

Author's Irish roots inspire

Fugitive from Injustice

By Robert T. McMaster
Unquomok Press

Over the last several years, Williamsburg writer Robert McMaster turned to an earlier era of regional history for four linked novels known as the “Trolley Day Series,” stories set in early 20th century Holyoke and surrounding towns that explored class struggle, the clash between agriculture and industrialization, and major events such as World War I.

For his newest series of novels, McMaster, a former college biology teacher, has drawn on his Irish roots for inspiration.

The “County Wicklow” mystery series is set in contemporary Ireland, in a picturesque region south of Dublin, marked by the Wicklow Mountains, lakes, a long stretch of coastline, and, for Ireland, a fair amount of tree cover.

The first book in the series, 2023’s “Rose of Glenkerry,” introduced the main characters, including Ciarn “Cary” McGurk, a recent university graduate who’s thinking of moving to London to work in journalism. Instead he returns to his home in the town of Glenkerry to help an old friend, Rosie O’Malley, solve a fam-

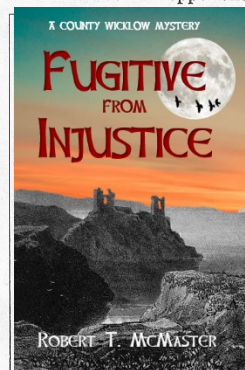
ily mystery that includes the sudden disappearance of Rosie’s mother.

In McMaster’s new book, “Fugitive from Injustice,” Cary and Rosie are now an item, and Cary has remained in Glenkerry to try and revive the small weekly newspaper his late father, Patrick, founded 30 years earlier.

But with a minimal budget, Cary’s not sure how he’s going to make the operation fly without good stories — something beyond routine news — to bring in readers and advertisers.

Then, out for a shoreline run one morning, he finds the body of an unidentified man sprawled in the sand with what looks like a serious head wound. The Garda — Ireland’s national police — are called in, and the initial investigation reveals the man is originally from Syria.

Cary’s got a friend on the force, Del, who on background says Syrian police haven’t been too helpful on the case. Is there a possibility the man had been an opponent of the Syrian government during the country’s prolonged civil war and was murdered?



From there the story unfolds to take up the larger issue of refugees from other war-torn countries such as Ukraine and Afghanistan coming to Ireland and the perils they have faced — as well as the tensions that can rise in small towns with their presence.

In Glenkerry, everyone is buzzing about the dead man, but police are saying almost nothing. So Cary, with Rosie’s help, begins to do some private sleuthing, and the two uncover a web of intrigue that goes back 10 years, stretching from Ireland to the Mideast.

Rosie, meantime, is teaching in the local high school, where she’s caught up in helping a girl who’s being sexually harassed by a male student.

As a counterweight to these darker themes, “Fugitive from Injustice” has another storyline involving the Glenkerry girls’ camogie — Irish “hurling” — team, made up of girls from different countries and and cultures who are united by their passion for the sport.

It’s one way in which McMaster portrays a changing Ireland, including the little town at the center of the novel.

“To the casual visitor, Glenkerry appears frozen in time,” he writes, still the farming center it had been for decades. But change is happening: the local shops now include “a day spa, an espresso stand, and a frozen yogurt vendor,” while huge vacation homes have replaced some old stone farmhouses in the outlying fields and lanes.

In press notes, McMaster says Ireland has taken in many refugees, including more Ukrainians per capita than any other country. And the refugee stories in his novel, he adds, “are based on actual public accounts and they are not always easy to read, but I feel it is important that they be heard.”

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