

Page 1

[Life](#), [Death](#)



Page 1 English 102 — DL 27 January 2013 Assignment 1 — Response Paper “The Story of An Hour” written by Kate Chopin all takes place within a one hour time period. During this time Mrs. Mallard is informed of her husband, Brently Mallard's, death by her sister and her husband's friend. After hearing the news of her husband's death Mrs. Mallard retreats to her room where she ponders her newly found fate. At the realization that she no longer has to live for anyone but herself Mrs. Mallard is overcome with a monstrous joy. After being pressed by her sister Mrs. Mallard starts to come down the stairs right as her husband, who in fact is not dead, is walking in. Mrs. Mallard then collapses to the floor. Dead. “When the doctors came in they said she had died of heart disease-of joy that kills.” (Kirsznner and Mandell 116) The term “of joy that kills” can be understood in two different ways. One way is that she was so overjoyed to see her husband again that the pure happiness she felt killed her. Another way to look at the last line is that when she saw her husband again she felt such a grave disappointment because of the fact that she would again be subjected to live under his rule that she died. The joy that killed Mrs. Mallard can be her tremendously exciting feelings when her husband reappeared before her eyes, completely unexpected. Deep down in her heart, she loved her husband though living with him made her depressed. The joy she felt with the freedom she found in her husband's death was clear, but no specific evidence pointed out that she absolutely hated him. “She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead.” (Kirsznner and Mandell 116) This quote shows that even though she was excited to have her life back to

herself she did on some level love her husband and would weep again at his funeral. However, if we take the last line of the story literally, we would understand that Mrs. Mallard was intensely infatuated by her marriage to her husband that she died from the excitement of knowing he was still alive. Another way of understanding the reason for her death " of joy that kills" can be the terrible shock she endured when realizing that her husband was in fact still alive and she would have to remain married to him for the rest of her life. " There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature".(Kirszner and Mandell 116) This lets us know that not just her husband was repressing her but also other people around her. Mrs. Mallard's life had no meaning or excitement. All she ever wanted was freedom from the marriage and not to feel entitled to her husband at all times. That's why when finding out about her husband's death, a new sense of life came over her and she felt relieved from her former lifestyle that included him. Her feelings were expressed when she kept whispering " Free! Body and soul free! " (Kirszner and Mandell 116)She then felt that her soul was free from the suffering her husband had brought upon her. She was then over joyed because she didn't have to live for anyone but herself. But, when she was on the peak of her newly found freedom, the reappearance of Mr. Mallard put her into complete and utter shock. She died instantly from a heart attack because she was so distraught at the thought of having to live the rest of her life with her husband, her heart simply could not take it. In conclusion, the reason of Mrs. Mallard's death " of joy that kills" can be understood as either the joy from

seeing that her husband had in fact not died, and had returned or the scare of having to live the depressing life she had previously shared under rule of her husband. However, personally I believe the second theory is more likely than the first. It is more likely to conclude that Mrs. Mallard died from shock and disappointment, rather than joy as the doctors diagnosed. Towards the reason of her death, the literary term “ of joy that kills” implies a sense of irony which enhances the bitter sweetness of the ending. References:

Kirszner, Laurie G., and Stephen R. Mandell. *Portable Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. 8th. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013.

116. Print. PS: I know the page I cited in my response paper is different than the pages you have but when I went to the book store they were all out of the Compact Edition, so I had to buy the regular version. I hope that it is not a problem. Thank you, Carrin Marie Quin.