Plot Synopsis for “The Last Leaf”

1. Johnsy and Sue are two young painters who share a studio apartment in New York’s Greenwich Village.
2. In November, Johnsy falls victim to pneumonia.
3. While working in the bedroom, Sue overhears Johnsy counting backward to herself.
4. Johnsy explains that she is counting ivy leaves as they fall from a vine on a wall outside; she believes she will die when the last leaf falls.
5. Sue scoffs, but Johnsy is convinced.
6. Sue confides her fears in their neighbor Behrman, and elderly painter who has always intended to paint a masterpiece but has failed time and again.
7. After a night of drenching rain and gusting winds, one ivy leaf is left on the vine.
8. When it is still there the following morning, Johnsy realizes that it was wrong of her to want to die.
9. She begins to recover immediately, but Behrman is stricken with pneumonia.
10. The next day, Sue tells Johnsy that Behrman has died.
11. Later she reveals that Behrman became sick after painting outdoors on a wet night- painting an ivy leaf on the wall the night the last real leaf fell.

Literary Analysis Challenges for “The Last Leaf”

O. Henry uses the image of the ivy leaf to create a symbol on which the whole story focuses. What does the leaf symbolize to the different characters?

O. Henry filled his story with situational irony. List and explain two examples.

How would the story have been different if O. Henry had established Behrman as a successful painter?