The stories I have chosen to compare and contrast are “The Tell Tale Heart” by Edgar Allen Poe and “The Story of an Hour”. Edgar Allen Poe is known for his dark and miserable tales, reflecting his dark and miserable life. “The Tell Tale Heart” is the story of a murderer’s guilt and how he is eaten alive by the madness driving him to take someone’s life and the side effects of what it does to him. “The Story of an Hour” is a story of a woman’s husband being falsely taken away from her. The murderer and the wife in these two stories both experience something everyone experiences, feeling something they don’t want to feel. In “The Tale Tell Heart” a man is feeling the necessity to kill a man by the way his EVIL Eye stares at him everyday. Perhaps the man feels incorrectly judged by the Eye? Maybe he feels constantly watched by the Eye, as though it is waiting for him to make a mistake? The wife gets the news that her husband is killed in a car crash. Normally, a woman would fall prostrate in grief and mourn the loss of her husband, but this woman is almost relieved. Maybe she was abused by her husband but didn’t have the heart to kill him herself? Nevertheless, she was happy her husband died and imagined a new life, free from him and at no cost to her. When he returns and it was declared that there was a mistake she has her new life taken away from her and she dies from being “overjoyed”.

A reoccurring theme in these stories is guilt. Both characters in these stories feel an immense amount of guilt. In “The Tale Tell Heart” the narrator constantly reminds us that he is not mad. The Eye provoked him to kill the old man. The Eye stared at the narrator everyday with it’s vulture-like evilness. The man just couldn’t take it anymore and every night during the week before he committed the murder, the narrator would treat the old man with such kindness, the old man never saw it coming. Every night, when he would sneak into the man’s room at exactly midnight, he would watch the old man sleep. He saw the old man laying there, innocently sleeping soundly in his bed and he would instantly forget why he needed to kill this man. Then, one night he accidentally woke the man up and he was seen by the Evil Eye in the dark of night. The pale blue Eye had seen the narrator and he lost it. The narrator killed the old man. But the way he saw it was he was killing the Eye, not the man. Five minutes ago, he was a man. Now he is a murderer. He decapitated the body, cutting it up limb by limb. He stuffed the remnants of the once kind old man under the floorboards and suddenly there was a knock at the door. One of the neighbors had heard the shriek of terror from the old man the moment before he was murdered and called the police. The narrator finishes hiding the body and feels proud of himself for being rid of the Evil Eye. He answers the door and acts as though nothing has happened. “The shriek was just me in a dream” he says to the officers as he invites them to look around. He pulls up a chair and audaciously puts his own chair over the same floor boards hiding the old man’s decapitated body. The officers are satisfied and begin to leave. They look around- they know something. They sense he is lying. Why did that man put his chair over those particular floorboards? What’s under them? What could he possibly dream of that caused him to scream so loud the neighbors heard? Why is he alone in someone else’s house? Where is the old man who lives here? THEY KNOW. Overwhelmed with these thoughts racing through him crowded mind, the murderer cannot take it anymore. “I ADMIT TO THE DEED. LOOK UNDER THE FLOORBOARDS.” Guilt didn’t just occur in this short story, it was this short story. Guilt is what inspired this short story. The murderer that was once a man was eaten alive and almost got away with a terrible thing. This proved that this man was not meant to kill that old man. The old
man had done nothing wrong, it was the Evil Eye that provoked this man into madness and led him to do a terrible thing.

In “The Story of an Hour” this woman’s guilt was different. She felt guilty for being happy about her husband’s death. This is more a tale of mistaken identity. A woman hears that her husband has been killed due to an automobile accident. When she hears this she excuses herself, others believe because she is devastated and needs time alone. She is actually relieved. She imagines her life without her husband- and she likes what she sees. “But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome”. With her husband’s death she saw a new life for herself. Maybe her husband was abusive to her, maybe she was in love with someone else? It says, “She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead”. “Had never looked save with love upon her” Maybe she thought her husband had never truly loved her. Killing her husband had probably never crossed her mind because this woman is not a bad person. She felt guilty for being happy her husband was dead. She would go to the funeral play the whole “depressed-widow” facade, then in a few months she would live her dream life and be a free woman again. Then, in the midst of imagining all the possibilities of her new life, she answers the door and there is her husband, very much alive and very much still her husband. Overwhelmed with “joy” she dies. Some say it was because she was so happy her husband was brought back to her after being taken away, but maybe it was all the time she had wanted out of her marriage and she finally got it at no cost to her, she is once again trapped.

I really liked both of these short stories because they have a very in-depth meaning to them. In “The Tell Tale Heart” the man has his kryptonite, and he must destroy it, only he ends up destroying himself in the end. My favorite of the two was the “Story of an Hour” because i can relate to the woman thoroughly. I think there is something very beautiful in having no one to live for but also something very depressing. “There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself” I think this woman found her freedom handed to her by God himself and she welcomed her new years as a widow with open arms and was excited about finally living for herself.

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