It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences: veiled hints that reve aI in half concealing Her husband's friend, Richards, was there too, near her.It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence e of the railroad disaswas received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed". Ha had only takthe time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to foreany less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message. She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inabisister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself, she went away to her room alosto accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, inShe would have no one follow her.. There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she spressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach ieher soul. She could see in the open square before herhouse the tops of trees that were all aquiverwith the new spring life. The delicious breathof rain was in the air. In the street below, apeddler was crying his wares. The notes ofa distant song which someone wassingingreached her faintly, and countless sparrowswere twittering in the eaves. There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window. She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless,except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itselfto sleep continues to sob in its dreams. She was young, with a fair, calm race, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certainstrength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonderon one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated asuspension of intelligent thought. There wassomething coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it?She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out ofthe sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She wasbeginning to recognize this thingthat wasapproaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will, as apowerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself.a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over underthe breath: "free, free, free!"A clear andexalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestionas trivial.Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring fo.admission.Someone was opening the front door with a latchkey.It was Brently Mallard who entered,little travelstained, composedly carrying his grip-sack andumbrella.She knew that shewould weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that hadnever looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead.It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be lone She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities.He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; atRichards' quick motion to screen him from the viewof his wife.Her pulses beat fast, and the coursingblood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself.There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which menand women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.Whancould love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertionwhich she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being: "Free! Body and soul free!"Sh.clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs.The vacant

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stare and the look of terror that had followed itwent from her eyes.Akind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked uponit in that brief moment of illumination.There was a feveridtriumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like the goddess of victory.But she saw beyond thatbitter 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.No; she was drinking in a very elixir of tthrough that open window.She breathed a quick prayer that life michbe long.Richards stood waitingfor them at the bottom.They stayed keen and bright.she kept whispering.

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