

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of the joy that kills.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

GENERAL VOCABULARY

epiphany a moment of sudden and great understanding or realisation

‘The Story of an Hour’ is about a woman, Mrs Mallard, who has a heart condition which means that she should not become over-excited. She is told, and briefly believes, that her husband has been killed in a train accident. The story documents the mix of the intense emotions, confusion and sense of freedom that she feels upon hearing this news.

The story describes the **epiphany** that Mrs Mallard experiences as she considers her husband’s ‘death’. She comes to the realisation that, although she sometimes loved her husband, that she is free and happier without him. She looks forward to her future, rather than worrying about it as she had before.

The reader learns that her name is Louise: she has her own identity and is known by her own, rather than married, name because she is free. She opens the door to her sister Josephine with a sparkle in her eye and a new sense of self. They descend the staircase together. Someone opens the door. It is her husband, Brently Mallard, unharmed and unaware of the transformation that has occurred with his absence. You hear a scream from Josephine and see the attempt to conceal the living dead from the view of the heart patient. But it is too late and Mrs. Mallard’s heart stops.

EXPLORING LANGUAGE

Mrs Mallard’s appearance, status and feelings are described in detail over the course of the story. Copy and complete the following table, considering her thoughts and finding evidence to support you.