



READING & DISCUSSION GUIDE

LICENSE TO THRILL

LILY BOLLINGER

A CHAMPAGNE WIDOWS NOVEL

READING & DISCUSSION GUIDE: LICENSE TO THRILL BY REBECCA ROSENBERG

This combined guide is designed to facilitate a probing, personal, and a little provocative conversation among friends. It explores the grit and glitz of Lily Bollinger’s life—a journey spanning three decades as she transforms from a woman surviving war to a global icon defining her own legacy.

PART I: FIRST IMPRESSIONS & THE STORYTELLER’S CRAFT

- **The Weight of the Past:** The novel uses a dual timeline, alternating between Lily’s past (1941–1965) and her later life (1967–1974). How did interweaving these eras affect your experience? Did the past timeline effectively build tension for the present-day narrative?
- **Setting the Tone:** Each major section is introduced by a French epigraph, such as *Le tout pour le tout* (“All or nothing”). How did these phrases foreshadow the action or connect to the overarching themes?
- **Image and Wit:** Lily’s famous quote is: “I only drink Champagne when I’m happy and when I’m sad... Otherwise, I never touch it—unless I’m thirsty.” What does this say about her personality and the pressure she felt to control her reputation?

PART II: THE EVOLUTION OF LILY BOLLINGER

- **The Performance of Compliance:** In the 1940s, Lily hosted Nazi officials like the *Wein Führer* at her table while Resistance fighters operated in her cellars. How do you think this “double life” shaped her? Is it possible to collaborate for survival without losing your soul?
- **The “Bicycle” Insight:** Lily famously rode her bicycle through vineyards during bombings to save fuel for her community. What does this small detail reveal about her brand of leadership and connection to the land?
- **Tradition vs. Innovation:** Explore how Lily navigated the French legal principle *Le mort saisit le vif* (the heir assumes the deceased’s duty). How did her perspective on legacy change after she took over in 1941?

PART III: CONFLICT, COURAGE, AND CULTURAL IMPACT

- **The Enemy Within:** While the Nazis couldn't break Bollinger, the infighting between Lily's three "quarrelsome nephews" nearly did. Why are family power struggles often more vicious than external threats?
- **Reclaiming the Narrative:** In 1967, critic Cyril Ray dismissed Lily as an "aging widow". She responded by partnering with the James Bond franchise. Was this a clever business move or a personal refusal to be "aged out" of relevance?
- **The Bond Connection:** Discuss the irony of a traditional French estate partnering with a fictional British spy. Why did this gamble work so well, and how did it validate her leadership?
- **The Burden of Secrets:** The novel suggests Lily's masterpiece was the secret she kept for decades to protect her empire and her love for "the Commodore". Was keeping this secret an act of strength or a tragic sacrifice?

FOR THE BOOK CLUB LEADER: THE THREE WIDOWS

If your group has followed Rebecca Rosenberg's Champagne Widows series, compare Lily's grit to the previous subjects:

- Barbe-Nicole Clicquot (*Champagne Widows*): The technical innovator.
- Louise Pommery (*Madame Pommery*): The marketing visionary.
- Lily Bollinger (*License to Thrill*): The master of endurance.

Closing Thought: Which of these three women do you think faced the most daunting mountain to climb?