

The Story of an Hour

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This short story is based on a very interesting paradox. The narrative begins with the news that Mr Mallard has died in a train accident. It is said that his wife's heart may not be able to bear this news as her heart is weak. It is supposed that on hearing the news of the death of her husband, Mrs. Mallard may fall dead because of grief. At the end of the short story, it is not the news of her husband's death that kills her, but rather the news of his being alive. In other words, she does not die as a result of grief but rather as a result of "the joy that kills".

Most of the narrative in the short story revolves around the development of Mrs. Mallard's psychological and emotional reactions to the news of her husband's death. Mrs Mallard does not receive the news of her husband's death in the ordinary way. She runs upstairs to her room, where she locks herself up and does not allow anyone to enter to her for talk or food. This is the moment at which the shock of the news is strongest. She cannot formulate her thoughts into words. This is a moment of numbness at which Mrs Mallard lacks the ability even to realise her own loss. A few minutes later, the clouds of sorrow will clear up and Mrs Mallard will find herself fully aware of what is happening and completely able to weigh the whole thing properly.

Far from being heart-broken by her sudden loss, and far from being hocked by her most unexpected widowhood, Mrs. Mallard develops a completely different feeling. Strangely enough, Mrs. Mallard begins to experience a sense of liberty and to see a prospect of independence. She now feels free body and soul. She is obliged to follow him blindly. All this is over now. Mrs. Mallard can from now on live totally for herself. There is no need for her to care about anybody else and there is no reason why she has to feel sorry.

This sudden feeling of relief does not mean that Mrs. Mallard used to hate her husband. It may only be a feeling of a hidden desire to be responsible for nobody in the world except one self. We all develop this feeling every now and then. We sometimes wish to live alone, or at least to have a walk without anybody for company. The sudden appearance of Mr Mallard though he has come back from the dead seems to have destroyed her feelings and happiness. She cannot stand the situation and therefore dies on the spot. Her sudden death may be symbolic of the death of her dreams. Now that her husband is still alive, she cannot enjoy those feelings of being on her own and her desire not to worry about anybody but herself. When she sees her husband before her again, she falls dead, not because she has seen a ghost but because she has been deprived of her tasteful freedom.

Throughout this short story, the reader can deduce that psychology is more important than events. This is because we are not concerned, in this short story at least, with any kind of event or episode, but we are concerned with what a certain event does inside the heart of a human being. The story penetrates into the inside of the character more than it is concerned with what happens outside him or her. So, it is an introspective story.

Chiefly, the theme of this short story is concerned with the effect of the news we hear on our own feelings and emotions. Sorrow or grief may not always be as deep as joy. We do not always fall dead on receiving the news that someone dear to us has died. However, we are all expected to die when we see that the dear dead person has come back to life.

All actions in this story do not exceed one hour. The writer wants to say that our feelings and emotions are not determined by the length or the duration of time. They are determined by the intensity of our feeling itself. Again, what happens inside the heart of man is far more important than what happens in the whole world.