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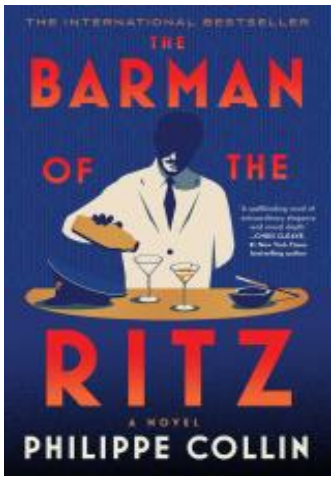
The Barman of the Ritz

by Philippe Collin



About the Book

A celebrated bartender at the Ritz Hotel during the Nazi occupation of Paris harbors a dangerous secret in this ?magnificent? (*ELLE*), ?brilliant? (*Le Parisien*) international bestseller based on a true story.

Paris, 1940. The Nazis have descended on Paris, and the Occupation has begun. Businesses across the city have shuttered, but the legendary Ritz Hotel remains open, its dazzling lights still burning bright on the Place Vendôme. When it becomes the favorite watering hole of the occupying forces, its barman, Frank Meier, is forced to adapt to a new clientele. But Frank has a secret: he is Jewish.

Tensions rise as the war progresses, but Frank refuses to leave his post behind the bar. Unbeknownst to the Nazi officers he serves night after night, Frank forms precarious alliances with unlikely accomplices in order to save other Jewish families in the city and keep his loved ones alive.

Inspired by real events, with the highest of stakes and a brilliant protagonist, THE BARMAN OF THE RITZ is a heady cocktail of history and fiction set in one of Paris?s most glamorous places, diving deep into the impossible choices of an ordinary man in extraordinary circumstances.

Discussion Guide

1. Although Frank?s diary is fictional, Philippe Collin explains in the author?s note that he conceived of the diary entries to ?shed light on this extraordinary life.? How do you think Frank?s diary entries serve the story? Why do you think Collin chose to include these entries at specific spots in the story?

2. Frank explains how he became a barman in New York on page 20. Why do you think Frank chose to become a bartender? How do you think it fits his character?

3. On page 44, Frank writes in his diary entry: ?Where am I from? I don?t really know anymore.? Discuss how the theme of Frank?s complicated identity comes up through the novel and why it is significant.

4. On page 58, Collin writes that Frank is ?humiliated by his own spinelessness.? Discuss the theme of ?spinelessness? throughout the book. Do you see Frank as spineless or brave? In what ways do you think he does or does not overcome his self-perceived ?spinelessness??

5. On page 73, Blanche tells Frank, ?I?ve always felt safe inside your bar, no matter the chaos of the world outside.? Why do you think this is significant? How does this inform their relationship?

6. Frank finds himself ?caught between two worlds that exist side by side yet never meet: the world of the Ritz, with its pomp, its opulence, and its predators, and the outside world where people are struggling? (page 92). How does Frank navigate these two worlds? How is he different in each?

7. When Luciano is scared that he will be caught for being Jewish, Frank tells him that ?the bar is a theater, where everyone wears a mask? (page 102). Can you see this playing out in other parts of the story? What are some ways in which the bar acts as a theater?

8. Frank is faced with many moral dilemmas. Do you think Frank should have taken Süss? deal? On page 128, he says, ?Do I really have a choice?? How would you answer that question for him?

9. Frank believes that he is continuously being used by characters in the book, first by Blanche, and then by Inga. Do you think he was being used? If you think that he was, why do you think these characters used him?

10. Although Frank Meier and many of the characters in the book were real, the character of Luciano is fictional. Why do you think Collin chose to include him as a character?

11. On page 338, Frank says, ?I am a prisoner of the Ritz and of my own inaction.? Frank has described the Ritz as both a theater and a prison. In what ways is the Ritz a prison?

12. Blanche gets arrested three times, and after the third time, Frank admits he thinks she has been getting arrested on purpose. Do you agree? If so, why do you think she does this?

13. Several times throughout the novel, Frank imagines confessing his Jewish identity, even though it would have serious consequences for him. Why do you think he considers this? How has the weight of his secrets affected him?

Author Bio

Philippe Collin has been a producer at France Inter for the past 20 years and holds a master?s degree in contemporary

history. Since 2021, he has produced a series of historical podcasts that have been downloaded by more than 40 million listeners. THE BARMAN OF THE RITZ is his first novel.

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