



# Christmas Holiday

*W. Somerset Maugham*

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## **Christmas Holiday** W. Somerset Maugham

For Christmas, Charley Mason's father granted him a trip to Paris, all expenses paid. It should have been a lark, but on his first night Charley meets a woman whose story will forever change his life.

For Lydia has seen tragedy. The Russian Revolution displaced her family, left her homeless, fatherless. And for reasons that elude Charley, Lydia pines for a man half a world away--a dope dealer and murderer whose sins Lydia seeks to absolve through her own self- destruction. Haunting, erotic, deeply effecting, **Christmas Holiday** explores two souls capsized by compassion--and the confusion that engulfed a generation in the days between the Great Wars.

## **Christmas Holiday Details**

Date : Published December 5th 2000 by Vintage (first published 1939)

ISBN : 9780375724619

Author : W. Somerset Maugham

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Classics, Fiction, Holiday, Christmas, Cultural, France, European Literature, British Literature

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# From Reader Review Christmas Holiday for online ebook

## Hunter Murphy says

Ah, Maugham. Certainly this man is one of the most talented novelists to ever walk the earth. Christmas Holiday is an incredible story. A young man from a cultured, middle-class English family travels to Paris to spend Christmas holiday with some desperate people. He has no idea whom he's about to encounter. It just sort of happens. Many other things happen too.

A dear childhood friend of his has become a raving, cynical, misanthropic ascetic, basically starving himself of human companionship as well as food and water. The protagonist is at first amused by his friend's extreme philosophy and then repulsed.

This is a coming-of-age tale really. The young protagonist's warm, happy heart is introduced to the heartbreak of the world. It's tough to see the young man's eyes open in such a way, but Maugham is a magician with his writing. There were so many good lines in this book that I probably underlined a third of it.

There's also a really compelling murder mystery within the book. I'm surprised the author didn't try his hand at the crime genre. He could have written mysteries easily. There are slow parts in this novel, but the writing is so fine that I hardly noticed them.

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## Doroti says

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## Leslie says

Interesting story of a young man (22? 23?) first coming to realize that people (and the world) are more complex than he had thought whilst on his first Christmas holiday apart from his family.

Although Charlie is the "main character", much of the book is taken up with the story of Lydia -- a young Russian woman he meets through his friend Simon. Both Lydia and Simon think and live so differently from Charlie's family, he begins to awaken to the fact that he has only experienced a small part of the world.

I found some of Simon's philosophy upsetting (as I assume Maugham meant it to be) and surprisingly relevant to today's world -- Simon would understand the people who shot that school in Pakistan the other day; I don't.

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## Frederick says

This is a short novel about time spent between a man who's life will go well and a woman who's life will not. The last sentence is the best last sentence I've ever read.

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## Terry ~ Huntress of Erudition says

This is good - easy to read, with well thought out characters, except that I would have liked the protagonist to enjoy his holiday in Paris, seeing the sights, etc. a little longer before the serious stuff started.

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## Sketchbook says

Published on the eve of W2, Maugham presents a situation: a conventional young man, Charley, age 23, has a week's holiday in Paris and his unexpected experiences blitz his mind. Back home he can't even talk about Paris, you see, "the bottom had fallen out of his world." Last line. *What happened?* He had dined at Coupole, had drinks at the Dome, visited the Louvre, attended a Christmas concert...heard a journalist rant about dictators and the stupidity of the human race, and, oh yes, he met a whore. *Sounds very vin ordinaire* to me.

MOM was clearly pecking out propaganda and doing a parody of himself at the same time. The Brits were appeasing Hitler (Peace in Our Time) and pleased as punch to be unworried about anything. With customary grace and crisp writing, MOM -- here's a short story pushed into 300 pages -- swoons into a backstory of the unfortunate Lydia, a Russian emigre who unluckily married a thug, now on Devil's Island because he--. Never mind. My eyes glazed over. She works in a brothel to atone for her hubby's sins. (Huhh?)

I didn't believe any of it. This is the sort of Bad Book that damaged MOMs reputation. Apparently Graham Greene belched upon finishing it. However, there's a keen line worth quoting: "I can't imagine anything more heart-rending than to love with all your soul someone that you know is worthless." MOM was thinking of Gerald Haxton.

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## Karel Alleene says

The first thirty pages are a joy to read: Maugham paints the portrait of a well established art-loving family: the Masons. They don't seem to have the temper of a 'true' artist and they don't really know (or want to know) why they love a painting.

'We're just humble, simple people,' said Venetia. It was a lucky coincidence that she loved Debussy instead of Sullivan and that she preferred Virginia Woolf over Galsworthy.'

'They had a good taste and the right judgement.'

'Out of themselves they would have never recognized Cézanne as a great painter, but once they realized he was a great artist, they acknowledged - in all seriousness - that fact for themselves.'

They react to art as keen spectators, and yes they just love Paris. The moment young Charley arrives in Paris (as some kind of 'rite de passage') Maugham introduces Simon, cynical journalist and friend of Charley. Someone who knows the 'ropes'. The trouble is: I simply don't buy Simon. He feels like a schedule of a cynical person, he talks in sentences that seem to come out of a textbook title 'How to feel nothing and become totally numb':

'If I would feel something like love in my heart I would tear it out like a rotten tooth.'

And Simon goes on and on like this. To make things worse Maugham felt the urge to add a crime story in which Lydia (or the Russian princess Olga) becomes the victim of a ruthless con-man and robber Robert. Maugham keeps adding more and more details to the crime story, as a reader you start asking yourself the question: is this becoming some kind of thriller?

I get the general idea that Maugham wants to develop the story of the 'real' Paris: not only the place where you can visit the paintings of Degas, Manet and Fragonard but also the place of petty theft and more serious crime. But Maugham simply - I think - loses the plot: it's like he keeps adding spicy ingredients to his story. I also lost count of how many times he uses the word 'shiver'.

The last chapters see him return to a more tuned-down writing style, which suits Maugham just fine.

A bit of a frustrating reading experience, because the character of Charlie Mason is great and he is in fact a 'stranger' in Paris. He loves the 'idea' of Paris but doesn't have the slightest hunch of what is really happening. Sure, he loves to walk around in the Louvre. Knows a thing or two about the paintings, but once outside the museum he's totally lost.

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## Petya says

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## Gail says

Maugham was clearly still finding his style in this early book, but it is nonetheless a very enjoyable read. His cutting and concise character descriptions are just as brilliant as in his later works. He paints a glimpse of a world that enthralls Charley and the reader, despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact, that the inhabitants of this world are doomed to a life of oppression and despair. The story is so rich that it is hard to remember that the entire book only covers about a week: Charley's one-week holiday in Paris. Good, serious travel always changes a person's perspective and rarely allows one to blindly return to the life he or she previously believed to be complete. Charley intended to take a light holiday, but instead traveled further than he ever knew was possible.

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## SCARABOOKS says

Il figlio alle soglie del primo lavoro di una buona e colta e ricca famiglia inglese va a Parigi negli anni '30 a passare il Natale. Cerca avventure e incontra il Male; in due forme diverse, che forse è sorprendente trovare in Maugham.

Come qualità non si segnala come il suo miglior romanzo. Un po' scialbo e scontato, con poco colore e poco sapore. Sempre con piacere si legge però, per via dello stile: sempre pulito, efficace, elegante. Manca un po' il ritmo e la acida e perfida ironia che ci si aspetta, ecco. Però c'è quell'elemento sorprendente che è di grande stimolo.

Qui Maugham, dal suo consueto terreno di indagine delle relazioni uomo-donna da cui pur sempre parte e che sempre al centro mette, si avventura a sondare due grandi temi del novecento. Quello del superuomo e quello del potere deviante che sulla mente dell'uomo hanno avuto le correnti culturali dominanti nella prima metà del secolo scorso.

Tre uomini esemplari di tre tendenze diverse. Uno, della tranquilla accettazione di una tradizione borghese. Il secondo, della spinta a piegare la realtà e le proprie emozioni ad un progetto (in questo caso di disumana trasformazione rivoluzionaria). E l'altro della pura affermazione del proprio io, del proprio potere-diritto di agire contro ogni regola, secondo la propria forza e il proprio incontrollato libero arbitrio di super-uomo. Al centro, a catalizzare e subire reazioni, una poveretta, chiamata a esemplificare un'altra figura che nel novecento è stata suo malgrado al centro della scena: quella della vittima.

L'esaltazione del Male e insieme la sua banalizzazione che hanno dominato un'epoca vengono fuori molto bene dal gioco che si svolge in questo triangolo. Pensavo che c'è una differenza che salta fuori benissimo qui con la letteratura dell'Ottocento. Per esempio, col Dostoevski di Delitto e castigo, dove pure il tema del Male viene profeticamente sviluppato. Lì tutto si svolge sulle tonalità della tragedia e Raskòl'nikov un grande personaggio tragico è; qui tutto assume un aspetto da ballo in maschera o da cabaret brechtiano. E a pensarci, lo stesso Hitler o ancor più Mussolini, ma anche Stalin a rivederle oggi in effetti orrende maschere sono.

Per tornare alla sostanza del tema, potremmo ricondurre il tutto alla vecchia dicotomia tra l'accettazione della normalità (e quindi anche delle tinte grigie della noia, dell'abitudine, della dritta strada tracciata) e la tentazione dell'estremo (e quindi della febbre adrenalinica dell'azione, di una qualche nuova avventura).

Ultima annotazione di lettura. Maugham si conferma un autore che sta sulla soglia temporale in cui dalla società vittoriana in dissolvimento, si affaccia il narciso novecentesco nelle sue diverse versioni. Qui in quelle della prima metà del secolo, quelle vocate al Male, appunto. La seconda metà del secolo ci porterà la versione del narciso nella civiltà dell'immagine e del consumismo identitario. E chissà il cinismo disincantato e l'umorismo perfido di Maugham di cui ho sentito la mancanza cosa ne avrebbe tirato fuori.

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## **L. Marquet says**

W. Somerset Maugham  
Christmas Holiday  
Published 1939.

The first thing you need to know about W. Somerset Maugham's Christmas Holiday is that it has nothing to do with Christmas.

The book was written in 1939 when Maugham was 63. It is one of his last major pieces.

Christmas Holiday tells the story of Charley Mason, a comfortably-born 24-year old, who spends a week-long holiday in Paris. (Yes, it is at Christmas.)

Charley's father has given him the vacation and is expecting him to sow his oats a bit but this does not happen. The story that unfolds is like a set of Russian matryoshka dolls. First there's Charley, then Charley's cynical friend Simon, then the Russian woman he meets through Simon, Lydia, and finally Lydia's imprisoned husband Robert Berger, who we never meet but know a fair amount about.

These people are all without the advantages Charley has in life and live an opportunistic, amoral, but passionate existence. Charley's life, on the other hand is calculated, detached, and formulaic.

The book seems to have heavy autobiographical influences with Maugham representing himself in Charley. Charley, like Maugham is comfortably born, both have spent time in Paris, and both were encouraged into a profession that did not suit them. In Maugham's case it was medicine, in Charley's case it was accounting. At one point Maugham describes Charley as "taking to it as a duck to water" which is how he described his own transition from doctor to novelist.

Maugham was a homosexual and Charley never has sex with Lydia, even though they spent a week in the same hotel room and she is in the profession.

At a broader level, Charley (the Englishman) in the book is disabused of the protected naïve life he lives, well-ordered, controlled and unemotional. When it is all over and Charley returns home to England things seem just as they were a week earlier, but Charley has changed forever.

Maugham may have been making a broader characterization about the British in general. Published in 1939, the British were naïve about Hitler and what was happening on the continent. After all, Prime Minister

Chamberlain had just returned (30 September 1938) from Munich proclaiming “Peace in our time.”

The characters:

Charley Mason. 24-year old comfortably born Englishman goes to Paris for a week.

Simon Fenimore. Charley’s schoolboy friend, cynic, anarchist, manipulator. Ignores Charley except to set him up with “Princess Olga”

Lydia. Russian prostitute who Charley meets at the Serail and is introduced as “Princess Olga.” Married to Robert Berger the rake, she atones for his sins by debasing herself.

Robert Berger. Imprisoned husband of Lydia, drug dealer, unscrupulous, deceitful and manipulative.

Unworthy of love, but loved by Lydia all the same.

Some fun vocabulary words:

sempstress n. var. seamstress.

comely adj. good-looking, pleasing in appearance; exceedingly attractive in an overtly sexual way.

corpulence n. fatness, portliness esp of body. < 1400 Middle English < Latin corpus, body.

frowsy adj. also frousy; frowzy. Dirty and untidy, slovenly; ill-smelling, musty.

turbid adj. not clear due to stirred up sediment, clouded; confused, muddled. < Latin turbidus disturbed.

lachrymose adj. suggestive of or tending to cause tears, mournful; given to shedding tears readily. < Latin lacrimosus tear

dissimulation n. act of dissimulating, feigning, hypocrisy. < Latin dissimulation.

sursis n. Fr. Reprieve. Legal: suspension of sentence for a period of probation.

pinchbeck n. an alloy of copper and zinc, used in imitation of gold. Named after its inventor, Christopher Pinchbeck (d. 1732). Also something sham, spurious, or counterfeit.

colloquy n. a conversational exchange, dialogue; conference. < Latin colloquium.

tippet n. a scarf, usually of fur or wool, for covering the neck and shoulders.

portière n. a curtain hung in a doorway to replace the door or for decoration. < Fr. Portière.

pelmet n. a decorative cornice of valance at the head of a window or doorway, used to cover the curtain hangers.

marcel v. to wave (the hair) by means of special irons, producing the effect of regular, continuous waves. < named after Marcel Grateau (d. 1936) Fr. Hairdresser who originated it.

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## Karen Witzler says

Very good. My first Maugham. Amazing discussion of social class, art, crime, and society through the eyes of an upper middle- class 23 year old named Charley. (He could have come through my daughter's elitist high school.) He knows all the right things to say about all the right pictures and can play the best music in the proper fashion and his dad (whose family came up from servants to a peerage) has sent him to Paris for a finishing touch to his education. Dad means him to do the brothels and middle-brow artistic mother means him to do the museums. Charley meets Lydia (whose family post-Russian Revolution has taken the opposite trajectory) in a brothel and they proceed to the climax at the Louvre. Marxist/Fascist friend Simon's diatribe on dictators, class, and will was written in the 1930's but is horribly apropos to the thoughts of too many young men in 2018. Little things in the book provoke connections - there is a written scene that I swear is the precursor of Hitchcock's visual setting of Rear Window. Lydia is the precursor of the woman in Breaking the Waves. Berger puts me in mind of Meursault in The Stranger which I am about to reread. I'm off to look at



Chardin still lives on the Internet - and the Odalisque in art and to read more Maugham. ~~~Curious about the American film-noir movie version of this book set in New Orleans, but for the life of me I can't see this outside of Paris.

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### **Chrissie says**

Three stars because I liked this book. It takes a while to get into. The beginning is a rapid summary of Charley's respectable, well-off, bourgeois English family. Not snobbish, but proud of what they have attained. Intellectual and well-versed in the arts. His parents had raised Charley and his sister insuring that they had read what should be read, had viewed those paintings one should see and gone to concerts so they were well acquainted with the famous classical composers. All was in order. Charley would be working in the family real estate business. Art was to be enjoyed but not a source of income. The picture drawn is SO bourgeois. Life is comfortable, planned, happy. With all this settled Charley at 23 is off to a good start. The parents' reward is a one week trip to Paris over Christmas. Yes, probably a little fling with the girls, because isn't that perfectly normal?! It is part of being a man.

I will say this, without giving too much of a spoiler, Charley's world opens up on this trip to Paris. He learns of a whole new world. He meets Russian "Princess Olga", aka Lydia. He meets up with his old friend Simon, also 23. Socialist? Communist? Well, certainly not satisfied with the world as it is, and not Charley's staid world. Between the wars, when this book is set, there were many Russian immigrants. Second to Charley, this book is about Lydia and these Russian immigrants living in Paris. Lydia is fascinating. She has so much to teach Charley about art, music, love and life. The author is wonderfully knowledgeable in all these fields and so the book is quite a treasure trove of literary, musical and the visual arts. But what is also emphasized is the emotional response you have towards the arts.

The book has a clear message, a bit too blatantly proclaimed. Some sections could be shortened, for example when Simon is expounding his political views.

My audiobook was narrated by Ben Elliot. The Russian accent is not exaggerated. The French is well pronounced. Good speed. Easy to follow. Yep, a very good narration.

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### **classic reverie says**

The only thing that is Merry is that it is a Christmas time frame read which has Christmas Eve and Day during the holiday and a visit to a Christmas mass in Paris. This is a bildungsroman story which is about a young Englishman who comes home changed after his solitary visit to Paris. This has a more political and life meaning than anything else but it is a really engaging story which this being my first Maugham and looking forward to reading him again. Charley goes to a brothel in Paris and meets someone that changes how he sees life. Loved this sad story.

Lux radio theatre, September 9, 1945.

<https://www.oldtimeradiodownloads.com...>

## Susan says

A young man from an artsy, comfortably middle class English family spends his Christmas holidays in Paris, seeing another side of life and art. Somehow this story didn't quite come off as a whole for me, perhaps because it's difficult to make a nice character who doesn't come/across as bland. But Maugham is a skilled novelist, and he does some clever framing here, so the different stories fit neatly together like a set of nested Russian dolls.

## Lyubina Yordanova says

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### Robin says

Unexpectedly drew me in. Loved it.

**?????????? says**

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