



BOOK CLUB KIT

*Even the most steadfast nurse on the front line needs a little R&R.
Use the following guide to host your next event and you won't be
hosting your average book club.*

Facebook: **Writer Mary-Rose MacColl** Twitter: **@MaryRoseMacColl**
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Praise for

IN FALLING SNOW

“MacColl’s narrative is fortified by impeccable research and her innate ability to create a powerful bond between readers and characters. Well done.” —**KIRKUS REVIEWS** (starred)

“The well-crafted new novel from Australian author MacColl, her first to be published in America...will appeal to a wide audience including those who enjoy historical fiction and medical drama.”
—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

“This satisfying saga from an award-winning Australian author takes the reader across continents and time... Women as healers, family secrets, medical mysteries, historical setting—call the producers of *Call the Midwife*.” —**BOOKLIST**

“This is a story of love, ultimately, and a woman whose life has sought to atone for a mistake she hardly knew she made. Caught between the past and her impending mortality, Iris relives her life as a nurse in WWI, when she was too young to understand what her choices would mean not only for her, but for the family she cobbled together out of the rubble. At once perceptive and sympathetic, *In Falling Snow* beguiles, a tale of selflessness and youthful indiscretion as singular and seductive as one could hope for.
—**ROBIN OLIVEIRA, NEW YORK TIMES** bestselling author of *MY NAME IS MARY SUTTER*

“In her sweeping American debut, Mary-Rose MacColl creates a beautifully by the choice to follow her brother across continents into France. An epic tale of love, heartache, and a sisterhood created by nursing in a time of war, *In Falling Snow* is one of those novels you will want to read again. If you liked *The Aviator’s Wife*, you will love this book!” —**MICHELLE MORAN**, bestselling author of *CLEOPATRA’S DAUGHTER*

“A thoroughly absorbing time-switching tale that gives a fascinating insight into one of the little-known stories of the Great War, that of the Scottish Women’s Hospital at Royaumont Abbey on the Western Front. Mary-Rose MacColl brings the courageous women of Royaumont to vivid life as we follow their joys and sorrows, and discover secrets that will affect their families for generations to come.”
—**LUCINDA RILEY**, author of internationally bestselling *THE ORCHID HOUSE*

“*In Falling Snow* is expertly researched and written with a keen eye to the complexities of wartime and the mighty role of women therein. From past to present, Australia to France, MacColl guides readers through unknown lands abroad and territories of the heart. For readers, like me, who love to see history’s forgotten heroes given powerful voice, you will delight in this novel.” —**SARAH MCCOY**, author of the international bestseller *THE BAKER’S DAUGHTER*

“*In Falling Snow* is a moving story about women’s roles and the challenging decisions they face as mothers, nurses, doctors and leaders. MacColl brings to light the forgotten histories of the women of Royaumont hospital with engaging prose. The lives of Iris and Grace are divided by several decades, but their career ambitions and the sacrifices they face are universal.” —**SUZANNE DESROCHERS**, author of *BRIDE OF NEW FRANCE*

AT THE PARTY

Serve

ROYAUMONT PUNCH (2I+)

DIRECTIONS

With a vegetable peeler, remove zest from each lemon in a long, continuous spiral. Juice lemons, and strain pulp (you should have 3/4 cup juice). Set aside. Heat sugar and 1/2 cup water in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Bring to a boil. Remove from heat. Add zest. Let syrup cool completely, about 2 hours. Pour Champagne, vodka, lemon juice, and syrup into a punch bowl; stir. Serve glasses of punch with candied peels.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 lemons, room temperature
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 bottle (750 milliliters) Champagne, chilled
- 3/4 cup best-quality vodka, chilled
- 4 ounces candied lemon peels

Host's Note: Lemons are easier to peel and will release more juice at room temperature than when chilled. Servings 8. Please drink responsibly.

THE FLOWER BIRD (2I+)

DIRECTIONS

Drop bitters onto sugar cube; let soak in. Place sugar cube in a Champagne flute. Add Cognac, and top with Champagne.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 drops bitters
- 1 sugar cube
- 1 ounce Cognac
- 4 ounces chilled Champagne

Host's Note: Serves 1. Please drink responsibly.

ICE BREAKERS

Begin your discussion with these questions written by the author, Mary-Rose MacColl.
True or false/ fact or fiction... Or, which of these are historical facts and which are plausible whoppers?

The church at Royaumont Abbey was torn down in the French Revolution. Bullocks were used to pull down the columns.

- **True.** The church, just two meters shy of Notre Dame Paris in height, was pulled down in the Revolution, using bullocks and chains. What a loss of heritage!

Royaumont Hospital was bombed during World War I.

- **False.** Royaumont was never bombed.

The youngest known soldier in the British Army in World War I was 14 years old when he enlisted.

- **False.** The youngest known soldier was only 12 when he enlisted.

The US made no contribution to Royaumont.

- **False.** The American Red Cross was a major contributor financially to the hospital, with the US and England connected through the suffrage movement.

The only male staff member at Royaumont was the cook, because the French wouldn't tolerate an English cook for French soldiers.

- **True.** Michelet, a wounded French chef, came to Royaumont to recuperate. The soldiers loved him and he stayed.

The cistercians built the original abbey of Royaumont in the 13th century under the guidance of Louis IX who was the Sun King.

- **False.** While it's true that the cistercians built the abbey under the guidance of Louis IX, he was Saint Louis, the only canonised king of France and not the Sun King (Louis XIV).

The Scottish Women's Hospitals Committee in Edinburgh designed a uniform and tried to force the doctors at Royaumont to wear it. The doctors refused.

- **True.** Although this is the one story in the novel everyone thinks must be made up. In fact, the Committee in Edinburgh had all the hallmarks of a distant bureaucracy, interfering with the hospital without much understanding of the true working conditions at Royaumont.

Pre-eclampsia is a life-threatening condition in pregnancy.

- **True.** Pre-eclampsia remains a high-risk complication in pregnancy which is treatable if caught in time.

Women were allowed into medicine in England from around 1850.

- **False.** The first English woman to complete a medical degree, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, completed her studies in Paris. Her qualification was not recognised in England until 1876 when finally, women could study to become doctors. Anderson's sister, Millicent Fawcett, was President of the National Women's Suffrage Societies, which grew into the Scottish Women's Hospitals Association.

Royaumont Hospital pioneered a new treatment for war wounds using exposure to air and sunlight.

- **True.** The hospital's bacteriologist Elsie Dalyell also made major research inroads into the treatment of gas gangrene.
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AT THE PARTY

Discussion Questions

1. Caught up by Dr. Ivens' personality and vision, Iris postpones her original mission. Although she later comes to question her decision to stay at Royaumont, do you believe Tom would have returned with Iris to Australia had she found him earlier?
2. Have you ever met someone like Dr. Ivens? Why is charisma as crucial a part of her job as talent?
3. How does Cicely's story about her mentally ill mother add to the novel?
4. Did Violet take Tom as a lover for her own sake or for Iris's? How did learning that Violet received the scholarship to study medicine affect your opinion of her?
5. At the beginning of the book, Grace thinks of Iris as unerringly proper. It's only later that she discovers the many secrets her grandmother kept. Why is it so difficult for us to see older generations as individuals with passions and disappointments of their own?
6. Why does Iris offer to raise Violet and Tom's child as her own? Would you be willing to do the same if it meant deferring your personal ambitions?
7. How did *In Falling Snow* affect your feelings on the difficulties faced by women of previous generations? If you had been alive during World War I, what do you imagine you might have been doing?
8. Do you agree with Iris's decision to delay calling the ambulance until she felt certain that Al couldn't be revived? Did she come to truly love him?
9. What does the baby sugar glider represent?
10. Towards the end of the novel, a letter from Iris to Violet reveals that she believes each of them wound up living the life that suited her best. What do you think?





A Conversation with *MARY-ROSE MACCOLL*

Q. In your Author's Note, you write about accidentally stumbling upon *Women of Royaumont: A Scottish Women's Hospital on the Western Front* in a library. What inspired you to interweave the story of Royaumont with that of a female doctor battling sexism in the 1970s?

A. I was really interested in these women from my grandmother's generation who'd achieved something extraordinary at a time when it was very difficult for women to pursue professional lives. I very much wanted to honor them and was surprised that their story hadn't yet captured the public imagination. The seventies was another key period for women in professions. Grace is the first generation of women to "have it all." I didn't think of these things consciously while writing. Iris was always going to be reflecting on her past experience at a later time. Grace walked in one day and started bossing her grandmother around. She happened to be part of the first generation of women who were mothers and doctors and it was just a lovely time to write about.

Q. You gave Iris Crane your grandmother's surname. Do they share any other characteristics?

A. For me, writing always has an intellectual trigger and an emotional trigger. I was very close to my maternal grandmother, Meta Crane, who was one of those grandmothers who made everything right in my young life. She died soon after I came across the women of Royaumont. She was about the right age to have served in World War I and she was a nurse. I started to wonder what her life might have been like if instead of doing the things she'd done—marrying my grandfather, running his medical practice and raising four children—she'd gone to Royaumont. She and Iris do share some qualities in common. They're both nurses who grew up on a property called Risdon in the country west of Brisbane in Queensland. My grandmother married Al (Alban Lynch not Alastair Hogan) and the two Als are both doctors whose practices are in Fortitude Valley.

Q. Is Dr. Frances Ivens based upon the real founder and head of Royaumont? Does the abbey where the hospital was established still exist?

A. Oh yes, all the characters at Royaumont other than Violet and Iris are based on the real doctors and nurses and orderlies who worked there. Miss Ivens was the medical chief of the hospital. Obviously my character is imagined—I never met the real Frances Ivens—but her quick assessment of a situation (sometimes to a fault), her organisational skills (or lack thereof when it comes to details!), confidence and especially, her bedside manner, were all a matter of record. As for the abbey, it's now a cultural foundation for France and I was very lucky to stay there for a week while researching the novel which allowed me to walk through those corridors, up the stairs where the orderlies carried patients, to the wards where the patients were cared for. It's a truly amazing place.

Q. Between the Senegalese conscripts, the firing squads, and the French soldiers' "precious pinard," you've recreated the feel of World War I in astonishing detail. How long did it take you to research this book?

A. I first read the history of Royaumont in Eileen Crofton's *The Women of Royaumont* which was very helpful (it's being republished this year as *Angels of Mercy* by English publisher Birlinn). From there, I read mainly first-hand accounts of the experiences of doctors, nurses and soldiers during the war. I was quite nervous about writing some of the marginalised stories, including those of African soldiers and I was lucky enough to find an audio-recorded account of a Senegalese soldier which helped me understand better what war must have been like for these people. I also read some of the broader history to know what happened when and where. I tend to write first and research later so the whole process was years rather than months.

Q. In an earlier nonfiction work called *The Birth Wars*, you wrote about the conflict between those who view birth as a medical procedure and those who see it as a natural process. In *Grace*, you created an OBGYN who views pain relief during childbirth as a woman's right. What drew you to return to the subject in this novel?

A. Maternity care, in Australia and elsewhere, is in a state of entrenched conflict. Instead of people on both sides of that conflict working together to make sure women get the best evidence-based maternity care, in many care environments, the two sides are at war with one another. Although the battles were different in the seventies from how they are now, the war is the same. When I came to write *The Birth Wars*, I was amazed that in the twenty-first century we haven't sorted this out. I came back to this conflict with *In Falling Snow* because it was still in my mind. It's also relevant to the novel's themes.

Q. *In Falling Snow* displays a thorough understanding of medicine, particularly of obstetrics. Was this a career you once considered pursuing yourself?

A. I didn't ever consider a career in medicine. I have worked closely with doctors on reviews over the years—I worked in universities for ten years and as a consultant writer on a number of health and medical reviews—and met many obstetricians and midwives while researching *The Birth Wars*. Grace's character came very naturally, but I also wanted to make sure the obstetrics in the novel was true-to-life. An obstetrician friend kindly read the novel in manuscript for me.

Q. Do you believe that women in medicine today face less professional prejudice than they did in Grace's time?

A. Yes. Women who wanted to study medicine in the early twentieth century faced barriers even in terms of getting in to medical schools. Now the intake into medicine is around fifty percent female. But there are still issues for women who want careers and children and they are fraught.

Q. Would you consider this a feminist novel?

A. *In Falling Snow* first and foremost tells the story of the women of Royaumont and they were extraordinary. It certainly reflects on the issues facing those women who wanted to pursue careers at the time when this was largely unavailable to women. In the seventies, again women were negotiating career and family issues. They were great times to write about.

Q. You divide your time between Australia and Canada. Do you consider yourself as a citizen of one country more than the other?

A. I was born in Australia and grew up there but feel enormous affinity with Canada and the mountains around Banff in Alberta. Fortunately, the Banff Centre makes it possible for writers to stay in Banff to work on projects. I've written my last two novels in Banff.

Q. Who are some of your favorite writers and literary influences?

A. I grew up reading Superman and Batman comics with my three brothers. My mother was a keen reader and didn't really care what we read so long as our eyes were on words. I eventually grew out of comics and now read widely so I'll limit myself to writers who I've tended to read everything of (in no particular order): Amanda Lohrey, Margaret Atwood, Charlotte Bronte, Kate Atkinson, Carol Shields, Michel Odent, Eowyn Ivey, Tim Winton, Umberto Eco, Atul Gawande, Ann Patchett, and Sebastian Barry.

Q. What are you working on now?

A. Another wonderful and largely unknown story about swimming in the 1920s. I have an Australian character living in England who goes to America to train with the Women's Swimming Association in New York (a really great group) and comes back in 1926 intending to cross the English Channel.

