

# "the story of an hour" essay

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Prompt: Read "The Story of an Hour" carefully. Examine the protagonist's attitude about the death of her husband. How is this attitude revealed and how does it contribute to the meaning of the story? In "The Story of an Hour" the protagonist, Mrs. Mallard, is introduced as a married woman who learns of the death of her husband. Her attitude towards this information develops during the story and is revealed by Chopin's use of contrast, word choice, and tone. Mrs. Mallard's reaction shows the readers that though a woman can enjoy a relationship, love and its responsibilities can be oppressive. The contrast in this story occurs when Mrs. Mallard retires to her room to mourn, and sits in a "comfortable, roomy armchair" (4) across from an "open window." (4) During this scene, Mrs. Mallard is also aware of the "open square before her house" (5) and "spring life" (5) along with the "delicious breath of rain" (5) and "patches of blue sky." (5) All of these are verbal indications of the contrast in her emotions to her environment, and they foreshadow her joyful realization that she is free. Chopin's choice to describe the armchair as "roomy" and the window as "open" also start to indicate the contrast between her new life without her husband and her old life, where he oppressed her even though she loved him. Chopin's word choice also indicates Mrs. Mallard's attitude. When Mrs. Mallard first learns of her husband's death, the phrases "wild abandonment," "storm of grief," and "physical exhaustion" (3-4) are used to show that she was devastated with the news of her husband's death. Later, phrases such as "dull stare," "suspension of intelligent thought," "subtle and elusive," and "striving to beat it back" (8-10) start to show how Mrs. Mallard had ended her grieving and was beginning to allow other ideas to pass through her mind. Finally,

phrases such as “ keen and bright, ” “ monstrous joy, ” and “ her fancy was running riot” (11-19) show the transition to Mrs. Mallard’s joy. All of these phrases that Chopin chose to describe Mrs. Mallard and her situation use tone that expresses her changing emotions, and they add to the feeling that allows the reader to understand that Mrs. Mallard no longer feels oppressed. Finally, Chopin’s overall tone also indicates Mrs. Mallard’s attitude. At first she is mourning, so the tone is sad and dark, “ Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul. ” (4) As she realizes the change in her thought the tone changes to mysterious and cautious, “ There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. ” (9) Finally, she realizes her freedom, and becomes joyful and optimistic, “ What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! ” (15) This shows how Mrs. Mallard’s attitude changes by directly showing her as more cheerful and optimistic, and these examples also show how Mrs. Mallard felt that her relationship was oppressive. Overall, the contrast, word choice, and tone that Chopin uses in this story help to express how Mrs. Mallard transitioned from depressed to optimistic as a result of her realization that she would no longer be under the control of her husband, and therefore she would no longer be oppressed, or told what to do.