

## Odour of Chrysanthemums

David Herbert Lawrence (1885 – 1930) is an English novelist and poet, ranked among the most influential and controversial literary figures of the 20th century. He has written more than forty books on his vision of the natural, whole human being, opposing the artificiality of modern industrial society. He mentions love as being dehumanized in our modern world. *The White Peacock* (1911) and *Sons and Lovers* (1913) are two of his early fiction. “Odour of Chrysanthemums” is an analysis on the lives of coal miners who put their lives on the line each time they enter the mine. But more than that, Lawrence philosophically questions the purpose of marriage and raising children.

The story opens with the day sinking into the horizon and the miners going back to their homes. These people are solitary beings moving like “shadows diverging” because of the black dust covering them and because of their dance with death. Elizabeth Bates was an attractive but ordinary woman with two children used to her poor life. She was a stubborn yet practical woman but her husband Walter Bates spent all his meagre earnings in drink and pubs. John and Annie were the Bates children who waited for their father to return. Elizabeth’s father was a railway engine operator who stopped by for tea every evening. Though Elizabeth despised her father remarrying, she accepted his need for support in his age. While walking in the tiny garden, Elizabeth plucked some wispy pink chrysanthemums and tucked them into her apron.

Elizabeth Bates knew her husband might spend the night at the “Prince of Wales” pub and be brought home drunk when he was late. Annie returned from school and asked her mother about the flowers. Elizabeth recalled the symbolic connection of chrysanthemums and her life. The flowers were there when she got married, when Annie was born and when Walter was brought home drunk. Elizabeth was pregnant once again and she hated her husband for her bitter marital life. Walter was one who always took more than he gave. She sent the children to bed and started sewing while waiting for Walter. She contacted her neighbour Mrs. Rigley and her husband. But they had no information on Walter. Elizabeth was too embarrassed to go to the pub and bring Walter back.

Walter’s mother was a highly sensitive woman who visited Elizabeth fearing for her son. When revealed that Walter had been in an accident, his mother wails while Elizabeth immediately makes a financial calculation for providing for the children. Walter was brought on a stretcher by manager Matthews who says the poor man was trapped in when the roof collapsed. Walter had asphyxiated and there was no wound or injury on his person. Walter’s mother began crying and wailing when Elizabeth asked her not to wake

the children. She remained calm and level-headed, preparing the parlour, washing the body and dressing Walter for the funeral.

A little vase of chrysanthemums was knocked over in the process of moving Walter and the whole house smelt of them. Elizabeth reflected on her true relationship with Walter while performing the last rites. The flowers that represented the death of their marriage were now directly connected to death. Death had separated them but she realized that marriage had never united them in the first place. There was no love between them and the child in her womb seemed heavy. Elizabeth understood that one can never connect with another person in life. Marriage was the product of a failed social order.

### **To Room Nineteen**