

課題文 (2015年度リーディング部門)

The last Leaf

Sue and Johnsy lived in a poor old apartment and had a studio in it. They wanted to be great artists. One day in cold November, Johnsy got pneumonia. Her condition became worse, and was ill in bed.

Sue heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside. Johnsy's eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting -- counting backward. "Twelve," she said, and a little later "eleven," and then "ten" and "nine," and then "eight" and "seven," almost together.

Sue looked out the window. What was there to count? There was only an empty yard and blank side of the house seven meters away. An old ivy vine climbed half way up the wall. The cold breath of autumn hit leaves from the plant until its branches, almost bare, hung on the bricks.

"What was it, dear?" asked Sue. "Six," said Johnsy, quietly. "They're falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost hundred. It made my head hurt to count them. But now it's easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now."

"Five what, dear?" asked Sue.

"Leaves. On the plant. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you? I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my interests on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves."

(オー・ヘンリー『最後の一葉』)

(語句) studio アトリエ/ pneumonia 肺炎/ yard 囲われた土地
blank 窓や戸の無い/ ivy vine 蔦の蔓/ breath 息 /branch 枝
bare 裸の/ brick れんが/ turn loose ~を失う
go sailing down ヨットを走らせ下ってゆく