



## BACKGROUND

**Kate Chopin** (1851–1904) wrote more than one hundred short stories and two novels. Her work features intelligent and sensitive female characters and is often set in Louisiana where she spent her married life. Her first novel, *At Fault* (1890), received little attention when it was published. Her second, *The Awakening* (1899), told the story of a woman who leaves her family and eventually commits suicide. It was widely condemned by critics as shocking and morbid. However, since its rediscovery in the 1950s, it has been hailed as an insightful work that foreshadowed the feminist movement in literature.



# THE STORY OF AN HOUR

Short Story by Kate Chopin

## SETTING A PURPOSE

As you read, make notes about how much control Mrs. Mallard has over her life and how this changes during the course of the story.

- 1 **K**nowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.
- 2 It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.
- 3 She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild **abandonment**, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

## Notice & Note

Use the side margins to notice and note signposts in the text.

## ANALYZE POINT OF VIEW

**Annotate:** Mark the clues in paragraphs 1–3 that indicate the point of view.

**Evaluate:** Which type of third-person narrator is Chopin using? What is the effect of this point of view?

## abandonment

(ə-băn'dən-měnt) *n.* a lack of restraint or inhibition.



## NOTICE & NOTE

### ANALYZE POINT OF VIEW

**Annotate:** Mark text in paragraphs 4–6 that show what Mrs. Mallard is seeing.

**Interpret:** How do you think the author's use of third-person point of view hints at the story's theme, or larger message about life?

- 4 There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.
- 5 She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.
- 6 There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.





7 She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

8 She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

9 There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

10 Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

11 When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The **vacant** stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

12 She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

13 She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

14 There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of **illumination**.

15 And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

16 “Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

### MAKE AND CONFIRM PREDICTIONS

**Annotate:** Mark clues in paragraph 7 that describe the impact her husband’s death has had on Mrs. Mallard.

**Predict:** How do you think Mrs. Mallard will cope after learning about the death of her husband?

### vacant

(vāˈkənt) *adj.* blank, expressionless.

### MAKE AND CONFIRM PREDICTIONS

**Annotate:** Mark details in paragraph 13 that tell you what Mrs. Mallard is thinking about.

**Cite Evidence:** Do these details confirm or disprove predictions you made about the story? Explain.

### illumination

(ī-lōō-mə-nāˈshən) *n.* awareness or enlightenment.



## NOTICE & NOTE



### LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

**Annotate:** In paragraph 19, mark the sentence that effectively conveys an idea about how Mrs. Mallard feels.

**Analyze:** How does this sentence create mood and convey Mrs. Mallard's feelings?

17 Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

18 “Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life<sup>1</sup> through that open window.

19 Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

20 She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

<sup>1</sup> **elixir of life:** a medicine that restores vigor or the essence of life.



- 21 Someone was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, **composedly** carrying his grip-sack<sup>2</sup> and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.
- 22 But Richards was too late.
- 23 When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

<sup>2</sup> **grip-sack:** a small traveling bag or satchel.

**composed**  
(kəm-pōzd') *adj.* self-possessed; calm.

#### ANALYZE POINT OF VIEW

**Annotate:** Mark words and phrases in paragraph 21 that show how each character feels or what they know.

**Evaluate:** How does the author's use of third-person point of view affect your understanding of the plot and conflict?

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer these questions before moving on to the **Analyze the Text** section on the following page.

- Why do you think the short story is titled "The Story of an Hour"?
  - The accident happened over an hour-long period.
  - The story takes place in an hour.
  - It is all the time Mrs. Mallard needed to grieve.
  - It is the amount of time it takes before she accepts the death.
- Who informs Mrs. Mallard about her husband's death?
  - A servant
  - Richards
  - The doctors
  - Josephine
- What causes Mrs. Mallard's death, according to the doctors?
  - The fright at seeing a ghost
  - Pneumonia
  - Heart disease
  - A broken heart