

“ The Last Leaf ”

by O. Henry

[This is an example only. No permission to duplicate is granted.]

READ-ALOUND SCRIPT

Master Script 000

Balance Publishing Company
1346 South Quality Avenue
Sanger, CA 93657

<http://www.balancepublishing.com>

“The Last Leaf”

by O. Henry

adapted to audio script by Don Kisner

CAUTION: No part of this script may be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or reproduced in any way without prior written permission of the publisher. All performance rights, including amateur and professional motion picture, recitation, video, audio, public reading, radio, TV and cable vision broadcasting are reserved. This is master read-aloud script 000. Written permission may be acquired by contacting: Rights and Permissions, Balance Publishing Company, 1346 South Quality Avenue, Sanger, CA 93657; email: balance02@sprynet.com.

[This is an example only. No permission to duplicate is granted.]

CHARACTERS

JOHNSY
SUE
DOCTOR

MR. BEHRMAN
NARRATOR

SCENE ONE

NARRATOR: In New York City, there's a small district just west of Washington Square, where the narrow, irregular streets have run crazy and broken themselves into short strips called *places*. It's an ancient, residential community where many of the beautiful, old, brick houses date back to the 1820's, when an epidemic forced people from the city to what was then a rural suburban village. Now, in the final year of the nineteenth century, we find clusters of colorful restaurants, theaters, and shops. People interested in the creative lifestyle were attracted by the quaint, continental atmosphere, and so, to this village of the big city, they've come: the artists, the actors, the musicians, the dancers, the writers, hunting for nirth windows and 18th century gables and Dutch attics and low rents.

[RESTAURANT SOUNDS]

It's an evening in late spring, and the dinner hour finds the little Eighth Street Delmonico's busy as usual. Most of the patrons this evening, the village old-timers, blend into the surroundings: but now and then there's one who stands out, a recent arrival. Joanna Gaines is one of these. Alone in the crowd, she looks new, fragile, out of place.

She pays for her tray of food, then standing for a moment, awkward, she looks around. Finally, spotting her goal, chin out, she crosses the room to a tiny table with two chairs and only one diner.

§ § §

JOHNSY: Excuse me! All the other tables seem to be taken. Do you mind if I sit here?

SUE: Oh! No! Of course not! I'd love the company. Please! Join me.

JOHNSY: Thank you! My name is Joanna Gaines.

SUE: Hello, Joanna! Susan Cross. Friends call me Sue.

JOHNSY: Hi, Sue. My friends call me Johnsy.

SUE: Johnsy! I like it.

JOHNSY: It's really busy in here this time of day, isn't it. Do you eat here often?

SUE: Just about every day. It's the cheapest, and the best place around. I haven't seen you in here before, have I?

JOHNSY: No, this is the first time. I just got to town three days ago. It's all so very different from California.

SUE: Oh, California? I was there once. What part are you from?

JOHNSY: A small town near San Francisco, Sebastopol. Do you know it?

SUE: Afraid not. I only spent a few days there, all of them in Los Angeles. Why'd you come to New York?

JOHNSY: To work, and study, I'm an artist. Or at least I'd like to be.

SUE: Oh! Wonderful! So am I.

JOHNSY: Have you lived in the Village long?

SUE: About four months.

§ § §

NARRATOR: That's how Sue and Johnsy met. Soon they found their tastes in art, chicory salad, and clothes so congenial, and their need for the economics of shared rent so demanding, that a joint studio resulted. It was at the top of a squatty, three-story brick that, finally, they found exactly what they wanted.

That was in May.

[This is an example only. No permission to duplicate is granted.]

SCENE TWO

NARRATOR: In November, a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy finger. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, swiftly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown *places*.

Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch windowpanes at the blank side of the next brick house.

One morning, after the doctor had finished his third visit, Sue followed him into the small dark space just outside the apartment that served as a hallway.

§ § §

SUE: How is she, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Not good. Not good at all, I'm afraid. She has one chance in let us say, ten. And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-up on the side of the undertaker makes the entire field of medicine look silly.

SUE: Is there anything that I can do to help, Doctor?

DOCTOR: The little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?

SUE: She... well, she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day.

DOCTOR: Paint? Bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking about twice a man, for instance?

SUE: A man? Is a man worth... No, doctor, there's nothing of that kind.

DOCTOR: Well, it's weakness, then. I'll do everything that medicine, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But when-ever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession, I subtract fifty percent from the curative power from medicines. What can you do to help? Well, if you can get her to show some interest in something, even the new winter styles in coat sleeves, then I'll promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one-in-ten.

SCENE THREE

NARRATOR: After the doctor had gone, Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. Then she swaggered into Johnsy's room with her drawing board, whistling. Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bed-clothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking she was asleep. She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story.

JOHNSY: [*SHE IS COUNTING BACKWARDS.*] Twelve! Eleven! Ten! Nine! Eight!

NARRATOR: Johnsy's eyes were open wide and she was staring out the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of a brick house forty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks.

JOHNSY: Seven!

SUE: What is it, dear?

JOHNSY: Six! They're falling faster now. Three days ago, there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now.

SUE: Five what, dear?

JOHNSY: Leaves on the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for days. Didn't the doctor tell you?

SUE: Oh, I've never heard of such nonsense. What do old ivy leaves have to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so much.

JOHNSY: It's just a feeling I have. I don't know how I know, Sue, but somehow I do. I'm sure that when the last leaf falls off that vine, I'll die.

SUE: Don't be a silly goose. Why, the doctor told me this morning that your chances of getting well real soon, were... Let's see, exactly what did he say? He said the chances were ten to one! Why, that's almost as good a chance as when we're in New York when we ride on the street cars or we pass a new building. Try to take some broth now, won't you? And I'll go back to my drawing, so I can sell the editor with it, and buy port wine for my sick child, and pork chops for my greedy old self.

JOHNSY: You needn't get any more wine. There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too.

SUE: Johnsy, dear, will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I'm done working? I must get those drawings done by tomorrow. I need the light, or I'd pull the shade down.

JOHNSY: Couldn't you draw in the other room?

SUE: I'd rather be here with you. Besides, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves.

JOHNSY: All right, but tell me as soon as you've finished, because I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves.

SUE: You try to get some sleep, now. I must go downstairs and see if Mr. Behrman will come up to be my model for the old hermit miner. I'll not be gone a minute. Don't try to move 'til I come back.

SCENE FOUR

NARRATOR: Old Behrman was a painter who lived one floor down. He was past sixty and had a Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. For forty years he had wielded the brush without success. Always, according to his own words, he had been just about to paint a master-piece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nearly nothing, except now and then an ad for a magazine, or a billboard. And occasionally, he earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony, who couldn't pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming master-piece. For the rest, he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed at softness in any one, and thought himself protector to the two young artists in the studio above.

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly lighted den below. In one corner was a blank canvas that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece.

§ § §

SUE: ...she was counting backward. I asked her what she was counting and she said, "The ivy leaves." She's convinced when the last leaf falls, she will die too. I'm scared!

BEHRMAN: Vot are you speaking, dot my leetle Johnsy wants not to live? Nonsense! She must not think this vay. It is crazy. Why do you let it happen?

SUE: Oh, I don't know, Mr. Behrman. It's... It's just that she's as light and fragile as a leaf herself. I guess I'm just afraid it'll all come true and she will die when the last leaf falls.

BEHRMAN: Vass! Is dere people in der vorld with der foolishness to die because leafs they fall from a vine? I have not heard of such a thing. Why do you allow that silly business to come in der brain of her? No, I will not pose as a model for your fool hermit dunder-head. Ach, poor leetle Miss Johnsy.

SUE: She's very ill and weak, and the fever has left her mind full of strange, and morbid thoughts. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you don't care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you're a horrid old... old... old... fibbertigibbett.

BEHRMAN: You are chust like a voman! Who said I vill not bose? Go on. I will come with you. For half an hour I haf been trying to say dat I am ready to bose. Gott! Dis is not any place in which one so schones as Miss Johnsy shall lie sick. Some day I vill baint a masterpiece, and ve shall all go away. Goot? Ya!

SCENE FIVE

[This is an example only. No permission to duplicate is granted.]

NARRATOR: Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. A cold persistent rain was falling mingled with snow. Sue pulled Johnsy's shade down to the window sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room where they peered fearfully out of the window at the ivy vine. They looked at each other, neither spoke. Then Behrman in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit-miner on an upturned kettle for a rock. Later, when the sketch was done, the old man went on his way.

The next morning when Sue awoke from an hour's sleep, she found Johnsy with dulled, wide-open eyes staring at the drawn shade.

§ § §

SUE: Have something to eat this morning, won't you Johnsy? Just a little broth or a taste of fruit.

JOHNSY: Pull it up! I want to see.

SUE: Look! Johnsy! It's still there! All that weather, and it's still there!

JOHNSY: It's the last one. I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard so much wind. It will fall today, and I'll die at the same time.

SUE: Dear! Dear, Johnsy! Think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do if you should die?

§ § §

NARRATOR: But Johnsy did not answer. The loneliest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious far journey. Something seemed to be drawing her away more strongly now, as one by one the ties that bound her to friendship and to earth were loosed.

The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR: When the light of the next day spread over the Village, once more making clear the details of Johnsy's ancient, ivied brick wall, the determined little leaf was still there.

§ § §

JOHNSY: Sue, come in here for a moment, will you? Sit here beside me. I have something I want to say.

SUE: Johnsy, I wish you wouldn't keep on about the leaf. I really can't stand to hear you talk that way.

JOHNSY: I know, Sue. I know. I promise. Don't go! Please don't go.

SUE: Well, all right. If you promise not to talk about death.

JOHNSY: Oh, Sue! What an awful person I've been! I've been sitting here for the longest time, staring out the window at the last leaf, thinking of the past few days. All of a sudden it came to me.

SUE: What? What came to you, Dear?

JOHNSY: Sue, something made that last leaf stay on the vine so that I'd realize how bad I've been. It was a message. Don't you see, Sue, something wanted me to live.

SUE: Oh, Johnsy!

JOHNSY: Someday, Sue, I'm going to paint the Bay of Naples.

SUE: Oh, Johnsy! Johnsy! How wonderful! I'm so happy!

JOHNSY: You can bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and, no; bring me a hand-mirror first; and pack some pillows about me, and I'll sit up and watch you cook.

[This is an example only. No permission to duplicate is granted.]

SCENE SEVEN

NARRATOR: The doctor came in the afternoon, and found Johnsy full of the color of life, and declared the battle won.

DOCTOR: She'll be just fine. All she needs now is good food and nursing.

SUE: Thank you, Doctor. I'll see that she gets them.

DOCTOR: Good! And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is. Some kind of an artist, I believe.

SUE: Oh, no, not Mr. Behrman. I hadn't heard. What's wrong with him?

DOCTOR: Pneumonia, too.

SUE: Oh, my God! Is it bad?

DOCTOR: Yes, I'm sorry to say. Quite bad! He's an old man, he's very weak, and it was too late for me to do very much. There's no hope for him. But he goes to the hospital today to be made more comfortable.

SCENE EIGHT

NARRATOR: The day passed and Johnsy grew stronger by the hour. Life was once more part of her world. Everything was beautiful, even the Bay of Naples didn't seem so far away. Sue went about her necessary errands: the drawings had to be delivered; they were out of port wine; and, of course, there was the hospital and Mr. Behrman. And late that afternoon, Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woolen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around Johnsy, pillows and all.

§ § §

SUE: I have something to tell you, dear. Our Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia today.

JOHNSY: Oh, dear God, no!

SUE: He'd been ill for only two days. On the morning of the first day, the janitor found him downstairs. His shoes and his clothing were wet, his apartment icy cold, and he was helpless with pain. At first, they couldn't imagine where he'd been on such a dreadful night. But then they found a lantern, still burning, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and in his room, they found brushes and a palette with green and yellow colors on them. Look out the window, at the last leaf. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? That leaf is Mr. Behrman's masterpiece. He painted it there that night—the night the last leaf fell.

Discussion/Writing Activity

“The Last Leaf”

DIRECTIONS: When using these questions as writing assignments, use separate paper.

1. The ending of “The Last Leaf” was meant to surprise.
 - a. Did you think it would end differently?
 - b. How did you think it would end?
 - c. Why did you think it would end this way?
 - d. If you knew it would end as it did, explain how you knew.
2. The author of a story has the power to create his CHARACTERS any way he wishes.
 - a. Why do you think O. Henry made Behrman a pathetic, old unsuccessful artist?
 - b. Is there a contradiction in Behrman's CHARACTER?
 - (1) What is the contradiction?
 - (2) Why do you think O. Henry created this contradiction?
 - c. Why do you think O. Henry cast Sue and Johnsy as struggling, naive artists?
3. Do you think Mr. Behrman would have painted the leaf on the wall if he had known he would catch pneumonia and die?
4. Who are the main CHARACTERS?
5. What is the SETTING of time and place of “The Last Leaf”?
6. Is it easy to determine the SETTING? How is the setting revealed to you?
7. What is the period of time that the story covers?
8. What is the MOOD of the story? List some examples of mood development in “The Last Leaf.”
9. Identify some instances of PERSONIFICATION in “The Last Leaf.”
10. Discuss THEME in “The Last Leaf.”

Discussion/Writing Activity

“The Last Leaf”

- The ending of “The Last Leaf” was meant to surprise. *[Answers will vary.]*
 - Did you think it would end differently?
 - How did you think it would end?
 - Why did you think it would end this way?
 - If you knew it would end as it did, explain how you knew.
- The author of a story has the power to create his CHARACTERS any way he wishes.
 - Why do you think O. Henry made Behrman a pathetic, old, unsuccessful artist? *[O. Henry wanted to arouse our sympathy for Behrman. Also, he could insure a surprise ending by insinuating that the failed, old artist would never really create a masterpiece.]*
 - Is there a contradiction in Behrman's CHARACTER? *[Yes.]*
 - What is the contradiction? *[Our first impression of Behrman is quite negative. He seems to be a disagreeable and unlikable man. Later, however, we discover that his crankiness is really a cover-up for his soft heart.]*
 - Why do you think O. Henry created this contradiction? *[This contradiction in Behrman's character heightens the impact we feel when he suddenly and unexpectedly sacrifices himself for Johnsy.]*
 - Why do you think O. Henry cast Sue and Johnsy as struggling, naive artists? *[Again, to arouse sympathy. In an age of cynicism and bitterness, we tend to sympathize with youth and idealism. Such contrasting themes engage the reader and make for a more rewarding story.]*
- Do you think Mr. Behrman would have painted the leaf on the wall if he had known he would catch pneumonia and die? *[Probably. His life was nearly over anyway, whereas Johnsy's was just beginning.]*
- Who are the main CHARACTERS? *[Johnsy, Sue, Mr. Behrman]*
- What is the SETTING of time and place of “The Last Leaf”? *[Greenwich Village, 1899.]*
- Is it easy to determine the SETTING? *[Answers will vary.]* How is the setting revealed to you? *[The reader is told it is New York City, but the author assumes the reader knows something about the city—its history, and various neighborhoods, such as Greenwich Village, where the artists lived.]*
- What is the period of time that the story covers? *[May to November or December.]*
- What is the MOOD of the story? *[The overall mood is of despair and sadness, but the power of tenderness and love are also an important part of the mood.]* List some examples of mood development in “The Last Leaf.” *[“...and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch windowpanes at the blank side of the next brick house.” “An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall.” “The loneliest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious far journey.” “That leaf is Mr. Behrman's masterpiece. He painted it there that night—the night the last leaf fell.”]*
- Identify some instances of PERSONIFICATION in “The Last Leaf.” *[(1) “...the narrow, irregular streets have run crazy and broken themselves into short strips called places.” (2) “In November, a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy finger.” (3) “Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, swiftly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown places.” (4) “Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman.” (5) “A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the redfisted, short-breathed old duffer” (6) “The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine...” (7) “... its skeleton branches clung ... to the crumbling bricks.”]*
- Discuss THEME in “The Last Leaf.” *[The meaning of this story can best be identified by looking at the outcome. If you look at the outcome from Mr. Behrman's view, you might conclude that here is a man who, after almost a lifetime, is a failure—he has no family and he has accomplished nothing that will live on when he is dead. Behrman probably viewed his sacrifice as worthwhile. From Behrman's view, the theme is: Love of another can be stronger than love for self. If you look at the outcome, from Johnsy's view you might conclude that Johnsy is a very foolish and silly young woman. She caused her friends a great deal of worry and concern. From Johnsy's view, the theme is: Foolish and immature solutions to serious situations can result in tragic consequences for those who love us.]*