

Plot: Historical
Time: 1621-1622

Captain Ralph Percy, a Virginia planter and veteran of the Dutch war for independence. He was among the first settlers at Jamestown. Against his better judgment, he takes the advice of his good friend, John Rolfe, and seeks a wife among the women who arrive in the colony early in 1621. Rescuing her from the rude attentions of some of his fellow colonists, Percy chooses on impulse the haughty but beautiful Jocelyn Leigh. By his marriage, he incurs the wrath of Lord Carnal. He risks imprisonment and death to win the respect and eventually the love of his wife. At the end of this quest, Percy saves Jamestown by warning his fellow settlers of the projected slaughter of all the colonists by the united Indian tribes of eastern Virginia.

Jocelyn Leigh, a ward of the English king, James I. She flees to Virginia under an assumed name to escape being forced into an unwanted marriage with Lord Carnal, a man whom she hates. In desperation, she weds Captain Ralph Percy to gain his protection. Although she confesses her deception to her husband, her pride will not permit her to love the man whose name and devotion she has accepted. When Carnal pursues her to Virginia, Jocelyn realizes that her flight may cost Ralph his life. Slowly she falls in love with the man whose loyalty never falters despite arrest, torture, and almost certain death. Surviving the attack on Jamestown, Jocelyn is reunited with the husband whom she now loves as well as respects.

Lord Carnal, one of the favorites of James I. His personality combines all the loathsome qualities associated with those handsome young men who preyed on the English king's weaknesses. There are no redeeming aspects to Carnal: He follows Jocelyn Leigh to Virginia to force her into an unwanted marriage simply to see her suffer, and he marks Captain Percy for death by thwarting his plan. After an accident robs Carnal of his physical beauty, he escapes from his failures to retain the king's favor and to win Jocelyn Leigh by taking poison.

Jeremy Sparrow, a former actor turned minister. He is a close friend of Captain Ralph Percy and is the clergyman who marries him to Jocelyn Leigh. A giant of a man who possesses both great strength and courage, Sparrow saves Ralph and Jocelyn from certain death and effects their eventual reunion. A ventriloquist, he uses his talent both to amuse and to serve his friends when they are in danger.

Diccon, who like Percy is a veteran of the Dutch wars. Because of minor criminal offenses, he is indentured to his former commander. Unlike the majority of the novel's

characters, Diccon possesses a personality that has real depth. He is both saint and sinner, a surly, brawling man who attempts at one point to murder Ralph Percy, only to sacrifice himself for that same master whom he loves and hates. A man of the lowest social class, he is nevertheless a complex individual, a bundle of contradictions.

John Rolfe, the husband of Pocahontas, the close friend of Captain Ralph Percy and his defender from the attacks of Lord Carnal and the authorities of the Virginia Company. A well-known historical personality, Rolfe was one of the early leaders of England's first successful colony in North America. The tragic early death of his wife left him a widower at the time of the attempted slaughter of the English in Virginia, and he moves through the novel as a sad but ever-noble figure. Endowed with all the virtues associated with persons of gentle birth, he is the obvious opposite of Lord Carnal.

Nicolo, Lord Carnal's physician, the personification of evil. His death by self-administered poison is regretted by no one, including his master. A combination of all the bad qualities attributed by seventeenth century Englishmen to all foreigners, and especially to Italians, Nicolo is woven into the fabric of the story like a dark thread twisted into one of the tapestries favored by the early Virginians.

Nantauquas, the son of Powhatan and the brother-in-law of John Rolfe, the noble savage brought to life. A friend of the English settlers and especially of Captain Ralph Percy, he is haunted by the fear of what may happen to his people and their way of life if the number of colonists increases. Although he reluctantly participates in the massive attack by the Indians on the Virginia colony, he spares the lives of Ralph Percy, Jocelyn Leigh, and Jeremy Sparrow. Sorrow and a certain fatalism cling to Nantauquas like the fur mantle he wears.

—Clifton W. Potter, Jr.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Author: Harper Lee
First published: 1960
Genre: Novel
Locale: Alabama
Plot: Bildungsroman
Time: 1932-1935

Jean Louise "Scout" Finch, a five-year-old girl when the story begins. She is smart and precocious, having learned to read at an early age by studying her father's law books. A hot-head, more willing to fight than to think, she is often in trouble. She serves as a willing accomplice in her older brother's escapades. It is in her clear, honest voice that the story is told.

Jeremy “Jem” Atticus Finch, Scout’s brother, nine years old when the novel begins. He is thoughtful, with a slower fuse than Scout, and often acts as interpreter to his sister of the world’s confusing contradictions and vagaries. He intends to be a lawyer like his father when he grows up.

Atticus Finch, Scout and Jem’s father, a lawyer in Maycomb, Alabama. A widower, almost fifty years old, Atticus responds to the challenge of rearing two small children by treating them as equals, with dignity and honesty. Atticus is a rare man, not only because he is a keen judge of human nature but also because he is able to forgive his fellow citizens their faults. When he defends a black man charged with raping a white woman, he does so knowing full well the wrath he will draw from the community. Standing up to the town’s anger and ridicule requires both physical and moral courage, and Atticus shows that he has both.

Calpurnia, the Finch’s cook and housekeeper, a self-educated black woman in her fifties. Calpurnia acts as Scout and Jem’s substitute mother. It is through Calpurnia that the Finches learn how the black community is responding to the rape charge against Tom Robinson.

Charles “Dill” Baker Harris, a fatherless boy one year older than Scout. Shunted from home to home, Dill comes to Maycomb in the summers to stay with his aunt. A grand storyteller and an inspired actor, he is Scout and Jem’s favorite playmate. Dill is based on Truman Capote, Harper Lee’s lifelong friend from her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama.

Arthur “Boo” Radley, a recluse in his forties who lives with his brother, next door to the Finches. Boo was put under the equivalent of house arrest by his father years ago as punishment for a teenage prank. Few have seen him since, and many of the children’s games revolve around trying to make Boo come out.

Tom Robinson, a twenty-five-year-old black laborer, married and the father of three children. Tom is an honest, well-respected man. Although he has a disabled left arm, he is a strong and steady worker. Tom ignores the social dicta that forbid a black man from associating with a white woman, and, out of pity, helps overworked Mayella Ewell with some of her heavier chores. He is killed trying to escape from prison before Atticus can appeal his conviction for rape.

Helen Robinson, Tom’s wife.

Robert (Bob) E. Lee Ewell, a cocky, uneducated widower who spends his relief checks on green whiskey and lets his oldest daughter, Mayella, worry about how to feed herself and the other seven children from what she can forage from the town dump. After Atticus implies in court that Bob, not

Tom, beat Mayella, Bob vows revenge. He is found dead with a knife in his ribs after Scout and Jem are attacked.

Mayella Violet Ewell, Bob Ewell’s nineteen-year-old daughter. She is a stocky, friendless girl more or less resigned to a difficult life. When her attempt to kiss Tom is discovered, she quickly joins her father in accusing the black man of rape.

Alexandra Finch Hancock, Atticus’ married sister. She strongly disapproves of how Atticus is rearing his children, especially Scout. During the trial, she comes to stay with the Finches.

John (Jack) Hale Finch, Atticus’ younger brother by ten years, a physician.

Miss Maudie Atkinson, an independent-minded widow who lives near the Finches. Like Atticus, she treats Scout and Jem with respect, and they enjoy her company.

Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, a very old invalid who breaks her addiction to morphine, the painkiller prescribed to her, before she dies.

Miss Stephanie Crawford, the neighborhood busybody.

—Liz Marshall

To the Land of the Cattails

Author: Aharon Appelfeld

First published: 1986

Genre: Novel

Locale: En route between Austria and Bukovina

Plot: Allegory

Time: 1938-1940

Toni Strauss, née Rosenfeld, a Jewish woman who was divorced by her gentile husband when she was only twenty years old; they had been married three years. A dark, beautiful woman, she has had many lovers. A year after an elderly lover dies and leaves her a legacy, Toni decides that she and her son must return to her birthplace. She is short on education and academic knowledge, which leads her son to think that she is a stupid woman, yet people fall in love with her wherever she goes. Toni almost dies of typhus when they are in Buszwn. Throughout the book, Toni experiences an ever-growing fear. It is an oppression that grows greater as she and Rudi near her parents’ village, just as her craving for coffee increases. In the end, she is taken by the Nazis, along with her parents, to the concentration camps.

Rudi Strauss, Toni’s son by her gentile husband, August Strauss. Rudi loves his mother but cannot stand the way that her mind seems to be a jumble of thoughts clouded with fear.

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