The setting in O'Henry's, "The Last Leaf" is essential to the character's feelings and actions. Johnsy, the main character, becomes sick with pneumonia. She bases her life on the changes of a vine out her window. She adored the vine before and during her sickness. Although the vine experiences minor alterations throughout the story, the feelings it evokes change considerably. The vine creates a sense of despair, repentance, and courage.

Johnsy becomes overcome with helplessness and depression due to the vine. She allows the vine to rule her life. She tells her roommate, "Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I've known that for three days. Didn't the doctor tell you?" (Line 57) She doesn't consider other's feelings and decides to put herself above the people around her, which is seen when Sue begs her, "'Dear, dear!' said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"" (Line 112). Johnsy looks to the vine for permission to die.

A feeling of repentance overcomes Johnsy when the last leaf stays on the vine for two days after a terrible gale. The vine makes her realize just how selfish she has been and about the seriousness of death. She apologizes to Sue by saying, "'I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die.'" (Line 124) The last leaf's determination to remain on the vine gives her resolve to live and plan for the future. She becomes intent on pursuing a career in art and maps out a life as a painter. Behrmen, a drunken man who boasts of his future masterpiece and lives beneath

Johnsy's apartment, finds courage because of the vine. Sue goes down to his apartment to ask him to pose in a painting of hers. She tells him of Johnsy's decision to die, and he finds it extremely foolish that Johnsy would let a little thing like a leaf control her life. He risked his life to save Johnsy by painting his masterpiece, a leaf, next to the vine during the horrible storm, "Look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece - he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell." (Line 141)

Behrman died as a result of his bravery, but he gave a young girl her chance to live. O'Henry was an expert at forming effective settings and creating character reactions.
This is displayed by how he made a simple prop generate such emotions as defeat, remorse, and bravery. A woman named Eudora Welty stated, "Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else... Fiction depends for its life on place."

Johnsy, Behrmen, and Sue are all drastically changed because of the vine and its leaf. They all are changed, as a result, of this influential plant.