

Whether it was a joy  
that killed louise:  
analysis of kate  
chopin's the story of  
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No doubt it is a big grief for a loving spouse to lose his or her loved one. And if someone told me a story about a woman who bewailed her deceased husband and then died of overwhelming happiness after she saw him safe and sound, I would definitely believe in reliability of this story. Especially, if I was told that the woman had heart problems.

It is known that not only a sorrow but and an excessive joy can cause a fatal heart attack. However, after reading Kate Chopin's *The Story of an Hour*, I felt puzzled about doctors' conclusion that Mrs. Mallard died "of joy that kills. So, was it really an overwhelming joy that Louise's heart couldn't bear? In her fictional tale Chopin describes the experience of Louise Mallard, a young woman with a heart trouble, immediately after receiving news of her husband's death.

All the events of the story take place within an hour in Louise's home. The story begins by informing us that Louise's husband, Brently Mallard, was killed in a railroad disaster. Knowing that Louise has a heart condition, her sister Josephine was hesitant about breaking the bad news to her. Unlike most women who find themselves in denial after being told something of this magnitude, Mrs.

Mallard wept at once, went away to her room and locked the door. During Louise's solitude in her room, Josephine was kneeling at the other side of the door begging for Louise to unlock and come out. Josephine was concerned that her sister was stressing herself and it would have negative effect on her heart. Eventually Louise opened the door and walked out with her sister toward the stairs. To everybody's surprise, Brently Mallard walked through

the front door alive and well which caused Mrs. Mallard's heart attack and immediate death.

While doctors and her family believed Louise had a heart attack because she was overjoyed, the details of the hour led me to conclude there was a different reason for Louise's heart attack. When I read the story the first time nothing seemed unusual to me until 5-th paragraph. The fact that Mrs. Mallard reacted to her husband's death with immediate grieving and "with sudden, wild abandonment", unlike many women would react, did not make me think that there was something amiss with her. After all, each and every human being has an intense range of emotions that are neither right nor wrong - they simply belong to that particular individual.

I also found nothing suspicious in Mrs. Mallard's retreating to her room. Here, however, alone in the privacy of her room, was where the story made its twist, to my mind. I remember times in my personal life when overwhelming grief or shock seized me - nothing in the world looked right, certainly not happy or pleasant. While Mrs.

Mallard was slouched in a chair her experience didn't feel that tragic at all - her mood was rather peaceful and relaxed. A peaceful picture that Louise saw out of her window - "trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain ... sparrows ... patches of blue sky ..." - was definitely not emblematic of grief. Those things told me that she was seeing her life as if having a new look. The author proceeds telling about a specific feeling that came over Mrs. Mallard and became greater as she expressed it through her body, mind, and her words.

Louise's pulse was beating faster and this actually relaxed her. She envisioned what her life was going to be like in the future now, when she was on her own, and all of the visions were of happiness and freedom. She whispered the words under her breath, "Free, free, free! in order to embrace the reality through the sound of her own voice. All of those descriptions suggested to me that Louise was very unhappy in her marriage and as a result she felt free and relieved that it was over.

Though Mrs. Mallard came across a couple of moments indicated that she loved her husband and he was a kind man, but her love paled in comparison to "a monstrous 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! Final details that strengthened my sense of the happy state of Louise's soul were at the moment when she opened the door to her sister. Chopin writes that "there was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory." It seemed to me clear that Louise felt as if the struggle of her life was over and she had won. After all of the Chopin's eloquent descriptions it was so easy to conceive what feelings and thoughts rushed past joyful Louise at the moment when she saw her husband entering the front door safe and sound.

All of her hopes and dreams about her happy future destroyed due to the fact she would be still a wife. Just as Josephine was wrong about what Louise was going through in her bedroom, the doctors were wrong by concluding that Mrs. Mallard died of "a joy that kills." It was actual joy that Louise felt

when she realized her husband was dead, and pain so great that killed her when Louise saw him walking through the door.