

Dear Faculty:

We are delighted that you have decided to use the 2008 Common Book Committee selection, The Last Town on Earth, in your course this fall. We look forward to hosting the author, Thomas Mullen, on October 20, 2008, for a discussion of the novel, and we encourage you to attend the common-book-oriented events that will preface his arrival.

For many years, BGSU's Common Reading Experience has provided faculty, staff and students with an opportunity to engage in college-level academic discussions of powerful texts as an integral part of the BGSU first-year experience. The Last Town on Earth is an important addition to the textual selections that have sparked important discussions and debates on campus in the past: Tuesdays with Morrie, Geeks, The Laramie Project, Hope in the Unseen, The Things They Carried, The Kite Runner, Into the Forest, and The Glass Castle.

This plot summary is provided to you as a teaching tool, a means of revisiting the essential details of the text prior to discussing the novel with your students. In combination with the character analysis and the model discussion questions, also located on the BGSU Common Reading Experience website, this summary should help provide a solid foundation for what we hope will be a important contribution to your course and a memorable series of events for our incoming first-year cohort.

Sincerely,

Brett Holden

PLOT SUMMARY: **THE LAST TOWN ON EARTH**

Genre: historical fiction

Setting: the town of Commonwealth, Washington, during the First World War

Point of View: third person omniscient narrator with story told in past tense

Preface **(xi-xiv)**

A doctor and two nurses drive through the streets of Timber Falls. The flu has been ravaging the town for three weeks. It's Sunday, and streets once filled with people are vacant.

The medical professionals are making house calls, looking in on those suffering from the epidemic, which appears to only be killing those in their prime. They have been drawn to a house in a poor section of town by neighbors who have reported hearing strange sounds emanating from within. At the house, the healthcare professionals find several children living in squalor and starvation. Upstairs, they find the parents: the mother dead and the father close to death. In another room they find two young adults suffocating from the virus. The doctor calls the exhausted undertaker but knows that it will be hours before he arrives at the home to remove the corpses.

Part One: Commonwealth

I (3-13)

Philip Worthy, 16, and Graham Stone, 25, stand guard duty at the edge of Commonwealth. A tree has been felled to block the road and a sign, warning of town quarantine, has been posted.

Commonwealth, a small lumber town north of Seattle, stands isolated in the pine forest. The nearest town of significance is Timber Falls, some 15 miles to the southwest.

The month is October. It's cold and Graham gives the younger Philip his jacket to wear. Philip, we learn, grew up without a father or siblings, and was "dragged throughout the west by an itinerant mother" until an accident left him in the Worthy's care. Two years ago, the Worthy's had moved to Commonwealth and Philip befriended Graham, who saw him as a younger brother. Graham, the narrator tells us, fled from a drunken father and led a life of fights, jail time, and conflict with law enforcement, but became a foreman at a good mill.

Tension has been looming since the prior Sunday, when a man, wearing a fedora and driving a Model T, had approached the fallen tree, then turned back. Both men are worried that he could possibly return. They spend their time placing bets on the longevity of the quarantine against the flu outbreak.

A soldier, who claims that his ship capsized, has arrived at their post, pleading for food and shelter. He has been in the woods for two days. Graham and Philip refuse to allow him into their quarantined town. When he refuses to leave and to listen to their commands, Graham shoots him in the chest. On one knee, the soldier reaches for his own rifle (slung over his shoulder) and Graham shoots him a second time. The event traumatizes both Graham and Philip. Guilty, Philip later questions why he hadn't gone to town to retrieve food for the man prior to demanding he move on fifteen miles to Timber Falls, where everyone was ill with the flu. The two guards will seek council with Doc Banes, who will be able to tell them how long they must wait to bury the corpse so as to avoid contamination.

II (14-25)

Commonwealth's quarantine sign was posted one week earlier, following a town meeting where Charles Worthy convinced the people of Commonwealth that isolating themselves against the flu was the only thing they could do to prevent the contagion from collapsing the town. No one would be allowed to leave and then return, and no outsider would be permitted to enter Commonwealth.

Rebecca Worthy, Charles' wife and the adopted mother of Philip, was against the quarantine. A socialist at heart and the daughter of the deceased Jay Woodson (a leftist who wrote obscurely but extensively about the future economic collapse of the country), Rebecca had remained silent during the vote.

Prior to the outbreak, Rebecca had encouraged Charles to take charge as the leader of Commonwealth and supported him as he built the town up. The narrator suggests that she has been a shaping influence in his emergence as a leader despite his quiet past as the bookkeeper for his father's mill in Everett. Charles, we learn, had split from his father and brothers following the Everett Massacre, a successful effort on the part of mill owners to quash a union strike among mill workers. Charles had used his share of the family fortune to buy the land upon which Commonwealth now stands.

The flu, having begun in Boston and Philadelphia, has spread quickly via soldiers on military bases and is extremely virulent. Many local towns have been infected and, although many townspeople do not like the idea of being cut off from their families, friends, and business partners in other towns, they must move to protect themselves. They have provisions that should last for two months. Influenced by Graham's lead, Philip signs up for guard duty in order that they might protect the town from outsiders.

III (26-34)

Philip reflects on the identity of the soldier they shot and suffers the guilt of having contributed to his death by not acting against it. It's Wednesday, exactly two weeks since the quarantine. Rebecca feeds Philip and they discuss her missing her suffrage and anti-war group meetings due to the quarantine.

Laura, the 14-year-old adoptive sister of Philip, resented having an older brother when the Worthy's adopted him. And Philip doesn't know how to feel about Rebecca's kindnesses, as she is the opposite of his neglectful mother.

Thirty minutes after shooting the soldier, Graham sends Philip to bring Doc Banes. Upon his arrival, Doc tells the men to leave the body alone for twenty-four hours, then they will bury it. Philip, guilt-ridden over the death, wants to help with the process.

Philip feels that it was a mistake to volunteer for guard duty and, although she won't openly admit it, Rebecca is inwardly seething about his involvement. But, her anger is much more complex. Years earlier, her sisters ran off to a commune to isolate themselves from the world and Rebecca still harbors anger toward them. Her younger sister, Maureen, is married with three children. To Rebecca's chagrin, Maureen has actively supported the war effort—rolling bandages for the troops, assembling care packages, posting propaganda signs, and reporting anyone who isn't rationing or buying war bonds. Rebecca wonders if winning the vote for the suffrage movement in the 1916 elections would have put the option to stay out of the war in Europe in the hands of American women voters or if America would have simply gone to war despite the female vote. She remains angry at the moneyed class, which has led us to war for profit. Perhaps this war would simply lead to more wars.

Charles attempts to comfort Philip. Having never been in a situation where he killed someone, Charles can only tell his adopted son that he “did the right thing,” that the soldier clearly had the flu and that allowing him to enter the town would have meant certain death in Commonwealth.

IV (35-43)

Philip purchases flour and cornmeal at Rebecca's request from the Metzger's General Store, owned and operated by spunky Flora, and reserved Alfred, Metzger. Philip is attracted to Elsie, the Metzger's daughter of 15, and Flora attempts to encourage their relationship in the novel. Elsie, at Flora's request, helps Philip carry groceries home. Flora senses that something is wrong with Philip when he visits and suggests that her daughter's presence might aid Philip.

Elsie walks with Philip, helping him carry his groceries home. Along the way, she asks probing questions concerning the soldier. Following Charles's request, Philip lies about the incident, claiming that he and Graham shot into the air and the soldier left when challenged.

Following Philip's injury when he was younger, he had been left with tingling in his fingertips that would spread up his limbs, resulting in his loss of motor function. His left foot had had to be amputated.

Elsie and Philip come to the realization during their walk that Commonwealth is a place free from war, flu, and social unrest. It is "the last town on earth" (42) and its residents are safe.

Philip considers all of the injuries suffered by mine workers due to their jobs and how Graham must have had to learn to redistribute the weight he carried with his four-fingered hand. Philip wonders "if there was some end point, some line in the dirt, some amount of pain and suffering beyond which one could never continue" (43).

V (44-47)

Charles, Graham, Philip, Jarred Rankle, Mo, and Deacon bury the dead soldier in an area away from normal use so as to disguise the shooting.

Rankle, a former Wobbly, is Charles's trusted head foreman at the mill and a man considered to be efficient and intelligent. Having "lost" his family, Rankle is single and serves the role of "uncle" to Laura and Philip, often coming to the Worthy home for dinner.

Mo, a former boxer from Chicago and normally talkative, is nearly silent during the burial, as are the others.

While the others stop to rest while digging, Graham digs without pause, helps bury the soldier's body, then returns in silence to the town. Rankle and Mo remain on guard duty.

VI (48-55)

Philip's life struggles are recounted by the omniscient narrator in this section of the novel. Behind in his school due to being taken from town to town by his mother, he felt ignored. At school he was quiet and at home he was distant. He struggled with feelings of inferiority, a result of his amputated foot and his hard past. In Commonwealth, Graham taught him to think differently of himself.

Graham taught Philip to hunt and to do construction work, engaging the boy in the building of new homes in town.

Amelia, at the age of seven, was charged with caring for her three younger brothers when her mother died. Out of necessity, she learned to can, to sew, to knit, and to do household repairs. Married to Graham, Amelia's first child was stillborn. At the time of the child's death, Philip helped Graham work on building Graham and Amelia's home. While working, Graham was allowed to remain silent about the tragic loss. The crooked lower step in the inside staircase in the Stone home, Philip imagines, was a visible sign of

Graham's thankfulness for Philip's helping him when no one else in town had known how to assist him in his grief.

Philip goes to Graham and Amelia's home to discuss the shooting of the soldier with Graham. He engages in awkward bantering with the couple. Called by Graham to help him retrieve firewood, out of earshot of Amelia, Philip asks Graham if he is alright in light of the shooting. Graham reports that he was in no way wrong to shoot the soldier. Philip decides he cannot confide his fear and anxieties concerning the shooting to Graham. Graham is to be on guard duty all night with Deacon that evening. As Philip walks home he thinks about what had happened to Graham in Everett.

VII (56-70)

Graham is haunted in his sleep by the shooting. He realizes, in reflecting on his plight, that anything can be taken from someone at any time. He will never allow that to happen again. He had to protect his wife and daughter by shooting the soldier.

The omniscient narrator reveals Graham's thoughts concerning his past. At the age of 23, Graham had survived six years past leaving home after fighting with his father. He had been riding trains illegally for years, picking fruit in California and working in the Montana mines. He had been beaten up at times. And, he had learned his "road skills" from a group of men who had taught him how to work the system—bum train rides, avoid law enforcement, find jobs, avoid being used, and protect himself on the road. One early morning on a train near the Sawtooth Mountains he had an epiphany: "Surely he had a purpose, a reason for existing in a place as maddeningly beautiful as this, but what" (57)? This changed in Everett, when his buddy, Matt, told him that he could make more money in a shingle-weaving plant. Four months into the job, Graham, in a coughing fit, lost his finger to a saw. The town doctor charged him two full week's wages to fix it. Walking home following the procedure, he was approached by a female Wobbly, Tamara, who encouraged him to join their union cause.

Lured by his attraction to Tamara, Graham attended his first Wobbly meeting, where he promised her he'd buy a red card. He followed her to see her speak out publicly, inviting a brawl. Soon after she took the pulpit, a fight broke out and Graham grabbed Tamara and they fled. He kissed her later, and realized her physical vulnerability and his own, now that he had someone to worry about and protect.

Violence in Everett escalated following the outbreaks of fighting. The IWW office sent Tamara (with Graham accompanying her) to Seattle to recruit more IWW representatives to aid in the strike. In Seattle, Graham slept with Tamara. The next day, they returned to Everett on a steam ship with 400 IWW members. At the docks in Everett, Sheriff McRae agitated the IWW members and a shot was fired. In the panic, IWW members aboard ship ran away from the firing as many were shot and fell into the water. Graham was separated from Tamara, whose corpse he spotted in the ocean. Thugs sent to assault the IWW members shot her in the face as she floated. Graham left aboard the ship, and vowed "I will never again permit myself to be in so powerless a position" (70).

Recovering from the flashback of the Everett Massacre, Graham vows that no one will come into Commonwealth and threaten the town or his family. He will shoot them down.

VIII (71-73)

Chapter 8 is a collection of brief, anonymous discussions among various Commonwealth citizens concerning the quarantine: rumors that Mr. Worthy introduced the quarantine to prevent his workers from leaving town to assume “better” jobs in shipbuilding on the coast; concerns over a person’s coughing; anger over the general store not stocking enough alcohol for consumption; recollections of the impact of past flu strains on people; anxieties of one man concerning his girlfriend who lives in Timber Falls and how she’ll read his willingness to be quarantined.

Tensions form, and worries mount, within Commonwealth.

IX (74-79)

Laura wonders if the flu was a weapon engineered by the Germans that drifted across the ocean. Philip dismisses the chance, as he postulates that it would have killed the Germans, too. Laura suggests that perhaps Germans don’t get the flu. Philip reminds her that many Germans, like Elsie and her family, are Americans now.

Philip recounts the pro-war propaganda that was occurring two weeks prior to the quarantine. He had been to Timber Falls to see a pro-American/anti-German motion picture, The Phantom Operative. In between changing film reels, a “Four-Minute Man” jumped upon on stage and spoke negatively of “the Hun,” encouraged the civilians to keep contributing to the war effort (especially by enlisting), and reminded people to buy more Liberty Bonds. Naturally, the Americans defeated the Germans at the end of the film.

Laura continues contemplating the source of the flu. Philip thinks of Laura, now his adoptive sister, and how he needs to prove his manhood to her as he likewise deals with the awkwardness of now being her brother and math tutor. Laura asks Philip to borrow one of his fighter-pilot books, which he purchased at the general store in Timber Falls and hid in his closet, away from the anti-war Rebecca. Philip is aware that most of these books are only partly based upon fact. One tells of the downfall of the Red Barron; the other speaks of spies being among us. Laura smuggles the book to read in her bed. Philip fantasizes that he’s a soldier and contemplates what Elsie would write to him if he were away at war.

X (80-85)

Rebecca and Charles talk of Philip. Rebecca is angry that Charles let Philip serve as a guard and thus witness Graham shooting the soldier. However, she doesn’t blame Charles for what happened. The moderate Charles has been arguing with Rebecca about

the war and she nearly accuses him of war profiteering. The price of lumber has risen because the military is using so much in airplane design. Charles feels the weight of responsibility as leader of Commonwealth, and wants his vision of “love for all” to reign in their community.

Charles goes to see Doc Banes, and Jarred Rankle visits Rebecca, returning Wobbly journals he borrowed from her. Rankle inquires as to Charles’ presence and is unnerved when he hears that he has gone to see the doctor (fear of the flu dominates the characters’ minds). Rebecca assures him that Charles is simply going to talk to Doc.

Rankle’s story is explained. While living outside Missoula, he came upon hard times and went away on a timber-felling job. While he was gone, he and his wife corresponded regularly, but the letters from her ceased. Following the job, concerned, Rankle returned to find his wife and child missing from their home. He searched for them, but never found them. After two years as an alcoholic, Rankle met Rubinski, a Wobbly that convinced him that his story was common and that he should join the Wobbly ranks, which Rankle did. Following the Everett Massacre, Rankle left the Wobblies and went to Commonwealth, where he hoped to find a better life.

Prior to leaving the Worthy home, Rankle comforts Rebecca, who is upset over the quarantine. He touches her hand to comfort her and they share an awkward moment of sexual tension prior to his leaving.

XI (86-90)

J.B. Merriwether owns Merriwether’s First Bank in Timber Falls. His daughter, Gwen, is suffering with the flu. His son, James, is fighting in France, and the Merriwethers await any communication from him. J.B.’s wife is Violet.

Fearful of contracting the flu, and needing to “do something” rather than sit and listen to Gwen cough, J.B. spends time posting war bond posters around Timber Falls and attempting to sell bonds to residents. His “passion” for the war bond drive came as a result of his hearing a Four Minute Man speech at the Pioneers Club. His desire to sell bonds, and the lack of his success in doing so among the sick in Timber Falls, moved him to drive to Commonwealth to sell to citizens in Charles Worthy’s town. The mysterious man who appeared at the quarantine sign and turned around in his Model T near the beginning of the novel, we learn, was J.B.

Merriwether feels vulnerable because of the flu and he has learned not to trust the world.

XII (91-95)

Elsie approaches Philip on a Sunday morning while he’s painting and asks him what they were burying in the woods. Philip, shaken, lies and tells her first that it was a couple of dead deer that Doc Banes wanted buried due to possible disease. Elsie presses Philip, knowing that he’s lying. She claims that she knows it was a body and wants to know if it

was the soldier. Philip admits that it was, but lies again, saying that the man, not permitted to enter the town, died of either the flu or exposure. He never mentions that Graham shot him.

Philip, Elsie believes, is upset for two reasons. First, Philip's mother died of exposure one night in a snowy gorge. Second, she feels that that he must feel responsible for the soldier's death.

Elsie vows not to tell anyone about the dead soldier.

XIII (96-111)

Mo, an ex-boxer from Detroit who fled to the northwest after killing his sparring partner, pulls guard duty with Philip. Mo is an incessant talker who irritates those with whom he works and lives. This night, Mo leaves his post to gather firewood, as promised, for Jay Wachowski's family. He is contributing to the community effort to help Joe, a sawyer who broke both hands in an accident in the mill the prior week.

After Mo leaves, Philip stands off against a second soldier who wanders toward Commonwealth looking for food and shelter. When the man won't turn away, Philip engages in a firearm exchange with him. Neither are wounded. When the soldier charges Philip and trips, dropping his pistol, Philip takes him at gunpoint to an abandoned building left over from when Reginald Worthy ran the mill area. Not having the nerve to kill the soldier, Philip wants to hide him and feed him, expecting the man to leave the next day. Unfortunately Mo, who heard the exchange of gunfire, returned and followed Philip and the soldier to the building. Mo locks Philip in the cellar with the second soldier and goes to report the possible contamination to Mr. Worthy.

PART TWO: PRISONERS

I (115-118)

J.B. Merriwhether has been summoned to the Pioneers Club and leaves Violet to look after their sick daughter, Gwen. Four men join him: Joseph Miller, a successful business banker; Nathan Hightower, a mill foreman whose two sons had been killed in action in World War I; Lionel Winslow, the 30-year-old son of one of the town's timber barons; and Skip Bartrum, the sheriff of Timber Falls. J.B. learns that the four men are members of the American Protective League, a citizens' enforcement organization endorsed by the U.S. Department of Justice to police their local citizens' behaviors. The APL's job was to watch for dissenters, draft saboteurs, and war critics. Interested in J.B.'s observations about the Commonwealth quarantine, the men wonder if the town is somehow involved in something that recently happened at Fort Jenkins.

II (119-125)

Mo runs to town and notifies Charles, Doc Banes, and Jarred Rankle that he has Philip and another soldier locked in a building. Graham sees the commotion, grabs his rifle, and joins the group. They reach the building, and Doc Banes and Charles don gauze masks and approach the building. They decide that they will leave the two men locked in the cellar for 48 hours, the incubation period of the flu virus. They will feed them, but will make them keep their dirty dishes so as not to communicate the contagion.

Charles, who lost his brother, Timothy, to sickness when the boy was 16, had made a connection between his son and his adopted son, Philip. He is concerned about leaving his adopted son in a cellar for two days with a stranger, but understands the necessity of doing so.

The second American soldier identifies himself as Private Frank Summers and notes that he had found Commonwealth on his way back to Fort Jenkins. Summers explains that, due to an accident at sea, their troop ship had sunk and he was in need of food and shelter.

Once Doc and Charles have spoken to Philip from behind the closed cellar door and explained the forty-eight-hour quarantine plan, they leave. Private Summers inquires as to Philip's age and as to why he isn't serving his country. He sees Philip's physical handicap.

Philip feels as if he has let down the town.

III (126-131)

Doc Martin Banes has insomnia. He took Charles home and explained to the Worthy's what had happened to Philip. He returned home to an empty house. His wife, Margaret, had died five years earlier of pneumonia.

Doc Banes' past is recounted. Banes had been trained in 1886 to be a physician, when modern medicine was in its early stages and training involved attending some lectures and being given a license. He had seen many changes in his time as a physician. Some of those changes had been reported to him by a prior patient, now turned physician, Jonathan Price. Dr. Price had been assigned medical duty at Fort Devens, outside of Boston, and had reported that "a plague" had erupted among the soldiers, there. Price noted that those who were infected bled from their eyes, ears, and nose. They essentially drowned in their own bodily fluids. The military camp was a madhouse, not prepared to handle such an outbreak. The soldiers were bunked far too closely together, cross-contaminating one another. Soldiers who had not been properly quarantined had been moved away from the base with diagnoses of "uninfected." They, too, had spread the virus—beyond the camp. Fort Jenkins, Doc Banes knows, was likewise infected.

The chapter concludes with Banes wondering if he has quarantined Philip and the second soldier long enough. Should he keep them inside for a week? He prays that the flu stays out of Commonwealth.

IV (132-134)

Charles and Rebecca take food, a lamp, blankets and pillows to the building where Philip and the second soldier are being held. Charles and Rebecca then return home.

Rebecca confronts Charles, telling him that the quarantine must end. Charles counters, noting that he must do all he can to save the town. Philip is no more important than any of the other sons of Commonwealth, Charles holds.

Charles sits down to try again to write a comforting letter to Philip, the boy he adopted five years ago when he found him in a ravine, abandoned by his father. Charles vowed at that time to never abandon Philip, and now he feels forced to do so.

V (135-142)

Philip dreams of his early life. His mother, Fiona, had taken him from cousin to cousin, living in their homes until her behavior (sleeping around or stealing from them) led the families to cast them out. Philip was often forced to leave behind friends, schools, belongings, and opportunities, whenever they moved. Fiona told him to be lucky she didn't do to him what most parents would do—leave him in an orphanage.

In Redmond, WA, Fiona met a paper mill foreman named Carl Jasper. They lived with Carl for a year, until the three were forced to flee for unknown reasons. Philip had refused to go, until Carl hit him, bloodying the boy's nose. They drove toward an unknown destination until Carl lost control of the car in the snow, and they rolled into a ravine. Philip was pinned in the car by Carl's body. Fiona moaned and Philip screamed for her. Eventually, slowly freezing in the snow and moving in and out of consciousness, Philip came to in a hospital. He had been rescued by a passerby, Charles Worthy.

It had been some time since Philip had dreamed of the accident. He awoke to find the food, blankets, lamp and matches left for him outside the cellar door. After eating and starting a fire in the building's fireplace, both the soldier and Philip drift off to sleep.

VI (143-144)

Deacon stands guard over the building where Philip and the second soldier are being held.

Deacon's past is recounted. As a troubled youth, Deacon claimed to an abbot that he had heard God call him to be a Catholic priest. He's past forty years of age, but at sixteen he had wanted a purpose in his life and lied about hearing God's voice because he was tired of waiting. One day, out of frustration and anger, Deacon ransacked the seminary library,

threw a Bible at a priest, and fled the area. At the first timber camp, Deacon told his story and the nickname “Deacon” stuck.

Deacon wonders if Philip or the second soldier have the flu. He’s on guard duty until morning, when he will be relieved.

VII (145-153)

A knock at the door signals food. Philip retrieves it and hides a letter from Charles so the soldier doesn’t see it. Tensions between the second soldier (Frank Summers) and Philip continue, Philip uncertain as to the soldier’s character, motives, and forthcoming actions. Tensions increase when the soldier coughs and spits into the fire.

When the soldier goes to find a location to relieve himself, Philip retrieves the letter from Charles and reads it. Charles apologizes and notes that, although they don’t understand how Philip came into close contact with this soldier, they will learn more when they can let the two men free of the building. Although the chances the soldier has the flu are slim, Doc Banes and Charles know they must quarantine them. The letter moves Philip, who hasn’t felt Charles’ concern to this degree since the man brought him home from the accident.

Philip learns from Frank that Frank’s ship sunk due to an unknown cause when the soldier was below deck, that the ships separated in bad weather, and that Frank and another soldier managed to board a lifeboat and escape the sea. Fears abound that it was sabotage, possibly involving a U-boat, but such rumors abounded at that time.

Philip explains to Frank that his foot was amputated due to frostbite from the automobile accident. The soldier then questions Philip’s earlier decision to deny him quarters and food in such cold weather. Philip and the soldier talk of what the soldier will say about being detained when he returns to his base. The conversation causes both men to relax, and they formally introduce themselves and shake hands.

A crisis has formed at the soldier’s military base, with many having the flu, notes the soldier. However, the soldier does not believe anyone around him had it. The soldier’s mother wrote to him, noting that Missoula, Montana, had likewise been devastated by the flu.

VIII (154-157)

Graham visits Charles and asks that he might be relieved of his mill work so that he can personally pull more shifts on guard duty in order to protect the town. Despite the fact that cut lumber is piling up high and cannot be sold off due to the quarantine, the town can survive economically if they can keep the flu from affecting the townspeople.

When Graham inquires as to why Philip allowed the soldier to come near him, Charles notes that they aren’t sure but that they’ll find out when they are freed.

Graham questions Doc Banes' judgment in allowing the men out after only being quarantined for a short time. The flu is not like a regular flu, and therefore how can they know that forty-eight hours will signal enough time for the bug to show itself? Graham speaks of Doc Banes' allegiance to Charles, and notes that he (Graham) doesn't "have a lot of confidence in him" (Banes).

IX (158-163)

Although remote, Commonwealth is deeply affected by World War I. The town, less than a year old, is affected by Wilson's desire for war. Having just helped build this democratic community, the townspeople are torn over the idea of a war to "make the world safe for democracy."

Commonwealth is affected in another way—war means a great deal of money, especially for those in the lumber business. The town experiences a great increase in demand for lumber by the military (to build fighter planes) and is benefiting from the contracts.

In the end, the mill-working men of Commonwealth were not required to register for the military draft due to being declared "essential for the war effort." Graham, with Amelia pregnant, refused to enlist and Philip was too young. However, Inston, a minister friend of Rebecca's, was invited by the Presbyterian-trained Charles to serve as the spiritual leader of the town and incited a vocal debate among parishioners with a pro-war sermon. Parishioners, representing different views on the war, took sides. As a result of the sermon, a group of ten mill workers led by the tall, redheaded Walsh, registered for the draft despite their deferral, were drafted, and they haven't been heard from since.

X (164-170)

Elsie learns from Laura that Philip is being held captive in the building with the second soldier. She wants to visit him, but Laura notes that it is forbidden.

In school that day, Elsie had great difficulty focusing. Although she was Mrs. Worthy's assistant, she spent the day concerned about Philip. During recess, news of Philip's quarantine spread.

After school, Elsie talks to Rebecca about Philip's plight. Was it necessary to quarantine him? Shouldn't he be released? Rebecca notes that in a democracy the majority rules through voting and that the hope is that the majority will be right. They must simply wait, as Philip should be OK.

At home, Elsie writes a letter to Philip. She delivers it to the building where Graham is on guard duty. After taking the letter from Elsie, Graham silently turns his back to her and she leaves. In the forest, Elsie sneaks up to the back of the building and spots a hole where she might slip in to see Philip. She enjoys spying on people and knowing as much as possible concerning what's happening in Commonwealth. Not understanding what was going on bothered Elsie and she knows Commonwealth is harboring big secrets. The

people, afraid of catching the flu, are now terse and evasive. She decides not to risk breaking the quarantine and returns home, rather than sneaking into the building to see Philip.

XI (171-180)

Philip and Frank play cards to pass the time. Food arrives. When Philip goes to the door he sees Graham scowling at him from a distance.

Frank has a girlfriend, Michelle, whom he plans to marry when he returns to Missoula, Montana. The marriage deferment that many men took advantage of in the early days of the war was eliminated, so Frank couldn't have avoided service by marrying Michelle. Currently, Frank assumes that Michelle is contributing to the war effort like most of America—rolling bandages and saving peach pits (for gas mask filters).

Philip receives a letter from Elsie. She doesn't blame him for his decision to kill the first soldier (with Graham) or for giving shelter to the second soldier.

Philip learns from Frank that training is problematic at Fort Jenkins. They use broom handles as rifles, for example. The United States, at the start of the war, was behind in military production and most weapons in the stockpile, and those being produced went directly to soldiers who were deployed. They were not reserved for training purposes.

Philip finds out that Frank is twenty-five, single, and worked as a carpenter with his father, who built houses in Missoula. His younger sister is blind. And, Frank enjoys fishing and hiking. As time passes, Philip and Frank learn more about one another.

Frank inquires as to who from Commonwealth is serving in the war. Philip notes that most men applied for, and received, work deferments and others declared conscientious objector status.

XII (181-182)

Leonard Thibeault, a Commonwealth mill worker, suffers an attack. It begins with pain behind his eyes, exacerbated by the town whistle. His entire body, especially his joints, aches. He wonders what he had consumed the night before.

In his bed, Leonard sweats and soaks his night clothes. He can't gather the energy to remove the blankets that cover him.

Inhaling deeply in order to increase his air intake, Leonard's stomach muscles seize, and he coughs violently until he drifts into reveries in which he plays ball with his dead cousin.

XIII (183-189)

Graham, although exhausted, feels driven to continue to guard the town. He's not sleeping well, but he has a great deal to lose if the flu arrives.

The narrator reflects upon Graham and Amelia's relationship. Although his courtship with Amelia was brief, Graham had not sought permission from Amelia's drunken father to marry her. Her mother had died young and Amelia had raised her three brothers while her father left on seasonal logging jobs. Graham had met her at church in Timber Hills, following his arrival after the Everett mess. Haunted by the loss of Tamara, Graham mourned for a long time. However, now married to Amelia, he understands how naïve his love for Tamara was.

Graham's father, too, had been a drunk. And his mother, back in Kansas, never stood up to her husband. Graham knew that Amelia wanted to get away from her father, Horace.

Amelia was strong and didn't turn away from his battered hand when he had handed her flowers. She touched it and looked at him. He had known at the time he would marry her.

Two years later, they had a family, a house, and a good life in Commonwealth. It was a great deal to lose.

Graham, haunted by the soldier he killed, cannot sleep. Although Amelia doesn't like Graham pulling so many guard shifts (he promises to find others to help with the burden), she knows that he aims to protect the town from the contagion that threatens them. After cutting wood, Graham leaves for a guard shift. Amelia asks him to tell Philip that they are thinking of him.

XIV (189-196)

It's 11 a.m. and Mo bursts into Charles Worthy's office. At 6 p.m. that evening, Doc Banes would examine Philip and the second soldier and determine their fitness to be released from quarantine in the cellar. Mo reports that men from Timber Falls are at the edge of town demanding to see him.

Charles and Mo join Graham at the edge of town. Five men from Timber Falls are standing near the log: Lionel Winslow, J.B. Merriwether, Joseph Miller, Skip Bartrum and Nathan Hightower. Charles, with a gauze mask on his face, talks with the men.

Charles explains the quarantine of Commonwealth and the men assert that they are suspicious about such behavior. At first they contend that they are there to sell Liberty Bonds, then they note that they are looking for military draft-dodgers, then they say that they are looking for German spies who committed acts of sabotage at Fort Jenkins. Charles assures the men that the town is off-limits in order to protect the citizens. As the

men from Timber Falls leave, Graham wonders if the soldiers they have encountered were the German spies/saboteurs of whom Miller spoke.

XV (197-202)

One hour following the standoff with the Timber Falls men, Charles has gathered nine magistrates in his office to discuss the circumstances. They debate the German spy theory and the true identity of the second soldier, who is currently confined with Philip. Rebecca, in attendance, insists that they not only identify the second soldier, but let Philip out immediately. Charles and Doc Banes object. They will leave the men confined for a full forty-eight hours to ensure that no contagion is spread.

As the magistrates converse, one of the men suggests that perhaps the flu has been engineered and delivered by German saboteurs.

“What if we are blamed for harboring a German spy or a deserter?” people ask. At that point Rankle reminds the group that Miller is a member of the American Protective League and that they are the “spies.”

Following the meeting, Graham considers Philip’s situation. He wants the boy to remain in confinement to prevent the town from a possible outbreak of the flu, but he understands that Rebecca would never allow it and that Doc was serious about the forty-eight-hour time limit. Graham is committed to protecting the town and senses that something critical is about to happen.

XVI (203-210)

At 5 p.m., one hour prior to Doc Banes’ promised examination, Philip and Frank nervously wait. Frank wants to stay in Commonwealth overnight, as it’s almost dark outside. Philip says that his family will put him up.

Doc Banes enters, examines Philip, and finds him healthy. He allows him to leave the building. Outside, Charles, Rebecca, and Laura greet him. Graham and Mo stand back, not wanting to be exposed.

Prior to leaving for home, Charles asks Philip about the second soldier and if he seemed to be hiding anything. Philip says no and leaves. Inside, Doc Banes finds Frank to be healthy, but notes strange marks on his neck, as if the man had been struggling and injured. When Frank does not respond readily to Doc Banes’ questioning about his true identity and his reasons for coming to Commonwealth, Doc calls in Graham and Mo. They hold the soldier at gunpoint as he begs to be released. Charles then calls for chains to detain the man.

PART THREE: SACRIFICE

I (213-214)

In Timber Falls, Joseph Miller talks with Sheriff Bartrum. Bartrum notes that something crooked, presumably linked to the Fort Jenkins incident, is going on in Commonwealth. Miller tells him to explore the war registration records of the men of Commonwealth. Merriwhether was on the registration board and will have insights into the registration records of the men of Commonwealth, which will make the task easy. Merriwhether's daughter dies that morning of the flu. Tensions continue to rise—daughters die of the flu in Timber Falls, while sons die at war.

II (215-218)

The next day, Doc Banes awakens, relaxed...until Jeanine comes and beckons him to her ill husband's bedside. Yolen is feverish, white, and weak. Doc learns during the encounter that another man, Leonard, never showed up to the mill to work the day before. Doc asks Jeanine to stay in the house and to report any changes in Yolen's condition. He learns that Yolen had come into contact with Otto and Ray, two of their friends.

In Leonard's house, Doc finds the man dead in bed. Blood has been scattered about the room and in the bed.

The flu has taken hold in Commonwealth.

III (219-223)

Philip hadn't slept well due to nightmares. When he wakes up late, he meets Charles downstairs at the dining room table. Philip apologizes for having let the second soldier get near him, and he explains the circumstances of their altercation to Charles, who doesn't blame him. Philip can't imagine that Frank is a spy, but Charles notes that they have to hold him until the army comes for him. Something about Frank's story is untrue and they can't afford to let a German spy free. Philip notes that they should be prudent in their decisions, as the town's character has changed due to the flu panic. Charles tells Philip that the townspeople do not hold a grudge against him. Just then, Doc Banes knocks at the door, after running to Charles' house.

IV (224-232)

The people of Commonwealth begin to panic as news of Leonard's death circulates. The Yolen house is quarantined, with an armed guard posted outside. The town is being divided into guards and the guarded.

The mill area is strangely affected by the lack of ships. Philip approaches O'Hare, the river chief. O'Hare places a handkerchief across his face and reports to Philip that three men never showed up for work.

At the Metzger's General Store Elsie gets water for Flora. Her mother has begun to cough and feels something in her throat.

Philip, Doc Banes and Charles meet in Charles' office. At that time, Philip reports that seven men are absent from work, and Doc Banes collects their addresses and heads out to check on them. Philip, although he isn't sick, wonders if he is the cause of the flu. He keeps distanced from others, and the quarantine from which he has been delivered doesn't seem nearly as bad as it once did.

Jarred Rankle and Graham discuss the flu. Rankle reports that three of his men went home ill in the middle of the day. Fear is escalating among the people of Commonwealth. Graham keeps away from Douglas, a man who volunteered to deliver the food to the quarantined Philip and Frank. Graham feels that the second soldier, Frank, is to blame for this outbreak. Nothing happened until he arrived in Commonwealth. Rankle asks Graham not to take any risks as a result of his panic over the flu.

In the Metzger's General Store, the shelves are bare. The citizens of Commonwealth have been panic-buying. Flora admits to Elsie that she isn't feeling well.

V (233-235)

Philip, lying on his bed, is visited by Laura, who returns his fighter-pilot books. She notes that Rebecca is considering closing the school. Some of those who have fallen ill have children enrolled.

Laura presses Philip for information concerning Frank, the second soldier. Is he a German spy? Had he been attempting to conceal an accent? Philip, although he wonders the same things, is angered by the questioning and notes that Frank doesn't seem like a spy to him. They could just as easily jail Elsie Metzger's parents, who are German. After Laura leaves, Philip wishes he could speak to Frank, but he may be exposed to the flu if he were to do so. He lies awake, staring into the darkness.

VI (236-242)

Yolen's body is blue as Doc Banes inspects him the next morning. His temperature is unchanged and his coughs are violent. Jeanine tells Doc that she feels like a prisoner in her own house and he explains that they need to keep an eye on the flu. However, he knows that it is now spreading uncontrollably.

No one who normally assists Doc Banes volunteers to help now. They remain in their homes, afraid of the disease. Deacon stands guard in front of Yolen's home.

Doc's visit to the Metzger residence is most startling. Flora has been taken ill. She coughs deeply, has a fever of 105, and her legs feel broken. She took ill in less than two

hours. Doc tells Elsie to close the store. In a conversation with Alfred Metzger, Doc comes to realize the Flora most likely caught the flu from someone visiting their store and that the store had been flooded by townspeople panic-buying.

Doc Banes has great difficulty tracing the flu. He is exhausted and helpless.

Symptoms of the flu are explained. Nosebleeds, combined with coughing, result in blood being cast about the environments where victims are suffering. Nausea and vomiting are common, as are earaches and dizziness. Doc uses needles to drain pus from infected ears. Headaches are severe.

Banes wonders whether Leonard's body has been buried. Krugman, the elderly undertaker, must be notified. Charles must set aside lumber for coffins.

VII (243-245)

Short passages represent the anxieties and rumors in Commonwealth.

1. Two townspeople communicate a common fear of animals—are they harboring and spreading the flu? One individual has shot his dog, killing it to protect his family. Another thinks such action is ridiculous.
2. Two men discuss the Metzger's General Store closing and how they are running out of supplies in their homes. No one knows when the grocery will reopen.
3. A person contends that drinking whisky will keep the flu away.
4. Two men discuss Mientkiewicz, a mill worker who staggered to work coughing and doubling over. One man watches him struggle as he walks down the street, but he doesn't get close enough to the sick man to be exposed to the flu. The Commonwealth resident to whom he is speaking feels that he shouldn't be talking to his friend because he might indeed have been exposed to the flu.
5. One man notes that he's wearing garlic around his neck because his wife has suggested that it will keep him healthy.
6. One individual believes that the mill-owning Charles Worthy has a plentitude of supplies in the basement of his own house while the common folk in Commonwealth go hungry. Others attempt to temper the man, noting that the man criticizing Charles shouldn't be believed.
7. Finally, an individual tells others to "shut up" because "voices spread germs" (245).

The levels of panic and superstition and rumor are growing in Commonwealth.

VIII (246-248)

Ignoring Doc Bane's orders, Rebecca and the pregnant Amelia (carrying her child, whom no one would babysit) go to meet three other women to harvest their community garden. Despite the risk, the women rationalize that standing far apart as they pick produce, and only coming together for a short period of time to split up their harvest, will prevent them from spreading the flu if anyone has it.

Rebecca reveals that three children, one being Elsie, are absent from school today.

When the women reach the community garden they realize it has been ransacked. Someone from the town has taken nearly everything they planted. "Who would do this?" asks Amelia. "Anyone," replies Rebecca (248).

IX (249-251)

Graham returns following guard duty, and an upset Amelia tells him their community garden has been ransacked. Graham understands in light of the panic and the general store being closed. While Amelia insists that they find out who stole the vegetables, Graham tells her that they must remain calm, weather the flu in town, and not go hunting for stolen goods in people's potentially contaminated homes.

Following Amelia's request, Graham constructs and installs latches on the doors in their home to keep people from entering their house to steal the harvest they have taken from their personal garden.

After Amelia kisses Graham on the lips, Graham lies to her, telling her he must go see Mo about a guard shift. She notes that she feels sorry for Philip, that neither he nor the second soldier could have brought the flu into Commonwealth and that, perhaps, Philip's letting the soldier into the town was the right thing to do. After contemplating what that means in relation to his own killing of the first soldier, Graham blows up at Amelia and leaves the house.

Graham is on his way to do something that will redeem himself, as well as Philip and the entire town.

X (252-262)

The next day, thirty-two men are absent from work. Numbers of the ill are growing at an alarming rate as the flu sweeps through Commonwealth. Leonard had died, but so had his friends with whom he had been drinking, Otto and Ray. The speed of the disease shocks Doc Banes.

Doc tells Charles that Flora Metzger is ill and Philip is visibly shaken as he overhears the news. He is afraid that Elsie will contract the illness. As the day continues, Philip, from

reports collected from foremen, learns that forty-two men in all are now infected and absent from work.

Philip, out of a sense of shame, stays late at the office. After he leaves and is walking through town, mill workers confront him. The men debate about taking Philip into the woods to “deal with him” for bringing the flu to Commonwealth, until one man reminds the others that Philip, too, may be carrying the flu. They leave Philip alone.

On his walk, Philip comes upon Elsie, who is on her way to the store to collect provisions. She is outside her home, against Doc Banes’ orders, breaking quarantine. Philip approaches her, accompanies her to the store, and kisses her on the lips three times during their interaction. He has now dramatically increased his exposure to the disease. Philip agrees to do for Elsie what she did for him while he was confined—write letters. Elsie places her mask back upon her face and leaves for home. Philip remains behind, feeling “wonderful and horrible, nervous and bold, excited and confused” (262). He walks away, heading toward the storage buildings.

XI (263-268)

As Philip walks toward the storage buildings, he is bothered by the dark silence of the Commonwealth streets. He hears coughs emanating from the houses as he passes them. Doc Banes travels down the road as Philip hides and observes.

At the storage buildings, Philip, against the request of Lightning (the guard), enters the building where they are holding Frank, the second soldier. There he finds the man chained by the ankles to a beam, with his wrists bound. Frank’s face is bruised.

Philip and Frank discuss the flu and Frank insists that he’s not a German spy, nor is he a deserter. Philip, Frank pleads, must let the man go or the soldier will be hung at Fort Jenkins. Frank admits that he, like Philip, is a murderer. That is why he was fleeing. He was not involved in the sinking of a ship.

XII (269-284)

Frank recollects his boot camp experience at Fort Jenkins. There, as a Private, he observed other soldiers humiliating and beating a conscientious objector named Hunter. They wanted the C.O. to give in and join their ranks in the fighting to come.

Camp life had been monotonous. Soldier time was usually occupied with endless drills. Poorly equipped, the soldiers used broom handles to represent guns and bayonets. Their ranks were filled by men of many immigrant backgrounds, and Frank, educated and age twenty-five, was revered among the men.

Ollie, the son of a Lutheran minister from Tacoma, wished to build a mission in the Philippines after the war. However, he held great contempt for conscientious objectors, who were “yellow” and could remain at the rear scrubbing urinals and doing menial labor

as the real soldiers died in rat-infested trenches on the front lines. Frank later decided that he, too, detested C.O.'s.

Frank's great-grandfather, Emmett Summers, fought and died during the American Civil War, on the part of the Confederacy, at the Battle of Antietam. Frank reflects upon his great-grandfather's service as a "lost cause," similar to the conscientious objector's insistence on pacifism, Frank's own desire to avoid trench warfare, or Frank's investment in Michelle.

One night, following a card game at the YMCA, Frank came upon soldiers beating a conscientious objector in a storeroom. One man, Sepenski, used a bayonet to stab the C.O. in the leg. Frank interrupted the assault and asked the soldiers if he could take a shot at the C.O. The men agreed. Frank considered punching the C.O. in the jaw in an attempt to knock him out so as to save him from the torture to come. However, when given the chance, Frank punched Sepenski and knocked him out. Placed in a headlock by a soldier from Chicago, Frank tried desperately to free himself by slamming the man's body against a wall. Eventually, Frank dislodged the assailant by accidentally breaking his neck. When he righted himself, he saw that the C.O. had stabbed Sepenski and another man to death with the bayonet. Both Frank and the C.O. fled, secretly stowing away on a supply truck that took them away from Fort Jenkins. The C.O. stole a jacket and a rifle from the back of the truck. Frank took a pistol. [The mystery of how the two soldiers arrived at the edge of Commonwealth is now clear. The first soldier, the man shot by Graham, was the C.O. The second was Frank.]

XIII (283-288)

Alone, Philip ponders Frank's story. During the telling, Frank cries and eventually breaks down.

Philip thinks of the first soldier (the conscientious objector) Graham had shot and killed. Who was to blame for the killing? Was it Graham? Was it Philip himself? Was it both of them?

Philip's relationship with Graham has been seriously strained by the quarantine, the shooting, and the incident with the second soldier, Frank. Perhaps they are forever separated and the individual Philip is actually most similar to is Frank.

Philip considers Graham's motivations for his behavior (saving his wife and child). Philip has nothing to gain from helping Frank escape Commonwealth. In fact, he could find himself in serious trouble with the town, and the military, if he would decide to do so. To aid Frank would be a risk to the town Charles had created.

And still, Philip believes that all decisions made following the quarantine were selfish, that the people have placed themselves above others. With Charles and Graham unable to offer him guidance, Philip is alone. But he comes to understand that the quarantine itself had compromised the very nature of the utopian society they had fought to build.

Before leaving Frank, Philip promises to help the soldier escape. As the chapter concludes, Philip hears new sounds of coughing coming from Zeke's (a mill worker's) home. Zeke's wife has contracted the flu.

XIV (289-290)

The next day Philip has a great deal of difficulty focusing upon his work. He spends time writing Elsie what becomes a disjointed letter, but he signs it and places it under Metzger's door. He doesn't dare enter the contaminated home.

The next night, Philip visits Frank while Lightning is on guard duty. He frees Frank from the chains, helps him break through a rotten place in the wall, and leaves after Frank flees.

Snow is coming and Philip spends the evening remembering how Charles had rescued him from the accident site.

XV (291-292)

In the Metzger household, Flora's condition dramatically worsens. Coughing violently, then wheezing, Flora wakes Elsie and Alfred. From her bed, Flora coughs blood into the air. Alfred panics as Elsie covers her ears in horror.

Elsie runs for Doc Banes to assist. Flora is having trouble breathing.

XVI (293-302)

Graham relieves Deacon at the storage building, and now guards Frank. Deacon understands Graham's desire to have him go home; Deacon doesn't have a likable personality, and his ex-priest, prostitute-frequenting lifestyle doesn't help things.

Doc Banes has given up, Graham thought. Doc wouldn't live for long and probably doesn't care if the rest of humanity passes away in the months to come. [Graham's anger with Doc Banes continues.]

Frank has had trouble sleeping. He has been thinking about the conscientious objector and how they had fled after the supply truck had stopped. They had run quickly through the woods, to put distance between themselves and the military searchers that would be coming. At night, Frank and the C.O. had wept in each other's arms. The next day, Frank, angry that the C.O. had not thanked him for helping him, walks quickly and the two men become separated.

Suddenly, as Frank is thinking, Graham enters the storage building and tells Frank to get up. He is about to be set free. After taking off Frank's leg chains and asking Frank to hold his bound wrists up so that he can free him, Graham steps forward and drives a knife into Frank, eventually killing him. As he had learned from his father's example (the man

had once bought infected pigs that had killed and/or sickened the other pigs on his farm and had to be killed to “clear the air”), Graham kills the soldier to bring a sense of calm back to Commonwealth.

Graham had made an agreement with Mo to allow Frank free. For the loan of Mo’s horse, Icarus, Graham would set the second soldier free and guide him out of the area along little-used Indian trails so no one would see him. With the soldier gone, Commonwealth would return to normal after the flu had worked its course. [Graham had decided on his own to kill Frank.]

Graham takes Frank’s body into the woods and buries it in a grave he had previously dug for the occasion. He returns Mo’s horse, then goes back to the store building to pretend to guard a now-vacant site.

XVII (303-308)

Charles hadn’t slept well, haunted by nightmares concerning the mill’s failing. I.O.U.’s are stacking up and, with no bank in Commonwealth, no one is getting paid. Fear and suspicion are ruining the utopia.

Charles struggles with his having quarantined Commonwealth. Perhaps the flu could still be somehow contained. He had built this utopia, despite the odds, and no flu is going to stop him.

Walking by the Metzger’s store, Charles notes broken windows and enters. The store had been robbed of everything. Inside, an angry and saddened Alfred Metzger, asks Charles who would do this. This is the second blow. The prior night Alfred’s wife, Flora, had died when she was unable to breathe. Charles wonders if, somehow, the events of Flora’s death and the robbing of the store are linked.

Metzger’s neighbors in utopian Commonwealth had not only robbed the communal garden but had ransacked his store and robbed him.

In anger, Metzger blames Charles. Had Charles not quarantined the town, people would be free to fill their pantries with goods from Timber Lake. Charles begins to second-guess his decision to quarantine the town.

Mill workers enter the store demanding food and are angered when they realize all has been stolen. They begin to wonder who did it. Charles considers forming a group to search houses for the goods, but realizes that this would undermine the very nature of the Commonwealth utopian philosophy. Jarred Rankle enters the store, calms the men, and dismisses them to the mill. He then warns Charles about the brewing tensions in the town.

Charles apologizes to Alfred, noting that the quarantine was wrong and will be abolished. Alfred tells Charles that Charles is not welcome in his home.

XVIII (309-312)

Rankle is surprised not to find Deacon guarding the store building. He dismisses Graham to rest, after noticing blood on one of his hands. Graham passes it off as a probable accident that must have occurred when he was chopping wood earlier.

Rankle, taking the soldier-prisoner oatmeal, soon finds Frank's empty chains.

Charles breaks the news of Flora Metzger's death to Philip, then recommends that the boy stay away from the Metzger home until things settle down. Philip learns that twenty-three additional men are absent from the mill and Doc Banes recommends that Charles shut down the mill before more workers take ill. Charles then recommends to Doc that they drop the quarantine of Commonwealth. The flu is already present. Banes agrees.

On his way home, Philip stops at the Metzger's home to give his condolences. Alfred sends the boy away.

XIX (313-317)

To the people of Commonwealth, Frank's escape is no longer a pressing concern. He is no longer a problem, like the flu and the closing of the mill had become.

Charles, concerned with his business and the town, contemplates how they could stir business now that the quarantine has ended. After some time, he returns home and tells Philip what Rankle had said—that Frank has escaped.

Philip goes to the store building to inspect the scene. There, he finds Rankle in the basement. During his inspection, Philip finds a sizeable blood stain, which seems to have been hastily covered with dirt. Likewise, he finds Frank's photo of Michelle (which Frank would never have left behind). Philip presses Rankle for information and learns that Graham had been on duty when Frank was discovered missing. Philip, putting the clues together, begins to suspect Graham in the disappearance. When he tells Rankle that he intends to look Graham up immediately, Rankle forbids him to speak to Graham until the flu epidemic ceases and forbids Philip to say anything about the scene to anyone. That night Philip lies in bed, haunted by thoughts of Graham, Frank, the C.O., and the flu.

PART FOUR: SPECTERS

I (321-323)

Violet Merriwhether, broken by the loss of her daughter, Gwen, to the flu, and her son, James, to the war, cannot bring herself to face J.B. She remains isolated from her husband, refusing to unlock their bedroom door.

J.B. is sitting at the dining room table when Joseph Miller arrives. This reminds him of the day he sat at the very same table when the telegram announcing James's death came. He hadn't opened it for some time and struggled with how he would possibly convey the news to Violet.

J.B. sleeps on the floor in the room beneath his and Violet's bedroom. Each day he relives his loss.

Joseph Miller lets himself in, and asks J.B. for his help with a plan. J.B. is willing to assist whenever he is needed.

II (324-331)

Philip wakes with a pounding headache and soon is coughing. Rebecca sends Charles for Doc Banes. Philip has contracted the flu and feels awful.

Despite his illness, Philip feels that he must confront Graham concerning Frank's disappearance. He dresses, carefully exits the house, and stumbles to Graham's home. There, he confronts Graham and realizes his suspicions are correct—Graham had killed and buried Frank. Philip accuses Graham of being a murderer for killing Frank; Graham accuses Philip of being a murderer for bringing the flu to Commonwealth.

Both Philip and Graham fight, and Philip eventually and accidentally coughs in Graham's face. With their screams, Charles and Amelia draw the fighting pairs' attention and they separate. Charles helps the ailing Philip to walk home, pausing when Philip experiences a coughing fit. Graham sits outside of his own home. Having been exposed to the flu, he is not willing to enter and endanger the lives of the pregnant Amelia and the young Millie.

III (332-342)

In the throes of fever, Philip dreams he's on a cramped train traveling to an unknown destination with faceless sick men. He awakens from the dream to find Rebecca with a gauze mask looking over him. She places a cold towel on his forehead; he pleads with her not to leave him. But Laura has fallen ill as well and now needs her care, too.

Philip struggles with the flu, never having felt so completely ill.

In Philip's dream, Graham enters with his rifle in hand and tells Philip he is there to guard him. Feeling conflicting emotions, Philip is angered by Graham, yet grateful that he is there protecting him from whatever threatened him.

Philip's fingertips grow numb, as the flu continues to run its course. Can he survive?

Elsie appears at the window and, using her breath on the window, writes short notes to Philip, asking him how he is and telling him that she loves him.

Philip returns to sleep and his dream of the train. He has never been so ill—not after the accident and not the time he had contracted pneumonia and his mother, Fiona, had actually selflessly cared for him until he had recovered.

When Philip wakes up again, Charles is in the room with news. Doc Banes has discovered how the flu had managed to enter Commonwealth. Some unnamed men had gone off to Timber Falls for alcohol, to meet with girlfriends, or to sleep with prostitutes. They secretly had exited and entered the town, not using the main road, but old Indian pathways through the woods. Charles wonders why God had brought the flu upon the people of Commonwealth, but he is unable to imagine a reason.

Philip falls back to sleep. He dreams of Frank, riddled with bullet holes. In the dream, Frank speaks to him about not worrying about others but taking care of himself. He conveys that his own coming to the aid of the C.O. had resulted in his misfortune. In another dream, Philip sees Fiona, who appears in a beautiful and tranquil form. She asks Philip to go with her and he does, never feeling so calm.

Philip sleeps.

IV (343-348)

Now, two weeks after the flu appears in Commonwealth, Doc Banes begins to think that it might be abating. The death rate appears to be declining.

Deacon, who has fallen ill with the flu, joins Doc as one of his most committed nurses. Deacon doesn't say anything to Doc, but in his feverish state he had finally heard from God, who commanded him to assist those who were suffering with the virus. Banes understands that a fever "does things" to people; in this case, the fever had changed a person for the better.

Doc Banes is haunted by the silence of the streets and secretly yearns for people to reappear, for life in Commonwealth to continue as it once had been. [Doc sustains his desire to live, despite the losses he had suffered, and witnessed, in his life.]

Harmon, a young boy in Commonwealth, ventures outside his parents' home while they are sleeping, despite their warnings that no one should go outside. Walking through the silent streets, he comes to a big tree stump and sits down. From this vantage point, the boy witnesses eight men approaching the town road with saws and removing the fallen trees. These men chase Harmon back into town in their cars.

Amelia is bored and restless in her confinement, but Millie keeps her spirits elevated. Since Philip coughed in his face, potentially contaminating him, Graham sought the

advice of Doc Banes, who told him that he might as well enter his home and be with his family as nothing could be done.

Graham is haunted by Philip's accusations of murder. He had killed Frank, the second soldier, as a sacrifice. Still, this had not stopped the flu.

Crape now hangs in the Wainwright's window and hadn't been there the day prior. "I wonder who it was?" Graham contemplates.

V (349-356)

Twenty men from Timber Falls, sworn members of the American Protective League led by Sheriff Bartrum, arrive in Commonwealth and begin searching house-to-house for draft dodgers. Winslow, J.B. Merriwether, and Hightower are members of the group.

At the first house, Ils produces his paperwork and, aside from suffering intimidation, is able to prove his job is considered "essential for the war effort" and the men leave.

Gerry Timlin, the man at the second house, cannot produce papers. Despite his being ill with the flu, and despite his wife Pauline's attempts (verbally and physically) to free her husband, he is cuffed and placed in a truck. Pauline sends her eldest son to tell Charles Worthy what is happening.

At the Worthy household, despite Doc Banes expectation that Philip will die, Philip is slowly recovering. He is walking about the house and even eating. Elsie Metzger, Rebecca informs him, isn't so lucky. Elsie has the flu, and her condition is worsening; she is not expected to live.

Pauline Timlin's son arrives at the Worthy household, looking for Charles.

VI (357-369)

More than twelve men have already been arrested by the APL. Winslow is happy—they are making it impossible for Charles Worthy's mill to operate. Soon his own mill might benefit from a lack of competition.

Charles appears, angry and demanding to know what is happening. He now realizes that he should have insisted that his mill workers register for the draft and be declared essential for the war effort and gain worker deferments. Miller explains to Charles that the men are being arrested for not registering for the draft as ordered.

Following the death of her own husband, Hunt, Corrine ventures over to Rankle's home and nurses him back to health. The first day of snow, the day of the APL raid, Rankle begins to significantly recover.

Members of the APL, with Sheriff Bartrum, approach Rankle's home and demand his papers. Rankle, defiant, notes that he would not fight in "Wilson's crooked war" (361). When Rankle criticizes members of the group for their actions, Bartrum punches him in the stomach, and the members of the APL take turns beating the man. Hightower holds Corrine back until they finish assaulting Rankle, then he releases her.

Philip is dazed by the news of Elsie's illness, as well as by the effects of the flu. Rebecca tells Philip about the APL's presence in the town and how Donny Timlin had come to get Charles. Philip can imagine Graham being arrested, hung, and buried in an unmarked grave. After seeing the APL knock on Jay Wachowski's door, Philip dresses and takes his rifle.

J.B. is revolted by the sight of families being broken apart and men being beaten. When ordered to kick a man the APL had been brutalizing, J.B. pauses, thinking of his dead son, James. Following Hightower's order, J.B. kicks the man in the back, lightly. He would not be so easy on the next man.

Graham, hearing shots being fired, walks out onto his porch and witnesses the APL kicking and hitting a man. He recognizes Hightower from the earlier altercation at the edge of town, when he had forbidden the men entrance to Commonwealth.

Hightower is seeking retribution for his sons, who had gone to war when asked. He had sacrificed his sons, and no "slackers" would be tolerated. When a young kid drops from a window and runs, attempting to evade the APL, Hightower tackles him.

As the day comes to a close, the APL trucks are full of prisoners. Miller wishes to return to Timber Falls, where the men could be jailed, and to return to Commonwealth after the snow ceases. Hightower agrees, until he looks down the street and sees Graham.

Deacon is arrested while working with Doc. In captivity, Deacon tends to the beaten Rankle.

Charles attempts to charge the APL again, but is pushed away. He stands helplessly beside Doc as they watch the APL continue their work. At this rate, all of the viable mill workers will be imprisoned. The men of Commonwealth, weakened by the flu and the lack of adequate food, are unable to resist the APL's actions.

VII (370-378)

Bartrum, Hightower, and J.B. walk to Graham's house and nearly knock the door in. Graham, standing behind the door, opens it slightly and braces himself. He tells the men to leave Commonwealth, that what they are doing in town is wrong. Sheriff Bartrum replies that they want his deferment papers and that they are there legally on behalf of the federal government.

Behind the door, Graham holds his rifle out of view. When Hightower shoulders the door into Graham's hand holding the rifle, Graham tries to switch the gun into his other hand, but Hightower punches Graham. A series of blows are exchanged, with Graham breaking Hightower's jaw. Knocking Graham to the ground, the three members of the APL kick him in the ribs and abdomen until he appears to be subdued. Amelia emerges and begs the men to stop. Just then, Philip appears with rifle in hand and warns the men to leave. As Bartrum moves his pistol, against Philip's warning, Philip shoots him, knocking him backward out of the house and down the front steps. Graham elbows Hightower in the stomach and escapes his grip, diving for Bartrum's pistol before J.B. reaches the weapon. Ordered to leave by Philip and Graham, Hightower and J.B. exit the house, passing Bartrum's dead body in the snow. Outside, Graham confronts Miller and shoots the tires out of the closest APL truck, which contains men from Commonwealth. Miller leaves with members of the APL, and doesn't tell them of Bartrum's death until they return to Timber Falls.

Philip, placing his rifle on the snow, releases the Commonwealth men from the immobile APL truck. Alfred Metzger is one of the prisoners, who returns to his home to face the horrors of the flu that await him.

Unnumbered Final Chapter (379-387)

The omniscient narrator draws several storylines to a close, resolving the tensions of the novel.

Philip stands in a train station, a fate from which he cannot run.

Commonwealth has been sealed in by the snowstorm. It will delay the APL's return.

Following the confrontation, Philip had slept for two days, recovering his strength. The night of the raid, Elise had died of the flu.

Once the roads were passable, men who had registered for the draft went to the local town of Pauling and purchased food and newspapers. They learned that an armistice had been signed. World War I actually had ended the day of the APL raid.

Rebecca decides that she will go to Timber Falls, phone her political contacts, and begin to protest the way the men of Commonwealth had been brutalized by the APL. She will then petition for better treatment for men like Jarred Rankle, who are being held in the jail in Timber Falls.

Following the raid, Charles and Rebecca visit the homes in Commonwealth, assessing who had been apprehended by the APL, who is ill, who has no food, and who has died. In the end, Doc Banes' records show that 250 people in Commonwealth had contracted the flu; 56 had died. Doc had never fallen ill. Graham and his family had been spared.

While the survivors of the flu feel angry and vindictive, they can't take revenge on the flu. There is no tangible form to the evil.

Having admitted killing the second soldier, Graham has to explain his actions to Amelia. She is upset, but they later reconcile.

Three days after the raid, Philip waits at the Pauling train station. He will go on to Portland, where he will be safe with Charles' cousin. Charles will meet him there in a few days to begin to sort out the legalities of Philip's having killed Sheriff Bartrum. In the end, Philip isn't haunted by the shooting. Bartrum was evil. However, Philip is still bothered by the death of the first soldier.

The ride to the train station is silent. Once there, Charles goes to purchase Philip's ticket. At that time Graham thanks Philip for helping him against the APL. Philip notes that he cannot apologize for allowing Frank, the second soldier, into town. Charles embraces Philip before returning with Graham to Commonwealth.

Graham, back in Commonwealth, is concerned with the repercussions of the APL raid. He is not optimistic like Charles. Graham and Amelia decide to leave Commonwealth.

At the train station, Philip realizes he had never been so alone as he is at this moment, but he isn't afraid. Now recovered from the flu, he will have to work through Elsie's death. Perhaps it would be best not to return to Commonwealth, he considers, but instead to move on to a new destination. He feels stripped of many of the things that he had once believed defined who he was. He intends to move on and build something new.