

# The Diamond Necklace.

BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

Translated from the French for THE SCRAP BOOK.

THIS short story relates to what Thomas Hardy would call "one of life's little ironies." It is not cynical, as are so many stories which its author wrote; but it is grim and touched with a certain fatalism which is very characteristic of his manner. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about it is the subtle, elusive fashion in which Maupassant half suggests, without appearing to do so, a doubt in the reader's mind as to whether, after all, *Mathilde's* life might not have ended in a far worse tragedy had the event not happened precisely as it did; for then, intoxicated with pleasure and greedy for admiration, her fate might have been that of a *Mme. Bovary*, as drawn so pitilessly in the great novel of Flaubert.

SHE was one of those pretty, charming girls, born, as if by a mistake of destiny, in a family of the lower middle class. She had no dowry, no expectations, no way of being known, understood, loved, married, by a rich and distinguished man, and she had accepted, without enthusiasm, an under-clerk in the Department of Public Instruction.

She was simple, knowing no art of the great world, but wretched as an outcast. When women possess neither rank nor lineage, their beauty, their grace, their charm, serve them instead of birth and family. Their native fineness, their instinctive elegance, their easy adaptability, are their only distinction, and these place the daughters of the common people on a par with the noblest ladies.

She suffered constantly, believing herself born to all that was delicate, all that was exquisite. She suffered from the poverty of her home, the cheap hangings, the well-worn furniture, the ugly carpets. All the things that another woman of her rank would not even have noticed tortured and maddened her. The very sight of her little maid of all work awakened in her mind hopeless regrets and passionate longings. She dreamed

of silent antechambers, hung with oriental draperies, lighted by tall bronze candelabra, and of two superb lackeys in knee-breeches, asleep in large armchairs, made drowsy by the luxurious warmth of the apartment. She dreamed of great drawing-rooms whose walls were ancient silk, with beautiful furniture and priceless ornaments, and of little boudoirs, tempting, fragrant, made for an hour's chat with the most intimate friends, men of renown and position whose notice all women envied and desired.

When she sat down to dinner at the round table with its half-soiled linen, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup saying, in a tone of supreme satisfaction, "Ah, how good this is! I don't know anything better than beef broth," she dreamed of costly dinners, of polished silver, of tapestries peopling the walls with lords and ladies of ancient times, with strange birds in the midst of a fairy forest; she dreamed of exquisite dishes served on rare china, of whispered compliments heard with the smile of a sphinx, while the fair listener was eating the rosy flesh of a trout or the wing of a hen thrush.

She had no pretty clothes, nor one single jewel, and she cared for nothing

else; she felt that she was made for that. She wanted so to please, to be envied, to be flattered and sought after.

She had one rich friend, from her convent days, but she no longer cared to visit her, it was so dreadful when she came home. And she wept whole days together with anger, with regret, with resentment, and with despair. But one evening her husband entered with an air of triumph, holding in his hand a large envelope.

"Look," said he, "here is something for you!"

She tore the wrapper eagerly, and drew out a card on which was engraved these words: "The Secretary of Public Instruction and Mme. George Ramponneau beg the honor of the presence of M. and Mme. Loisel, at the Mansion of the Department, on the evening of Monday, the 18th of January."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she threw the invitation contemptuously on the table and demanded:

"What do you want me to do with that?"

"But, my dear, I thought you would be charmed. You never go out, and here is a chance—a great chance! I had a world of trouble to get it. Everybody wants one; they are very special, and but few, I can tell you, are given to employees. You will see there the whole of the official set."

She looked at him scornfully and asked, with much irritation:

"What do you want me to put on my back to go there?"

He had not thought of that, and stammered:

"Why, the dress you wear to the theater; I'm sure it is very becoming——"

He stopped, astonished, desperate, on seeing that his wife was in tears. Two great drops were rolling slowly down from the corners of her eyes to the corners of her mouth.

"What is it? What is it?" he begged soothingly.

But, by a violent effort, she controlled herself, and answered in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I have no dress to wear, and so, of course, I cannot go. Give the invitation to some friend of

yours whose wife has some clothes to put on."

He was wretched, but would not give up.

"See here, Mathilde, how much would it cost to get a suitable dress—one that you could wear other places, too; something very simple?"

She thought a moment, running over the items in her mind and at the same time trying to hit upon a sum that would not startle her husband's economical soul and be met with an immediate refusal.

At last she said, with much deliberation:

"I don't know exactly, but it seems to me that with four hundred francs I could manage."

He grew a shade paler. That was just the sum he had saved up for a gun, so that he might join a hunting-party the next summer, in the fields around Nanterre, with some friends who went gunning there every Sunday.

He said, nevertheless:

"Very well; I can give you four hundred francs, but try to have a pretty gown."

The great day was approaching, and Mme. Loisel seemed preoccupied and distressed. Still, her gown was ready. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What in the world is the matter? For the last three days you have not been like yourself."

And she answered:

"I am worried because I have not a single piece of jewelry to wear—not one. And without it I shall look poverty-stricken in all my new things. I would almost rather not go."

"Get some natural flowers," he said; "they are very much worn, and for ten francs you could get two or three beautiful roses."

She was not a bit convinced.

"No; there is nothing more humiliating than to look poor among a lot of rich women."

But her husband cried:

"What a goose you are! Why don't you look up your friend Mme. Forestier and ask her to lend you some of her jewelry? You know her well enough for that, I am sure."

She gave a little cry of joy.

"Why, yes; I never thought of that."

The next day she went to her friend and explained her trouble.

Mme. Forestier took out her jewel-box and opened it and said to Mme. Loisel:

"Take your choice, dearie."

She looked first at the bracelets, then at a collar of pearls, then at a Venetian cross of gold and precious stones of beautiful workmanship. She tried on the necklaces before the glass, hesitating, not able to make up her mind to take them or to leave them. She kept asking:

"You haven't any other?"

"Why, yes; look. I don't know what you would like."

All at once she discovered, in a black satin case, a magnificent *rivière* of diamonds; and her heart began to beat with immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it out. She fastened it around her neck, over her street gown, and stood in ecstasy before her own reflection in the mirror.

Then she asked hesitatingly, with her head in a whirl:

"Could you lend me that—nothing but that?"

"Why, yes; of course."

She threw her arms about her friend's neck, kissed her rapturously, and fled with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Mme. Loisel was a great success. She was the most beautiful woman in the room, exquisite, gracious, and beside herself with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, and wanted to be presented. All the members of the cabinet asked to waltz with her. The secretary himself noticed her.

She danced on air, her head completely turned, intoxicated with pleasure, thinking of nothing in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of dream of happiness, made up of all the flatteries, of all the admiration, of all the newly awakened desires, of that triumph so complete, so dear to a woman's heart.

She left about four in the morning. Her husband, since midnight, had been asleep in a little room deserted except by three other men whose wives were having a beautiful time. He threw over her shoulders the outdoor wraps she had brought, plain little garments whose

poverty sorted ill with the elegance of her ball gown. She felt it, and made her escape, so as not to be noticed by the other women who were wrapped in rich furs.

Loisel tried to detain her:

"Wait a minute. You will catch cold. I'll go and call a cab."

But she did not hear, and ran quickly down the stairs. Out in the street, they could not find a carriage, and began to search, calling to the cabbies they saw in the distance.

They walked toward the Seine, desperate, shivering. At last they met, on the quay, one of those dilapidated night-hawks that are never seen in Paris until after dark, as if they were ashamed of their wretchedness during the day.

It set them down at their own door, Rue des Martyrs, and they climbed languidly to their apartment. It was over for her. And he, poor fellow, remembered that he had to be at the office at ten o'clock!

She threw off her wraps in front of the mirror, so as to see herself once more in her glory. But suddenly she gave a cry. She no longer had the diamonds around her neck.

Her husband, already half-undressed, asked:

"What is the matter?"

She turned to him dazed:

"I—I—I have lost Mme. Forestier's diamond necklace."

He sprang up wildly.

"What! What! It can't be possible!"

And they searched in the folds of the gown, in the folds of the mantle, in the pockets—everywhere. It was not to be found.

He asked: "Are you sure you had it still when you left the ball?"

"Yes; I had my hand on it in the vestibule."

"But if you had dropped it in the street we would have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, I think so. Do you remember the number?"

"No. And you—didn't you notice it?"

"No."

They looked at each other, horrified. Finally Loisel dressed himself.

"I'll go," said he, "over every step

we went on foot, to see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in her ball gown, without strength to get to bed, sunk in a chair, cold, stupefied.

Her husband returned at seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to the police headquarters, to the newspaper offices, to offer a reward; to the cab companies; everywhere, in fact, where there was the shadow of a hope.

She waited all day in the same state of terror at this frightful disaster.

Loisel returned at night—with his face wrinkled and pale. He had found out nothing.

"You must write to your friend," said he, "that you have broken the clasp of the necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to look around."

And she wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had given up all hope. And Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must think about replacing it."

The next day they took the case in which the necklace had been and sought the jeweler whose name was on the inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I, *madame*, who sold that *rivière*; I only furnished the box."

Then they went from one jewelry shop to another, looking for a similar necklace, trying to remember just what it was like, their hearts filled with anguish and despair.

They found in a shop of the Palais Royal a diamond necklace which seemed to them exactly like the one they sought. It cost forty thousand francs. They could get it for thirty-six thousand.

Then they begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days. And they made the condition that he take it back for thirty-four thousand francs if the other were found before the last of February.

Loisel owned eighteen thousand francs, left him by his father. He would borrow the rest.

He did borrow it, asking a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis here, three there. He gave notes, made ruinous engagements, had to do with usurers and all the race of money-lenders. He compromised his whole life; he risked his signature, not

knowing whether he would ever be able to honor it, and, shuddering at the agony of the future, at the black misery that was closing down upon him, at the thought of all the physical privations to be endured, all the mental tortures, he went and bought the new necklace, paying down on the merchant's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Mme. Loisel carried back the necklace to Mme. Forestier the latter remarked, rather coolly:

"You ought to have returned it sooner, because I wanted to wear it."

She did not open the case, as her friend had feared. If she perceived the substitution, what would she think? Would she not take her for a thief?

Mme. Loisel came to know the horrors of grinding poverty. But she did her part, grown suddenly brave and strong. The dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They sent away the maid; they changed their apartment; they rented an attic above the roofs of the city. She came to know the drudgery of housework, the odious tasks of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, breaking her pretty finger-nails on the coarse pots and pans. She washed the soiled clothes and the heavy house-cloths, and hung them out on the lines to dry. Every morning she carried down the refuse into the street and carried up the water, pausing for breath on each landing. And, dressed like a woman of the working classes, she went to the fruit dealer, the grocer, the butcher, her basket on her arm, bargaining, slighted, defending, sous by sous, her poor little all.

Every month some of the obligations must be met, and others contracted, to gain time.

Her husband worked in the evening straightening out accounts; in the night, often, he did copying at five sous a page.

And this life lasted for ten years.

At the end of ten years they had paid back everything—everything, even with the usurious interest added. Mme. Loisel looked like an old woman now. She had become the stout, hard, coarse housewife of the lower classes. With unkempt hair, her skirt all awry, her hands rough, she talked loud, and knew only how to sweep and scrub. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office,

she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of that ball where she had been so beautiful and so flattered.

What would have happened if she had never lost the necklace? Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is—how uncertain. How little it takes to make or mar it all!

One Sunday, when she had gone out for a turn on the Champs Elysées to forget the dull cares of the week, she came suddenly upon a woman walking with a little girl. It was Mme. Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive.

Mme. Loisel trembled. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that the debt was paid she would tell her everything. Why not?

She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other failed entirely to recognize her, and was astonished at being addressed so familiarly by this *bourgeoise*. She stammered:

"But—*madame!* I do not know—you must be mistaken."

"No; I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend gave a little cry.

"Oh! My poor Mathilde, how you have changed!"

"Yes, I have been through very hard times since I saw you last, and many miseries—and it was on account of you!"

"Of me! What do you mean?"

"Do you remember the diamond necklace that you loaned me for the ball at the secretary's?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"Why, you returned it to me."

"I returned another just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You can guess it was no easy task for us, who had no money, or none to speak of; but at last it is done, and I am very glad."

Mme. Forestier was amazed.

"You say that you bought a diamond necklace to take the place of mine?"

"Yes; and you never found it out? They certainly were very much alike."

And she smiled with a naïve, satisfied joy.

Mme. Forestier, deeply moved, took both her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! But *mine was imitation!* It was worth, at the most, a hundred francs!"

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