

Disappointment

"The Story of an Hour" is a short story in which Kate Chopin, the author, presents an often unheard of view of marriage. Mrs. Louise Mallard, Chopin's main character, experiences the exhilaration of freedom rather than the desolation of loneliness after she learns of her husband's death. Later, when Mrs. Mallard learns that her husband, Brently, still lives, she knows that all hope of freedom is gone. The crushing disappointment kills Mrs. Mallard. Published in the late eighteenth hundreds, the oppressive nature of marriage in "The Story of an Hour" may well be a reflection of, though not exclusive to, that era.

Though Chopin relates Mrs. Mallard's story, she does not do so in first person. Chopin reveals the story through a narrator's voice. The narrator is not simply an observer, however. The narrator knows, for example, that Mrs. Mallard, for the most part, did not love her husband (paragraph 15). It is obvious that the narrator knows more than can be physically observed. Chopin, however, never tells the reader what Mrs. Mallard is feeling. Instead, the reader must look into Mrs. Mallard's actions and words in order to understand what Mrs. Mallard feels.

Mrs. Mallard is held back in her marriage. The lines of her face "bespoke repression" (paragraph 8). When Mrs. Mallard learns of her husband's death, she knows that there will "be no powerful will bending her" (paragraph 14). There will be no husband who believes he has the "right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature" (paragraph 14). Mrs. Mallard acknowledges that her husband loved her. Brently had only ever looked at Mrs. Mallard with love (paragraph 13). This information implies to the reader that Brently is not a bad man; he simply believes that it is his right, and perhaps his obligation as a husband, to direct Mrs. Mallard in everything she does. When Mrs. Mallard learns of her husband's death, she realizes that he will no longer be there to repress her; there will be no one, save her, to direct her will. Then, in a crushing blow, everything she has just realized and begun to look forward to is stolen from her grasp.

Upon learning of her husband's death, Mrs. Mallard realizes that she is now free. She repeats the words "Free, free, free!" (paragraph 11) and feels her body come alive. Her pulse beats faster; her blood runs warmer; her eyes brighten (paragraph 11). Mrs. Mallard knows that from now on she can live for herself and no one else, that "all sort of days...would be her own" (paragraph 19). Mrs. Mallard sees the chance to live out the rest of her days for herself; she sees the opportunity to be her own person. Mrs. Mallard now looks forward to a long life. She had previously dreaded the years ahead spent under the thumb of her husband (paragraph 19). Now, though, Mrs. Mallard is someone who has much to look forward to and many joys to appreciate. This opportunity is taken from her just as her chance of freedom is taken from her when she learns that Brently still lives. When Mrs. Mallard sees Brently walk through the front door, the disappointment and the devastation of loss that she suffers cause her heart to fail.

When Mrs. Mallard walks down the stairs with her sister, she has triumph in her eyes (paragraph 20). The front door opens, however, and Brently walks in. What effect does this have on Mrs. Mallard? It kills her. Mrs. Mallard has, in a very short time, realized the world is a wonderful place and that she can live in it anyway she chooses. She gains freedom, independence, individuality, and a whole host of things to look forward to in life. When Brently walks in the door, though, Mrs. Mallard knows that she will have to spend the rest of her life as no more than his wife does, just as she had been. She knows that she will never be free. This is too much for Mrs. Mallard to handle. Life had been grim before, with her looking forward to the years ahead "with a shudder" (paragraph 19). Now that Mrs. Mallard has tasted what life might have been like without her husband, the idea of resuming her former life is unbearably grim. When Mrs. Mallard sees that her husband still lives, she dies, killed by the disappointment of losing everything she so recently thought she had gained.

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