



By William Somerset Maugham

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#### Understanding the Text

1. Although the author was not a vindictive man he was very happy to see the twenty one stone lady who had impoverished him twenty years ago, and says he had finally had his revenge. What makes him say this?

Answer: The story Luncheon relates incidents, replete with humour and irony, involving the author and a lady in a restaurant twenty years ago. The author narrates how he was tactfully suggested by a lady to meet her at a high grade restaurant Foyot. Given the poor economic condition of the author at that time, visiting a highly expensive restaurant like Foyot along with a lady for a luncheon was very ironical. The author narrates in a flashback how at that point of time he could not turn down her request only to meet with embarrassing situation at the restaurant. In the name of a little luncheon, the lady started placing order after order for highly expensive items from the menu like salmon, caviare, champagne, asparagus etc. without bothering about the bill. Unable to reveal his actual position, the author kept giving excuses for not ordering items for himself. Ultimately, he had to give away whatever money he had with him in paying the bill. He was left without even a penny and the whole month was before him.

The author was not a vindictive man so he did not say a word to her but chose to endure. It is in this context, the author says on seeing the lady after twenty years that the embarrassment done to him in the restaurant by the lady was avenged in due course of time as the lady is now only twenty one stone.

2. There are quite a few places where the author uses the expressions 'my heart sank', 'panic seized' etc. What was the reason for this?

Answer: The author has used the expression 'My heart sank' when the lady ordered for caviare. The author has used this expression to convey his inability to afford caviare. The use of this expression lends humour to the situation.

In yet another situation, the author uses the expression 'panic seized' to state that more than embarrassing it was a matter of concern when the lady ordered for asparagus as he anticipated that its price may exceed his budget line. The expression very aptly brings out the author's mental state of embarrassment and anticipation at that point of time.

3. Locate instances of irony in the story.

Answer: The story The Luncheon is replete with instances of irony. Irony is a technique in which an unexpected situation is revealed either in terms of speech or incident. In other words, an ironical situation is never expected or anticipated. It happens and comes as a shock or surprise. In the present story there are many instances of irony. In the beginning of the story when the author visits Foyot thinking that he would manage with his limited budget, he finds the unexpected thing. He discovers that the prices in the bill of fare are very high. He has not anticipated this. It comes as a shock or

surprise, hence, ironical. At first the lady friend tells the author that she never eats anything for luncheon. But soon she says that she will love to have salmon, a highly priced item in the menu. This is ironical. Then she orders for caviare, and then champagne and at last asparagus. These instances are all ironical.

The story has instances of verbal irony also. The lady's remark that she never eats anything for luncheon is ironical as she eventually orders for so many costly items. Another instance of verbal irony in the story is when the author tells the lady that his doctors have absolutely forbidden him to drink champagne. In fact, the entire story is built on the structure of irony.

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