

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kate Chopin (1850-1904), born Katharine O'Flaherty, was an American author chiefly known for her short stories and novels. She is considered a predecessor of American 20th century feminist authors. Most of her works are set in Louisiana. Her themes are women-centric and revolve around their search for self-hood and self-discovery. Her writings are often considered a subtle revolt against gender conformity and outdated social customs and conventions that limit a woman's life by restricting her freedom.

Her major works were two short story collections: Bayou Folk (1894) and A Night in Acadie (1897). One could trace the influence of Guy de Maupassant in her composition.

ABOUT THE STORY:

Some argue that modern feminism was borne on her pages, and one needs to look no further than her 1894 short story "The Story of an Hour" to support the claim.

The story was initially published in 'Vogue' in 1894 as The Dream of an Hour.

Kate Chopin did not shy away from endorsing female independence in such a carefree manner. During the late 19th century, the freedom enjoyed by the women was lamentably restricted. Her story The Story of an Hour explores the freedom of choice that a woman might exercise regarding her individual likings in a society predominated by financial concerns and patriarchal conventions.

Knowing 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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## EXPLANATION

The story revolves around Mrs. Mallard, the protagonist of the story with a weak heart, who is treated very delicately by her near and dear ones. Her sister Josephine comes to know about the tragic news of her husband's death from their family friend Richards who was in the newspaper's office when he had received the news. Briefly Mallard, Mr. Mallard's husband, died in a railroad accident. He had taken some time to assure himself about the authenticity of the news by a second telegram, and had hastened to the Mallard's residence before any less careful and less careful friend brought the news to them as he knew that Mrs. Mallard had a weak heart and the news had to be delivered exquisitely.

Mrs. Mallard accepted the significance of the news and immediately mourns over the inconsolable loss by weeping. She wept into her sister's arms and went away into her room alone. She wanted no one to follow her or disturb her privacy.

Retreating to her bedroom, Mrs. Mallard collapses into her comfortable roomy armchair, facing the window. An intense physical exhaustion seems to haunt her body, making it into her soul. Weary of the lamentation she stares outside the window. She can see the tops of trees booming with the 'new spring of life'. Everything has acquired a new hue. She hears the customary cry of paddlers trying to 'sell his wares' and notices the various stretches of blue in the sky.

Louis sits with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair with no movement when a sudden sob shakes her. As she sits motionless in the chair

a strange and unknown feeling grips her. She senses with fear that feeling is approaching her about which she has no idea. There is a dull stare in her eyes whose gaze indicates 'a suspension of intelligent thought.'

To be continued in the next class...