The Story of an Hour
Kate Chopin
The title of the short story refers to the time elapsed between the moments at which the protagonist, Louise Mallard, hears that her husband is dead and discovers that he is alive after all. *The Story of an Hour* was considered controversial during the 1890s because it deals with a female protagonist who feels liberated by the news of her husband's death. In *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Emily Toth argues that Chopin "had to have her heroine die" in order to make the story publishable.
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Characters

Mrs. Louise Mallard is the protagonist of the story. She is introduced as being "afflicted with a heart trouble", which is why great care is taken in telling her of her husband's death. She mourns her husband, but then begins to feel relieved and liberated.

Mr. Brently Mallard is assumed dead until the end of the story when it is revealed that the news of his death was a mistake.
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 Characters

Josephine is Louise's sister who tells Louise of her husband's death. She embodies the feminine ideals of the time, acting as the picture perfect wife figure.

Richards represents the standard image and expectations of the man during the time period - responsible for protecting women. However, he fails which could have been a bit controversial for the time period.
An ironically detached and melancholy tone: The story comes off as subtly cruel in that Louise's reaction to the death of her husband was not one of sadness from loss but rather a bitter joy she feels when she comes to the understanding that she is now free from the shackles of marriage, his perceived death representing freedom and independence from the role she is forever bound to by society - a wife.
Third-person narrative

The non-participant narrator provides access to Mrs. Mallard's life: her medical condition or state, her strict marriage, her lackluster relationship with her husband, her perspective on "love" she has for her husband, and her perspective on her newly awakened ideas on her personal freedom—which she associates with the death of her husband.
Kate Chopin brought attention to the racial issues that existed during the times of slavery and introduced the two main characters in the story, Désirée and Armand, and creates many symbolisms, ironies, and themes seen throughout the story.
Marriage vs. Freedom

Mrs. Mallard believes that both women and men limit each other in matrimony. The story is not about the husband being abusive to his wife or vice-versa. Instead, it focuses on the individual's inner desires for freedom. Louise's desire for freedom far exceeds her love for him - a controversial idea that goes against the norms of society.
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❖ Symbolism

❖ **Spring** – This symbolizes a new beginning which represents life and that is what Mrs. Mallard gains as a widow. It also helps to note that spring comes after winter.

❖ **Mrs. Mallard’s Heart**: She dies of heart failure triggered by overwhelming emotional stress. No one will ever know that the overwhelming emotional stress was due to her loss of hope for the future.
Women's Liberation Movement

In the story, this housewife who has been confined to the social norms of the obedient wife, has an unorthodox reaction to the death of her husband. She anticipates her newfound freedom from the suppression of her husband, of men, and becomes invigorated by it. This idea is one of the key values of the feminist movement, and thus "The Story of an Hour" was an important literary work to show a woman breaking from the norm of society.
Film Adaptation

*The Joy that Kills*, 1984 film adaptation, directed by Tina Rathbone. It was released in 1984 as part of the PBS series American Playhouse.