

Symbolism of the necklace



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Throughout life, hardships and misfortunes can lead to one's self-improvement. Guy de Maupassant's story "The Necklace" presents many symbols which illustrate the work's major idea of greed. The protagonist, Mathilde Loisel is the wife of an insignificant clerk, who is unhappy with her life because of her social economic status. She dreams of wealth and is increasingly frustrated because of her desire to always want more. The most important symbol within the story is the necklace, which foremost is a representation of greed and materialism.

The necklace is composed of fake diamonds, which epitomize the artificiality of Mathilde's personality. Furthermore, considering the setting of the story, the attic flat, where Mrs. Loisel lives with her husband, is another play on the protagonists' personality because it displays the true coarseness of her character. Finally, the shawl is another important symbol which exemplifies poverty and necessity in Mathilde's life. The relevancy of greed is a significant theme, which is portrayed by the use of many symbols.

The necklace, including the fake diamonds, the attic flat and Mathilde's shawl collectively work together to display the idea of how it only takes a little thing to destroy you. With an invitation to a fancy, high-class dinner at the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Loisel's downfall begins. At the beginning of the story, the reader quickly learns of Mathilde's selfish personality and her yearning for luxuries and items that are unattainable for her at the time. When she declares that she does not have a dress for the occasion her husband volunteers to pay for a new one, despite the fact that it will cost him his next summer's vacation.

However, even with the new gown, Mathilde seems sad, uneasy and anxious. To her husband she complains, “ It’s awful, but I don’t have any jewels to wear, not a single gem, nothing to dress up my outfit. I’ll look like a beggar. I’d almost rather not go to the party” . With Mr. Loisel’s solution of borrowing jewelry from a rich friend Mathilde becomes content. Mrs. Loisel fails to understand the concept that one can be naturally pretty and graceful without the need of materialistic items.

The necklace that Mrs. Forrestier lends her is foremost representation of her greed. Mathilde feels as if she is entitled to having the finer things in life and solely believes that her happiness depends on what she has and what she does not. The necklace is a major symbol which plays a key role in portraying the themes of greed in this story. The necklace creates situational irony within the story because both the protagonist and the reader are unaware of the fact that the piece of jewelry Mrs. Loisel wears proudly around her neck is indeed, fake. Mathilde makes a false assumption, where she thinks that because her friend Mrs.

Forrestier is far wealthier than herself, she would in fact own much more expensive items. On the night of the party, “ Mrs. Loisel was a success. She was prettier than anyone else, stylish, graceful, smiling and wild with joy. All the men saw her, asked her name, sought to be introduced. All the important administrators stood in line to waltz with her. The Chancellor himself eyed her. ” From the beginning of the story up until right before she attended the dinner, Mathilde’s personality displayed her overwhelming sadness and wish for wealth.

However, during the party, she became a different person as she acted like what was happening in the moment was familiar to her. The necklace as a whole represents Mathilde's greed but the diamonds alone imitate the artificiality of her personality. The way she acts with her husband, and at home is a far stretch from how she wants to behave. Mrs. Loisel is embarrassed with herself, and like the diamonds display, there is nothing true about her character. Moving on, a third symbol which is relevant throughout the story is the attic flat in which Mr. and Mrs. Loisel reside in.

Before the misplacement of the necklace, Mathilde lived in a small but breathable home. Although she was unhappy, the apartment still provided her with heat, electricity and water; the basic needs for her to get by on. At the beginning of the story, the narrator states, " She suffered because of her grim apartment with its drab walls, threadbare furniture, ugly curtains. All such things, which most other women would not have noticed, tortured her and filled her with despair" The description of Mrs. Loisel's apartment reflects the realities of the middle - class at the time (late 18th century).

After the loss of Mrs. Forrestier's necklace, Mr. and Mrs. Loisel had to dismiss the maid and rent an attic flat as they no longer were able to afford to pay for anything. Following the news Mathilde receives about the horrifying debt that she must pay, the narrator describes to her new life; She learned to do the heavy housework, dirty kitchen jobs. She washed the dishes, wearing away her manicured fingernails on greasy pots and encrusted baking dishes. She hand washed dirty linen, shirts, and dish towel that she hung out on the line to dry.

Each morning, she took the garbage down to the street, and she carried up water, stopping at each floor to catch her breath. And, dressed in cheap housedresses, she went to the fruit dealer, the grocer, the butchers, with her basket under her arms, haggling, insulting, defending her measly cash penny by penny. They had to make installment payments every month, and, to buy more time, to refinance loans. The husband worked evenings to make fair copies of tradesmen's accounts, and late into the night he made copies at five cents a page. And this life lasted ten years.

Mrs. Loisel's attic flat is symbolic of the true coarseness of her personality. In the beginning, it was her greed and manipulation which was represented as the narrator described her negative views on her apartment. But the end, it was not only her personality which was being reflected upon but her appearance as well. The significance of the attic flat is apparent throughout the novel and assists the story interpret the major idea. Lastly, the story comes across another important symbol which is Mathilde's shawl. Though Mrs. Loisel's social economic status is middle-class, during the party she feels much higher than that.

However, it is at the end of the party, when she realizes the actuality of what her life is really like. Before they left, Mr. Loisel's actions upset his wife, " He threw, over her shoulders, the shawl that he had brought for the trip home – a modest everyday wrap, the poverty of which contrasted sharply with the elegance of her evening gown. She felt it hurried away to avoid being noticed by the other women who luxuriated in rich furs. Mathilde is ashamed of her shabby everyday shawl and that is why she rushes away to avoid being seen by anyone else.

Though she does not want to wear the shawl there is still a necessity for it in her life. When the shawl is placed around her shoulders, Mathilde is forced back into the reality of her situations and her glamour disappears. On its own, the piece of clothing has minor significance, but considered with the other symbols, it aids in portraying the theme of the story. In conclusion, many symbols are used in Maupassant's story "The Necklace" to portray the initial theme of greed. The most important out of all the symbols is the necklace which was primarily a representation of greed and materialism.

The composition of the necklace, the fake diamonds, imitated the artificiality of Mathilde's personality and how she became a different person while attending the dinner. Thirdly, the attic flat was an embodiment of the crudity of Mrs. Loisel's character. Lastly, the shawl exemplified poverty and necessity within the protagonists' life. It is apparent by the end of the story that though one may wish for a luxury, it is important not to forget what you already have, and to be thankful for it. Greed may be viewed as something small, but it only takes something little to destroy you.