

William Sidney Porter was born in Greensboro, North Carolina on September 11, 1862. He was a voracious reader as a child reading anything from classics to cheap dime store novels. He graduated from his aunt's elementary school in 1876 and then enrolled at the Lindsey Street High School though his aunt continued to tutor him until he was fifteen. Porter travelled to Texas in March 1882, hoping a change of air would help relieve a persistent cough. In Austin he led an active social life as well as singing and playing both guitar and mandolin. He became a member of the Hill City Quartet, and through this began courting Athol Estes, then seventeen and from a wealthy family. Her mother objected to the match because Athol was suffering from tuberculosis. On July 1, 1887, Porter eloped with Athol. Porter's friend Richard Hall became Texas Land Commissioner and offered Porter a job as a draftsman at the Texas General Land Office (GLO) in 1887 at a salary of \$100 a month, drawing maps from surveys and field notes. As a developing and popular writer he continued to contribute to magazines and newspapers. Porter resigned from the GLO in early 1891 and began working at the First National Bank of Austin as a teller and bookkeeper. The bank was informally run and Porter was careless in keeping his books and was fired for suspected embezzlement. He next went to work full time on his humorous weekly called *The Rolling Stone*, which he started while working at the bank. *The Rolling Stone* featured satire on life, people and politics and included Porter's short stories and sketches. Although eventually reaching a top circulation of 1500, *The Rolling Stone* failed in April 1895. However, his writing and drawings had caught the attention of the editor at the *Houston Post*. Porter and his family moved to Houston in 1895, where he started writing for the *Post*. His salary was only \$25 a month, but rose steadily. Porter gathered ideas for his column by loitering in hotel lobbies and observing and talking to people there. While he was in Houston, the First National Bank of Austin was audited by federal auditors and they found the embezzlement that had led to his firing. A federal indictment followed and he was arrested on charges of embezzlement. Porter's father-in-law posted bail to keep Porter out of jail. Porter was due to stand trial on July 7, 1896, but the day before he fled, first to New Orleans and then Honduras. Whilst in Trujillo for several months he wrote *Cabbages and Kings*, in which he coined the term banana republic to describe the country. Athol Estes Porter died on July 25, 1897, from tuberculosis. Porter was found guilty of embezzlement in February 1898 and sentenced to five years in prison as federal prisoner 30664 in Columbus, Ohio. There, Porter, as a licensed pharmacist, worked in the prison hospital as the night druggist and given his own room in the hospital wing. There he had fourteen stories published under various pseudonyms, but was becoming best known as O. Henry, a pseudonym that first appeared with the story *Whistling Dicks Christmas Stocking* in the December 1899 issue of *McClure's Magazine*. Porter was released in July 1901, for good behavior after serving three years. Porter reunited with his daughter Margaret, now age 11, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Athol's parents had moved after Porter's conviction. Porter's most prolific writing period began in 1902, in New York City. While there, he wrote 381 short stories. His wit, characterization, and plot twists were loved by his readers but panned by critics. In 1907 Porter married childhood sweetheart Sarah (Sallie) Lindsey Coleman, whom he met again after revisiting his native state of North Carolina. Porter was a heavy drinker, and his health deteriorated markedly in 1908, which affected his writing. In 1909, Sarah left him, and he died on June 5, 1910, of cirrhosis of the liver, complications of diabetes, and an enlarged heart.

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