



Catholic Girl's Guide to Summer Reading

A Company of Swans by Eva Ibbotson   

STORY: For nineteen-year-old Harriet Morton, the daughter of an unfeeling widowed professor, life in 1912 Cambridge is no more than a dreary existence completely bereft of happiness and love, except for the moments when she is dancing in Madame Lavarre's advanced ballet class. When she is offered a position in a touring ballet company that will be performing in the Amazon, her father refuses his permission. Harriet runs away with the company. She makes friends with the star ballerina and falls in love with the wealthy young theater founder, Rom Verney, who is the estranged uncle of a young boy she became friends with back in England. But when her boring would-be fiancée shows up to take her back to England, all of her happiness is put on the line.

GOOD: The subtle and beautiful descriptions of English countryside, coupled with fantastically warm and real depictions of the Amazon's tropical landscape, make for wonderfully picturesque reading that creates a mini-movie in the mind's eye. Harriet's intelligence, sympathy, innocence, and strength provide an excellent role model for young women in the early part of the story, and Rom Verney's willingness to preserve her youthful trust provides a welcome hope for male behavior.

BAD: Despite an early promotion of innocence and child-like affection, about two-thirds through the book, Harriet decides to become a "ruined woman" to Rom, because she thinks that he wishes to marry someone else and will keep her as a mistress once he is married. Rom, although he at first has his scruples, gives in wholeheartedly. A few insinuations of premarital relations and an arranged suggestive dance, as well as some questionable remarks in regard to God's works in happiness and human desires could be cautionary to younger readers. Recommended to ages thirteen and up.

MORALS: Despite several delicately handled mentions of sexual relationships and God-related questions, the book has an acceptable view of innocence and the vocation of marriage. In addition, there are several favorable sections in which a small group of Sisters is the sole help and source of love to a young boy with the measles, although the Sisters are said, in a passage written in a humorous attitude, to be criticizing the child's mother. Harriet appears to be Catholic.