

SYNOPSIS

AN IRISH NURSE IN AFRICA

The action in this anti-war novel takes place in South Africa during the first year of the second Boer War of 12th October 1899 to May 1902. It features the adventures of a young Irish woman who survives on her natural wit plus Cork street fighting ability. Accurate timelines are observed. Real historic figures interact with my fictional characters.

In 1899 the British are defeated in Dundee, Natal. Never having retreated since the Napoleonic Wars, in *Yule's Retreat* the British flee at dead of night, leaving wounded and medical staff behind. An Irish nurse serving in South Africa with the newly established Royal Army Medical Corps is trapped with them. Frances O'Driscoll manages to escape from the Boers and gets away on the *Last Train from Ladysmith*.

Pulled from semi-retirement as Governor of Ireland, Field Marshal Lord Roberts is sent to command the British Army. Because of a health problem, he has Nurse O'Driscoll assigned to travel with him. Frances is present at many incidents and sees General Kitchener throwing men at fortified Boer positions (*Paardeberg*). The British discover the Boer secret weapon, the spade, and lose hundreds of men to hidden trenches. An unfriendly eye relishes reports of British reverses in *The Kaiser Laughs*.

A British officer, Gerald Mannering, much respected by his men, takes Frances for an outing (*Frances Goes Riding*) and discovers she has strong opinions, different from his aristocratic wife. In *Frances meets George* an astonished Frances discovers her eldest brother appears to be supplying horses to the British Army. She does not know that, having run away at fifteen, he has succeeded in business in the Orange Free State, and is serving his adopted country. Having in the past been elected Commandant of a Boer Commando, George has moved on to become a Boer spy

In chapter 19 (*Bloemfontein Occupied*) the Free State capital falls. Frances nurses during the enteric epidemic as fifteen British soldiers die each day. It is while working with Dr Conan Doyle that Frances meets Rudyard Kipling, Edgar Wallace and an Australian writer, 'Banjo' Paterson.

In the Transvaal Frances discovers that Mannering has been badly wounded in the battle of *Diamond Hill*. When stationed in Pretoria Frances nurses Mannering, now blind and deaf. She begins to experiment with ways to communicate with taps on his remaining hand. During a visit to a house adjacent to British Headquarters, Frances meets her brother who has just escaped from a military trial. She helps him to escape, still believing him to be a shady horse trader.

Wearied of wartime injuries and military neglect of sickness, Frances decides to leave the RAMC. The Colonel and his batman (*Cape Train*) are due to sail for England and Frances intends to look for civil nursing locally before the war ends. Meanwhile the Colonel's father, Alderman Mannering, has arranged for Frances to accompany the batman home to assist his son. Frances refuses as she cannot face British class attitudes and is very aware of the beautiful wife waiting at home. When the ship has sailed Frances receives a telegram. Mannering's wife has died. Frances is suddenly faced with altered choices.

28 chapters, 372 pages.

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