

A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON O. HENRY'S "THE LAST LEAF"

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O. Henry's short story "The Last Leaf," first published in 1907 in his collection "The Four Million", is a deeply moving narrative stories that learns topics of hope, sacrifice, and the human spirit. Set in Greenwich Village, the story goes around two young artists, Johnsy and Sue, and their elderly neighbor, Mr. Behrman. O. Henry presents an inspiring and heartbreaking story that is brilliantly told via the perspectives of these characters. In this essay, I will share my personal thoughts and analysis of "The Last Leaf," highlighting its emotional side and the long-lasting effect it has had on my reading.

The plot summary of "The Last Leaf" is dishonestly simple but rich with meaning in it. Johnsy, one of the two young artists, falls seriously ill with pneumonia. Her physical condition declines, and she becomes fixated on the idea that she will die when the last leaf falls from the ivy vine outside her window. Her friend and roommate, Sue, is deeply concerned and does everything in her power to provide comfort and encouragement for her. Meanwhile, their elderly neighbor, Mr. Behrman, who is also an artist, becomes an unlikely hero by painting a leaf on the wall to give Johnsy hope and the will to live. This act, however, ultimately leads to Mr. Behrman's own death¹. One of the most noticeable aspects of the story is the theme of hope and its transformative power. Johnsy's action that her fate is tied to the falling leaves represents her surrender to lose her hope. When she sees the seemingly immovable last leaf, her belief shifts from hopelessness to a renewed desire to fight her illness. This theme deeply resonated with me, as it underscores the profound impact that hope can have on a person's outlook and will to survive. Mr. Behrman's selfless act of painting the leaf, despite his own frailty, serves as a powerful reminder that hope can come from the most unexpected sources and can make a significant difference in someone's life.

¹ Henry, O. "The Last Leaf." In *The Four Million*, 1907.

The character of Mr. Behrman is particularly captivating. Initially portrayed as a grumpy, failed artist who has never achieved his dream of painting a masterpiece, he ultimately becomes the story's hero. His decision to paint the leaf on the wall, knowing it could be his last act, discovers his deep compassion and willingness to sacrifice for others. This transformation from a seemingly insignificant figure to a hero who saves Johnsy's life is moving. It made me reflect on how true heroism often goes unnoticed and how acts of kindness and sacrifice, no matter how small, can have a long lasting impact.² The relationship between Johnsy and Sue adds an emotional sense to the story that is both heart touching and relatable. Sue's unwavering care and support for Johnsy, despite her own fears and challenges, highlight the strength of their friendship. Sue's every act to keep Johnsy's spirits up, even when faced with the prospect of losing her friend, demonstrates the flexibility and sense of their bond. This magnificence is beautifully detailed, emphasizing the importance of having a support system during times of crisis. It reminded me of the value of friendship and the essential role that emotional support plays in our lives, especially during difficult times.

O. Henry's signature twist ending in "The Last Leaf" is both unexpected and deeply moving. When it is said that the last leaf was actually a painting by Mr. Behrman, it adds a big layer to the narrative field. This twist not only highlights Mr. Behrman's victim but also states the power of perception and belief. The painted leaf becomes a symbol of enduring hope for her life, allowing Johnsy to overcome her illness. The twist left a lasting impression on me, as it shows the story's main idea of hope, and the impact of noticeable small acts of kindness.

Reading "The Last Leaf" has been an experience for me. It has deepened my appreciation for O. Henry's ability to describe complex emotions and themes within a short narrative. The story serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of empathy, and the lasting power of hope in the face of adversity. Mr. Behrman's act

² Current-Garcia, Eugene, and Walton R. Patrick. *O. Henry (William Sydney Porter)*. Twayne Publishers, 1965.

of painting the leaf, Sue's support, and Johnsy's renewed will to live all contribute to a narrative that is both heart-wrenching and uplifting.

In conclusion, "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry is a masterful work of art of hope, and the human spirit. Through its simple yet narrative, the story captures the essence of selflessness and the transformative power of hope. The characters of Johnsy, Sue, and Mr. Behrman each contribute to a story that is both heart-touching and pleased, demonstrating the big amount of impact of kindness and emotional support.

REFERENCES

1. Henry, O. "The Last Leaf." In **The Four Million**, 1907.
2. Current-Garcia, Eugene, and Walton R. Patrick. **O. Henry (William Sydney Porter)**. Twayne Publishers, 1965.