

The Luncheon Summary

Writer: W. Somerset Maugham | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Meeting the Woman at the Play After Many Years: One day, the narrator went to watch a play. During the interval, he suddenly saw the same woman in the crowd. She signaled to him, and he politely went and sat beside her. They were meeting after many years. At first, he could not recognize her.

Meeting the Woman at the Play After Many Years: One day, the narrator went to watch a play. During the interval, he suddenly saw the same woman in the crowd. She signaled to him, and he politely went and sat beside her. They were meeting after many years. At first, he could not recognize her. The woman happily started the conversation. She reminded him of the old days. She said, "You asked me to luncheon." Hearing this, the narrator's past memories came alive. He remembered the Paris of twenty years earlier. At that time, he was very poor. He lived in a tiny room. His life was full of struggle. His first meeting with the woman, her request, and the whole luncheon incident came back to his mind. In that moment at the play, his youthful memories felt alive again.

Living in Poverty in Paris and the Woman's Luncheon Request: At that time, the narrator was new in Paris. He had just begun his writing career. His income was very low. He lived day by day with difficulty. He stayed in a small room in the Latin Quarter. The room was simple and plain. Sometimes he did not even have enough money to buy food. He survived by reducing even his coffee. He lived a very disciplined and modest life. During this time, the woman read one of his books. She praised his writing and sent him a letter. The young writer felt happy and replied politely. A few days later, she wrote again. This time she informed him that she was coming to Paris. She had little time, but she wanted to meet the writer. She directly requested that they have lunch together at Foyot's.

Foyot's was a very expensive restaurant. Ordinary people could not go there. French senators usually dined there. It was impossible for the writer to eat in such a place. Yet he agreed. He could not refuse the woman. He was young, polite, and felt a little proud. For these reasons, he accepted the luncheon invitation even though it was beyond his means. He calculated that the rest of the month would be very difficult. Still, he thought that he must take this risk to save his dignity.

The Woman's Hypocrisy: "I never eat anything for luncheon": After entering the restaurant, the woman claimed that she never ate anything for luncheon. She said she "just eat one thing." She said these words with great confidence. The narrator felt a little relieved. He thought the bill would be small. But the reality was the opposite. The woman first mentioned salmon. Even though it was not on the menu, she asked about it. In the end, the narrator ordered the expensive salmon for her. Later, she brought up caviar. She said caviar did not bother her. The narrator's heart fell. Caviar was very costly. Still he ordered it.

Then came the topic of drinks. The woman said she "never drink anything." Immediately after that, she said she drank white wine. Finally, she added that her doctor allowed her to drink only champagne. The narrator was forced to order champagne. He himself took only water. While eating, the woman talked cheerfully about art, literature, and music. But she did not stop. She repeated again that she never ate luncheon. Then she asked for expensive asparagus. She said she would regret leaving Paris without eating it. The narrator knew it was terribly costly. Yet he ordered it. In the end, she also took an expensive out-of-season peach. The narrator ate a cheap mutton chop. He anxiously kept calculating the cost in his mind. His hands trembled thinking how much he would have to pay. He knew he had very little money in his pocket. The woman's hypocrisy and overeating left him completely helpless.

The Narrator's Financial Crisis and Pressure: The woman's eating gradually put the narrator under stress. He saw her ordering one expensive dish after another. She ate caviar, salmon, asparagus, ice-cream, and even the peach that was out of season. The narrator knew all these items were extremely costly. He had only a small amount of money. He did not even have enough to last the rest of the month. So he became frightened. After ordering the asparagus, he felt real fear. He kept thinking what would happen if the bill went beyond what he could pay. He secretly made different plans in his mind. He thought that if the money fell short, he would dramatically say, "My money had been stolen." And if that did not work, he would leave his watch behind and come later to pay.

This fear made him totally helpless. He could not enjoy the meal at all. He only kept calculating the bill. When the bill came, he somehow managed to pay it. But he almost had no money left for the tip. He gave only three francs. The woman thought he was stingy. After leaving the restaurant, he realized that the rest of his month would now be full of financial trouble.

Farewell Irony and the Narrator's Revenge: At the time of departure, the woman again began giving advice. She said, "Never eat more than one thing for luncheon." Her voice carried pride and hypocrisy. The narrator smiled politely. In a humorous tone, he said, "I'll eat nothing for dinner tonight." The woman took it as a joke and laughed. She happily called him a

“humorist.” Then she cheerfully got into a taxi and left.

The narrator stood outside and watched her go with a strange feeling. He realized that the woman did not understand his financial trouble at all. She never thought that her overeating could cause suffering to someone else. Years later, when the narrator wrote this story, the bitter experience of that day was still with him. He remarks sarcastically that he finally got his revenge. Because today the woman weighs twenty-one stone (1 stone = 14 pounds / about 6.35 kg). In other words, she is now very fat. This comment is gentle satire, which turns his pain and humiliation into humor.

LxNotes