

Name: _____ Class: _____

Hearts and Hands

By O. Henry
1902

William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), best known by his pen name O. Henry, was an American short story writer. The following story takes place during a time of American westward expansion, when living out west was seen as adventurous compared to the already established east coast. As you read, take notes on how the author develops the characters of the handcuffed men.

- [1] At Denver there was an influx¹ of passengers into the coaches on the eastbound B. & M. Express.² In one coach there sat a very pretty young woman dressed in elegant taste and surrounded by all the luxurious comforts of an experienced traveler. Among the newcomers were two young men, one of handsome presence with a bold, frank countenance³ and manner; the other a ruffled, glum-faced person, heavily built and roughly dressed. The two were handcuffed together.



"Coast Guard Yard" by Coast Guard News is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As they passed down the aisle of the coach the only vacant⁴ seat offered was a reversed one facing the attractive young woman. Here the linked couple seated themselves. The young woman's glance fell upon them with a distant, swift disinterest; then with a lovely smile brightening her countenance and a tender pink tingeing her rounded cheeks, she held out a little gray-gloved hand. When she spoke her voice, full, sweet, and deliberate, proclaimed that its owner was accustomed to speak and be heard.

"Well, Mr. Easton, if you will make me speak first, I suppose I must. Don't you ever recognize old friends when you meet them in the West?"

The younger man roused⁵ himself sharply at the sound of her voice, seemed to struggle with a slight embarrassment which he threw off instantly, and then clasped her fingers with his left hand.

- [5] "It's Miss Fairchild," he said, with a smile. "I'll ask you to excuse the other hand; it's otherwise engaged just at present."

1. **Influx (noun):** an arrival of a large number of people or things
 2. Here, "B. & M. Express" is likely a reference to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, an American railroad company in the west from the late 19th century.
 3. **Countenance (noun):** a person's face or facial expression
 4. **Vacant (adjective):** empty or unoccupied
 5. **Rouse (verb):** to cause to be active or excited

He slightly raised his right hand, bound at the wrist by the shining “bracelet” to the left one of his companion. The glad look in the girl’s eyes slowly changed to a bewildered horror. The glow faded from her cheeks. Her lips parted in a vague, relaxing distress. Easton, with a little laugh, as if amused, was about to speak again when the other forestalled him. The glum-faced man had been watching the girl’s countenance with veiled glances from his keen, shrewd⁶ eyes.

“You’ll excuse me for speaking, miss, but, I see you’re acquainted with the marshal⁷ here. If you’ll ask him to speak a word for me when we get to the pen⁸ he’ll do it, and it’ll make things easier for me there. He’s taking me to Leavenworth prison. It’s seven years for counterfeiting.”⁹

“Oh!” said the girl, with a deep breath and returning color. “So that is what you are doing out here? A marshal!”

“My dear Miss Fairchild,” said Easton, calmly, “I had to do something. Money has a way of taking wings unto itself, and you know it takes money to keep step with our crowd in Washington. I saw this opening in the West, and — well, a marshalship isn’t quite as high a position as that of ambassador, but — ”

- [10] “The ambassador,” said the girl, warmly, “doesn’t call any more. He needn’t ever have done so. You ought to know that. And so now you are one of these dashing Western heroes, and you ride and shoot and go into all kinds of dangers. That’s different from the Washington life. You have been missed from the old crowd.”

The girl’s eyes, fascinated, went back, widening a little, to rest upon the glittering handcuffs.

“Don’t you worry about them, miss,” said the other man. “All marshals handcuff themselves to their prisoners to keep them from getting away. Mr. Easton knows his business.”

“Will we see you again soon in Washington?” asked the girl.

“Not soon, I think,” said Easton. “My butterfly days are over, I fear.”

- [15] “I love the West,” said the girl irrelevantly.¹⁰ Her eyes were shining softly. She looked away out the car window. She began to speak truly and simply without the gloss of style and manner: “Mamma and I spent the summer in Denver. She went home a week ago because father was slightly ill. I could live and be happy in the West. I think the air here agrees with me. Money isn’t everything. But people always misunderstand things and remain stupid — ”

“Say, Mr. Marshal,” growled the glum-faced man. “This isn’t quite fair. I’m needing a drink, and haven’t had a smoke all day. Haven’t you talked long enough? Take me in the smoker now, won’t you? I’m half dead for a pipe.”

The bound travelers rose to their feet, Easton with the same slow smile on his face.

6. **Shrewd** (*adjective*): sharp or perceptive
7. A marshal is a federal or municipal law officer.
8. Slang for a penitentiary jail or prison
9. Counterfeiting refers to the illegal practice of manufacturing fake money.
10. **Irrelevant** (*adjective*): not connected with or related to something

"I can't deny a petition for tobacco," he said, lightly. "It's the one friend of the unfortunate. Good-bye, Miss Fairchild. Duty calls, you know." He held out his hand for a farewell.

"It's too bad you are not going East," she said, reclothing herself with manner and style. "But you must go on to Leavenworth, I suppose?"

[20] "Yes," said Easton, "I must go on to Leavenworth."

The two men sidled¹¹ down the aisle into the smoker.

The two passengers in a seat nearby had heard most of the conversation. Said one of them: "That marshal's a good sort of chap. Some of these Western fellows are all right."

"Pretty young to hold an office like that, isn't he?" asked the other.

"Young!" exclaimed the first speaker, "why — Oh! Didn't you catch on? Say — did you ever know an officer to handcuff a prisoner to his right hand?"¹²

"Hearts and Hands" by O. Henry (1902) is in the public domain.

11. **Sidle (verb):** to walk in a quiet or cautious way
12. It is implied that he would use his right hand to wield a weapon.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What does the word “forestall” mean as used in paragraph 6? [RL.4]
 - A. to distract
 - B. to watch
 - C. to joke
 - D. to interrupt

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes from paragraph 6 best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. “with a little laugh”
 - B. “as if amused”
 - C. “about to speak again”
 - D. “with veiled glances”

3. PART A: What can the reader infer about Easton’s character based on the interaction between him and Miss Fairchild? [RL.3]
 - A. He is a charming young man who values the importance of money, which was likely the thing that got him into trouble.
 - B. He is a timid, awkward man who, if he were not interrupted, would have told Miss Fairchild the truth and pleaded for help.
 - C. He is in love with Miss Fairchild and went out west to make money so he could marry her, but became a marshal when he failed.
 - D. He is dishonest and deceptive, as shown by how easily he lies to Miss Fairchild and pulls the unwilling marshal into the lie too.

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. “Among the newcomers were two young men, one of handsome presence with a bold, frank countenance and manner” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “Easton, with a little laugh, as if amused, was about to speak again when the other forestalled him.” (Paragraph 6)
 - C. “‘My dear Miss Fairchild,’ said Easton, calmly, ‘I had to do something... you know it takes money to keep step with our crowd in Washington.’” (Paragraph 9)
 - D. “‘I saw this opening in the West, and — well, a marshalship isn’t quite as high a position as that of ambassador, but — ’” (Paragraph 9)

5. How does the information provided in paragraph 10 help readers understand Miss Fairchild's perspective on Mr. Easton? [RL.6]
- A. Like the real marshal, she is very observant and seems to have seen through Easton's lie; she hints at this by comparing him to the "Wild West" stories.
 - B. She seems impressed with Easton, partly due to her interest in the West and the new image she has of him as a western hero.
 - C. Like Easton, Miss Fairchild believes that money is the most important thing, but she pretends otherwise to avoid hurting his feelings.
 - D. She seems to have a crush on Easton, though only because he reminds her of many fond memories of their old group in Washington.

6. How does the "glum-faced" man's actions contribute to the development of a theme of the story? [RL.3]

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Why do you think the marshal decided to help Easton? Did Easton deserve this? Why or why not?
2. Why doesn't Easton tell the truth? Do you think he should have? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever wanted to pretend to be someone or something you are not? Why?
4. Ms. Fairchild's opinion of Easton changes over the passage. What factors contributed to this change? Is she fairly and/or accurately judging his character? Why or why not?
5. The name of the passage is "Hearts and Hands." Why do you think Henry chose this name? What he is saying about each? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers.
6. In the context of this story, is it possible to really change your identity? Is it right even to try to? Why or why not? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
7. In the context of this story, why do people do bad things? What was it that drove Easton to crime? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.