

# *THE LAST LEAF*

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Revised by Hal Ames

There were two young artists who lived in Greenwich Village in New York City. One was named Sue and the other Joanna. Joanna preferred to be called Joanie. They lived on the top floor of a three story apartment building.

It was November. A pneumonia epidemic hit the city and was spreading throughout the city. Joanie had fallen ill with the disease.

She lay in her bed looking out of the small window that faced a red brick building across the courtyard. She stared at an ivy vine that grew up the side of the building reaching up to the top.

The doctor came to the house to check on Joanie. He examined her and took her temperature. He shook his head, and then he asked Sue to go to the other room so he could talk to her.

The doctor told her, “She isn’t doing very well. It seems as though she has made up her mind that she is going to die. She has one chance in ten of surviving. The only chance for her is to have the desire to live. She seems to have lost that.”

He continued, “Is there anything you can think of that will inspire her to live? Is there anything that she wants to do?”

“She has always wanted to paint the Bay of Naples in Italy,” Sue replied.

“Paint? I don’t think that’s going to be possible. Does she have a man in her life?” the doctor asked.

“A man? No, she doesn’t have a man. I don’t know of anything else that might give her a reason to live,” Sue said trying to think of something that might help her friend to have a purpose in her life.

“I’ll do all I can to help her, but she has to want to live. If she has no desire to live,

the medicines effects are reduced by at least fifty percent,” the doctor said.

After the doctor left, Sue went to the kitchen and cried. She tried to think of a way to cheer Joanie up. She went to the drawing room and picked up an unfinished drawing she had begun earlier. She went into the room whistling.

Joanie lay with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking that Joanie was asleep. She took a pen and began to work on the picture she was drawing for the magazine she worked for. She knew she had to work hard to make a name for herself as an artist.

Sue sat quietly beside Joanie. Joanie was just staring out of the window. Every once in while Joanie would cough, but other than that, she was very quiet.

Just then Joanie began to count backwards. “Twelve.” A little later she said, “Eleven.” And then a while after she said quickly, “Ten, nine, eight.”

Sue looked out of the window. What was she counting? There was the empty yard and the building on the other side. The only thing of interest was the old ivy vine climbing the side of the building. The leaves were almost gone from the autumn cold.

“What are you counting?” Sue asked.

In a soft voice Joanie answered, “Six, they’re falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost one hundred, now there are only six. Now five.”

“Five? Five what?” Sue asked looking out of the window with Joanie.

“Don’t you see? The ivy leaves on the building, there are only five left. When the last one falls off, I must go. I’ve known this for the last three days. Didn’t the doctor tell you?” Joanie said to Sue, never looking at her but staring at the leaves as they fell off of the vine.

“What are you talking about? The doctor said you have ten to one chance! What do ivy leaves have to with anything? You must think about getting well! Let me get you some soup,” Sue said, with a smile trying to make Joanie feel better. “I need to finish my artwork so we can get money for food.”

Joanie didn’t look up. She lay on her side looking at the vine.

She said, “Sue, don’t worry about food for me. Oh, look another one fell down. Now

there are only four left. I hope by evening the last one will fall. I want the last one to fall before it gets dark, then I'll go too. I want to go sailing down just like one of those leaves."

Sue got a tear in her eye as she listened to Joanie.

"Please get some sleep. I have to finish my work and turn it in tomorrow. I need to see Mr. Behrman so he can be my model for my drawing. I'll be right back," Sue informed Joanie.

Mr. Behrman was also an artist. He lived on the first floor of the apartment building. He had become fond of Sue and Joanie and was very protective of the girls.

He hadn't painted much over the last twenty years. He said he did not have an inspiration to paint. Mostly he made money by being a model for other painters. He was cheaper than professional models.

Sue found him in his apartment staring at a blank canvas. He was deep in thought about something.

"Hello Mr. Behrman, how are you?" she asked.

"I'm doing well thank you. What can I do for you today?" he asked.

"I need a model for the drawing I'm doing for my magazine. Are you available?" Sue asked.

"Yes, of course. When do you need me?" he inquired.

"Right away," Sue answered.

"Sure. You look sad, what is wrong?" Mr. Behrman saw the look of sadness on Sue's face.

She told him about Joanie and how she was ready to die.

"That is so silly to wait for the leaves to fall so she can die. Why do you let her think such things?" he said, after hearing the story.

"She's very sick and weak. She's full of strange ideas. I think it's the illness that's speaking," Sue surmised.

"It's not the time for someone as good as Joanie to die. Someday I'll paint a masterpiece and all of this will go away," Mr. Behrman said with seriousness.

Sue and Mr. Behrman went up to the apartment and looked at Joanie, who was

sleeping. Sue pulled the window shade down to cover the window.

They went to the drawing room and Mr. Behrman sat for the drawing. When they were finished they looked out at the cold rainy courtyard and over at the ivy vine. The wind was blowing and the remaining leaves were blowing away.

The next morning Sue went into Joanie's room.

"Open the shade please, I want to see the ivy plant," Joanie requested.

Sue opened the shade. One leaf was still hanging onto the wall. The leaf was green in the middle, but the edges were turning yellow. It would not be long before it also fell from the vine.

"It's the last one. When I heard the wind last night I was sure that it would be gone. It will fall today and then I will die at the same time."

"Don't talk like that. Think of me. What'll I do if you are gone," Sue said with tears in her eyes.

Joanie just lay quietly staring at the last leaf.

"I can't bear to think about it," Sue said as she walked out of the room.

All day long Joanie looked at the leaf, waiting for it to fall. But it never fell down.

The next morning, when Joanie woke up, the leaf was still there. The wind and the rain had not made it fall.

"Sue, come here please," Joanie called out.

Sue came into the room.

"I've been very selfish, for some reason that leaf has not fallen. I think it's because it wants to show me that I've been wrong to want to die. May I have some of the soup you are preparing?" she said, much to the surprise of Sue.

After she had some soup, she again surprised Sue by saying, "Someday I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

Later in the day the doctor came and checked on Joanie.

He talked to Sue in the hallway.

"She has an even chance now. Keep her fed and warm. We have a good chance to save her," the doctor said with a big smile. "Now I must see another patient in the

building. I believe that Mr. Behrman has also contracted pneumonia. He is much older and I don't give him much of a chance to survive."

The next day the doctor returned and gave a good report about Joanie. With good nutrition and rest she would be OK.

Unfortunately the news about Mr. Behrman was not good. He had died in the early morning from the pneumonia.

After the doctor left, Sue went in to talk to Joanie.

She told Joanie what the doctor had said to her, "When the medical people found Mr. Behrman they saw his clothing was soaking wet. Everything was icy cold. They had no idea how he got that way, especially on such a terrible night as it had been.

"They told me they found his lantern, his ladder, and his painting supplies were also cold and wet. His pallet was colored with green and yellow paints mixed together."

Sue opened the shade on the window.

Sue related to Joanie, "Didn't you wonder why the last ivy leaf never fell from the wall after the wind blew so strong all night? Mr. Behrman painted his masterpiece just for you the night the last leaf fell."