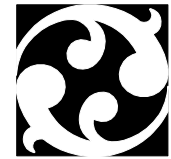




# CAMELOT BOOK CLUB



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## ***A HANDFUL OF DUST*** by Evelyn Waugh

The book's protagonist is Tony Last, an Englishman who would much rather tend to his beloved estate in the country, Hetton, than join his wife on trips to see their arrogant and aristocratic friends in London. Brenda, the wife, becomes bored with their quaint life and has an affair with an unlikely Mama's boy named Beaver. Their son dies in an accident.

In a strange twist, on a trip to South America, Tony ends up in the dense Amazon jungle in the care of an illiterate man who promises to let him go but instead forces him to read aloud from Dickens. The main idea is that betrayal follows Tony wherever he goes — from his wife in England to the enigmatic man in the jungle.

It's a humorous satire of the London aristocracy, in which the people treat their "friends" misfortunes as entertainment. In fact, they gossip about the affair his wife is having in his own house, during a party he is throwing.

The jungle is a parable for a certain stratum of English society in London — seemingly harmless at first, but with dark undercurrents of backstabbing, lies, and treachery.

(Editor's Note: The above is adapted from online customers' reviews.)

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## NOTES and COMMENTS from CAMELOT'S DISCUSSION

- None of the characters had redeeming qualities. Except Nanny – we liked her.
- John Beaver was such a loser, but since Brenda chose him, her friends thought he "must be OK."
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- Author Waugh had a unique style of writing, in which he didn't condemn the characters or their lifestyles, but let the reader draw his/her own conclusions.
- It was an ironic, humorous moment in the book when Tony escaped his life to travel to the Amazon jungle, and there found he would spend the rest of his life being forced to read Dickens aloud.
- Tony, the most boring person, turned out to be subjected to abject boredom himself.
- Brenda's family had the titles of aristocracy; Tony's had the country mansion.
- A very humorous happening was when it was realized that the Indians had abandoned Tony and Dr. Messinger in the jungle. Dr. M's comment was so typical of English understatement: "The situation is grave." he said, "But not desperate."
- If you read this book, don't expect, as one of us did, a tale of an ordinary, dysfunctional American

family. The English aristocratic version of dysfunction is very much different!

- ❑ One reader said she was quite bored with the book at first, but the end redeemed the book.
- ❑ Even if some of the English humor passes you by, reading the book serves to broaden one's perspectives and to help understand other ways of thought.
- ❑ An absolutely great title - A Handful of Dust - our inability to hold dust in our hand describes the emptiness of this stratum of English aristocracy.

#### NEXT MEETING

**When?** Friday, October 16, 2009, 1:30p.m.

**Where?** At Sue Ward's house

**Why?** To have fun, and to discuss our October selection,

*The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, a book about women of strength and dignity who carry on and manage to care about others despite an unjust system.

Note: November book selection is *South of Broad* Pat Conroy's newest novel. Please note your calendars, that the November meeting will be changed to the second Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup>, because of the Thanksgiving holiday.

#### MEETING NOTES

Our hostess, Ann Fitzgerald, started our meeting by inviting each of us to tell of new events in their lives. And everyone related major happenings: Gwen attending a grandchild's wedding; Karen, so bonded with the new baby in the family; Peggy/Margaret' excited about grandchildren, and even great grandchildren expected in October; Anne Simms helping their daughter move into a loft in Nashville; Barbara's tales of her little one's new experiences in school; Sue telling about her littlest budding piano player who wants to learn "Here Comes the Bride"; Ann F.'s daughter with a new condo and new job (and Ann has the cats); and Ann Seher, who related the sad news of her brilliant sister's dementia. We missed Robin at the meeting - she was busy preparing for her son's wedding on Saturday.

Ann served coffee with amaretto and wonderful buttermilk pie - mmm - so good. And Buddy, the resident Chihuahua, noticed no-one was looking, so he chewed part of the tail off Cliff's Davy Crockett hat.

Your Editor observes that all the news we discussed involves our children and theirs - well, isn't that what it's all about? The motto at our house is "Family, Friends, and Faith". I'll bet it is at your house, too.

## Quote of the Day

**LIFE ISN'T ABOUT WAITING FOR THE STORM TO PASS...  
IT'S ABOUT LEARNING TO DANCE IN THE RAIN.**

CAMELOT BOOK CLUB IS GREAT

