



Printz Honor Speech

E. Lockhart

In a novella called *The Suicide Club*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, a pair of young men go out for a night on the town. They're in a club. A He is well educated and has squandered his family money. When he found he was in love, and had stupidly lost his fortune and could not propose marriage to the woman he loved, he embarked on a project to punish himself by making himself destitute —and forcibly ingesting pastry.

The cream tart guy invites his friends to visit a club he's recently joined. A suicide club.

It's in a fancy house. There's a mysterious host —a weird dude in a velvet jacket. Each high regards the death of the members. He who gets the ace of spades will die tomorrow.

The members spend every night together, drinking and carousing. They have a curious bond with one another. No one passes moral judgements. What the club offers them is not really a chance to die. It's the opportunity to live, however briefly, as if they might die tomorrow. Free from responsibility, free from consequences.

Stevenson's story lent its name to an actual club that formed in the 1970s, which Frankie writes about in *Disreputable History*. The San Francisco Suicide Club's members refused to abide by certain unwritten rules —social codes for behavior – and they made people aware of the existence of those rules by breaking them in public situations. They partied in sewers and graveyards, rode city buses dressed as clowns, climbed the Golden Gate Bridge.

My own book pulls from Stevenson's the notion that membership in a club involves a renegotiation of one's

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visited by Evelyn Waugh, a writer
which he he was also strongly attracted.



In *Brideshead*, a young middle class man named Charles goes to a very fancy college and befriends the gorgeous, dissolute Lord Sebastian Flyte. Charles ends up falling in love not only with Sebastian, but with Sebastian's whole family. With their beautiful house —Brideshead. With the way they live.

I was interested in writing about a person who does that – falls in love not with just one person, but with a *whole group* of people, a way of life, and becomes completely immersed this other person's world only to realize that the essence of that world is something she can never have. Charles can never be a member of the Flyte family nor a member of the upper class, and part of him doesn't love Sebastian or Julia so much as he wishes to to *be them*. Same with Frankie and Matthew.

All too often, I think, both well meaning and nefarious adults treat YA novels as if they are billboards. As if the books are moral lessons cloaked as entertainments, and the youth of today should read these novels in order to learn to have hope, stay strong or speak out. We also fear they'll read the wrong things and lust for bad boys, embark on disordered eating patterns or experiment with drugs.

But books are not billboards. They are meant for complicated responses. They are ambiguous. They are meant to be