Death can change people in many ways. People who personally experience death, like the lady who felt death in the story “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, can endure many hardships after their experience. When death affects others, they tend to go through the stages of grief, these being, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In “The Story of an Hour,” Ms. Mallard goes through these stages, and she goes through these stages very quickly. This may be due to a mental disability that she has adopted from several years of neglect from her husband, or it could be that she just doesn’t have feelings towards her husband anymore.

Now, in order to understand grief, one must know the stages of grief. Jackson P. Rainer says, “One who survives the death of a loved one adapts to a life requiring the confrontation of the painfully real absence of the physical being of the loved one” (Rainer 1). What Jackson P. Rainer is saying is that everyone who goes through the death of a loved one goes through the stages of grief as they learn to adapt to their life without their loved one. The first stage is denial. This stage is where people tend to think that their loved one is not dead. This stage of grief tends to be short lived as the next stage sets in very quickly. The second stage of grief is anger. This stage of grief can be the hardest on the people around the person who is in this stage. This stage tends to be an intense feeling of self-hatred. This stage is where the person feels as if they were the cause of the loss they have suffered. The person feeling this way may turn to self-harm, where they inflict damage onto themselves. This stage of grief can also cause the person to
become outwardly abusive. The person may see someone else as the cause to their loss, and the person could try to harm said person. The third stage of grief is bargaining. This stage is where a person tries to give their life up to bring back whomever they lost. This person will try to bargain with their god, devil, death, or doctors. The fourth stage of grief is depression. This stage is where a person becomes overwhelmingly sad. The person tends to shut people out and tries to ignore society as much as possible. This stage can last the longest. This stage may never be overcome. Self-harm can be very common to people in this stage of grief. The person in this stage may also have suicidal thoughts, and may try to act upon those thoughts. The fifth stage of grief is acceptance. This stage can take the longest to reach. This stage is where the person will finally come to terms with their loss and try to continue with life. The person in this stage of grief will still reminisce their time with their loved one. Once this stage is reached, one can consider themselves done with their grief, though they can still be upset about their loss.

Now, in “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, one finds that Ms. Mallard has skipped through the first three stages of grief. Skipping stages of grief is very common, and most people tend to skip around the stages of grief. If someone, who is outwardly aggressive, loses someone, then they will go through the anger stage, but, if someone, who is kind gentle and is very docile, loses someone, they might not go through the anger stage of grief. Another instance is that a religious person might skip the third step: bargaining, since they understand that death is a part of life and that their loved one has gone to a better place. This is the case with Ms. Mallard. She understands that her husband has died and becomes depressed. One can see her going through her depression when she is with her friends and family, Kate Chopin states, “She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms” (Chopin para. 3). Kate Chopin is saying that Ms. Mallard is sinking deeper and deeper into depression. This can be very harmful in
overcoming the depression stage of grief. Joseph Hayes states, “The knowledge of death undercuts human motivation like nothing else. In light of this basic fact of life, nearly all goal directed action can appear pointless and absurd” (Hayes para. 1). Hayes says this because, when someone dies or when someone knows they are about to die, the person will believe that living is a concept that they cannot grasp. It is like a lesson in school that they are just not understanding. When faced with death, many will buckle to their knees and beg for redemption, whilst others will sit idly by and wait for their end. This occurs in “The Story of an Hour” when Ms. Mallard finds out about her husband’s death. She becomes a social recluse and hides away in her room. She looks outside, thinking of what her life could have been.

The next and last stage of grief that Ms. Mallard goes through is acceptance. Ms. Mallard starts to accept the loss of her husband when she starts looking out her window. She sees the beautiful landscape, people enjoying themselves outside, and what was holding her back from being happy. Guler Bolraz quotes Steger, “The extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or overarching aim in life” (qtd. Bolraz 3). What Steger is saying is that people can see themselves in many ways, but when someone has truly accepted their life for what it is. They can truly begin life again. This happens to Ms. Mallard when she sees what she can do in life. She saw how she could live for herself. This is where Ms. Mallard truly overcame her depression.

Now, one might think that she is a happy go lucky lady, but she has gone through the stages of grief far too quickly. Her mental condition would need to be very degraded for this to occur. Sarah Olsen states “The imagination, to perceive gratefulness cannot be born by the patient, because this would mean to accept help from others” (Olsen 24). This means that she
cannot accept help from her family, and this happens when she runs to her room and demands that no one help her. This is a sign of psychosis, or is it? Kate Chopin states, “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” (Chopin para.11), meaning that her husband did not love her, or she saw no love from her husband in years. This neglect caused a mental break to occur in her mind. Ms. Mallard starts to find happiness in the sad fact that her husband is no longer alive. This is also a sign of neglect. This neglect was of the absence of love. Her husband was not caring and did not love her. Therefore, she was so happy to find out that he had died. This means that she did not have a mental disorder, but was instead lonely.

Although Ms. Mallard has accepted her loss, she sees this as more of an awakening. Ms. Mallard is overjoyed when she prepares to leave her room. When she first starts to feel this way, Kate Chopin states, “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself” (Chopin para. 13). Ms. Mallard starts to become happy at the death of her husband. She even whispers to herself about being free. She states this as if her husband had been keeping her captive for years. Where does all of this come from? This excitement comes from her knowing that her grief is gone, and that she can finally be free from her husband, who no longer loved her or showed her love. This excitement meant that she could finally go on trips to new places and meet new people.

In conclusion, Ms. Mallard goes through only two stages of grief. She does so very quickly, but, just because she gets over her husband’s death, does not mean that she is an evil woman who hated her husband, nor does it mean that she is a crazy psychopathic murderer. She just got over her marriage. Her husband did not love her anymore, and she did not love him. She was always looking for a way out. His pseudo death was her door, and she unlocked it.
Normally, overcoming grief and becoming happy can take time, but she does this in an hour. If not for her quick end, I’m sure that Ms. Mallard would have become a stronger person. Grief is something that can be taken in steps or all at once. The closer you are to someone, the longer it will take you to overcome grief. This can take months, years, or just an hour. Overcoming these feats most will come out a better person, while others will suffer with their everyday lives.
Works Cited


