**Kate Chopin: The Story of an Hour**

[Name of Writer]

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Literary symbolism has historically played a significant role in describing complex social and psychological dilemmas. Authors have highlighted countless serious issues with imagery that keeps the scandal alive and yet eludes a direct attack on the conservative norms around them. Many female authors have been especially associated with the deliberately highlighted feminist undertones in their works. Chopin is one such author who wrote ‘The Story of an Hour’ in 1894. (Toth) Her works have also been repeatedly scrutinized for the not-so-subtle feminist symbolism.

In this specific story, Chopin has focused on describing the emotional roller coaster of an eighteenth-century wife who learns of her husband’s death and slowly realizes that the apparent tragedy actually translates into freedom. There are several descriptions that are synonyms for joy and freedom in the way Mrs. Mallard reacts to her husband’s death. She cries abruptly and soon demands solitude where she sits in front of an open window.

The open window is the greatest symbol for hope and promise. The initial sorrow has quickly subsided to her subconscious when the exhaustion pushes her into the ‘comfortable’ chair. The spring life she can see from the window, the rain breath she can smell and the song she can hear are all implications of how the window is causing delight that seeps into her being through three different senses. All of these are symbols for life and joy. The promise for more is implied through the phrase which describes patches of clear sky peeking from between clouds. The exhaustion she felt while sitting in the chair relates to the clouds. The fact that she focuses on the patches is a synonym for our character fixating on hope. This is immediately followed by a direct and clear change in her emotional state. She has understood that life is still full and foregoing the clouds that used to surround her dull married life, she is choosing to focus on the patches of a clear bright sky.

The single word full of every emotion she feels at this moment while looking out the window is ‘free’. The window is, therefore, not only a symbol for hope but it is also a symbol for escape. An escape from the restrictions of quiet subservience into the great unknown of life. The same symbols (spring life, smell of rain, songs and sparrows chirping) now become analogues for life itself. And she is looking at life and the joys it brings through an open window. She is drinking an ‘elixir of life’ through the open window. There is finally an escape route in her sights, and she is free to pursue it. She is one jump away from crossing the window and falling, arms open, into the life that awaits her outside. The simple fact that married life in the eighteenth century essentially restrained women within the confides of their homes also comes into play here. The open window is how she can finally leave the house; both literally and figuratively. The little prayer for a long life that she whispers before getting up is juxtaposed with the horror she had felt the previous day at the prospect of a long life. The perspective of the window meaning hope is re-implied here.

It is quite easy to deduce here that Kate Chopin is looking to dissect the exhaustion brought upon a woman by marriage. The sheer joy at the prospect of freedom that Mrs. Mallard feels at the death of her loving husband is a sad commentary on how marriage could essentially become a prison for the womankind. The fact that her heart disease literally kills her at the sudden withdrawal of her short-lived joy is the final testament to this truth.

# References

Toth, Emily. *Kate Chopin: A Vocation and a Voice*. New York: Penguin, 1991. Print.