

Eurydice Ascending

Inspired by Kate Chopin's 'A Story of an Hour'

Written by Arwyn Anderson

Characters

Louise Mallard: Early 20s, female, younger sister of Josephine Williams and wife of Brently Mallard. A homebody with a weak heart.

Brently Mallard: Late 20s, male, husband of Louise Mallard, friend to Richards. A tired man who works a desk job in the city center of St. Louis.

Josephine Williams: Late 20s, female, older sister of Louise Mallard. Unmarried but wants to become a wife instead of a spinster.

John Richards: mid-late 20s, male, friend of Brently mallard. A journalist who has a troubling connection to Louise Mallard.

Boy: Teenager, male, works with Richards. Delivers telegrams and messages, usually for the newspaper.

Doctor: late 30s, male, doubled with **Boy**. A doctor.

Place

Walnut park east neighborhood in St Louis, Missouri

Time

Late 1890s to early 1900s, springtime

Act I

Scene 1 - The kitchen & living room of the Mallard house (Louise Mallard, Brently Mallard)

Scene 2 - garden/exterior of the Mallard house (Louise Mallard, Josephine Williams)

Scene 3 - John Richards' personal office in the newspaper building (John Richards, Boy)

Scene 4 - The kitchen & living room of the Mallard house (Josephine Williams, John Richards)

Scene 5 - The kitchen & living room of Mallard house (Josephine Williams, John Richards, Louise Mallard)

Scene 6 - Louise and Brently's bedroom (Louise Mallard, Josephine Williams)

Scene 7 - Kitchen/living room of the Mallard house (Josephine Williams, Louise Mallard, John Richards, Brently Mallard, Doctor)

Act I

Scene 1

The scene takes place in the Kitchen of Brently and Louise's house. In the kitchen, stage left, there is an old, worn copper or silver sink with a counter or table next to it. Stage center there is a wooden breakfast

table with two chairs, one directly behind it stage center and another stage right of the table. The lights are cold and harsh. Louise Mallard is at the old sink, scrubbing dishes. Every once and a while she sets down a dish and looks over at her husband. Brently is at the wooden table, sitting in the center chair, eating his food in a disgruntled manner. Louise puts down her dishes and turns to face Brently.

Louise

I sweetened your oatmeal today with cinnamon. The woman at the store said it was a good cure for stress.

Brently

Hm.

Brently doesn't look up at Louise. She goes back to scrubbing for a moment and then turns back around as Brently is finishing his breakfast. Louise takes his bowl and speaks up again.

Louise

My mother wrote again. She wants us to visit her and father before the month is out. Do you think you will be able to get time off?

Brently

Maybe.

Louise

Might be hard to get time off if you're working overtime everyday.

Brently

Could be.

Brently stands up to grab his coat, preparing to leave. Louise walks up to him and catches his hand, holding it, Brently doesn't turn to face her and remains impassive.

Louise

I know you must think I'm awful, but please say something to me that's more than three words! You're worrying me...and I know Mr. Richards is worried as well.

Brently turns to the side, glancing at Louise, he doesn't pull his hand away, but a bit of annoyance grazes his face.

Brently

How do you know how John feels about this?

Louise

He told me so. He came across town because he was so worried.

Brently scoffs and pulls his hand away from Louise, finally turning to face her.

Brently (raising his voice)

You let a man visit you, who you knew held affections for you, while your husband was away, slaving away at his job, and you expect me to feel bad for the both of you? You must be out of your mind because I'll be damned before I ever-

Louise (intercutting)

-Just listen to me-

Brently (overlying)

-ever speak to that bastard again.

Louise (yelling)

Just listen to me! What he did was wrong and he knows and feels the utmost shame. He wants his friend back and I want my husband to talk to me again

Brently turns back around and goes to open the door.

Brently

...Weed that damn garden of yours while I'm gone, makes us look lazy.

(Brently exits out the door stage right)

Louise slumps against the door and sighs before standing back up again to complete work

Scene 2

The exterior of the mallard house, there is an old time-y washing bin with a metal scratching board and a few wild plants. Louise is on her knees, Scrubbing clothes. She slows her movements, until she stops completely, dismayed.

Louise

Will he ever listen? With how stubborn he is I wouldn't be surprised if he never talks to John again. If I talk to him I risk being sent away. Brently is usually a kind man, in his own way, but I have no doubt he'd send me away either to a madhouse or back to my parents, maybe even marry another woman, for appearances.

She sighs and scrubs her hands over her face.

Louise

I must feel lucky that he's been this...understanding so far. Most men would've been even worse.

She goes back to scrubbing.

(Josephine enters stage right)

Josephine waits at the door frame for a while before clearing her throat, causing Louise to look up.

Louise

Josephine! I must have not heard you knock. I'm so sorry.

Louise wraps up her washing and begins to take things out to hang.

Josephine

It's no trouble, I'm just glad to see you again. How have you been? How's Brently been?

Louise fumbles with the clothes, having trouble hanging them up.

Louise

Good! Everything has been just wonderful.

Josephine crosses down stage left to talk to Louise

Josephine

Do you need help with hanging the clothes up?

Louise (raising her voice)

I can hang up my own clothes, Josephine. It's fine!

Josephine steps away, upstage center, confused and slightly shocked at Louise's tone.

Josephine

Alright, I will leave you to it then.

Josephine turns to leave and crosses stage right. As she is about to leave Louise speaks up.

Louise

I'm sorry Josephine. I...things have been rough with Brently. Things that I'm too ashamed to tell you about. But that doesn't matter now, I've been a bad hostess. Let us go inside and I can heat up the kettle.

Louise abandons her line drying hurriedly and goes to bring Josephine inside, but Josephine intercepts her at center stage.

Josephine

No, you stay here and finish hanging up the clothes. I think I can manage making some tea. Then, sister, you will tell me everything.

Louise
Thank you

Louise smiles at her sister and kisses her cheek before walking back to hang up clothes on the line. Josephine looks at her with a mixture of protectiveness and resentment before exiting stage right.

Scene 3

In Between center stage and stage right sits a wooden desk with one chair sat at it. On the desk is a typewriter. A sullen anxious looking Richards sits at the desk, typing. He writes some words down on one page before pulling it unceremoniously from the typewriter and throwing it on the ground. He takes his glasses off before pinching the bridge of his nose. As he starts talking he stands up and drifts to the side of his desk

Richards

I haven't written a single passable sentence today. At the pace I'm going at now I should just resign and not face the embarrassment of being asked to leave...The way he looked at me that day haunts all of my thoughts. Like I had just twisted a knife into his back, equal parts disgusted and betrayed. I need to think of other things...Brently clearly made up his mind about me. He's always been so stubborn.

Richards sits back down at his desk, attempting to write, thumping down on the keys harder and harder before, again, pulling out the paper and throwing it on the ground

(Enter Boy stage left)

The boy looks at the strewn pieces of paper gathering around Richards' desk.

Boy

You should get to writing somethin' good quick. The boss wants you to write a story about a trolley crash that just happened downtown, he said he expects it down as fast as possible.

The boy goes to put a piece of paper down in front of Richards and starts to walk off. Richards scans the piece of paper and sees 'Brently Mallard' under the list of those who are presumed to be dead.

Richards

Trolley crash on Washington Ave and Tucker Boulevard. Presumed dead...Brently mallard. When did this report come in?

Boy (shrugging)

I was given it five minutes ago

Richards hands the paper back to the boy.

Richards

Tell whoever gave you this that the newspaper refuses to write an article until another telegram comes in confirming all of this information.

Boy

I'll do all that..if you cough up some coin

Richards willingly gives the boy his money, slightly displeased.

(Boy exits stage left)

Richards

Honestly it's callous for Mr. Johnson to think I'd run such a serious story based on the shoddy information of one telegram.

(Enter the Boy from stage left)

Boy

'Nother telegram for you, just as you requested.

Richards hopefully scans the telegram before devastation wipes over his face at the description of Brently's death. He quickly pulls on his coat and puts the telegram in his pocket.

Richards

I am needed elsewhere. Tell Mr. Johnson I cannot cover the story.

Richards shoves the first telegram and some coins into the Boy's hand and shoes him off.

(The boy exits stage left)

Richards

The last words I ever said to him were an apology. The memory closest to my mind now is not of the good times we had before as boys, running through fields in the summer, splashing around in the lake. I wish I could've drained all the anger from his face and somehow I wish I could have taken him back to that time. Now all I'm left with is the scattered memory of a man and his soon to be grieving wife.

(Richards exits stage left, rushing out)

Scene 4

Josephine is standing at the counter humming as she pours two mugs of tea, brings them to the breakfast table, sits down, and pulls out a book from her travel bag; she doesn't get through the first page before the doorbell rings. Josephine doesn't look up from her book and continues reading, annoyed.

Richards (from behind the door)

Please let me in Louise, I have something to tell you!

Josephine

One moment, I'll be right there

Josephine goes to open the door, as she does Richards rushes through it, looking around.

Richards

Where is Louise?

Josephine

I did not know my sister had disheveled male houseguests over who call her by her first name. Who are you?

Richards

I'm... I was one of Brently's friends, John Richards.

Josephine goes over to him and tries to back him towards the door with a bit of maneuvering.

Josephine

Wonderful, Mr. Richards, in that case you can come back when Brently is home and we can sort this all out.

Richards grabs Josephine by the shoulders and looks intensely into her eyes.

Richards

You don't understand I have to talk to Louise because her husband is dead!

Josephine steps back, shocked, not believing Richards.

Josephine

Is this some sort of elaborate lark you're trying to get me to play along with? I think it would be best if you go home, sir, you look rather unwell.

Richards shakes his head and pulls out the telegram from his pocket.

Richards

Fine. Hopefully you'll believe these words because you refuse to believe mine.

Josephine scans the paper and goes to lean on the table in dismay.

Josephine

And you believed the word of one report?

Richards

The second one is back at my office at the *St Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Josephine sits down on the stage right chair, hand clasped to her mouth.

Josephine

It will be a miracle if Louise's heart does not burst right out of her chest the moment she catches wind of this. She's a fragile bird, she cannot deal with things as easily as other people. (Aside) Is this a punishment for my envy of her? She was always such a beautiful little thing, everyone wanted to protect her in their golden cages. She never realized how lucky she was to be wanted. Fate seemed to cast me as the maiden aunt to her children if she had not spurned that too. At my age marriage is becoming more and more of a distant dream that passes me by, no matter how much I try to reach for it.

Josephine turns to Richards.

Josephine

I'll help you to tell her. We must do it gently, do not tell her too much too quick

Richards takes Josephine's hand.

Richards

Thank you.

Josephine

Of course, anything for my sister.

Scene 5

Richards is worrying behind Josephine's chair, not seated, waiting with baited breath, Josephine sits very straight in her chair, unmoving.

(Louise enters, stage left)

Louise stops dead in her tracks when she sees Richards.

Louise

Oh, Mr. Richards, what a...surprise. I'm sorry but I think you should leave. I'm very busy right, Josephine?

Josephine stands up with a small sad smile and beckons her sister.

Josephine

Come, sit with us.

Louise walks up to Josephine and takes her hand.

Louise (whispering)

I cannot tell you everything right now but what I was planning to tell you is that he (motioning discreetly to Richards) is the one who is at the forefront of the turmoil in my marriage. If Brently sees him here it would surely enrage him and perhaps crumple the foundation of our marriage.

Josephine pats her sister's hand and leads her towards the coffee table.

Josephine

Come, sit down, don't worry about him for now.

Louise sits down in the center stage chair, off put by her sister's calm nature.

Josephine

Mr. Richards was telling me about his work at the newspaper and how fast they've gotten on reporting on all kinds of accidents. Telegrams have sped up the process so much, but apparently even such reliable machines can be prone to breaking down.

Louise

I did not realize you were so interested in the going ons of the newspaper. Why the sudden interest?

Josphine

It's just remarkable to me that something so robust can break so easily. Apparently there's been a string of streetcar crashes, too many people in one car and the whole thing can topple over when it turns. I bet it gives the newspaper a lot to write about.

Richards (nodding)

You are absolutely right, we just had one recently, In fact, I just received the report.

Louise

Why are you two acting so weird and blabbering on about the newspaper and streetcars? Tell me why I shouldn't be worrying about Brently even though both of you know he would be out of his right mind if he saw Richards here.

Richards looks down and leans against the sink while Josephine leans towards Louise.

Josephine

I'm so sorry.

Louise

Why are you apologizing?

Richards

We just found out in the report today, I rushed over here to tell you that he...

Louise

Is he...oh God is he dead? No...No you have to be wrong there must have been a mistake.

Josephine

I'm so sorry Louise.

Louise

No!

Louise breaks down, holding onto Josephine, who tenderly strokes her sister's hair. Then all at once, Louise stands up sobbing.

(Louise exits stage left)

Richards makes moves to follow her.

Josephine

Leave her be, I'll go look after her, you should fetch a doctor in case this news proves too hard for her to bear.

Richards

I...I am so sorry

Josephine

Just...go fetch a doctor. I think your presence...your news... will jeopardize my sister's equilibrium. I will take care of her as I always have.

(Josephine exits stage left)

Richards sighs, leaning on the table.

Richards

Is that how I will be known, for a crime that was only attempted, not completed. I think back to that night and wonder what I was trying to do. I never even felt an inclination towards her before that. Now when I remember that time I can only think of Brently.

Richards shakes off the thoughts quickly and walks towards the door.

(Richards exits stage right)

Scene 6

In Mallard's bedroom there is a door stage left and a bed center stage. Stage right there is a balcony and there is an armchair that faces it. Louise comes storming into the room and shuts the door, sitting down on the armchair and sobbing.

Louise

My last words to him were in argument. It felt like he saw me as an ordinary household object, similar to my wash bin. That's what I was to him, a tool, necessary but surely a nuisance. If we had a child no doubt in time it would become an object too. He didn't want children just thought he ought to have one to keep up appearances. It was always about appearances. In truth I don't know if I wanted one either. It was something I should've wanted, another thing to get so involved with I'd forget myself. In my dreams I float above St. Louis, above Brently, and all the like, away from all this. I didn't dream that way because I hated him, If I did I would have taken up John. No, I dream of leaving so I can soar like the sparrows out my window.

Louise stands up and makes her way to the balcony. Suddenly the sounds of the street and the birds twittering fill the room. The rest of the bedroom is swallowed in darkness as the lights focus on Louise at the balcony.

Louise

My worst nightmare used to be being forsaken by my husband, but in its happening I feel this strange new emotion lifting me up on its wings. I thought I would have to go back with mother, back to that cold chamber to be examined by an evergreen pool of doctors but I see the truth. My wings have become unbound and I shed Mrs. Mallard, Ms. Williams, all. I am Louise again, unbound, soaring with adventure.

Louise steps back into her room and starts laughing with joy, the spot light follows her and the birds still twitter.

Louise

I am free! Mind, body, soul, all I am free! Free!

A knock sounds at the door, the bird twitters stop, the light stops spotlighting Louise, and beyond the door is Josephine, kneeling and peering through the keyhole

Josephine

What are you doing, Louise? Open the door, you will make yourself ill!

Louise is lying back on the bed, she flings her hands around and sighs.

Louise

Go away...I am not making myself ill, in fact I feel wonderful!

Josephine

For heaven's sake, Louise, Open the door!

Louise sighs and stands up, opening the door and greeting her sister with a hug and twirling around in a giddy way. Josephine is somewhat appalled by this behavior, trying to calm her sister down.

Josephine

What has gotten into you?

Louise takes Josephine's face in her hands and laughs.

Louise

Don't you see Josephine...I have drunk from the elixir of life itself and have been reborn!

Josephine, concerned, takes her sister's hands and tries to lead Louise out of the bedroom.

Josephine

Perhaps the doctor can give you a sedative to calm you down.

(Louise and Josephine exit)

Scene 7

Louise and Josephine sit at the breakfast table in the kitchen, the door is closer now, allowing a group of people to be on the unlit side of the stage right door. Louise and Josephine have idle conversation and the other side of the door is lit showing Richards and a doctor wearing a suit and carrying a bag full of equipment.

Richards

Mrs. Mallard is in there, but try to be as calm with her as you can. She has suffered a great deal of shock today.

The doctor goes through the door and begins to inspect Louise, who is annoyed, while Josephine watches, still seated.

(Brently enters stage right)

Brently walks, with his eyes trained steadily ahead. When he notices Richards he becomes visibly mad. Richards looks at Brently like he's a ghost, scared but in awe.

Richards

Brently? But- how, they said you were-

Brently

I considered you a brother for all my life but you have gone too far. You find it alright to visit my wife, while I am out of the house, on multiple occasions, after you have already made a pass at her-

Richards

-Brently you don't understand we all thought you were-

Brently

You must be out of your goddamn mind if you think I will just sit by while this happens-

Brently pushes Richards away while Richards tries to explain himself. The scene inside comes back into focus. Louise's heartbeat starts to fill the room, slowly building

Louise

Could I step out for some fresh air, I am feeling quite faint.

The doctor nods and Louise goes to open the door. As she opens it Richards and Brently look back at her. Her heart beat is deafening now as she sees her husband.

Brently

Louise, we need to talk.

Louise's heartbeat Reaches a high and she collapses. Shouts sound as the lights fade. Then a spotlight comes back up, centered on Louise.

Louise

When the doctors come to give the report to the curious minds of the paper they will say I was a young woman who died before her time from a weak heart and an overload of joy. I did not live yet as Louise before I was swept back. I am like Eurydice, condemned by the cold stare of my husband after I was so

close to the sunlight where all the creatures seemed to overflow with freedom. I, the condemned, will have my image maimed and distorted. None will know the joy I felt in the knowledge that my husband was gone, It would be too unpleasant. Because I died of heart disease—

All
of a joy that kills.

The spotlight goes out.