

THE LAST LEAF

HOT QUESTIONS

Question : “Behrman’s extreme sacrifice at the altar of art infused life in a young, depressed woman and it shows his unparalleled commitment to art” – Elucidate the statement in the context of the story “The Last Leaf”.

Answer : The statement underscores Behrman’s profound dedication to his art, which ultimately becomes a beacon of hope and life for a young, despairing woman. In “The Last Leaf”, Johnsy, a young artist, loses her will to live as she battles pneumonia, tying her fate to the falling leaves of an ivy vine outside her window. She believes she will die when the last leaf falls. Behrman, an aging artist, learns of Johnsy’s fragile condition and her belief. Despite his frailty and bad weather, he paints a realistic leaf on the wall after the real one falls. His act is more than just artistic; it’s a selfless gesture of compassion. This painted leaf becomes a symbol of resilience and rekindles Johnsy’s desire to live. Tragically, Behrman contracts pneumonia while painting in the freezing rain and succumbs to it, sacrificing his life for his art and for Johnsy. His masterpiece—a simple, lifelike leaf—illustrates his unwavering commitment to art and humanity. Through this ultimate sacrifice, Behrman proves that art, when infused with selflessness and love, can transcend its aesthetic purpose and become a medium of salvation and inspiration.

Question: “Sue’s unwavering support and creative thinking played a crucial role in Johnsy’s recovery.” – Justify the statement in the context of the story “The Last Leaf.”

Answer: Sue, Johnsy’s friend and roommate, epitomizes true friendship through her dedication and optimism. As Johnsy succumbs to despair, Sue provides emotional and physical support, refusing to let her give in to hopelessness. She cares for Johnsy tirelessly, ensuring she is comfortable and encouraging her to eat and rest. Sue’s creative thinking is evident when she discusses Johnsy’s condition with Behrman, indirectly inspiring his selfless act. Her efforts reflect her determination to uplift Johnsy’s spirits, including her resolve to create cheerful artwork nearby to distract her friend. Sue’s empathy, persistence, and ingenuity ultimately contribute significantly to Johnsy’s renewed will to live, showcasing how a supportive companion can positively influence someone battling despair.

SHORT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Johnsy associate her life with the falling ivy leaves?

Johnsy, weakened by pneumonia, developed a morbid belief that her life was tied to the ivy leaves. She convinced herself that when the last leaf fell, she too would die, reflecting her mental despair and loss of willpower.

2. What role does Sue play in Johnsy’s recovery?

Sue supports Johnsy by nursing her, keeping her hopeful, and distracting her with cheerful conversations. Her unwavering care helps sustain Johnsy during her illness, making Sue a pillar of strength in her recovery.

3. Why was Behrman’s painting of the last leaf significant?

Behrman’s painted leaf symbolized hope and resilience. It inspired Johnsy to fight her illness, rekindling her will to live. The painting transcended its artistic purpose, becoming a lifeline for Johnsy.

4. What does the painted leaf reveal about Behrman’s character?

Behrman’s selfless act of painting the leaf in adverse weather highlights his compassion, bravery, and dedication to art. It portrays him as a true artist who uses his talent to serve others.

5. Why does Sue call Behrman a ‘masterpiece’?

Sue calls Behrman’s painted leaf a masterpiece because it not only saved Johnsy’s life but also represented his ultimate artistic triumph, achieved through his selfless sacrifice.

6. How does the weather contribute to the story’s theme?

The harsh, stormy weather mirrors Johnsy’s deteriorating condition and despair. Conversely, the persistence of the painted leaf against the storm symbolizes hope, resilience, and survival.

7. What message does The Last Leaf convey about friendship?

The story conveys that true friendship involves selflessness, care, and support. Sue’s unwavering efforts to help Johnsy and Behrman’s ultimate sacrifice demonstrate the power of compassion and empathy.

8. Why does Johnsy regain her will to live after seeing the last leaf?

Johnsy interprets the last leaf’s persistence through the storm as a sign of strength and hope. It inspires her to fight her illness and reconsider her defeatist attitude.

9. What is ironic about Behrman’s death?

The irony lies in Behrman losing his life while saving Johnsy. Though he dies, his ultimate artwork, the painted leaf, ensures Johnsy’s survival, making his sacrifice deeply poignant.

10. How does O. Henry use symbolism in the story?

The ivy vine symbolizes Johnsy’s fragile will to live, while the painted leaf represents hope and resilience. These symbols emphasize the themes of sacrifice, friendship, and the triumph of the human spirit.