

Sons and Lovers

D. H. LAWRENCE

Level 5

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Introduction

Gertrude Morel no longer loved her husband. She had not wanted this child and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart . . . It had come into the world unloved. She would love it all the more, now that it was here.

Gertrude Morel is poor and unhappily married. Her husband Walter is rough and insensitive, spending much of his free time in the pub. Mrs Morel turns instead to her children, especially her three sons. At first William, the eldest, is her favourite. But things happen, and Mrs Morel turns all her love and attention to Paul, the second son.

This moving story describes family life in a coalminer's family in the early twentieth century. It also describes the emotional development of Paul, torn between his passionate love for his mother and his romantic friendships with two young women, Miriam and Clara.

David Herbert Lawrence was born near Nottingham in 1885, the fourth of five children. He trained as a school teacher and taught at a school in the south of England for three years.

In 1911, his first novel, *The White Peacock*, came out. In the same year his mother died and he gave up teaching because of ill health. He went to Germany and Italy with Frieda Weekley, a married woman whom he married on his return to England in 1914.

Lawrence was now a full-time professional writer. Unhappy in England, where he was criticised for opposing the First World War and for the sexual openness of his books, Lawrence spent most of his time abroad with Frieda. He died in the south of France in 1930, aged forty-four.

Sons and Lovers (1913), one of Lawrence's most famous novels, is based on his own family life. Other important books include *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).

Chapter 1 The Early Years

The Morel family lived in the village of Bestwood in a house built by the mining company for its employees. Gertrude Morel was thirty-one years old and had been married for eight years. Her husband, Walter, was a coalminer. There were two children: William, a boy of seven, and Annie, who was only five. Mrs Morel was expecting her third baby in two months' time. They could not afford to have this third: she did not want it. Its father spent most of his free time drinking in the pub. She had no respect for him but she was tied to him. She was sick of it, this struggle with poverty and ugliness and dirt.

Gertrude Morel was from a Nottingham family: educated, church-going people. Her father was an unsuccessful engineer. She had her mother's small, well-made figure and her father's clear blue eyes. When she was twenty-three years old, she met, at a Christmas party, a young man of twenty-seven. Walter had shining, black, wavy hair and a black beard. He laughed often and heartily, with a rich, ringing laugh. He was quick in his movements, an excellent dancer. He was so open and pleasant with everybody. Gertrude, who was not pleasure-loving like Walter, had never met anyone like him. His body burned with a soft golden flame, the flame of life, and seemed to her something wonderful.

Walter Morel was equally impressed by Gertrude: her blue eyes, her soft brown curls, her beautiful smile. She spoke in an educated way, she had the manners of a lady. The next Christmas they were married and for three months she was perfectly happy. She admired him for being a miner, risking his life daily. Sometimes when she herself was tired of lovetalk, she tried to open her heart seriously to him. He listened to her respectfully

but without understanding. She realised that she could not share her deeper thoughts and ideas with him. Instead, he took pleasure in making and mending, doing little jobs around the house.

Her first big shock was when she found that the bills for their new furniture were not yet paid; and that he did not own their house, as he had told her, but was paying rent – and too high a rent – for it. Then he began to be rather late coming home.

‘They’re working very late these days, aren’t they?’ she said to a neighbour.

‘No later than they always do,’ she answered. ‘But they stop to have a drink at the pub and then they get talking. Dinner stone cold and it’s just what they deserve!’

‘But Mr Morel doesn’t drink.’

The woman looked hard at Mrs Morel, then went on with her work, saying nothing.

Mrs Morel was very ill when the first boy was born. Morel was good to her but she felt very lonely, miles away from her own people. When her husband was with her, it made the loneliness worse. The child was small and weak at first but he quickly grew strong. He was a beautiful baby, with dark golden curls and dark blue eyes, which gradually changed to a clear grey. He came just when her disappointment was at its greatest and her life seemed most empty. She gave all her attention to her child and the father was jealous. While the baby was still small, it often annoyed Morel, and sometimes he hit it. Then Mrs Morel hated her husband for days. Feeling unloved, Morel went out and drank. On his return she greeted him with fierce, stinging remarks about his drinking.

Morel always rose early, about five or six, even on a holiday. On Sunday morning he usually got up and prepared breakfast. The child rose with his father, while the mother lay resting for another hour or so. William was now one year old and his

mother was proud of him, he was so pretty. One Sunday morning Mrs Morel lay listening to the two of them talking below. Then she fell asleep. When she came downstairs, there was a big fire burning and breakfast was laid. Morel sat in his armchair, looking rather shamefaced. The child stood between his legs, his head of hair cut short like a sheep; and on a newspaper spread out in front of the fire lay William’s golden curls, shining in the firelight. Mrs Morel stood quite still and went very white.

‘So what do you think of him?’ laughed Morel, a little guiltily.

She came forward, ready to hit him. ‘I could kill you, I could!’ she said, so angry she could hardly speak. She picked up the child, buried her face in his shoulder and cried painfully. Morel sat looking at the fire in shock. Later she said she had been silly, the boy’s hair had to be cut sooner or later. But she remembered this event for the rest of her life. Before, she had wanted to bring her husband closer to her. From now on he was an outsider. This made her life easier to accept. The pity was, she was too much his opposite. In trying to make him better than he was, she destroyed him.





'I could kill you, I could!' Mrs Morel said, so angry she could hardly speak.

working in the house. In the evening Morel returned, kicking open the garden gate and breaking the lock. He entered the kitchen unsteadily and nearly upset a bowl of boiling liquid which was cooling on the table.

'God help us, coming home in his drunkenness!' cried Mrs Morel.

'Coming home in his what?' shouted her husband, his hat over one eye.

'Say you're *not* drunk!' she insisted.

'Only a nasty old cat like you could have such a thought,' answered Morel.

'You've been drinking all day, so if you're not drunk by eleven o'clock at night-' she replied. 'We know well enough what you do when you go out with your beautiful Jerry. There's money to drink with, if there's money for nothing else.'

'I've not spent two shillings all day,' he said.

'Well, if Jerry's been buying your drinks, tell him to spend his money on his children - they need it! And what about your own children? You can't afford to keep them, can you?'

'What's it got to do with you?' he shouted.

'Got to do with me? Why, a lot! You give me just twenty-five shillings to do everything with, you go off drinking all day, come rolling home at midnight-'

'It's a lie, it's a lie - shut your face, woman!'

The quarrel got fiercer and fiercer. Each forgot everything except their hatred of the other. She was just as angry as he.

'You're a liar!' he shouted, banging on the table with his hand. 'You're a liar! You're a liar!'

All the dislike she felt for him now came pouring out.

'You're nothing but dirt in this house!' she cried.

would have gone long ago, but for those children. Do you think I stay for *you*?’

He came up to her and held her arms tightly. She cried out, struggling to be free. He took her roughly to the outside door and pushed her out of the house, banging the door shut and locking it behind her. Then he sank exhausted into a chair and soon lost consciousness. She stood for a few moments staring helplessly in the August night, her body shaking, remembering the unborn child inside her. The darkness was full of the sweet smell of flowers. There was no noise anywhere. Then a train rushed across the valley miles away. She went to the back door and tried the handle. It was still locked. Through the window she could just see her husband’s head on the table and his arms spread out. She knocked on the window more and more loudly but still he did not wake. Fearful for the unborn child, she walked up and down the garden path to keep warm, knocking every now and then on the window, telling herself that in the end he must wake. At last he heard the knocking and woke up.

‘Open the door, Walter,’ she said coldly.

Realising what he had done, he hurried to unlock the door. As Mrs Morel entered, she saw him disappearing shamefacedly up the stairs. When at last she herself went to bed, Morel was already asleep.

Chapter 2 The Birth of Paul

Before the baby was born, Mrs Morel cleaned the house from top to bottom. When Morel got home one evening, the child had already arrived. The delivery nurse met him in the kitchen.

‘Your wife is in a bad way. It’s a boy child.’

He hung up his coat and then dropped into his chair.

‘Have you got a drink?’ he asked. The nurse brought him one,

then without a word served him his dinner and went back upstairs. He ate his meal, sat for twenty minutes, made up the fire and then unwillingly went up to the bedroom. His face was still black and sweaty as he stood at the end of the bed.

‘Well, how are you then?’ he asked.

‘I shall be all right,’ she answered.

‘Hm. It’s a boy.’

She turned down the blanket and showed him the baby. He pretended to be pleased but she knew he was not much interested. He wanted to kiss her but he did not dare, so he left the room.

Mrs Morel sat looking at her baby and the baby looked up at her. It had blue eyes like her own, which seemed to bring out her most secret thoughts. She no longer loved her husband. She had not wanted this child and there it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. A wave of hot love went out of her towards the child. She held it close to her face and breast. It had come into the world unloved. She would love it all the more, now it was here.



He leaned unsteadily on the table and pulled at the table drawer to get a knife to cut bread. The drawer stuck, so he pulled harder. It flew right out and spoons, forks, knives fell all over the floor. The baby woke at the noise.

'What are you doing, you drunken fool?' the mother cried.

In trying to fit the drawer back in, it fell, hurting his leg. In his anger he picked it up and threw it at his wife. One of the corners hit her above the eye. Blood ran into her eye and red drops fell on the baby's blanket.

'Did it hit you?' asked Morel, bending over her unsteadily.

'Go away!'

'Let me look at it, woman.'

She smelled the drink on his breath and weakly pushed him away.

He stood staring at her.

'What has it done to you, dear?' he asked.

'You can see what it's done,' she answered.

Mrs Morel would not let him touch her. She cleaned the wound herself and went upstairs, telling him to mend the fire and lock the door.

'It was her own fault,' he told himself afterwards. Having hurt her, he hated her.

By the following Wednesday he had no money left. He looked inside his wife's purse when she was in the garden with the baby, and took a sixpence. The next day Mrs Morel found the money missing and was sure he had taken it. When he had had his dinner, she said to him coldly: 'Did you take sixpence from my purse last night?'

Although he denied it, she knew he was lying.

'So you steal sixpence from my purse while I'm bringing the washing in,' she said accusingly.

'I'll make you pay for this,' answered Morel. He got washed and went upstairs with a determined expression on his face.

Soon afterwards he came down dressed, with his things tied up in an enormous blue handkerchief.

'You'll see me again when you do,' he said.

'It'll be before I want to,' his wife replied.

At that, he marched out of the house with his parcel.

William and Annie were surprised to find their father gone.

'Where's he going to?' asked William.

