

## **The Necklace** by Guy de Maupassant (1884)

*Adapted for English Language Learners—Easier Version (Level B1)*

### **Dreams and Disappointment**

Mathilde Loisel was a beautiful woman who made people stop and look when she walked down the street. But life had not been kind to her. She was married to Monsieur Loisel, a government clerk who worked hard but earned little money. Their small apartment was clean but simple, and to Mathilde, it felt like a prison.

She would touch their old wooden table and dream of smooth, expensive furniture. She would look at their plain plates and imagine fine dishes painted with flowers. Every morning she woke up to cheap furniture and old wallpaper, but in her mind she saw herself in grand rooms where elegant ladies danced under bright lights.

Her only connection to that rich world was Madame Forestier, a friend from school who had married a wealthy man. Mathilde rarely visited Jeanne's beautiful home on the Champs-Élysées because each visit made her feel smaller and more unhappy. The expensive carpets and crystal lights only showed her what her own life was missing.

Monsieur Loisel saw his wife's sadness and tried to make her happy with small gifts—cakes from the bakery, flowers from the market, funny stories from work. But Mathilde barely looked at these things. Her mind was always thinking about the grand life that seemed impossible to reach.

### **The Invitation**

One cold February evening, Monsieur Loisel came home looking very excited. He was holding a cream-colored envelope. "My dear Mathilde, the Minister of Education is giving a grand party at the Palais des Tuileries! My boss gave me this invitation—it was very hard to get."

Instead of happiness, Mathilde's face turned pale and her eyes showed anger. "What do you want me to wear? I have nothing—no good dress, no jewelry. I would look terrible next to those rich ladies."

Her husband's face fell, but he spoke gently. "How much would a good dress cost?"

"Four hundred francs," she whispered, afraid to say the number out loud.

Mathilde knew that was exactly the money Monsieur Loisel had saved to buy a new hunting gun. But seeing his wife's pain, he agreed without waiting. "Very well. You will have your dress."

The next weeks changed everything. Mathilde chose blue silk in the newest style with small beads. When she put on the finished dress, she became the elegant woman she had always believed herself to be.

But as the evening got closer, her excitement disappeared. Her husband noticed her sad eyes and serious face and asked, "What is wrong, dear?"

"I have no jewelry," Mathilde said sadly. "A lady is nothing without beautiful jewels."

"Maybe you could borrow something from Madame Forestier?" her husband suggested.

The idea hit Mathilde like lightning. Why had she not thought of this before?

### **The River of Stars**

The next morning, Mathilde went to Jeanne Forestier's mansion. Servants led her through rooms filled with art and expensive furniture. Jeanne welcomed her warmly, and when Mathilde explained about the invitation, she clapped her hands with joy.

"How wonderful! You must borrow something magnificent."

She led Mathilde to her dressing room, where a huge jewelry box sat open like a treasure chest. Inside were green bracelets, pearl earrings, red jewels, and diamond rings that sparkled like stars. Then, in a small black box, Mathilde found something amazing—a diamond necklace of extraordinary beauty.

When Mathilde lifted it, the diamonds seemed to flow like a river of stars. As Madame Forestier put it around her neck, Mathilde watched herself change in the mirror. She no longer saw a clerk's wife, but a woman of class and elegance.

"It's perfect," Madame Forestier said. "You were born to wear jewels like these."

"May I borrow this for the party?" Mathilde asked.

"Of course, my dear friend," her friend replied without hesitation.

Mathilde left feeling like she was in a dream, holding the jewelry box against her coat, her heart beating fast with excitement. Finally, she would be ready for one magical evening.

### **One Perfect Night**

The palace was full of light, its grand rooms filled with the best of Paris society. Crystal lights threw rainbows across shiny marble floors, while musicians played dance music. The air smelled of exotic flowers and was filled with conversations in many languages.

As Mathilde walked up the wide staircase, she felt everyone looking at her. Important men asked to meet her, elegant ladies admired her dress, and several asked about her

magnificent necklace. She danced with government ministers and foreign diplomats, her feet barely touching the ground.

"Madame Loisel," whispered a Russian count, "you are the most charming woman in all of Paris tonight."

For hours, Mathilde lived her dreams. She drank champagne from crystal glasses, tasted expensive foods she had only read about, and talked with surprising intelligence and charm. She forgot the small apartment and daily problems—for this one perfect night, she belonged in this world of beauty and grace.

The clock struck four before the evening ended. Not wanting to be seen in her old coat among the expensive furs, Mathilde and her husband left quickly. They found an old carriage and rode through the quiet city as the magical evening disappeared behind them.

At home, she stood in front of their small mirror for one last look at her changed self. She reached up to take off the diamond necklace—and her hands found nothing but bare skin.

The necklace was gone.

### **The Search and the Price**

Fear hit Mathilde like thunder. They searched desperately through her clothes, every pocket, every corner of their room. Nothing.

Monsieur Loisel went back through the snowy streets with a lamp, searched the palace ballroom, visited the police, and put notices in newspapers offering money for the necklace's return. For a week, they lived in fear, asking flower sellers and street cleaners, looking at every inch of street. The necklace had disappeared completely.

Finally, they faced the terrible truth: they would have to replace it.

They spent another week visiting every jewelry store in Paris. At last, in a small shop near the Palais-Royal, they found an identical necklace. The price was thirty-six thousand francs—more than ten years of Monsieur Loisel's salary.

They used his inheritance of eighteen thousand francs, then borrowed the rest at high interest rates. He signed papers that would control them for many years, promising monthly payments that would use almost every franc they earned.

With shaking hands and a heavy heart, Mathilde returned the replacement to Madame Forestier, who accepted it without opening the case.

### **Ten Years of Struggle**

The debt changed everything. They moved to a tiny room under the roof of an old building. Mathilde learned the hard realities of being poor—her soft hands became red and rough from

cleaning floors and carrying water up five flights of stairs. She learned to bargain at markets for cheap food, to make soup from bones, to fix clothes until they were more patches than original cloth.

Her husband worked his government job during the day, then spent evenings copying papers for extra money. He worked late into the night, his eyes hurting from strain.

The woman who had once cried over broken plates learned to make meals from nothing, to find pride in honest work, to face each day without feeling sorry for herself. Her beauty changed—the softness disappeared, replaced by the thin strength of someone who could endure anything.

Ten years passed like a slow river of great struggles and small victories. On Sundays, Mathilde would walk to the Seine river and remember that magical night, keeping it as something beautiful that had briefly lit up her life.

### **The Final Truth**

On a bright Sunday morning in spring, Mathilde walked through the Tuileries Gardens where fashionable families walked in their best clothes. Her dress was clean but had patches, her hands showed the wear of hard work, and her face showed the marks of ten difficult years.

Near the fountain, she saw her old friend, Madame Jeanne Forestier—still elegant, still beautiful, hardly changed. For a moment, Mathilde waited. Then she walked toward her former friend.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

Madame Forestier looked puzzled, studying the worn woman in front of her. "I'm sorry, but I don't think we've been introduced..."

"It's me, Jeanne. Mathilde Loisel."

Understanding came slowly, followed by shock. "Mathilde! Oh, how you've changed!"

With the directness that hardship had taught her, Mathilde told the whole story: the lost necklace, the replacement, the debt, the ten years of sacrifice.

Madame Forestier stood frozen, her face growing pale. When Mathilde finished, Jeanne reached out and took both her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde," she whispered, her voice breaking. "The necklace you lost... it was artificial. The diamonds were glass, the setting was cheap metal. The whole piece was worth no more than five hundred francs."