

'On my account? Whatever do you mean?'

'Do you remember that diamond necklace you lent me to go to the reception at the Ministry?'

'Yes. What about it?'

'Well I lost it.'

'Lost it? But you returned it to me.'

'No, I returned another one just like it. And we've been paying for it these past ten years. You know, it wasn't easy for us. We had nothing... But it's over and done with now, and I'm glad.'

Madame Forestier stopped. 'You mean you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?'

'Yes. And you never noticed the difference, did you? They were exactly alike.' And she smiled a proud, innocent smile.

Madame Forestier looked very upset and, taking both her hands in hers, said:

'Oh, my poor Mathilde! But it was only an imitation necklace. It couldn't have been worth much more than five hundred francs!...'

### UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

The story has a lot in common with the fairytale 'Cinderella', but the outcome is completely different. Everything hinges on the surprise ending, but the effectiveness of this depends on the events which lead up to it and, in particular, on the characters involved. Of these, Madame Loisel is the most important and the most controversial. You will need to understand her character well in order to answer exam questions.

In the first few sentences of the story, you learn that Madame Loisel is young and attractive, and, whilst not rich, she is certainly not poor. Why then, is she 'unhappy all the time'? Copy and complete the table, making a list of the reasons you can find for her unhappiness, using the first section (up to 'tears of sorrow, regret, despair, and anguish').

▼ REASON	SUPPORTING QUOTATION	▼ EFFECT
Her background and family were very ordinary.	'She is one of those who get themselves born the daughters of very minor civil servants.'	She has no possibility of marrying a rich or important man.
She has charm and beauty but is relatively poor.		She feels degraded and undervalued.
She feels she is a victim of the strict order of society.		