

## READING GROUP GUIDE



### PADDY HIRSCH

is an award-winning journalist and online video host who produces the NPR podcast *The Indicator from Planet Money*. The author of *The Devil's Half Mile* and *Hudson's Kill* came to journalism after serving for eight years as an officer in the British Royal Marines, and lives in Los Angeles. He is also the author of a nonfiction book explaining economics, *Man vs. Markets*.

Photo Credit: Tessa Neustadt

1. Upon his return to New York City, it seems everyone Justy encounters is corrupt in some way. Is this inevitable in a society with little regulation? Is it possible to be a good person when surrounded by so much corruption?
2. On page 77, John Colley argues that slavery is necessary for the economy. One of Colley's arguments is that freeing slaves would create a new group of workers available for cheap labor, who would then drive people already looking for jobs—in this case, the Irish community—out of work. This argument doesn't work with Justy, and in hindsight we know it wasn't true. But why might it have been a useful argument? How have this and similar arguments been effective historically?
3. On page 172, Kerry talks about what it's like to be a woman in the 1790s, and it isn't a pretty picture. "All the world's a stage, right? Except we're not players. All we are is fucking furniture." Knowing her options, what do you think of the choices Kerry made? What kind of choices do you think you would make if you were in a similar position?
4. Justy is adamant throughout the book that he will make his own, honest living, and will not be associated with his uncle, the Bull. Despite this, many of the choices he makes are morally and legally questionable. Given that, do you think his determination to leave the Bull behind has more to do with a desire to lead an honest life or a desire to make his own way in the world with no more help from his family?
5. On pages 93 through 95, the Bull saves Bridie, a woman in his neighborhood, from being attacked by three men. The men said they would rent lodgings from Birdie, then when she said she'd sleep with them for extra they tried to force themselves on her without paying. The Bull has the men pulled off her and forces them to pay. When Bridie thanks him, the Bull says, "It's not about saving you, Bridie. It's about making sure everyone knows their place.... You come to my part of town, you pay your way. In advance." Do you admire the Bull's actions here? Why or why not?
6. At the end of the novel, Justy helps the conspirators figure out a way to sidestep the questionable financial legality of what they've been doing on Wall Street, in exchange for the men who killed his father. With everything you know about the scheme, do you agree with this choice or do you think Justy's desire for revenge is blinding him?
7. Justice Flanagan bears a name that carries a heavy weight. How does he live up to his name?
8. At the end of everything, Justy understands why Kerry did what she did and still trusts her. Would you? Why or why not?
9. Although the book is set in 1799, when you consider the role of gender, race and class, there are still a number of parallels to today. How have things changed over the centuries? And how have they stayed the same?
10. What expectations do you have for Justy? *Hudson's Kill*, the sequel is set in 1803. What do you think transpires for him in those four years?



FORGE BOOKS