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This Last Leaf

George L. Hoffman

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GRANDPARENTS

THIS LAST LEAF

by *George L. Hoffman*

He doesn't cling to life,
this patriarch of nearly one hundred
years.
Life clings to him and won't let him go.
The bud from which he came
was too strongly bonded where it grew,
and the bough that holds him fast
won't release him to the wind.
Through all his days of sun and rain,
heat and cold, drouth and flood,
his leaf grew tough and bitter
to the tongues of those who thought
to test his will.
He took the wind and rain
and curled to the sun.
But now he shakes and flutters
to make small rasping sounds
against himself, his greening faded,
his fluids slow, reluctant rivers
in his veins.

He knew of Holmes' last leaf,
for in his youth he read of him
and doubtless smiled to think
that one should grow so old.
But carefree youth can't see
a hundred years, nor can the tender bud
of spring ever know the last sad leaf of
fall.

I don't smile to see him here
alone upon his bough.
His shriveled leaf can never green again.
His spring, his summer, his winter,
are all gone.
But he wants no hothouse shelf to shelter
him,
no magic elixer to hold him to his limb.
I pray that he may fall some quiet evening
and float gently on the wind
to that dark place to be as one
with those whom once he knew.
Even as he waits, I listen
for the whisper of his fall. ■■



illustration by *Lisa Bradford*

GEORGE L. HOFFMAN, of Clackamas, Oregon, was reared in the Custer City area.