

## "The Luncheon"

-Somerset Maugham

Summary of 'The Luncheon' the writer of 'The Luncheon' William Somerset Maugham, in this short story, relates about a lady who is an admirer of his stories. She wins the author's favor and expresses her wish to meet him at a high class restaurant. William exposes the false motives of modest eating habits, of the middle classes with a touch of humor.

Twenty years ago the author was living in Paris, when he had met a lady, who is an admirer of his stories. She had met him at a play and relates to him the incident during the interval which had occurred at that time. She had read a book written by him, and had written a letter to him about her views. Another letter was posted, stating about her visit to Paris and her desire to have a little luncheon at the Foyots, a restaurant where French senators eat. William was not a rich man and had never even thought of visiting that restaurant, nor did he possess the art of refusing her request.

Estimating the cost of a luncheon, which should not cost more than fifteen Francs, he decided to cut down coffee from his menu, so that he could have enough for himself for the next two weeks. His meeting was fixed on Thursday, at half past twelve, through correspondence. The lady was in her Forties, talkative, and not attractive. She had ordered for Salmon, and Caviar, while the Salmon was being prepared. William had ordered for the cheapest dish mutton- chops.

After the meal, she had ordered for white champagne. She kept enjoying the meal, and chatting about art, literature, and music, while William kept wondering about the bill. The bill of fare was soaring above that which he had anticipated. When the waiter had come with the bill she waived him aside with an air of gesture and ordered for Asparagus, the horribly expensive dish. William's heart sank, his mouth watered, and yet he had to quell his emotions. Adding to worsen the situation, she ordered for ice-cream and then coffee, all the same announcing that 'she never ate anything for luncheon - just a bite' Thoughts kept reeling through William's mind about how he was going to pay the exorbitant bill or how could he feign an act of his pocket having been picked.

To his utter dismay, the head waiter walked up to the table with a large basket full of huge Peaches. She picked up one protesting that her meal was just a snack, and that she could certainly enjoy the Peach.

The bill was finally paid, and William found himself with just a few Francs for the tips, and not a penny left in his pocket for the whole month. William believes, that he had had his revenge for then, when the Twenty years had passed by, he met her weighing One Hundred and Thirty -Six Kilograms.

# The Night Train at Deoli

-Ruskin Bond

## SUMMARY

The Night Train at Deoli is a story of adolescent infatuation presented with great sensitivity. It expresses the narrator's love for a poor basket-seller whom he encounters at a small station while on his way to Dehra Dun. He meets the girl only twice, never to see her again, but she remains in his memory ever after. The story focuses on the meeting of the two strangers and their brief acquaintance. It captures the essence of a few moments with the unrestrained suspense and all pervasive romanticism.

The story, that is woven against the backdrop of Deoli-a small station where the train would briefly halt before entering the heavy jungles of the Indian Terai belt, begins with the eighteen-year old protagonist narrating an incident about one of his regular visits to his grandmother's place during his college vacations. The train would reach Deoli station at about five in the morning and halt there for about ten minutes. The narrator vividly describes the ambience of the small railway station with just one platform, that was dimly lit with electric bulbs and oil lamps and the jungle across the railway tracks would just be visible in the faint light of dawn. No one ever got down or got into the train here.

The platform boasted of a tea stall, a fruit vendor, and a few straw dogs; not much else.

The narrator inquisitively wondered what happened behind the walls of the stations and felt sorry for the little place for which no one apparently cared. He was extremely curious about the place and intrigued by the mysteries that lay beyond it, he wished to explore it someday. He once met a young girl selling cane baskets at Deoli station and was fascinated by her charm. She was certainly not clothed ornately but possessed a graceful gait and a dignified look that captivated the narrator's attention. She had a pale skin, shiny black hair and dark and expressive eyes. He looked at her intently and even though she pretended not to notice, their eyes met.

"Do you want a basket?" she asked. "They are made of the finest cane..."

The narrator was enamoured by her beauty and got off the train to get to the tea-stall. There was a mutual attraction between the two and the girl followed him there and asked him whether he wanted to buy a basket. The narrator, although after some hesitation, bought a basket-only not to disappoint the girl and paid her a rupee in return, hardly daring to touch her fingers. Their conversation was cut short by the clanging of the bell by the station master and the narrator had to rush back to his compartment. He watched the girl from his window smiling at him, standing on the platform alone for long.

I watched her until the signal-box came in way, and the jungle hid the station, but I could still see her standing there alone...

This was how the first meeting ended on a note of interest tinged with gloom and the cherished moment too seemed to slip away with the platform. The narrator sat awake for the rest of the journey as he was unable to get rid of the lingering picture of the girl's face and her dark smouldering eyes, standing alone and looking at him, which accounted for the magic spell. However, upon reaching his grandmother's place, he soon forgot about the meeting as there were other things to occupy his mind. It was only when he was making his return journey, two months later that he remembered the girl. An expectation to see her once again surged through him and filled him with an unexpected thrill. The second meeting of the girl and the narrator was like that of old friends. Anxious to express his feelings, the narrator got off the train and waved to her. The girl too smiled back at him. Both did remember their first meeting and the initial hesitation was gone. She did not go about the platform



selling baskets but came straight to him at the tea-stall and the mutual pleasure of meeting each other was silently communicated. The narrator felt a wild impulse to put her on the train and take her away with him as he couldn't bear the idea of seeing her once again receding into distance of Deoli station. He held her hand and told her that he was going to Delhi and promised to return. The girl in return, nodded to say that she would be there to meet him again.

This time on returning home, the narrator did not forget her. He took a fancy to the girl and his hardly communicated longing turned into a feverish desperation in love. He was impatient for the term to finish finally and left for Dehra Dun. He was agitated, yet resolute to tell her about his feelings.

I was determined that I wouldn't stand helplessly before her, hardly able to speak or do anything about my feelings.

The climax of the story is reached when the narrator does not find the girl at the station. He wonders what might have happened to her and he suddenly felt tenderness and a sense of responsibility for her. He enquired about her but to no avail. Limited time as he had, he had to abandon his search and run up to his train to catch it. As the train sped through the jungles, the narrator brooded over the suspense of the girl not being at the platform. On his way back, he made another attempt to know more about her. However, the new station master and the tea-stall owner could not help him much and the train too, never stopped long enough for him to complete his enquiry. Hence the mystery of the girl remained unsolved.

What could I do about finding a girl I had seen only twice, who had hardly spoken to me, and about whom I knew nothing, absolutely nothing-but from whom I felt tenderness and responsibility that I had never felt before?

The narrator consoled himself with a resolve to break his journey there once and spend a day in the village to find out more about her but it never happened so.

Somehow, I couldn't bring myself to break journey at Deoli and spend a day there.

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He never met the girl ever again but every time he travelled past the Deoli station, he hoped and dreamt of meeting her, and seeing the same unchanged face of the basket seller smiling at him. Her memories remained with him like a dream in the corner of his mind and the feeling of passion for the mysterious girl pervaded his spirit, refusing to fade into oblivion, which like a deep-rooted lingering obsession that he continued to cherish. As a romantic he sought to escape the bitter reality which once unveiled, might account for extreme disappointment and deep disillusionment. Romanticism is quite often defined as the love for strange and unknown & the pursuit of a beautiful story that eludes us. The atmosphere of mystery is built up at the outset of the story with the portrayal of the remote station of Deoli. The essence of the author's romanticism lies in representing a strange, meeting artistically-the unspoken words, the eloquent conversation, the pale beauty of the girl, the light in her eyes when she meets the author, the narrator's impulse to take her with him, the intense eagerness to see her and finally the unknown destiny of the girl- all add to the feeling of romance. The narrator admits that he would never break his journey at Deoli as it would spoil his 'game'-the game of trying to spot the familiar and cheerful face of the girl at the station and experiencing a thrill of expectation surging through him, from which he seemed to derive contentment. The faint and bright memories of the dream like encounter create a world where passion reigns supreme. The end too remains enveloped in mystery and the author lets it remain so like a beautiful and curious dream, the memory of which creates an elusive and mesmerizing effect.



## Theme

In *The Night Train at Deoli* by Ruskin Bond we have the theme of innocence, memories, connection, love, letting go, desire, acceptance and fear. Taken from his *Collected Short Stories* collection the story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed man and after reading the story the reader realises that Bond may be exploring the theme of letting go. The narrator is unable to let go of the girl at Deoli despite the passing of time. It is as though he has reserved a place for the girl in his heart. Though some critics might suggest that the narrator has become infatuated with the girl it is more likely that she is his first love and it is for this reason that he has never let go of the girl or forgotten her. It is also somewhat ironic that the narrator tells the reader that nothing happens at Deoli. Yet Deoli is the place where the narrator has fallen in love for the first time. It might also be important that the narrator no longer gets off the train at Deoli as this could suggest that the narrator rather than having to face reality and discover what happened the girl. Prefers instead to hold onto his memories.

It is easier for the narrator to live his life with the unbroken heart of a young man than to have to discover that the girl may have simply moved on with her life and got married. This type of reality would be crushing to the narrator and as such he holds onto his memories. If anything it may be easier for the narrator to remember happy times that can last forever in memories than to become aware of the truth. Which may leave some readers suspecting that the narrator is simply deceiving himself? That he is unable to accept that the girl may have moved on with her life. It is also interesting that the girl had little or no impact on any of the other characters in the story. It is only the narrator who feels as though the girl was special. There is also a sense that the narrator and the girl have made a connection with one another. At least that is how the narrator feels. So strong are the feelings that the narrator has for the girl that he cuts short his visit to his grandmothers. It is as though the narrator is driven by desire.

It might also be important that the narrator only had brief moments of engagement with the girl as Bond could be suggesting that a brief moment is all it takes for an individual to fall in love. Even if during those brief moments the narrator learned nothing about the girl he has fallen in love with. The fact that the narrator never sees the girl again could also suggest that there is an element of loss in the story. However the narrator butts any sense of loss to the back of his mind preferring instead to think that someday he will see the girl again. Which would play on the theme of acceptance and letting go? At no stage in the story does the narrator accept that he will never see the girl again. Something that is clearer to the reader by the fact that the narrator journeys through Deoli more frequently as he has grown older. Still hoping to see the girl.

If anything the narrator is holding onto a memory and nothing more. Despite the years passing he has never seen the girl again nor is he likely too. For the narrator has never taken the steps to try and find the girl. Which may suggest that the narrator is afraid to find out the truth? The narrator's heart is not broken rather it is optimistic. However should the narrator find out the truth about the girl and the truth is unpleasant to the narrator. Then his heart will be broken. It is for this reason that the narrator dreams about what could be. Maintaining the innocence he had when he was afraid to touch the girl's fingers. If anything the narrator has put the girl on a pedestal which she may not justify. In his mind the narrator has created an image of the girl that may not be real. However it is real to the narrator. Just as everyone's first love is real. At the end of the story the narrator has no regrets because he is working off his memory. Time changes people but the narrator doesn't allow for this. To him the girl has remained the same. She will always be the same for the narrator because the narrator cannot let her go. If anything the narrator lives in hope that he may one day see the girl in Deoli again. However the reality is most likely very different.

## How Much Land Does a Man Need? by Leo Tolstoy

"How Much Land Does a Man Need?" is a parable by Leo Tolstoy that explores themes of greed, ambition, and the human condition. The story follows Pahom, a peasant who becomes dissatisfied with his modest holdings and dreams of acquiring more land, believing that it will bring him security and happiness. Pahom's quest for land leads him to make increasingly reckless decisions, driven by a desire to outdo his neighbors and secure an expansive territory for himself.

As he seeks more land, he encounters the Bashkirs, who offer him a peculiar deal: he can claim all the land he can walk around in a day, but he must return to the starting point by sundown. Fueled by ambition and the allure of endless land, Pahom pushes himself to the limit. In his frenzied attempt to secure more, he ultimately meets his demise, illustrating a poignant critique of human greed. The story serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of excessive desire and the fleeting nature of material wealth, culminating in the ironic realization that what one truly needs is often far simpler than they imagine.

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By: Edwards, Bruce L., Jr.

First published: "Mnogo li cheloveku zemli nuzhno?", 1886 (English translation, 1887)

Type of plot: Parable

Time of work: The late 1800's

Locale: Russia

Principal Characters:

- Pahom, a landowner who strives for security in owning more and more land
- The Chief of the Bashkirs, who offers Pahom as much land as he can walk around in a day
- The Devil, the tempter who arranges Pahom's land deals

The Story

An elder sister from the city visits her younger sister, the wife of a peasant farmer in the village. In the midst of their visit, the two of them get into an argument about whether the city or the peasant lifestyle is preferable. The elder sister suggests that city life boasts better clothes, good things to eat and drink, and various entertainments, such as the theater. The younger sister replies that though peasant life may be rough, she and her husband are free, will always have enough to eat, and are not tempted by the devil to indulge in such worldly pursuits.

Pahom, the husband of the younger sister, enters the debate and suggests that the charm of the peasant life is that the peasant has no time to let nonsense settle in his head. The one drawback of peasant life, he declares, is that the peasant does not have enough land:



'If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!' The devil, overhearing this boast, decides to give Pahom his wish, seducing him with the extra land that Pahom thinks will give him security.

Pahom's journey toward greed and destruction continues through a series of land deals, each bringing temporary satisfaction but ultimately leading to more desire. He quarrels with neighbors, moves to new lands, and finally meets the Bashkirs, who promise him as much land as he can encircle in a single day. Driven by greed, Pahom overextends himself and dies from exhaustion just as he completes the circuit. His servant buries him in a six-foot grave — all the land he truly needed.