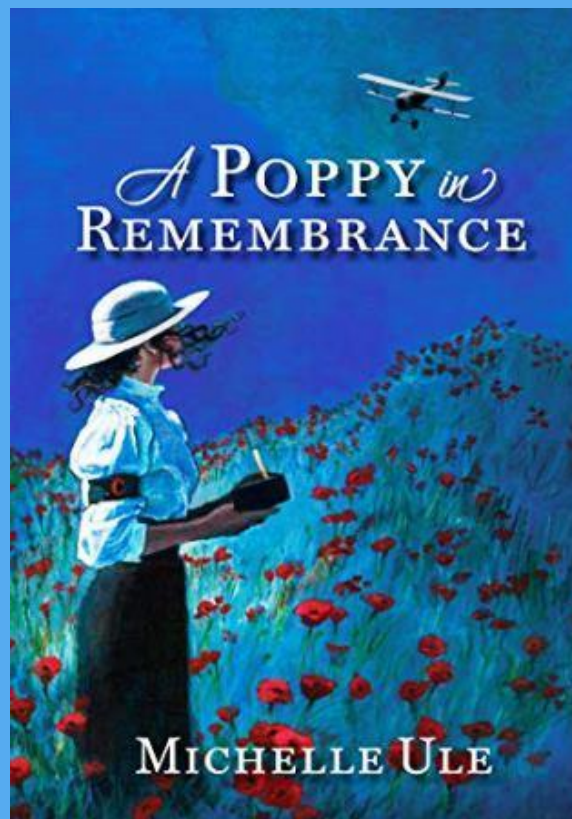


A Poppy in Remembrance



Chapter One

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Introduction

This is a reader peek at the first chapter of Michelle Ule's

A Poppy in Remembrance

Spanning three countries and the four years of World War I, *A Poppy in Remembrance* is the epic story of an American woman struggling to become a journalist in a man's world.

As she searches for where she belongs—spiritually, professionally and emotionally—Claire Meacham discovers God and love through her relationships with Oswald and Biddy Chambers, an earnest YMCA worker, and a dashing New Zealand soldier, all the while seeking that elusive byline.

About Michelle Ule

Michelle Ule is an essayist, the author of two novels, five best-selling novellas, and the biographer of *Mrs. Oswald Chambers: The Woman Behind the World's Bestselling Devotional*.

A UCLA graduate where she wrote for the paper, she's taught Bible study for 35 years and loves to travel the world. Michelle lives in Northern California with her family, where she reads a physical newspaper every day.

You can always find her at www.michelleule.com

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A Poppy in Remembrance

Chapter One

London, August 5, 1914

Claire Meacham opened the door over her mother's "Wait!" and exited before the chauffeur brought the motorcar to a halt. She had to find Peter before he made a decision they'd all regret.

She squeezed into the throng, her trusty leather satchel banging at her side. How would she find him in this mob?

"Don't push, miss," growled a Cockney voice.

She yanked in her elbows with murmured apologies. Before her stretched an ocean of men wearing hats: bowlers, straw, flat caps, and even a top hat worn by a dandy in a disheveled tuxedo. "Peter!" She hoped her voice would carry. "Peter!"

The warm morning air reeked from the sweat of work and the tang of alcohol. A place so far removed from Radcliffe's organized, hushed library would be hard to find. And yet there Claire stood, surprisingly tall among the British men, looking, hoping, and begging whatever God might be watching to find an earnest twenty-two-year-old with curling sandy hair, gray eyes, and rosy cheeks.

"Any sign of him?" Claire's mother caught up with her as the multitude parted with a polite doffing of headgear. Anne Meacham's refined dignity, along with her shining white-blond hair under a proper hat, always brought out

the best in people, no matter their station in life.

“He had a head start.” Claire took her mother’s arm as they shuffled toward the looming brick building two blocks ahead. She thought of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. They never worried about getting into Scotland Yard.

But then, they hadn’t tried to visit on August 5, 1914. The front page of the *Times* proclaimed the problem in three bold words: BRITAIN AT WAR.

Newsboys held the paper aloft and shouted the latest information. Whenever Claire caught sight of the headline, her stomach flipped and she shuddered. How could the Meacham family have left sane, orderly Boston in time for a war? What was her father thinking?

No need to ask: the latest news and his empty bank account always commanded his attention.

That morning, however, Jock Meacham wanted his only living male relative yanked from the line before he did something foolish. Claire craned her neck. A six-footer like Peter should stand out in this crowd.

“Can I help you, miss?” A British bobby in a rumpled blue uniform appeared before her.

“We’re looking for my cousin but so many people—”

“Men started lining up as soon as the king announced war.” He rubbed the nape of his neck. “I’ve been here since midnight. Hundred have come through, thousands. They’re keen to fight the Germans and kick the Kaiser back to Berlin.”

A nearby military band struck up “Rule Britannia,” and two sailors moved through the male sea bellowing:

“Interested in the navy? Hove to the right!”

“We’ve the finest ships on the ocean!”

More roars and raised fists shook in the humid air.

Anne pointed after a handful of men drifting to starboard.

“Peter’s an excellent sailor; maybe we should try the Admiralty?”

Claire secured her spectacles and shook her head. “He adores biplanes now, he wouldn’t join the navy.” She put the ball of her French-heeled shoe onto a lamp post base, lifted her ankle-length skirt and hoisted herself up.

An approving male chorus eddied around her knees.

“What are you doing?” Anne grabbed at her hem.

At eleven o’clock last night when King George V declared war, the family had toasted each other with solemn faces. After Peter gulped down three glasses of champagne in short order, Claire tucked a red rose into her cousin’s lapel as a civilized touch before the horror began. Then he and his childhood friend Edward left and did not return.

Amid the swell of dark coats, she hoped to spy the crimson flower.

“Do you see him?” Anne tried to shield Claire’s legs.
“Climb down.”

“Peter!” She shouted again, and dozens of male voices took up the call, some in falsetto: “Peter! Oh, Peter!”

Claire slipped to the sidewalk and her hair toppled around her shoulders. “No sign of him.” She rifled through her satchel—aha—then twisted the thick ebony curls into a knot and jabbed a yellow shorthand pencil through to anchor them.

A whistle caught her attention. Men turned and she glimpsed limp red petals. Claire stumbled through the crowd to a familiar face.

Peter glared at her. “You don’t belong here. Do you see any other women?”

“Papa says it’s too soon. There’s no hurry and plenty to

accomplish beforehand; you need to plan your actions strategically.”

“Hey, Claire, they’re not taking women yet!” Edward, her cousin Sylvia’s beau, lifted a magnum of champagne to salute her. With tie askew and bloodshot eyes, his ruddy face nearly matched his hair color. He slung an arm across Peter’s shoulder. “We’re going together.”

“Peter cannot enlist. His mother needs him.” The line retreated at Anne’s commanding voice. Several guffaws and a murmured “Mama’s boy” made for a scoffing audience.

Claire didn’t know much about men but understood her mother’s scolding wouldn’t work. “You have responsibilities. Your father’s estate will be settled in another month or so and then you can enlist. The war only started last night. You have plenty of time.”

“We’ll beat the Boche by Christmas,” Edward declared. “If we don’t enlist now, we’ll miss the whole thing.”

She eyed him, appalled at his ignorance. An Oxford graduate should have known better.

“Uncle Jock sent you, didn’t he? He couldn’t be bothered to come himself but sent you two to find me?” Peter’s nostrils flared in his mottled face and spittle flew from his mouth.

“That’s uncalled for!” Anne cried.

Claire frowned. “Papa’s reporting on the war.”

“Aye, the war, a story, something else always needs attending to by Uncle Jock, nothing personal.”

A heavy paw clenched Claire’s arm. “Let the boy go. He don’t need womenfolk dragging him back to the nursery.”

“Take your hands off her!” Peter clenched his fists.

Claire wrenched her arm away. "I'm not saying he shouldn't defend his country. He just needs to put his affairs in order before he joins the army."

Peter looked back and forth between exuberant Edward and the working-class men surrounding them.

Claire held her breath as he weighed his options. A resplendent Union Jack sagged in the hot sun beside the arched doorway. Men in sharp new uniforms gestured to the crowd, beckoning them forward.

"Even if you don't come with me, Peter, I'm joining up. I'd never be able to face my father otherwise." Edward hiccupped.

Anne touched Peter's shoulder. "He's not your concern. Your mother needs you."

Peter crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. "I need to go with my mate."

Claire's heart hammered so hard her chest ached. "Edward doesn't fly."

A murmur rose around them—"flyer."

"Them biplanes is dangerous," a burly man said with admiration. "Made of paper, they are."

Peter examined the overcast sky as if seeking an answer from his late father, then groaned and reached for Edward's hand. "I'm sorry, old boy, but not today. Claire's right, I need to resolve my responsibilities before I enlist. I'll be a few weeks behind you but I'm coming. What shall I tell Sylvia?"

The good cheer vanished from Edward's face. His chin trembled. "Tell her she'll be an officer's wife before Christmas."

"Good luck." He stepped out of line and took Anne's arm

with a sigh. "How did you get here?"

"Mr. Able is waiting in the motorcar." Claire directed them to Whitehall Avenue, stumbling in relief. They walked several blocks in silence.

"You made the right choice. Your mother is distraught," Anne murmured as they settled into the soft leather back seat. It smelled of wealth. "I had no idea you were learning to fly."

Claire glanced at Peter. Her mother never missed anything.

"I didn't want to upset Mummy."

Anne stared at him.

"Home, sir?" the chauffeur asked from behind the steering wheel.

"No. Take us to the Boston News Syndicate offices. It's time for me to deal with my uncle man to man."

Anne clutched his arm. "I don't believe that's a good idea. We never bother Jock at the office and certainly not on the day a war starts."

"The news is always king with Uncle Jock," Peter said. "Right, Claire? Isn't that why you're aching to become a newspaper reporter yourself? You're as bad as he is, always pushing your nose into other people's business to find out what's happening."

Claire gasped at his betrayal. She'd been waiting for the right moment to reveal her dream to her parents.

All her stenography training, history lessons, and language practice had one goal: preparation for becoming a foreign correspondent. But her mother wouldn't approve and Jock, Claire shuddered, would dismiss her goal as the fanciful dreams of a child.

"Really?" Anne leaned back into the seat. "We haven't

known many respectable female reporters. We intend for you to be a history teacher. Why else did we spend all that money sending you to college?"

Claire looked out the window at suffragettes in Trafalgar Square exhorting men to enlist, and her confidence slipped away. Her parents kept no secrets from one another. If her father ridiculed her hopes, Claire's soul would shatter, just like her lost senior year of college. No home, no Radcliffe, no future; her shoulders slumped.

Peter shifted beside her and cleared his throat. She shook her head.

The motorcar crept past St. Martin's in the Field church, and Claire rallied to devise an answer as they headed east toward Fleet Street and Jock Meacham.

"Grandfather always said I was a born reporter," Claire finally said. "You know I'm a good writer."

"You are a good writer," Anne agreed, "but your grandfather's poor judgment is the reason we're living in England on my sister's charity while we pray your father doesn't lose his job."

Claire had no answer to the truth.

Peter waved his hands. "No charity, Aunt Anne, we're thankful you're here. My mother's spirits are much improved since you arrived. I'm sorry I spoke. I didn't mean to cause trouble."

Anne arched a brow. "So what are you doing now?"

He swallowed. "Setting things straight with Uncle Jock. He needs to understand I'm not a child. I'm a man."

Mr. Able stopped the motorcar before a gray stone building flying flags from several nations, including the United States. Peter opened the door and stepped out with Claire right behind him carrying her satchel. "Aunt Anne?" he stretched his hand to her.

She stared straight ahead. “Jock won’t tolerate domestic issues in the office. If you’re determined to confront him in the newsroom, I’ll remain with Mr. Able. This has been an illuminating outing and I have much to consider. We will wait.”

Claire and Peter entered a foyer of black and white marble tiles. Claire’s head swerved as she took it all in. She’d not visited yet and longed to examine the newsroom where her father worked as a journalist and editor—assuming he didn’t throw them out first.

“I say, Claire, I’m sorry. I thought you’d have told them by now.”

She stopped at the lift gate. “I didn’t know your flying lessons were a secret.”

“You know Mummy.” He squared his shoulders. “We’ll face your father together. It can’t be worse than the time we ran his sailboat aground.”

Claire adjusted her satchel and blew out her breath at his usual optimism. If they didn’t handle Jock correctly, this could go much worse.

Two years older, Peter had always been her hero. He’d taken responsibilities seriously those family summers in Newport, Rhode Island, teaching her to sail and warning her to ignore his sister’s bossy ways. Her solitary childhood would have been much lonelier without those summers and Peter’s letters from across the Atlantic.

Now she wasn’t so sure about his judgment.

They rode the creaking lift to the third floor and exited into a hallway facing frosted glass doors marked with white letters: Boston Newspaper Syndicate. Peter blanched at the bold label. “A mate of mine from Oxford works here, Nigel Bentley-Smith, a copyboy. You’d like him; he studied history.”

The rickety staccato of typewriters echoed from the

office, and an echoing excitement welled in Claire. She ached to see her byline in a newspaper, particularly *The Boston Daily* owned by the BNS, and yearned to hear today's latest news. While she'd hoped to prepare a little longer before broaching her writing aspirations with her father, if she acted decisively, she might be able to lay the groundwork for an opportunity.

It was a long shot, but she'd fulfilled her father's order and deterred Peter from enlisting in the British Expeditionary Force. Surely he'd see her as responsible and competent, even resourceful like a good reporter.

Peter straightened his shoulders like a soldier, strode to the doors, and pushed them open with a bang.

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The rest of the book is available at
<https://amzn.to/2OwLrCg>

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