

The necklace and story of an hour

Literature



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Madame Loisel is defined by what she lacks and what she is not, rather than by what she has and is. She is not a well-rounded character, but Maupassant did not intend for her to be one. Instead, she is a type- a figure whose motivation is to fill in the gaps in her own character, in the same way, that the detective fills in the gaps in the mystery narrative.

Although the event and the dress are prerequisites for Madame Loisel's happiness, she is "utterly miserable" and seriously contemplates not going to the Ministry because she lacks jewelry and the appearance of elegance and wealth. It is thus not the accumulated finery that appeases Madame Loisel's feelings of inadequacy but rather the necklace in particular. Whereas before she was filled with "grief, regret, despair, and misery," with Madame Forestier's jewels about her neck Madame Loisel is "elegant, graceful, smiling, and quite above herself with happiness." It is the necklace that transforms Madame Loisel into such a success. Her possession of the necklace, however, is temporary- unlike her dress or her memories of the ball, she cannot hold onto it- and from this arises the story's mystery. What, the reader asks, will happen when Madame Loisel must return the necklace? How will its return affect her? What sort of person will she be when she no longer has the necklace to make her content?

We know however that the descriptives of Madame Loisel's success as the fabulous lady are foreshadowing throughout the story that there will be a lie ahead of us. Indeed it comes with the story of fixing a clasp when in fact a When they finally give up their search, Madame Loisel declares that they must "see about replacing the diamonds." With this, it would seem that the mystery has been solved. The introduction of the necklace into Madame Loisel's life has made her temporarily content, but more importantly, it has

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produced in her the tendency to lie, even to one of her oldest friends. The incident has revealed that she lacks the moral fiber to admit the truth about Madame Forestier's jewels. As a result of this ethical stumble, the Loiseles must learn to cope with hardship and true poverty to a degree that they had never known before. The formerly beautiful Madame Loisel becomes "like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households." This is the effect of the loss of the necklace. With it, she is a grand success, literally the "belle of the ball"; without it, she is a hollow woman, bereft of morals and burdened by poverty.

The Story of an Hour details a very ordinary reality and conscientiously analyzes that moment in a woman's life when the boundaries of the accepted everyday world are suddenly shattered and the process of self-consciousness begins. It is within those details, however, that we foreshadow a surprise ending. The foreshadowing starts from the very first sentence, which reports a variety of important facts about the protagonist. First, we learn that she is married and suffers from "heart trouble". This is the first hint at the death at the end of the story providing a solid ground for the denouncement. Louise Mallard, dutiful wife, and true woman are gently told that her husband has been killed in a train accident. Her response is atypical, however, and that is the subject of the story: what Louise thinks and feels as she finds herself thrust into solitude and self-contemplation for the first time.

Louise appears in the opening as the frail, genteel, devoted wife of a prosperous businessman; she is at first only named as such: Mrs. Mallard. However, her first response to the tragedy indicates a second Louise nestling within that social shell: "she did not hear the story as many women have

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heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms." Chopin thus implies that perhaps some part of Louise readily accepts the news. She also intimates that since Louise unconsciously chooses to enfold herself in a female embrace and not in the arms of the male friend who tells her of Mallard's death, Louise has already turned to a female world, one in which she is central. It is in the mid-section of the story, set in Louise's room, that Louise and Chopin's reader explore and come to understand the reaction and potential action, social self-Mrs. Mallard-and private, female self-Louise.