman?

Answer:

Behrman appears to be a selfless, caring man, who was fond of his neighbours, and put their welfare before his own. He is a great painter, because the leaf he paints is so realistic that no one can distinguish it from a real one.

Question 18.

What was Behrman's masterpiece? Why was it called so?

Answer:

The leaf that he painted on the creeper was his masterpiece, because it was realistic that Johnsy did not realise that it had been painted. As a result, she recovered from her illness. Even though it was not a famous painting, it was one that saved a life, and thus, it was a masterpiece.

Question 19.

Do you think Johnsy was a good friend? Give reasons for your answer?

Answer:

Either Yes or No is acceptable, as long as it is supported by sufficient arguments. No, I don't think she was a good friend, because she did not respond to the love and care showered on her by Sue. She did not respond to the doctor's treatment just because she had decided in her head that she would die the day the last leaf on the creeper fell, and she ignored any attempts by her friend to help her. Yes, she was a good friend, as she did finally realise and appreciate all that Sue had done for her. She apologised and made an effort to recover, thereby showing that she cared about Sue's friendship.

Question 20.

What was Johnsy's illness? What ultimately cured her: medicine, or her will to live?

Answer:

Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia. She was not responding to medicines, because she had no will to live. When she finally made up her mind to get better, she recovered from her illness.

Question 21.

Do you think the feeling of depression Johnsy had is common among teenagers? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer:

Yes, feelings of depression can be common among teenagers. They are usually sheltered and protected from the ups and downs of life by their parents as children, and often find it difficult to deal with obstacles and challenges as they grow up.

Question 22.

Behrman has a dream. What is it? Does it come true?

Answer:

Behrman had a dream of painting a masterpiece. It did come true when he painted the leaf

on the wall on which the creeper was growing. The painting was so realistic that it helped revive Johnsy who had been waiting for the last leaf on the creeper to fall.

Question 23.

What was Behrman's masterpiece? What makes Sue say so?

Answer:

His masterpiece was the leaf that he painted on the wall next to the creeper. Sue called it his masterpiece because it was so realistic that no one realised that it had been painted.

Question 24.

How long had Behrman been ill? Why did he die so quickly?

Answer:

Behrman had been ill for two days. He died very quickly, because he had gone out in the storm and remained in his wet clothes even after he returned to his flat. He was about sixty years old, and caught a chill very quickly. Further, he was found to be ill by the janitor, as he lived alone, which also suggests that he did not really have anyone to take care of him.

Question 25.

Johnsy calls herself 'wicked'. Do you agree with her?

Answer:

Johnsy can be called wicked, because she not only lost her will to live, she also ignored all the attempts by her friend Sue to help her. Even though Sue was going to great efforts to take care of her, Johnsy did not respond. In fact, it was because of her stubborn nature that Behrman ultimately lost his life.

## Questions and Answers Long Answer Type

Question 1.

Do you think Behrman was a great artist or a great human being? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer:

In my opinion, Behrman was a great human being. No doubt he was a talented artist, which is evident from his painting of the leaf on the wall. The painting was so realistic that everyone thought it was a real leaf, which saved Johnsy's life. Johnsy had made up her mind that she would die of her illness the day the last leaf fell off the creeper.

However, Behrman decided to help Sue, her friend, who was worried about the effect the falling of the last leaf would have on Johnsy. This shows how caring, selfless and concerned he was. He went out in the stormy and cold night to paint the leaf, and came back soaked to the skin, in no condition to even remove his wet clothes and shoes. He made the supreme sacrifice of his life to save the life of another human being.

Question 2.

Compare and contrast the characters of Sue and Johnsy?

Answer:

Sue and Johnsy were both artists and good friends. They shared a small flat in an old building. Sue was a very loyal and caring friend. She did everything she could to take care of Johnsy when she fell ill with pneumonia. She not only took care of Johnsy physically, but also helped by earning money by selling her paintings. She cooked and ensured that Johnsy received the best treatment.

Johnsy on the other hand appears to have been a depressed and gloomy person, who is very self-absorbed. She did not have the will to fight against her illness, and did not respond to the doctor or to Sue's care and concern. She was highly imaginative and superstitious, as she came to believe that her life was linked to the number of leaves on the creeper outside her window. She believed that she would die the day the last leaf of the creeper fell.

It was because of this stubborn belief that Behrman, an older artist, lost his life when he went out in the storm to paint a leaf onto the creeper so that Johnsy would not realise that the last leaf had actually fallen.

Question 3.

This story shows the power of the mind. Discuss.

Answer:

Yes, the story reveals the power of one's thoughts and the mind in making us believe in something. In this story, we see that one of the characters, Johnsy, is suffering from pneumonia. She believes that she will not survive, and as a result even medicines have no effect on her. Even her doctor was worried about her chances of recovery. Later, we see the power of the mind once again when she recovers.

At this point, her belief was that she would only live as long as the last leaf stayed on the creeper. When she sees that the leaf does not fall off despite the wind and stormy conditions, it makes her believe that even she might be able to survive. Even though it is not a real leaf, and was just painted by Behrman, Johnsy draws inspiration from it, and slowly gains the will to live. Therefore, the story clearly expresses the power of the mind in changing the course of our lives.

Question 4.

Why has the story been called 'The Last Leaf'? Do you think it is appropriate? Give reasons for your answer?

Answer:

As the title suggests, the story revolves around the importance of a single leaf on a tree. The leaf is particularly important in saving the life of a girl, who had convinced herself that she would die the moment the last leaf fell off the tree. However, the leaf miraculously stays on the tree, giving the girl hope to survive. The title also refers to the fact that the leaf is the last artwork made by an out of work painter, which also becomes his masterpiece.

Question 5.

What is the theme and message of the story?

Answer:

The main theme explored in the short story "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry is that of

selflessness and sacrifice. Other minor themes also resurface from the text, and the most notable ones are the theme of hope and the theme of death.

#### Selflessness and sacrifice

This theme is illustrated by Behrman and his efforts to help Johnsy find a reason to live and something to hold on to. When he finds out that Johnsy is convinced that she will die once the last ivy leaf falls, the man is determined to do something to prevent her death. As an ultimate sacrifice, he gets out in the rain and snow in the middle of the night to paint an ivy leaf on the brick wall.

#### Hope

The theme of hope is illustrated in the story by Sue. Even though the doctor only gives Johnsy one chance in ten to recover, Sue does not lose her hope. Note that she tries to be optimistic in her interactions with Johnsy, lying to her about her chances to survive and hoping that Johnsy finds something to cling on to

#### Death

The theme of death is explored in several ways in the story. On the one hand, this theme is hinted at through the title of the story, where the word "last" represents something close to an end.

#### MCQ TYPE QUESTIONS/ ANSWER IN ONE WORD

Q1- What was Johnsy suffering from?

- A) headache
- B) pneumonia
- C) fever
- D) Malaria

Q2- According to the doctors what was the cure to her illness?

- A) medicines
- B) strong medicines
- C) love and care
- D) her own willingness to live

Q3- What kind of feeling did Johnsy have?

- A) a common teenager's feeling of depression
- B) sadness
- C) joyous
- D) low sounding

Q4- Mention the reasons for depression in teenagers.

- A) peer pressure
- B) poor performance in the exams
- C) inability to live upto parents' expectations
- D) all

Q5- Who was Behrman?

- A) A 60 years old painter
- B) a 50 years old man
- C) a 40 years old man
- D) a young boy

Q6- What was Behrman's dream?

- A) to travel the world
- B) to paint a masterpiece
- C) to make a colorful painting
- D) to make a poster

Q7- Who was Johnsy?

- A) A young artist
- B) a girl
- C) a sick girl
- D) none

Q8- What misconception had Johnsy developed in her mind?

- A) she was great
- B) she can't be cured
- C) she would die with the fall of last the leaf on the creeper
- D) all

Q9- What kind of teenagers never lose hope?

- A) who stay positive and face life's difficulties with a positive mind
- B) who are glamorous
- C) who never fall sick
- D) who have everything

Q10- When was Behrman able to make his dream true?

- A) when he painted the last leaf on ivy
- B) when he died
- C) when he thought of Johnsy
- D) none

Q11- What did Sue speak when he looked at the last ivy leaf painting?

- A) a great painting
- B) nice work
- C) a masterpiece
- D) None

Q12- What was Behrman's masterpiece?

- A) painting of monalisa
- B) painting of a flower
- C) painting of ivy the leaf
- D) none

Q13- Why was the ivy leaf painting a masterpiece?

- A) because it was difficult to make out whether it was a real leaf or a painting
- B) because it was very beautiful
- C) because it's colours were very bright
- D) none

Q14- What happened to Behrman after he painted his masterpiece?

- A) drenched and died of pneumonia
- B) he felt proud and happy
- C) was honoured
- D) none

Q15- What happened to Johnsy when she saw Behrman's masterpiece painting?

- A) she became confident that she could be cured
- B) felt delighted
- C) jumped out of bed
- D) none

Q16- Where did Behrman spend his night to make his masterpiece?

- A) in a hotel
- B) on a mountain
- C) in a heavy storm
- D) none

Q17- What did Behrman's masterpiece do?

- A) made everyone happy
- B) saved Johnsy's life by rekindling the positive belief in her
- C) Behrman was rewarded
- D) All

Q18- Why do many teenagers feel depressed?

- A) because of too many desires
- B) because of higher aspirations
- C) because of inability to cope up with the expectations
- D) All

Q19- Why did doctors say that Johnsy could not be cured with medicines?

- A) because treatment was not available
- B) because no competent doctor was available
- C) because she lost her will to get well
- D) All

Q20- Mention the characters of the story.

- A) Behrman
- B) Sue
- C) Johnsy
- D) All

For Reference to context type questions read the chapter carefully twice or thrice and learn the name of the author.

For any doubt do contact me on my personal number and the questions and summary given in this document is enough for you all to score 95+ in exams. All the important question answers have been covered in this .

The answers of MCQ's are given on next page

### Answer key

| Q. No. | Answer | Q. No. | Answer |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 1      | B      | 11     | C      |
| 2      | D      | 12     | C      |
| 3      | A      | 13     | A      |
| 4      | D      | 14     | A      |
| 5      | A      | 15     | A      |
| 6      | B      | 16     | C      |
| 7      | A      | 17     | B      |
| 8      | C      | 18     | C      |
| 9      | A      | 19     | C      |
| 10     | A      | 20     | D      |