



▲ Maupassant's favourite themes include the countryside and daily life, but also pessimism, despair, madness and death.

hierarchy A strict order of importance.

Breton Someone from Brittany, an area of north-western France.

liveried Part of a uniform, usually a servant's uniform.

trinket A small decorative object.

'THE NECKLACE' GUY DE MAUPASSANT

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This story is translated from French. It was written by Guy de Maupassant, who lived from 1850 to 1893 and was famous for his short stories. It is set against the background of 19th century Paris in France, where society was divided into strict social classes. Monsieur and Madame Loisel (the main characters) are not poor, but neither are they rich. They depend on the little money Monsieur Loisel earns from his minor job with the government.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Find out more about Guy de Maupassant. There are many websites giving information about him. His short stories are also available online, such as 'Vendetta' and 'Boule de Suif'.
- 2 Think of a time when you made a mistake that had serious consequences. Who or what was to blame? What lessons did you draw from the experience?

▼ 'THE NECKLACE' BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT

She was one of those pretty, delightful girls who, apparently by some error of Fate, get themselves born the daughters of very minor civil servants. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of meeting some rich, important man who would understand, love, and marry her. So she went along with a proposal made by a junior clerk in the Ministry of Education.

She dressed simply, being unable to afford anything better, but she was every whit as unhappy as any daughter of good family who has come down in the world. Women have neither rank nor class, and their beauty, grace, and charm do service for birthright and connections. Natural guile, instinctive elegance, and adaptability are what determines their place in the hierarchy, and a girl of no birth to speak of may easily be the equal of any society lady.

She was unhappy all the time, for she felt that she was intended for a life of refinement and luxury. She was made unhappy by the run-down apartment they lived in, the peeling walls, the battered chairs, and the ugly curtains. Now all this, which any other woman of her station might never even have noticed, was torture to her and made her very angry. The spectacle of the young Breton peasant girl who did the household chores stirred sad regrets and impossible fancies. She dreamed of silent antechambers hung with oriental tapestries, lit by tall, bronze candelabras, and of two tall footmen in liveried breeches asleep in the huge armchairs, dozing in the heavy heat of a stove. She dreamed of great drawing-rooms dressed with old silk, filled with fine furniture which showed off trinkets beyond price, and of pretty little parlours, filled with perfumes and just made for intimate talk at five in the afternoon with one's closest friends who would be the most famous and sought-after men of the day whose attentions were much coveted and desired by all women.