

THE JEWELS.

BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

Translated for the New York Evening Post by Julia de Kay.

She was a handsome girl, born, by a mistake of destiny, into a family of hard workers. She had no fortune, no hope of any, no chance of meeting rich suitors, and so she let herself be married to a young employe in the Board of Public Education.

She dressed simply because she could not afford to dress expensively. Consequently she was very discontented, thinking herself worthy of the highest luxury and elegance.

She despised the cheap flat in which she lived, with its bare walls, shabby furniture, and hideous hangings—all these things, generally a matter of indifference to a woman of her class, were positive torture to her—and so she gave herself up to absurd, impossible dreams. She dreamed of gorgeous anterooms, hung with Oriental fabrics, lighted with candles in bronze sconces, of servants in livery and powder, dozing in armchairs, drowsy with the heat and perfume of the place. She dreamed of great salons, draped with gleaming silk, of tables loaded with priceless bric-a-brac, of little coquettish boudoirs and five-o'clock teas with intimate, chosen friends, and all the distinguished and sought-after men eager to gain admittance to the charmed circle. When she sat down to dinner at the little round table, covered with a cloth that had seen three days' service, opposite to her husband, who himself removed the cover of the soup tureen, declaring with an air of perfect content, "What a delicious soup!" Nothing is better than vegetable soup," she would decline the soup, and dream of dainty little dinners in a dining room hung with tapestries, the table brilliant with glass and silver, and viands served on wonderful dishes.

She had nothing—no money, no jewels, no toilettes. As she really cared for nothing else, her life seemed worthless to her. She longed to be envied, fascinating, and sought after, and she believed that she would be all these if she could dress as she wished to. She had given up visiting her one rich friend, a former schoolmate; the contrast in their surroundings was too painful to her. For days at a time she wept from sheer despair.

One night her husband came home, beaming with delight, a large envelope in his hand. "Here is something for you," he said. She tore open the envelope and found a printed card that read:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Mme. George Rampanneau request the pleasure of M. and Mme. Loisel's company, at the house of the Minister, on Monday evening, 18th January."

Instead of the delight which her husband had anticipated, she threw the paper on the table and said crossly:

"What good is that to me?"
"Why, my dear, I thought you would be pleased. You go out so seldom, and it will be well worth seeing. I had hard work to get the invitation. It is to be a very swell affair, and very few of the clerks are asked. You will see all of the high officials."

"What have I to wear to such a function as that?" she answered sulkily.

"Would not that gown do that you wear to the theatre? You always look so pretty in it." To his horror she burst into violent weeping.

"My darling, what is the matter?"

With great effort she calmed herself.
"It is nothing. Only, as I have no ball dress, I cannot go to the ball. Give the card to one of your friends whose wife has better clothes than I have."

These words touched him deeply.

"How much would a ball dress cost you? Something simple, that would be useful to you on other occasions?" he asked.

"I do not know exactly. I think I might manage with eighty dollars."

He turned a little pale, for he had been putting money aside lately for the purchase of a gun, and he had been looking forward to a gunning trip to Nanterre with some friends the following summer; but he answered bravely:

"Very well, you shall have eighty dollars. Do the best with it that you can."

For days before the ball Mathilde seemed restless and dissatisfied, although her dress was ready and a perfect success. Her husband asked her what she was worrying about.

"I have no jewels," she said; "not one stone of any kind. I shall look quite poverty-stricken. I would almost rather stay at home."

"Why do you not wear natural flowers, they are so much worn now? For two dollars you can get three magnificent roses."

"No," she said pettishly; "there is nothing so humiliating as to look poor among a lot of rich women."

"Why," said M. Loisel, suddenly, "why do you not ask your friend Mme. Forestier to lend you some of her jewels?"

She uttered a cry of delight. "What a splendid idea! I never thought of that."

She flew to her friend, and told her all her troubles.

Mme. Forestier brought out her jewel box and opened it, saying: "Choose for yourself, my dear; take anything you want."

With eager fingers Mathilde turned over the jewels, bracelets, a pearl necklace, jewelled cross. She tried them on before the mirror, finding it hard to decide. At last in a black satin box she found a superb necklace of diamonds. Her heart beat wildly; her fingers trembled as she clasped them about her throat. "Would her friend lend such valuable jewels?" "Yes, yes; you can wear them my dear." Mme. Loisel embraced her friend and fled homeward with her treasure.

Madame Loisel was a great success at the ball. She was the prettiest woman in the room, graceful, smiling, wildly happy. All the men asked to be presented; the high officials asked her to dance; the Minister himself remarked upon her beauty.

She danced with such a passion of enjoyment, lost to everything but the triumphs of the hour, in a sort of fairyland of admiration and homage, the atmosphere so precious to a woman, that it was hard indeed to come back to earth again. She consented to go home at four o'clock. Since midnight her husband had been peacefully slumbering in an anteroom, with several other indulgent husbands, whose wives were enjoying themselves. He folded her wrap carefully about her—the poor little everyday wrap, that looked so mean over her handsome dress. She tried to escape the glances of the other women, who were putting on their costly furs, but her husband insisted that she should wait while he called a cab, as she was too warm to brave the night air. She flew down the stairs and into the street, and walked up and down while her husband sought for a "night hawk." Finally one was procured, and she arrived at her home with a sinking heart. Her happiness was over! She threw off her cloak and stood gazing at herself in the mirror. Suddenly a scream of horror burst from her lips. The diamond necklace was gone!

"The necklace! I have lost Louise's necklace!"

They searched everywhere—in the folds of her dress, her pocket, her wrap. The necklace was not to be found.

"Did you have it when you left the palace?"

"Yes. I felt it when I stood in the vestibule."

"You must have lost it in the cab. Do you remember the number?"

"No."

"Nor do I. I will go at once and search over the route we came."

At seven o'clock he returned after a fruitless search. He had informed the police, sent notices to the papers and the cab companies, offering a large reward.

Mathilde sat all day brooding upon the terrible disaster. Loisel came home at night pale and haggard.

"Write to your friend that you broke the clasp and are having it mended."

At the end of the week they gave up hope. Loisel, older by five years, declared that the jewels must be replaced. They went from jeweler to jeweler trying to find an exact counterpart, both almost ill with anxiety and distress. At last they found one, and the jeweler said its price was eight thousand dollars, but he would let them have it for seven thousand. They stipulated that if the other necklace were found that he would take his back for six thousand. Loisel had three thousand dollars left to him by his father; he must borrow the rest. He borrowed on all sides—four hundred of one, fifty of another, five here, ten there. He signed notes, made ruinous engagements, had recourse to money lenders. He compromised his future career, signed recklessly without knowing how he should repay, hurried to the jewelers, seized the necklace, and handed over the hard-won seven thousand dollars.

When they returned the necklace to Mme. Forestier she said reproachfully:

"You might have returned it sooner. I might have wanted to wear it myself."

Luckily, she did not open the box. Had she noticed the substitution what would she have thought?

And now began a terrible life for the Loisels. The debts must be paid at once, and Mathilde was determined that she would bear her full share of the burden.

She dismissed her servant, and they took a small room up under the eaves. She did all the work, even to the washing and cooking. She washed dishes and pots and pans, spoiling her pretty white hands and rosy nails; she carried down refuse and brought up water.

Every morning, with a basket on her arm, she went to market, bargaining and cheapening, and often receiving insult because she tried to make the money go as far as possible. Every month they paid off some of their notes, and made others, to gain time. Loisel did expert accounting in the evenings, and at night did copying at five cents a page; any thing that would bring in money. This awful life lasted just ten years. At the end of that time they had paid every cent, with interest and taxes. But Mathilde had become an old woman; she had become rough and



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coarse, like a woman of the people, with unkempt hair, gown awry, red hands; she talked and laughed loudly as she scrubbed her floors.

Sometimes, however, as she sat at her windows, she would dream of that wonderful evening, when she was courted and admired at the ball.

What would her fate have been had she not borrowed the necklace? Who knows? Life is so strange, so uncertain. It takes such a small thing to make or mar it.

One Sunday she had gone to the park to rest herself after the labors of the week, when suddenly she came face to face with a lady, also walking and accompanied by a little child. It was Louise, still young, still pretty and attractive. Mathilde was much agitated. Should she speak to her? Why not? Now that all the debts were paid she could tell her the whole story. "Good morning, Louise," she faltered. Mme. Forestier not recognizing her, and wondering who it could be that addressed her so familiarly, replied: "I think you must be mistaken. I—"

"No, I am Mme. Loisel," her old friend exclaimed.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde, you are so awfully changed."

"Yes, I have had hard times and much suffering since I saw you last, and you are the cause of it."

"If how is that possible?"

"You remember the diamond necklace that you lent me to wear at the ball at the palace?"

"Yes."

"Well, I lost it."

"How can that be when you returned it to me?"

"I only returned an exact copy of it. It has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can imagine how hard it has been."

"Mme. Forestier started.

"You bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never discovered it, they were so exactly alike."

Mme. Forestier, pale and trembling, seized her friend's hand and cried:

"O Mathilde, my poor Mathilde, mine were only imitation, and only worth two hundred dollars!"

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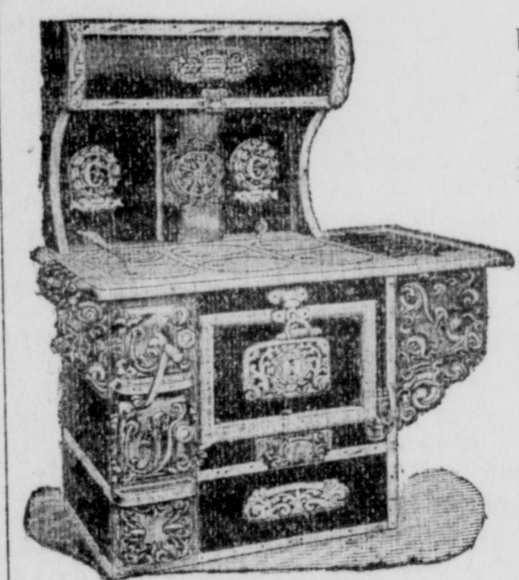


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