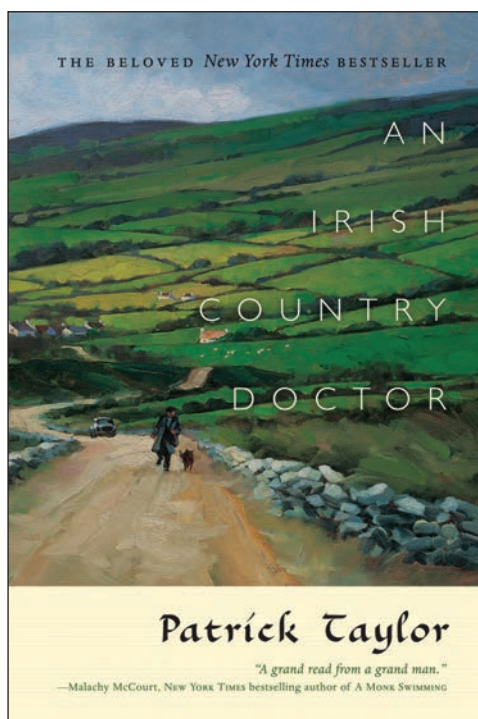


Patrick Taylor

An Irish Country Doctor



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“A grand read from a grand man.”

—MALACHY MCCOURT,
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
A MONK SWIMMING

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: Dorothy Timman

Patrick Taylor, M.D., was born and raised in Bangor County Down in Northern Ireland. Dr. Taylor is a distinguished medical researcher, off-shore sailor, model-boat builder, and father of two grown children. He now lives on Saltspring Island, British Columbia.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Barry Laverty, M.B., can barely find the village of Ballybucklebo on a map when he first sets out to seek gainful employment there, but already he knows that there is nowhere he would rather live than in the emerald hills and dales of Northern Ireland. The proud owner of a spanking-new medical degree and little else in the way of worldly possessions, Barry jumps at the chance to secure a position as an assistant in a small rural practice.

At least until he meets Dr. Fingal Flahertie O’Reilly.

The older physician, whose motto is to never let the patients get the upper hand, has his own way of doing things. At first, Barry can’t decide if the pugnacious O’Reilly is the biggest charlatan he has ever met, or the best teacher he could ever hope for. Through O’Reilly Barry soon gets to know all of the village’s colorful and endearing residents, including: a malingering Major and his equally hypochondriacal wife; an unwed servant girl, who refuses to divulge the father of her upcoming baby; a slightly daft old couple unable to marry for lack of a roof; and a host of other eccentric characters who make every day an education for the inexperienced young doctor.

Ballybucklebo is long way from Belfast, and Barry is quick to discover that he still has a lot to learn about the quirks and traditions of country life. But with pluck and compassion and only the slightest touch of blarney, he will find out more about life—and love—than he ever imagined back in medical school.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

* Note that these questions reveal much of the novel's plot; to preserve your reading pleasure, please don't look at these questions until after you've finished reading the book.

1. Just a few pages into *An Irish Country Doctor*, its main character, Barry Lavery, speaks of his love for and devotion to Northern Ireland. What do we learn about the soul of the country, by the story's end? What makes it such a compelling home for Barry, and for Taylor's other characters?
2. Barry's first encounter with Dr. Fingal Flahertie O'Reilly is surprising, to say the least. What is your initial reaction to O'Reilly? Does your opinion of him change along with Barry's as the book progresses?
3. By many standards, Dr. O'Reilly's medical practice is often unorthodox. Is he an effective physician? Is he a moral one? Have you ever known a doctor who resembled him? Would you trust O'Reilly with your own medical care?
4. There are several instances throughout the book in which O'Reilly breaches traditional ethics—in maintaining confidentiality, in telling patients the truth, even in prescribing “tonics”—while caring for his patients. How does Barry react to this? How do those breaches make you feel? Are there ever medical situations like these in which you think the end justifies the means?
5. *An Irish Country Doctor* portrays two people who each lost their partner long ago, and who have now platonically shared a home and a life for decades. What do you think makes O'Reilly and Kinky such good colleagues in the running of his practice and his day-to-day life? How do they play off one another's temperament? At any point in the story, did you wonder why they had never fallen in love with one another? Why has each remained single for so long?
6. Barry's first meeting with Patricia seems to have a quality about it of “love at first sight,” of his being smitten by her beauty and she by his slightly awkward charm. Is there more to their attraction than that? Do you think that “love at first sight” can form the basis of an enduring relationship?
7. In one of Barry's most difficult moments, Patricia says that she wants to prioritize her education and career over a relationship with him. Do you believe her despite Barry's questions about her motives? Are her concerns reasonable, for the decade in which the story takes place?

8. Julie MacAteer's pregnancy brings up a discussion between Barry and O'Reilly on the ethics of abortion. Are you surprised by either of their reactions? How dated do Julie's options appear, compared to our present-day point of view? Do Barry and O'Reilly offer the care and support that she needs?

9. Barry reflects on the difficulty of treating patients whose health has been ravaged by the effects of poverty. Does fighting poverty have a role in health care itself? To what degree do you think this issue is still a factor in health care today?

10. What are the greatest benefits of living in a village like Ballybucklebo? What are the greatest difficulties? How do you feel about the eccentric characters—Maggie, Sonny, Seamus Galvin, Bertie Bishop—with whom Taylor has peopled his story?

11. O'Reilly talks frequently about “not letting the customer get the upper hand.” Does this rule seem patronizing, or comical, or is it a question of simple self-defense for him? Do you think that doctors and their patients should be on equal footing, or should doctors wield greater authority? What do you think about the amount of authority that O'Reilly carries in the small world of Ballybucklebo?

12. Barry often compares his big-city hospital experience with the new world of O'Reilly's small-town rural practice. What are the biggest differences between the work of a country GP (general practitioner) and a physician at a city hospital such as The Royal? What could Barry stand to lose by choosing the life that O'Reilly has chosen? What might he gain?

PRAISE FOR AN IRISH COUNTRY DOCTOR

“*An Irish Country Doctor* makes for escapist, delightful fun.” —*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“Ballybucklebo is an easy place for readers to sink into, with likable characters and atmospheric dialogue.

—*KIRKUS REVIEWS*

“Quirky, funny, and deeply moving by turns, Taylor's writing perfectly captures the language and character of Ulster in times gone by. I promise you will enjoy this book immensely; I did.”

—MORGAN LLYWELYN, *NEW YORK TIMES*
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE LAST PRINCE OF IRELAND*

“Wraps you in the sensations of a vanished time and place.” —*VANCOUVER SUN*

“With an unerring eye for detail, the talents of a natural storyteller and the ability to pepper his anecdotes with large doses of wit and humor, Patrick Taylor has written a delightful novel...the lives of the engaging and eccentric townspeople, whose hilarious mishaps provide a perfect foil for the endeavors of the town’s medical men.”

—*CALGARY HERALD*

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