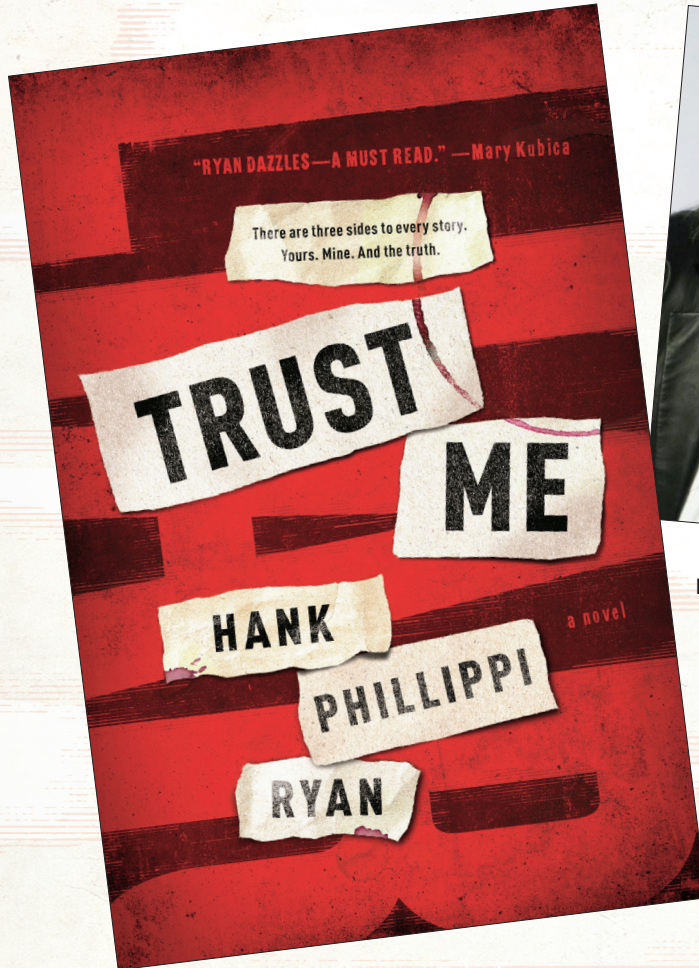# READING GROUP GUIDE

HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN has won five Agatha Awards, in addition to the Anthony, Macavity, Daphne du Maurier, and Mary Higgins Clark Award for her bestselling mystery novels. As an investigative reporter, her work has resulted in new laws, criminals sent to prison, homes saved from foreclosure, and millions of dollars in restitution for victims and consumers. Along with her thirty-four Emmys and fourteen Edward R. Murrow awards, Hank has received dozens of other honors for her ground-breaking journalism. A former president of Sisters in Crime and founder of MWA University, she lives in Boston with her husband, a nationally renowned civil rights and criminal defense attorney. *Trust Me* is her first standalone novel.

TRUST ME
HANK PHILLIPPI RYAN

1. At the beginning of *Trust Me*, the bereaved and grief-stricken Mercer Hennessy accepts an assignment to write a book about a notorious murder trial. Do you think she should have accepted the job? Why? Do you think Katherine should have offered it to her? What happens when the lines between work and personal relationships are crossed?

2. The author reveals the book Mercer is writing, and lets us see the story Mercer's creating about what happened to Tasha Nicole Bryant. Does knowing how Mercer feels about Ashlyn Bryant color your reading of her book? Do you think Mercer can be impartial? Should she be?

3. Have you read *In Cold Blood* or any similar books about real-life crimes? When you read true crime, have you wondered how the authors knew what the characters said, or what they thought? Since they could not have known exact dialogue, did that change how you felt about the "true" story? Or what you believed was true?

4. Mercer counts the days that have passed since the car crash that ruined her family and, she fears, her future. Do you think that's a healthy way to deal with grief? Do you think she understands the extent of how her grief colors her actions? How have you dealt with grief in your own life, and has it influenced how you feel about a person or situation?

5. At one point, Mercer recalls a T. S. Eliot poem and connects that to her realizations about the truth: that there's what we're told, and what we believe, and also the actual truth. She sees that those three things might be different. Have you ever been told something, believed something different, and then discovered that the truth was somewhere in the middle? Are "facts" set in stone, or can they change?

6. When Mercer begins to suspect a new reality about her relationship with her husband, she realizes what she thought was true in their lives could be interpreted in a very different way. Did you suspect her husband of duplicity? How well do we know the people we share our lives with?

7. Did your attitude about Ashlyn Bryant change as you read the book? How much was your attitude about Ashlyn colored by Mercer's opinion of her character? Did your attitude change along with Mercer's? Or because of something else?

8. In *Trust Me*, Mercer thinks about the Casey Anthony case and the O. J. Simpson case. Have you ever followed a major trial? Did you watch it on TV or read about it in print? Did the outcome surprise you? (Have you ever been on a jury? How did that change your view of "truth?")

9. Mercer is manipulated by Ashlyn, but Mercer is manipulating Ashlyn, too. Is it acceptable to manipulate someone if your goals are honorable? Do you think you could be manipulated in this way? Why or why not? Is there anyone you trust in those times you can't trust yourself?

10. As a reporter, Mercer wants to tell the facts of the case, but maybe her bias gets in the way. Do you think it does? Do you think this is common? How do you separate fact from opinion when you are reading the news? How do you figure out what to believe? Are there certain sources that you trust over others? If so, why? What is the best way to find the truth?

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