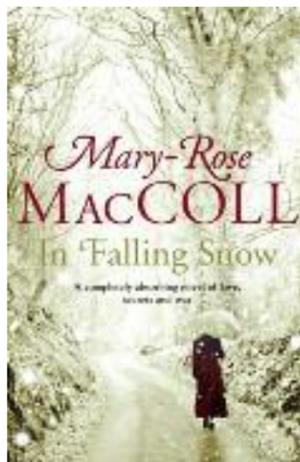


BOOK REVIEW

*In
Falling
Snow*

by Mary-Rose
MacColl

Review by
Robin Tennant-Wood



In 1915 my grandfather, a country lad from Wagga Wagga still two weeks shy of his 18th birthday, set sail for Gallipoli. He had with him a bible, given to him by his mother. Inscribed on the front page in my great-grandmother's handwriting are the words, "To Herbert, on the eve of your departure to a great and terrible war." My grandfather survived and the bible is still in the possession of my family. Why am I telling you this? That inscription came to mind on more than one occasion as I read Mary-Rose MacColl's *In Falling Snow*. It is that 'great and terrible war' and its effects, reaching through generations, that underpins the long-hidden secrets and loves in the parallel lives of Iris Crane, a World War 1 nursing veteran, and her granddaughter, Grace, an obstetrician.

Separated by a generation, these women face eerily similar attitudes against women in the medical profession and personal tragedies that require all the mental and emotional resilience with which MacColl has gently imbued her characters.

In 1914, Iris, then 17, travels to France to find and bring home her 15-year brother who has run away to enlist in the army. Instead, she meets the charismatic Miss Frances Ivens, who is establishing a hospital in an historic Abbey — Royaumont. The hospital is staffed entirely by women, and Iris, who begins working there as a nurse, harbours ambitions of becoming a doctor.

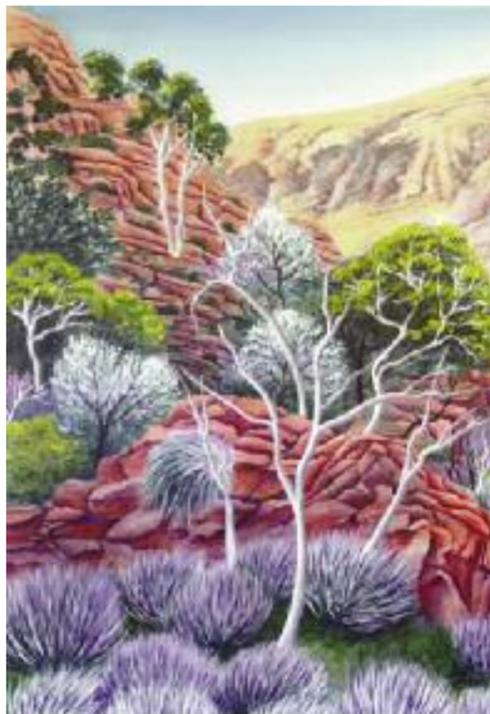
The book opens in the 1970s when Iris, living in inner city Brisbane, receives an invitation to a Royaume reunion. From there the book moves seamlessly between the eras and the lives of Iris and Grace, gradually peeling away the layers of secrets with the intervening years, as the long-hidden legacy of war resonates through two generations.

In the hands of a less sensitive writer this has the potential to descend into sentimentality, but MacColl keeps the pace and twists of the plot moving towards a conclusion that is surprising and utterly believable.

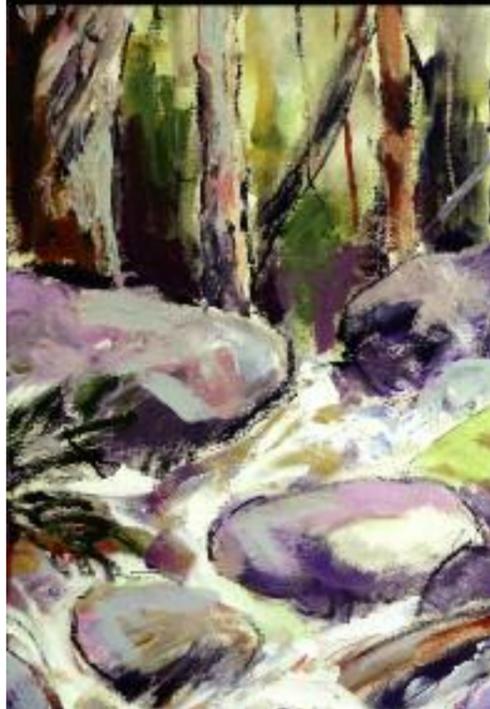
The book is impeccably researched and fuses together a real history within the texture of the storyline. Although Iris and Grace and their lives are fictional, Royaumont Abbey is not. It was indeed a military hospital operated by the Scottish Women's Hospitals, under the direction of the French Red Cross, for the duration of the First World War. And the charismatic Miss Frances Ivens? She was real too and was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* — the highest honour of the French republic.

With the centenary of the beginning of World War 1 this year, and the Anzac centenary next year, we will read a lot about the male heroes of war. This book stands as a tribute to the women who served.

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THE ANSWERS BLOWING IN THE WIND GO RIGHT OVER SOME HEADS

HERE WE GO AGAIN. Time is flying by and I'm not sure if it's a function of getting older or whether we really are living life in the fast lane. Issue number six already!

It's been a time for expos in this last month. First we had the seniors and then the youth expo. As it happens I have a joke for each end of the age spectrum.

Did you hear the one about the toddler who kept swiping the page of his book with his finger, trying to get the image to change?

And then there are the old boomers at the demo yelling:

"What do we want?"

"Memory training!"

"When do we want it?"

"What was that first bit again?"

I hope you enjoy this issue of *BWD* and if you don't, because it's got nothing of interest to you, that you then send me something that is. There are some great stories in our community but I can't find them if you don't help.

Anyway, it's good to read about people from these parts to make a change from all that recycled daily news. As Phillip Adams said, on the anniversary of Australian television, "We haven't had fifty years of television, more like one year of it fifty times".

Now for the confession. I'm off to Canada for a few weeks to be with my partner Alison who has the use of an artists' studio in Toronto for a month.

This very magazine that is perched in your hands, or on the table in front of you, was printed way after I took to the air and headed north. There may be some errors, clangers even, but sorry, for this issue there's nothing I can do about it.

Have a jolly good '175 Alive' while I'm away researching whether our Canadian cousins see the world in much the same way as we do. I will report the result of my investigation in the next issue.

I just looked at my stars and there was nothing there. My future suggests that it will be an adverse day if I don't get on and write some or there will be a hole on page 34 and a magazine 35 out of 36 parts finished is in big trouble.

Paul Cockram

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