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Freedom and Control in Marriage

Marriage is often seen as a partnership that brings stability and companionship. However, marriage can create lots of pressure, uncertainty, doubt, and conflicting. In the short stories “Lamb to the Slaughter” by Roald Dahl and “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, both stories center around the two women who comes to a sudden change in their marriages. These situations cause the Characters to respond differently and in an unexpected way. Although the situations in each story are different, both authors show just how marriage can affect a person sense of freedom. By focusing on Mary Maloney and Louise Mallard, both authors show how changes in a marriage can reveal deep emotions and a search for independence.

One way the two stories are similar is that both women have an emotional reaction due to a sudden change in their marriages. In “Lamb to the Slaughter,” Mary Maloney begins the story as a wife who is looking forward to her husband she loves to be home from work. However, when he arrives home, he explains to her that she needs to sit down because he needs to tell her something. Everything changes when her husband delivers unsettling news. The story never explains what he says to her, but its obvious that he is leaving her. Mary reacts violently and hits him in the head with a frozen leg of lamb. Dahl describes the moment writing that she “swung

the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air” (Dahl). This unexpected action shows how quickly her emotions move from love to desperation. In “The Story of an Hour,” Louise Mallard also experiences a shift in emotion. When she receives news that her husband has died in a train wreck, her first reaction is sadness. But, as she sits alone in her room, she begins to realize that the future might hold new possibilities for her. Chopin begins to write the Louise quietly whispers “free, free, free,” as a sense of independence (Chopin). In both stories, the author shows how unexpected news can quickly change a person’s frame of mind.

Another connection between the two stories is the theme of personal freedom. Louise Mallard’s experience focuses on this. She realizes that marriage still prevented her from living for herself. She begins to think about a future without him and full of possibilities. Chopin explains that Louise realizes that there will no longer be a “powerful will bending hers” (Chopin). This shows that she feels relief that she will be able to make her own decisions. Mary Maloney’s situation is a little bit different. Her husband’s decision threatens their marriage and everything that she has worked hard for. Rather than accepting it, she reacts violently and kills him. Afterwards she thinks of ways to protect herself. She thoughtfully sets up an alibi and even feeds the police officers who are investigating her husband’s death the leg of lamb. Her actions are severe, but it shows how much she wants to keep the life she had. Both stories reveal that the characters feel limited by their circumstances, reacting to gaining or losing independence.

Despite these similarities, the two stories differ in how both characters respond in their situations. First, Mary Maloney reacts with violence and kills her husband, and in so doing, she produces an alibi to cover up what she has done. Then later feeds the murder weapon to the police officers that is investigating the murder. Her actions reflect the dark irony and twisted humor that Dahl includes in the story. Meanwhile, Louise Mallard’s story is more emotional than

physical. She is alone majority of the story alone, quietly thinking about her future. Instead of responding with action, she experiences a quiet realization of who she is and what freedom means to her. Chopin story turns tragic when Louise finds out that her husband did not die in the train wreck. Seeing him overwhelms her and she dies. Although the doctors claim that she died from joy, readers can see that the sudden loss of freedom she envisioned led to her death. This contrast in the endings illustrates how different authors can interpret and present the same them in their own way.

Overall, both “Lamb to the Slaughter” and “The story of an Hour” explore the complicated emotions connected to marriage and independence. Each story shows how sudden changes in a relationship can reveal feelings that were previously hidden. Mary Maloney and Louise Mallard both experience powerful emotional shifts after receiving unexpected news about their husbands. Although their reactions are quite different, both characters reveal a deeper struggle with control and personal freedom within marriage. Dahl uses dark humor and irony to portray Mary’s desperate attempt to present the life she once knew, while Chopin centers on the brief Louise’s brief but powerful awareness of her independence. Taken together, these stories reveal how literature can explore the pressures people face in relationships and their deep desire for freedom.

Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *Vogue*, 1894.

Dahl, Roald. "Lamb to the Slaughter." *Someone Like You*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.