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Conflict in Guy de Maupassant’s The Necklace

Most stories are made up of three parts namely the introduction, development, and the resolution of a conflict. A conflict is a vital part of any story because it helps in the development of the storyline and it may used to depict the moral of the story. Skrabanek describes a conflict as challenging situation with which the character must contend with (1). In the short story “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant, the protagonist Mathilde goes through various internal and external conflicts. This paper will explore the major conflicts that Mathilde goes through, how these conflicts causes her to change, and the significance of the change she goes through.

Mathilde is introduced a pretty young woman, who hails from a humble background. Her beauty contrasts the economic status of her family. The economic status of Mathilde’s family makes her lack high expectations in life. As a result, she agrees to marry a minor clerk in the Ministry of Education. The first major internal conflict begins after her marriage. While she had come to terms with the economic status of her birth, Mathilda’s ambitions are aroused after her marriage. The narrator indicates that “she was as unhappy as if she had gone through a bankruptcy” (7). This means that, one would have expected Malthilda to be content with the love and the humble life that her husband offeres her, given that she has come from a humble background. On the contrary, Malthilda experiences an internal conflict of a strong desire to be rich. While her beauty would be enough to make her fit into the higher society, she wants to be richer than everyone else. The internal conflict here is the struggle between who she is and who she desires to be. This struggle makes her overambitious, bitter, unhappy, and ungrateful.

For instance, while her husband is grateful for the modest meal of beef stew, Mathilde dreams of a sophisticated feast served on fine dishes, and enjoyed in the company of affluent acquaintances. Also, her husband thinks that she would be overwhelmed by the invitation to the Ministry party. However, the invitation only generates another conflict. While Mathilde would take pleasure going to the party, she wants to be the most beautiful woman in the party, adorned in beautiful and costly cloths and jewels. However, she has none of these things. This only reminds Mathilde how poor she is. She does not recognize her husband’s sacrifice to buy her a dress for the party. She keeps on complaining, and even when the dress is ready, she is still unhappy and bitter that she does not have jewelry to complement her dress.

In order to solve this conflict, Mathilde’s husband suggests that she wears some flowers, which are fashionable at that time of the year. However, Mathilde is not convinced, she says that “there is nothing more humiliating than looking shabby in the company of rich women” (9). This conflict is finally solved when Mathilde’s husband suggest that she should borrow a necklace from her rich friend Mrs. Forrestier. In fact, for an instance Mathilde is able to live her dream for the few hours she attends the party. “She is prettier that anyone else, stylish, graceful, smiling and wild with joy” (9). This is all that wanted; to be above everyone. The conflict between who she is and who she desires to be is resolved, but only for while. The solution to this conflict leads to the major external conflict in the story which is how to replace the necklace before Mrs. Forrestier finds out that she lost it. Instead of being genuine with Mrs. Forrestier, Mathilde and her husband opts to replace the jewel without telling her the truth. This dishonesty would cost them unwarranted pain and distress in the next ten years.

In order to solve this conflict, Loisel has to borrow the money from different friends and money lenders. Replacing the necklace, however, does not entirely resolve the conflict. Mathilde and her husband have to look for ways to repay the money they have borrowed together with the accumulating interests. This conflict brings a drastic change in Mathilde. Unlike before when she lives in denial, she embraces her position this time round. “She did her share, however, completely, heroically” (12). This indicates that Mathilde has for once accepted and appreciated who she is. As a result, her lifestyle changes completely. They move into a cheaper house, and they dismiss the maid so that Mathilde have to do all the house chores. Actually, Mathilde adopts the life of a poor woman ungrudgingly. Her behavior changes drastically to match her poor life. Leading this life for ten years; after which all the debts are paid leaves her “old…, strong, hard, and rude woman of poor households” (12). Her change from denial to humility is further witnessed at the end of the story, when she volunteers to approach Mrs. Forrestier even in her poor state, and tell her the truth. This shows that she is no longer ashamed of who she is, and hse has also become truthful.

In conclusion, the conflicts in “The Necklace” bring change in the protagonist Mathilde. These changes are significant in bringing out the moral of the story. For instance, the ambitions yielded by Mathilde’s internal conflict teach the reader on the detrimental consequences of uncontrolled ambitions. The reader also learns that ungratefulness and denial could lead to unhappiness. The changes yielded by the major external conflict depicts that even though Mathilde has become poorer, the fact that she accepted her position makes her happier than she was before. This is an indication that happiness cannot be bought with money. Also, Mr. and Mrs. Loisel’s untruthfulness towards Mrs. Forrestier reminds the reader that dishonesty could yield unwarranted and long lasting misery, and that the truth can set one free.

Works Cited

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