SONS AND LOVERS

D H LAWRENCE

Collins English Library

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Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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Collins English Library Level 6

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D H LAWRENCE

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1 The Morels

Monday morning was a holiday, the day of the annual fair. Gertrude Morel's husband was a miner: he had gone out early and she did not think he would come home until late. The two children were excited. William, a boy of seven, could not wait till the fair began, and Annie, who was three, pulled at her mother's sleeve and begged to go.

"You shall go after dinner."

"Can't I have my dinner now, mother?" cried William.

"You can wait five minutes."

They had nearly finished dinner when the first music of the fair began.

"It's begun," he cried. He jumped down from his chair and ran out.

"You haven't got your twopence," called Mrs Morel. William ran back for the money, and disappeared. Annie began to cry. "I want to go too, I want to go to the fair."

"You shall, you shall. When I'm ready."

Gertrude Morel was thirty-one years old, had been married for eight years, and was expecting a third child in two months.

The Morels lived in Bestwood, a mining village ten miles from the town of Nottingham. They had one of a row of miners' houses. From the front the houses looked quite solid and well-built. But the kitchens, where the families lived, overlooked a row of nasty rubbish pits.

The mines and the houses were surrounded by fields and woods, not yet spoiled by the growth of industry. Later in the afternoon Mrs Morel went out across those fields, with Annie holding her hand. The hay was gathered from the fields and cattle were standing under the trees. It was warm, peaceful.

Mrs Morel didn't like the noise of the fair; the loud music, the shouting of the men at the sideshows and stalls. At the fairground William ran to her.

"Mother, look there – there's a lion, they say he killed three men. I've spent my money and look – " He gave her two egg cups with pink roses on them. "I won them at that stall, you have to roll those little balls into the right holes. I wanted them for you."

"H'm," said Mrs Morel, pleased. "Pretty."

William led her round the fair. He would not leave her, he was proud of her. She looked unlike the other women, in her neat black dress.

She bought some sweets for Annie and then, when she was tired, said, "Are you coming home now, William, or later?"

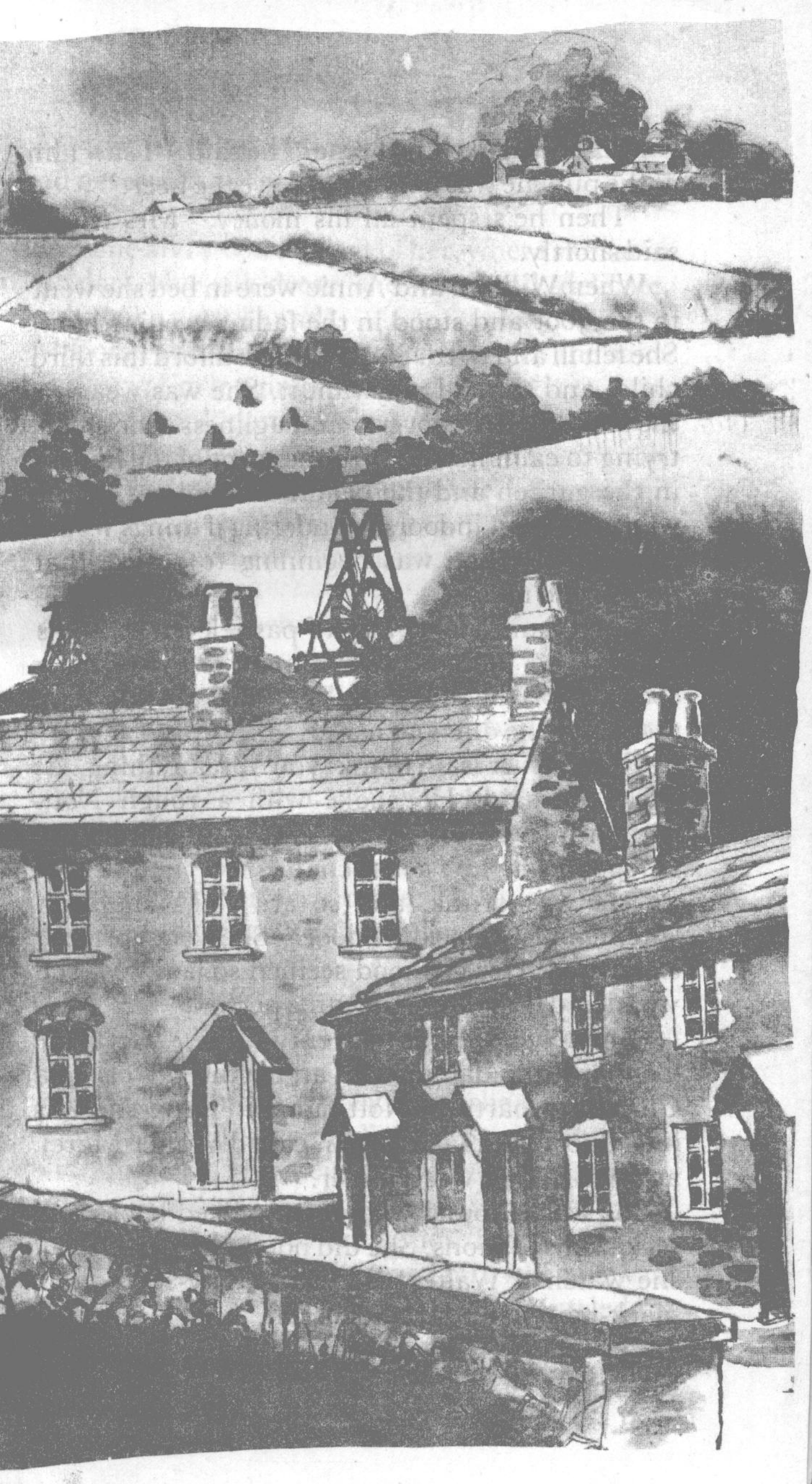
"Going home already?"

"Already? It's past four."

"Don't go so soon."

"You needn't come if you don't want to," she said.

She went slowly away with Annie while William stood watching her, wanting to go with her, and yet unable to leave the fair. He stayed, but came home at half past six, tired and pale and somehow unhappy. After his mother went, he had not enjoyed himself.



"Has my dad come home?" he said. "I saw him at the pub, he was helping to serve the beer."

"Then he's spent all his money," Mrs Morel said shortly.

When William and Annie were in bed she went to the door and stood in the fading evening light. She felt ill and tired. She could not afford this third child, and she did not want it. She was weary of the struggle with poverty and ugliness. She stood, trying to calm herself with the scent of the flowers in the garden and the beautiful evening. After a while she went indoors, wondering if things would ever change. She was beginning to realise that they would not.

Morel came home at half past eleven. He was drunk, and pleased with himself. "I brought a coconut for the children," he said, putting it on the table. She did not answer.

"You never say thank you for anything, do you," he said. He spoke with a rough Nottinghamshire accent. "I got it for nothing from Bill Hodgekinson, he's a nice chap."

"He was drunk, and so are you," she said. "Remember to lock the door." She went upstairs, exhausted. Her girlhood seemed so far away, she wondered if she were the same person.

When she was twenty-three, Gertrude Coppard, the daughter of an engineer, went to a Christmas party in Nottingham. There she was introduced to a young man called Walter Morel, and was told he was a miner.

She was a young woman who liked books and serious discussions. She did not dance herself, but she watched Walter. He was twenty-seven; tall, black-haired and red-cheeked, full of life and

laughter, burning with warm life like a flame. She had never met anyone like him.

He came and stood in front of her, where she sat in her dark blue silk dress; she was small, delicate, and had beautiful hands.

"Come and have this dance with me," he said. "It's easy. I'm longing to see you dance."

"No, I won't dance," she said with a smile. He sat down beside her.

"But you mustn't miss your dance," she said.

"No, I don't care about it."

After a moment, she said, "And you're a miner?"

"Yes, I went down when I was ten."

"Wasn't that very hard?"

"You soon get used to it. You live like the mice and you come out at night to see what's happening."

She looked at him, startled. She had never thought of the life of miners, hundreds of them working below the earth and coming out at night. He seemed to her very brave. He risked his life daily, and yet he was so cheerful and warm.

The next Christmas they were married. For three months she was perfectly happy. For six months she was very happy.

He didn't drink, and they lived, she thought, in his own house. It was small, but convenient, with solid furniture. Her neighbours seemed strange, but she was quite happy when Morel was near her. He was clever with his hands; he could make or mend anything, and she loved him when he was busy and happy. Sometimes, though, she tried to

talk seriously to him. He listened without understanding, and she had flashes of fear.

Then, one day, she found a bundle of papers in the pocket of his best black suit. They were bills for the furniture. She thought he had paid them. Then she discovered that he did not own their house, but paid rent for it. And he still owed money for the wedding.

She said very little to Morel, but her manner to him changed. Something had become hard as rock inside her. He began to come home very late.

"The miners are working late now, aren't they?" she said to her neighbour.

"No later than usual. They stop for beer at the pub."

"But Mr Morel doesn't drink."

The woman looked at her and said nothing.

A year after their marriage she had William. Morel was good to her, as good as gold. But she still felt lonely, even when he was with her.

The child was beautiful, with golden curling hair, and his mother loved him deeply. He came just when her own bitterness was greatest. Morel was jealous, and Mrs Morel turned from him. Then began a battle between husband and wife, a fearful bloody battle that would end only with the death of one.

Morel became bad-tempered. She fought to change him, to make him moral and religious, but his nature was too different, and she would not accept him as he was. Once, he hit the baby. Then the mother hated him, really hated him for days. He went out and drank, and when he came back she burned him with her words. She tried to

change him, but she destroyed him.

He had been steady at work, but now the money grew less. He quarrelled with the other miners and hated authority; so he got worse and worse places, where the coal was thin and hard to get.

One Sunday morning Mrs Morel lay in bed, listening to the chatter of the father and child downstairs.

When she came down, the fire was glowing, the room was warm and breakfast was ready. Morel sat in his armchair, rather frightened, and the child stood near him. On a newspaper on the floor were all the soft yellow curls. Mrs Morel stood very still. "I could kill you," she said.

"Do you want to make him a girl?" he said.

After that, she cooked his meals, but she hardly spoke to him.

Afterwards, she said she had been silly. The boy's hair had to be cut sooner or later. But she knew, and Morel knew, that something unforgettable had happened. She remembered the scene all her life.

2 The birth of Paul and another battle

Paul was born a year later. She was glad the child was a boy, she liked to be the mother of men.

One evening she took the baby and walked across the fields in the ripe evening light. She watched the blazing sun go down, leaving a soft flower-blue sky. It was one of those still moments

when small troubles disappear and the beauty of things stands out. She felt peaceful and strong.

She no longer loved her husband, she had not wanted this child, but it lay in her arms and pulled at her heart. She held it closer. She felt that the birth-string connecting its tiny body with hers, had not been broken. A wave of hot love went over her. With all her force, she would make up to this child, which she had brought into the world unloved.

After a while she went home. The house was empty but Morel was home by ten o'clock, and that day, at least, ended peacefully.

At this time Morel was very irritable, very bad-tempered. His work seemed to exhaust him. When he came home he could not say a civil word to anyone; if the children made a noise he shouted. It made their mother angry, and they hated him.

One Friday he was not home by eleven. The baby was not well, restless and crying. Mrs Morel was very tired and still weak; she could hardly control herself.

He came. He was drunk.

"Is there nothing to eat in the house?" he demanded. His voice was insulting.

"You know what there is," she said.

He pulled the table drawer to get the bread knife. It stuck, and in a temper he pulled it out too far. Everything fell on the floor, and the baby started to cry.

"What are you doing, you drunken clumsy fool?" she shouted.

He pulled the drawer angrily, and it came out of the table. It fell and cut his leg, and he threw it at

her. It hit her head and blood ran down her face. He stood blindly for a moment, and then went to her. "Let me look at it."

"Go away!" she cried. Weakly she pushed him away. Her face was as cold as stone, her mouth shut tightly. He looked at her and felt sick with weakness and hopelessness.

She went upstairs.

Next morning she told the children, "I went outside to get the coal, my candle blew out and I fell against the door." They looked at her with wide eyes. There was an unhappy feeling in the house. The children were depressed, they didn't know what to do, what to play with.

Mrs Morel was bitter, because she had loved him.

During the next week Morel became seriously ill. He was not a good patient; he was one of the worst imaginable. In spite of everything, and apart from the fact that his wages paid for their food, she did not want him to die.

She had to do everything, the nursing of the baby and her husband, all the cooking and cleaning. Sometimes the neighbours helped, but not every day.

Nevertheless there was peace in the house for some time. She was less impatient, and he, depending on her like a child, was almost happy.

Neither knew that she was more patient because she loved him less. There were many stages in the lessening of her love for him, but it was always growing less. She turned now for love and life to the children.

William was growing fast, and doing well at school. He made the world glow for her. Paul, delicate and quiet, followed his mother like a shadow. Sometimes he had moods of depression, and cried.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know," sobbed the child. Morel was impatient. "I'll beat him till he stops."

"You will not." She took Paul into the garden and after a while he stopped crying.

When William was thirteen his mother got him a job in an office.

"Why don't you put him in the mine?" said Morel. "Send him with me, he'll earn ten shillings a week, easily."

"He's not going down the mine," she said.

She was proud of her son. William was a very clever boy. He went to the night school and learned shorthand and account-keeping. When he was sixteen he taught in the night school himself.

He began to make friends with the sons of the bank manager and the chemist and the schoolmaster. He never drank, but he went to dances, and he began to go out with girls. Paul heard descriptions of all kinds of flower-like girls, most of them lived in William's heart for a short two weeks.

Sometimes a strange girl knocked at the door.

"Is Mr Morel in?"

"My husband is not at home," said Mrs Morel.

"I mean young Mr Morel. I met him at a dance."

"Oh, at a dance?"

"Yes."

"I don't approve of the girls my son meets at dances. Good afternoon." And she shut the door.

When he was nineteen William got a better job in Nottingham. Annie was now studying to be a teacher; Paul did well at school, and had lessons in French and Maths from the minister, who was his godfather.

Then William got a job in London, at a hundred and twenty pounds a year. This seemed an enormous sum.

"Think of me in London, mother. We'll be rich."

He never thought that she might be hurt because he was going away. She felt as if he were going out of her heart. He took nearly all of himself away, and that was grief and pain to her.

Paul was still pale and quiet, and he seemed older than he was. He was so conscious of people's feelings, specially his mother's feelings. When she was unhappy, he could have no peace.

Morel continued to drink and shout, and for months he made the family miserable. Paul never forgot coming home one evening. His mother had one eye swollen and discoloured. Morel stood in front of the fire, head down, and William, just home from work, stared angrily at his father.

"Coward," he said. "You wouldn't do it if I were here."

Paul and Annie sat side by side, pale-faced. Paul hoped William would fight his father. But Mrs Morel stopped it. "We've had enough," she said. "Look at your children."

"What have I done to the children? They're like you, you've taught them your nasty ways."

She did not answer. No-one spoke, and after a while Morel went to bed.