

THE JOY THAT KILLS

adapted from "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin

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In 1884, a tragic railroad accident occurred. Louise Mallard, after being cautiously notified that her husband perished in the accident, was initially devastated and secluded herself in her room to grieve in peace. However, all Louise could remember is how suffocating her marriage truly was. Realizing that she is free to be herself, she goes out into the world to start a new independent life. Just as she imagine all that she could do, her husband shows up, and Louise collapses and dies from cardiac arrest.

- *Scene One:* A railroad accident occurs.
- *Scene Two:* Louise learns of her husband's death.
- *Scene Three:* Louise mourns in her room.
- *Scene Four:* Louise remembers what her marriage was like.
- *Scene Five:* Louise realizes that she is free.
- *Scene Six:* Louise frolics outside of her house.
- *Scene Seven:* Louise makes her way to the local town.
- *Scene Eight:* Louise strolls through the village alone.
- *Scene Nine:* Louise meets Mabel, her friend, at a tavern.
- *Scene Ten:* Louise and Mabel talk and walk around the town.
- *Scene Eleven:* Mabel goes home and Louise makes her way home.
- *Scene Twelve:* Excited for her new life, Louise returns home.
- *Scene Thirteen:* Louise does work around the house by herself.
- *Scene Fourteen:* Louise watches the sunset outside.
- *Scene Fifteen:* Louise disposes of Brently's belongings; Brentley returns home and Louise dies from cardiac arrest.
- *Scene Sixteen:* Brently and the nurse speculate that Louise's death was caused by joy.
- *Scene Seventeen:* Brentley goes into the bedroom and sees that Louise has broken many of his most valuable items.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - EARLY MORNING

Smoke is seen over the horizon a train is approaching down the tracks. The train WHISTLES and CREAKS as it slides off of the track and falls over on its side. Passengers begin rushing out of the train as the cars hit each other one after another and fall over like dominoes.

INT. PARLOR OF MALLARD HOME - MID MORNING

LOUISE MALLARD is sitting in a high backed burgundy armchair. She looks around the room, deep in thought. Her face is set in a nervous frown and she cautiously eyes the on the wall. The room is decorated with lace and frills everywhere. The door CRASHES open and Louise jumps with a YELP. A woman rushes in, SLAMMING the door behind her. The woman is winded and hurried as she looks around frantically. She has what appears to be a newspaper clutched tightly in her hand. The woman spots LOUISE and jumps even higher than the latter did a few moments before.

WOMAN

Louise! What are you doing here?!

The woman is Louise Mallard's sister, Josephine.

LOUISE

(startled)

This is my home, Josephine. I'm merely waiting for my husband to return home from his Trip.

JOSEPHINE'S face drops. Her eyes look to the floor. She knows she can't bring herself to look at the innocently confused look on her sister's face. She carefully shuts the door and hides the paper behind her back.

JOSEPHINE

(calm, soft)

There something I must tell you Louise.

Josephine crosses the parlor and kneels down in front of Louise. Josephine tenderly takes Louise's hand in her own. Her eyes look sad.

LOUISE

(worried, frightened)

What is it dear sister? What has you so

Spooked?

Josephine looks down at their intertwined hands. She takes a long pause, as if she is picking her words very carefully.

JOSEPHINE

I wish to not frighten you. For I know
your heart is quite weak as you age.

(beat)

It is your beloved husband.

Louise's eyes widen, She jerks her hand from Josephine's grasp. With both hands she grips the armrests of the chair.

LOUISE

(gasping)

Brently?

Josephine nods.

LOUISE

Dear God! Not my husband! What has he done?!

Josephine presents the newspaper to her stricken sister. She places it in Louise's lap.

JOSEPHINE

(calm, soft)

There was...

(beat)

An accident.

Louise looks down at at the front page. The heading reads: "TRAGIC RAILROAD ACCIDENT, FATAL". Louise furrows her brow. She is very confused. Josephine avoids her eyes as she speaks next.

JOSEPHINE

(soft, almost a whisper)

Brently's train. He was on his way home. He...

(beat)

Didn't make it.

INT. MALLARD MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

LOUISE is sobbing on her bed. Her GASPS and MOANS can be heard throughout the house. JOSEPHINE waits outside in the hallway. She TAPS softly a few times on the wooden frame of the door.

JOSEPHINE
(muffled)

Louise?

LOUISE
(weak)

He's gone! Dead! I wasn't even given the
chance to say goodbye!

JOSEPHINE
(muffled)

Please, Louise! What can I do for you?

LOUISE
(through sobs)

Just let me be! For I am all alone now. I must
grow accustomed to the loneliness.

Josephine SIGH is heard through the door. Her footsteps ECHO
down the hall, progressively getting quieter until they fade
into nothing. Louise wipes her face and takes deep breaths. She
looks around the room at the photographs of she and her husband
framed on the wall and sitting on the dressers. She stares at
her hands.

LOUISE (VO)

I am all alone now.

(beat)

I have no one to be with.

(beat)

I have no one to share my life with.

(beat)

No one be bound to.

(beat)

No one to dedicate my life to.

EXT. OPEN AIR TRAIN PLATFORM - EARLY MORNING - FLASHBACK

The MALLARDS are waiting for BRENTLY MALLARD's train to arrive.
Brently stand short and stout, chin held high in the air. LOUISE
trails behind him. She is holding her husband's suitcase. As the
occasional townsmen pass by, Brently warmly greets them. Louise
merely smiles, a strain obvious in her eye.

BRENTLY

Now, Louise, I'll only be gone a few short

days. While I am gone, I will need our home cleaned until it is spotless. Remember, I want to see my perfectly groomed mustache in the mirror on the wall.

Brently chortles at himself. Louise merely nods up at her husband and she struggles to shield her eyes from the sun.

BRENTLY

(patronizing)

Try not to go into town while I am gone. The people of this wretched town will begin all of their mindless gossip if they so much as glance at you without me. It is odd enough for you to be out on this platform. Everyone knows one musn't be out without her husband.

Louise nods once again. Brently raises his arm and checks his watch. A shrill WHISTLE is heard in the distance and smoke appears on the horizon as the train approaches. Brently begins fumbling around for his belongings. Louise SIGHS and hands him his hat, coat, cane, and suitcase. She hands them one after the other. He doesn't thank her. Louise can say anything the train pulls in. patrons bustle about to get on board and Brently boards after giving his wife a hasty one-armed hug. After a while his head pops out of a window as the train starts up and the conductor WHISTLES once more.

BRENTLY

(hurried)

Oh! And please don't forget, my beloved! My suit must be retrieved from the tailors on your way home!

INT. MALLARD BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

LOUISE is still sitting on the bed. She slowly removes her hands from her face and stands.

LOUISE (VO)

No one to be bound to.

(beat)

No one to stand in the way of my happiness.

(beat)

No one to live for...

Louise crosses to the window and looks out at all of the land around her. The field before her is sprinkled with wildflowers of every color imaginable. Louise GASPS and begins to tremble.

LOUISE

No one to live for...

(beat)

Louise's face breaks into a wide grin and she lets out a giggle.

LOUISE

But myself!

Louise crosses to the dresser and looks at her reflection in the mirror. She begins wiping at her face in a hurry. She wants to rid herself of the evidence of the sorrow and grief. Now Louise feels nothing but joy.

LOUISE

(joyfully)

Me! Finally, finally there is so much time
for me to be myself! I'm...

(beat)

I'm free!

Louise runs over out of her room and down the stairs. She's giggling the whole way.

EXT. MALLARD FRONT YARD - MORNING

LOUISE opens the door and runs out, flailing with joy. She twirls in the grass and stares up into the sky, LAUGHING and smiling.

EXT. NEARBY FOREST - LATE MORNING

LOUISE runs through the grass and reaches the forest. A twig SNAPS as she runs over it. She climbs over a fallen branch and continues running, with the local town in sight.

EXT. LOCAL TOWN - NOON

LOUISE enters the town by herself. As she walks through, many TOWNSPEOPLE give her strange looks, having seen her without her husband for the first time. Louise continues smiling. She heads for a tavern.

INT. TAVERN - NOON

LOUISE enters the tavern alone and slowly takes a seat. She waits anxiously and awkwardly. Suddenly she sees her friend MABEL enter. She SQUEALS with excitement.

LOUISE
(eccastatic)

Mabel!

Mabel looks at Louise and rushes over to her.

MABEL
(concerned)

Louise...

(beat)

Mabel takes a seat.

MABEL
What are you doing here without Brentley?

LOUISE
(excited)
He's gone, Mabel. He perished in the
Accident.

MABEL
(shocked)
Oh my god, Louise. How do you feel?

LOUISE
Well, I started the day devastated. But
then I started reminiscing about...
(beat)
How awful he was... I now realize that...
(beat)

Mabel slowly begins to smile.

MABEL
(gloating)
Go on... say it.

Louise SIGHS.

LOUISE
(reluctantly)

You were right.

Mabel LAUGHS with pleasure.

MABEL

Hey. Whaddya think we get out of here? It's so boring in here. We don't have any husbands to keep us around here against our will.

Louise smiles and starts LAUGHING. Both women exit the tavern.

EXT. LOCAL TOWN STREETS - NOON

LOUISE and MABEL stroll across the town. Both are happy for Louise.

LOUISE (OS)

(joyful)

I know it sounds awful. I truly did love him...

(beat)

Mabel bites into an apple, making a loud CRUNCH.

MABEL

(braggadocious)

See? I told you how euphoric it is. See...

(beat)

They say marriage is the best part of a woman's life. I personally don't understand what the hell someone had to be drinking to say such a thing. There is no joy whatsoever. Why get married if all he's gonna do is push you around anyways?

Mabel turns to Louise with emphasis.

MABEL

(with emphasis)

The joy of marriage is an illusion of freedom. If you're a married woman, the only thing you have to look forward to is either his death, or your death.

LOUISE

Then we are two very lucky women.

Both Mabel and Louise LAUGH.

EXT. MABEL'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

LOUISE and MABEL near Mabel's house at the end of the town. The sun shines down on the terrain. Mabel YAWNS.

MABEL

(tired)

It's getting late. Remember, just because you don't have curfew anymore, that doesn't mean you can't ever go home.

LOUISE

Oh, I know...

(beat)

Louise looks back at the town and her distant home.

LOUISE

I know.

MABEL

Good-bye, Louise.

LOUISE

Good-bye, Mabel.

Louise turns and starts back toward her home.

EXT. FOREST - EVENING

LOUISE trots back through the small forest after leaving the town. She climbs under a branch, and she SNAPS another twig. She shuffles her way through some leaves until she catches a glimpse of her house at the top of the hill.

INT. MALLARD KITCHEN - EVENING

LOUISE manually washes the last dishes in the kitchen. She is satisfied that Brentley is not behind her to force her to do so. She finishes the last dish and grabs her coat afterward. She makes her way to the door.

EXT. MALLARD YARD - SUNSET

LOUISE exits her house and walks through the yard. She feels a slight breeze WHISTLING in the air. The sun is beginning to set. Louise finds a decent spot in the yard to sit: right at the edge of the hill. Plenty of light shines on her face.

LOUISE
(satisfied)

You would never let me sit here. Go this far. Let me watch something so beautiful and glorious. Because I'm just such a frail woman and I'll probably fall if I sit here.

Louise adjusts herself and makes sure she won't fall. The sun is getting much less bright.

LOUISE
The sun isn't the only thing setting tonight, Brentley. You're setting with it. Our marriage is setting with it.

The sun has little light left.

LOUISE
Good-bye, Brentley.

The sun is fully set And no more light shines on Louise's face. The surrounding terrain goes fully dark. She gets up and goes back into her house.

INT. MALLARD BEDROOM - EARLY NIGHT

LOUISE gathers up many of Brentley's belongings and throws them into the closet. CLANG after CLANG is all she can hear from throwing each valuable. Louise GIGGLES with satisfaction after every toss she makes into the closet. Suddenly, the doorbell RINGS. Louise looks up, shocked, and her expression of utter eccentricity turns to an expression of utter disarray. Louise slowly creeps down the stairs with apprehension. She slowly opens the door to see her living husband BRENTLEY MALLARD standing there.

Brentley
(excited)

Loui-

Louise SHRIEKS and drops dead on the floor.

INT. MALLARD TAVERN - MORNING

BRENTLEY sits in the tavern, distraught, while a NURSE tends to LOUISE'S deceased body.

BRENTLEY
(saddened)

I just...

(beat)

I just don't understand...

The nurse looks up, apathetically and aggravated. She looks back down and begins to cover Louise's body.

NURSE
Well, it was certainly a shock to see
that you weren't killed in the train accident.

BRENTLEY
(confused)
What train accident?

The nurse looks up and points to the newspaper on Brentley's armchair. He picks it up and squints at it.

BRENTLEY
No... no, no, no, no...

NURSE
Think about it. She reads that paper in
the morning and thinks for the whole day
that her husband is dead. Now don't tell me
she wouldn't have had a heart attack upon
seeing that you were alive all along.

Brentley gets up from the chair and paces.

BRENTLEY
I can't imagine how she felt.

NURSE
Well, that's exactly how she died.

Brentley turns to the nurse, confused.

NURSE
It's the joy that kills.

Brentley hurries up the stairs.

INT. MALLARD BEDROOM - MORNING

BRENTLEY rushes into the bedroom to see all of his belongings smashed, cracked, and disposed of. He stares around at the floor with a blank face of astonishment. He slowly turns to look into the closet and sees all his most valuable belongings, completely broken, in the closet. Brentley turns to the far wall and realizes that he cannot see his own perfectly groomed mustache in the mirror.

FIN