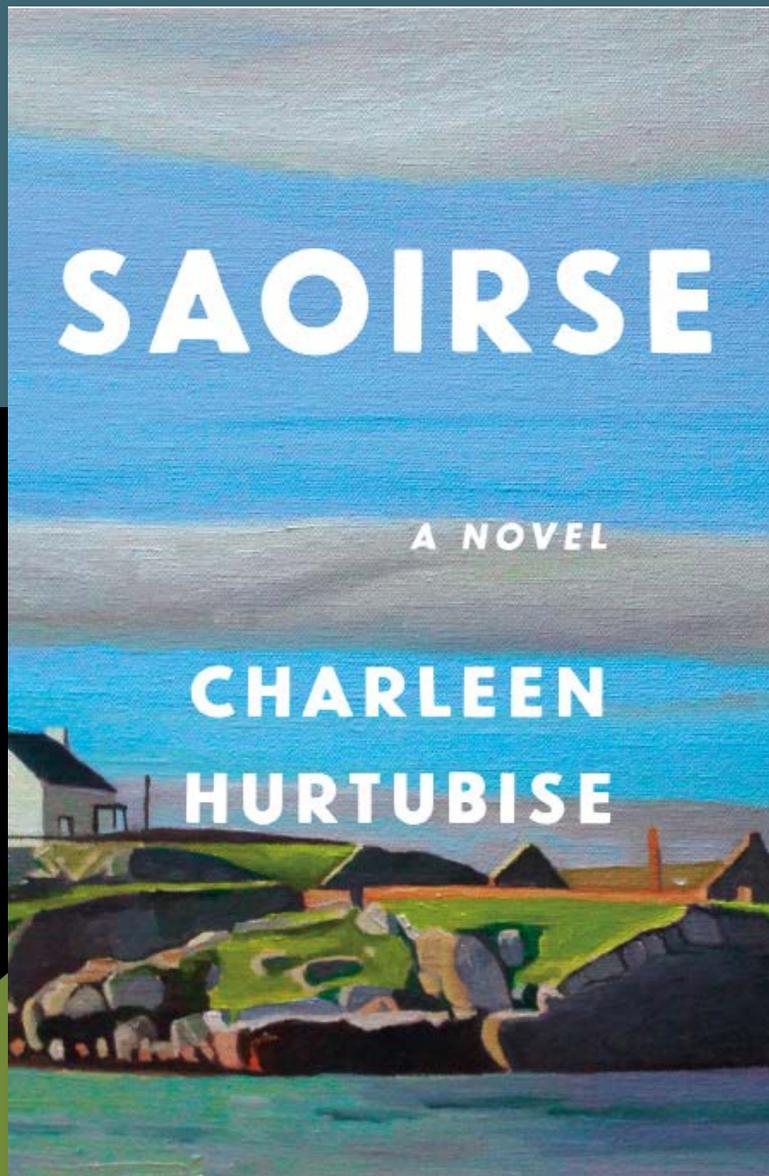


Book Club Kit



“AUDACIOUS AND PROPULSIVE, A STORY THAT SURGES WITH EMOTIONAL VITALITY—THIS IS A DAZZLING NOVEL.”

—COLIN WALSH, AUTHOR OF KALA

Discussion Questions

1. How does the name Saoirse — meaning “freedom” — reflect the protagonist’s emotional journey? What do you think freedom really means for Saoirse?
2. What do you think the book suggests about the possibility (or impossibility) of truly starting over?
3. Did you sympathize with Sarah’s choice to assume the identity of Saoirse to escape her dangerous life in the U.S.? Is what she did justifiable?
4. What does the novel reveal about the cost of keeping secrets?
5. Discuss Saoirse’s arrival in Ireland and how quickly she was swept up into Paul’s world. Do you think there was anything she could have done differently? Would you have made different choices in that position?
6. How do you think Saoirse uses her art to process her life? Does painting serve as a form of freedom, a form of confession, or both?
7. Discuss the author’s method of telling Saoirse’s backstory through subjects that she painted. What effect did this device have on your reading of these events?
8. How do past traumas continue to shape Saoirse’s life, even years after she has fled?
9. What moments in the novel suggest the possibility of healing — or reveal how fragile it might be?
10. How does the constant tension of the fear of being found out drive Saoirse’s actions?
11. How do Saoirse’s relationships with Paul and his family, Daithí, and her daughters reflect her desire for safety and love?
12. When Saoirse does find a loving partner in Daithí, why do you think she hides the truth about her identity for as long as she does?

Discussion Questions

13. Can you ever really “know” someone if they are hiding a big secret from you? How would you have reacted in Daithi’s shoes?
14. At what point did you feel the greatest sense of suspense or dread?
15. What role does the Irish coast play in shaping the mood and themes of the story?
16. How does the story make you reflect on your own beliefs about truth and reinvention?

AN INTERVIEW

with Charleen Hurtubise



CHARLEEN HURTUBISE is author of *The Polite Act of Drowning*. *Saoirse* is her US debut novel. She has a graduate degree from Trinity College in Dublin and an MFA in Creative Writing from University College Dublin, where she has facilitated creative writing seminars. Born in Florida to a French-Canadian father and an Irish mother, she spent much of her childhood in Michigan, her early adult years in Boston, and has now lived half of her life in Ireland, which is home. She lives in Dublin but the pull of Donegal and its mesmerizing landscapes influence both her writing and her visual arts practice.

What inspired you to write a story about your character, Saoirse, running away to Ireland?

The idea of an American running away, hiding in Ireland, and accidentally starting a life was sparked by various news stories in the Irish media. It wasn't one particular story, but the fact that over the years, people from various nationalities have slipped into Ireland, undetected, and lived their life until they were exposed due to one factor or another. I thought if this could happen in recent years with all our technology and digital footprints, it could certainly happen back in the '90s. And what would that be like for a young woman on the run, to find herself lifted out of her chaos for a while — and what would happen if she began to build a life, and that life was threatened by the truth she concealed? The story bloomed from there.

When Saoirse first meets Paul, she can't quite read who he is. Over time, she begins to develop a sense of his true character through his interactions with his friends and how they respond to him, which starts to shape how she sees him. What were you exploring with that early dynamic in the story?

Saoirse is new to Ireland, she is disorientated and emotionally raw, and Paul appears steady and from a good family, which equals stability in her eyes. On the surface there is enough there about Paul to find attractive. She is reeling from the traumas of the very recent past and needs to steady her situation in the moment, and Paul appears to be this steadying force. As she is on shaky ground and in survival mode, it is easy to ignore the signs, because she needs his support. She has spent her life compromising for her own safety, and Paul is another choice she has made for her survival. The reality of the situation is that her relationship with Paul is transactional as much as his is, and that is the complexity of her situation as someone who has always been living in the moment and fighting for survival. She isn't the "heroine" in this moment, for certain. And by the time she comes to know who he really is, then it is too late.

When Saoirse meets Daithí, she's still somewhat involved with Paul — but she falls almost immediately. How is this not just another form of reaching for safety, transferring this search for survival from one love interest to another?

This is exactly the kind of complexity that brings tension to fiction — the truth is, it is both of these things, love and survival! She is, of course, still in survival mode, still needing safety, but with Daithí, there is an emotional safety which she has never experienced before, and it catches her off guard. Her reaction to him isn't about being rescued, it is about being recognised — they have seen something in one another that stems from a much deeper level than material circumstances. But the complexity it brings to the story, the tension it creates, means the deeper she gets into a relationship with him, the higher the stakes and the more she realizes what she stands to lose.

Saoirse comes from a rough, unstable background — how is it that she has so much going on intellectually, artistically, emotionally? Where does that depth come from?

I think this is an important question both in terms of character development and how we interrogate our assumptions around background, class, and interiority in fiction. People carry depth and potential regardless of where they come from, but we don't look beyond our judgments to see who they really are beyond our own perceptions. Saoirse comes from a chaotic background, and her constant survival mode forced her to observe, to adapt, to read a room quickly — an intelligence in itself. She earned her wisdom through her resilience. As for her art, her work began as an outlet, not to impress anyone.

And speaking of Saoirse's art, it really does feel like a lifeline for her. Can you speak more to how this helped her survive?

For Saoirse, art is private, not performative — it's about making the chaos inside her bearable. She grew up in a world where things didn't make sense, where survival meant staying quiet, disappearing, or doing what she was told. Now, her situation in Ireland is similar to her past, especially when she becomes stuck with Paul. When everything else in her life feels unstable and she is stuck in a loveless world, the work is hers, and she can disappear into it. It's not healing in a sentimental way — it's more like excavation. She's pulling something out of herself she can't say in words. And in doing that, she finds a kind of language that helps her process all her lived trauma and grief. The paradox is, in her lack of ambition, lack of seeking recognition, it finds her. Her admirers love her work for its genuineness, its authentic nature, and that is what ultimately accelerates her trouble towards the end of the novel.

Sasa is a character who is only briefly introduced as a name in the opening chapters — and apart from the odd mention, she does not appear again until the end of the novel. Did you envision her absence, and ultimately her reemergence, would have such a hold over this story?

Sasa is like a haunting — her very name carries unease; her existence holds the entire threat and tension of the novel together. I always knew the timing of her appearance would be crucial to completing the emotional arc, but what I hadn't anticipated was how she would resonate with readers. Without giving any spoilers, it's like she embodies this simmering collective rage of women that feels very current.

Throughout the novel, Saoirse feels that if she could only find the courage to confide in Daithí then he might be the one person who could help her. He's steady, reliable, and trustworthy, and he's in love with her — so why doesn't she tell him the truth earlier?

Because she has never found a way to step down from the survival mode that she is in. She has had respite from it now that she is in his world, but not relief. And now she's not just protecting herself, she's protecting her children. She has lived with these high stakes for so long, and she is still calculating her risk. Even though Daithí feels trustworthy, even though she wants to believe in him and the idea that love conquers all, she can't be sure how he'll react if the truth comes to light. But the paradox is, the longer she conceals the truth, the more dangerous the fallout becomes.



**If you decide to adopt *Saoirse* for your book club, we would love to hear about it!
Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media
using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #SaoirseNovel.**

Praise for *Saoirse*

“Audacious and **PROPULSIVE**, a story that surges with emotional vitality—this is a **DAZZLING** novel.”

—Colin Walsh, author of *Kala*

“**BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN** and **ENTICINGLY INTRIGUING**, *Hurtubise* is a shiny new star in the Irish literary firmament.”

—Liz Nugent, bestselling author of *Strange Sally Diamond* and *Unraveling Oliver*

“A novel as rich with narrative layers as the visual art of its protagonist... an **AUDACIOUS** act of storytelling.”

—Belinda McKeon, author of *Tender* and *Solace*

“A **BEAUTIFULLY WROUGHT**, deeply human story of the power of creativity in the face of survival. By turns funny and **MOVING**, with an unforgettable cast of characters (with a special mention to Daithí, the Mr Darcy of Donegal), *Saoirse* brims with humanity and hope.”

—Louise Nealon, author of *Snowflake*

“**GRIPPING** and **EMOTIONALLY COMPLEX**, *Saoirse* is a moving portrait of love, heartbreak and the sacrifices one woman makes for the family and life she deserves...**LUMINOUS!**”

—Michelle Gallen, author of *Factory Girls*

“*Hurtubise* balances grit and **TENDERNESS** on a high wire of sustained tension.”

—Lauren McKenzie, author of *The Couples*