

Drama

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# The NECKLACE

A twisted tale of greed and glamour

**BASED ON THE CLASSIC SHORT STORY BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT  
ADAPTED BY SPENCER KAYDEN AND MACK LEWIS**



SCOPE.SCHOLASTIC.COM • JANUARY 2015

**11**



## CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

**\*STAGE MANAGERS 1 AND 2 (SM1, SM2)**, describe the actions in the play

**\*OLD PIERRE**, the narrator and Matilda's husband as an old man

**SET DESIGNER**, describes the setting

**\*MATILDA LOISEL**, a young woman

**\*PIERRE LOISEL**, Matilda's husband as a young man

**MARIE-CLAIRE**, the Loiseles' maid

**JEANNE FORESTIER**, Matilda's friend

**MADAME AMBASSADOR**

**GENTLEMAN**

**JEWELER**

*\*Starred characters are major roles.*

*Go to Scope Online for a pronunciation guide to the French names and words in this play.*

**OLD PIERRE:** Matilda had quite an imagination. Oh, how I strove to make her happy!

**SM2:** Marie-Claire, the maid, enters.

**MATILDA:** Marie-Claire, do try to straighten up before the master gets home. Everything looks so terrible!

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Madame, you have a beautiful home.

**MATILDA:** Nothing but faded wallpaper and dilapidated furniture. How it tortures me to live in such squalor. Oh, my life is a mistake of destiny. Make it better!

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Madame?

**MATILDA:** Dust! Straighten! Fluff!

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Yes, right away.

**SM1:** Marie-Claire gets to work. Young Pierre Loisel enters, grinning. He is holding a large envelope.

**PIERRE:** I have something for you, my sweet!

**SM2:** Matilda tears it open and reads the card inside.

**MATILDA:** "Monsieur and Madame Loisel, your presence is requested at the ambassador's ball."

**SM1:** Matilda drops the card onto the table.

**MATILDA:** We cannot go.

**PIERRE:** Darling, I thought you'd be pleased.

**MATILDA:** What am I to wear to such a fancy affair?

**PIERRE** (*stammering*): Well, I . . .

**SM2:** Two large tears run down Matilda's cheeks.

**PIERRE:** My dear, what would a new gown cost?

**MATILDA:** I could manage with . . . 400 francs.

**PIERRE:** 400 francs?

**OLD PIERRE:** We had so little money to spare for luxuries. But her sadness was too much to bear.

**PIERRE:** Of course, my love.



### AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

How does Matilda's desire for status backfire?

## SCENE 1

**SM1:** In front of the curtain stands an old man in a worn-out coat. He walks to center stage.

**OLD PIERRE** (*to the audience*): *Bonjour!* Welcome to Paris, 1875! But perhaps "welcome" is not the right word, for I am about to tell you a story that—if you have even a shred of compassion—will break your heart.

**SM2:** Old Pierre spreads his arms as the curtain opens on a modest living room in a modest house.

**SET DESIGNER:** The curtains are faded and the furniture worn, but the room is cozy and warm.

**SM1:** A young woman stands in front of a mirror. She has draped an exquisite silk handkerchief over the front of her plain dress.

**OLD PIERRE:** This is my wife, Matilda. (*wistfully*) Back then, she was as beautiful as she was charming.

**MATILDA LOISEL** (*curtsying to herself in the mirror*): *Merci, Monsieur.* The pleasure is all mine. *Oui oui*, this dress was custom-made for me. Oh, you are too, too kind.



This is the author Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893). He was the J.K. Rowling of his day—wildly successful and popular. "The Necklace" is still widely read today.

## SCENE 2

**SM1:** Pierre sits on the couch reading a newspaper. Marie-Claire is dusting.

**SM2:** Matilda steps into the room.

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Why, Madame! How beautiful!

**PIERRE:** You look exquisite, my dear. Is this your new gown for the ball?

**MATILDA** (*sadly*): Yes. Well, it was . . . but I am afraid we cannot go.

**PIERRE:** What? Why? Your dress is perfect!

**MATILDA:** My neck is bare. I've no jewels.

**PIERRE:** You could wear flowers.





Matilda and Pierre were part of a growing middle class in 1870s France. During this time, more people were able to afford luxuries once attainable only by the very wealthy. Many in the new middle class yearned to imitate the lives of the super-rich by hosting lavish parties and going to trendy cafes like this one.



Fashion was very important in Paris. Matilda would have wanted a dress like this.

**MATILDA:** Flowers?! How humiliating it would be to appear so shabby among the most elegant women of Paris.

**PIERRE:** What about your friend, Madame Forestier? She would lend you some jewels, I am sure.

**MATILDA** (*brightening*): A wonderful idea!

### ❖ SCENE 3 ❖

**OLD PIERRE:** Matilda visits Madame Jeanne Forestier.

**JEANNE** (*opening the door*): Why, Matilda, what a delightful surprise. What brings you?

**MATILDA:** I have been invited to the ambassador's ball. Pierre went out of his way to procure an invitation and buy me a gown.

**JEANNE:** How glamorous! You must be thrilled.

**MATILDA:** In truth, I am ashamed. I haven't any jewelry. My husband means well, but he's merely a clerk.

**JEANNE:** Well, you must borrow something of mine. Please, come in.

**SM1:** Matilda regards Jeanne's home. It is richly appointed, with beautiful tapestries and paintings.

**SM2:** Jeanne leads Matilda to a gilded dressing table and presents her with a large box of jewelry.

**JEANNE:** Choose anything you like.

**SM1:** Matilda runs her fingers over a pearl necklace, a golden brooch—and hesitates.

**MATILDA:** Is there anything else?

**JEANNE:** Keep looking. I am certain you will find something.

**SM2:** Matilda catches sight of a black satin case. Inside is a superb diamond necklace. Her hands tremble as she lifts it and fastens it around her neck.

**MATILDA** (*with hesitation*): Would you lend this to me?

**JEANNE** (*smiling*): Yes, of course.

**SM1:** Matilda departs with her sparkling treasure.

### ❖ SCENE 4 ❖

**SM2:** Matilda and Pierre arrive at the ball.

**SET DESIGNER:** The rich furnishings and bright chandeliers dazzle their eyes.

**PIERRE:** Monsieur and Madame Ambassador, may I present my wife, Matilda Loisel.

**MADAME AMBASSADOR:** What a pleasure to meet a young lady of such poise and sophistication.

**SM1:** Matilda curtsies deeply.

**MATILDA:** The pleasure is all mine, Madame.

**GENTLEMAN:** *Pardonnez-moi.* May I have this dance?

**MATILDA:** Of course! You are too kind.

**SM2:** Matilda waltzes off with the gentleman.





**OLD PIERRE:** All evening, Matilda floated on a cloud of happiness. Many guests remarked on her radiance. It warmed my heart to see her so ecstatic. At four in the morning, she was finally ready to leave.

**PIERRE:** Here is your coat, my dear.

**MATILDA:** That old coat? Not here, Pierre!

**PIERRE:** But it is bitterly cold.

**MATILDA:** I'll put it on a few blocks away, where we cannot be seen.

## ❧ SCENE 5 ❧

**SM1:** Back at home, Matilda stands on front of the mirror, admiring herself one last time.

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** How was the ball?

**MATILDA:** Oh, it was magnificent, Marie-Claire. It was—  
(clutching her throat) The necklace! It is gone!

**PIERRE:** Impossible!

**SM2:** They search the folds of her dress, her coat, the couch cushions . . . everywhere.

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Are you sure you had it when you left the party?

**MATILDA:** Yes! Madame Fifi praised it as I said good-bye.

**PIERRE:** If you had lost it in the street, we would have heard it fall.

**OLD PIERRE:** We looked at each other, dumbfounded. It was all a terrible, terrible nightmare. But how could we know our nightmare was just beginning?

**PIERRE:** I will retrace our steps and search every inch.

**SM1:** Pierre returns many hours later. His face is drawn and haggard. He shakes his head.

**PIERRE:** I went to the police, the carriage companies, even the papers to offer a reward.

**SM2:** Matilda is too stunned to speak. It's as if the life has been drained from her body.

**MARIE-CLAIRE:** Whatever will you do?

**PIERRE:** Matilda, write to your friend. Tell her that the clasp is broken and we are having it fixed. Maybe the necklace will turn up in a few days.

**OLD PIERRE:** By the end of the week, we had lost all hope. I felt I had aged five years in five days.



Francs were the currency of France. Francs worth \$36,000 in 1875 would be worth about \$165,000 today.

## ❧ SCENE 6 ❧

**OLD PIERRE:** We went from jeweler to jeweler, searching for a matching necklace.

**SM1:** They enter a shop at the Palais-Royal.

**PIERRE:** Look, Matilda! This string of diamonds looks just like it, *oui*?

**MATILDA:** Yes. It's very close!

**JEWELER:** You have very good taste. That necklace is 40,000 francs.

**OLD PIERRE:** That number still rings in my mind like a funeral bell.

**PIERRE:** Would you consider 30,000?

**JEWELER:** The lowest I can go is 36,000.

**SM2:** Pierre gulps.

**PIERRE:** Please hold it for three days. We will be back with the money.

**SM1:** Out on the street, Matilda turns to Pierre.

**MATILDA:** Where will we get the money?

**PIERRE:** I have 18,000 francs that was left to me by my father. The rest we shall borrow.

**MATILDA:** From whom?

**PIERRE:** Anyone. Everyone. Whatever it takes.

**MATILDA:** We will have to let Marie-Claire go.

**PIERRE:** Yes, I suppose so. We can no longer afford her wages.

**OLD PIERRE:** We borrowed from friends, family, neighbors—even unsavory moneylenders. We scraped together the money and bought the necklace. Matilda took it to Madame Forestier as though nothing had happened.

## ❧ SCENE 7 ❧

**OLD PIERRE:** From that moment on, we lived in abject poverty. I must say, though, that Matilda acted heroically.

**SM2:** The lights come up on a small and drab attic apartment.

**SET DESIGNER:** Threadbare sheets and clothing hang on a line to dry.





Like most of Paris's poor, Matilda and Pierre would probably have had to cram into a shabby one-room apartment.

had never been lost? How strange life is. How fickle.

## SCENE 8

**SM1:** One morning, Matilda is strolling along the Champs-Élysées. She recognizes a vibrant-looking woman.

**MATILDA:** Jeanne?

**SM2:** Jeanne stares blankly at Matilda's lined face and ragged clothing.

**JEANNE:** I do not know you.

**MATILDA:** I am Matilda . . . Loisel.

**JEANNE:** Matilda? You have changed!

**MATILDA:** We have had hard times since I saw you last, and many sorrows . . . and I must say, all on your account.

**JEANNE:** On my account? How?

**MATILDA:** You remember the diamond necklace you lent me? For the ambassador's ball?

**JEANNE:** That was so long ago.

**MATILDA:** Well, I lost it.

**JEANNE:** But you brought it back.

**MATILDA:** We bought another just like it. It took us 10 years to pay for.

**JEANNE:** Oh!

**MATILDA:** It was not easy. We had no money. But it is paid for at last. And we are finally free.

**SM1:** Matilda smiles proudly.

**JEANNE (slowly):** You bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?

**MATILDA:** Yes, it was nearly identical.

**SM2:** Jeanne takes Matilda's two hands in her own.

**JEANNE:** My poor, poor Matilda. How can I tell you this? That necklace was an imitation. It was worth 500 francs at most.

**SM1:** Matilda's jaw drops.

**JEANNE:** How I wish you had told me the truth.

**SM2:** Matilda stands aghast as the curtain falls. Old Pierre hobbles to center stage.

**OLD PIERRE:** How fickle life is. How fickle life is, indeed. ●

As poor Parisians, Matilda and Pierre would have faced constant discrimination: The poor were often viewed with mistrust and even scorn. For women like Matilda, jobs were limited to cleaning houses, sewing, and washing clothes.

**SM1:** Matilda hauls buckets of water up the stairs, stopping on each landing to catch her breath.

**OLD PIERRE:** I took a second job. Matilda learned to do the cooking and cleaning herself. All her fine things were sold.

**SM2:** Matilda kneels on the floor and begins scrubbing.

**OLD PIERRE:** Matilda haggled with the grocer and butcher for every halfpenny, but it was never enough. We always owed more. This life lasted for 10 years.

**SM1:** Pierre enters with a half-wilted flower.

**PIERRE:** My sweet, today is the day. (*He hands Matilda the flower.*) We are out of debt at last.

**SM2:** Matilda stands and looks at herself in an old mirror. Her hair is unkempt, her hands coarse and red.

**MATILDA:** Do you remember that evening long ago? I am but a shell of that woman.

**PIERRE:** You are perfect to me.

**MATILDA:** What would have happened if those jewels





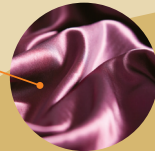
# Status Symbols Through History

Humans have always loved showing off. **By Allison Friedman**

**W**e fork over big bucks for designer clothes. We spend our savings on the newest iPhone. And we show off by posting selfies with our Beats. These objects are known as status symbols. Displaying them for the world to see is a way to say “I belong” or “I can afford this.” For better or worse, humans have been using status symbols to announce their position in society for eons. **Look at our timeline to see what we mean.**

## PURPLE

In the ancient world, purple dye was so costly to produce that only the very wealthy could afford purple fabric. Wearing purple was a way to say “Hey! I’m important!”



**1500 B.C.**

## BOOKS

In ancient Rome, every book was painstakingly written by hand on fragile paper called papyrus. If you had a personal library, it meant serious status.



**100 B.C.**

## PINEAPPLE

In England, having a pineapple—a rare fruit imported from South America—made you the envy of all. Only the wealthy could afford to grow pineapples, which required daily care year-round. Some shops rented out their pineapples as centerpieces for parties.



**1700s**

**2015**

## SMARTPHONE

Among kids and teens, tech—whether a smartphone or a GoPro—is a more important status symbol than clothing, partly because technology allows them to connect 24-7 and always be “in the know.”



**2005**

**2000**



## UGG BOOTS

UGGs were originally worn by sheep farmers in Australia. Then stars like Paris Hilton began wearing them around Hollywood, and suddenly everyone wanted them. Some kids even worried they would be outcasts without UGGs.

**1970s**

**1980s**



## AIR JORDANS

In the past, sneakers were plain white. Then Air Jordans came along. Many wondered who would buy such ugly shoes. But Air Jordans were a big hit among kids. Showing up at school in a pair provoked envy.



## DESIGNER JEANS

Until the 1970s, jeans were worn mostly by cowboys and miners. Then high-fashion designers began selling them for big bucks. Sporting so-called “designer” jeans earned you distinction.

## FAKE BRACES

In Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, having braces is a mark of prestige because most kids who need orthodontic care cannot afford it. For the past 10 years or so, kids have been wearing fake “fashion braces” for status.



**What are the status symbols in *The Necklace*? How does the desire for status affect Matilda? How does it affect us?**

## WRITING CONTEST

Who or what is to blame for Matilda’s suffering? Answer this question in a short essay. Use text evidence to support your answer. Send your response to **POOR MATILDA CONTEST**. Five winners will each get a copy of *Splendors and Glooms* by Laura Amy Schlitz. See page 2 for details.



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