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ENGL 1302-75428

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5 July 2016

# “A Joy that Kills”

Kate Chopin’s, “The Story of An Hour”,details a story about a wife who believes her husband is dead and imagines her future without him, one that is full of new freedom. Througout the story, the wife recognizes that although she will continue to mourn the loss of her husband, she is joyful about what it to come for herself. Chopin offers an enlivening moment for a woman who seeks hope, however unexpectedly at the end reveals the opposite, only to take away the wife’s independence and instead leave the husband to mourn.

The story Chopin writes covers a short period of Louise Mallard’s life, only an hour, hence the title “The Story of An Hour”. From the moment she learns about her husband’s death to the moment he comes home to reveal that he is alive, the time in between gives Louise an awakening moment in her life where she feels like what is to come ahead of her is full of hope. This story is rather short and can be read quickly, however, the reader leaves with a powerful story detailing the joy found in independence that can become all-consuming. When Louise is given the news of her husband’s death she immediately experiences sorrow and grief, however Chopin begins to soften the intensity of Louise’s emotions to highlight an exciting revelation.

Louise becomes joyful but reminds herself to resist these feelings to “beat it back with her will” (Chopin 2). Not only does this reveal the power joy brings that can often consume ones thoughts but it also shows how women were supposed to abandon their own emotions in order to please men. Chopin details this when Louise sees the “new spring life”, birds, and songs that occupies the open window outside her room (Chopin 1). She is able to experience this without having to abide by the rules and demands of a man. She isn’t dreaming of a new life, it is there so easily to have, just right outside the window, however, when she turns away, the joy is no longer there; rather it has become forbidden with the independence she only shortly got to experience. The story Chopin writes to capitalize on this independence is very ironic. From the first paragraph the reader notices the ironic juxtapositions and can tell what later will destroy Mrs. Mallard. She deals with a heart condition and is given “great care” when her sister gives her the news about her husband (Chopin 1). However, really the people that are caring for her have no idea what she is experiencing. She is not crying because she is heart-broken from the loss like her sister thinks she is but she is crying out of relief. Only the readers and the narrator understand the joy and the real heart trouble from her marriage she was experiencing. Chopin also is very ironic in the end when she reveals that Louise dies once her husband walks through the door. Mr. Mallard was supposedly killed in a railway accident, however comes home safe. The outside world seems to offer more danger than staying inside, but Chopin demonstrates rather the opposite; nothing good comes from being trapped and restrained. When the doctors arrived once Louise died, they said “she had died of a heart disease—of a joy that kills” (Chopin 3). The joy she experiences is so powerful that it causes Louise’s own death. Chopin leaves the reader with this dramatic irony only to end the story there.

This short story can be compared to Jack Garratt’s song, “Surprise Yourself”. The song explores the meaning of adventure and what it means to “surprise yourself” when you let something unfamiliar take you away (Garratt 17-18). Just as the song details cherishing the experience, Chopin writes as Louise hopes for such an experience. Garratt in the final verse sings,

“Lover, if you only knew/ The times that train has fooled me too/ And tears me from a place I know/ It helps me to surprise myself” (Garratt 13-16). The singer states that it is okay to have had the train take him to a place of unfamiliarity. He understands that that experience should be cherished because it was given to him in the first place. Although it might be terrifying to let go, he tells her that it is good to surprise yourself and look back on the experience as an adventure. In “A Story of An Hour”, Louise dreams of this adventure and is excited for that surprise. What is very humbling about comparing these two pieces is that one story is saying embrace that unsettling feeling while the other story reveals that many people are not able to have that adventure. Both are not exactly similar but they cross the same lines and address the joy that comes from newness whether one is able to experience it or not.

Even though “A Story of An Hour” was written in the late 1800s, it is very much still relatable for women in society of the 21st century. Women of course have been able to experience much more freedom and equality today than compared to women in Chopin’s time, however we are still dealing with that ladder of inequality. Overall, Chopin’s work here in this story with Louise allows people to understand to treasure freedom and independence. For me, I related very much to Louise’s personality. I am not one to share many of my feelings, rather I internalize a lot of what I am thinking. Her character was strong and passionate and no matter what stage of society we are in, whether it’s in the 1800s or today, there have always been strong, passionate women, seen for example in Kate Chopin herself.

This short story is worth reading, so descriptive and interesting that the reader can become Louise. We are able to understand through her and understand what she seeks through Chopin’s dedication to the story. She allows the reader to experience Louise find happiness out of death, and yet through narration, see her struggle through the complexities of human emotion.

# Works Cited

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