

THE NECKLACE

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

-
- **The Necklace** (in French, "La Parure") is perhaps the most famous short story by French author Guy de Maupassant. It's been called Madame Bovary in miniature, and tells the tale of a dissatisfied middle-class woman whose dreams of wealth and glamour end in disaster.

At the beginning of the story, we meet Mathilde Loisel, a middle-class girl who desperately wishes she were wealthy. She's got looks and charm, but had the bad luck to be born into a family of clerks, who marry her to another clerk in the Department of Education. Mathilde is so convinced she's *meant* to be rich that she detests her real life and spends all day dreaming and despairing about the fabulous life she's *not* having. She envisions footmen, feasts, fancy furniture, and strings of rich young men to seduce. One day her husband comes home with an invitation to a fancy ball thrown by his boss. He had gone to a lot of trouble to get the invitation, but Mathilde's first reaction is to throw a fit. She doesn't have anything nice to wear. He doesn't know what to do, and offers to buy his wife a dress, so long as it's not too expensive. Mathilde asks for 400 francs, and he agrees. It's not too long before Mathilde throws another fit, though, this time because she has no jewels. So M. Loisel suggests she go see her friend Mme. Forestier, a rich woman who can probably lend her something. Mathilde goes to see Mme. Forestier, and she is in luck. Mathilde is able to borrow a gorgeous diamond necklace. With the necklace, she's sure to be a stunner.

The night of the ball arrives, and Mathilde has the time of her life. Everyone *loves* her and she is absolutely thrilled. She and her husband (who falls asleep off in a corner) don't leave until 4am. Mathilde suddenly dashes outside to avoid being seen in her shabby coat. She and her husband catch a cab and head home. But once back at home, Mathilde makes a horrifying discovery: the diamond necklace is gone. M. Loisel spends all of the next day, and even the next week, searching the city for the necklace, but finds nothing. It's gone. So he and Mathilde decide they have no choice but to buy Mme. Forestier a new necklace. They visit one jewelry store after another until at last they find a necklace that looks just the same as the one they lost. Unfortunately, it's 36 *thousand* francs, which is exactly twice the amount of *all* the money M. Loisel has to his name. So M. Loisel goes massively into debt and buys the necklace, and Mathilde returns it to Mme. Forestier, who doesn't notice the substitution. Buying the necklace catapults the Loisels into poverty for the next *ten years*. That's right, *ten years*. They lose their house, their maid, their comfortable lifestyle, and on top of it all Mathilde loses her good looks.



After ten years, all the debts are finally paid. Now that all the debts are paid off, Mathilde decides she wants to finally tell Mme. Forestier the sad story of the necklace and her ten years of poverty, and she does. At that point, Mme. Forestier, is aghast, reveals to Mathilde that the necklace she lost was just a fake. It was worth only five hundred francs.



One of the themes within 'The Necklace' is the dichotomy of reality vs. appearance. Madame Loisel is beautiful on the outside, but inside she is discontented with her less-than-wealthy lifestyle. This reinforces the idea that wealth means happiness. Mathilde is gripped by a greed that contrasts with her husband's kind generosity. She believes that material wealth will bring her joy, and her pride prevents her from admitting to Madame Forestier that she is not rich, and that she has lost the necklace she borrowed.

Because of her pride and obsession with wealth, Mathilde loses years of her life and spends all of her savings on replacing the necklace, only to find out that the original necklace was a fake to begin with; a falsely wealthy appearance, just like Madame Loisel herself.

The story demonstrates the value of honesty; if Mathilde had been honest to Madame Forestier, she'd likely have been able to easily replace the necklace and enjoy the prosperity she wanted but never had.



The Necklace gets its title from the gorgeous piece of diamond jewelry that drives the story's plot. The expensive nature of the necklace is not the only way in which wealth is central to this story. The main character of 'The Necklace' is obsessed with wealth. She wants nothing else than to escape from her shabby middle-class life with a shabby middle-class husband and live the glamorous life for which she was *born*. ***This story makes us realise that one must learn to live within one's means and be content with what one has. It is the only choice for a life of contentment, peace and everlasting happiness.***

