



The Last Leaf

Johnsey wanted to die. And she knew she would die when the last leaf fell from the vine on the old brick wall opposite that dreary room near Washington Square. She was so weary. But Old Behrman—the fierce old man who had tried for forty years to paint a masterpiece—who drank gin to excess—stepped in and kept that leaf on the wall. Johnsey got well. It was a life for a life.

With the vision that sees the majesty of heroism in plain men—O. Henry tells the story.

. . . The young man returns to his room. It is all over. His search is vain. The ebbing of his last hope has drained his faith. . . . For a time he sat staring at the yellow, singing gaslight. Then he rose. He walked to the bed and began to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drove them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. When all was snug and taut he turned out the light, turned the gas full on again and laid himself gratefully upon the bed.

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And now let the reader note the ending paragraphs of the story, so told that not one word of it must be altered or abridged from the form in which O. Henry framed it.

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It was Mrs. McCool's night to go with the can for beer. So she fetched it and sat with Mrs. Purdy (the landlady) in one of those subterranean retreats where housekeepers foregather and the worm dieth seldom.

"I rented out my third floor, back, this evening," said Mrs. Purdy, across a fine circle of foam. "A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago."

"Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am?" said Mrs. McCool, with intense admiration. "You do be a wonder for rentin' rooms of