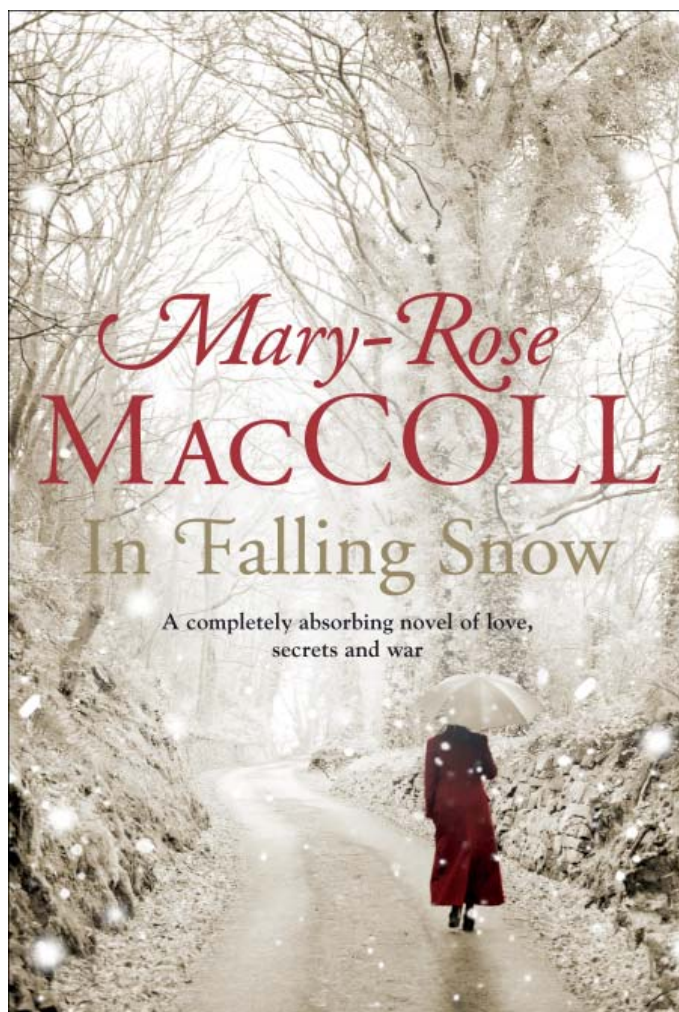


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

'In the beginning, it was the summers I remembered - long warm days under the palest blue skies, the cornflowers and forget-me-nots lining the road through the Lys forest, the buzz of insects going about their work, Violet telling me lies.'

Iris is getting old. A widow, her days are spent living quietly and worrying about her granddaughter, Grace, a headstrong young doctor. It's a small sort of life. But one day an invitation comes for Iris through the post to a reunion in France, where she served in a hospital during WWI. Determined to go, Iris is overcome by the memories of the past, when as a shy, naive young woman she followed her fifteen-year-old brother, Tom, to France in 1914 intending to bring him home.

On her way to find Tom, Iris comes across the charismatic Miss Ivens, who is setting up a field hospital in the old abbey of Royaumont, north of Paris. Putting her fears aside, Iris decides to stay at Royaumont, and it is there that she truly comes of age, finding her capability and her strength, discovering her passion for medicine, making friends with the vivacious Violet and falling in love.

But war is a brutal thing, and when the ultimate tragedy happens, there is a terrible price that Iris has to pay, a price that will echo down the generations.

A moving and uplifting novel about the small, unsung acts of heroism of which love makes us capable.

About the author

Mary-Rose MacColl is an Australian writer with current interests in families, children and mountains. She spent most of 2011 working on *In Falling Snow*, her fourth novel, on a residency in Banff, Canada. Her first novel, *No Safe Place*, was runner-up in the 1995 Australian Vogel literary award and her first non-fiction book, *The Birth Wars*, was a finalist in the 2009 Walkley Awards. She lives in Brisbane with her husband and young son.

Author, Mary-Rose MacColl, on writing ...

I was in the wrong aisle at The University of Queensland library, having transposed two digits in a call number, when I came across a book about the Scottish women doctors who started a hospital in France during the First World War. I sat down on the floor and started reading Eileen Crofton's marvellous history.

My grandmother died not long after this. I was in Melbourne, Australia at the time. It was raining and cold, and after my uncle called to tell me the news, I went to St Patrick's Cathedral and lit a candle. My grandmother had been a magic person in my young life. She is a magic person in all my memories. She'd trained as a nurse and might have gone to Royaumont if she'd had the kinds of life opportunities I've had.

These two experiences, finding the lost history of the women of Royaumont and my grandmother's death, were the basis for the novel where a young nurse from Stanthorpe, Australia, Iris Crane, goes to the hospital at Royaumont and her life is changed.

I write in notebooks mostly, or on cards, and, at the start of a novel, it's really only vague ideas, character sketches and scenes. This is how I worked on *In Falling Snow*. I visited the abbey where the hospital was set up as a guest of Fondation Royaumont and that was a wonderful experience. I finished the draft in real falling snow, in Banff, Canada. While all the locals complained, I couldn't have been happier to spend a winter watching the snow fall.

Reviews & Quotes

'MacColl skilfully blends meticulous historical research with a moving human narrative: *In Falling Snow* may be one among many novels about wartime love and heroism, but it's a well-executed and gripping piece of popular fiction.'
- *Bookseller & Publisher*

'As Grace discovers her grandmother's past, the strength of the women in her family is revealed to her. *In Falling Snow* is a riveting read.' - *GoodReading Magazine*

'What a treat it has been to read such a powerful and beautifully written book, based on the fascinating true story of the Scottish Women Doctors who ran hospitals in France and Serbia during WW1.' - *Culture Street*

'...moves between the past and the present, from Australia to war torn France to create a compelling story of love, loss, friendship, family and dreams... wonderfully engaging... I regretted putting it down...' - *Book'd Out*

'This novel is wonderfully measured and beautifully written... MacColl has long been one of my favourite writers, for her honesty and depth of vision. This is a story that you will become emotionally entangled with. Highly recommended.' - Kim Wilkinson, Reader Review, *Goodreads*

For discussion

- ☞ The author has said that she while she didn't want to write a novel about war – 'many others have done that much better than I ever could' - she did want to explore how such a profound experience might affect generations of families. Do you feel this has been achieved?
- ☞ In many ways, *In Falling Snow* is a novel about motherhood and the great joy and great cost of becoming a mother. Discuss these great joys and great costs.
- ☞ This novel spans the period of history from World War I when women couldn't pursue careers and have a family, to the seventies when they were told they could have it all, career, family, lives of their own. It's an issue we still haven't resolved. What conclusions do you draw about the choices of women?
- ☞ Royaumont Abbey has been spoken about by readers and critics as sitting comfortably among the strong characters in this novel. Are there other novels you've read about which you might say the same thing?
- ☞ Every generation faces new challenges and rises above them. Would you agree with that statement?

- ☞ Changing timelines and flashbacks are two ways in which the author reveals her story. Are there other techniques of which you were aware as you read? Did you think the different timelines and flashbacks did their job well?
- ☞ There were hundreds of boy soldiers in the Allied armies during WW1 – the youngest known British soldier was just 12 years old. The author’s own grandfather fought in WW1 as an underage soldier. Can you imagine what effect these boys’ experiences had on the rest of their lives?
- ☞ This is a novel about family secrets and the harm they do, the tragedy of war and the great goodness of ordinary people when the extraordinary is expected of them. Discuss.

Suggested Reading

Hannah & Emil by Belinda Castles

The Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood

Possession by AS Byatt

The Shifting Fog by Kate Morton

Regeneration by Pat Barker

The Little Stranger by Sarah Waters