

## CHAPTER

# 07

# The Last Leaf

by O Henry

### Chapter Sketch

'The Last Leaf' is a story about two artist friends, Sue and Johnsy, who live together. Once Johnsy falls ill and does not get well for a long time. Sue comes to know that Johnsy is thinking that she would die when the last leaf from a creeper outside the window would fall. She tries to convince Johnsy that she is wrong in thinking so but she doesn't change her mind. Finally, a neighbour, Behrman, paints a plastic leaf and sticks it on the creeper while Johnsy is asleep. The leaf does not fall inspite of the fierce winds and storm and after some time Johnsy realises that she was wrong in relating her death to the falling leaves of the creeper. In the process of saving Johnsy, Behrman falls ill as heavy has drenched himself in heavy rain and caught pneumonia.

### About the Characters

**Sue** She is an artist who shares a small flat with her friend. She helps her friend in getting well.

**Johnsy** She is the friend of Sue and lives with her. She is also an artist.

**Behrman** Behrman is a sixty year old painter and neighbour of Sue and Johnsy. He saves the life of Johnsy.

### Summary of the Chapter

#### The Two Friends Sue and Johnsy

Sue and Johnsy are two friends who live in a small flat on the third floor of an old building. They are artists and make paintings for living. Once Johnsy falls ill of pneumonia. She keeps looking out of the window while lying on the bed. She thinks that she is going to die.

#### The Doctor's Visit

Although the doctor comes everyday but the condition of Johnsy does not change. One day, the doctor asks Sue if anything is bothering Johnsy. The doctor tells her that it is difficult for Johnsy to get well as she has made up her mind that she will not get well. He also tells her that in this case, the medicines will not help her.

#### Sue Tries to Make Johnsy Interested in Things

Sue tries her best to make Johnsy interested in things. She talks about clothes and fashion but Johnsy does not respond. She brings her drawing board in her room and starts to paint but Johnsy does not look at her. She also starts whistling while working but Johnsy just does not notice and keeps lying still looking outside the window.

#### Sue Gets to Know about Johnsy's Strange Belief

While trying to get Johnsy's attention, Sue notices that she is counting backwards. She comes to know that Johnsy is counting the remaining leaves that are on the Ivy creeper outside the window. Johnsy tells her that the leaves are falling rapidly (speedily) in the autumn season. She also informs her that she would die, once the last leaf falls from the creeper.

## Sue Tries to Convince Johnsy

Sue tries to convince Johnsy that she is foolish in thinking that she would die with the falling of the last leaf of the ivy creeper. She even lies to her that the doctor is confident that she would get well soon. But, Johnsy does not change her mind and keeps on counting the remaining leaves on the creeper.

## Behrman Arrives at their Flat

A neighbour named Behrman arrives at their home. He gets to know about Johnsy's condition and sees that there is only one leaf remaining on the creeper which could fall anytime. He goes back to his house and paints a leaf that looks identical to the creeper's leaf and sticks it on the creeper while Johnsy is sleeping. In the process of doing so, he gets wet as it is raining heavily and it was icy cold. He falls sick and gets pneumonia.

## Johnsy Starts Getting Well

Johnsy keeps looking out of the window and notices that the last leaf is not falling. Even wind and the rain do not make the leaf fall. She realises that she was wrong in supposing that she would die with the falling of the last leaf and starts getting well.

## Sue Informs Johnsy of the Mystery

When Johnsy gets well, Sue tells her the mystery of the last leaf. She informs her that she has got well due to the efforts of Behrman. Behrman, looking at Johnsy's condition, did a wonderful thing. He painted a similar Leaf of Ivy creeper, used a lantern and ladder and pasted it on Ivy creeper. It was raining heavily and he got wet completely. He was struck with pneumonia and died after two days. Behrman had painted a masterpiece (a leaf that looked identical to the leaf on the ivy creeper) and in the process of helping her he had fallen ill and died.

## Chapter Highlights

- 1 Sue and Johnsy, two young artists, share a small flat.
- 2 Johnsy falls ill of pneumonia in November.
- 3 Although the doctor comes everyday for her checkup, there is no change in her condition.
- 4 Doctor notices that Johnsy has made up her mind that she does not want to live. So, he tells Sue that medicines alone would not help her in getting well.
- 5 Sue comes to know that Johnsy is counting the remaining leaves on a creeper outside her window and has assumed that she would die when the last leaf falls from the creeper.
- 6 Sue tries to change Johnsy's mind but she keeps on assuming the same.
- 7 Behrman, a painter, comes to their flat and sees Johnsy's condition and gets to know about her assumption.
- 8 As the last leaf has fallen while Johnsy was asleep, he paints a similar looking leaf and sticks it on the creeper.
- 9 Johnsy notices that the leaf is not falling from the creeper inspite of the fierce winds and storm and changes her mind.
- 10 She starts getting well but Behrman falls ill as he got totally wet in the icy rain and catches pneumonia while he was sticking the leaf on the creeper. He dies ultimately.

## Word Meanings

The given page nos. correspond to the pages in the prescribed textbook.

Word	Meaning
<b>PAGE 46</b>	
masterpiece	a great book, painting, music, movie, etc
convince	to believe that something is true
tiptoed	walked slowly
feeble	very weak
exclaimed	to say something in an enthusiastic or forceful way
reluctantly	hesitantly
<b>PAGE 47</b>	
fierce	very violent
clinging	to hold onto someone or something very tightly
wicked	morally bad
gloomy	sad or depressed
janitor	a person who is a caretaker or doorkeeper of a building
<b>PAGE 48</b>	
wondered	something that is surprising or hard to believe
flutter	to move with quick, light movements

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# NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

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## **Think About It** (Page 48)

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

**Ans.** Johnsy is suffering from pneumonia. She has lost hope and thinks that she would not get well. Somehow, she starts believing that she would die once the last leaf from the creeper outside her window would fall.

Johnsy can be cured only by her willingness to live and not just by medicines.

- 2** Do you think the feeling of depression that Johnsy has, is common among teenagers?

**Ans.** Yes, the feeling of depression that Johnsy has, is quite common among teenagers. They may undergo depression due to various reasons like stress, peer pressure, conflict with parents, academic pressure etc.

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

**Ans.** Behrman has a dream of painting a masterpiece. It does come true when he paints a leaf that looks identical to the leaf on the creeper. Because of this masterpiece, Johnsy survives.

As it saves the life of Johnsy, it can be called a masterpiece. However, Behrman does not live to realise his dream.

- 4** What is Behrman's masterpiece? What makes Sue say so?

**Ans.** The leaf painted and tied on the creeper by Behrman is his masterpiece.

Sue said so as it was successful in saving the life of her friend, Johnsy.

## **Talk About It** (Page 48)

- 1** Have you ever felt depressed and rejected? How did you overcome such feelings? Share your experience with your classmates.

**Ans.** Yes, I have been depressed once. It was the occasion of my cousin sister's marriage. I was unable to go to attend the marriage as I had an exam the next day. My father went to attend the marriage and I felt rejected. Later on, I realised that my parent's refusal for not letting me attend it, was for my good. My mother also helped me in overcoming the depression by saying that whatever happens, happens for good.

# Exam Practice

## Extract Based Questions

[4 Marks each]

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

1 She talked about clothes and fashions but Johnsy did not respond. Johnsy continued to lie still on her bed. Sue brought her drawing board into Johnsy's room and started painting. To take Johnsy's mind off her illness, she whistled while working.

- (i) Who is 'she' in the extract?
  - ☒ (a) Sue
  - (b) Johnsy
  - (c) Sue's friend
  - (d) Sue's sister
- (ii) Why did Johnsy continue to lie on her bed?
  - (a) As she liked to sleep
  - ☒ (b) As she was ill and depressed
  - (c) As she did not want to work
  - (d) As she was paralysed
- (iii) Find a word from the extract which means 'to keep on'.
  - (a) Stalled
  - (b) Started
  - ☒ (c) Continued
  - (d) Carry on
- (iv) Which part of speech is 'while'?
  - (a) Adverb
  - (b) Noun
  - (c) Verb
  - ☒ (d) Conjunction

- Ans. (i) (a) Sue  
 (ii) (b) As she was ill and depressed  
 (iii) (c) Continued  
 (iv) (d) Conjunction

2 "Oh, that's nonsense", replied Sue. "What have old Ivy leaves to do with your getting well? The doctor is confident that you will get better." Johnsy did not say anything. Sue went and brought her a bowl of soup.

- (i) What 'nonsense' is referred in the extract?
  - (a) The belief of Johnsy that she would die any time
  - (b) The belief of Johnsy that she would meet with an accident
  - ☒ (c) The belief of Johnsy that she would die as soon as the last leaf of the Ivy creeper would fall
  - (d) The belief of Johnsy that she would die as soon as Behrman paints a leaf
- (ii) Was the doctor really confident about Johnsy?
  - ☒ (a) No
  - (b) Yes
  - (c) At times he was confident
  - (d) Can't say because nothing is given about this in the story

- (iii) The word 'nonsense' in the extract is a .....
  - (a) Adjective
  - ☒ (b) Noun
  - (c) Verb
  - (d) Adverb
- (iv) Find a word from the extract that means 'sure'.
  - ☒ (a) Confident
  - (b) Well
  - (c) Certain
  - (d) Likely

- Ans. (i) (c) The belief of Johnsy that she would die as soon as the last leaf of the Ivy creeper would fall  
 (ii) (a) No  
 (iii) (b) Noun  
 (iv) (a) Confident

3 He was a sixty year old painter. His lifelong dream was to paint a masterpiece but that had remained a dream.

- (i) Who is 'he' in the extract?
  - (a) Johnsy's doctor
  - (b) Johnsy's friend
  - ☒ (c) Behrman
  - (d) Sue's neighbour
- (ii) What did he do for a living?
  - (a) He repaired cars
  - ☒ (b) He painted
  - (c) He danced
  - (d) He acted
- (iii) Find a word from the extract that means the same as 'a work of outstanding artistry, skill or workmanship'.
  - (a) Masterchef
  - (b) Masterblaster
  - ☒ (c) Masterpiece
  - (d) Dream
- (iv) The word 'dream' in the extract means
  - (a) Nightmare
  - (b) Hallucination
  - ☒ (c) Ambition
  - (d) Portfolio

- Ans. (i) (c) Behrman  
 (ii) (b) He painted  
 (iii) (c) Masterpiece  
 (iv) (c) Ambition

4 Then they found a ladder and a lantern still lighted lying near his bed. There were also some brushes and green and yellow paints on the floor near the ladder.

- (i) Who are 'they' in the extract?
  - ☒ (a) Sue and Johnsy
  - (b) Sue and her doctor
  - (c) Johnsy and the doctor
  - (d) Johnsy and her neighbour



- (ii) What did 'he' do with the brushes and paints?  
 (a) 'He' painted a tree using the brushes and the paints  
 (b) 'He' painted Sue's photo using the brush and the paints  
 (c) 'He' painted a flower using the brushes and the paints  
 (d) 'He' painted a leaf using the brushes and the paints
- (iii) ..... is the opposite of 'lighted' as used in the extract.  
 (a) Put on (b) Ignited  
 (c) Drain off (d) Put out

- (iv) What is the opposite of 'near'?  
 (a) Adjacent  
 (b) Shower  
 (c) Far  
 (d) Bear

- Ans.** (i) (a) Sue and Johnsy  
 (ii) (d) 'He' painted a leaf using the brushes and the paints  
 (iii) (d) Put out  
 (iv) (c) Far

### Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

- 1 What did the two friends in the story 'The Last Leaf' do? Where did they live?

**Ans.** The two friends in the story 'The Last Leaf', Sue and Johnsy, were artists. They used to paint and earn meagrely for their living. They lived in a small flat on the third floor of an old building.

- 2 When did Johnsy fall ill? What was the cause of her illness?

**Ans.** Johnsy fell very seriously ill in the month of November. She was suffering from pneumonia. Apart from this, she was also depressed and believed that she would not get well. That feeling was more dangerous than the illness itself.

- 3 Describe the things Sue did to make Johnsy interested.

**Ans.** Sue tried her best to make Johnsy take an interest in things. She talked about clothes and fashions. She started painting in Johnsy's room so that she notices her and even whistled while painting to grab her attention.

- 4 Name the creeper that Johnsy continuously looked at. Why was it shedding its leaves?

**Ans.** The name of the creeper that Johnsy continuously looked at was Ivy creeper. It was nearby the window of the room. It was shedding its leaves as it was autumn season when generally trees shed old leaves.

- 5 How did Johnsy spend her day?

**Ans.** Johnsy spent her day lying on her bed. She kept gazing out of the window and counted the leaves that were remaining on the Ivy creeper. At times, she also slept. She was under depression and was losing the will to live.

- 6 Describe the strange supposition of Johnsy.

**Ans.** Johnsy kept on counting the remaining leaves on the Ivy creeper outside her window. She supposed that she would die once the last leaf on the creeper would fall. It was a very stupid idea and she must not have thought so.

- 7 Who was Behrman? Why did he come to Sue's flat?

**Ans.** Behrman was a sixty year old painter who was a neighbour of Sue and Johnsy. He wanted to help Sue and Johnsy in one of the paintings. He came to Sue's flat as she wanted him to pose as an old miner so that she could complete her painting.

- 8 What made Johnsy change her mind?

**Ans.** Johnsy was certain that the last leaf from the Ivy creeper outside her window would fall soon. When the last leaf did not fall in the storm and the fierce winds, Johnsy changed her mind. She came out of depression and started her interest in her life.

- 9 How did Behrman save Johnsy's life?

**Ans.** Behrman saved Johnsy's life by painting a leaf that looked identical to the last leaf on the Ivy creeper. He tied the leaf to the creeper. The leaf staying intact on the creeper inspite of fierce winds and storm led Johnsy to change her mind and save herself.

1 What was troubling Johnsy and how did she get well?

Ans. Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia. It was accompanied by high fever. Apart from this ailment, she was depressed and had lost hope for living. She thought that she would die as soon as the last leaf from the Ivy creeper outside her window would fall. Sue called the doctor so that Johnsy could be treated.

Although the doctor came regularly for her checkup and gave her medicines, he was doubtful about her getting well as she didn't want to live. Sue came to know about Johnsy's strange supposition and tried her best so that she can get rid of her nonsensical belief. But, Johnsy did not want to change. When she observed that the last leaf was intact despite strong winds and storm, she realised that it is a sin to want to die. This led her to think positive and get well. After that, she came back to life.

2 "Behrman's visit to Sue's flat was a blessing in disguise for Johnsy." Justify the above statement.

Ans. Sue got a small painting project in which she was to paint an old miner. She pondered for a while whom to make the role model and she thought of Mr Behrman. Sue called Behrman to her flat as she wanted him to be her model so that she could paint the picture of an old miner. When he came, he told him about Johnsy's illness and the fact that Johnsy believed that she would die when the last leaf from the Ivy creeper would fall.

When Behrman came to her flat, he saw the pitiable condition of Johnsy. He didn't say a word and went back to his room. He painted a leaf similar to the Ivy creeper's leaf and took a ladder and tied that leaf to the creeper while Johnsy was sleeping. When Johnsy noticed that the leaf has not fallen in the harsh winds, she realised that it was a sin to want to die. From then onwards, she hoped to get well which eventually saved her life.

Hence, we can say that Behrman's visit to Sue's flat was a blessing in disguise for Johnsy.

3 What lessons do you learn from the story 'The Last Leaf'?

Ans. The story comes along with a great lesson for its readers. When there is nothing left in your life then the zeal to live gets lost. But, an inspiration is always there to keep you going ahead in the life. A thought which is positive keeps you well on the path of life. The story 'The Last Leaf' teaches us to be positive in life and never believe in superstitions. It also teaches us not to lose hope in difficult circumstances and of helping others.

Johnsy, the artist in the story, falls ill and loses hope of living. She could not get well despite the best efforts of her roommate, Sue and her doctor. Later on, she realises that relating one's death to the falling leaves of a creeper is nonsensical. She also learns that life is precious and it is a sin to let oneself die.

Behrman, the painter in the story, helps Johnsy by painting a leaf that would not fall in the fierce winds or storm and in the process of saving her, loses his life. His selfless act of helping his neighbour teaches us to be compassionate and helpful towards others.



# Self Assessment

## Extract Based Question

Read the following extract carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1 I have been a bad girl. You have looked after me so lovingly and I have not cooperated with you. I have been depressed and gloomy. The last leaf had shown me how wicked I am.
- (i) Who said the above lines and to whom?
- (a) Johnsy to Sue (b) Sue to Johnsy  
(c) Johnsy to her neighbour (d) Johnsy to the painter
- (ii) Why was the speaker of the above lines depressed and gloomy?
- (a) Because she had lost her parents (b) Because she had lost her pet  
(c) Because she was ill (d) Because she had failed to get a job
- (iii) Find a word from the extract which means 'cruel'.
- (a) Wicked (b) Bad  
(c) Ugly (d) Shameful
- (iv) Give the opposite of 'depressed'.
- (a) Happy (b) Gloomy  
(c) Sad (d) Frowning

## Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

- 2 What did the doctor tell Sue?
- 3 Why didn't Johnsy eat anything?
- 4 Where did Behrman go after leaving Sue's flat? What did he do?
- 5 Why did Johnsy curse herself?
- 6 How did Behrman fall ill? How long was he ill?
- 7 Draw a character sketch of Sue.

## Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

- 8 Describe the incidents that led Johnsy to change her mind?
- 9 Draw a character sketch of Behrman in your own words.
- 10 "A patient should never lose hope of getting well". Justify the statement with reference to the story "The Last Leaf".