

# Analysis of the story of an hour

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In 1894, Kate Chopin wrote, *The Story of an Hour*. In this fictional tale the author describes the experience of Louise Mallard, a woman with heart trouble, immediately after receiving news of her husband's death. Unlike the expected reaction, Louise actually has a moment of relief realizing the freedoms she now has, which were taken from her by an unhappy marriage.

All the events of the story take place within an hour in Louise's home. In the final minutes of the hour, Mrs. Mallard is shocked to see that her husband walks through the front door alive and well, which causes her to have a heart attack and die. While her family believes she had a heart attack because she was overjoyed, the author leads us to conclude the heart attack was actually caused by her realization that the freedoms she looked forward to were no longer a reality. Kate Chopin's description of what the main character feels and sees shows us how this is possible.

The story is very well written as it flows from one paragraph to another each presenting a new idea or information for the reader. The story begins by informing us that Louise's husband, Brently Mallard, was killed in a railroad disaster. Being that Louise has a heart condition, her family was concerned with how she would react to the bad news. Her sister, Josephine, broke the news to her.

She immediately cried as expected but the interesting part of the story is when she goes into her room and locks the door. While Mrs. Mallard is slouched in a chair her experience doesn't feel that tragic at all. The mood is rather peaceful and relaxing. The reader is reminded more of a sunny day than a gloomy sky. At this point it is almost confusing but Kate Chopin

quickly explains the scenario. She explains of a feeling the main character feels approaching. It is then explained that Louise feels free as a result of her husband's death. We learn that there is no feeling of guilt whatsoever in this moment.

As we stroll through the short paragraphs we see how this feeling of joy becomes greater as she expresses it more through her body, mind, and her words. Her pulse was beating faster and this actually relaxed her. She envisioned what her life was going to be like in the future now that she was on her own and all the visions were of happiness and freedom. She whispered words to herself about her freedom in order to embrace the reality through the sounds of her own voice.

Though she came across a couple of moments that suggested she loved her husband dearly and he was a kind man, her feeling of joy obviously overpowered her memories of having loved her husband. She completely recognized the strong possibilities of crying over her husband's death in the future, yet nothing could ruin the beautiful future she felt was in store for her.

During Louise's experience in her room, Josephine was kneeling on the other side of the door begging for Louise to unlock and open it. Josephine was concerned that her sister was stressing herself and it would have negative effects due to her heart problem. Eventually Louise does open the door and walks out with her sister towards the stairs.

To everybody's surprise, Brently Mallard walks in the house through the front door. During this moment Josephine yells out while Richard, who is Brently's

brother, rushed to cover him from his wife's view in order to keep her from having a heart attack from the shock of seeing her husband was alive.

Richard did not achieve this as Louise Mallard had died of a heart attack due to her heart disease.

There may be several explanations given as to why Mrs. Mallard's reaction caused her death. What was the real reason she had a heart attack? The obvious and probably the easiest answer is simply that she was shocked as if she had seen a ghost. We can go a simple step beyond that and say that a wife who realizes her husband is alive after the thought of his death is filled with such a joy that a troubled heart could not handle. Both of these reasons are very possible, yet the details of this hour suggest there is a different reason for Louise's heart attack.

The narrative reveals in several ways that her husband's death was a positive turn in her life that she was actually excited about. Once she saw her husband alive, it destroyed her future of freedom and happiness she had looked so forward to, which her heart could not handle.

The scene in her bedroom provides us with proof of the mood Louise was in immediately after the news of her husband's death. The following, which is excerpted from the story, clearly paints a peaceful picture as Mrs. Mallard looks out of her window:

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all a-quiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

This immediately suggests Louise was not feeling rage of any sort. The author proceeds to tell us about a specific feeling that comes over Mrs. Mallard. She whispered the words under her breath, Free, free, free! She began to welcome this feeling and thought about the unfairness of marriage, which suggests to us that she was very unhappy in her marriage, which results in her feeling of freedom from not belonging to a marriage anymore.

The author uses one sentence in particular which shows us that Louise's love for her husband paled in comparison to the joy of her newfound freedom: What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! This is eventually followed by a description of Louise by the author as she opened the door to her sister on the other side: There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory.

It is very clear that Mrs. Mallard felt as if the struggles of her life were over. She had won. Compare this to an inmate serving life in prison who is told he will be released, not having to finish his sentence. An hour later the prisoner is put in handcuffs and taken back to his cell where he is reminded he will be for life. Imagine the mental strain that would cause the prisoner. I believe Mrs. Mallard's situation to be very similar.

This is why after careful review of the text I am convinced that Louise's reaction to seeing her husband was still alive, was complete disappointment rather than joy. It was all her newfound hopes and dreams of a future of happiness destroyed due to the fact she would still be a wife. Just as

Josephine was wrong about what Louise was going through in the bedroom, the doctors were wrong by saying she died of a joy that kills.