



## Is conflict necessary?

### Writing About the Big Question

In "The Necklace," a woman is jealous of people with greater wealth and social standing. Use these sentence starters to develop your ideas about the Big Question.

Jealousy can lead to many conflicts because \_\_\_\_\_.

Learning to **appreciate** who we are and what we have can help us avoid conflict because \_\_\_\_\_.

**While You Read** Consider how a jealous attitude creates both internal and external conflict.



### Vocabulary

Read each word and its definition. Decide whether you know the word well, know it a little bit, or do not know it at all. After you read, see how your knowledge of each word has increased.

- rueful (rūō' fəl) *adj.* feeling sorrow or regret (p. 333) *With a rueful sigh, she picked up the pieces of the broken dish.* *rue v.*
- resplendent (ri splen' dənt) *adj.* shining brightly (p. 336) *The winner's face was resplendent as he accepted the prize.* *splendor n. splendid adj.*
- dejection (dē jek' shən) *n.* lowness of spirits; depression (p. 339) *I suffered dejection when I lost the spelling bee.* *deject v. dejected adj.*
- fortitude (fōrt' ə tōōd') *n.* the strength to bear misfortune and pain (p. 340) *Lucy met each problem with fortitude and a sense of humor.* *forte n.*
- disheveled (di shev' əld) *adj.* untidy (p. 341) *Val's disheveled hair showed that it was very windy outside.* *dishevel v.*
- profoundly (prō found' lē) *adv.* deeply (p. 342) *We were all profoundly moved by the long-lost brothers' reunion.* *profound adj.*

### Word Study

The Latin root **-jec(t)-** means "to throw."

In this story, the Loiseles feel dejection. A problem has made them feel gloomy; literally, it has thrown them down emotionally.



## Meet **Guy de Maupassant** (1850–1893)

### Author of *The Necklace*

Perhaps the best-known short-story writer in the world, Guy de Maupassant (gē də mō pä sän') wrote tales that are realistic and pessimistic, and often offer surprise endings.

**Friendship with Writers** Following his army service, Maupassant settled in Paris, where he began to develop his skills as a writer, guided by the famous French author Gustave Flaubert. Maupassant also joined a circle of writers led by French novelist Emile Zola. With Zola's encouragement, Maupassant published his first short story, "Ball of Fat," in 1880. The story earned him immediate fame and freed him to write full time. "The Necklace" is perhaps his most widely read story.

#### **BACKGROUND FOR THE STORY**

##### **European Society**

During the nineteenth century, the old social order in Europe changed. Previously, society had been divided into two main classes: nobles, who owned land, and peasants, who farmed it. However, as industry spread, a new middle class emerged and people could rise—or sink—in social position. Some sought to own material goods as a mark of higher social standing.


#### *Did You Know?*

Maupassant wrote more than 300 short stories, six novels, and other books.



# *The Necklace*

Guy de Maupassant



*She was one of those pretty, charming young women who are born, as if by an error of Fate, into a petty official's family.*

She had no dowry,<sup>1</sup> no hopes, not the slightest chance of being appreciated, understood, loved, and married by a rich and distinguished man; so she slipped into marriage with a minor civil servant at the Ministry of Education.

Unable to afford jewelry, she dressed simply; but she was as wretched as a *déclassée*, for women have neither caste nor breeding—in them beauty, grace, and charm replace pride of birth. Innate refinement, instinctive elegance, and suppleness of wit give them their place on the only scale that counts, and these qualities make humble girls the peers of the grandest ladies.

She suffered constantly, feeling that all the attributes of a gracious life, every luxury, should rightly have been hers. The poverty of her rooms—the shabby walls, the worn furniture, the ugly upholstery—caused her pain. All these things that another woman of her class would not even have noticed, tormented her and made her angry. The very sight of the little Breton girl who cleaned for her awoke rueful thoughts and the wildest dreams in her mind. She dreamt of thick-carpeted reception rooms with Oriental hangings, lighted by tall,

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1. **dowry** (dou' rē) *n.* property that a woman brought to her husband at marriage.

### Literary Analysis Characterization

What does the author tell you directly about the young woman in the first two paragraphs?

### Vocabulary

**rueful** (rōō' fəl) *adj.*  
feeling sorrow or regret

### Reading Check

Why does the woman suffer constantly?

**Literary Analysis  
Characterization**

What does the husband's comment in this paragraph reveal indirectly about his character?

**Reading Skill  
Cause and Effect**

Why do visits to her rich friend always fill the young woman with despair?

bronze torches, and with two huge footmen in knee breeches, made drowsy by the heat from the stove, asleep in the wide armchairs. She dreamt of great drawing rooms upholstered in old silks, with fragile little tables holding priceless knick-knacks, and of enchanting little sitting rooms redolent of perfume, designed for tea-time chats with intimate friends—famous, sought-after men whose attentions all women longed for.

When she sat down to dinner at her round table with its three-day-old cloth, and watched her husband opposite her lift the lid of the soup tureen and exclaim, delighted: "Ah, a good homemade beef stew! There's nothing better . . ." she would visualize elegant dinners with gleaming silver amid tapestried walls peopled by knights and ladies and exotic birds in a fairy forest; she would think of exquisite dishes served on gorgeous china, and of gallantries whispered and received with sphinx-like smiles while eating the pink flesh of trout or wings of grouse.

She had no proper wardrobe, no jewels, nothing. And those were the only things that she loved—she felt she was made for them. She would have so loved to charm, to be envied, to be admired and sought after.

She had a rich friend, a schoolmate from the convent she had attended, but she didn't like to visit her because it always made her so miserable when she got home again. She would weep for whole days at a time from sorrow, regret, despair, and distress.

Then one evening her husband arrived home looking triumphant and waving a large envelope.

"There," he said, "there's something for you."

She tore it open eagerly and took out a printed card which said:

"The Minister of Education and Madame Georges Ramponneau [ma dam' zhôrz ram pə nō'] request the pleasure of the company of M. and Mme. Loisel [lwa zel'] at an evening reception at the Ministry on Monday, January 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she tossed the invitation on the table and muttered, annoyed:

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

"Why, I thought you'd be pleased, dear. You never go out and this would be an occasion for you, a great one! I had a lot of trouble getting it. Everyone wants an invitation; they're in great demand and there are only a few reserved for the employees. All the officials will be there."

She looked at him, irritated, and said impatiently:

"I haven't a thing to wear. How could I go?"

It had never even occurred to him. He stammered:  
“But what about the dress you wear to the theater? I think it’s lovely. . . .”

He fell silent, amazed and bewildered to see that his wife was crying. Two big tears escaped from the corners of her eyes and rolled slowly toward the corners of her mouth. He mumbled:

“What is it? What is it?”

But, with great effort, she had overcome her misery; and now she answered him calmly, wiping her tear-damp cheeks:

“It’s nothing. It’s just that I have no evening dress and so I can’t go to the party. Give the invitation to one of your colleagues whose wife will be better dressed than I would be.”

He was overcome. He said:

“Listen. Mathilde [ma tēld’], how much would an evening dress cost—a suitable one that you could wear again on other occasions, something very simple?”

She thought for several seconds, making her calculations and at the same time estimating how much she could ask for without eliciting an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from this economical government clerk.

At last, not too sure of herself, she said:

“It’s hard to say exactly but I think I could manage with four hundred francs.”

He went a little pale, for that was exactly the amount he had put aside to buy a rifle so that he could go hunting the following summer near Nanterre, with a few friends who went shooting larks around there on Sundays.

However, he said:

“Well, all right, then. I’ll give you four hundred francs. But try to get something really nice.”

As the day of the ball drew closer, Madame Loisel seemed depressed, disturbed, worried—despite the fact that her dress was ready. One evening her husband said:

“What’s the matter? You’ve really been very strange these last few days.”

And she answered:

“I hate not having a single jewel, not one stone, to wear. I shall look so dowdy.<sup>2</sup> I’d almost rather not go to the party.”

2. dowdy (dou’de) *adj.* shabby.

### Reading Skill Cause and Effect

Why is the husband surprised by his wife’s reaction to the party invitation?

*She had no proper wardrobe, no jewels, nothing. And those were the only things that she loved—she felt she was made for them.*

### Reading Check

What does Monsieur Loisel give up to make his wife happy?

### Literary Analysis Characterization

What does Madame Loisel's comment reveal indirectly about her attitudes and values?

### Vocabulary

**resplendent** (ri splen' dənt) *adj.* shining brightly

He suggested:

"You can wear some fresh flowers. It's considered very chic<sup>3</sup> at this time of year. For ten francs you can get two or three beautiful roses."

That didn't satisfy her at all.

"No . . . there's nothing more humiliating than to look poverty-stricken among a lot of rich women."

Then her husband exclaimed:

"Wait—you silly thing! Why don't you go and see Madame Forestier [fôr əs tyā] and ask her to lend you some jewelry. You certainly know her well enough for that, don't you think?"

She let out a joyful cry.

"You're right. It never occurred to me."

The next day she went to see her friend and related her tale of woe.

Madame Forestier went to her mirrored wardrobe, took out a big jewel case, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said:

"Take your pick, my dear."

Her eyes wandered from some bracelets to a pearl necklace, then to a gold Venetian cross set with stones, of very fine workmanship. She tried on the jewelry before the mirror, hesitating, unable to bring herself to take them off, to give them back. And she kept asking:

"Do you have anything else, by chance?"

"Why yes. Here, look for yourself. I don't know which ones you'll like."

All at once, in a box lined with black satin, she came upon a superb diamond necklace, and her heart started beating with overwhelming desire. Her hands trembled as she picked it up. She fastened it around her neck over her high-necked dress and stood there gazing at herself ecstatically.

Hesitantly, filled with terrible anguish, she asked:

"Could you lend me this one—just this and nothing else?"

"Yes, of course."

She threw her arms around her friend's neck, kissed her ardently, and fled with her treasure.

The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a great success. She was the prettiest woman there—resplendent, graceful, beaming, and deliriously happy. All the men looked at her, asked who she was, tried to get themselves introduced to her. All the minister's aides wanted to waltz with her. The minister himself noticed her.

3. chic (shék) *adj.* fashionable.



She danced enraptured—carried away, intoxicated with pleasure, forgetting everything in this triumph of her beauty and the glory of her success, floating in a cloud of happiness formed by all this homage, all this admiration, all the desires she had stirred up—by this victory so complete and so sweet to the heart of a woman.

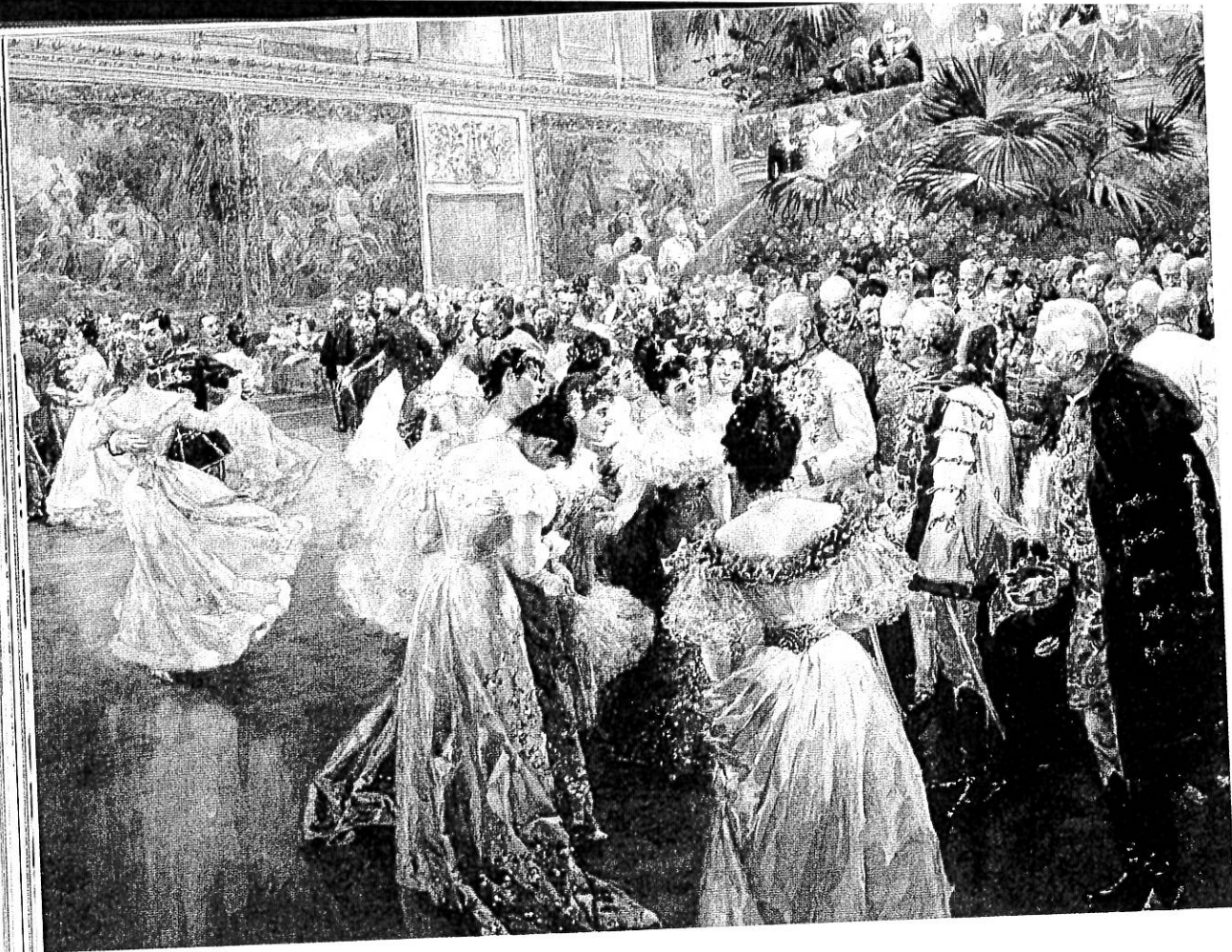
When she left the party, it was almost four in the morning. Her husband had been sleeping since midnight in a small, deserted

▲ **Critical Viewing**

What key part of the story could this image illustrate? [**Connect**]

**Reading Check**

How does Madame Loisel feel at the ball?



▲ **Critical Viewing**

What details in this painting suggest the setting of the story?

[Connect]

sitting room, with three other gentlemen whose wives were having a wonderful time.

He brought her wraps so that they could leave and put them around her shoulders—the plain wraps from her everyday life whose shabbiness jarred with the elegance of her evening dress. She felt this and wanted to escape quickly so that the other women, who were enveloping themselves in their rich furs, wouldn't see her.

Loisel held her back.

"Wait a minute. You'll catch cold out there. I'm going to call a cab."

But she wouldn't listen to him and went hastily downstairs. Outside in the street, there was no cab to be found: they set out to look for one, calling to the drivers they saw passing in the distance.

They walked toward the Seine,<sup>4</sup> shivering and miserable. Finally, on the embankment, they found one of those ancient nocturnal broughams<sup>5</sup> which are only to be seen in Paris at night, as if they were ashamed to show their shabbiness in daylight.

4. Seine (sān) river flowing through Paris.

5. broughams (brōōmz) *n.* horse-drawn carriages.

It took them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and they went sadly upstairs to their apartment. For her, it was all over. And he was thinking that he had to be at the Ministry by ten.

She took off her wraps before the mirror so that she could see herself in all her glory once more. Then she cried out. The necklace was gone; there was nothing around her neck.

Her husband, already half undressed, asked: "What's the matter?"

She turned toward him in a frenzy: "The . . . the . . . necklace—it's gone."

He got up, thunderstruck.

"What did you say? . . . What! . . . Impossible!"

And they searched the folds of her dress, the folds of her wrap, the pockets, everywhere. They didn't find it.

He asked:

"Are you sure you still had it when we left the ball?"

"Yes. I remember touching it in the hallway 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, most likely. Do you remember the number?"

"No. What about you—did you notice it?"

"No."

They looked at each other in utter dejection. Finally Loisel got dressed again.

"I'm going to retrace the whole distance we covered on foot," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he left the house. She remained in her evening dress, too weak to go to bed, sitting crushed on a chair, lifeless and blank.

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

He went to the police station, to the newspapers to offer a reward, to the offices of the cab companies—in a word, wherever there seemed to be the slightest hope of tracing it.

She spent the whole day waiting, in a state of utter hopelessness before such an appalling catastrophe.

Loisel returned in the evening, his face lined and pale; he had learned nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you've broken the clasp of the necklace and that you're getting it mended. That'll give us time to decide what to do."

*He brought  
her wraps so  
that they could  
leave and put  
them around her  
shoulders—the  
plain wraps from  
her everyday life...*

#### Vocabulary

**dejection** (di jek' shən) *n.* lowness of spirits; depression

#### Literary Analysis Characterization

What do the Loisels' actions after the necklace is lost reveal about their individual characters?

#### Reading Check

When does Madame Loisel discover the necklace is missing?

**Reading Skill**  
**Cause and Effect**

What fear prevents the Loisels from telling Madame Forestier the necklace was lost?

She wrote the letter at his dictation.  
By the end of the week, they had lost all hope.  
Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:  
"We'll have to replace the necklace."

The next day they took the case in which it had been kept and went to the jeweler whose name appeared inside it. He looked through his ledgers:

"I didn't sell this necklace, madame. I only supplied the case."

Then they went from one jeweler to the next, trying to find a necklace like the other, racking their memories, both of them sick with worry and distress.

In a fashionable shop near the Palais Royal, they found a diamond necklace which they decided was exactly like the other. It was worth 40,000 francs. They could have it for 36,000 francs.

They asked the jeweler to hold it for them for three days, and they stipulated that he should take it back for 34,000 francs if the other necklace was found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed 18,000 francs left him by his father. He would borrow the rest.

He borrowed, asking a thousand francs from one man, five hundred from another, a hundred here, fifty there. He signed promissory notes,<sup>6</sup> borrowed at exorbitant rates, dealt with usurers and the entire race of moneylenders. He compromised his whole career, gave his signature even when he wasn't sure he would be able to honor it, and horrified by the anxieties with which his future would be filled, by the black misery about to descend upon him, by the prospect of physical privation and moral suffering, went to get the new necklace, placing on the jeweler's counter 36,000 francs.

When Madame Loisel went to return the necklace, Madame Forestier said in a faintly waspish tone:

"You could have brought it back a little sooner! I might have needed it."

She didn't open the case as her friend had feared she might. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Mightn't she have taken Madame Loisel for a thief?

Madame Loisel came to know the awful life of the poverty-stricken. However, she resigned herself to it with unexpected fortitude. The crushing debt had to be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed the maid; they moved into an attic under the roof.

She came to know all the heavy household chores, the loathsome work of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, wearing

6. promissory (präm' i sôr' ē) notes written promises to pay back borrowed money.

**Vocabulary**  
**fortitude**

(fôrt' ə tōōd') *n.* the strength to bear misfortune and pain

down her pink nails on greasy casseroles and the bottoms of saucepans. She did the laundry, washing shirts and dishcloths which she hung on a line to dry: she took the garbage down to the street every morning, and carried water upstairs, stopping at every floor to get her breath. Dressed like a working-class woman, she went to the fruit store, the grocer, and the butcher with her basket on her arm, bargaining, outraged, contesting each sou<sup>7</sup> of her pitiful funds.

Every month some notes had to be honored and more time requested on others.

Her husband worked in the evenings, putting a shopkeeper's ledgers in order, and often at night as well, doing copying at twenty-five centimes a page.

And it went on like that for ten years.

After ten years, they had made good on everything, including the usurious rates and the compound interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become the sort of strong woman, hard and coarse, that one finds in poor families. Disheveled, her skirts askew, with reddened hands, she spoke in a loud voice, slopping water over the floors as she washed them. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she would sit down by the window and muse over that party long ago when she had been so beautiful, the belle of the ball.

How would things have turned out if she hadn't lost that necklace? Who could tell? How strange and fickle life is! How little it takes to make or break you!

Then one Sunday when she was strolling along the Champs Elysées<sup>8</sup> to forget the week's chores for a while, she suddenly caught sight of a woman taking a child for a walk. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still charming.

Madame Loisel started to tremble. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly she should. And now that she had paid everything back, why shouldn't she tell her the whole story?

She went up to her.

"Hello, Jeanne."

The other didn't recognize her and was surprised that this plainly dressed woman should speak to her so familiarly. She murmured:

"But . . . madame! . . . I'm sure . . . You must be mistaken."

"No, I'm not. I am Mathilde Loisel."

#### Vocabulary

##### disheveled

(di shev' əld) *adj.* untidy

*She had become the  
sort of strong woman,  
hard and coarse,  
that one finds in poor  
families.*

#### Reading Skill

##### Cause and Effect

What causes Madame Loisel to tremble at the sight of Madame Forestier?



#### Reading Check

How has Madame Loisel's appearance changed?

7. **sou** (sō) *n.* former French coin, worth very little; the centime (sən» tēm«), mentioned later, was also of little value.

8. **Champs Elysées** (shän zā lē zā) fashionable street in Paris.

### Vocabulary

**profoundly** (prō  
found' lē) *adv.* deeply

Her friend gave a little cry.

"Oh! Oh, my poor Mathilde, how you've changed!"

"Yes, I've been through some pretty hard times since I last saw you and I've had plenty of trouble—and all because of you!"

"Because of me? What do you mean?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me to wear to the party at the Ministry?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What are you talking about? You returned it to me."

"What I gave back to you was another one just like it. And it took us ten years to pay for it. You can imagine it wasn't easy for us, since we were quite poor. . . . Anyway, I'm glad it's over and done with."

Madame Forestier stopped short.

"You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace that other one?"

"Yes. You didn't even notice then? They really were exactly alike."

And she smiled, full of a proud, simple joy.

Madame Forestier, **profoundly** moved, took Mathilde's hands in her own.

"Oh, my poor, poor Mathilde! Mine was false. It was worth five hundred francs at the most!"

1. **Respond:** Do you feel sorry for Madame Loisel at the end of the story? Why or why not?
2. (a) As the story begins, why is Madame Loisel unhappy with her life? (b) **Infer:** Do you think the author wants readers to sympathize with her unhappiness? Explain your response.
3. (a) How does Monsieur Loisel respond to Madame Loisel's disappointment? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** How is Monsieur Loisel different from his wife? Use details from the text to explain.
4. (a) **Interpret:** How does the change in Madame Loisel's appearance illustrate the internal and external conflicts of the story? (b) **Draw Conclusions:** What is the effect of this change?



**Is conflict necessary?**

- (a) What external conflict is proven unnecessary by the end of the story? (b) Could a change in Madame Loisel's attitude have prevented her internal conflict?