

# READER'S GUIDE

## *The Dead Celebrities Club* by Susan Swan

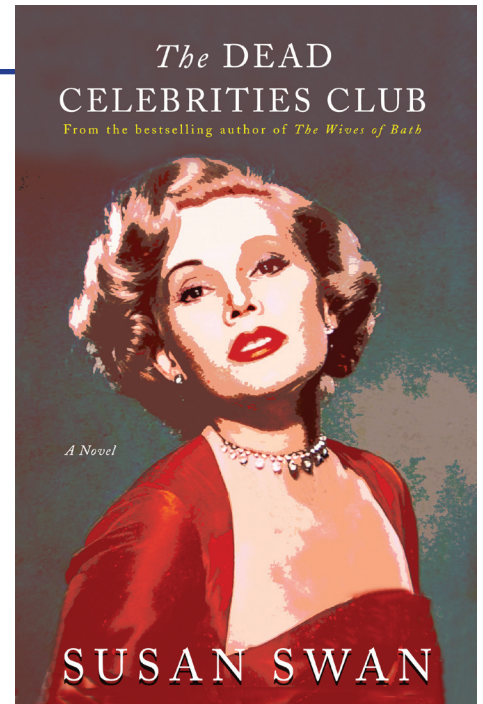
### INTRODUCING *The Dead Celebrities Club*

Charm and boarding school connections to billionaire media personality Earl Lindquist aren't sufficient for Dale Paul to avoid being sent to an upstate New York white collar jail on multiple counts of fraud for gambling away US military pensions.

Promising himself to earn back his son's previously gambled inheritance, Dale Paul dreams up an illegal lottery for his fellow inmates based on the death of old and frail celebrities.

Disgraced and for once in his life, penniless, Dale Paul's relationships with his family deteriorate while he works on his scheme to make himself rich again.

Win or lose, Dale Paul goes through a sea change that may (or may not) make a new man of him. But will the enterprising gambler get caught in his own con?



### IMPORTANT THEMES

**Class** – Dale Paul represents the point of view of the wealthy and privileged, having himself always been in the position. His prison sentence forces him to come face to face with those who did not have the advantages he did. His treatment inside the prison reflects this as well, and the status which wealth can provide.

**Parenthood / Family** – The relationship between family, most notably parents and children, is explored through Dale Paul's relationship with his son. Dale Paul relates to his family in terms of who they are but also as who he thinks they should be. His relationships become strained when these two ideas conflict, which is most strongly shown through his relationship with Davie.

**Death / Value of life** – Dale Paul's dead pool calls into question the value of human life. While many people are appalled by his commodifying what is generally seen as a tragedy, he sees no wrong in profiting from it. For most of the novel Dale Paul views the value of people and life as what they can do for him. Death is contemplated from his detached point of view while other character's reactions to it provide a foil to Dale Paul.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the author trying to say about North American culture through the story of Dale Paul?
2. Dale Paul describes Davie as “soft-hearted.” Does Dale Paul’s description seem accurate, and what does this say about his relationship with his son?
3. What is Dale Paul’s reaction to his son’s supposed suicide? How does it differ from his reaction to his mother’s death?
4. Discuss how Dale Paul relates to others. How would these relationships be classified? Are there common threads or major differences?
5. Discuss the ethics of participating in a dead pool.
6. Compare and contrast Dale Paul’s experience in the prison to his experience in boarding school.
7. What role does the notion of celebrity play in the novel? What does it mean to Dale Paul?
8. What do Dale Paul’s doodles reveal about his journey?



### ABOUT SUSAN

Susan Swan is the author of author of eight books of fiction, including *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, which was nominated for both the Governor General’s Literary Award and the Books in Canada First Novel Award; the internationally best-selling *Wives of Bath*; and *The Western Light*, selected as one of the top ten novels of its year by the Ontario Library Association. Born in Midland, Ontario, she attended McGill University, was professor at York University, and chair of The Writers’ Union of Canada. She lives in Toronto with her partner, Patrick Crean.