

The Necklace

Guy de Maupassant

Then she saw it—a magnificent diamond necklace. Her heart began to pound with desire. Her hands shook as she held it.

She was a pretty and charming young woman. But her family was very poor. She had no way of being known or loved by any rich or famous man. And so she married a clerk at the Ministry of Education.

She dressed plainly because she could not afford better. This made her very unhappy because she thought she deserved better. She suffered all the time, for she felt she was born for the good things of life.

She hated the place where she lived. She hated the dull walls and the worn-out chairs and the ugly curtains. She had a housekeeper who helped her with the work. But even this gave her no pleasure. She longed for large rooms filled with fine carpets and expensive furniture.

While she ate stew with her husband, she dreamed of delicious dinners served on beautiful dishes. She wished for shining silverware and lovely tablecloths. These were the things that she loved. She felt she was made for them but had been cheated by life.

She had a friend, an old school-mate, who was rich. Yet, she did not like to visit her because she felt so poor when she returned home.

One evening, her husband came home with a big smile on his face. He knew that his wife was unhappy. He often wished he could give her the fine things she wanted. Now, he hoped, he could offer something which would make her smile.

"Here," he said, as he handed her

an envelope, "this is for you."

Quickly, she ripped it open and pulled out a printed card. It said:

*The Minister of Public Education
requests the honor of your presence
at the Ministry's Annual Ball
on Monday evening, January 18th*

Instead of being delighted as her husband hoped, she threw the invitation on the table.

"What do you want me to do with that?" she cried angrily.

"But my dear, I thought you would be glad. You never go out, and this is such a fine occasion. I had a lot of trouble getting it. Everyone wants to go. And they don't invite many clerks. All the important people will be there."

She looked at him and said sharply, "And what do you expect me to wear?"

He had not thought of that.

"Why, the dress you wear to the theater. It looks very pretty to me."

He stopped suddenly, seeing that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran down from the corners of her eyes to the corners of her mouth.

He asked, "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

She tried hard to calm herself. Wiping her wet cheeks, she replied, "Nothing. Only I have no gown, and therefore, I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some friend whose wife has more clothes."

He was upset and said, "Mathilde, how much would it cost for a good dress? We can afford something simple—something that you could wear for other times."

She thought for several seconds, wondering how much her husband would agree to spend. Finally, she replied slowly, "I don't know exactly. But I think I could do it with 400 francs."

He grew a little pale. He was setting aside just that amount to buy a gun. He planned to treat himself to a hunting trip with friends the next summer. But he said, "All right. I'll give you 400 francs. Buy yourself something pretty."

The day of the ball drew near. Madame Loisel's splendid new dress had been purchased. Yet, she seemed sad and uneasy.

"What is the matter? You've been acting so strangely these last three days," her husband asked.

"It's just that I haven't a single jewel, not a stone to wear—nothing! I shall look a sight! I'd almost rather not go at all."

"You could wear flowers," he suggested. "They're in style at this time of year. For ten francs, you can get two or three beautiful roses."

"No," she said. "There's nothing more embarrassing than to look poor among people who are rich."

"How silly we are!" he answered suddenly. "Go and see your friend, Madame Forestier. Ask her to lend



you some jewels. You know her well enough to do that."

"That's true!" she cried with joy. "I hadn't thought of that."

The next day, she swallowed her pride and went to her friend. But she did not need to feel ashamed. Her good friend, Madame Forestier, was happy to see her again. Taking out a large jewel box, she opened it, and offered it to Madame Loisel.

"Choose, my dear," she said.

The box was filled with bracelets, a pearl necklace, and pins made of gold. Madame Loisel tried them on, one after the other. She could not make up her mind.

"Haven't you any more?" she kept asking.

"Yes, yes. Look. I don't know what you like."

Then she saw it—a magnificent

diamond necklace. Her heart began to pound with desire. Her hands shook as she held it. She fastened it around her neck. Standing before a large mirror, she stared in breathless delight at the sight of herself.

Then she asked slowly, "Can you lend me that, only that?"

"Why yes, certainly."

She threw her arms around her friend and kissed her. Then she rushed home with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Madame Loisel was a great success. She was the prettiest woman there, smiling and charming, and full of joy. All the men wanted to be introduced to her. Everyone wished to dance with her. The minister himself noticed her.

She danced madly, floating on a cloud of happiness. Never before had she known such pleasure.

They left at about four o'clock in the morning. The air was chilly. She threw a little cloak over her shoulders and rushed outside. She could not bear to be seen by the other women who were wearing costly furs.

She ran down the stairs and out into the street. They found a cab and headed home. The wonderful evening was ended for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten o'clock.

The cab stopped at the door of their home. Silently, they both reentered their poor world. She removed the cloak which covered her shoulders. One last time, she stood before the mirror to look at herself in her beautiful gown. But suddenly, she gave a cry. "The necklace! The diamond necklace!" she screamed, "It's lost!"

"What? It's impossible!"

They looked in the folds of her

dress, in the cloak, in her pockets—everywhere. They did not find it.

"Did you have it on when you left the ball?" he asked.

"Yes. I felt it in the hall."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes. Probably. Did you take his number?"

"No. And you, did you notice it?"

"No."

They stared at one another, dazed. At last, Monsieur Loisel said, "I shall go back on foot. I'll go back over the whole route we have taken to see if I can find it."

He went out while she waited, still wearing her ball dress. She did not have the strength to go to bed. She was too tired to move or to think.

At seven o'clock, her husband came back. He had found nothing.

He went to Police Headquarters, then to the newspaper office to offer a reward. He went to the cab companies. He went everywhere that gave the slightest hope.

She waited all day in fear. Monsieur Loisel returned at night. His face was hollow and pale.

"You must write to your friend," he said. "Tell her that you have broken the lock on the necklace and that you are having it fixed. That will give us more time."

She did as he said.

By the end of the week, they had lost all hope. Monsieur Loisel, who

had aged five years, finally said, "We must think of how to replace that necklace."

The next day, they took the box in which the necklace had come. They went to the jeweler whose name was inside. The jeweler looked through his books.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I did not sell that necklace. I only sold the case."

They went from jeweler to jeweler, searching for a necklace like the one she had lost. Finally, in one shop, they found a diamond necklace which looked exactly like it. It was worth 40,000 francs. The jeweler offered it to them for 36,000.

They begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days while they raised the money. And they made a deal with him. The jeweler would buy it back for 34,000 francs if they found the other before the end of February.

Monsieur Loisel had 18,000 francs which his father had left him. He would borrow the rest.

He borrowed a thousand francs here, five hundred there. He went to money lenders. He signed notes and made deals. He took chances without knowing if he could ever pay back the money. Finally, he had it all. He went to buy the necklace, placing 36,000 francs upon the jeweler's counter.

Madame Loisel brought the necklace to her friend.

"You should have returned it sooner. I might have needed it," Madame Forestier said coolly.

She did not open the case as her friend had feared. If she had noticed it was another necklace, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Would she have taken Madame Loisel for a thief?

From that time on, Madame Loisel knew a life of poverty. But that terrible debt had to be paid. And she would pay it! They got rid of their housekeeper and rented a tiny room under the roof.

She scrubbed the dishes, using her nails on the pots and pans. She washed the dirty linen which she hung to dry upon a line. Each day, she took the garbage down and carried the water up. She stopped for breath at every landing. Dressed in old clothing, she went to the grocer and the butcher. She begged and bargained to save a few cents.

Each month, they paid a part of their debt.

Her husband worked late every evening copying bills for pennies a page.

This life lasted for ten years.

Finally, they had paid everything. Madame Loisel looked old now. Her hair hung loose, and her hands were red and rough. She spoke in a loud voice as she mopped the floor. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down near the window. She thought of that gay evening long ago, of the ball where she had been so beautiful and admired.

What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who

knows? Who knows? How life changes! How little a thing is needed for us to be lost or saved!

One Sunday afternoon, after a hard week, Madame Loisel went for a walk in the park. Suddenly, she saw a woman walking with a child. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful.

Madame Loisel felt moved. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she was going to tell her all about it. Why not?

She went up to her.

"Hello, Jeanne."

Madame Forestier was surprised to

be addressed by this plain, old woman.

"But, madame, I do not know you. You must be mistaken," Madame Forestier said.

"No. I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend gave a cry, "Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you have changed!"

"Yes, I have had many hard days since I last saw you. Terrible days. And because of you."

"Of me? How is that?"

"Do you remember that diamond necklace you lent me to wear to the ball?"

"Yes. Well?"



"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You returned it."

"I returned another just like it. And for this, we have been paying for ten years. You can understand that it was not very easy. My husband and I had nothing. But at last, it is over, and I am very glad."

Madame Forestier cast a long look at her old friend.

"You say you bought a necklace of

diamonds to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never noticed it then! They were very alike." As she spoke, she smiled with a joy which was both simple and proud.

Madame Forestier was strangely moved and gently took her friend's hands in her own.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde!" she said. "My necklace was fake. It was glass, not diamond. At most, it was worth 500 francs!"

About the Author

Guy de Maupassant, a French writer, is one of the greatest short-story writers of all time. His first short story was not published until he was thirty. But then, in the next ten years, he wrote more than 300 short stories, six novels, several travel

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) _____

books, and a volume of poetry.

Maupassant said that the purpose of his stories was to "catch humanity in the act." In "The Necklace," he created characters who were not only caught *in* the act, but *by* the act.