THE NECKLACE

By Burton Bumgarner

Aadapted from the story by Guy de Maupassant

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Charleston, South Carolina, sometime after the Civil War. A poor woman borrows a diamond necklace from a wealthy friend to wear at a party. She hopes that this outing will change the circumstances of her life and fortune, and that the other guests will see that she and her husband really belong within the ranks of the upper classes. But things go awry, and she loses the necklace. Pride will not allow her to tell her friend of the loss. Instead she has another necklace made to match the one that was lost, and she and her husband spend the next 12 years paying for the replacement. Only after it is paid off do they learn that the necklace, which so controlled their destinies, was not what they believed it to be.

Based on the famous short story by Guy de Maupassant, *The Necklace* tells of the values society places on wealth and status, and the lengths to which some people will go to gain what they think will make them happy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 4 w, 6 flexible, doubling possible)

MATILDA: A woman who envies wealth.
EDWARD: Matilda's husband.
LENORE: Matilda's wealthy friend.
WILLIAM: Lenore's husband.
A WAITER
WOMAN GUEST AT THE PARTY
MAN GUEST AT THE PARTY
A MERCHANT
3 DINERS AT A RESTAURANT
A NANNY
A TAILOR
A YOUNG GIRL

PLACE/TIME

Charleston, South Carolina**.** Some time after the Civil War

SETTING

The play may be performed on a bare stage with props and furniture. A table and chairs are DSL, a park bench is DSR.

PROPS

Baby carriage	Baby doll
Bowl, soup, cup	Envelope with party invitation
2 coffee cups	Jewelry box
Hand mirror	String of pearls, necklaces, rings
Necklace of large stones	Tray and Champagne glasses
Broom and dustpan	Coffee cups
Dinner check	Dollar bill

Jewelry displays, note pad (Jeweler)
Apron, note pad (Waitress), three menus
2 dresses, needle and thread
Bucket and scrubbing brush

THE NECKLACE

(AT RISE: MATILDA and LENORE are seated on a park bench DSL. They are wearing full dresses and sun bonnets and use hand fans. A baby carriage is beside Lenore, and she periodically peeks inside at the sleeping baby. Matilda tries to ignore the baby's presence.)

MATILDA: You are so fortunate, Lenore.
LENORE: And how is that?
MATILDA: You have a beautiful house on the battery, and a wealthy husband. You married into an established family. The cream of society.
LENORE: I have a husband who loves me. Wealthy or not, love is the most important gift. You have a loving husband, too, Matilda. Edward is a wonderful man.
MATILDA: True. But his family is ... average. And I'm afraid they will always be ... average.
LENORE: We've been friends for a very long time. Since we were children. Talk of money makes me uncomfortable.
MATILDA: I apologize. I suppose I've always envied you. When we were children you were so pretty. Much prettier than I.
LENORE: Don't be silly! You were a beautiful young girl. All of the boys thought so. Including William.
MATILDA: I was a fat-cheeked little girl, and a gangly adolescent. *(Lighthearted.)* But I'm not so bad now, am I?
LENORE: You are very beautiful, Matilda. As anyone can see.
MATILDA: The fact remains that you are much prettier than I am, you married into an established family, and now you have a beautiful child. *(MATILDA crosses to the baby carriage and peeks in at the baby. A baby's cry is heard. Matilda jumps back.)*

LENORE: *(Peeks into the baby carriage.)* A beautiful child who needs to get out of this hot sunshine. *(SHE stands.)* I must take her home. It's been a fine afternoon, Matilda. I've enjoyed getting out of the house. *(Hugs MATILDA.)*
MATILDA: Let's meet after lunch tomorrow.
LENORE: I'll have to see. This is the time of year William's family goes to the mountains. To avoid the summer heat. We're leaving within the next week.

(LENORE exits with the baby carriage. MATILDA silently daydreams. EDWARD enters SR and sits at the table DSR. Matilda stands and crosses SR, and exits. LIGHTS cross fade. She enters with a bowl, a spoon and a cup, which she plops down in front of Edward. Her bonnet is gone.)

EDWARD: Ah! This looks delicious! *(HE cautiously sniffs at the bowl.)* What is it?
MATILDA: *(Sitting across from HIM.)* It's the most we can afford.
EDWARD: Hmm. *(Carefully tastes the liquid in the bowl.)* Chicken and rice?
MATILDA: Chicken without rice.
EDWARD: Perhaps a bit of salt may bring out the flavor. *(Reaches for salt.)*
MATILDA: Don't use too much salt. Seasonings are expensive.
EDWARD: Matilda, I may not earn as much money as you'd like, but I do earn enough to buy the occasional chicken or pork chop from the market. And if a chicken or pork chop is too much, there are always potatoes and rutabagas to make soup. And salt is not expensive! We are not so poor as you think.
MATILDA: We ARE poor, Edward! We live in a pauper's house in the worst part of the city. Today I met Lenore on the battery. You remember Lenore? The girl I grew up with? The girl who married your friend William?
EDWARD: I remember Lenore.

MATILDA: Well, we sat there in the heat. Watching the ships in the harbor, wishing for a cool breeze, knowing the weather will be hot for the next four months. I was trying to have a conversation with her, but that baby of her's was a distraction.

EDWARD: Babies have a way of doing that.

MATILDA: Well, do you know what she said? Would you like to know?

EDWARD: Do I have a choice?

MATILDA: She said William's family goes to the mountains in the summer. To avoid the heat of the city. The mountains, Edward! I've never seen the mountains. I can't begin to imagine what they must be like.

EDWARD: I assume they're tall and have lots of trees growing everywhere.

MATILDA: All my life I dreamed of going to the mountains when the summer comes. I've dreamed of a large house south of Broad Street. I dreamed of servants, and weekends in the country, and grand dinners, and parties. And now my friend Lenore has it all, and I have ... *(Looking around.)* this.

EDWARD: *(Disappointed.)* Am I such a disappointment to you?

MATILDA: *(Crossing and placing HER hands on HIS shoulders.)* No, dear. I married you for love.

EDWARD: You could have married William. There was a time when he was in love with you.

MATILDA: *(Dreamily.)* I know. I didn't take him seriously. He isn't at all handsome. But I could overlook his lack of handsomeness.

EDWARD: *(Hurt.)* You sound resentful.

MATILDA: Oh, Edward. I knew you weren't a wealthy man. But with your job at the bank, I thought that there would always be the chance you could become wealthy.

EDWARD: Be patient, Matilda. My day is coming.

MATILDA: You say that over and over. But when?

EDWARD: Soon.

MATILDA: I don't believe you.

EDWARD: I have proof.

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