

## **Discussion Questions for The Italian Party**

### **About the novel:**

- This book has been called “sneaky” for how it seems to be a comedy, yet explores more serious issues as well. Did it live up to your expectations, surprise you, or something else?
- What effect does it have on you as a reader when you experience the story from more than one point of view, as in this book where you get both Scottie and Michael’s thoughts?
- People like to put books into “genres,” but some books resist categories. In your view, is this a spy story, a love story, a missing person story, a coming of age story, or something else?
- This novel could be considered part of a genre called “comedies of remarriage,” which includes films like “The Awful Truth” and “The Philadelphia Story.” How is the end of the novel both a happy ending and not a happy ending?

### **About the characters:**

- How did your view of Michael change as the story progressed? Scottie?
- Scottie and Michael were too young to participate in World War II, yet it had an effect on them to grow up during those years. How are they children of both the ‘40s and ‘50s?
- Who is Sebastian loyal to? Which side is he on? Why?
- What role do animals play in the novel?

### **About the time period:**

- Did it surprise you to learn that it was against the law to be gay if you were a government employee in the 1950s?
- The 1950s can be seen as a cultural response to World War II. What events in this novel link those two eras? How was the mood of the ‘50s a reaction to the war years?
- What was appealing to post-war Italians about American products and the American way of life?

- Most Cold War stories take a very clear side in that struggle. What side does this novel take?
- The Cold War was a time of deep paranoia about loyalty. How is that conveyed in this novel?
- How does it change your view of Italy to know that the U.S. had such a direct impact on its elected leaders for fifty years?

**About parallels to the present:**

- Scottie and Michael were not completely honest with each other before their marriage. Can you imagine this happening today?
- This novel was conceived and written before the news that Russia tried to interfere with the U.S. election of 2016. How did that present day story affect your perception of Michael's mission to interfere in Siena's election?
- The novel was written before the "Me, Too" movement and our current cultural conversation about sexual harassment and sexual abuse. How would Scottie's experience at Vassar be different today?
- What do you think happens to Scottie and Michael as the 1960s arrive? They would be in their late 80s now—would they have stayed married?