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The Necklace

From the short story
La Parure by Guy de Maupassant

Adapted by
Nikki Harmon

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The Necklace

by Nikki Harmon

CHARACTERS

2 W/1 M

MATHILDE LOISEL: *A woman born into a family of government clerks with no dowry, no future and feeling that the advantages of the rich and gracious life should have been hers.*

HENRI LOISEL: *A minor civil servant at the Ministry of Education very much in love with his wife.*

MADAME FORESTIER: *A rich friend of Mathilde's.*

SETTING/TIME

Unit set – a simple Paris apartment that by props and lighting becomes a run-down garret, an upscale apartment, and all the streets of Paris - 1880's.

GLOSSARY

Bastille: *A fortress-prison in Paris, known formally as Bastille Saint-Antoine—best known today because of the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution. Known today as Bastille Day.*

Centième: *A French coin; 1/100 of a Franc. (see note below re: francs)*

C'est absolument impossible!: *It's absolutely impossible!*

Countertenor: *Male voice with a range above a tenor.*

500 Francs (The “s” is silent): *The franc was the French currency prior to the Euro.*

Île du Diable: *Devil's Island; the Penal colony in French Guiana.*

Immédiatement: *Immediately.*

Je t'aime: *I love you.*

Ma chère: *My dear.*

Magnifique: *Magnificent.*

Mon Dieu!: *My God!*

Mon petite chou: *My little cabbage; a term of endearment.*

Pas de tout, de tout, de tout-de-tout!!!: *Not at all, at all, at all, at all!!!*

Pâtisserie: *Pastry shop.*

Rue de Faubourg St-Honoré: *A Paris street known for expensive shops.*

Sou: *Term for a franc; in this case it means a small amount.*

Vin ordinaire: *Ordinary table wine.*

The Necklace

by Nikki Harmon

A Play in One Act

SETTING: *MATHILDE and Henri's simple apartment, which later on becomes a run-down garret; an upscale apartment and all the streets of Paris in the 1880's, open enough to allow the characters to be in different parts of Paris by merely turning or moving a few steps.*

AT RISE: *MATHILDE LOISEL is at home, admiring herself in a full length mirror.*

MATHILDE

I have pearls for teeth and sapphires for eyes. There is no one in the whole of Paris who would deny that my hair is the finest and softest of any woman in all of the city. Finer than the finest Chinese silk, woven from the most perfect silk worm. That my feet are the tiniest, most perfect feet in all of France. In all of Europe. In all the world! That my hands are the daintiest, my mouth, like a rose bud at its most fragrant. That my whole self is . . . magnifique! Before my marriage to Henri, men waited for days on end merely to catch a glimpse of my soft skin, my gentle hands, and the hope of a smile from my perfect lips. And the ones I did not chose, they would return day after day, hoping I would chose them to be the one I might smile upon, if only for a moment. Yes! I could have had my choice of men. Any man I wanted . . . If only I had been rich.

HENRI LOISEL ENTERS SL carrying a tattered briefcase.

HENRI

I have a surprise, ma chère Mathilde. A *very* special surprise. One you will never guess. Not in ten thousand lifetimes! Twenty or even *thirty thousand!*

MATHILDE

You've copied your voice into one of those speaking machines, and spent our next week's grocery money to do so.

HENRI looks sad. It's an old argument.

I knew it. I knew it! I can tell by the way you hang your head. Henri, if you have wasted a single centième of your hard earned money on that silly dream of yours...

HENRI

It's not a silly dream.

MATHILDE

...that you will one day sing at La Scala!? At *La Scala*, like Felice Varesi!

HENRI

Varesi is a baritone. *I am a...*

MATHILDE

...man who cannot sing any better than the man with the monkey in the Place de la Concorde!

HENRI

The Monkey Man is a *Countertenor*.

MATHILDE

(Folding her arms like the period at the end of an argument)

Who will *also* never sing at La Scala!

HENRI

(Waving a large envelope)

You haven't yet guessed my a surprise, ma chère.

MATHILDE

(Grabbing the envelope)

A silk envelope with a gold crest? Why didn't you tell me right away? How could you let me go on talking when you had something so important to show me?...and our names written right on it...in gold leaf no less! I don't know anyone who has ever had their names written in gold leaf. Non! Not one single person...ever.

HENRI

Mathilde...the envelope.

MATHILDE

First I must read our names out loud. *(Reading)* Monsieur et Madame Loisel. *(Sighs)* There's a different sound when it's written in gold. *(Sniffing at it)* ...and with just the slightest hint of scent. Not too much. Just enough. Someone very important wrote this. I can tell.

HENRI

Are you ever going to open it?

MATHILDE

Envelopes such as this demand respect. You don't open such an envelope the way you do a butcher's bill. *(Taking a deep breath; opening the envelope; reading)* "Le Ministre de l'Éducation et Madame Georges Ramponneau request the honor of the company of Monsieur et Madame Loisel at a formal reception and grand ball in honor of The Grand Duchess Olga Feodorovna, and her daughter, The Grand Duchess Anastasia Mikhailovna, to be held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Monday, Eighteen January."

*HENRI beams with pride but
MATHILDE breaks into tears and throws
down the invitation.*

MATHILDE (Cont'd)

How could you do this to me? How could you? Have I not been a good wife to you? Have I not been faithful and caring? Have I not been everything a wife could be?

HENRI

(Carefully picking up the invitation)

Yes, of course you have. You are the most perfect wife a man could ever ask for. I could not wish for a better wife.

MATHILDE

Do you love me?

HENRI

Yes. Of course I do. You know I do. More than anything in the world.

MATHILDE

Then how could you have ever done such a thing to me? How?! How?! *How could you do this to me??!*

HENRI

You're always saying we never go anywhere. Now we have an invitation to go somewhere better than anywhere we have ever dreamt of going, and you act as if I'd plunged a dagger into your heart.

MATHILDE

You don't understand!

HENRI

I am the only one in my entire department who was given an invitation. Not even Honoré, who's been in the department twenty years longer than anyone else, and now my wife doesn't want to go.

MATHILDE

Can't you think of me for once?

HENRI

I *was* thinking of you. I *am* thinking of you. I am *always* thinking of you.

MATHILDE cries.

Why on earth are you crying?

MATHILDE

Look at me!

HENRI

Yes?

MATHILDE

What do you see?

HENRI

My wife. I see my beautiful, wonderful, lovely wife who I love more than anything in the world. I see her crying and I have no idea why.

MATHILDE

My dress!

HENRI

Yes?

MATHILDE

Is this the kind of dress I can wear to a grand ball?

HENRI

I think it's a very nice dress. I've always liked it.

MATHILDE

The concierge wouldn't even open the door for us. We'd be sent to the side entrance. "There goes the poor civil servant and his even poorer wife." Is that what you want?

HENRI

What about the blue dress you wear to the movies each week? The one with the little lace collar. That's a pretty dress.

MATHILDE

I can't wear that! Not to a ball. In the movies we sit in the dark, and when we leave why do you think I always want to be the last ones out?

HENRI

Are we always the last ones out?

MATHILDE

Henri! You never see *anything*!

HENRY

But . . .

MATHILDE

And, if someone is still in the lobby, then I press my purse on the left side so they won't see the holes I've darned, and put my hand on the right side to cover the faded spots from too many washings. Too many washings from too many wearings, Henri, because this is the only dress I own that is half decent. (*Crying harder*)

HENRI

Don't cry, mon peite chou.¹ It'll be alright.

MATHILDE

Give the invitation away. Give it to someone whose wife has a dress to wear because yours has nothing but a rag.

HENRI

How much would a new dress cost? One that would make you happy?

MATHILDE

Four hundred francs.

HENRI

That much for a dress?.

MATHILDE starts crying again.

Please don't cry. I'll give you the four hundred francs. I'll give it to you because I love you, but please buy something that will last a long time.

MATHILDE

Je t'aime!²

MATHILDE throws her arms around HENRI and they kiss, and then She starts to cry again.

HENRI

Now what's the matter?

MATHILDE

I have no jewelry. Not a single diamond or emerald. Not a pearl or a sapphire. I have nothing! Not even a tiny gold clip to wear in my hair. How can I wear an evening gown without jewelry? People would know we didn't belong there. They would know we were poor and laugh at us. I couldn't stand it if they laughed at us. Non, non. We can't go to the ball. It's utterly impossible! Take the invitation back. Say that I am sick. That my mother's aunt's son is dying of a terrible incurable disease, and I must help care for him. Tell them anything, only take the invitation back and never mention it again. Never! Never! *Never!* mention it again, or I shall cry until the day I die. Do you hear me, Henri? Never, never, never, because if I hear it again I *will* die.

HENRI

You could wear flowers. Rich women wear them behind their ears and tied to their wrists, and some even hang them around their necks. You'd be in style and it'd only cost a few sou.

¹ "My little cabbage." A term of endearment. (*pronounced shoo*)

² I love you.

MATHILDE

Don't you know anything? *Everyone* knows that under those flowers the women wear diamonds and pearls. If I wore flowers without jewelry I'd be laughed at. They'd point and laugh and say, "Look, there's a woman whose husband could only afford flowers." I'd be so embarrassed I'd die. I'd die, I tell you. I'd simply die. Non, non. We can't go to the ball. There is no way that can ever happen. C'est absolument impossible!³

HENRI

But . . .

MATHILDE

Non! Pas de tout, de tout, de tout-de-tout!!!⁴

HENRI

What about your friend, Madame Forestier? She'd lend you some of her jewelry. She's rich. She must have diamonds and pearls enough for four balls. Ask her as friend to friend. I'm sure she will lend you anything you wish.

MATHILDE

Of course! I had forgotten about Jeanne. She is a good enough friend; she'd understand. She'd never laugh at me. I'll go to her at once. Oh, Henri, it's going to be the most perfect evening ever.

They kiss. MATHILDE crosses to Madame Forestier's apartment as HENRI EXITS.

And I'll buy the dress I saw last week in the window of that little shop on rue de Faubourg St-Honoré.⁵ The one with the pretty sleeves and the lace tie. And shoes! I'll need shoes. But how am I going to get shoes *and* a dress out of four hundred francs?! . . . The grocery money. I'll take that and water the stew for a week. With an extra onion it won't matter. And I'll need gloves, too. Long white ones. Jeanne has a pair. I've seen her wear them. She'll lend me hers and no one will laugh at me. Not one person, because no one laughs at people who look rich.

MADAME FORESTIER ENTERS USR with several velvet jewelry boxes.

MADAME FORESTIER

Choose, chéri. Whatever you want.

MATHILDE

(Opening each box)

The pearls are lovely and the Venetian cross is so beautiful with its rubies, and the gold chains are so elegant. I can't make up my mind. *(Opening the red velvet box)* Oh, Jeanne! This is

³ It's absolutely impossible!

⁴ An expression said rapidly, and meaning "Not at all, at all, at all-at-all!"

⁵ The Paris street known for expensive stores.

MATHILDE (Cont'd)

the most beautiful necklace I have ever seen. The diamonds look like raindrops and the clasp ...I've never seen a diamond that lovely, and that large. Will you lend me this, alone? It's all I'll need, just this magnificent necklace.

MADAME FORESTIER

Certainly.

MATHILDE

Merci, Jeanne!! Merci beaucoup, my sweet Jeanne.

*MATHILDE hugs MADAME
FORESTIER kissing her on both cheeks.*

I'll be the most beautiful woman at the ball, and it will be all because of you! Wait until Henri sees how beautiful I am! He will be so proud of me!

*We Hear Symphonie Fantastique, Op.
14: II Un Bal, by Hector Berlioz,⁶ as
MATHILDE EXITS SR clutching the
necklace and the box as MADAME
FORESTIER EXITS SL.*

*HENRI ENTERS wearing a jacket. The
Lights C/F into a deep evening glow –
The Music Fades to a low level under the
following.*

HENRI

Mathilde! Mathilde! Hurry, you'll catch cold standing in the hall. And close the door. I can feel the night chill all the way in here. *(Taking off his jacket and calling offstage)* What an evening! I've never seen so many important people all in one place, at one time and heard so many important conversations. Everyone had something more important to say than the next one, and I was there to hear it all! And once, or maybe it was even twice. Yes, I'm sure it was twice, someone turned to me and asked, "Don't you think so?" and I nodded my head, yes, and they turned back and said, "See, he agrees." Me! My opinion was asked for. A thing like that has never happened before. What an evening! And the food. So much, and so many different kinds. I could have tried everything there was and still not have eaten one thing I'd ever eaten before. I don't know what I liked best. The raspberry and orange crepes suzettes. The tiny little round beef pastries. And the caviar! The caviar was so wonderful, but I don't know if it was just because I've never eaten caviar before or if it truly was the finest caviar in the whole of France. What do you think Mathilde? Did you like the caviar best? Mathilde? Mathilde, are you coming in?

6 Suggestion: Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique; Copyright: 2006 High Definition Classics; Tbilisi Symphony Orchestra, Andreas Spörri conducting

MATHILDE (Off)

I just want to look at myself in the mirror one last time. I want to turn around and around and keep dancing and spinning and twirling and never ever have to wear anything but this wonderful, beautiful dress again.

HENRI

And you deserve to, my sweet Mathilde, but close the door, first. The draft is terrible.

MATHILDE (Off)

I will, Henri, in just a moment.

HENRI

Of all the other women there, you were the most beautiful. Everyone said so. Everyone wanted to dance with you. The Prime Minister himself told his aide who told the Minister of Education, who told me that the Prime Minister thought you were very charming. Those were his exact words. "Very charming." Imagine that. Mathilde? Did you hear me? Mathilde?

MATHILDE (Off)

Yes, dear. You said I was charming.

HENRI

The Minister talked to me just as if I was somebody. And his wife wanted to know where you bought your dress. Imagine that! And hers must have cost five times four hundred francs and *she* wanted to know where *you* bought yours. It's just like I've always said. You needn't have money to have taste. Right, chéri? Like I've always said . . . Chéri? What are you still doing out there that is taking so long?

MUSIC ABRUPTLY OUT.

MATHILDE (Off)

I LOST IT!!!

HENRI

Lost what?

MATHILDE

(Runs in)

It must have fallen off in that awful carriage. That driver hit every hole in the street, and he drove too fast. I told you to tell him to slow down. You remember. I told you to tell him not to drive so fast.

HENRI

If you hadn't rushed us out of the Ministry so fast we could have gotten one of the ones lined up in front and we wouldn't have had to ride in one of those shoddy ones by the Seine.

MATHILDE

And let the other women see I only a cotton coat and not one of silk or velvet?! Never! It would have ruined everything. Tomorrow that'd be all they remembered. The Civil Servant's wife and her plain coat. If I'd had a silk coat I'd never have lost it!

HENRI

Lost what?

MATHILDE

IT! IT! I LOST *IT*!

HENRI

What?!

MATHILDE

The necklace!!! The *diamond* necklace. I've lost Madame Forestier's necklace!

HENRI

That's not possible! You had it when you left the Ministry.

MATHILDE

Yes, I felt it around my neck while I was in the vestibule just before we left.

HENRI

Then you must have dropped it when you were dancing in the hall, just now. Go back and look. It probably just fell under the table and is lying in a shadow.

MATHILDE

I looked. I crawled around on the floor and pulled up the rug and looked in places I haven't stood in, in months and it's not there. It's not anywhere! What are we going to do? What are we going to do? How can I tell her I lost her necklace? She'll think I stole it and call the police. They'll put me in prison! I'll be shipped off the Île du Diable, or worse.

HENRI

There is nothing worse. But there is no need to talk of such things. (*Putting his arm around her*) That will never happen. I won't let it.

MATHILDE

Then what are we to do?!

HENRI

Maybe it fell off in the carriage. Yes! Yes! That's probably exactly what happened. It was a *very* bumpy ride. Remember, I said that and you said I was right. That it seemed as if the driver was finding every single hole on the Boulevard. Yes, I remember that distinctly. I said it was bumpy and you said, "Yes, very bumpy." So, it's probably on the floor of that carriage. Right there, where it must have fallen off your neck. (*Putting on his coat*) Do you remember the number? I'll track down the carriage and find it. There can't be that many carriages. Tell me the number and I will find it.

MATHILDE

I don't remember.

HENRI

What did the driver look like? I think he had dark hair. Or blond. But not too blond. He was sitting, so I don't know if he was tall. Was he tall? He could have been tall. Do you remember?

MATHILDE

(Sobbing)

I don't remember. I don't remember anything.

HENRI

Maybe it's not in the carriage. Maybe it fell into the street. I remember the streets. Yes, I remember them. I remember exactly. Thirty-Seven quai d'Orsay, to Boulevard Raspail, across the Seine, through the Place de la Concorde, to Rue de Rivoli, and finally Rue de Castiglione.

MATHILDE

Where are you going?!

HENRI

To walk every foot between here and the Ministry. It has to be out there.

HENRI runs DS into the "streets of Paris" asking "everyone" in sight if they have seen the necklace, pointing this way and that, to all the possible places the necklace might have fallen, or rolled or was kicked aside, as MATHILDE sinks into a chair, sobbing. The Lights in the apartment Dim to Moonlight that Slowly Rises into morning, and HENRI grows more frantic and more tired.

MATHILDE's still sitting, rocking back and forth in shock as HENRI's pace slows with the sadness and realization that he's no closer to the necklace than when he started.

HENRI

Have you seen it? Last night my wife lost a necklace. It is her friend's necklace. Have you seen a necklace lying on the streets? Perhaps, if you think back, maybe a glimmer of moonlight on a shiny speck of something caught your eye. You walked past it and thought nothing of it. Please! Madam, Monsieur, please. You, Madam, perhaps you might remember? Or you, Monsieur, did you see a diamond necklace? Any one, please. I *must* find it. Please help me find the necklace. It is very very important that we find the necklace. Won't someone please help me? Someone must have seen it.

HENRI crosses back into the apartment, exhausted.

HENRI

Nothing.

MATHILDE

You looked everywhere?!

HENRI

Everywhere. I went to the police station. To the newspapers. I stopped every carriage I saw. I asked every person, every child, and they saw nothing. The police didn't take me seriously. The carriage drivers all said they would tell the other drivers to look for the necklace. *They* believed me. It seems the rich are always losing their jewelry and when the drivers return it to them, they give them handsome rewards. I don't know where I'd get such a reward if they did find it. And the newspapers said that if they ran a story about it everyone in Paris would know about our troubles, and that would mean Madame Forestier would know, too.

MATHILDE

We're ruined!

HENRI

Write your friend and tell her you broke the clasp and you're having it repaired, and that it'll take a week. By then someone'll have turned it in. People are naturally honest. I'm sure they'll take it to the police when they find it. We just have to wait.

MATHILDE

She'll think I stole it.

HENRI

Not if you write the letter. No one would write something if it wasn't true. It's a fact. Everyone knows that.

MATHILDE

(Searching for paper and pen)

You're right. But it'll have to be simple and short, as if I jotted it down without a care. That way she'll believe it. And I am sure she'll be very glad she's getting a new catch for the necklace. That I was such a good friend that I would look out for her necklace as if it were mine. Yes, you're absolutely right. A letter is absolutely the right thing to do. *(Writing)* I will explain how careful I was with her necklace, but that the catch snagged on my shawl, and snapped off. And that I would never want to return her jewelry to her broken, and that is simply why I have delayed in its return. So that it would returned in the same condition that I borrowed it and not until I have restored...it...to...it's...original beauty...Your Good Friend, Mathilde. *(Sealing the envelope)* There!

HENRI

Give me the note and I'll post it, and we can start looking again. Maybe it slid under a rock and it's just sitting there waiting for us to find it. It's very possible that could have happened. Yes. Yes. I am absolutely possible it could have happened. Rocks are known to roll on top of things all the time. And things are always hiding under them.

MATHILDE crosses US and changes out of her evening dress and into a house dress, as HENRI returns to the streets to search again.

HENRI (Cont'd)

Or Maybe it got kicked behind a tree by the Seine. Children are always playing there and one of them probably just kicked it behind a tree. Or maybe it's buried in the snow and no one'll know about it until Spring. Or a dog could have found it and carried it home, or maybe he buried it. It's possible. Anything is possible. . . . It has to be.

MATHILDE turns DS. She's markedly more tired and tries to think of all of the possibilities, while HENRI continues searching all of Paris.

MATHILDE

(To herself)

Maybe the necklace caught on the wheels of a carriage and dragged it back to the stable. Maybe it's lying at the bottom of a pond all the way out in the Bois. Carriages take couples out to the Bois all the time. It could be lying there right now. Or, maybe by now it's in front of the Gare du Nord and someone's suitcase hooked it and carried it all the way to Switzerland, and now it's sitting in a corner of a hotel room in Lucerne. Or maybe that suitcase went to Spain, and a child buried it in a sand pile as found treasure on the beach on Costa Brava. Or, maybe the wheels of a cart in Les Halles ran over it, and the necklace was caught up on them, and dragged for a while, until it snapped off, and was flung into the Seine and was washed out to sea, and a fisherman caught it in his net, or it's been swallowed up by a big fish, maybe even a whale or a dolphin, who's on his way to the Indian Ocean... Maybe there are too many maybes.

HENRI enters the apartment.

HENRI

We have to replace the necklace.

MATHILDE

It was a *diamond* necklace!

HENRI

Mathilde, it's not out there. Do you understand? I've looked everywhere.

MATHILDE

Maybe . . .

HENRI

Everywhere. Now give me the box. The name of the Jeweler's on the top. They probably have other's like it. She'll never know the difference. Rich people have so much jewelry that it all looks alike to them.

HENRI and MATHILDE cross to the Jeweler's shop.

MATHILDE

You're probably right.

HENRI

And he'll let me pay him on time. I have a good job. I'm a trustworthy person. He'll see that. Everything will be alright.

HENRI turns US into the shop as MATHILDE holds her breath. A moment later He turns back.

MATHILDE

Did he have one? Does it look just the same? Everything thing is all right, isn't it, Henri? Please say it is.

HENRI

He only sold the box, not the necklace.

MATHILDE

Go back. He must know who bought the box and that person will know who sold the necklace. Go back, Henri, and ask him. I'm sure he'll know.

HENRI

The boxes are sold in cartons of hundreds to shops all over Paris. We'll just have to keep looking.

MATHILDE

There are so many shops. We'll die of old age before we find a necklace that'll match.

HENRI

We will find one if we have to go to every single shop and back again the day after, and the next day after that, until we see the right one with the same necklace. We won't give up looking.

They walk the streets looking.

Perhaps in that shop.

MATHILDE

Or that one over there.

HENRI

And there's one over there we haven't gone into, there, across the street. And two across from the fountain near the Place de la Concorde. They're sure to have the necklace. I think I even saw one in the window the other week that resembled it perfectly. Yes, I am almost certain of it.

MATHILDE

And the one in the Place Vendôme.. They'll have one there. There are so many rich people who live there, they would need a shop like that for all those people. Rich people don't like to travel too far to buy things.

HENRI

Or along the Boulevard de la Madeleine, near the Opera, where the flowers are. There must be three or four all on the same street.

MATHILDE

Yes, that sounds like where she would've bought it. I'm sure of it.

HENRI

You're probably right. The next shop will most definitely be the right one.

*The Lights X/F into Evening and both
MATHILDE and HENRI are exhausted
as they start home.*

MATHILDE

We've seen so many necklaces, I can't remember what the real one looked like any more. Did the stones have little points or were they round? I think they were round. Non. Non. Not round. I'm sure they had points. Or were they square? Non, round. Oh, Henri, I can't remember anymore! I can't remember at all.

HENRI

You're just tired, that's all. We'll get some sleep and then we'll go out again.

MATHILDE

It's all my fault. We wouldn't be in all this trouble if I hadn't been so vain. It's all my fault. I should have worn flowers. You are always so practical and I am always so . . .

HENRI

There! In that shop! Look! Can you see it. In the window right by the set of diamond rings. It's a perfect match.

MATHILDE

WHAT SHOP?! WHERE?!

HENRI

There. By the girl with the rose cart. See! It's right in the middle of the window! She bought it just where you said she would.

*MATHILDE crosses closer to the
“window.”*

MATHILDE

I think you're right, Henri. *(Getting a closer look)* Yes! Yes, it's perfect. I remember it now. *I remember.* It's exactly the same. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind.

HENRI turns US and He's “in” the shop.

Quick, before someone else sees the necklace and buys it. Hurry, Henri. Hurry! We're too close now to lose it again.

*A moment later He turns back with a
necklace.*

HENRI

The jeweler says it's worth forty thousand francs, but we can have it for thirty-six thousand. I signed a note and he let me have it.

MATHILDE

Our lives will end before we can pay that much.

HENRI

I made an arrangement with him. If we find the necklace in a month's time we can return this one and he will give us back thirty-four thousand francs. It's a fair bargain.

MATHILDE

It's a death sentence. They will restore the Bastille, stone by stone, and we will be thrown into its dungeons, to live out our lives in a debtors prison.

HENRI

Mathilde.

MATHILDE

At the very least, our lives will be eaten up repaying this debt. How could you have made such a terrible arrangement with that man?

HENRI

What choice do we have?

MATHILDE

But where's the money going to come from? We have nothing. Not a sou to squeeze another one out of.

HENRI

We can borrow from our friends. Surely they will...

MATHILDE

Let our friends know what's happened? Impossible! They would laugh at us. We'd never be able to show ourselves on the streets again. I would be the laughing stock of all of Paris. The woman who lost a diamond necklace and had to beg to pay it back. I don't know what I was thinking when I went to Jeanne. I'm a silly vain woman and all this is my fault. I wouldn't blame you if you left me and never came back.

HENRI

Mon Cher Mathilde. I love you and I would never leave. (*Kissing her forehead*) Never.

MATHILDE

But what are we going to do?

HENRI

We'll just tell everyone we sent our savings to my second cousin's son in Montpellier to pay a legal bill. They'll believe that. Lawyers are very expensive and people are always going into debt to pay their bills. It happens all the time. And people are always lending other people money when they need it. It's a very believable thing.

MATHILDE

And if our friends don't have enough money?

HENRI

We'll borrow from the money lenders.

MATHILDE

Then we'll have sold our very selves. The interest alone will be a debt for our children's children to pay!

HENRI

If we both work more hours I'm sure, in five or ten...or many fifteen years, we'll have paid it off.

MATHILDE

I only wish I could...

HENRI

We have no other choice. (*Handing her the necklace*) Take it to Madame Forestier, and hurry. I don't want to look at it a single minute more.

MATHILDE puts the necklace into the velvet box and crosses to Madame Forestier's apartment as HENRI crosses back home with bowed shoulders.

MADAME FORESTIER ENTERS.

MATHILDE

I've brought back the necklace. It was so kind of you to have let me borrow it. It is such a beautiful...

MADAME FORESTIER

You should have brought it sooner. I might have wanted to wear it. It was very inconsiderate of you to have waited so long, Mathilde. Very inconsiderate...

MATHILDE

But I told you in the note. I had to have the clasp repaired.

MADAME FORESTIER

Yes, but still, I wasn't expecting to be without it for so long when I lent it to you. I had to wear the ruby and pearl necklace in its place to the Prince's dinner last night and simply *everyone* remembered I'd worn the same necklace just the month before. It was very embarrassing. Very embarrassing and it was all your fault, Mathilde. All *your* fault. I don't know how I will ever be able to forgive you. But, at least, I have it back now. And that's what's important.

MADAME FORESTIER turns sharply and EXITS USR, without opening the box and MATHILDE returns home.

HENRI

Did she know the difference?

MATHILDE

She didn't open the box. She never even looked at it. I could have brought her pebbles from the Seine for all she knew.

HENRI

That's something we can be thankful for. If she'd looked closely she might have noticed. Seen that it wasn't the same necklace and then where would it have been?

MATHILDE

What do we do now?

HENRI

Now we repay the debt. Now we work as long as it takes to pay the grocer his three thousand francs, the man down the hall his two hundred francs, and everyone else in the entire city, until every sou of the debt every centième of the interest is paid.

MATHILDE

We'll have to move won't we? To leave our home.

HENRI

I'll find someone to trade us a room for work.

MATHILDE

And I could scrub their floors, do all their cleaning. I can wash dishes and scrub their floors, do all their cleaning. And the dishes at the bistro. Repair clothes. I know how to make alterations, how to sew patches. And I could take in laundry. That's something I could do in the room. I'll get the money somehow.

HENRI

We'll do it together.

MATHILDE

Je t'aime, Henri.

HENRI

And I you, mon chère.

MATHILDE folds up the table shawls, as HENRI folds the afghans, packing them into a wicker basket that's half filled with shirts, revealing, under the coverings, old furniture to suggest a different room during the following.

MATHILDE

This shawl's always been on the table. My mother gave it to us. Remember? It's all she had but she said it looked better here. *(Near tears)* And your grandmother's afghan. Was it our first or second anniversary she gave it to us?

HENRI

This new room'll be fine. You'll see.

MATHILDE

(Sadly)

Yes. It will do just fine.

HENRI

(Trying to cheer her up)

There is even music. Someone is practicing. Can you hear it? A violin, the bow still new to his hands. And over there, through that window. Singing. Such sweet singing. See Mathilde, we are surrounded by beauty.

The furniture has been rearranged and they're now in the new room.

MATHILDE

It's smaller than I thought it would be. And darker. And colder. And there're mice, there, in the corner. And what is that moving over there? There. Behind the chest. Oh, Henri, I did this. I brought us to this.

HENRI

We are on the fifth floor, far above the street, so it will be quiet. You know how the carriage horses used to wake you at night. And look. Not a single leak in the roof. And there, a good strong stove for burning wood. You catch cold so easily. The store will keep you warm. (*Running out of things to cheer her up*) It's important to have a good stove.

MATHILDE

Yes, Henri, it is. But wood costs money, and I have a warm cloth coat. I'll be all right. I just need to button it all the way up and I won't feel a single breeze of the wind. (*Trying to find something to like about it*) The skylight's big. The sun'll brighten up the room. And the sink is large enough to wash a full load of clothes, and the ironing board'll fit right here. It's the perfect space for it. (*Her voice breaks*) Henri, this is all my fault. Everything is my fault.

HENRI

It'll be all right.

MATHILDE turns US, her posture aging as she lifts the basket. Time has passed and the labor makes them both older than their years. HENRI takes two ledgers from his briefcase, and hunched, over, begins working on them.

The grocer said we could pay off what we owe him if I do his books. It will take me perhaps an extra half hour, an hour at the most. And he has talked to the baker and she has agreed to let me do her books, too.

MATHILDE

When will you have the time, working at the Ministry all day and doing everyone else's books at night? When will you sleep?

HENRI

I can do the grocer's books when I return from the Ministry and before I work on the Bistro's books. And the baker's books, I can do those afterwards.

MATHILDE

But that's when we eat.

HENRI

It means an extra two francs. (*Putting his arm around her*) It will be fine. You'll see... You'll see.

MATHILDE

If I hang another line to dry on I could take in more washing. We still have some room next to the bed, in the corner. (*Growing older*) See this shirt. It belongs to Madame Ettiene. Do you remember her? She used to sell fresh fruit in Les Halles every morning, and now she's married to the First Assistant to the Aide to the Minister of Protocol. She pays the most because she remembers what it's like to be poor. She was always kind, Madame Ettiene.

MATHILDE (Cont'd)

When she worked for the old grocer, she'd give women who couldn't pay their bills, and extra carrot for stewing, when she knew all the grocer was going to do with it was feed it to the dogs in the alley. I think he knew about the carrots, and just looked the other way. What did he care anyway, she used to say. And besides he feeds the dogs such big meaty bones, one or two less carrots won't mean anything to the dogs. With all that meat, they wouldn't have room for the carrots anyway.

MATHILDE ages more as she sorts the laundry and begins ironing. Her voice is harsher, her hair's not as neat. Her smile's been replaced with a scowl. HENRI, too, has aged beyond his years, with stooped shoulders and tired voice.

HENRI

That was good of her.

MATHILDE

I've asked to clean the offices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Aides. The other women who clean say that if they pass you in the halls they sometimes give you a sou. At first I was afraid he might recognize me from the ball. I wouldn't want you to be ashamed. To have the Minister see you on the street and think, "There's that civil servant whose wife has to scrub floors." But you don't have to worry. I always wear a scarf, and when I'm on my knees you can't see my face at all. He'll never know it's me. And we could use the extra sou...Henri? Did you hear me? Henri?

HENRI

Yes. I hear you.

MATHILDE

Is it all right if I scrub the Minister's floor? The regular woman is in Arles taking care of her sick mother, and I can have her position for a whole month. Longer, even, if her mother takes a turn for the worse.

HENRI

Mathilde! How can you say such a thing? Wishing the poor woman's mother more sickness.

MATHILDE

I don't know. I don't know anything any more. I think of nothing but how much money I can make to get us out of this never ending debt that I brought upon us. I see nothing any more but the debt. I pass a pâtisserie and see a woman with her basket filled with croissants and I cry. All I have set on our table are the hard ends of Mme. Dupont's baguettes that she leaves wrapped in a napkin at our door, each morning, because she thinks that it might be the only bread we have for the day. I can barely face her in the street for fear she sees that I know that it's she who is leaving the food. Oh, Henri, this is all my fault, and I have ruined both of our lives over my silly vanity.

HENRI

We will do what we need to do. That is all we can do. Things are what they are. That is the way it is. That is the way it will always be. We can only do what we can to make the best of what we have.

MATHILDE nods her head and slowly goes back to ironing.

(With sadness) You're probably right. He won't recognize you with the scarf.

MATHILDE continues ironing and HENRI continues on the books in silence until...

MATHILDE

The stew has meat in it today.

HENRI

How?

MATHILDE

I paid the butcher all we owed him and he gave it to me. I think he pities us.

HENRI

I won't accept charity, Mathilde.

MATHILDE

It's just a small piece.

HENRI

We'll have meat again, and wine, too. And not just vin ordinaire⁷ but *good* wine, like before. But it will be because we paid for it.

MATHILDE

But Henri. It's *meat*.

HENRI

Keep a careful record so we can pay him back. Make sure you weigh it and write down the exact weight. And the day, too. We should pay interest on the price of the meat, too. A loan without interest is never fully paid.

MATHILDE

Yes, Henri.

⁷ ordinary table wine

HENRI goes back to the ledgers sadder than before and the years continue as the Lights X/F into Dawn.

MATHILDE (Cont'd)

And you have to ask more for what you do. Two francs a ledger is not enough. You are worth more than that. You are worth three. Non, four francs at least. Maybe even five!

HENRI

Two is what they give me.

MATHILDE

It'll be over soon, and we'll never have to live like this again. Tomorrow we repay our last franc. I promise you Henri, never, never again.

HENRI

Yes. Soon.

MATHILDE

And they'll all have their money and we will live again in our lovely little apartment, and I won't mind that the horses wake me up, and I will never care what anyone thinks of my dress or if I have flowers on my wrist or diamonds. It'll all be as it used to be, and all of this horrible nightmare will be over and done with, and we will think no more of it. I promise, Henri. I promise you this with all my heart.

HENRI

Yes, as it used to be.

They Both work in silence as time passes as Night turns to a Bright Sunny Day.

MATHILDE turns US, and puts on a scarf. When she turns back she's stooped and older.

Where are you going?

MATHILDE

For a walk on the Champs-Élysées. It's Sunday and I need to walk. I need to see people. I need to feel, if only for an hour, that I am like other women. That I have so much money that I can afford to spend a whole hour doing nothing but walking. Henri, I need this.

HENRI

(Sadly nodding)

If you see Monsieur Magrett, tell him I will have his books finished tomorrow and I will bring them to him.

MATHILDE

Tomorrow. I will tell him.

MATHILDE puts on her shawl, and slowly crosses DS as MADAME FORESTIER ENTERS, and MATHILDE sees her.

(To herself)

Jeanne! How can I face her? What if the necklace we gave her is not as much alike as we thought it was? There could have been a blemish on one of the stones and one day she noticed it, and realized that it was not hers. What if she's known the difference all along and took pity on me and that's why she never said anything? Non. I must be strong and face her. Besides, it's almost paid for. Pretty soon we'll have no more debts and we will be friends again. I must face her and tell her everything. Now I can finally stand and admit everything. She'll understand. I know she will. *(To MADAME FORESTIER)* Bonjour, Jeanne.

MADAME FORESTIER

I'm sorry. I do not know you, Madame.

MATHILDE

Yes, you do.

MADAME FORESTIER

You're mistaken. Please let me pass.

MATHILDE

I am Mathilde.

MADAM FORESTIER

Move away from me immédiatement, or I shall call for a gendarme and he will arrest you and take you to prison where people like you belong. Now, please move out of my way or I shall have no choice . . .

MATHILDE

It is me. Mathilde Loisel.

MADAME FORESTIER

Impossible. I know Mathilde Loisel. Mathilde Loisel is my friend. I have know her for a lifetime. She is my same age. You, you are...

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes