

# "girl with a pearl earring" by tracy chevalier essay sample



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## **“ Girl With a Pearl Earring” by Tracy Chevalier Essay Sample**

The novel “ Girl With a Pearl Earring” by Tracy Chevalier chronicles the young life of a woman named Griet, as she travels through a journey full of love, hate, jealousy, hardship, and other experiences throughout her work as a maid. She is employed at the famous painter Vermeer’s very large household. Catharina plays a main role in the house and is Vermeer’s stuck-up housewife who gives birth to many children. Her mother, Maria Thins, is wiser and conducts most of the family’s business manners. Griet is constantly quarrelling with another maid named Tanneke, who gets very jealous of Griet at times, as does Catharina and her daughter Cornelia. Cornelia is almost an exact replica of Catharina’s stuck-up and snobby personality. Throughout the novel, Griet, Catharina, Tanneke, and Cornelia compete over their presence in the mind of Vermeer. Griet wins this battle, but in an essence, also loses the battle because everyone in the household is trying to get rid of her. Griet is admired the most by Vermeer, which is something that she likes, but also places her in the most volatile position of the household.

Cornelia is always seeking ways to get Griet into trouble with her mother, Catharina. She secretly searches all day for any way to annoy or disturb Griet. This is in part because of her jealousy towards Griet and partly towards wanting to be closer with her father, Vermeer. It is evident that Cornelia doesn’t just have a “ grudge” against maids, because she is only looking for ways to be a nuisance only with Griet, never with Tanneke. Griet even says that Cornelia was out to get her, “ Cornelia had been waiting some time for

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this mischief. She had even managed somehow to get up in the attic and steal the powder." (113). This is the event in which Cornelia steals some of the red powder that Griet has been grinding for Vermeer and smudges it all over Griet's apron. Cornelia does this hoping for Catharina to find out about Griet running special errands for Vermeer. This shows that Cornelia becomes so jealous of Griet that she even begins contracting elaborate plans to get rid of her. Despite being a young girl, she knows that Griet and Vermeer are becoming closer, and she wants to stop it. With the constant mischief of Cornelia, Griet is coming closer and closer to losing her job, just as Cornelia wants.

The other maid, Tanneke, is very jealous of Griet getting more respect from Vermeer and Maria Thins and being treated better than her by them. Tanneke has worked with the Vermeer family for most of her life and she expects to be the most highly appreciated maid, but suddenly Griet, who has been working there for less than a year, earns Vermeer's admiration. After Tanneke sees the red powder on Griet's apron, she knows that she has been running special errands for Vermeer. She then visits Maria Thins about it, but Maria says something that causes her to never speak of it again. Although she never mentions the event again, she is never the same with Griet.

" I never found out what Maria Thins said to Tanneke, what threats or promises she made to keep her quiet. But it worked... She became much harder with me..." (114). This shows that Maria Thins respects that Griet is helping Vermeer with his paints, hopefully making him paint faster. Tanneke is very upset that some maid, who just moved in, suddenly earns more

respect from Vermeer and Maria Thins than she had in her fifteen years  
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working there. As Tanneke grows even more jealous, she also tries to get rid of Griet, making the position of having Vermeer's admiration even more precarious.

The person that is the most afraid and intimidated by Griet's developing relationship with Vermeer is Catharina. Ever since the moment Griet first moves in, Catharina has held a grudge against her. As Griet earns Vermeer's "preference," Catharina's jealousy grows immensely. Catharina can't stand the fact that Griet is getting more attention from Vermeer than she is, even though she is Vermeer's wife. She has been searching for acceptance and affection from Vermeer, both of which she gets too few of to satisfy her needs. Catharina cannot believe that a puny maid is getting more attention from Vermeer than she has her entire life. When Catharina finds out that Vermeer has been secretly painting Griet, all of her anger and jealousy mounts to a point where she cannot bear it anymore.

She finally expresses this desire to get attention from Vermeer, "Catharina was no fool. She knew that the real matter was not the earrings. She wanted them to be, she tried to make them be so, but she could not help herself. She turned to her husband. 'Why,' she asked, 'have you never painted me?'" (214). Catharina has been wondering this probably most of her life with Vermeer, she could tolerate Vermeer painting Tanneke, but painting Griet is too much for her. This is the last Catharina can put up with Griet, and while she is contemplating firing her, Griet runs away, without ever seeing the finished painting of herself.

Griet has the most coveted position in the house, seeing as everyone is trying to be in her spot. This position is very risky, because as time wears on Catharina, Tanneke, and Cornelia are all growing more envious. As Griet becomes infatuated with Vermeer she doesn't realize the dangerous situation she is in, and that it will eventually lead to her downfall. Ultimately, being highly respected by Vermeer brings Catharina, who can no longer bear her husband's high regard for Griet, to fire her. In the long term this is a good and bad thing for Griet. She can finally get away from working as a maid and taking orders from Catharina and Maria Thins, and become her own woman in charge of herself. She controls her own destiny. The bad side is that Griet never sees the true love of her life again, because they go about their separate ways and he eventually dies. Pieter is a person that Griet uses to get away from the memories of Vermeer, but no matter what she does, she will always remember the warmth of Vermeer's body in the winter, the feel of his hands upon hers, and the touch of his fingers upon her lips.