

to room nineteen doris lessing

To Room Nineteen is a poignant short story by Doris Lessing that delves into the complexities of identity, marital discontent, and the search for personal freedom. First published in 1963 as part of the collection "The Wind Blows Away Our Words," the narrative presents a critical examination of domestic life and the sacrifices often made by women within the institution of marriage. By focusing on the life of the protagonist, Susan, Lessing invites readers to reflect on the societal expectations placed on women and the profound impacts these can have on personal fulfillment and mental health.

Plot Summary

The story centers around Susan Rawlings, a seemingly content middle-class woman and mother of four children. Married to a supportive husband, Matthew, Susan appears to embody the ideal of a devoted wife and mother. However, beneath this façade lies profound dissatisfaction and an unsettling sense of alienation.

Life Before Room Nineteen

In the beginning, Susan navigates her life as a homemaker, fulfilling her roles with dedication. Yet, as the story unfolds, it becomes evident that Susan's life is dominated by the repetitive nature of her domestic responsibilities. The pressures of motherhood and the expectations of being a "perfect" wife weigh heavily on her. The narrative highlights several key aspects of her life before she discovers Room Nineteen:

1. Domestic Routine: Susan's days are filled with the monotony of housework, child-rearing, and attending to her husband's needs. This routine, while structured, becomes suffocating for her.
2. Loss of Self: As a devoted mother and wife, Susan gradually loses her own identity, becoming increasingly invisible in her own life. Her aspirations and desires are overshadowed by her family's needs.
3. Isolation: Despite being surrounded by her family, Susan experiences a profound sense of loneliness. Her emotional and intellectual needs are neglected, leaving her feeling trapped within the confines of her home.

The Discovery of Room Nineteen

The turning point in Susan's journey occurs when she discovers a secluded room in a hotel—Room Nineteen. This space represents a sanctuary, a place

where she can escape from her responsibilities and reclaim her individuality. The room becomes a symbol of freedom and self-reflection, contrasting sharply with her domestic life.

- Symbolism of Room Nineteen: The room symbolizes both liberation and the paradox of freedom. It allows Susan to explore her thoughts and emotions without judgment, but it also highlights the lengths to which she must go to find solitude.

- The Importance of Solitude: In Room Nineteen, Susan engages in introspection, contemplating her life choices and the sacrifices she has made. This solitude is essential for her mental well-being, as it enables her to confront her feelings of dissatisfaction.

Thematic Exploration

Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" is rich with themes that resonate with the struggles of many women, particularly those grappling with societal expectations and personal identity.

Identity and Self-Discovery

One of the central themes of the story is the quest for self-identity. Susan's journey reflects the conflict between societal roles and personal desires. As she spends more time in Room Nineteen, she begins to rediscover her own identity outside of her roles as a mother and wife.

- The Fragmentation of Identity: The story illustrates how societal norms can fragment a woman's identity, leading to a lack of self-awareness. Susan's realization that she is more than just a mother or wife is a crucial part of her journey.

- The Crisis of Identity: Susan's struggle with her identity culminates in a crisis, as she grapples with the reality of her existence. Her moments of clarity in Room Nineteen reveal the depth of her internal conflict.

Isolation and Loneliness

Lessing poignantly captures the theme of isolation experienced by women in domestic settings. Despite having a supportive husband and children, Susan feels increasingly isolated in her role.

- Emotional Isolation: Susan's emotional isolation is exacerbated by her inability to communicate her feelings to her husband. This lack of understanding deepens her sense of loneliness, leading her to seek refuge in

Room Nineteen.

- **Societal Expectations:** The societal expectation for women to be self-sacrificing and wholly devoted to their families contributes to Susan's isolation. The pressure to conform stifles her individuality, leaving her feeling trapped.

Character Analysis

The characters in "To Room Nineteen" are intricately crafted, each representing different facets of societal norms and personal struggles.

Susan Rawlings

Susan is the protagonist whose journey of self-discovery forms the backbone of the narrative. She is depicted as intelligent, thoughtful, and introspective, yet deeply conflicted.

- **Complexity:** Susan's character embodies the struggle between societal expectations and personal desires. Her internal conflict is palpable, making her a relatable figure for many readers.
- **Evolution:** Throughout the story, Susan evolves from a passive character confined by her roles to one who actively seeks a form of liberation in Room Nineteen.

Matthew Rawlings

Matthew serves as a foil to Susan, representing the traditional male figure in a marriage. While he is supportive and caring, he is also oblivious to Susan's internal struggles.

- **Symbol of Patriarchy:** Matthew's character embodies the societal norms that dictate the roles of men and women in marriage. His inability to perceive Susan's dissatisfaction highlights the limitations placed on both genders.
- **Miscommunication:** The lack of communication between Matthew and Susan underscores the theme of isolation. Despite his best intentions, he fails to connect with her emotionally.

Conclusion

In "To Room Nineteen," Doris Lessing masterfully explores the complexities of

identity, isolation, and the quest for personal freedom. Through the character of Susan Rawlings, readers are invited to reflect on the constraints of societal expectations and the importance of self-discovery. The story resonates with anyone who has ever felt confined by their roles, offering a powerful commentary on the sacrifices women make in the pursuit of fulfillment.

Ultimately, Lessing's narrative serves as a reminder of the necessity of solitude and self-reflection in understanding one's identity. Room Nineteen becomes more than just a physical space; it symbolizes the need for personal agency and the courage to confront one's inner turmoil. Through Susan's journey, Lessing articulates a universal struggle, encouraging readers to seek their own Room Nineteen in a world that often demands conformity over individuality.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main themes explored in Doris Lessing's 'To Room Nineteen'?

The main themes include the search for identity, the constraints of societal roles, the complexities of marriage, and the struggle for personal freedom.

How does Doris Lessing portray the concept of mental health in 'To Room Nineteen'?

Lessing examines mental health through the character of Susan, who experiences isolation and existential crisis, highlighting the impact of societal expectations on women's mental well-being.

What role does the setting play in 'To Room Nineteen'?

The setting, particularly the titular room, serves as a symbol of escape and personal space for Susan, contrasting with her domestic life and reflecting her internal conflict.

In what ways does 'To Room Nineteen' reflect feminist ideas?

The story critiques traditional gender roles and the limitations placed on women, showcasing Susan's struggle against the expectations of motherhood and marriage, which resonate with feminist discourse.

What is the significance of the title 'To Room Nineteen'?

The title signifies a personal refuge for the protagonist, representing her desire for independence and the search for a space where she can confront her identity and desires away from societal pressures.

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