



Love in a Cold Climate

By Nancy Mitford

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A sparkling romantic comedy that vividly evokes the lost glamour of aristocratic life in England between the wars.

Polly Hampton has long been groomed for the perfect marriage by her mother, the fearsome and ambitious Lady Montdore. But Polly, with her stunning good looks and impeccable connections, is bored by the monotony of her glittering debut season in London. Having just come from India, where her father served as Viceroy, she claims to have hoped that society in a colder climate would be less obsessed with love affairs. The apparently aloof and indifferent Polly has a long-held secret, however, one that leads to the shattering of her mother's dreams and her own disinheritance. When an elderly duke begins pursuing the disgraced Polly and a callow potential heir curries favor with her parents, nothing goes as expected, but in the end all find happiness in their own unconventional ways.

Featuring an introduction by Flora Fraser.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Mitford’s art at its best is so fine, so beautifully shimmering with wit and gaiety that it creates a standard of its own.” —*The New Republic*

“Entirely original, inimitable, and irresistible.” —*Spectator*

About the Author

Nancy Mitford, daughter of Lord and Lady Redesdale and the eldest of the six legendary Mitford sisters, was born in 1904 and educated at home on the family estate in Oxfordshire. She made her debut in London and soon became one of the bright young things of the 1920s, a close friend of Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh, John Betjeman, and their circle. A beauty and a wit, she began writing for magazines and writing novels while she was still in her twenties. In all, she wrote eight novels as well as biographies of Madame de Pompadour, Voltaire, Louis XIV, and Frederick the Great. She died in 1973. More information can be found at www.nancymitford.com.

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Chapter 1

I am obliged to begin this story with a brief account of the Hampton family, because it is necessary to emphasise the fact once and for all that the Hamptons were very grand as well as very rich. A short session with Burke or with Debrett would be quite enough to make this clear, but these large volumes are not always available, while the books on the subject by Lord Montdore’s brother-in-law, Boy Dougdale, are all out of print. His great talent for snobbishness and small talent for literature have produced three detailed studies of his wife’s forebears, but they can only be read now by asking a bookseller to get them at second hand. (The bookseller will put an advertisement in his trade paper, *The Clique*: “H. Dougdale, any by.” He will be snowed under with copies at about a shilling each and will then proudly inform his customer that he has “managed to find what you want,” implying hours of careful search on barrows, dirt cheap, at 30/- the three.) *Georgiana Lady Montdore and Her Circle*, *The Magnificent Montdores* and *Old Chronicles of Hampton*, I have them beside me as I write, and see that the opening paragraph of the first is:

“Two ladies, one dark, one fair, both young and lovely, were driving briskly towards the little village of Kensington on a fine May morning. They were Georgiana, Countess of Montdore and her great friend Walburga, Duchess of Paddington, and they made a delightfully animated picture as they discussed the burning question of the hour—should one or should one not subscribe to a parting present for poor dear Princess Lieven?”

This book is dedicated, by gracious permission, to Her Royal Highness, the Grand Duchess Peter of Russia, and has eight full-page illustrations.

It must be said that when this trilogy first came out it had quite a vogue with the lending-library public.

“The family of Hampton is ancient in the West of England, indeed Fuller, in his *Worthies* mentions it as being of stupendous antiquity.”

Burke makes it out just a shade more ancient than does Debrett, but both plunge back into the mists of mediaeval times from which they drag forth ancestors with P. G. Wodehouse names, Ugs and Berts and

Threds, and Walter Scott fates. “His Lordship was attainted—beheaded—convicted—proscribed—exiled—dragged from prison by a furious mob—slain at the Battle of Crécy—went down in the White Ship—perished during the third crusade—killed in a duel.” There were very few natural deaths to record in the early misty days. Both Burke and Debrett linger with obvious enjoyment over so genuine an object as this family, unspoilt by the ambiguities of female line and deed poll. Nor could any of those horrid books, which came out in the nineteenth century, devoted to research and aiming to denigrate the nobility, make the object seem less genuine. Tall, golden-haired barons, born in wedlock and all looking very much alike, succeeded each other at Hampton, on lands which had never been bought or sold, generation after generation until, in 1770, the Lord Hampton of the day brought back, from a visit to Versailles, a French bride, a Mademoiselle de Montdore. Their son had brown eyes, a dark skin and presumably, for it is powdered in all the pictures of him, black hair. This blackness did not persist in the family. He married a golden-haired heiress from Derbyshire, and the Hamptons reverted to their blue-and-gold looks, for which they are famous to this day. The son of the Frenchwoman was rather clever and very worldly; he dabbled in politics and wrote a book of aphorisms, but his chief claim to fame was his great and lifelong friendship with the Regent, which procured him, among other favours, an earldom. His mother’s family having all perished during the Terror in France, he took her name as his title. Enormously rich, he spent enormously; he had a taste for French objects of art and acquired, during the years which followed the Revolution, a splendid collection of such things, including many pieces from the royal establishments, and others which had been looted out of the Hotel de Montdore in the rue de Varenne. To make a suitable setting for this collection, he then proceeded to pull down at Hampton the large plain house that Adam had built for his grandfather and to drag over to England stone by stone (as modern American millionaires are supposed to do) a Gothic French chateau. This he assembled round a splendid tower of his own designing, covered the walls of the rooms with French panelling and silks and set it in a formal landscape which he also designed and planted himself. It was all very grand and very mad, and in the between wars period of which I write, very much out of fashion. “I suppose it is beautiful,” people used to say, “but frankly I don’t admire it.”

This Lord Montdore also built Montdore House in Park Lane and a castle on a crag in Aberdeenshire. He was really much the most interesting and original character the family produced, but no member of it deviated from a tradition of authority. A solid, worthy, powerful Hampton can be found on every page of English history, his influence enormous in the West of England and his counsels not unheeded in London.

The tradition was carried on by the father of my friend, Polly Hampton. If an Englishman could be descended from the gods it would be he, so much the very type of English nobleman that those who believed in aristocratic government would always begin by pointing to him as a justification of their argument. It was generally felt, indeed, that if there were more people like him the country would not be in its present mess, even Socialists conceding his excellence, which they could afford to do since there was only one of him and he was getting on. A scholar, a Christian, a gentleman, finest shot in the British Isles, best-looking Viceroy we ever sent to India, a popular landlord, a pillar of the Conservative Party, a wonderful old man, in short, who nothing common ever did or mean. My cousin Linda and I, two irreverent little girls whose opinion makes no odds, used to think that he was a wonderful old fraud, and it seemed to us that in that house it was Lady Montdore who really counted. Now Lady Montdore was forever doing common things and mean, and she was intensely unpopular, quite as much disliked as her husband was loved, so that anything he might do that was considered not quite worthy of him, or which did not quite fit in with his reputation, was immediately laid at her door. “Of course she made him do it.” On the other hand, I have often wondered whether without her to bully him and push him forward and plot and intrigue for him and “make him do it,” whether, in fact, without the help of those very attributes which caused her to be so much disliked, her thick skin and ambition and boundless driving energy, he would ever have done anything at all noteworthy in the world.

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