

Cold mountain: ada and inman's journeys toward love

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Charles Frazier's 1997 novel *Cold Mountain* eloquently describes the odyssey of a Confederate deserter named Inman towards the end of the American Civil War. He has grown weary of the atrocities of the war and yearns to return to his home of Cold Mountain, North Carolina, and his lover, Ada Monroe.

Before he leaves, he speaks with a blind man who tells Inman his (the blind man's) situation "might have been worse had he ever been given a glimpse of the world and lost it" (Frazier 9). Inman does not understand this because, in his own way, he is blind to love beyond his idealized view of Ada as stability and beauty. As he journeys towards Cold Mountain and Ada, his encounters with strangers open his eyes to the different aspects of love. As Inman ventures home, he often is reminded of Ada in the women he sees. All are "...about as pretty as a woman could be" with dark hair, thin frames and long fingers (126).

This seems to be a romanticized view of Ada; after all the time he has been gone she cannot look possibly the same as before. Inman, in his own way, reveres Ada and sees her as everything the chaos of war is not. Though this perspective is "...a happy vision that [Inman] was grateful to have been granted", it is not true love as it is only admiring certain characteristics and not all of what makes Ada, including her flaws (127). As Inman learns through his travels, he moves past this sentimentalized view of love as Ada towards a more complex but stronger love for her. Though Ada stays in Cold Mountain, she too learns about love while Inman is gone. At first, Ada struggles to pick up the pieces after her father Monroe dies and leaves her a farm with which she does not know what to do.

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Ada grew up in the high society of Charleston and Monroe never taught her anything about self-sustenance, as the farm was never intended for that. Monroe had “ kept her back from the hardness of work” and sheltered Ada (31). He did because Ada was especially precious to him as the personification of his eternal love for her mother, who died in childbirth. While he was alive, Ada never thought of how being sheltered could have affected her and contented herself with ‘ following [him] to Liberia if [she] could’ (54). Out of love for her father she decides to take on the responsibility though she resents being uninformed now that he is gone.

She comes to forgive him for being overprotective as she sees it as an act of love. Her forgiveness and acceptance of caring for the farm despite being inept with agriculture show sacrifice, which is essential to true love. This will greatly affect the love between Inman and her when they are later reunited. Ada also learns about love after she makes a friendship out of survival. A young woman named Ruby comes to the farm offering to help Ada run it as Ruby is experienced in matters of “...plowing, planting, harvesting, woodcutting and the like” (67).

Ada certainly needs the help but cannot afford to pay Ruby much as a servant. Ruby turns down money on the condition that they work as equals. Ada accepts because she would not survive for long on her own, and realistically, Ruby probably would not either. Ada and Ruby are both alone in the world and are looking for a connection that could help them. As both do their share of work, they have more success than Ada could have ever have had alone. Each works for both theirs and the other’s benefit and they are

able to coexist, though they come from different backgrounds (Ada, a former refined, educated city girl, and Ruby, an independent, illiterate wanderer with a deep understanding of nature).

Their need for another person's company is motivation for Ada and Inman throughout their individual experiences and helps them persevere despite difficulties. It is eye-opening for them to see how different people are and the sacrifices necessary for survival. Once they get a grasp of this, Ada and Inman are prepared to love the other when they are reunited. Few of the people whom Inman meet teach him as much about love as the goat lady. About midway through his journey, Inman is in the woods when a woman offers him food and a place to stay. Inman tries to pay her, but her rationale is that she is "...not bad off yet" and neither requires nor accepts a fee (265).

The woman, who lives on her own and relies on mainly herself and a few goats, comments on how "scarcity's much...the bearing of life", yet she is more than willing to give Inman what he needs (274). The lady could have easily sent Inman on his way or reported him as a deserter, which could benefit her. Instead the goat lady shows Inman nothing but true love and generosity. She gives him advice on love after he describes Ada's beauty and how he intends on marrying her. The goat lady tells him that "marrying a woman for her beauty makes no...sense". After this, Inman begins to rethink how he feels about Ada.

At this point, can actually love her as a changed, complex person, even if she is different from the image he has made in his head. When Inman finally

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returns to Cold Mountain, Ada does not even recognize him at first. Likewise, Inman, too is shocked at how different Ada looks; her face and body harder and firmer from all she has been through. Their love can no longer be based on the physical as they both have changed too much. Inman has learned about generosity, sacrifice and other aspects of love and Ada, too, now knows more about love.

Though their reunion is short-lived due to Inman's accidental but tragic death, their love is now eternal. Ten years later, Ada is still raising their child as the representation of their ongoing love. This is proof once love is formed on a deeper connection, it can outlast any odds put against it.