

# THE LAST LEAF

Adapted as a One-Act Play

*By Robert Brome*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

In this story by O. Henry and adapted by Robert Brome, two girls pursue art careers in New York, sharing a dingy, one-room flat. One grows sick when her paintings fail to sell. Only a vigorous desire to live can enable her to survive. She counts dead ivy leaves on a vine outside the window, convinced when the last leaf falls she will die. The morning after a fierce wind storm, when surely all the leaves will be gone, she sees a single leaf remaining.

**PLAYING TIME:** 25 minutes.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
(3 m, 3 w)

**SUE ARENDS:** 20, an aspiring artist from Maine.

**JOANNA (Johnsy) PRICE:** 19, her apartment mate.

**PHIL THORPE:** 23, an aspiring sculptor.

**LEND A THORPE:** 21, his attractive, vivacious wife.

**DR. MALLORY:** 53, an overworked medical practitioner.

**MR. BEHRMAN:** 69, a painter waiting to do his masterpiece.

**PLACE:** A shabby, single-room flat in Greenwich Village.

**TIME:** A November, several generations ago. Late evening;  
then, early next morning.

**SETTING**

The scene is a cheap, one-room flat rented by a pair of struggling young female artists. The SR wall boasts a broad, old-fashioned window with drape-on-rod that has seen more affluent times. In center of SL wall is a door leading to the third floor corridor. Against SR wall stands a single cot, masquerading as a sofa with its three worn cushions propped against window sill. There is a similar cot against right half of Rear wall, also, a part-time sofa, but now serving its main purpose as a bed. A cupboard has been placed against left half of Rear wall; a wooden stand with a two-burner gas plate upon it is UPS from door SL. Just DS from cupboard there is a scarred, spindly-looking kitchen table with a chair R and a chair L, likewise scarred and spindly. A small stand with water pail and dipper gracing it is DSL from SL door. A painter's easel is in USR corner, a half-finished oil painting thereupon. Other touches indicate that artists live here.

**Production note:** Folding canvas-and-wood camp cots would serve nicely and be easy to handle.

**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: Low WIND is heard off SR beyond window. On the cot USR we find JOHNSY lying very still under the covers, facing window, gazing R at something beyond that window. SUE, a button-down sweater about her shoulders, is drying a plate with a dishtowel near cupboard USL. Johnsy coughs deeply. Turning, Sue casts a worried look at Johnsy.)*

SUE: Johnsy ... ?

JOHNSY: Mmmmmm ... ?

SUE: Why don't I warm up that chicken broth?

JOHNSY: *(Weakly.)* Chicken broth ... ? *(Sighs.)* I told you at supper time ... I didn't want any broth ... I don't feel ... hungry ...

SUE: *(Moving SR after putting plate in cupboard and hanging up dish towel.)* You haven't been hungry for three days. No wonder you're weak. Come now - be a good girl - ? Before the doctor gets here?

JOHNSY: *(Half-moaning.)* Susie ... it's no use ...

SUE: But you must build some strength - fight this awful bug, whatever it is.

JOHNSY: Fight ... ? Why? Why should I ... ? I'm tired of fighting ... *(Sighs.)* I'm no more ... good in the world than that withered vine ... with its dead leaves ... there on the brick wall ... beyond the window ...

SUE: *(Circles SR to sit on edge of cot R of JOHNSY.)* Are you going to let a little bad luck get you down? Whoever came to New York as a struggling artist and sold a canvas the first week?

JOHNSY: It's been ... seven months ... and nothing ... nothing ... I can't go home ... I couldn't go back to San Francisco ... even if I had the ... train fare ...

SUE: Not while my sketches keep a few groceries in that cupboard and pay the rent - ! *(On second thought.)* Well, pay on the back rent.

JOHNSY: I can't ... sponge on you ...

SUE: Sponge?? Just wait. One of these days, you'll sell that canvas, your "Golden Gate at Sunset," for a hundred dollars. Hah! Five hundred - and cheap at the price. By then, I might not be able to unload a pen-and-ink sketch at twenty cents a dozen! Who will be sponging then? It's share-and-share-alike, Johnsy. (*Stands.*) Now let me warm up that broth ...

JOHNSY: (*After a coughing seizure.*) I ... I couldn't ... force it ... down ...

SUE: Johnsy. When that doctor comes - if he ever does get here! - I'm going to tell him everything. Have him pack you off to the hospital, where it might be far worse than chicken broth! (*Pauses.*) Oh, Johnsy ... I ... I'm sorry. I know how bad you feel. (*Touches JOHNSY'S forehead and frowns.*) And you have reason with that fever. Can I bring a cold cloth for your forehead?

JOHNSY: No ... I'm ... all right ... (*There is a KNOCK at door SL.*)

SUE: (*Crossing to door.*) The doctor - at last! (*Opens the door.*) - Oh. Come in - (*PHIL and LENDA enter SL exuberantly, they are a fine young couple, but obviously not in the throes of wealth.*)

PHIL: Susie! Call me Michelangelo! Lenda and I just stopped at the art shop in Washington Square, and what do you know? No Head! No Head of Medusa! (*Crossing SR toward CS.*) My Head of Medusa! Gone! Gone!

SUE: Gone?

LEND A: (*Just inside door.*) Gone!

PHIL: Some discriminating art connoisseur took my Medusa's Head right along with him!

LEND A: Discriminating or not, he paid for it. As much as I make in a month at that department store ribbon counter!

PHIL: (*HIS excitement continuing.*) Money! Cash! Twenty-five dollars!

LEND A: Minus five dollars commission for the art shop on Washington Square. But the important thing is that my sculptor-husband - as of today - is no longer an ignominious failure!

SUE: (*A glance toward JOHNSY.*) W-wonderful, Phil ...

PHIL: We debated whether to pay overdue rent or throw a celebration feed tonight and resuscitate all the starving inmates of this three-story brick pile. You know - sandwiches with honest-to-gosh ham in 'em!

LEND A: Needless to say, the celebration banquet won. You're both invited.

PHIL: You two, first of all! We'll stop below and invite Mr. Behrman. (*More seriously.*) It might be his first mouthful of food in a week, from the way the poor old guy looks these days.

(*JOHNSY coughs deeply.*)

LEND A: (*Crossing UPS to JOHNSY.*) Johnsy! Wh - what's wrong? Are you - sick?

SUE: Johnsy's been - under the weather - for a couple days.

LEND A: I'm sorry. I didn't realize. And we, Phil, with our fanfare!

PHIL: (*Moves UPS.*) Johnsy! I sell my first work of sculpture and you won't be there to help me eat the proceeds?

JOHNSY: (*Turning head toward PHIL.*) ... 'Fraid not. But I am ... happy for you ... happy someone is a ... success.

SUE: (*Hurriedly.*) We - we'll attend your next celebration.

PHIL: Don't hold your breath!

LEND A: Johnsy, what can I bring you? - I've got half a lemon. How about a little hot lemonade? (*JOHNSY shakes head, then coughs.*)

SUE: (*Sighs.*) She's declining all offers.

## **End of Freeview**

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