

4.2 The Luncheon

Warming Up!

1. Talk with your partner and discuss the following questions :

- (a) Have you ever been invited to lunch, at any hotel, by your friend?
- (b) What was the occasion?
- (c) Did you enjoy the lunch? Why?

2. Discuss in pairs :

People with foibles are often not conscious of them. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. As you know, every country has its own currency. Find out the currency of at least 6 countries alongwith their current exchange rate in India, with the help of the internet. One is done for you.

For example, Switzerland: franc; 1 franc = 66.73 INR

Country	Currency	Exchange Rate in Indian Currency



The Luncheon

William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was a distinguished British playwright, novelist and short story writer. He was among the most popular writers of his era and reputedly the highest paid author during the 1930s. His work is characterized by a clear unadorned style, cosmopolitan settings, and a shrewd understanding of human nature.

A most delightfully humorous narrative 'The Luncheon' is a *Slice of Life* story about Maugham's luncheon date proposed to him by a woman who he hopes is a supporter of his art.

I caught sight of her at the play and in answer to her call. I went over during the interval and sat down beside her. It was long since I had last seen her and, if someone had not mentioned her name, I hardly think I would have recognised her. She addressed me brightly.

"Well, it's many years since we first met. How time does fly! We're none of us getting any younger. Do you remember the first time I saw you? You asked me to luncheon."

Did I remember?

It was twenty years ago and I was living in Paris. I had a tiny apartment and I was earning barely enough money. She had read a book of mine and had written to me about it. I answered, thanking her, and presently, I received from her another letter saying she was passing through Paris and would like to have a chat with me. But her time was limited and the only free moment she had was on the following Thursday and would I give her a little luncheon at *Foyot's* afterwards? *Foyot's* is a restaurant and it was so **far beyond my means** that I had never even thought of going there. I had eighty francs (gold francs) to last me the rest of the month and a modest luncheon should not cost more than fifteen. If I cut out coffee for the next two weeks, I could manage well enough.

I answered that I would meet my friend at *Foyot's* on Thursday at half-past twelve. She was, in appearance, **imposing** rather than attractive and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large and even, than were necessary for any practical purpose.

◆ What is the profession of the narrator?

◆ When was the lady free?

◆ Where and when did they decide to have luncheon?

● **far beyond one's means** : not affordable

● **imposing** : grand or impressive

◆ *What do you think the woman reassured the narrator about?*

◆ *'I never eat anything for luncheon'. Explain the irony in this line.*

◆ **caviar** : an expensive dish made of eggs of a fish, sturgeon

◆ *What does the use of the word 'sank' suggest about the narrator's feelings?*

She was talkative, but since she seemed to want to talk about me, I was prepared to be an attentive listener.

I was startled when the menu was brought, for the prices were a great deal higher than I had thought. But she reassured me.

"I never eat anything for luncheon," she said.

"Oh, don't say that!" I answered generously.

"I never eat more than one thing. I think people eat far too much nowadays. A little fish, perhaps. I wonder if they have any salmon."

Well, it was early in the year for salmon and it was not on the menu, but I asked the waiter if there was any. Yes, a beautiful salmon had just come in – it was the first they had had. I ordered it for my guest. The waiter asked her if she would have something while it was being cooked. "No," she answered, "I never eat more than one thing. Unless you had a little **caviar**. I never mind caviar."

I knew I could not afford caviar, but I could not very well tell her that. For myself, I chose the cheapest dish on the menu and that was a mutton chop.

"I think you're unwise to eat meat," she said. "I don't believe in overloading my stomach."

She ate the caviar and she ate the salmon. She talked gaily of art and literature and music. But I wondered what the bill would come to. When my mutton chop arrived, she took me quite seriously to task.

"I see that you're in the habit of eating a heavy luncheon. I'm sure it's a mistake. Why don't you follow my example and just eat one thing? I couldn't possibly eat anything more unless they had some of those giant asparagus. I should be sorry to leave Paris without having some of them."

My heart sank. I had seen them in the shops and I knew that they were horribly expensive. My mouth had often watered at the sight of them.

"I'm not in the least hungry," my guest sighed, "but if you insist, I don't mind having some asparagus." I ordered them.

"Aren't you going to have any?"

"No, I never eat asparagus."

We waited for the asparagus to be cooked. Panic seized me. It was not a question now of how much money I should have left over for the rest of the month, but whether I had enough to pay the bill. It would be **mortifying** to find myself ten francs short and be obliged to borrow from my guest. I knew exactly how much I had and if the bill came to more. I made up my mind that I would put my hand in my pocket and with a dramatic cry, start up and say it had been picked. Of course, it would be awkward if she had not money enough either to pay the bill. Then, the only thing would be to leave my watch and say I would come back and pay later.

The asparagus appeared. I watched her thrust them down her throat in large mouthfuls. At last, she finished.

“Coffee?” I said.

“Yes, just an ice cream and coffee,” she answered. I was past caring now, so I ordered coffee for myself and an ice cream and coffee for her.

“You know, there’s one thing I thoroughly believe in,” she said, as she ate the ice cream. “One should always get up from a meal feeling one could eat a little more.”

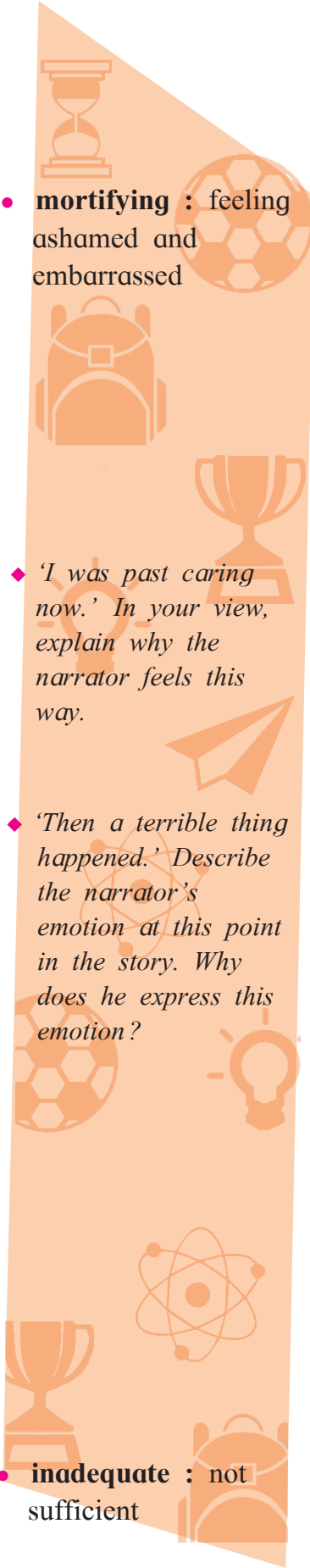
“Are you still hungry?” I asked faintly.

“Oh, no, I’m not hungry. You see, I don’t eat luncheon. I have a cup of coffee in the morning and then dinner, but I never eat more than one thing for luncheon. I was speaking for you.”

“Oh, I see.” Then a terrible thing happened. While we were waiting for the coffee, the head waiter came up to us bearing a large basket full of huge peaches. But surely peaches were not in season then? Lord knew what they cost! I knew a little later, for my guest going on with her conversation, absent-mindedly took one.

“You see, you’ve filled your stomach with a lot of meat,” my one miserable little chop “and you can’t eat any more. But I’ve just had a snack and I shall enjoy a peach.”

The bill came and when I paid it I found that I had only enough for a quite **inadequate** tip. Her eyes rested for an instant on the three francs I left for the



• **mortifying** : feeling ashamed and embarrassed

◆ *‘I was past caring now.’ In your view, explain why the narrator feels this way.*

◆ *‘Then a terrible thing happened.’ Describe the narrator’s emotion at this point in the story. Why does he express this emotion?*

• **inadequate** : not sufficient

- **retorted** : replied quickly with anger

- ◆ *How many things did the guest eat in all?*

- **vindictive** : revengeful

- **stone** : a unit of weight equal to 14 pounds.

waiter and I knew that she thought me mean. But when I walked out of the restaurant I had the whole month before me and not a penny in my pocket.

“Follow my example,” she said as we shook hands, “and never eat more than one thing for luncheon.”

“I’ll do better than that,” I **retorted**, “I’ll eat nothing for dinner tonight.”

“Humorist!” she cried gaily, jumping into a cab. “You’re quite a humorist!”

But I have had my revenge at last. I do not believe that I am a **vindictive** man, but when the gods take a hand in the matter it is understandable to observe the result with satisfaction. Today, she weighs twenty-one **stone**.

ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. Choose the correct option from the bracket and fill in the blanks given below.

(addressed, luncheon, generously, unwise, insist)

- (a) The chief guestthe students.
- (b) The crow was to sing.
- (c) I invited my relatives to
- (d) Parents always on children to be allrounders.
- (e) The king decided to donate his wealth among his subjects

2. Go through the story again and find out various instances which create humour in ‘The Luncheon’. Complete the table by picking up various humorous instances and the particular line from the story. One is done for you.

Humorous Instance	Line from the story
● The woman is a voracious eater	“ Follow my example, and never eat more than one thing for luncheon.”

3. Who said these words/sentences? Under what circumstances?

Words/Sentences	Who said?	Under what circumstances?
1. I never eat anything for luncheon.		
2. It’s many years since we first met.		
3. Are you still hungry?		
4. I don’t believe in overloading my stomach.		
5. I’ll eat nothing for dinner tonight.		

4. Answer in your own words.

- (a) Although the author was not a vindictive man, he was very happy to see her weigh twenty one stone and had finally had his revenge. What makes him say this? Explain.
- (b) There are quite a few places where the author uses the expressions ‘My heart sank, panic seized’etc. What was the reason for this ? Explain.
- (c) What are the instances which create humour in “The Luncheon”?
- (d) Describe the use of irony and humour in “The Luncheon”.

5. Pick out the words and phrases in the story that indicate that the author was not financially well off. One is done for you.

Words	not afford			
Phrases	beyond my means			

6. After reading the story, put the following events into correct order :

- (a) She gave me her last kind advice how to improve my eating habits.
- (b) I met her in the theatre after many years and I could hardly recognize her.
- (c) Twenty years ago, I lived in Paris and earned just enough money to get by.
- (d) I was really scared what could happen when I would pay the bill.
- (e) “I never eat anything for luncheon.”
- (f) I ordered a mutton chop for myself.
- (g) She had read a book of mine.
- (h) She ordered asparagus.
- (i) She suggested him to invite her to a famous and expensive restaurant.
- (j) I didn’t have dinner for the rest of the month.

7. Irony is the expression of meaning through the use of language signifying the opposite. Describe the use of irony in ‘The Luncheon’. Pick the sentences from the story that are examples of irony. Fill in the table ‘A’ the general direct meaning while in table ‘B’ its hidden meaning or the opposite meaning intended by the speaker. One is done for you.

Sentence	Direct meaning	Hidden meaning
* If I cut out coffee for the next two days,	* to stop drinking coffee	* to stop spending money in order to save money for some purpose.

8. Fill in the blank a word or a phrase given in the brackets in their appropriate forms. (startle, catch sight of, overload, water, pass)

1. “I never my stomach”, she said.
2. I was when the menu was brought.
3. The author the guest at the play.
4. I had seen asparagus in the shops, my mouth often at the sight of them.
5. The author’s guest was through Paris.

9. Use appropriate articles.

1. I have just had snack.
2. I have cup of coffee in the morning.
3. I want just ice cream and coffee.
4. Author and his guest gave order and then waited for asparagus to be cooked.

10. Classify the following words in the given table appropriately.

(modest, luncheon, generously, rank, restaurant, appearance, large, expensive, watch, coffee, brought, afford, practical, apartment, moment, brightly, started, thoroughly)

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb

11. Study the different uses of ‘could’. Identify what it indicates.

- (a) Lack of rain could cause draught. (possibility/condition)
- (b) Abhi could perform well in his school days. (suggestion/past ability)
- (c) Instead of playing computer games you could play real games with friends. (past ability/suggestion)
- (d) Could I use your computer for surfing net? (possibility/request)
- (e) We could go on an excursion, if we didn’t have exam. (suggestion/condition)

12. Fill in the gaps with appropriate Prepositions to make the passage meaningful.

I waited the airport Atlanta. My old school-mate was going to arrive New Airlines Mumbai, 21st March the year 2018. We had not met 40 years 1978. She was going to stay a week me Atlanta 21st 27th March, 2018.

My joy knew no bounds, when I saw her 40 years. home, I introduced her my family. Then I took her a big mall shopping. It was just my house. We went the street and climbed using the elevator, the staircase.

13. On the occasion of Diwali, write a letter to your friend to invite him/her to celebrate the festival in an innovative way. Use the following hints.

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|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| time and place | other friends are also invited |
| special dish is prepared | post lunch fun programmes, |
| | innovative activity |

14. Further reading :

- (a) “The Phantom Luncheon” by Saki.
- (b) “The Ant and the Grasshopper” by William Somerset Maugham.

Form 4 groups of the class. Every group will visit the school’s library or use internet to read both the creations of Saki and W. S. Maugham. After reading them, every group will summarise both the creations and later read out in the class.

