

Catholic Girl's Guide to Summer Reading

The Silver Crown, by Robert C. O'Brien 

STORY: A young girl, Ellen, finds a strange silver crown on her pillow on her tenth birthday. Since she always saw herself as a true queen, she is not surprised by the gift, and is not terribly curious about the giver, since, after all, it is her birthday. After a short walk alone early that morning, Ellen returns home to find her house burned down and her family assumed dead. Since she had just recently moved to town and has no friends, Ellen decides to get help from her aunt Sarah, who, unfortunately, lives several hundred miles away. She gets a ride from a pleasant-looking man, but is forced to escape from him when she realizes that he has something to do with her family's death. She is helped by a small boy and his mother, and is sent on a trek through the wilderness with the boy, Otto, to try to find her aunt. To complicate the matter, the two find themselves being tracked by a mysterious man. Could it all have something to do with the silver crown, which seems to have a subtle but mind-freeing effect on Ellen whenever she wears it?

GOOD: Beautifully detailed descriptions of the landscapes through which Ellen - and later Otto - travel are in great abundance, painting a gorgeous picture in the mind's eye. For a ten year-old, Ellen is extremely patient and clear-headed, making her a great role-model. In addition, many of the adult characters go out of their way to help the children, even putting themselves in danger to do so. The plot is intriguing and well-developed, with only slight lags, and gives a fabulous portrayal of children growing in responsibility and in care for others.

BAD: Some of the phrasing is slightly mature for the targeted age group (10 and up), but does not unduly distract from the plot. A few mildly scary situations and some minimally advanced philosophical questions may confuse younger readers, but do not take much explaining. A friar is shown in an unfavorable light, but the studies of a specific saint are strongly defended in several situations. However, there are a few instances in which Ellen makes unsafe decisions regarding strangers, such as asking help of them. As long as the reader can discern fact from fiction, this should not be a problem, especially considering that Ellen had asked help of police officers and firemen, but unexpected circumstances leave her without protection.

MORALS: The question of putting man in God's place is dealt with subtly and tastefully, and the ideas of kindness and protecting those unable to protect themselves are strongly encouraged. This book is absolutely wonderful from both a literary and Catholic standpoint.