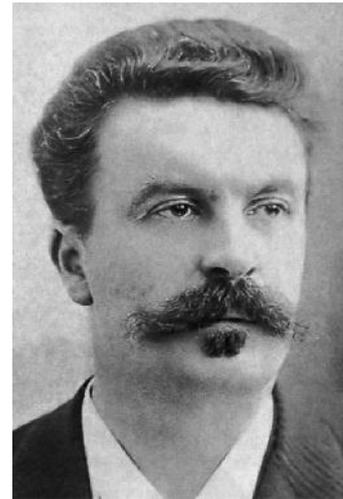


The following story, which was written in 1884 by a French author called GUY DE MAUPASSANT (pronounced 'Ghee - duh - Mow - puss - ont'). Guy de Maupassant was very famous for his short stories, and this story that I am going to tell you is probably his most famous one. It is called THE NECKLACE, and it goes like this:



Mathilde Loisel was a pretty and charming girl who was born into a family with no money and no distinctions. She had no chance of becoming well known and married to someone rich and famous, so instead she allowed herself to be married to a minor official at the Ministry of Education. The couple did not have much money, and Mathilde really resented the fact that she could not have fine clothes and beautiful furniture and a lovely life. She dreamed of living in a fantastic house with vast living rooms, furnished with rare old silks, priceless ornaments, where she would entertain famous people. Instead she had to look every day at the dirty walls of her house, the worn-out chairs and ugly curtains. She had no dresses or jewels, when those were the only things she loved. She wanted so much to be well known and envied and for everyone to want to talk to her. She had a rich friend, Madame Forestier - they had known each other from school - but Mathilde no longer wanted to visit because it made her so angry to see how well her friend lived when she had nothing.

One day Mathilde's husband came home, triumphantly holding a large envelope in his hand. 'Look,' he said, 'Here's something for you.' She opened the envelope - inside was an invitation to a dance being held by the Minister of Education and his wife. Mathilde tossed the invitation aside. 'What's the matter?' her husband asked, 'I thought you would be pleased.' 'There's no point in going,' she said, 'I have nothing to wear.' Her husband suggested that she wear the dress she normally wore when she went out to the theatre, but Mathilde started crying, 'I've got nothing to wear! Give the invitation to someone else.' So her husband asked her how much it would cost to buy a new dress that would be suitable for the dance. 'Four hundred francs' she said. Her husband gulped, but said to her, 'Okay - we can afford that. Here's the money - go and buy the dress.'

But even after buying a new dress, Mathilde was not happy. On the day of the dance she complained, 'I don't have any jewellery to wear!' Her husband said, 'Well, we can't afford to buy any jewellery - all our money went on the dress. Why don't you wear some flowers in your hair instead?' Mathilde started crying again, and her husband had a think and then said, 'Why don't you visit your friend Madame Forestier - she's bound to have something she can lend you.' 'Oh yes!' Mathilde replied, 'I hadn't thought of that.' So off Mathilde went to her friend's house, and asked her if she could borrow something to wear for the dance. Madame Forestier said, 'Of course! - here's my jewellery collection. Pick what you want.' Mathilde had a look, and ended up opening a black satin box with a brilliant diamond necklace in it. She put it on, and almost fainted at how beautiful the necklace looked on her. 'Can I borrow this?' she asked, and Madame Forestier said, 'Yes, of course.'

With her new dress and beautiful necklace, Mathilde was a sensation at the dance. Everyone wanted to dance with her. Mathilde had the most beautiful time - she didn't want it to end, and she and her husband ended up leaving the dance at four in the morning. (Though the husband had given up dancing at midnight and dozed off in a side room while waiting for his wife to finish dancing.) They took a cab home, and Mathilde sadly walked up the stairs to

their apartment - her beautiful evening was over. In her bedroom she took one final look at herself in her beautiful dress and cried out - the necklace was no longer round her neck! Her husband rushed in, and said, 'What's the matter?' 'The necklace - it's gone!' Mathilde replied. 'Gone! - How? When did you have it last?' 'I had it on me when we left the dance: I remember touching it as we walked out. It must have fallen off in the cab.' Neither of them could remember the number of the cab. In case it had fallen off somewhere else, they retraced their steps all the way back to the dance, but could not see the necklace anywhere on the ground. It was lost! Mathilde's husband said, 'You had better tell Madame Forestier that the necklace got damaged and you are having it repaired. That will give us more time to look for it.'

After a week, the necklace still had not turned up. Mathilde told her husband, 'There's no choice - we have to find a replacement.' So they looked at all the jewellery stores and finally found a necklace that looked the same as the lost necklace. But the cost! Even on sale, it would cost 36,000 francs. Mathilde's husband had inherited 18,000 francs from his father, so he decided to use that to help buy the replacement necklace - and he raised the remaining 18,000 francs by borrowing money from anyone who would lend it to him. They bought the replacement necklace, and Mathilde took it round to Madame Forestier, hoping she would not spot that it was a substitute for the original necklace. But Madame Forestier didn't notice a thing: she just coldly said, 'You could have returned it sooner. I might have needed it.' It took Mathilde and her husband ten years to repay the 18,000 francs they had borrowed to buy the replacement necklace. They were ten utterly hard and grim years, where Mathilde was forced to work every job she could get washing dishes or clothes. Her husband had to take a second job to the work in the evening. And they had to scrimp on every expenditure, eating really cheap and poor food every night. Those ten years were so hard that Mathilde started to look really old - so different from the beautiful charming figure she had struck at the dance. She spent every day thinking, 'Why did I lose the necklace? My life would have been so different, so much better.'

One Sunday, Mathilde was walking in Paris when she spotted Madame Forestier. Unlike Mathilde, her old friend still looked so young and beautiful, while Mathilde was worn out and haggard. Mathilde looked so different that when she said hello to Madame Forestier, Madame Forestier replied, 'I'm sorry - I don't think I know you?' Mathilde said, 'It's me, Mathilde!' 'Mathilde!' Madame Forestier cried, 'I didn't recognise you - you look so different. What has happened to you?' Mathilde said, 'I've had a really horrible time, these last ten years - and it's actually all because of you.' 'Because of me? How?' 'Well, do you remember that necklace I borrowed from you? I lost it, so I had to spend 36,000 francs buying a replacement, and it's taken 10 years to pay all the money back.' 'Mathilde!' Madame Forestier said, 'My poor Mathilde! Why didn't you tell me? The diamonds in my necklace were fake. It was only worth 500 francs at most!'

Pretty good twist ending, eh? But there's more to the story than just the twist ending. Do you think Mathilde is a particularly nice person? I don't think she is - instead of appreciating everything she had, she despised the good things that life had given her and dreamt of having a completely different life. (A bit like Dorothy Parker yesterday wanting 'one perfect limousine' rather than 'one perfect rose'.) And because of that she ended up losing everything. It's good to want more, but it's also important to appreciate the good things you already have, and build on those things instead of just throwing them away like they are worth nothing. Plus if only Mathilde had only been honest with her friend, then she would have discovered that losing the necklace wasn't so bad.