B1 原著扩展阅读

原著阅读实战训练 2

THE LAST LEAF

by O. Henry

OVERVIEW

- **Author**

O. Henry

- **Year Published**

1907

- **Type**

Short Story

- **Genre**

Fiction

AUTHORSHIP

- O. Henry
- 1862 - 1910
- O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter, an American short story writer who is known for his tales about the life of ordinary people, especially in New York. His stories generally expressed the effect of coincidence on character through humour, grim or irony. Above anything else, he is known for his surprise endings. Once his trademark, it finally cost him critical favour.

In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called "places." These "places" make strange angles and curves. One Street crosses itself a time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back, without a cent having been paid on account!

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a "colony."

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. "Johnsy" was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the table d'hôte of an Eighth Street "Delmonico's," and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

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

Mr. 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 window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, gray eyebrow.

"She has one chance in–let us say, ten," he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. "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 pharmacopoeia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?"

"She–she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day." said Sue.

"Paint?–bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking twice–a man for instance?"

"A man?" said Sue, with a jew's-harp twang in her voice. "Is a man worth–but, no, doctor; there is nothing of the kind."

"Well, it is the weakness, then," said the doctor. "I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one-in-ten."

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 ragtime.

Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bedclothes, 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. Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to Literature.

As Sue was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle of the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy, she heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside.

Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting– counting backward.

"Twelve," she said, and little later "eleven"; and then "ten," and "nine"; and then "eight" and "seven", almost together.

Sue look solicitously out of the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty 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.

"What is it, dear?" asked Sue.

"Six," said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. "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."

"Five what, dear? Tell your Sudie."

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

"Oh, I never heard of such nonsense," complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. "What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so, you naughty girl. Don't be a goosey. Why, the doctor told me this morning that your chances for getting well real soon were–let's see exactly what he said–he said the chances were ten to one! Why, that's almost as good a chance as we have in New York when we ride on the street cars or walk past a new building. Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self."

"You needn't get any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed out the window. "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."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in by to-morrow. I need the light, or I would draw the shade down."

"Couldn't you draw in the other room?" asked Johnsy, coldly.

"I'd rather be here by you," said Sue. "Beside, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, and lying white and still as fallen statue, "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."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman 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."

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along with the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nothing except now and then a daub in the line of commerce or advertising. He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece. For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself as especial mastiff-in-waiting to protect 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 on an easel that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece. She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away, when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker.

Old Behrman, with his red eyes plainly streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings.

"Vass!" he cried. "Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing. No, I will not bose as a model for your fool hermit-dunderhead. Vy do you allow dot silly pusiness to come in der brain of her? Ach, dot poor leetle Miss Yohnsy."

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue, "and the fever has left her mind morbid and full of strange fancies. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you do not care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you are a horrid old–old flibbertigibbet."

"You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman. "Who said I will not bose? Go on. I come mit you. For half an hour I haf peen trying to say dot I am ready to bose. Gott! dis is not any blace in which one so goot as Miss Yohnsy shall lie sick. Some day I vill baint a masterpiece, and ve shall all go away. Gott! yes."

Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit miner on an upturned kettle for a rock.

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

"Pull it up; I want to see," she ordered, in a whisper.

Wearily Sue obeyed.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last one on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from the branch some twenty feet above the ground.

"It is the last one," said Johnsy. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"

But Johnsy did not answer. The lonesomest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious, far journey. The fancy seemed to possess her more strongly 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.

When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised.

The ivy leaf was still there.

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove.

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring a me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and–no; bring me a hand-mirror first, and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

And hour later she said:

"Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left.

"Even chances," said the doctor, taking Sue's thin, shaking hand in his. "With good nursing you'll win." And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is–some kind of an artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is an old, weak man, and the attack is acute. There is no hope for him; but he goes to the hospital to-day to be made more comfortable."

The next day the doctor said to Sue: "She's out of danger. You won. Nutrition and care now–that's all."

And that afternoon Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woollen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around her, pillows and all.

"I have something to tell you, white mouse," she said. "Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia to-day in the hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colors mixed on it, and–look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece–he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Sue and Johnsy in New York City

The story opens with an omniscient narrator's description of Greenwich Village as a part of New York with mixed-up streets that don't follow a formal grid. Many painters come there to live for the "good light ... at a low cost." Two of these painters are Sue and Johnsy, who come from Maine and California respectively. They met in a restaurant and there discovered their similar tastes in art, food, and clothes, so they "decided to live and work together." That happened in the spring.

PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Mr. Pneumonia Shows Up

Toward winter, the narrator says, a visitor called "Mr. Pneumonia" comes to the Village. The disease touches many people with "icy fingers." He isn't nice; he makes Johnsy, the "weak little woman from California," sick. She takes to her bed, barely moving, and stares out the window at the house next door.

When the doctor comes, he tells Sue that Johnsy can live, but she doesn't seem to have the will to. He asks Sue if there's anything for Johnsy to live for. Sue says that Johnsy always wanted to go to Italy and paint the Bay of Naples. The doctor finds this silly and asks if there's a man in Johnsy's life who is "worth being troubled about." Sue replies, "A man? Is a man worth—No, doctor. There is not a man." The doctor says that Sue should try to get Johnsy interested in the future. That will improve her chances of living.

PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

The Leaves

After briefly crying, Sue comes into Johnsy's room to paint. Johnsy is staring out the window at a tree that is losing its leaves, counting the remaining leaves. In the space of a few moments she counts down from a dozen to five leaves on the tree, saying, "They're falling faster now." When the last leaf falls, Johnsy tells the puzzled Sue, she will die. Sue tells Johnsy she is being foolish, and that the doctor said her chances for getting well are very good. Johnsy refuses Sue's offer of food and watches another leaf fall, leaving four behind. She says she wants to watch the last leaf fall before night; "Then I'll go, too." Sue implores her friend not to look out the window. She is going to paint.

Sue says she needs a male model for her painting and goes to talk to their neighbor, Mike Behrman. Behrman is an old painter who drinks too much and isn't very successful. He always said he would paint a masterpiece someday, but he never got started. Meanwhile, he does modeling for other artists. He is very fond of Sue and Johnsy.

PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

Behrman's Visit

Sue can tell Behrman has been drinking. She tells him what Johnsy said. He's very upset and thinks it's foolish to die because of a leaf on a tree. Sue says Johnsy is sick and weak, and the sickness "has put these strange ideas into her mind." Behrman says he'll come and model for Sue. He says that someday he'll paint his masterpiece and take them away from here.

Behrman comes up to the floor where Sue and Johnsy live. Johnsy is asleep, and Sue covers the window. Then they go to another room and look fearfully out the window at the tree. They don't speak.

There is a huge storm that night, with snow and rain. Sue spends most of the night painting. Behrman leaves early in the morning, and Sue gets one hour's sleep.

PLOT SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

In the Morning

When Sue goes to Johnsy's room in the morning, Johnsy says she wants to see the tree.

Sue uncovers the window. Even with all the rain and snow, one leaf clings to the tree near the wall. It is dark green at the top but yellowing on the ends, and it hangs nearly 20 feet above the ground.

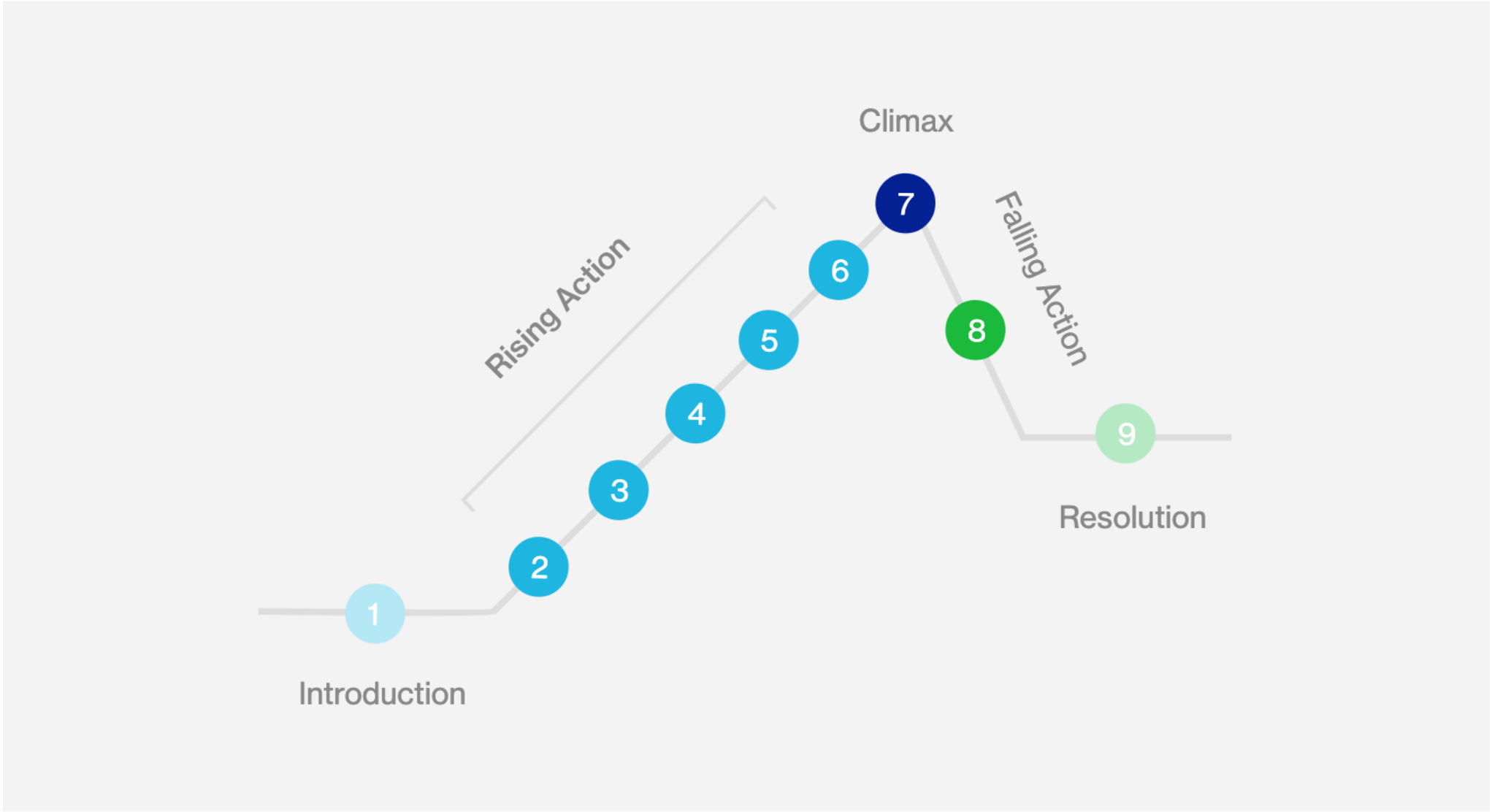
Johnsy is surprised that the leaf is there. Still, she says it will fall that day, and she will die. Sue presses her to be more positive but, the narrator says, Johnsy's soul is "preparing to go on its far journey." Johnsy is feeling less tied to friendship and the earth with every moment.

Even as it grows dark, however, the two women can see the sole leaf on the tree. There is a driving rain beating against the window.

The Last Leaf

When it is light again, Johnsy commands Sue to uncover the window so she can see if the leaf is gone. It is still there. Johnsy stares at the leaf for a long time. Then she calls Sue over and says it was wrong of her to want to die. Something has made the last leaf stay to show her how bad she was. She asks Sue to bring her mirror, and then she'll watch Sue cook. An hour later, she tells Sue she hopes to someday paint the Bay of Naples. In the afternoon, the doctor comes. He is pleased that Johnsy is looking better. He tells Sue that he has another patient in the building, old Behrman, who also has pneumonia. Behrman is going to the hospital that day and is going to die. The following day, the doctor comes again and says Johnsy is much better. That afternoon Sue goes to Johnsy's bed to tell her friend that Mr. Behrman has died of pneumonia. When someone found him in his room, his clothes and shoes were wet and as cold as ice. Everyone wondered where he'd been. Then they found a light, painting materials, and green and yellow paint. Sue points to the tree, which still has one last leaf hanging from it. She asks Johnsy if she wondered why it never moved, even in the wind. "Oh, my dear," she says, "it is Behrman's great masterpiece—he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

The Last Leaf Plot Diagram



- Introduction

1 Johnsy gets pneumonia.

- Rising Action

2 The doctor tells Sue that Johnsy needs something to live for.

3 Johnsy says she will die when the last leaf falls.

4 Sue tells Behrman about Johnsy's plan.

5 The next morning, after a storm, there is one leaf left.

6 The following morning, the last leaf is still there.

- Climax

7 Johnsy sees the last leaf and says she will live.

- Falling Action

8 The doctor tells Sue that Behrman is dying of pneumonia.

- Resolution

9 Sue tells Johnsy that Behrman painted the last leaf.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- **Sue**
- Sue has come to New York from Maine. She is a painter. While the reader doesn't know exactly what type of art Sue creates, it is clear that she is selling her art. Sue is very affectionate with her roommate, Johnsy, calling her "dear," suggesting they might be in love. In any case, she takes tender care of Johnsy throughout her illness and worries a great deal. She is also patient with Behrman, an elderly neighbor who has a drinking problem.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- **Johnsy**
- Johnsy came to New York from California to be an artist. Throughout most of the story, Johnsy is sick, weak, and unreasonably superstitious, believing she will die when the last leaf falls from a tree. However, in the end, she realizes that she was being foolish and regains her will to live.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

- **Mike Behrman**
- Mike Behrman always wanted to be a great artist. Now in his 60s, he has not lived up to his potential. He always planned to paint a masterpiece, but he never got started, perhaps because of his drinking problem. However, he is a kind-hearted man who is upset at the idea of Johnsy dying. He goes outside at night in a driving rain to paint the realistic-looking leaf that restores Johnsy's will to live.

THEME

- The idea that friendship makes **sacrifice** worthwhile is a major theme of "The Last Leaf." The self-sacrificing Sue toils to help her sick companion as the elderly Behrman paints in the rain and snow to save Johnsy's life. Both of them fearfully watch the clock, hoping for a miracle.

FRIENDSHIP IS WORTH SACRIFICE

- When Johnsy gets sick, Sue is ready to do anything to help her. She tries to keep Johnsy's spirits up by singing in her room. She coaxes her to eat. She takes time out for her own painting, but only so that she can sell her painting and earn money to help Johnsy. Finally, she pours her heart out to her elderly neighbor, Behrman.
- Johnsy's illness and the idea of her death make Behrman angry. With Sue, he spends the night worrying, staring out the window. He may not have accomplished much in life, but he is a generous man. He dreams of painting a masterpiece so that he may take his friends somewhere warmer. Finally, he decides to sacrifice his own health and life by going out into the bitter cold and rain to help his friend.
- The concept of worth is touched on when the doctor asks if there is "anything worth [Johnsy's] being troubled about? A man?" Sue quickly responds, "Is a man worth—No, doctor." But Behrman turns out to be a man worth "being troubled about," though for his friendship and not as a romantic partner.

ART AND THE MASTERPIECE

- O. Henry begins his story not with pneumonia walking about Greenwich Village, but with a hypothetical painter walking the twisty streets. Next he tells of the many artists who live there. Then he introduces the reader to two specific artists, Sue and Johnsy, drawn to one another through art. Only after all the stage is set does he introduce the subject of pneumonia. That's because this isn't a story about pneumonia. It's a story about art, the people who create it, and the way it can—in this story—literally save a life.

ART AND THE MASTERPIECE

- The importance of art is threaded throughout the story. When the doctor asks Sue what might be "troubling" Johnsy, Sue mentions art. Johnsy, she says, always wanted to go to Italy and paint the Bay of Naples. The doctor dismisses this notion. To him, a man of science, art isn't an important enough reason to live. He suggests romance or perhaps new clothing as better substitutes. But, to Johnsy, there is nothing more worth troubling over than art. She has come all the way from California to be an artist in New York. The author's way of signaling her hope has returned is to have her say "I want to paint the Bay of Naples."
- Behrman has "always talked of painting a great picture, a masterpiece," despite his lack of success. As voiced by Sue, the leaf he paints to allow Johnsy to live another day is this "great masterpiece." It helps Johnsy live in order to paint again.