

THE LAST TOWN ON EARTH
CHARACTER LIST AND DESCRIPTIONS
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by
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Setting

The novel is set during World War I (1917 and 1918) in Commonwealth, Washington, an isolated utopian mill town fifty-to-one-hundred miles north of Seattle. When Graham shoots the soldier, the month is October and America is embroiled in World War I.

Background considerations:

American Protective League

A Department-of-Justice “deputized” citizen group charged with monitoring the behaviors of their fellow townspeople. Members “weeded out” dissenters, draft saboteurs, and anti-war protestors. The Wilson Administration supported the APL’s harassment of dissenters, especially the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies). In the novel, Joseph Miller, Nathan Hightower, Lionel Winslow, and Sheriff Skip Bartrum of Timber Falls are members.

C.O.

Conscientious objector. An individual who, based on his or her anti-war philosophical or religious beliefs, refuses to engage in combat and, in some cases, refuses to support any war effort. C.O. status resulted in individuals either being drafted into some military occupational specialization that did not involve front-line fighting during World War I or, if they refused to take part in any war-related activities, being assigned homeland duties to support the United States. In the novel, C.O.’s are victims of brutal hazing at the hands of drafted soldiers.

Everett Massacre

On November 5, 1916, a major clash of union members, encouraged by the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), and vigilantes hired by business owners in Everett, Washington. Shots were fired and striking workers were broken. In the novel, this event serves as a catalyst to drive the socialist-minded Charles Worthy to split with his father and brothers and buy land that he shapes into the mill town of Commonwealth.

Four Minute Men

Volunteers who delivered war propaganda to the masses in America at any available venue during World War I. The volunteers were a result of President Woodrow Wilson’s Committee on Public Information, overseen by George Creel, a newspaper editor from

Mississippi. Four Minute Men appear in the novel, delivering anti-German messages and moving people to volunteer for combat service in Europe and to purchase war bonds to support America's war effort.

Wobbly

A member of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), a union founded in Chicago in 1905 that encouraged workers to come together to overthrow the moneyed employer class. Rebecca Worthy and Jarred Rankle are supporters of this organization in the novel.

Central Characters:

Amelia Stone

Pregnant wife of Graham Stone, mother of baby Millie, and person in charge of the Commonwealth Community Gardens. When she was seven her mother died and she was charged with caring for three younger brothers and running the home. She is skilled in canning, sewing, knitting, and home repair.

Carl Jasper

Jasper is an abusive paper mill foreman in Redmond, Washington, who takes in Fiona and Philip for a year. In trouble, Carl and Fiona flee in a new Ford. Carl is driving when his car leaves the road and enters a ravine, where Fiona is killed and Philip is seriously injured.

Charles Worthy

The fifty-two-year-old adopted father of Philip who founded the town of Commonwealth and runs the local mill. Once a quiet bookkeeper, he ascends to become a town leader, with the help of his wife, Rebecca. Charles is the son of Reginald Worthy, who had moved his family to Everett, Washington, in 1890 following his wife and son's deaths from pneumonia the year prior. Charles was twenty-four at the time and came to hate Portland, which was just developing as a town and was far inferior to Boston. His dislike for Portland, coupled with his father's insistence that he "learn the numbers," drove him to focus on bookkeeping as his father and brothers operated the physical mill. In comparison to his father and his brothers, Charles does not agree with cheating people by raising prices or with treating employees poorly during times of prosperity. He founded the town of Commonwealth as a utopian haven for mistreated mill workers and those in search of a better life.

The Conscientious Objector (The First American Soldier)

A young man who appears in uniform carrying a gun at the edge of Commonwealth. Supposedly, his ship capsized and the soldier has spent two days in the forest when he wanders upon Graham's and Philip's guard outpost and begs them for food and shelter.

Fearful that the coughing and sneezing man has the flu, Graham shoots him twice and kills him when the soldier refuses to move beyond Commonwealth to the contaminated town of Timber Falls, where everyone has the flu. Later in the novel, we learn that this individual was indeed the conscientious objector whom Frank Summers defended while fellow soldiers were assaulting this C.O.

Doc Banes (Doctor Martin Banes)

The 56-year-old friend of Charles and Rebecca Worthy who gave up retirement to help the Worthy's grow Commonwealth. He is the only physician in the town, trained in medicine in 1886. He had seen the field of medicine advance rapidly during his career. Margaret, his wife, had died of pneumonia five years earlier and they had had no children. Doc helps establish the quarantine in Commonwealth to stave off the flu, pays medical visits to those suffering with the symptoms, and spends a great deal of time in the novel counseling the sick and their families.

Elsie Metzger

Tomboyish 15-year-old daughter of Flora and Alfred Metzger, owners of the Metzger General Store in Commonwealth. Philip considers her "one of the best looking girls in town" (37-38). Flora, Elsie's mother, attempts to pair her daughter with Philip Worthy in the novel. Later in the novel Elsie falls ill and dies from the flu.

Fiona

Deceased mother of Philip who is killed when the car, driven by paper mill foreman Carl Jasper, leaves the road in a snowstorm and enters a ravine. Alive, Fiona, abandoned by her husband, drags Philip from family member to family member. Fiona's actions (sleeping around and stealing from family members) gradually results in her being ostracized by her entire family. In Redmond, Washington, Fiona meets Carl Jasper and she and Philip live with him for a year. Fiona once warned Philip that if he didn't go along with her lifestyle (sleeping around and leaving him alone at home as a child), she'd do what other mothers would have done in her situation—leave him at an orphanage.

Flora Metzger

Wife of Alfred Metzger, mother of Elsie, and manager of the Metzger General Store in Commonwealth. Flora contracts the flu from interactions with patrons in her store and later dies.

Private Frank Summers (The Second American Soldier)

The second soldier to appear on the road to Commonwealth in the novel. Philip Worthy confronts him and they exchange gunfire. Philip doesn't have the nerve to kill the man, and risks contamination by attempting to shelter and feed him. Mo, who observes Philip attempting to help the man, locks him and Philip in the cellar of an abandoned storage building. The soldier contends that their troop ship accidentally sunk in the ocean and he

was making his way back to Fort Jenkins when he happened upon Commonwealth. We later learn that Frank is really fleeing following his having accidentally broken the neck of (and killed) a fellow soldier who was assaulting a conscientious objector. Frank flees with the C.O. and they eventually part. The restrained Frank is eventually stabbed to death by Graham Stone in the cellar of the storage building for potentially bringing the flu to Commonwealth (which he did not). Graham buries Frank in an unmarked grave.

Jarred Rankle

Charles Worthy's head foreman at the mill in Commonwealth. Rankle shares Wobbly sentiments with Rebecca Worthy, and is considered a man of great efficiency and intellect by Charles. A man whose wife and child left him, he acts like an uncle to Laura and Philip, and often comes to the Worthy home for meals.

Rankle is savagely beaten by members of the American Protective League from Timber Falls when he refuses to produce his deferment papers and criticizes the men for their actions. At the conclusion of the story, he is still being held prisoner in the jail in Timber Falls for failing to register for the draft.

J.B. Merriwether

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

J.B. is the mysterious "man in the Model T" who approaches the Commonwealth quarantine sign early in the novel and later unknowingly warns members of the American Protective League in Timber Falls of the situation. J.B. remains distant from Gwen when she is ill, preferring for Violet to care for the girl. He is terrified of catching the flu.

J.B. joins the members of the American Protective League from Timber Falls in visiting the quarantine blockade outside of Commonwealth. Eventually, via a telegram, he learns of his son's death and suffers the loss of Gwen to the flu.

Later in the novel, J.B. joins Sheriff Bartrum and other members of the A.P.L. as they return to Commonwealth to apprehend draft-dodgers, and he assists with the assaults of those who cannot produce their deferment papers.

Joseph Miller

A popular and successful business banker in Timber Falls, the third highest-ranking member of the Pioneers Club, and a member of the American Protective League. Miller calls J.B. Merriwether in for questioning concerning the quarantine he observed in Commonwealth.

Graham Stone

One of the novel's central characters, Graham is twenty-five and is in Commonwealth to find a stable life after surviving a difficult early life. The narrator tells us that he fled from a drunken father and has led a life of fights, jail time, and conflict with law enforcement, but became a foreman at a good mill. He has a pregnant wife, Amelia, and an infant daughter, Millie. He had "adopted" Philip, who he views as a younger brother. Graham taught Philip to hunt and to do construction work, and Philip looks up to him. Graham shoots and kills the first soldier who approaches the quarantine barricade at the edge of Commonwealth as he's standing at guard with Philip. Focused upon protecting his family and his assets from ruin, Graham spends many hours on guard duty following the shooting. Near the conclusion of the novel, he stabs Frank Summers, the second soldier, to death and buries him in an unmarked grave. He also confronts the members of the A.P.L. when they come to his home to accost him, later shooting the tires out of an A.P.L. vehicle containing Commonwealth prisoners. In the end of the novel, Graham decides that he must leave Commonwealth and begin a new life with his family, away from the tensions surrounding the war.

Laura Worthy

Fourteen-year-old adoptive sister of Philip and daughter of Charles and Rachel Worthy. Laura suspects that the Germans have engineered the flu as a weapon against America. She shows compassion for her stepbrother, visiting him while he is quarantined. She eventually contracts the flu.

Leonard

A bachelor mill worker who appears to have contracted the flu in its early stages in Commonwealth. Doc Banes finds him dead in bed when he visits the man following Jeanine's comment that Leonard never showed up for work at the mill. Leonard has "bled out" throughout his room. Doc Banes, having visited the ill Yolen, understands that Leonard's death signals the fact that the flu is definitely in Commonwealth.

Lionel Winslow

The 30-year-old son of a local timber baron, Winslow is a member of the American Protective League in Timber Falls.

Mo

An ex-boxer from Detroit who killed his sparring partner and fled to the North West when he was 25. Now in his 30s, bald, and with a nose bent from having it broken in fights, Mo is an incessant talker who tends to irritate others. He volunteers for guard duty with Philip and catches Philip befriendng the second soldier to visit Commonwealth during the quarantine.

Nathan Hightower

A mill foreman who lost two sons to World War I, Hightower is a member of the American Protective League and friend to Joseph Miller, Lionel Winslow, and Sheriff Skip Bartrum in Timber Falls. When the A.P.L. visits Commonwealth on both occasions, he is one of the chief antagonizers, threatening and physically assaulting members of the town.

Philip Worthy

The protagonist of the novel, Philip is a sixteen-year-old friend of Graham and a two-year resident of Commonwealth. Philip grew up without a father or siblings, and was moved throughout the west by an irresponsible and neglectful mother, until Charles Worthy saved his life following a car accident. Worthy, who comes to be Philip's adopted father, made Philip his apprentice at the Commonwealth mill, drawing the disdain of other mill workers.

Philip battles against a sense of poor self-esteem throughout the novel. This comes as a direct result of his mother's neglect of him during his childhood and the embarrassment he feels due to his limp from an auto accident (he must walk with a block of wood in one shoe).

Philip is with Graham on guard duty when Graham shoots the conscientious objector. He later exchanges gunfire with the second soldier, Frank Summers. Moreover, he is quarantined with Frank when Mo catches him giving quarters to the potentially infected soldier.

Philip later contracts the flu, but recovers enough to come to Graham's defense at the conclusion of the novel when the A.P.L., under the direction of Sheriff Bartrum, comes to town to arrest draft-dodgers. Philip shoots and kills Bartrum when the sheriff handles his gun during their dispute.

Rebecca Worthy

Philip's adopted mother. Rebecca is the daughter of the late Jay Woodson, a leftist who wrote little-read "provocative disquisitions on the country's coming economic collapse" (15) while alive. Rebecca married Charles Worthy after Jay passed away, but continued her father's legacy by leading suffrage and anti-war groups and helping build Commonwealth, "a new hybrid of socialist haven and capitalist enterprise" (15). Rebecca supported Charles in stepping forward as a community leader and building Commonwealth, but she opposes the quarantine in Commonwealth throughout the novel. Following the quarantine, Rebecca vows to return to her work. Her first action will be to come to the aid of the jailed Jarred Rankle.

Sheriff Skip Bartrum

Bartrum, the sheriff of Timber Falls who is sympathetic to Prohibition, is a member of the American Protective League. He leads members of the A.P.L. from Timber Falls in visiting Commonwealth to contest the quarantine, and he returns with men to arrest draft-dodgers later in the novel. Bartrum is shot dead by Philip, who confronts him as members of the A.P.L. accost and assault Graham.

Yolen

A mill worker whose wife, Jeanine, reports is ill. Doc Banes visits their home and realizes that the flu has entered Commonwealth. Yolen had been drinking prior to his illness, with his friends, Otto and Ray, two other individuals linked to the flu's arrival.