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The Necklace Translation of Guy de Maupassant's *La Parure*

Dr. T. Priya
Assistant Professor
Centre for French
Bharathidasan University
Trichy – 620 024
Tamil Nadu. India

She was one of those pretty and charming girls, born, as if by a twist of fate, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of being known, understood, loved, or married by a rich and distinguished man; and yet she allowed herself to be married to a minor clerk in the Ministry of Public Instruction. She was simple, unable to adorn herself, but unfortunately, like a social outcast, for women have no caste or race; their beauty, grace, and charm serve as their birthright and family. Their innate refinement, their instinct for elegance, their quick wit, are their only hierarchy, and make the daughters of the people the equals of the greatest ladies. She suffered constantly, feeling herself born for all manner of delicacies and luxuries. She suffered from the poverty of her dwelling, the wretchedness of the walls, the worn-out chairs, and the ugliness of the fabrics. All these things, which another woman of her social class wouldn't even have noticed, tormented and outraged her. The sight of the little Breton girl doing her humble chores awakened in her sorrowful regrets and desperate dreams. She thought of the silent anterooms, upholstered with oriental tapestries, lit by tall bronze torchères, and of the two tall valets in breeches who slept in the wide armchairs, drowsy from the heavy heat of the radiator. She thought of the grand drawing rooms draped in antique silk, the fine furniture adorned with priceless trinkets, and the charming, perfumed little salons, made for five o'clock chats with the closest friends, the well-known and sought-after men whose attention all women envied and desired. When she sat down to dinner at the round table covered with a three-day-old tablecloth, opposite her husband who uncovered the tureen and exclaimed with delight, "Ah! The wonderful rustic stew! I know nothing better than this..." she dreamed of elegant dinners, gleaming silverware, tapestries adorning the walls with ancient figures and strange birds amidst a fairy-tale forest; she dreamed of exquisite dishes served on marvellous crockery, of whispered gallantries listened to with a sphinx-like smile, all while eating the pink flesh of a trout or the wings of a grouse. She had no finery, no jewellery, nothing. And that was all she loved; she felt she was made for it. She so longed to please, to be envied, to be alluring and sought after.

She had a wealthy friend, a former convent schoolmate, whom she no longer wanted to see, so much did she suffer on returning home. And she would weep for days on end, from grief, regret, despair, and distress.

Then, one evening, her husband came home, looking triumphant, holding a large envelope.

"Here," he said, "here's something for you."

She quickly tore open the paper and pulled out a printed card bearing these words:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Mrs. Georges Ramponneau request the honour of Mr. and Mrs. Loisel's presence at the Ministry building on Monday, January 18th." Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation on the table in despair, muttering,

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

"But, my dear, I thought you would be pleased." You never go out, and this is a wonderful opportunity! I had so much trouble getting it. Everyone wants it; it's highly sought after, and they don't give many to the employees. You'll see all the officials there." She looked at him irritably and declared impatiently, "What do you want me to wear to go there?" He hadn't thought of it; he stammered, "Why, the dress you wear to the theater. It seems very nice to me..." He fell silent, stunned and distraught, seeing his wife crying. Two large tears were slowly rolling down from the corners of her eyes to the corners of her mouth; he stammered, "What's wrong?" "What's wrong?" But, with a violent effort, she had overcome her distress and replied calmly, wiping her damp cheeks: "Nothing. I just don't have a dress, and therefore I can't go to this party. Give your card to some colleague whose wife will be better dressed than I am." He was sorry. He continued: "Now then, Mathilde." "How much would a decent dress cost, one that you could use again on other occasions, something very simple?" She thought for a few seconds, calculating her expenses and also considering how much she could ask for without provoking an immediate refusal and a horrified exclamation from the thrifty clerk. Finally, she replied hesitantly, "I don't know exactly, but it seems to me that with four hundred francs I could manage." He had paled a little, for he was saving just that amount to buy a rifle and treat himself to some hunting trips the following summer on the Nanterre plain with a few friends who went to shoot larks there on Sundays. He said, however, "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try to get a nice dress."

The day of the party was approaching, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, worried, and anxious. Her outfit was ready, however. One evening, her husband said to her, "What's wrong? You've been acting strangely for the past three days."

And she replied, "It bothers me not to have a single jewel, not a single stone, nothing to wear. I'll look utterly miserable. I'd almost rather not go to the party."

He continued, "You can wear fresh flowers. They're very chic this time of year. For ten francs, you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She wasn't convinced.

"No... there's nothing more humiliating than looking poor among rich women."

But her husband exclaimed, "How silly you are! Go to your friend Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewellery. You're close enough to her to do that." She cried out with joy: "It's true! I hadn't thought of that." The next day, she went to her friend's house and told her of her distress. Madame Forestier went to her wardrobe, took a large box, brought it over, opened it, and said to Madame Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

First she saw bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross, gold and precious stones, of admirable workmanship. She tried on the jewellery in front of the mirror, hesitated, unable to bring herself to part with it, to return it. She kept asking:

"Don't you have anything else?

But yes. Look. I don't know what might please you."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb diamond rivière necklace; and her heart began to beat with immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it. She fastened it around her neck, over her high-necked dress, and stood there in rapture before herself. Then, hesitantly, filled with anxiety, she asked, "Can you lend me this, just this ?"

"Yes, of course." She leaped into her friend's arms, kissed her passionately, and then ran off with her treasure.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was prettier than all the others, elegant, graceful, smiling and overjoyed. All the men stared at her, asked her name, sought to be introduced. All the cabinet aides wanted to waltz with her. The minister noticed her. She danced with abandon, with passion, intoxicated by pleasure, thinking of nothing else, in the
triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a kind of cloud of happiness made up of all these tributes, all this admiration, all these awakened desires, this victory so complete and
so sweet to the hearts of women. She left around four in the morning. Her husband, since midnight, had been sleeping in a small, deserted drawing room with three other gentlemen whose wives were having a great time. He threw over her shoulders the clothes he had brought for the outing, modest clothes of everyday life, whose poverty clashed with the elegance of her ball gown. She felt it and wanted to flee, so as not to be noticed by the other women who were wrapped in rich furs. Loisel held her back: "Wait. You'll catch a cold outside. I'll call a cab." But she didn't listen to him and quickly went down the stairs. When they were in the street, they couldn't find a carriage; and they began to search, calling out to the coachmen they saw passing in the distance. They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. Finally, on the platform, they found one of those old, dilapidated coupes that you only see in Paris at night, as if they were ashamed of their poverty during the day. He drove them back to their door on Rue des Martyrs, and they sadly went back inside. It was over for her. And he was thinking that he had to be at the Ministry by ten o'clock. She took off the clothes she had wrapped around her shoulders in front of the mirror, so she could see herself one last time in her glory. But suddenly she cried out. Her necklace was gone! Her husband, already half-undressed, asked, "What's wrong?" She turned to him, frantic: "I... I... I don't have Madame Forestier's necklace anymore." He jumped up, bewildered: "What!... how!... It's impossible!"
And they searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of her coat, in her pockets, everywhere. They couldn't find it.
He asked, "Are you sure you still had it when you left the ball?"
"Yes, I touched it in the vestibule of the ministry."
"But if you had lost it in the street, we would have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."
"Yes. That's likely. Did you take down the number?"
"No. And you, didn't you look at it?"
"No."
They stared at each other, stunned. Finally, Loisel got dressed again. "I'm going to retrace the entire route we took on foot," he said, "to see if I can find her."
And he went out. She remained in her evening dress, too weak to go to bed, slumped in a chair, without a fire, without a thought.
Her husband returned around seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to the police headquarters, to the newspapers, to get a promise of a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere, in short, where a glimmer of hope led him. She waited all day, in the same state of shock at this dreadful disaster. Loisel returned in the evening, his face gaunt and pale; he had discovered nothing.
"You must," he said, "write to your friend that you broke the clasp on her dress and that you are having it repaired. That will give us time to get organized."
She wrote as he dictated.
After a week, they had lost all hope.
And Loisel, aged five years, declared: "We must find a way to replace this jewel." The next day, they took the box that had contained it and went to the jeweller, whose name was written inside. He consulted his books: "It wasn't me, madam, who sold this necklace; I only provided the case." Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for a necklace like the other, consulting their memories, both of them overcome with grief and anguish. In a shop in the Palais Royal, they found a diamond necklace that seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They would let it go for thirty-six thousand. So they asked the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they stipulated that

it would be bought back for thirty-four thousand francs if the first necklace was found before the end of February. Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He would borrow the rest.

He borrowed, asking one thousand francs from one, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He wrote bills of exchange, made ruinous commitments, dealt with usurers, with every kind of moneylender. He compromised the rest of his life, risked his signature without even knowing if he could live up to it, and, terrified by the anxieties of the future, by the abject poverty that was about to befall him, by the prospect of all the physical deprivations and all the moral tortures, he went to seek the new river, depositing thirty-six thousand francs on the merchant's counter.

When Madame Loisel returned the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her, looking upset, "You should have given it back to me sooner, because I might have needed it." She didn't open the case, which her friend feared. If she had noticed the switch, what would she have thought? Wouldn't she have taken her for a thief?

Madame Loisel experienced the horrific life of the destitute. She made her decision, moreover, all at once, heroically. This dreadful debt had to be paid. She would pay. The maid was dismissed; they moved to a different apartment; they rented a garret. She learned the hard work of housework, the odious tasks of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, wearing down her pink fingernails on the greasy pottery and the bottoms of the pans. She soaped the dirty laundry,
the shirts and dishcloths, which she hung to dry on a line; every morning, she took the garbage down to the street and carried the water up, stopping on each floor to catch her breath. And, dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the greengrocer, the grocer, the butcher, basket on her arm, haggling,
being insulted, defending her meagre savings penny by penny. Each month, tickets had to be paid for, others renewed, and time had to be obtained. The husband worked evenings, settling the accounts of a merchant, and at night, often, he did copying for five cents a page.

And this life lasted ten years.
At the end of ten years, they had paid everything back, everything, with the usurious rate, and the accumulated interest compounded. Mrs. Loisel seemed old now. She had become the strong, tough, and rough woman of poor households. Unkempt, with skirts askew and red hands, she spoke loudly and scrubbed the floors with great care. But sometimes, when her husband was at his office, she would sit by the window and think of that evening long ago, that ball, where she had been so beautiful and so celebrated. What would have happened if she hadn't lost that finery? Who knows? Who knows? How strange and ever-changing life is! How little it takes to lose you or save you! Now, one Sunday, as she was strolling along the Champs-Élysées to relax from the week's chores, she suddenly noticed a woman walking a child. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still captivating.
Madame Loisel felt moved. Should she speak to her? Yes, of course. And now that she had paid, she would tell her everything. Why not?
She approached.
"Hello, Jeanne."
The other woman didn't recognize her, surprised to be addressed so familiarly by this bourgeois woman. She stammered:
"But... madam!... I don't know... You must be mistaken.
No. I am Mathilde Loisel." Her friend cried out:
"Oh! ... my poor Mathilde, how you've changed! ...
Yes, I've had some very hard days since I last saw you; so much misery... and all because of you!...
Because of me... What do you mean?
You remember that diamond necklace you lent me for the Ministry party.
Yes. Well?

Well, I lost it.

What! Since you brought it back to me.

I brought you another one just like it. And we've been paying for it for ten years. You understand that it wasn't easy for us, who had nothing... Well, it's over now, and I'm so very happy."

Mrs. Forestier had stopped. "You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?

"Yes. You didn't notice, did you? They were exactly the same."

And she smiled with a proud and naive joy.

"Mrs. Forestier, deeply moved, took both her hands.

"Oh! My poor Mathilde! But mine was fake. It was worth at most five hundred francs !..."