



O. HENRY, WORK OF OUTSTANDING ARTISTRY IN THE STORY, 'THE LAST LEAF'

KAVITA THAPLIYAL¹, Dr. S. CHELLIAH²

¹Doctorate Research Scholar: Assistant Professor & Chief Corporate Trainer, Business Communication & Soft Skills, Amity International Business School, I-3 Block, Amity University, Sector 125, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

²Research Guide: Professor, Head & Chairperson, Department of English, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai



KAVITA THAPLIYAL

ABSTRACT

Stories play a significant role in our lives, they inspire us to reason, recognize and to discover where we can relate it with us, in our lives. Among many legendary story writers, who are recognized worldwide through their strong hand on writing, this article is raising on a very famous and appreciated prize treasuring author of his times 'William Sydney Porter' who is lionized as "O. Henry" by his passionate lovers. The writing of O. Henry depicts a great blend of **S³**, where **sobs, sniffles, and smiles** tell us, a deep connectionism of life. All his short stories have great integration of characters, jocularly, shades of life and a surprise ending. In the words of 'Stephen Leacock' O. Henry is deserved to be called "**one of the greatest masters of modern literature**".

Struggle, rejections and miseries shaded Henry's life throughout, but his determination and hard work swayed William O. Henry to those pinnacles where, he has a standing of his own, in the world of literary legends of his time.

O. Henry's master piece story 'The Last Leaf' depicts the deep association of emotions and sob of human mind, where joy and sorry are amalgamated in such a fabulous way that forces us to relook into the Work of Outstanding Artistry by the author. The colours blended with emotions spread a unique harmonization and the game of hope and despair with the surprise ending has a great message to the generation to relook life with great zeal and enthusiasm and to have never given attitude.

Key Words: Optimism, Imagination, Originality, Hope, Desire

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INTRODUCTION

William Sydney Porter who was born in 1862 Greensboro, North Carolina, had an upsetting childhood due to loss of his mother at the age of just three. Struggle, rejections and miseries were shaded throughout his life, but his determination and hard work swayed him to have a standing of his own in the world of literary legends of his times. Heremains one of the most widely read American short

narrative writers, his pen has a strong voice to demonstrate romance, tragedy, extravaganza of joy and miseries of life in such a fabulous way that he has not only restrained himself in America but has travelled throughout the Globe and is still winning hearts of millions.

Settings of the Story

The story 'The Last Leaf' twitches with the opening of a scene in a small part of the City West of

Washington Square, where painters and artists from Greenwich have gathered and found this Square place much economic with ample cross ventilation where they can probably colour the imagination of their visualization and can also earn their livelihood, hence this old building has its own artistic shape and structure.

Prime Characters

SUE, JOHNSY, DOCTOR, Mr. BREHMAN, PNEUMONIA

The whole story revolves around this Washington Square Street; where on the top of the building with three floors lived two close friends, who met each other at Eighth Street Restaurant and on the very first meeting found a close resemblance in taste, liking, choices and nature were 'SUE' and 'JOHNSY'. Both of them were budding painting artist who had lots of aspirations and want to create a name in the years to come through their hands of paintings.

Sue has come to city New York from Maine and Johnsy called as Joanna, is from California. Sue is caring and strong headed girl and supports Johnsy to fight her illness whereas Johnsy is weak, sentimental and shown as a feeble character. The silent feature and personified character is of **Mr. Pneumonia**, who has seized the city New York and had made many innocent people victim of his treacherous hands. Johnsy the weakest character is trapped in the deadly web of the icy Pneumonia and is lying on the bed in despair, where she has lost all hopes of life and associates her breath with one of the creeper, creeping on the wall of other building, the creeper has many leaves and is bearing the gushes of icy weather and on the other side Johnsy has a deep symbolism associated with the leaves of this lean creeper, who is trying to hold the deadly torn bark of the wall by combatting the battle of torches and turmoil due to bad icy weather. The bad weather is so divesting that daily it is forcing the leaves of the creeper to fall down in abundance and leaving a very submissive impact on Johnsy; as she has inclined her hope of life with the leaves of the creeper and as they are shedding down she is also giving up hopes to live and fight her illness with the devil called Pneumonia.

There is another very important character in the story is of the Doctor, who is very busy and

professional and his helping people fight against the brutal Pneumonia. In spite of giving Johnsy the best treatment when the doctor couldn't find the promising results in Johnsy he suspects it must be some emotional setback and ask Sue, "Is there anything worth being troubled about? A man?" "A man?" but when Sue assures him that there is no such issue in Johnsy's life then the doctor tells Sue that he is trying his best on her but many times he as a doctor has noticed that if the patient has decided not to fight illness then it becomes very tough for any medicine to show positive results.

Sue makes all her possible efforts to bring Johnsy out of hopelessness and desolation, through her paintings, sang for her and even prepared a chicken soup for her but Johnsy was least interested in anything and was continuously peeping out of her window and was counting, leaves on the creeper which were now from innumerable to numerable, and she said in a feeble voice, frequently these leaves are shedding down and 'when the last leaf will fall, I will also die.'

Inspirations play a great role in our life and if there is a good support at the time of need one can easily chase milestone. Sue worked as a great motivator to Johnsy, she told her to relax and close her eyes and not to look outside the window, and kept the window covered by thick curtain. Sue couldn't see her close friend fading hopes of life and wanted to bring her out of extreme gloominess and waiting for the Last Leaf to fall, as Johnsy said to Sue, "Because I want to see the last leaf fall. I have done enough waiting. I have done enough thinking. I want to go sailing down, down, like one of those leaves." It was high time for Sue and she decided to paint a portrait of an Old Man and sell it immediately to bring good money for the good care of Johnsy. The old face to sketch on the canvas immediately came in her mind is one of *Mr. Behrman who stays on the first floor of the same building.*

The great phenomenal presentation of Artistry outstanding approach came live in the presence of the character of **Mr. Behrman**, an approximately 60 plus old wreck painter, who had throughout his life struggled and was waiting to create a masterpiece of his own. He passed his forty

years of life without paint and brush and today all of a sudden twenty years later, after listening Sue, who decides to help Sue and Johnsy and was stunned to listen that how stupid is her friend Johnsy who has inclined her soul with the Last Leaf.

O. Henry has beautifully tried to sketch such a great connection of '*Life & Death*' in such a fabulous way that itself talks about the **ARTISTRY** work of a legend. The green Leaf is a symbol of Life & Soul and the dry deadly fallen Leaf is of a body departing Soul. The audacity of hard weather's effect on the leaves is directly related to the setback on Johnsy and the Pneumonia is the unwanted barriers and hurdle in Johnsy's life which is breaking her into pieces.

The story also highlights the passion of an artist when the fire of his heart stimulates him to deliver what he was waiting since ages. The hunger of doing something and to bring out Johnsy from such an emotional trauma was now the motive of both Sue and Behrman and finally he told Sue to go back home and he will shortly join her to help Johnsy fight back the battle of her life. Both of them decided to do something astonishing that can bring remarkable change in the situation. Finally old Behrman came and Sue started painting till late morning, it was a terrible night as it was freezing cold and raining continuously with snow, almost whole night. Working for late till morning Sue went to take a nap and then in the very morning she stood close to Johnsy where, Johnsy was continuously peeping outside the window and the dark curtain was the only barrier that was stopping her to see the creeper with the hope of having leaves. The restless Johnsy in her feeble voice requested Sue to remove the curtain; it was a very painful moment for Sue as she could see her friend getting pail day after day and now there was no hope left in her. When Johnsy saw only ONE LEAF left, and that too is becoming pale towards the end, Johnsy was shattered and her despondency was now persuading her for the last leaf to fall and she was forcing her to breathe till the last leaf.

When Sue saw Johnsy dripping down and down, she immediately came into action and with her emotive voice asked her "Dear, dear Johnsy!",

"Think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?" but Johnsy was mute.

O. Henry has very graciously expressed the pain of kith and kin, who also suffer along the sufferer. The pain of Johnsy can be described but the emotional stage of Sue is equally imperative to understand and O. Henry has very well presented both the situations in a very meticulous way.

The day has passed, and with the approach of night, the fear of dropping down the last leaf was persistently lingering in Johnsy's mind. The bad weather and the western winds have added fuel to the fire. The whole night Johnsy kept tossing sides and when the day became little brighter, she told Sue to open the curtain.

This time peeping out of the window has something very diverse than of the days ahead. The creeper still has the LAST LEAF lush and green; it seems as if a new offspring has shown the promise of new life and zeal to live. Johnsy was shocked and stunned, she called Sue and her voice this time was much better than before, and she called Sue and said, "I've been a bad girl, Sue, "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how bad I was. It is wrong to want to die. I'll try to eat now and then she told Sue to get something for her to eat. Still somewhere in her mind a seed of doubt was still disturbing her that how the leaf has retained the heavy gushes of wind and to recheck her assurance she asked Johnsy to get her the looking glass so that she is double checked. Having been satisfied by the counter check, she told Sue that I want to live and will eat something, she also told "Sue, someday I hope to paint the Bay of Naples." Her dream; which she often shares with Sue. When the doctor in the evening came to see Johnsy he was very happy to see her recovering and said now give her good food and let her take ample of rest, she has shown positive signs of recovery. The doctor left both the young girls and told them that in the same building there is an old painter who is badly suffering from Pneumonia and his condition is critical, let me now go to see him and if require we will send him to the hospital.

The shades of life have been beautifully narrated by O. Henry in the short story the 'Last Leaf'. After the departure of the doctor that

afternoon Sue embraced Johnsy and said, "I have something to tell you," Johnsy. Mr. Behrman an old German painter died of Pneumonia today in the hospital. He was just ill from past two days. Everybody was shocked to see his sudden demise and the most confusing stage is that he was found in a very strange situation in his room, his hands were numb and body was cold, his shoes were wet and the body was freezing, everybody was suspecting that he was out of his room, in the exposed weather. People found a lantern, a staircase and some green yellow paint and brushes and some material of painting. Then Sue revealed with heavy heart the secret of the 'Last Leaf'..... she told Johnsy to look outside the window and concentrate on the leaf and notice the observations. Didn't you wonder why it never moved when the wind was blowing? Oh, my dear, it is Behrman's great masterpiece—he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

Conclusion

The story throughout holds its readers and has created a climax till the end and throughout the story O. Henry has spread his artistry outstanding in waving a fabulous string that connects all the characters together and the emotional sequence of hope and despair, care and concern, role and responsibilities and a zeal to deliver, is beautifully illustrated in Mr. Behrman. The cruelty of Pneumonia and its fatal effects on human and the demonstration friendship is one of the most touching part of artistry beauty. The old man Behrman who was so Curmudgeonly, has proven that there is no age for performance, only the thing that is very important is to remember in life is, "**the right time to grab the right opportunity**", and at that per of moment no power in the world should stop you to deliver and grow.

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