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# Wake



*Par Anna Hope*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA heart-breaking historical tale of love and hope set at the end of the Great War.'Hopes unblinking prose is reminiscent of Vera Brittain's classic memoir 'Testament of Youth' - New York

TimesRemembrance Day 1920: A wartime secret connects three womens lives: Hettie whose wounded brother wont speak; Evelyn who still grieves for her lost lover; and Ada, who has never received an official letter about her sons death, and is still waiting for him to come home. As the mystery that binds them begins to unravel, far away, in the fields of France, the Unknown Soldier embarks on his journey home. The mood of the nation is turning towards the future but can these three women ever let go of the past?ExtraitDay

1 Sunday, November 7, 1920 Northern France Three soldiers emerge from their billets near Arras, northern France: a colonel, a sergeant, and a private. It is somewhere close to the middle of the night and bitterly cold. The men make their way to a field ambulance parked next to the entrance gate; the colonel sits in the front with the sergeant, while the private climbs into the back. The sergeant starts up the engine, and drives them out and onto the road beyond. The young private holds on to a strap dangling from the roof, as the van lurches over the rutted road. He feels shaky, and this jolting is not helping things. The raw morning has the feel of a punishment: When he was woken, minutes ago, he was told only to get dressed and get outside. He has done nothing wrong so far as he can tell, but the army is tricky like that. There have been many times in the six months since he arrived in France when he has transgressed, and only afterward been told how or why. He closes his eyes, tightening his grip as the van pitches and rolls. He had hoped he would see things over here. The sorts of things he missed by being too young to fight. The sorts of things his older brother wrote home about. The hero brother who died taking a German trench, and whose body was never found. But the truth is he hasn't seen much of anything at all. In the front of the van, the sergeant sits forward, concentrating hard on the road ahead. He knows it well but still prefers to drive in the day, as there are several treacherous shell holes along it. He wouldn't want to lose a tire, not tonight. He, too, has no idea why he is here, so early and without warning, but from the taut silence of the colonel beside him, he knows enough not to ask. And so the soldiers sit, the engine rumbling beneath their feet, passing through open country now, though there is nothing to show for it--nothing visible beyond the headlights' glare, only an occasional startled animal scooting back into darkness on the road ahead. When they have been driving for half an hour or so, the colonel rasps out an order. "Here. Stop here." He hits his hand against the dash. The sergeant pulls the ambulance over onto the shoulder of the road. The engine judders and is still. There is silence, and the men climb down. The colonel turns on his flashlight and reaches into the back of the van. He brings out two shovels, handing one each to the other men. Next, he takes out a large burlap sack, which he carries himself. He climbs over a low wall and the men follow him, walking slowly, their flashlight beams bobbing ahead. The frosted ground means the mud is hard and easy enough to walk on, but the private is careful; the land is littered with twisted metal and with holes, sometimes deep. He knows the ground is peppered with unexploded shells. There are often funerals for the Chinese laborers who have been brought over to clear the fields of bodies and ordnance. He saw five dead last week alone, all laid out in a row. They end up buried in the very cemeteries they are over here to dig. But despite the cold and the uncertainty, he is starting to enjoy himself. It is exciting to be out here in this darkness, where ruined trees loom and danger feels close. He could almost imagine he is on a different mission. Something heroic. Something to write home about. Soon the ground falls away, and the men stand before a ditch in the earth, the remains of a trench. The colonel climbs down and begins walking along it, and the others follow, single file, along its zigzag lines. The private measures his height against the side. He is not a tall man, and the trench is not high. They pass the remains of a dugout on their right, its doorway bent at a crazed angle, one of its supports long gone. He hesitates a moment before it, shining his flashlight inside, but there is nothing much to see, only an old table, pushed up against the wall, a rusted tin can still standing open on the top. He pulls his light back from the dank hole, and hurries to keep up. The colonel turns left into a straighter, shorter trench and at the end of that, right into another, built in short, zigzag sections like the first. "Front line," says the sergeant, under his breath. After a few yards, the colonel's beam picks out a rusted ladder slung against the trench wall. He stops before it, placing his boot on the bottom rung, pressing once, twice, testing its strength. "Sir?" It is the sergeant speaking. "What's that?" The colonel turns his head. The sergeant clears his throat. "Do we need to go up that way, sir?" The private watches as the colonel swallows, his Adam's apple moving slowly up and down. "Have you got a better idea?" The sergeant seems to have nothing to say to that. The colonel turns, scaling the ladder in a few swift jerks. "Fuck's sake," mutters the sergeant. Still, he doesn't move. Standing behind him, the private is itching to climb. Even though he knows that on the other side there will only be more of the same blasted country, part of him wonders if there may be something else--something close to the thing he came out here for: that vague, brave wonderful thing he has not dared to speak of, even to himself. But he cannot move until the sergeant does, and the sergeant is frozen to the spot. The colonel's boots appear at the height of their heads; light is flung into their faces. "What's the holdup? Get yourselves over here. Now." He speaks like a machine gun, spitting out his words. "Yes sir." The sergeant closes his eyes, looking almost as though he may be saying a prayer, then turns and climbs the ladder. The private follows him, blood tumbling in his ears. Once over, they stand, gathering their breath, their beams sweeping wide across the scene before them: great rusting coils of wire, twenty, thirty feet wide, like the crazed

skeleton of some ancient serpent, stretching away in both directions as far as the eye can see. "Bloody hell," says the sergeant. Then, a little louder, "How're we going to get through that?" The colonel produces a pair of wire cutters from his pocket. "Here." The sergeant takes them, weighing them in his hand. He knows wire, has cut it often. Apron wiring. Laid enough of it, too. They used to leave gaps, when they had time to do it right--gaps that wouldn't be seen by the other side. But there are no gaps here. The wire is tangled and crushed and bent in on itself. Ruined. Like every bloody thing else. "Right." He hands his shovel to the private. "Make sure you light me, then." He bends and begins to cut. The private, trying to keep his beam straight, stares at the wire. There are things caught and held within its coils, things that look to have been there for a long time. There are tattered remnants of cloth, stiff with frost, and the light catches the pale whiteness of bones, though whether human or animal it is impossible to tell. The country smells strange out here--more metal than earth; he can taste it in his mouth. On the other side of the wire, the sergeant straightens and turns, beckoning for the men to follow. He has done a good job, and they are able to pick their way easily through the narrow path he has made. "This way." The colonel strides out across lumpy ground that is littered with tiny crosses: crosses made from white wood, or makeshift ones made from a couple of shell splinters lashed together. There are bottles, too, turned upside down and pushed into the mud, some of them still with scraps of paper visible inside. The colonel often stops beside one, kneeling and holding his light to read the inscription, but then carries on. The private searches the man's face as he reads. Who can he be looking for? Eventually the colonel crouches by one of the small wooden crosses, set a little way apart from the rest. "Here." He motions for the men to come forward. "Dig here." A date is written on the cross, scribbled in shaky black pencil, but no name. The private does as he's told, lifting his shovel and kicking it into the hard ground. The sergeant joins him, but after a couple of spadefuls of earth he stops. "Sir?" "What?" "What are we looking for, sir?" "A body," says the colonel. "And bloody well get on with it. We haven't got all day." The two men lock eyes for a moment before the sergeant looks away, spits on the ground, and continues to dig. Beneath its frosted crust the mud is softer, clinging, and they do not have to dig for long. Soon metal scrapes on metal. The sergeant puts down his shovel and kneels, clearing the mud from a steel helmet. "Think we might be there, sir." The colonel holds his light over the hole. "Keep going," he says, his voice tight. The men crouch low, and with their gloved hands, as best they can, they clear the mud from the body. But it is not a body, not really; it is only a heap of bones inside the remains of a uniform. Nothing is left of the flesh, only a few black-brown remnants clinging to the side of the skull. "Clear as much as you can," says the colonel, "and then check for his badges." The dead man is lying in the earth, his right arm beneath him. The men reach down, lifting and turning him over. The sergeant takes his pocketknife and scrapes away at where the shoulder should be. The man's regimental badges are there still, just, but they are unreadable, the colors long gone, leached into the soil; it is impossible to tell what they once were. "Can't see them, sir. Sorry, sir." The sergeant's face is red in the flashlight beam, sweaty from effort. "Check around the body. All around it. I want anything that might identify him at all." The men do as they are ordered, but find nothing. They stand slowly. The private rubs the small of his back, looking down at the meager remains of the unearthed man lying twisted on his side. Then a thought rises in him, unbidden: His brother died here. In a field like this in France. They never found his body. What if this was him? But there is no way of knowing. He looks back up at the colonel. There is no way of knowing if this is the body the colonel's looking for, either. This has been a waste of time. He waits for the colonel's reaction, bracing himself for the expected anger on his face. But the colonel only nods. "Good," he says, chucking his cigarette on the earth. "Now lift him out and put him in the sack." Hettie rubs her sleeve against the misted taxi window and peers out. She can't see much of anything; nothing that looks like a nightclub anyway, just empty, darkened streets. You wouldn't think they were just seconds from Leicester Square. "Here, please." Di leans forward, speaking to the driver. "That's a pound, then." He turns his light on, engine idling. Hettie hands over her ten-shilling share. A third of her pay. Her stomach plummets as it's passed to the front. But the taxi's not a luxury, not at this time; the buses aren't running and the tubes are shut. "It'll be worth it," whispers Di as they clamber down. "Promise. Swear on my life." The taxi pulls away and they find each other's hands, down an unlit side street, dance shoes crunching on gravel and glass. Despite the cold, damp pools in the hollow of Hettie's back. It must be way past one, later than she has ever been out. She thinks of her mother and her brother, fast asleep in Hammersmith. In not too many hours they'll be getting up for church. "This must be it." Di has stopped in front of an old, three-story house. No lights show behind the shuttered windows, and only a small blue bulb illuminates the door. "Are you sure?" says Hettie, breath massing before her in the freezing air. "Look." Di points to a small plaque nailed to the wall. The sign is ordinary-looking; it

could be a doctor's or a dentist's even. But there's a name there, etched into the bronze: DALTON'S, NO. 62. Dalton's. Legendary nightclub. So legendary some people say it doesn't exist. "Ready?" Di gives a blue, spectral grin, then lifts her hand and knocks. A panel slides open. Two pale eyes in an oblong of light. "Yes?" "I'm here to meet Humphrey," says Di. She is putting on her posh voice. Standing behind her, Hettie is filled with the urge to laugh. But the door opens. They have to squeeze to get around. On the other side is a small entrance area, little bigger than a cupboard, where a young doorman stands behind a high wooden desk. His gaze slides over Hettie, in her brown coat and tam-o'-shanter, but lingers on Di, with her dark eyes, the shorn points of her hair just showing beneath her hat. Di has this way of looking, down and to the side, and then slowly back up again. It makes men stare. She's doing it now. Hettie can see the doorman goggling like a caught fish. "You've to sign in," he says eventually, pointing at a large book lying open before him. Di pulls off her glove, leans in, and signs with a practiced sweep. "Your turn," she says, handing the pen to Hettie. From below comes the throb of music: a giddy trumpet. A woman whoops. Hettie can feel her heart: thud-thud-thud. The ink of Di's signature is glistening and has sprawled out of its box and onto the line beneath. She takes her own glove off and scratches her name: Henrietta Burns. "Go on, then." The man pulls the book back, gesturing behind him to unlit stairs. Di goes first. The staircase is old and creaky, and as Hettie puts a hand out to steady herself, she feels damp wall flake beneath her fingertips. This is not what she imagined; it's nothing like the Palais, where the glamour is all out front. You wouldn't think these musty old stairs led anywhere much at all. But she can hear the music properly now, people talking, the sound of feet fast on the floor, and as they reach the bottom, a wave of panic threatens to take her. "You'll stay close to me, won't you?" she says, reaching for Di's arm. *Revue de presse* *Hopes* unblinking prose is reminiscent of Vera Brittain's classic memoir *Testament of Youth* in its depiction of the social and emotional fallout, particularly on women, of the Great War. . . . *Hope* reaches beyond the higher echelons of society to women of different social classes, all linked by their reluctance to bid goodbye to the world the conflict has shattered. *The New York Times Book Review* is a tender and timely novel, full of compassion and quiet insight. The author gives us a moving and original glimpse into the haunted peace after the Great War, her characters drawn by the gravity of the unmarked, the unknown, and perhaps, finally, the un hoped for. *Chris Cleave*, author of *Little Bee* *Wake* is a compelling and emotionally charged debut about the painful aftermath of war and the way small, brave, or commonplace in which we keep ourselves going. It touches feelings we know, and settings dance halls, war fronts, queues outside the grocer that we don't. I loved it. *Rachel Joyce*, author of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* *Wake* is powerful and humane, a novel that charms and beguiles. *Anna Hopes* characters are so real, flawed, and searching, and her prose so natural, one almost forgets how very great a story she is telling. *Sadie Jones*, author of *The Uninvited Guests* Using telling detail, *Hope* creates a vibrant physical and emotional landscape in which her leading characters, and a sea of others, move irresistibly into the future, some having found resolution, others still in search. Fresh, confident, yet understated, *Hopes* first work movingly revisits immense tragedy while also confirming her own highly promising ability. *Kirkus* s