

A String of Beads

Somerset Maugham

The title of this short story is very important. Beads are not real ones. They have less value compared to pearls. In fact, it is not a string of beads; it is rather a string of jealousy. It is a story inside a story. The original one is told by the writer. The second story is told by Laura. The story deals with the theme of jealousy and the harm people do to each others.

Laura is telling the story to the narrator. She insists on telling it though the narrator does not seem to be interested. Laura was having dinner at the Livingstones. They had a nice governess called Miss Robinson, who was twenty or twenty-one. She was also very pretty. The name "Livingstone" is very ironic. It shows the true nature of these people.

There was a man who was dining with them, Count Borselli, who was an expert in precious stones. The governess sat to eat with them. He admired the string of beads she was wearing and when he asked to have a closer look at it, he said that it was worth about 50,000 pounds. Miss Robinson could not believe it as she had bought it at 15 shillings. Then, someone called in and asked to see Miss Robinson. Sophie Livingstone gave her permission to go. Laura suspected Miss Robinson of stealing it. She never accused her of being a receiver. The narrator interrupts Laura every now and then and accuses Laura of hating Miss Robinson. Laura really wanted something bad to happen to Miss Robinson.

When Miss Robinson comes back, she tells them what has happened. Two men had come from Jarrot's Stores. She had bought her string there for fifteen shillings and the man gave her an original one by mistake. They came to take the real string of pearls. Laura then cuts the story and expresses her annoyance, **"I can't understand how anyone could be so stupid as to take a really valuable string to Jarrot's"**. The men gave Miss Robinson her own string and a cheque of 300 pounds. Miss Robinson decided to leave the house and enjoy her life. We laugh at Sophie who took the chance and sold Miss Robinson many of her clothes that she did not want, though she said that she gave them to her for free.

Later, Miss Robinson wrote Sophie a letter, telling her that she has changed her plans. She picked up a rich Argentine in Deauville and had gone off to Paris with him. She had been in Paris ever since. Laura has seen her once herself wearing many jewels. She also had a house and a Rolls Royce. She then got hold of a Greek and Laura does not know who she is with now. Laura wished that Miss Robinson had been ruined. She wanted a different ending to that story. She wanted Miss Robinson to get **"engaged to a bank clerk who had been badly**

knocked about in the war, with only one leg, say, or half his face shot away: and they'd be dreadfully poor and there would be no prospect of their marrying for years, and he would be putting all his savings into buying a little house in the suburbs and they'd have arranged to marry when he had saved the last instalment." Laura wanted her to serve her husband and work as a governess forever. According to Laura, this is a "moral" ending. This shows the gap between classes of society. She therefore thinks that Miss Robinson should end up as a prostitute.

Laura is a talkative woman. She is curious and likes gossiping. She is also critical, jealous and judgemental. The man, her friend, dislikes her and does not trust her. She criticizes people who invite governesses to their tables; she is a class-conscious. Thus, the story is more about Laura's character. She talks about morality and what she does is immoral.

While having dinner with her friend, Laura criticizes her. She is wearing a great deal of jewellery. Laura is against the idea of buying a beautiful governess around because she would make troubles. She will not look after her work, she would rather look for men to get married to.

The narrator does not like the way Laura speaks about others. We notice that Laura is telling the story in a hasty way to give it a sense of reality. She does not take care of her words. She likes to accuse people to feel superior. She is also envious of the others as Miss Robinson. She enjoys the role of a story-teller. The man is making fun of her while she is really enjoying her time. She does not care about morality. For her, morality is nonsense. The title is very important because it keeps the interest of the reader. It is the idea of reality versus appearance. The pearls are real morality and the beads represent Laura's morality.

The character of Laura is very strange. She likes talking about people. She likes making comments on other people's lives. She is not really telling the story; she is rather going around it by showing off. She has a negative view of people. She believes that Miss Robinson is a spendthrift. Laura suffers from extreme jealousy. She is also envious and hard-hearted. She has no sympathy for others. The narrator here has a minimal value, because we see everything through Laura's eyes.