

CHAPTER - 8

THE LUNCHEON

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.

Appericiation

1. The author is a humorist

- a. How does the story reflect his sense of humour?
- b. What makes his lady friend remark----'You are quite a humorist' ?
- c. Give instances of the author's ability to laugh at himself.

Answer

a. The author is a humorist. Humour is a device which is employed to evoke laughter. The author has very deftly employed this device in the story *The Luncheon* from the beginning to the end. In the beginning of the story, the author brings out a humorous situation when he was tactfully suggested by a lady to offer her a little luncheon at a highly expensive restaurant Foyot. Given the economic condition of the author at that time, visiting Foyot was beyond his budget line. Driven by flattery, the author made all possible calculations and decided to go along with the lady to Foyot only to experience some embarrassing moments. These embarrassing moments are very humorous to the readers. The author was taken aback at the very beginning after visiting the restaurant when the lady in the name of little luncheon ordered for salmon, then caviare and champagne and asparagus. These situations are humorous and testify to the sense of humour of the author. The way he avoided placing orders for himself in order not to reveal his budget line is also very humorous. The way he describes the lady in the beginning as a woman of forty who was imposing rather than attractive is humorous. At the end, when the lady recommended the author to follow her example of having a so-called little luncheon, the author humorously replied that he would do better than that by eating nothing for the night that day.

Thus, the story unfolds the author's sense of humour from the beginning to the end. Every situation depicted in the story amply expresses his sense of humour.

b. The story *The Luncheon* narrates how the author's lady friend tactfully managed to have lunch in a highly expensive restaurant Foyot from the author. The author with all his monetary constraints decided to visit the restaurant where senators usually go only to come across some embarrassing situations. The author carefully chalked out a plan to order for some items in the highly expensive restaurant which would not affect his monthly budget. However, the irony unfolded when he found his lady friend placing order one after another without bothering about the budget of the author. At the end, when the author's lady friend recommended him to follow her path to have the so-called little luncheon, the author humorously replied that he would do better than that by not taking dinner that night. In this context, the lady friend made the quoted remark.

c. The story *The Luncheon* is full of instances to show the author's ability to laugh at himself. In the beginning of the story, the author admits that he was flattered to visit Foyot by the lady. The author admits that as he was young he could not say no to the invitation of the lady. In the restaurant when the lady started ordering for costly items one after another he could see the irony. He laughed at himself as to why he agreed to the proposal of having lunch in Foyot. In fact, from the beginning to the end the author shows his ability to laugh at himself.