Chapter 24: The Necklace

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Exercise 24.1 — Read and Find Out 1 (Page 40)

Q1 What kind of a person is Mme Loisel — why is she always unhappy?

SOLUTION

Matilda (Mme Loisel) is a pretty, young woman who is deeply dissatisfied with her life. Though born into a family of clerks with "no dowry, no hopes, no means", she believes herself "born for all delicacies and luxuries".

She is always unhappy because her modest reality falls far short of her dreams. The text says she "suffered incessantly" and "suffered from the poverty of her apartment, the shabby walls and the worn chairs", which "tortured and angered her".

Instead of appreciating what she has, she constantly imagines "elegant dinners", "shining silver" and "exquisite food". Her friend's wealth makes her weep "for whole days from despair and disappointment". In short, she is vain, discontented and materialistic.

Answer: She is a pretty but vain and discontented woman who is always unhappy because she craves wealth and luxury far beyond her modest means.

Q2 What kind of a person is her husband?

SOLUTION

Her husband, M. Loisel, is a petty clerk in the office of the Board of Education. He is a simple, contented and loving man, easily pleased with small comforts — he uncovers the dinner "with a delighted air" and says he knows "nothing better" than the good pot-pie.

He is caring and self-sacrificing. He works hard to obtain the party invitation to

please her, and gives up the four hundred francs he had saved to buy a gun so that she can have a pretty dress.

He is also loyal and responsible. After the necklace is lost, he searches the streets, goes to the police and newspapers, and borrows heavily, sharing the ten years of ruinous labour to repay the debt.

Answer: He is a simple, contented, loving and self-sacrificing clerk who works hard to please his wife and stands by her through the years of hardship.

Exercise 24.2 — Read and Find Out 2 (Page 41)

Q1 What fresh problem now disturbs Mme Loisel?

SOLUTION

Although her new dress is nearly ready, Mme Loisel now becomes "sad, disturbed, anxious" over a fresh problem: she has no jewel or ornament to wear with it.

She tells her husband, "I am vexed not to have a jewel, nothing to adorn myself with. I shall have such a poverty-stricken look", and says she would rather not go to the party than "have a shabby air in the midst of rich women".

Answer: She is troubled because she has no jewellery to wear to the ball and fears looking poor among the rich women.

Q2 How is the problem solved?

SOLUTION

Her husband suggests a solution: "Go and find your friend Mme Forestier and ask her to lend you her jewels." Matilda cries out with joy, saying she had not thought of it.

The next day she visits Mme Forestier, who opens her jewel-case and tells her to choose. After hesitating over bracelets, pearls and a gold cross, Matilda discovers "a superb necklace of diamonds" in a black satin box and borrows it.

Delighted, she embraces her friend and goes away with the borrowed necklace.

Answer: Her husband advises her to borrow jewels from her friend Mme Forestier, from whom Matilda borrows a beautiful diamond necklace.

Exercise 24.3 — Read and Find Out 3 (Page 42)

Q1 What do M. and Mme Loisel do next?

SOLUTION

On reaching home after the ball, Matilda discovers that the necklace is no longer around her neck. The couple search everywhere — "in the folds of the dress, in the folds of the cloak, in the pockets" — but cannot find it.

Loisel dresses again and retraces on foot the whole route they had walked, hoping to find it, but returns having found nothing.

He then goes to the police and the cab offices and puts an advertisement in the newspapers offering a reward. When all hope is lost, he tells Matilda to write to Mme Forestier that she has broken the clasp of the necklace and is having it repaired, to buy them time.

Answer: They frantically search for the lost necklace, retrace their route, inform the police and newspapers, and buy time by claiming the clasp is being repaired.

Q2 How do they replace the necklace?

SOLUTION

In a shop of the Palais-Royal they find a chaplet of diamonds that looks exactly like the lost one, valued at forty thousand francs but obtainable for thirty-six thousand francs.

Loisel uses the eighteen thousand francs his father had left him and borrows the rest. He makes "ruinous promises" and takes money "from usurers and the whole race of lenders", finally depositing thirty-six thousand francs to buy the new necklace.

Matilda returns this new necklace to Mme Forestier, who does not notice the substitution. To repay the huge debt, the couple then endure ten years of grinding poverty and hard labour.

Answer: They buy an identical diamond necklace for thirty-six thousand francs, using savings and heavy loans, then repay the debt through ten years of poverty and toil.

Exercise 24.4 — Think about it (Page 46)

Q1 The course of the Loisels' life changed due to the necklace. Comment.

SOLUTION

The borrowed diamond necklace completely transformed the Loisels' lives. Losing it plunged them into ruinous debt, since they had to buy a replacement for thirty-six thousand francs — using Loisel's inheritance of eighteen thousand francs and heavy borrowing from usurers.

To repay this "frightful debt", they sent away their maid, changed their lodgings and rented rooms in an attic. Matilda did all the harsh household work herself, while her husband worked evenings and nights doing extra copying. This life lasted ten years.

The comfortable, if modest, life they once had was destroyed. Matilda "seemed old now" and "had become a strong, hard woman, the crude woman of the poor household". A single evening of borrowed splendour thus reshaped their entire future — and the final irony is that the lost necklace was false, worth barely five hundred francs.

Answer: Losing the borrowed necklace forced the Loisels into ten years of debt and grinding poverty that aged and hardened them — all for a necklace that turned out to be false.

Q2 What was the cause of Matilda's ruin? How could she have avoided it?

SOLUTION

The root cause of Matilda's ruin was her vanity, discontent and false pride. Dissatisfied with her modest life, she craved luxury and refused to appear poor before rich women, which led her to borrow the diamond necklace in the first place.

The immediate cause was carelessness in losing the borrowed necklace, followed by dishonesty — instead of confessing the loss, the couple secretly replaced it with a costly new one and lied to Mme Forestier.

She could have avoided her ruin by being content with what she had, as her husband suggested (he offered natural flowers as ornaments). Above all, she could have simply told Mme Forestier the truth about the lost necklace; had she done so, she would have learned it was false and worth only five hundred francs,

sparing herself ten years of misery.

Answer: Her ruin was caused by vanity, discontent and dishonesty; she could have avoided it by being content with what she had and by honestly confessing the loss to her friend.

Q3 What would have happened to Matilda if she had confessed to her friend that she had lost her necklace?

SOLUTION

Had Matilda honestly confessed the loss to Mme Forestier, her whole tragedy would have been avoided.

Mme Forestier would have told her the truth — that the necklace was false and "not worth over five hundred francs". Matilda would then have had to pay only that small sum, or perhaps merely apologise, instead of thirty-six thousand francs.

She and her husband would have been spared the crushing debt and the ten years of poverty and hard labour that aged and hardened them. Their comfortable life would have continued, and Matilda would not have lost her youth and beauty.

Answer: She would have learned the necklace was false and worth barely five hundred francs, and so would have been spared the ruinous debt and ten years of poverty.

Q4 If you were caught in a situation like this, how would you have dealt with it?

SOLUTION

If I were in Matilda's place, I would deal with the situation honestly rather than hide the truth.

I would go straight to my friend, admit that I had accidentally lost the borrowed necklace, and sincerely apologise. Honesty would help me discover the real value of the necklace and settle the matter fairly, instead of assuming the worst.

This would spare me the burden of secret debt and years of needless suffering. The story teaches that honesty and contentment are far wiser than pride and pretence, so I would choose to face the truth courageously.

Answer: I would honestly confess the loss to my friend and apologise at once, since honesty would settle the matter fairly and spare years of needless suffering.