

Daughters and Rebels: An Autobiography Study Guide

**Daughters and Rebels: An Autobiography by Jessica
Mitford**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Daughters and Rebels: An Autobiography Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1-2.....	4
Chapters 3-4.....	5
Chapter 5-6.....	6
Chapters 7-9.....	7
Chapters 10-12.....	8
Chapters 13-14.....	9
Chapters 15-16.....	10
Chapters 17-18.....	11
Chapters 19-20.....	12
Chapters 21-23.....	13
Chapters 24-25.....	14
Chapters 26-27.....	15
Chapters 28-29.....	16
Chapters 30-31.....	17
Chapters 32-33.....	18
Characters.....	19
Objects/Places.....	22
Themes.....	24
Style.....	26
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	31

Plot Summary

Hons and Rebels by Jessica Mitford is the story of Mitford's upbringing and years of her marriage to Esmond Romilly. Jessica is from a wealthy aristocratic family, with a father who was a member of the House of Lords. Growing up on their country estate with her brother and five sisters was basically like growing up in isolation with no friends but each other. Their estate was totally self-sufficient, complete with a lessons room and a hospital room. Jessica yearned to meet people. She wants to escape the confines of her family and country estate and get out into the world. Jessica establishes her running away savings account at an early age. She thinks that the boredom and monotony will be broken when she becomes a debutant but is disappointed to find she is still confined to the stuffy world she grew up in.

Her family has leanings toward Hitler and Nazism, while her own personal leanings were towards socialism. She learns of her second cousins, Giles and Esmond Romilly's revolt against family and tradition from their publications and feels particularly close to Esmond, with whom she eventually elopes. She runs off to Spain with him, planning to fight against Franco. She uses her running away savings account to help with the expenses. After they marry, they are cut off from any financial support from their families and must work to support themselves. This results in some humorous incidents, like not knowing they had to pay for electricity until they ran up a huge bill.

They eventually decide to move to America, and the last half of the book covers their time there. They use letters of introduction to meet people and take part in a whirlwind of social events in New York and in Washington DC, taking whatever employment they can find to support themselves. They sell silk stockings in Washington and work as a drug store clerk and a busboy in Miami until Esmond borrows money and becomes a partner in the Roma restaurant and bar. Then they both become involved in the management of the bar. They leave there when Esmond decides to enlist in the Canadian Air Force. In spite of all of his rebellion, he feels he must fight against Fascism.

Hons and Rebels is light reading and reads like a novel. The book is humorous and enjoyable reading and well worth the time spent. The style of the author makes the book pleasant reading, even supplying the suspense of having the reader wonder what will happen next in the story.



Chapter 1-2

Chapter 1-2 Summary and Analysis

The book opens with a description of Cotswold and its buildings. The house is self-contained with its own school and hospital rooms. The children have very little contact with outsiders and find ways to amuse themselves. Unity and Jessica even make up their own language called Boudledidge. The Society of Hons is organized by the two of them and they are the only members. They fight the Horrible Counter-Hons, which consists of their brother, Tom. They play their childhood games within this framework.

The girls are educated at home by their mother and various governesses. There are no tests and they aren't exposed to the modern theories or controversies of the day. The variety they receive in their education is due to the fact that there was a high rate of turnover in governesses, one of whom taught the children to shoplift.

The family interests centers on the Church, the Conservative Party, and the House of Lords. Jessica's mother, called Muv, is active in Conservative Party activities and frequently brings her daughters along. They expect to follow the family tradition and support the Conservative Party, since their father, called Farve, is a member of the House of Lords. He only goes to London to attend sessions if there was a topic that interested him, such as any attempt to limit the powers of the House of Lords. He strongly believes in the principle of heredity. Farve particularly relishes his right to choose the clergy in his area. The entire Mitford is required to attend Church services.

Muv is an active giver to charity. She gives gifts to the poorer families of Swinbrook. As a child, Jessica is both aware of and bothered by poverty and formulates the idea that all money should be equally divided among the population. Her mother explains that this is the idea of the Socialists, which amazes her since she has been taught to oppose them, and explains to her why it isn't a good idea.

This is the environment in which Jessica grows up. She is aware of class distinction and the inequality of income at an early age.



Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

Jessica discusses how monotonous life was during her childhood. The family occasionally goes to their London home or her mother's home at High Wycombe. Both of Jessica's parents were from large families and they had relatives all over England. Jessica considers most of the married aunts to be rather stuffy, and the Maiden Aunt lives on a subsistence allowance in a London flat. Jessica and the others are very curious about why she never married.

The relative living nearest to them is Uncle Tommy, who is a magistrate for a police court. He would tell the children stories about his days at sea. Her mother's relatives have an entirely different nature than those of her father. They, like her Uncle Geoff, are of more an intellectual nature. Jessica finds her uncles boring.

Jessica makes it clear that she wants to attend University and feels that the quality of her schooling won't enable her to pass the entrance exams. Her mother won't consider sending her away to school even though she knows her daughter is unhappy. Jessica thinks things will be very different when she reaches eighteen and can leave Swinbrook House.

In the 1920s, her sister Nancy publishes her first novel. Her mother wanted it published under another name so people wouldn't talk, but she used her own name. All of her novels contain main figures who have the characteristics of her father. Most of the family is proud of her and of having an author in the family. Nancy begins to bring her friends from Oxford and London for weekend visits to Swinbrook, much to the dismay of her mother. This is exciting for Jessica, who had never been exposed to any point of view other than that of her parents. Jessica finds their discussions to be stimulating, and they open up a world she never knew existed in terms of literature, art, and more. Nancy gets her way and moves to London to study art, but returns home within a month. She misses having servants to pick up after her and her room was a mess. Jessica opens a savings account called her Running Away savings account so she would have money when the time comes for her to run away.

At this time, Jessica's older sister, Diana, who had been studying in Paris, announces her engagement to Bryan Guinness. Since the Guinness money came from trade and not heredity, there is some dissension in the family. After several months, the family agrees to the marriage. Diana spends the time pouting and brooding until she gets her own way.



Chapter 5-6

Chapter 5-6 Summary and Analysis

The family went to London for the wedding. Their Rutland Gate home was opposite Hyde Park. The family rarely used the home except for the London season. Jessica like being at the London house. Jessica was excited about the wedding and all the excitement of the preparations. She was to be one of the bridesmaids. Their nanny made sure there were excursions to various London sites so it was not a boring time, even though Jessica and Debo were not allowed off of the Rutland grounds alone.

On the day of the wedding, both Debo and Jessica had scarlet fever and could not attend the festivities. The girls, with their nanny, stayed in the country with Diana and Bryan after they returned from their honeymoon. Jessica noted how Diana changed after her wedding. She was not a wealthy and popular socialite and she also treated Jessica differently now. Jessica decides that Diana is no longer her favorite sister, and after the country visit, she rarely sees them but reads of them in the society papers.

Returning to Swinbrook after the wedding was a return to monotony. Jessica was thirteen at this time. Tom came home at times to study for his law exams and convinced Jessica to read Milton, Balzac, and other authors. During this time, there were trips to Switzerland, Sweden, and other places. Jessica also joined an organization known as the Sunbeams, which paired her with a younger poor girl who she could help and correspond with. She spent a lot of time writing letters to the child, Rose, and saved her money to buy her presents. Each of them wrote to the other of what their lives were like. Eventually, Muv offered Rose a job as a Between Maid. Both girls are overjoyed, but when they meet, they have nothing to say to each other, and Rose is so homesick that she returns home after a few days. This troubles Jessica, who doesn't understand what homesickness is. It took Jessica several years to recover from the incident and when she did, she was more involved in solving social problems.

Debo and Jessica are sent to school in Oakdale for a while. Jessica loves it, but Debo hates it so they are taken out of the school after a few months. The Mitfords are somewhat snobbish and class conscious and this places some restriction on who Jessica is allowed to associate with. Things would soon be changing since the time is now 1931 and changes are occurring in Russia and Germany.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary and Analysis

There are changes in England and Europe during the 1930s. Rising unemployment lead to hunger marches and clashes with the police. Many of these protests involve the Communists. The younger generation is political and blames the problems on the war reparations forced on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. These events are watched by the Mitfords at Swinbook House, especially when Oxford students pledge not to support the government.

Jessica becomes a pacifist at this time and then becomes interested in socialism. She begins reading books on the subject and discusses the class struggle with her family.

At fifteen, Jessica becomes closer to her eighteen-year-old sister Boud, who is out to shock the family by her dress and behavior. Boud enlivens a fading, social scene, which earned her the title of eccentric. Diana was not divorced from Bryan and the girls were not allowed to visit after the scandal of the divorce, but Boud broke the rules. There she met Diana's future husband, Sir Oswald Mosley. He was the organizer of the British Union of Fascists. Boud becomes a member, but Jessica won't join since she is more interested in Communism. They avoid the adults and stay in their own area, which each decorated according to her beliefs.

Hitler assumes power in Germany and Boud announces she wants to go there. She does, and becomes friends with Hitler and the power structure. Diana is accepted back into the family. She and Boud become close and travel to Germany. Eventually, Muv and Farve also visit. They are accepted by Hitler, who thinks Farve's position is more important than it really is. Jessica remains close to Boud, even though she still sympathizes with the Communists.

Jessica feels she would never be admitted to college because the quality of her home education was so inferior. She is not sixteen and still thinks of running away. At this time, she learns her second cousins, Giles and Esmond Romilly, are pacifists and are causing problems at their Wellington College military school. Esmond runs away from the school according to newspaper reports.

Jessica and her cousin Idden are sent to Paris to study French. This is the traditional year abroad and the girls live at a boarding house with minimal supervision. They are home in England in time for the London season, Jessica's first, since she had not yet been old enough.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

In London, Jessica finds that Esmond has opened a center for runaway boys at a left-wing bookstore. He is publishing a magazine, *Out of Bounds*, which is basically anti-Fascist. The magazine is successful. Jessica wants to meet Esmond but is busy planning her debut, part of which is being presented at Buckingham Palace. To Jessica, the best part of being a debutant is the opportunity to meet people. She is no longer confined to Swinbrook House.

The London season is a series of parties, teas and other social events that keep Jessica busy. Jessica can't remember the names of the people she meets at these events, much to her mother's consternation. She finds most of these events to also be boring since they are with people who had the same kind of upbringing as she. At the end of the season, she returns to Swinbrook where she and Debo are the only siblings at home. Boud and Diana spend most of their time in Germany, and during the few times they do visit Swinbrook, relations are very tense between them and Jessica. They quarrel over the atrocities against the Jews.

At this time, the Romilly brothers' book, *Out of Bounds*, is published and meets with favorable reviews. It is the story of their revolt against family, school, and tradition. Each brother wrote a section of the book, and Jessica found she identified with Esmond's section. Esmond had also adopted Communist ideals as a reaction to the Conservatism he was raised under, just as Jessica has. She finds many similarities in their pasts and in the upbringings. She keeps his book with her collection of Communist literature, and finds she wants to meet Esmond.



Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

The philosophy of Swinbrook House was that girls should have enough education to manage a household and staff of servants. They only need learn enough arithmetic to manage the household accounts. Not many of the girls are content with this role in life. Jessica is very moody and unhappy with her situation, but her mother says that this would change after she was married. Marriage results in a woman having things to do, like running the household. She doesn't feel that Jessica is making any progress in this direction and feels she needs a change. In the spring of 1936, Boud, Debo, Jessica, and Muv depart for a Mediterranean cruise.

The cruise is an educational tour, with many students and university people. All three girls engage in harmless shocking behavior to test their mother. Near the end of the cruise, tensions mount between Boud and Jessica over their different political views and they have a fist fight when Boud wears a swastika pin. There are also some problems with the locals in Spain over the swastika pin.

After the cruise, the family lives in London for several months. Muv frequently plays Nazi songs on the piano that Jessica is forced to sing. The differing political views are the cause of many hostilities in the household. Hitler is seizing more and more territory in Europe. Most people view Nazism as the counterbalance to Communism. The Fascist rebellion begins in Spain. Jessica's family becomes more divided in their views. Most maintain their pro-Hitler leanings. Jessica finds out that Esmond is fighting Franco in Spain.

Much of Jessica's moodiness stems from the boredom and monotony of her life, which her mother tries to solve with travel. Muv doesn't realize that Jessica feels she must help the Communist cause in some way. She doesn't feel that she is accomplishing anything by sitting at home.

At this time, England is scandalized by the affair of Prince Edward and Wallis Simpson. Jessica and her friend Peter Nevile organize a demonstration calling for the resignation of Baldwin. Jessica loses faith in Peter since their small protest has no effect on the Tory government, but he does introduce her to Giles Romilly. Giles is thinking of joining the International Brigade in Spain and Jessica says that she is also interested in joining and fighting. Instead, she leaves London and goes to Scotland with her family, where Muv talks of planning a world cruise for the girls the following March. As they are about to leave Scotland, Esmond's guardian, Dorothy Allhusen, invites Jessica to her estate for a visit.



Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary and Analysis

Jessica is excited at the prospect of meeting Esmond. She figures she has been in love with him for years. Nervous at being introduced to him, she is seated next to him at dinner and finds out that he is returning to Spain the following week. She asks if she can go with him. He says she can, and indicates that they will talk about it later. He already knew about her from Giles and Peter and was more interested in discussing British policy toward Spain at the table.

The next day they go for a walk and discuss their plans. He has a job with a newspaper to cover the events in Spain, and she has her Running Away savings account to cover expenses. They plan their getaway and decide to leave the following Sunday. When she arrives home, her mother is preoccupied with the plans for the world cruise. She has arranged a shopping excursion for Jessica and one of the other girls. Part of Jessica's plan was a phony letter from some cousins inviting Jessica for a two week visit in France. Muv finally agrees and Jessica is to leave on Sunday.

Muv has arranged a shopping date for Jessica with Dora, the girl who is accompanying them on the cruise. Jessica can't avoid the shopping date, but she has plans to meet Esmond. Jessica leaves Dora standing in a store and goes off to meet Esmond. They go to the Spanish Embassy to complete the required paperwork for their trip and buy a camera, charging it to Farve's account. They meet daily, completing the arrangement for the trip. On Sunday, her family sees her off at the train station. She and Esmond don't meet or talk until they are on the boat. In Paris, they find that the Spanish Embassy doesn't have Jessica's papers and the person they need to see is in London for two weeks. They become engaged while waiting for the boat to London.

They spend the night at Peter's, where it is decided that Peter will deliver a note to Jessica's parents saying that she eloped with Esmond. They return to Paris and travel around France with their cousins. When Jessica receives her papers, they depart for Spain. On the cargo boat, they are given the captain's cabin and Jessica is violently seasick during the journey. They arrive in Spain after three days at sea. They are greeted by the Foreign Minister who takes them directly to a boxing match.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary and Analysis

Jessica feels that she is living in a dream world in Bilbao with Esmond. They had free room and board from the Foreign Press Bureau. There is a great deal of poverty and starvation in Bilbao, and Jessica is amazed at the degree of poverty and the way the people live. The Press Bureau people give them a tour of the front. This is the only time they have any contact with the enemy. Their days fall into a routine - they gather the news in the morning and type the stories in the afternoon. This pays their expenses.

One day they receive a visit from the British pro-consul. He has a telegram from Anthony Eden, telling him to find Jessica and have her returned to London. They send a reply that the pro-consul has found Jessica but that she won't return to England. Jessica and Esmond also refuse the British consulate's request that Jessica return to England and then are told that her brother-in-law and sister would be arriving on a destroyer. Jessica goes to meet Nancy at the dock and is told she didn't make the trip. She is invited on board for lunch but refuses for fear that they would hold her captive and return her to England. When she returns to her quarters, she finds Esmond has received a letter from her father's solicitor threatening him with prison if he marries Jessica. This is the one thing that they hadn't thought of. Furthermore, the consulate says that Britain will withhold the aid they had promised Spain if Jessica didn't return. They finally compromise and go to the South of France, where they meet Nancy and Peter.

Jessica learns what happened when she didn't return and how upset her mother was, but she still refuses to return to England. Nancy and Peter depart and Jessica and Esmond remain in France. Esmond secures a job at the local Reuters. The hotel proprietor helps them translate radio broadcasts from which they write their news reports. This covers their room and board.

There is a court appointed legal guardian in France for Jessica since she is underage. Jessica and Esmond write him a letter requesting his permission for Jessica to marry, saying that if she was forced to wait until she was twenty-one, she might have a family before they marry. The guardian gives his consent.

Both of their mothers come to Bayonne for the wedding. They don't look happy but they gave them a nice wedding luncheon.

Jessica has had her way - she and Esmond are now married.



Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary and Analysis

Jessica and Esmond receive enough in wedding gifts to live on for a while. Esmond is convinced that he has devised a system for winning at boule, a gambling game. They decide to try out his system at the boule table in Dieppe. They buy camping equipment for the trip and borrow the car of a journalist for the trip. They finally arrive at the casino, eager to try their system. Their number keeps coming up, winning them small amounts so they can't test their system. They try another number and don't win again the entire evening. They lose all of their money in two hours.

They return to Dieppe without any money. They meet a friend, Roger Roughton, who buys them a drink, and the group sits and talks for a while. Roger has a huge house in Rotherhithe, and they move back to London and live in the house with him. Jessica is intent on being a good housekeeper but literally doesn't know how. She has to learn how to perform many household chores.

Esmond works as a copywriter for an advertising agency and they live on his salary. He tries to make extra money by gambling, but isn't very successful at it. They eventually stop trying and settle into holding social get-togethers with friends. Many of their friends are Communists, but Esmond refuses to join the Party himself. He and Jessica attend meetings of the Bermondsey Labor Party and take part in their activities. Jessica takes part in parades and demonstrations even though she is pregnant.

Jessica has some contact with her mother, in spite of Farve's harsh conditions. She is cut off from them financially and socially. Her brother Tom becomes a part of their social circle and she works as a market researcher to help with expenses. She learns a lot from her co-workers and from the people that she meets.

Jessica gives birth to a daughter. When the child contracts measles at the age of four months, she passes it on to her mother. Both are very ill. The child suffers complications and dies of pneumonia. The day after the funeral, Esmond and Jessica go to Corsica to recover from the ordeal. They remain there for three months.



Chapters 21-23

Chapters 21-23 Summary and Analysis

Jessica and Esmond return from Corsica in summer of 1938. They watch the progress of the war and can see that the war is being lost. Both of them continue to work to raise money for the Spanish cause, as the situation worsens in Europe. They never thought there would be such a thing as capitulation to Hitler, but the British didn't oppose him in Czechoslovakia. Jessica is in Southampton at the time and attends a protest meeting held by the Communist Party. She isn't impressed with them. They are more interested in pacifism and avoidance.

However, the two can see that the population is being prepared for war. They all know war will come. There is discussion of whether England would side with Russia or Germany. Esmond is depressed because he knew he would be called to service. They decide to move to America.

One of the reasons they decide to leave England is that they were having a problem with a process server from the electric company. Since both were from privileged backgrounds, neither knew they had to pay for electricity and had amassed a large bill. They thought that electricity was a gift from God and was free and were preparing to make a case on this basis. Because of this, they had moved from Rotherhithe Street to a furnished room to cut their expenses.

Jessica receives her trust fund of one hundred pounds when she turns twenty-one and they figure the money would cover their fare to America with a little left over to live on until they found jobs. They manage to obtain the necessary papers even though they don't have much money. Esmond thinks they could travel around America making money by giving lectures about English life, and they recruit some friends as co-workers. But as their friends drop out, they give up the idea of a lecture tour. They collect letters of introduction from everyone they can in preparation for their move to America.

Both have always led privileged and sheltered lives and are somewhat naive, as indicated by their problem with the electric bill. Since Peter is the only one who has ever been to America, they learn some of the idioms from him. They sail for New York on February 18, 1939 and stay at the Shelton Hotel when they arrived. They write letters to go with their letters of introduction and receive a response from someone who wanted to meet the friends of Peter Neville.



Chapters 24-25

Chapters 24-25 Summary and Analysis

Jessica and Esmond spend their first few days in New York seeing the sights and talking to people on the street. As a result of the letters of introduction, they are invited to many social functions and taken on many sight-seeing excursion, especially to sites of historical interest. Both Jessica and Esmond comment on the feelings of nationalism of the Americans. After a few weeks, they have a wide circle of friends and are invited to many social events.

They meet Kay Graham at a party and become immediate friends with her, spending a weekend at her parent's house in Westchester County. Her father owns the Washington Post. Jessica watches the interaction between Kay and her parents and realizes how different it is than the situation at Swinbrook House and her own family. Even though they had opposing political views, they still remained close. They favored capitalism and were anti-Fascist.

The story of their elopement is replayed in the New York press and they are interviewed by reporters. They become friends with the reporters, Liz Kelly and Dave Scherman.

They do not have as much luck in the job market as they did on the social scene. Jessica finally secures employment as a salesgirl in a dress shop, which saves them since their funds are low. They rent a furnished apartment in Greenwich Village. The couple is happy in New York and in their furnished apartment, feeling the situation will work out for them until their fortunes change.

One day they receive a call from a Mr. Donahue, a racing jockey. Esmond is excited because he wants them to bet in his betting scheme. Jessica is wary and then finds out that Esmond has already given him some money. Donahue arrives and tells them that they won seventy dollars and that they will be paid the next day. He invites them to attend the races at a New York racetrack and to travel to Florida with him for the races.

When they tell Dave Scherman about Donahue, he tells them that they have been conned. The next day, Donahue introduces Esmond to Jack Dempsey, but he doesn't have the winnings from the previous day. When Jessica returns home from work, she finds that Donahue never appeared and that they had lost the money. Esmond is rather naive and gullible and has a weak point for gambling. He is always looking for a way to make money gambling and always ends up losing the money.



Chapters 26-27

Chapters 26-27 Summary and Analysis

The situation in Europe worsens as Hitler continues to take more territory. After the Franco victory in Spain, England prepares for war, even though it is unclear who they will side with. When conscription begins, Esmond is happy that he is in New York, where he is out of reach of the British government. At this time, Esmond writes and sells an article about the situation in England. In it he says that he knows he will be back and will fight for England.

Esmond secures a job at an advertising agency. He is hired for one hundred dollars a week, which seems to be an outrageous sum to them. They later learn that the purpose of the agency is to lose money and function as a tax write-off for the playboy millionaire that owns it. Esmond does not have to spend much time at the office. He and Jessica bank his salary and live on Jessica's. They are trying to accumulate enough savings for their traveling tour of the United States.

Jessica takes a job with a Miss Warren who is in charge of concessions for the 1939 World's Fair. She has a Scottish tweed shop at the fair. During this time, Esmond is fired from his job because the advertising agency is dissolved. They decide there is no reason for them to remain in New York and begin to plan their grand tour, allowing themselves a great deal of flexibility. They collect letters of introduction from their friends and send out letters, looking for jobs in various parts of the country.

Esmond enrolls in bartending school and they buy an old Ford. At the end of June, they leave New York for a vacation in New England. They had arranged their itinerary to stay at people's houses as often as they could in order to save money. Both are impressed by the hospitality of Americans. They find that they didn't bring the proper clothing for some of the places where they stay, but they meet Horton, the English butler of Mrs. Curry Appleton, who they become friends with.

Chapters 28-29

Chapters 28-29 Summary and Analysis

Esmond and Jessica stay at a small cottage on Martha's Vineyard. They are visiting the co-editor of a small left-wing magazine, Seldon Rodman and his wife, and meet many left-wing people in the area. They check out of the cabin to save money, but sneak in at night to sleep there. The Rodman's assume they are camping.

The worsening situation in Europe leads to many political discussions with the people they meet. Esmond supports the Soviet position, especially in regard to the non-aggression pact. He would analyze the situation and present his views for anyone who would listen. Jessica and Esmond decide that they will not return to England until the fighting beings. They are basically very happy in America.

Esmond and Jessica travel to Washington DC. They want to try to gain a better understanding of American politics, which is why they plan to spend time in the area. They are puzzled by the fact that America has no Labor Party or socialist political party. They also hope to find jobs in the nation's capitol.

They rent a furnished room. Esmond finds a job selling Silktorn stockings. It is commission-based work but will still provide them with money. Jessica helps as his assistant, as they go door to door selling their product. Esmond follow the sales training he has been given and is very successful at selling the stockings, which are to be delivered by another group of people. He wins sales awards for his efforts and is very enthusiastic about the company. Even though Esmond and Jessica don't get rich, they cover their expenses while they are in Washington DC. They spend their day working at door to door sales and their evenings at society social events.



Chapters 30-31

Chapters 30-31 Summary and Analysis

While in Washington, the Romillys met many people who work in the various New Deal agencies. They are also active socially, attending many parties and other social events. The people they meet are very enthusiastic about the New Deal program. They find it very different from the situation in England. The Romillys become friends with the editor of the New Republic, Michael Straight and his wife, and obtain letters of reference for use in their future travels.

Straight introduces them to Clifford and Virginia Durr and they are invited to dinner at their home the next evening. They are questioned about their views on the war and their experiences in Spain. They get along very well with Virginia Durr, particularly Esmond. They also attend events at the Megen's home, the parents of Kay Graham, and are hired to write a series of articles on their experiences in America.

The Romillys spent a total of two weeks in America. Even though Jessica loves Esmond and functions as one with him, she misses her sister Boud and wonders what has happened to her. They leave for New Orleans, where Esmond plans to work as a bartender. They get lost along the way and end up in Florida and go on to Miami. Jessica finds a job since the tourist season is about to begin, but Esmond can't find employment as a bartender. He finally finds work as a waiter. He lasts one evening but stays on as a busboy and handyman. Within a week, he is working as a bartender, but the bar does not have proper licensing and is closed by the police. The owner needs one thousand dollars for the proper license. Esmond offers to provide the money if the owner accepts him as a partner. He flies to Washington and borrows the money from the Meyers, surprised at how easy the task is. He doesn't realize how wealthy the Meyers are.

Chapters 32-33

Chapters 32-33 Summary and Analysis

Esmond enters into a partnership with the Chizzola brothers, the owners of the Roma restaurant. They celebrate with a big feast. Jessica quits her job at the drug store and goes to work as the buyer and accountant for the restaurant. They eat all of their meals at the restaurant, as per their agreement with the Chizzolas. This is the first time in their marriage that they have had three good meals per day.

The mee the officials from the American Federation of Labor and talk to them about their positions, surprised that they are in favor of capitalism. Esmond studies the behavior of American drunks. He works hard to make the business a success, blocking out the situation in Europe. Jessica likes the work at the restaurant, but does not really like Miami. The Chizzolas are amused by them and watch in amazement as Esmond sets out to learn the business. He finds that there is a lot more to running a bar than just mixing drinks. Esmond develops different roles or characters that he plays for the customers.

At Christmas, there are rumors that Boud was badly injured and being returned to England. The report is in the papers and the press is calling Jessica for information. Jessica is very worried about Boud but can't find out any information.

As the fighting intensifies in Europe, Esmond and Jessica listen to the events on the radio. Esmond decides he must go back and fight once Churchill assumes control of the government. Esmond feels that the defeat of Nazism would bring about social changes. He decides to volunteer for the Canadian Air Force since he views the defeat of Hitler as paramount.

They repay almost all of the one thousand dollar loan before Esmond leaves for Canada. They settle their affairs in Miami and go to Washington DC where Jessica would remain and work. She lives with the Durrs for the next two and one half years. Esmond does not survive the war. He dies in November, 1941 at the age of twenty-three.



Characters

Jessica Mitford

Jessica Mitford is the author and the main character of the book. Her family moved to Swinbrook House in Cotswold when she was nine. She is one of seven children of a wealthy upper class family whose father is a member of the House of Lords. Jessica, who is nicknamed Decca, becomes aware of the poverty of the villagers at an early age, which bothers her. Most of her early education is at Swinbrook until she and Debo are sent to school at Oakdale. Jessica loved it for the few months they are there, but Debo hated it, so the girls had to return home to Swinbrook. She spent the traditional year abroad in Paris with her cousin Idden while developing her left wing beliefs.

Her second cousin is Esmond Romilly, who, along with his brother Giles, creates a stir over their left-wing views. Jessica's own political commitment intensifies and she considers fighting against Franco in Spain. Instead, she travels to Scotland with her family where her mother plans a world cruise, trying to improve Jessica's mood. After leaving Scotland, Jessica is invited to Havering House, where she meets Esmond. They make their plans to go to Spain together and depart the following Sunday.

In Paris, they become engaged and go on to Spain. They are tracked there and the British authorities try to persuade Jessica to return to England, but she refuses. Jessica and Esmond are finally married in Bayonne, France, with both of their mothers in attendance. They eventually move to London, and, after the death of their four-month-old child, they spend three months in Corsica before deciding to move to America. They travel around the American East, living and working in different places, until Esmond volunteers for the Canadian Air Force. Jessica remains in Virginia.

Esmond Romilly

Esmond and his brother Giles are second cousins of Jessica's and nephews of Winston Churchill. As pacifists, they caused trouble at Wellington College, a military school, and Esmond ran away. He appears in London and publishes a left-wing magazine called Out of Bounds. After being released from the Remand Home for delinquent boys, he stays at the country house of a relative. He and brother Giles write a book called Out of Bounds which details their revolt against family, school, and tradition. Jessica finds she relates to the section written by Esmond.

Esmond fights against Franco in Spain, is injured, and returns to London. Jessica is invited to his guardian's house and the two make plans for Jessica to go to Spain with him. They become engaged in Paris and go on to Spain. After some problems with the British authorities, Jessica and Esmond go to Bayonne, France where they soon marry. Both of their mothers attend the ceremony.



As World War II approaches, Esmond is not happy with the possibility of military service, and they move to America. They travel around the East Coast, living and working in different cities until Esmond volunteers for duty in the Canadian Air Force. He is killed in November, 1941, at the age of twenty-three.

Diana

Diana is an older sister of Jessica who married Bryan Guinness. She was Jessica's favorite sister until she married Bryan, whom she divorced after a few years of marriage. She becomes a Nazi sympathizer and spends much of her time in Germany with Boud.

Nancy

Nancy is an older sister of Jessica's and publishes her first novel in the 1920s. She is the ground breaker in the family in terms of adopting modern trends, like smoking and wearing long pants. She marries Peter Rodd.

Unity

Unity, called Boud, is a younger sister of Jessica's. She becomes a Nazi sympathizer and friend of the Hitler circle and spends most of her time in Germany.

Dorothy Allhusen

Dorothy is a Mitford cousin and the guardian of Esmond Romilly. She invites Jessica to her home, Havering House, where Jessica meets Esmond.

Giles Romilly

Giles Romilly is the brother of Esmond. The two of them published a book about their revolt against school, family, and tradition.

Peter Nevile

Peter is a friend of both Jessica and Esmond's. When Jessica and Esmond move to America, he writes letters of introduction for them.

Tom

Tom is Jessica's brother. He is sent to boarding at the age of eight and then on to Eton and moves to London while Jessica is still young.



Roger Roughton

Roger Roughton is a friend of Esmond's. They meet him in Dieppe and move to his house.

Pam

Pam is an older sister of Jessica's and marries a jockey named Derek Jackson.

Deborah

Deborah, know as Debo, is a younger sister of Jessica's.



Objects/Places

Cotswold

Cotswold is the area of England where Jessica was born and raised.

Swinbrook House

Swinbrook House is the name of the Mitford house in Cotswold. It was built by her father.

Oxford

Oxford is a city in England near Cotswold that the Mitford children frequently visited.

Rutland Gate

Rutland Gate is the area of London where the Mitfords have a home.

West End

The West End is an area of London where the wealthy and artistic people live.

Paris

Paris is the capital of France and the place where Jessica and her cousin Idden spent the traditional year abroad.

London

London is the capital of England and the place where the three month social season takes place.

Scotland

The Mitfords have Scottish relatives and spend several months visiting them.



Having House

Havering House is located near Marlborough and is the home of Mitford cousin, Dorothy Allhusen. It is where Jessica first meets Esmond.

Spain

Jessica runs off to Spain with Esmond to work against the Fascists.

Bayonne, France

Bayonne is a city in the south of France where Jessica and Esmond are married.

New York

New York is where Jessica and Esmond immigrated to. They rented a furnished apartment in Greenwich Village.

Washington DC

Washington, DC is the capitol of the United States where the Romillys live and work for a while.

Miami

Miami is a popular resort area in Florida.



Themes

Boredom

The underlying theme of the book is the boredom of the lives of the upper class with their country homes and life styles. Jessica and her siblings are raised at Swinbrook House, their self contained country estate. There is a succession of nannies, and all of their schooling takes place on the estate. There is even a hospital room where they are tended to when they are ill. Their mother believes that women only need enough schooling to enable them to manage a household and a staff of servants. The only children they have to play with are their siblings. They only leave the estate to travel to their London home or visit with relatives. The girls are bored with the monotony of their lives and seek ways to break out of it. From Jessica's mother's point of view, this is the typical life of aristocratic daughters who remain bored until they marry and have a household and servants to keep them busy.

Jessica believes that things would change when she becomes a debutant but she is sorely disappointed. Even with the parties, dinners and teas, it is just more of the same. She doesn't relate well to the other people and she keeps looking for some excitement. And as soon as the London season ends, it is back to the family estates with more boredom and monotony. Perhaps if she had been sent to school she wouldn't have felt such intense boredom. Her mother tries to deal with her boredom by taking her on cruises. They have a world cruise planned at the time that Jessica runs off with Esmond.

Discontent

Strongly associated with the theme of boredom is the theme of discontent. Boredom breeds discontent as the people trapped in the boredom try to break out of it. Jessica opens her Running Away savings account at a young age and always dreams of running away until she actually does it. She wants to be sent away to school, but her mother won't hear of it. Her sister Boud rebels by dressing outlandishly and doing outrageous things, like taking her pet rat to social events. Giles and Esmond Romilly express their discontent in writing while at military school. They make it clear that they refuse to submit to military discipline or support the government. They publish a book expressing their revolt against family, tradition, and militarism.

It should also be noted that this was a time of discontent in Europe as socialism and Fascism were on the rise. People were choosing between the two positions as they did in Jessica's family, and there were many discussion everywhere concerning the subject.

Most of Jessica's discontent stemmed from the isolation of her upbringing. This is what she wanted to break out of, and she finally did when she ran away with Esmond. This is when she stopped complaining of boredom and monotony.

Conflict

The theme of conflict underlies the background for the book. Socialism had come into being in Russia and Fascism was on the rise in Europe. Family members were choosing between the two, as they did in Jessica's family. Boud and Diane spend time in Germany and were part of Hitler's social circle. Most of the Mitford family leaned toward Fascism as the alternative to the socialism offered by Russia. Jessica herself favored socialism. This brought her into conflict with her sisters and family. When they were younger, Jessica and Boud had a room dedicated to their political literature and collection of political paraphernalia. Boud's side was Fascist and Jessica's side was socialist. But as they grew older and their beliefs grew stronger, the conflict between them increased and there were fights between them.

Europe knew that the conflict between Fascism and socialism would eventually lead to war. The question was, which side would England be on. When England declared war against Fascism, then Esmond decided that he could support England and enlisted in the Canadian Air Force. He felt the fight against Fascism was the most important objective and there would be many social changes after the war.

Style

Perspective

The book is written by Jessica Mitford and the perspective is her perspective. Written in the first person point of view with the author as the narrator, the reader views events through Jessica's eyes. She is telling the story of the book and rendering her opinions on various things. The reader views the country life style of the aristocrats from Jessica's boredom and monotony of the lifestyle. The conflict between Fascism and socialism is also viewed from Jessica's perspective, even though in some places she does present her sister's point of view.

The limitations of the use of the first person point of view is that the knowledge of the reader is limited to events at which the narrator is present. This is true of *Hons and Rebels*. The reader's knowledge is confined to Jessica's knowledge. The views or opinions that are presented or expounded on are Jessica's views and opinions.

The use of the first person perspective is good for an autobiography because the author is telling her own story. The reader can feel Jessica's boredom and unhappiness with the situation of her upbringing and can empathize with her and her disparate need to break out of the situation. The reader can understand Jessica and her actions much better through first person.

Tone

The tone of the book is set by the author since the book is written from her perspective. The tone is definitely one of boredom and discontent with the monotony and isolation of her upbringing. She wants experiences outside of her home. She disparately wants to go out into the world and meet different kinds of people. When she is exposed to children of other classes as a child, she doesn't know how to act because she has no experience to rely on. Her desire to break out of the confines of Swinbrook are so intense, that she establishes a running away savings account as a child and makes frequent contributions to it. This is the money that she eventually uses to when she runs away to Spain with Esmond.

Jessica's views on Fascism also predominate throughout the book. She favors socialism and is anti-Fascist, as she makes clear throughout the book. But she also did not find the solutions in the Communist Party. She and Esmond took part in Labor Party activities. When the war began, Esmond and Jessica were in the United States. Even though Esmond was beyond the reach of British conscription, he felt the need to fight Fascism and enlisted in the Canadian Air Force.

Structure

The structure of the book is simple. The book is divided into thirty-five chapters. None of the chapters is very long and some consist of only a few pages. There are no chapter titles, or table of contents.

The book is chronological without any jumping around in time. It begins when Jessica is a child and ends with Esmond leaving for Canada. Many of the people who are mentioned are not recurring characters and are only relevant to the incident which Jessica is relating at the time. There is a photo section which is always good in this kind of book since it makes the characters more real for the reader. The value of the photos is that they allow the reader to associate a name with a face. There is some use of French in the book, but even if the reader can't translate the phrases and sentences it does not detract from the story.

The chosen structure works well for the book. It allows Jessica to tell her story in a direct manner, and the style of writing and the ease of reading make the autobiography much like a novel for the reader. The inclusion of a photo section also makes the book more pleasurable.

Quotes

"Swinbrook had many aspects of a fortress or citadel of medieval times. From the point of view of the inmates it was self-contained in the sense that it was neither necessary, nor generally possible, to leave the premises for any of the normal human pursuits. Schoolroom with governess for education, riding stables and tennis court for exercise, seven of us children for mutual human companionship, the village church for spiritual consolation, our bedrooms for hospital wards even when operations were necessary - all were provided, either in the house itself or within easy walking distance. From the point of view of outsiders entry, in the rather unlikely event that they might seek it, was an impossibility. According to my father, outsiders included not only Huns, 'Frogs, Americans, blacks and all other foreigners, but also other people's children, the majority of my older sisters' acquaintances, almost all young men - in fact, the whole teeming population of the earth's surface, except for some, though not all, of our relations and a very few tweeded, red-faced country neighbors to whom my father had for some reason taken a liking." Chap. 1, pp. 2-3

"We were as though caught in a timeproofed corner of the world, foster children, if not exactly of silence, at least of slow time. The very landscape, cluttered up with history, was disconcertingly filled with evidence of the changelessness of things. The main road to Oxford, built by Julius Caesar two thousand years ago, had been altered only by modern surfacing the convenience of motorists; Roman coins, thrown up by the ploy as through carelessly dropped only yesterday, were to be had for the gathering." Chap. 3, p. 21

"As the months and years dragged slowly by, like the watched pot that never boils, the sad and embarrassing memory of Rose gradually receded, to be replaced much later by new and more revolutionary notions of how to solve the world's ills." Chap. 6, p. 57

"I responded, like many another of my generation, by becoming first a convinced pacifist, then quickly graduating to socialist ideas." Chap. 7, p. 63

"Nanny and my mother had often pointed out to me that if I was really a Communist, I should be more considerate of those members of the working class who happened to be at hand: 'Little D., I should think a Communist would be much tidier, and not make so much extra work for the servants,' Muv would say. Apparently, Esmond had the same problem with his parents: 'It must be remembered that all this time I was living in a conventional Conservative world. The conflict between this world and the one that centered for me round my Communist friends was bound to arise for a schoolboy taking an interest in the politics of the Left. My parent saw the absurdity of my position without trying to help. Usually, in fact, they elaborately drew and overdrew the contradiction for me. If I was a Communist, they would say, surely I should be working with my fellow men. As a start, it would be suggested that I should do a little housework, he practical proposal being that I should make the bed and clean the boots and shoes.'" Chap. 12, p. 99



"For me, the war in Spain inevitably now became my major preoccupation. My thoughts centered obsessively on ways of getting there; I mulled over and discarded endless plans." Chap. 13, p. 109

"Of course, I had been in love with Esmond for years, ever since I first heard of him. Although I had a strong belief that you can make anyone fall in love with you if you really concentrate on it - my older sisters had told me this was so, and I felt it must be true - now that I was about to meet him I was full of doubts and misgivings." Chap. 15, p. 121

"To our surprise, both our mothers came to come to Bayonne for the wedding. We were married by the British Consul, who did the wedding. We were married by the British Consul, who intoned a special service: 'By warrant of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs I hereby make known that according to the law of England you are man and wife.' The mothers sat looking, as Esmond said, 'more like chief mourners at a funeral than wedding guests.' But they cheered up after the ceremony, and took us and a party of our friends from the Basque consulate to a delicious wedding lunch." Chap. 18, p. 166

"Our friends who tried unsuccessfully to recruit us into the Party would generally oversimplify the reasons for Esmond's refusal to join: 'He's incapable of submitting to discipline,' or 'He's too much of an individualist.' Esmond's real reasons were considerable more complex. True, his nature was one that resisted discipline, yet he had proved himself quite capable of submitting to discipline when it was obviously necessary to the objective, as in Spain. But he saw no need for the kind of discipline for discipline's sake that seemed to be practiced in the English party, and he was determined to stay clear of the petty inner-party squabbles, the pigeonholing of people as 'deviationists,' 'petty-bourgeois disrupter's,' etc., of which we heard so much from our Communist friends. Though the Party's goals were generally the same as his own, there were rather too many false theatricals attacked to membership to suit the more sober mood in which he had returned from Spain." Chap. 19, pp. 176-177

"If Esmond reflected at that moment the despair of a generation that has lost control of its own destiny, he was not one to remain in despair for very long. Turning over and discarding possible alternative plans of action and modes of existence, the idea suddenly flashed upon him: we'd go and live in America until the war began." Chap. 22, p. 189

"It would do nicely until we found the gold that lay just beneath the pavement in New York. Esmond felt that all we need do now in that regard was to sit back and exploit out Old Worldishness for all it was worth. But shortly after were acquired the apartment, we found to our distress that two could play at that game." Chap. 24, pp. 213-214

"In conclusion he wrote: 'After escaping from England, what shall I do now if war breaks out? The answer is that I shall go back...to fight for the grey of British Imperialism allied to Polish and Romanian fascism against the black of German-Italian fascism.'" Chap. 26, p. 223



"Even if the dream of fifty or sixty dollars a week was one to which the Silkform trail failed to lead, we did end up making enough money to pay for most of our expenses in Washington." Chap. 29, p. 251

"Perhaps most young lovers share in common to some degree this feeling of oneness, of having 'eyes only for each other': certainly literature of all countries and ages is full of such references. In our case, we had more reason than most to feel bound to one another in a way that excluded people around us. Estrangement from our families, the circumstances of our marriage, our constant wanderings about, the death of the baby, all had conspired to weld us into a self-sufficient unit, a conspiracy of two against the world." Chap. 31, p. 261

"Whichever of these contrasting views of Esmond may have been closest to the objective truth, to me he was my whole world, my rescuer, the translator of all my dreams into reality, the fascinating companion of my whole adult life - three years, already - and the center of all happiness." Chap. 33, p. 279



Topics for Discussion

In what kind of environment did Jessica grow up?

What prompted Jessica's interest in socialist ideas?

How did Jessica become interested in Esmond Romilly?

What were the circumstances surrounding the marriage of Jessica and Esmond?

What factors contributed to Jessica and Esmond 's decision to move to America?

Discuss the kind of life Jessica and Esmond led in America.

In spite of his opposition to militarism, Esmond volunteers for service in the Canadian Air Force. Explain his reasoning.