

Horseman, Pass By Study Guide

Horseman, Pass By by Larry McMurtry

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Plot Summary

Lonnie is a young man growing up on his grandfather's ranch in Texas, in the 1950s. Lonnie lives with his Granddad and Grandma and his uncle Hud, who is Grandma's son from a previous marriage. Their hired hands include Lonzo, Jesse, who has only recently been hired, and Halmea, the African-American cook.

One day, one of Granddad's cattle drops dead for no apparent reason. They call in the state veterinarian to consult, and he fears that they have an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease, an extremely contagious cattle disease. The state vet brings in lots of men to test all of Granddad's cattle, so the entire herd has to be rounded up and quarantined. After a tense week, it turns out that the cows have the worst strain of the disease, and that they will all have to be shot and burned. Granddad at first resists, insisting that he will not shoot his own healthy cattle. Finally he relents, and the men go through a hellish day of blood and death, destroying every cow on the ranch. Granddad seems devastated.

In the evenings, Lonnie is filled with restlessness, and he sometimes drives into Thalia, the nearest town, to goof off with his friends, and see if they can scare up some trouble. Mostly they just get drunk, and Lonnie longs for the day that he can leave this rural area and see the world. Some evenings Lonnie pesters Halmea, trying to get a chance to see her in her nightgown, since he has a crush on her. One night, Lonnie hears a commotion in Halmea's cabin and discovers that his uncle Hud is attacking Halmea. Hud has already beat Jesse unconscious, and he beats up Lonnie, then rapes Halmea. The next morning, Halmea quits.

Since the rodeo is in town, Lonnie goes to see the shows, but his friend Hermy gets trampled by a bull and is hospitalized. On the way home, Lonnie and Hud get into an accident, striking Granddad, who is crawling, senile, on the road. Hud "puts Granddad out of his misery" with a shotgun. Afterward, Lonnie is not sure if Hud just wanted to take Granddad's land from him. Lonnie decides that there is no reason to stay there anymore and goes off to hitchhike around the world.



Prologue- Chapter 1

Prologue- Chapter 1 Summary

In the Prologue, Lonnie reminisces about his childhood on his family ranch in Texas, and how times have changed. He remembers how much slower life was before the arrival of mass communication. Lonnie talks about how the transformation is evidenced in the attitudes of the young people, who are very restless, wanting to go out and experience all the excitement life has to offer. Lonnie cannot help but see how faster, more convenient technology has pushed aside the rural way of life, changing things forever.

Young Lonnie is seventeen and lives with his grandparents and uncle on the family ranch. Granddad is old and has patience that comes from many years of doing the same slow, hard work. Granny is old and crabby, and always finds something to complain about. Granny has a son from a previous marriage named Hud. Hud works on the farm and is very good at what he does, but he is belligerent most of the time and likes to tease anyone who shows weakness. Hud, at 35, enjoys going into town every night after a long day of work, attending dances and rodeos. Lonnie envies Hud for his freedom to experience the excitement of the world, but avoids Hud when he can. Granny is unhappily preparing to go into the city for kidney surgery. The next day, Hud is to drive her to the hospital, but this does not stop him from tearing into the night in his car, off to chase girls.

Halmea is the black cook who lives in a small house on the ranch, and she is the only one who can ever keep Granny happy. Halmea is lazy a lot of the time, but she gets the job done in between reading magazines and painting her toenails. Although she is old, and makes no effort to be sexy, Lonnie focuses his teenage lust on Halmea. Whenever Lonnie gets a glimpse of skin showing beneath her old work dress, he pretends not to notice, but Halmea just laughs and tells him not to wet his diaper. After dinner, Jesse finally shows up, having finished his work for the day. Jesse is the new hired hand, and Lonnie loves to hear Jesse talk about his life. Halmea warms up some leftovers for Lonnie and Jesse, and as the three of them talk in the kitchen, Lonnie feels left out because he is too young to share in their camaraderie. Halmea tells Jesse that what he needs is a wife and children, but Jesse answers that he has enough trouble getting by on his own, without having to support a family. Lonnie follows Jesse back to the bunkhouse, getting Jesse to tell him about his younger days, and the excitement of having a car to take to rodeos and dances and bars. Although Jesse is tired out and poor, Lonnie feels bursting with energy, desperate for a time when he can experience all the excitement of modern times and big cities.



Prologue- Chapter 1 Analysis

Through the different ages of the characters, McMurtry presents different perspectives of life. Jesse especially represents the contrast, and connection, between the exuberant restlessness of youth, and the tired resignation of an adult who has tried and failed many times. Jesse is young enough that he has not yet succeeded in obtaining any of the things that he considers worth having: a family, a home, and some nice sycamore trees on his own land. He also expresses his pity for a nearby farmer who hires himself out to anyone who can pay him, so that he can scrape together enough to support his three children. Jesse can still remember the excitement of being seventeen and how much fun it was. He remarks that the time slips away so fast that he knows he will never have that feeling again. Jesse's physical condition also shows how his age is a sort of transition. He has a gimpy leg, which Hud likes to make fun of, but Lonnie notes that as far as cowboys go, Jesse is in pretty good shape. In contrast, Granddad's leg is messed up much worse from a roping accident. This shows that life deals out many injuries, and that growing older requires being injured many times.

Another indication of the theme of growing older, is Lonnie's growing awareness of sex. Although he is filled with lust for Halmea, it is a grimy, dirty lust, centered on the everyday, gross details of farm life. Lonnie is far more interested in Halmea's sweaty armpit hair than in the girls his own age. Since Lonnie has grown up in the dust of a Texas ranch, he does not see anything distasteful about a saggy, middle-aged woman, but instead feels an earthy sexuality in the grit and grime.



Chapters 2-3

Chapters 2-3 Summary

In the morning, Hud returns from town, having stayed up all night avoiding a storm. He is a few hours late picking up Granny, and she eagerly gets into the car, and the two depart for the hospital. Soon Newt Garrett, the local horse doctor, shows up, because Granddad has called him to ask about a heifer that has dropped dead. Lonzo, the other hired hand, has stayed in the pasture all night, guarding the cow from the buzzards. Although Hud thinks that they should just take the carcass to the processing plant so that they can still use the tallow and hide, Granddad thinks that the sudden death seems suspicious, and wants to have Newt check it out. Lonnie, Jesse, and Granddad all take Newt to see the heifer, and bring Lonzo his breakfast. Newt does not see any obvious cause of death, so he suggests cutting open the belly of the cow, to examine the inside. Newt suggests that Granddad should call the state veterinarian to take a look. Granddad is not happy to hear this, since he hates the government, and does not want to invite them onto his land. He also finds it very worrying that Newt would recommend another vet. Jesse takes a turn at watching the carcass, and the others return to the homestead.

Lonnie fools around, trying to convince Halmea to go swimming with him. Halmea is enjoying the absence of Granny, and taking advantage of the situation by playing whatever she wants on the radio, lounging on the best furniture, and goofing off. Although Halmea is in a mood to go fishing, she quickly realizes that Lonnie is just hoping to see her in a bathing suit, and laughingly tells him to go cool himself off. Frustrated, Lonnie goes and pulls weeds in the chicken yard. In the evening, he convinces Jesse and Lonzo to go into Thalia, the tiny town ten miles away, and the three spend the evening at the movies. Lonnie sees his buddies at the show, and wishes that he had left the hired hands behind, so he could have fun with people his own age. Jesse and Lonzo talk about how little entertainment there is available, and Jesse councils Lonnie to come alone next time he feels so restless.

The next day, Mr. Burriss, the state vet, shows up to look at the dead cow. When he sees that the animal has been cut open, he is dismayed and says that it is the worst thing that could have been done to the carcass. After examining the animal and cutting out her tongue for a specimen, Mr. Burriss tells Granddad that he fears that the cow died of hoof-and-mouth disease. Mr. Burriss urges them to get all the cattle on the ranch together for examination, and says that the ranch is now on a strict quarantine, so that no animals can arrive or leave. Mr. Burriss hopes that it is a milder strain of the disease, but warns Granddad that if his herd is infected with a bad strain, the entire herd will have to be shot. Granddad is worried, but tells Mr. Burriss that although he will quarantine his animals, he will not shoot healthy cows. On the way back, Jesse complains that he has the worst luck, and that he should never have come to this ranch. Lonnie wonders why Jesse always complains so much, thinking that life is not so bad as Jesse thinks.



Chapters 2-3 Analysis

At first, when the dead heifer is mentioned, it is treated very casually, as an issue of how they will dispose of the carcass in a profitable way. When Newt first examines the cow, he is confused as to the cause of death, and this is the first hint that this is going to be a real problem. His suggestion that Granddad call in the state vet foreshadows the impending doom that hoof-and-mouth disease could bring to the ranch, and to the state. This possible future desolation is also reflected in the status of the town of Thalia. Although Thalia used to be a decent-sized town in the days of the oil boom, with various businesses and entertainments available for oilers to spend all their money on, the oil has dried up, and the oilmen have moved on. Now, all that is left is a town square, a movie house, a pool hall, and a truck stop. Just as prosperity and busy economic activity have abandoned the rural area, so hoof-and-mouth disease could also destroy the fortune of any rancher unlucky enough to have it infect his stock. Although the disease does not always kill its victims outright, it is so contagious that in the United States, all animals which may be carrying it must be killed and burned.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The next day, all the men on the farm start out early to round up all the cattle. It takes them all day, and at sunset they have finally gathered the entire herd. Lonzo suggests that they may have to fight the government off to save the cattle, but Granddad says that first he wants to know what the problem really is. The vet wants to try infecting a few sheep and horses from the first dead heifer, to find out what strain of hoof-and-mouth it is. If the disease is contagious across species, then it is not so dangerous, but if it can only infect cows, then it is the worst possible strain. After they are done with their work, Lonnie gets permission to go into Thalia for the evening, ostensibly so he can pick up some groceries.

In Thalia, Lonnie meets his friends at the pool hall, and after a few games, they decide to drive to the state line to get some beer. Although they are below the legal drinking age, the old storekeeper does not care, as long as there are no cops around. The boys head back to Thalia, drinking and goofing off. Since everything is already closed for the night, they amuse themselves by sitting on the benches and bragging to one another. A visiting cousin keeps talking about how much better Oklahoma City is than Thalia, and with the beer's encouragement, two boys agree to fight for the town's honor, to show who is really tough. When the half-hearted fight is drunkenly concluded, Lonnie drives some of his friends home, and heads back to the ranch. He is filled with a longing for some sort of different situation, since he is tired of the quiet routine of the country. He dreams about all the girls he has known, and all the ones he has never met.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The way Lonnie spends his day draws quite a contrast between the work-oriented pace of the farm, with some job always needing to be done, and the exuberant, hyper frenzy of the teenagers, all of them itching for stimulation, and not knowing what to do with themselves. The boys are bored with their dull country life. This is interesting, since sex, violence, blood and gore are no strangers to farm life, and Lonnie has certainly faced situations that would make any city boy cringe. It is also interesting to note that as far as exciting stimuli go, impending doom and the prospect of mass slaughter are pretty exciting. Since the outside world has been able to influence the youth of Texas, they find themselves longing not just for something exciting to happen, but something that is different from what they have known before. This attitude emphasizes Lonnie's youth. The other characters, like Jesse and Granddad, have been through enough in their lives that they do not mind sitting patiently, knowing that life packs enough punches, without having to seek out excitement.



Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary

The state vet returns, with several technicians, to test the cattle for disease. It is not easy work, and requires the help of all the hands on the farm, as well as a few neighbors. While Lonnie is trying to wrestle a cow into the chute so she can be tested, the cow kicks him into the fence, where he sustains a concussion. After a little while, Lonnie gets back to work, fearing ridicule if he lets his injury keep him down. Soon, though, it is too much for him and he throws up everywhere, then returns to the house, barely able to walk. Halmea is concerned when she sees Lonnie, and makes him lie down in his room. It is blazing hot, and Halmea brings lemonade up to Lonnie's room. This tenderness touches him.

When Lonnie wakes up, the men have just finished their hard work, and he joins the others for supper. Just when they think they have finally earned some leisure time, they hear Hud and Granny returning in the car, so they have to help unload the car. As Lonnie is carrying the bags in, he sees Halmea in the kitchen, sobbing and holding her breast. Lonnie asks if he can get her anything, and Halmea suggests a gun. Confused, Lonnie asks Hud if he knows what is the matter, and Hud laughs. He giggles that he grabbed Halmea's breast when walking by. Lonnie tells Hud not to do that anymore, and Hud tells Lonnie that he does not have exclusive access to Halmea's body. Unable to sleep, Lonnie goes to Halmea's small house, and taps on her window until she hears him. She is afraid, but Lonnie just tells her that he wanted to thank her for the lemonade. Although he would normally be excited by the sight of her in her nightgown, tonight he feels subdued.

Granddad has bought some milk cows, which can not be delivered to the ranch with the quarantine in effect. His neighbor Hank agrees to buy them, so Lonnie, Hud and Granddad go to town to get the cows. Lonnie is bored, and watches the cattle sale until an annoying boy at the stockyards drives him away with incessant chatter. On the way home, Lonnie is wedged between Hud and Granddad, who finally have a chance to discuss the hoof-and-mouth disease problem. Hud had previously advised Granddad not to buy the cow which turned out to be infected, because Hud thinks that Mexican cattle is diseased. Now that Hud has been proven right, Granddad wonders what Hud thinks should be done about the situation. At first, Hud answers cryptically, telling Granddad that it is fifteen years too late to ask his opinion. Hud tells the story of the family, some of which Lonnie has never heard.

Many years before, Lonnie's father is trying to protect his mother from a snake by shooting it, but the bullet ricochets, killing the mother. The widowed Granddad nearly dies in a severe rodeo accident, and a kind woman (Hud's mother) nurses him. He asks her to marry him, and then they are both surprised when Granddad recovers from his injuries. Granddad takes Hud on as a stepson and extra hand on the ranch, and soon discovers that the nurse and her son are not such nice people. Nonetheless, he passes



many years with them, and discourages Hud going to college, since he needs someone to help out. When Hud gets drafted for World War II, Granddad has the power to keep Hud out of the war, but lets him go. Because of this, Hud can never forgive Granddad. On the way home, Hud tells Granddad that he plans on taking the ranch away from him, by whatever method he can. Hud predicts that all the cattle will have to die, and that this will lead to him inheriting the ranch. Granddad tells him that he is still the owner of the ranch, and that he is not planning on giving it to Hud any time soon.

Chapters 5-6 Analysis

There is a lot of family background in this section, which explains some of the tension in the family. Hud feels justified in trying to take his stepfather's land, because in his opinion, he has worked many years for free, just like a son. Unfortunately, Hud is not really consistent enough to make a good rancher; he is more concerned with having fun in the evenings and getting others to do his work. Hud thinks that his actions are acceptable because Granddad sent him off to fight, and possibly die, in a war. The story of Lonnie's father and biological grandmother is heartbreaking, and shows how close ranchers must live to death. In classical Greek literature, the act of killing a parent is one of the worst things someone can do, and is punished severely by the gods. Here is a situation with literal and figurative patricide: Hud wants to take away Granddad's livelihood, declaring him senile and incompetent to run the ranch, while Lonnie's father literally killed his own mother. Hud's treatment of Halmea could be considered a metaphor for his viewpoint of the ranch. Just as Hud wants to take all of Granddad's cattle, Hud tells Lonnie that "You ain't got no private milkin' rights" (Ch. 5, p. 68). This shows that Hud sees Halmea as just another piece of property on the ranch, which ought to be his, so he will take what he can get.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

After hearing Hud and Granddad's conversation, Lonnie is confused and depressed. He feels a consuming restlessness, which he tries to abate by shooting frogs in the early morning. He again finds himself at Halmea's window, and she counsels him not to waste time thinking "what if," but instead to buckle down and work. Lonnie listens to Jesse's stories about riding on the rodeo circuit, and he wishes desperately to travel somewhere that is more exciting than the ranch. Lonnie remembers his one trip to Fort Worth, and longs for stimulation and excitement. Soon it is time for the rodeo to come to town, and Lonnie goes early one morning to watch the rodeo people arrive. It is the one exciting event of the year for the town of Thalia, and also the one time when many old friends get together and have a good time. Lonnie observes the crowd, most of whom have been celebrating all night, and feels like a naive country bumpkin.

Mr. Burris, the state vet, returns to the ranch with news. Although the tests must still continue for one more day, it looks like Granddad's cattle have the worst possible strain of hoof-and-mouth disease. Mr. Burris explains that if they do not shoot all of Granddad's herd, the disease could spread, and kill one-third of the cattle in Texas. The vet assures Granddad that he will be paid a decent amount of money by the government for every cow slaughtered, and suggests that Granddad could check to see if there is any oil under the ranch that he could drill. Mr. Burris explains that the quarantine will have to last for a full year, before Granddad can bring any more animals to the ranch.

Granddad tells Mr. Burris that he will do all he can to help the government's efforts to cure hoof-and-mouth disease, including offering up his cattle to test cures. However, he is not willing to shoot his cattle, for he remembers seeing this done in the days of the Depression, and says that it was a horrible thing to see. He has a lawyer who is looking into what options he has, but Mr. Burris tells Granddad that this issue has already been fought many times in court. Granddad talks about how important it is for his money to come from something his own hands have done, which is why he does not want to allow anyone to drill for oil. If he did that, he would be receiving meaningless money, since he would have no hand in the work. To Granddad, the cattle are not just cows worth a lot of money. They are what he does, and the product of years of loving, hard work.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

Both Halmea and Granddad talk about what it is like to be helpless in the face of some great tragedy. They have both faced many tragedies in their lives, and they have learned that some injuries and scars never go away. Halmea and Granddad have realized that in life, a person takes a fall, and gets back up again if they can, and keeps doing it until they can no longer get up again. This idea is also illustrated in Lonnie and



Jesse. When Lonnie is filled with restlessness, he rides Granddad's horse at a full run, and falls off, rolling across the ground. Jesse, who sees the accident, is shocked and worried, and says that in all his days of the rodeo, he has never seen a harder-looking fall. Lonnie is fine, though, and feels wonderful for having survived such a breathtaking fall. This emphasizes Lonnie's youth, and the way he can bounce back from anything, physical or mental. Jesse is about fifteen years older, and he has taken so many falls in the rodeo that he is tired of it all.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Having a few free hours, Jesse, Lonnie, and Halmea go to Halmea's house to play Chinese checkers. Lonnie easily wins every game, but all three have a wonderful time talking and laughing. Jesse and Halmea discuss many of the social differences between blacks and whites, until Halmea is laughing so hard she can not hold the marbles. That evening, she puts the family's supper in the stove, while she goes to a fish fry with some friends. When Lonnie goes back to the farmhouse, Hud also arrives, very drunk and belligerent. Hud is outraged that Halmea is not there to serve him, and Granny submissively gives him his supper, afraid of her own son when he is in a mood like this.

That night, Lonnie is awakened by Hud's shouts. Seeing a light on in Halmea's house, Lonnie grabs his .22 rifle and hurries to Halmea's. Looking through the window, he can see that Hud is on top of Halmea, trying to pull her nightgown off her. She is already beat up, and as Lonnie wills himself to shoot Hud, Hud beats her more. Unable to shoot his uncle point-blank, Lonnie fires a warning shot through the window, hitting a wall. Hud laughs and pulls Lonnie through the door, taking the gun from him easily. As Hud hits him to the floor, Lonnie sees Jesse curled up on the floor, unconscious. Hud brags to Halmea that half of the men on the ranch have come to her aid, and the other half are too slow and weak to help her. Realizing that he is too weak to stop Hud, Lonnie lies on the floor as Hud rapes Halmea. When Hud has finished, he laughs and tells Halmea that this is what she gets for going to the fish fry, and that it will happen again if she goes off again without permission. After he leaves, Halmea picks up the gun and fires several shots into the darkness, provoking more laughter.

Immediately, Halmea pulls down her nightgown and tends to Jesse and Lonnie. They manage to get Jesse on his feet, and send him to the bunkhouse. Lonnie does what he can to help out Halmea, cleaning the wounds that she can not reach. Realizing how badly Hud has beaten her up, Lonnie offers to take her to the doctor or call the police. Halmea tells him that he absolutely must not call the police, because the case would be twisted around until Halmea would be blamed for being raped. That morning, she tells Granddad that she is quitting, and has Lonnie drive her into town, where she will stay with her aunt. When Lonnie returns home, he finds Granddad rounding up the cattle, while bulldozers dig pits to put the cattle in. Lonnie has to help Granddad with this huge task, but when they drag themselves home that night, there is no supper waiting for them.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In many ways, Halmea's rape is a metaphor for what is happening to the herd of cattle. Just as Mr. Burris has hinted several times that the entire herd must be slaughtered, so Hud has threatened to rape Halmea many times, to her and to Lonnie. Everyone is



hoping that these are just words and that goodness and decency will win out, but some ugly forces in the world are just too strong to be stopped. As Lonnie thinks about the event afterward, he can not get the image of Hud raping Halmea out of his head, and what bothers him the most is how much it reminds him of working with cows. He imagines Hud forcing a cow into submission, or spreading out a carcass while butchering. What bothers him the most is that he himself has wanted so many times to have sex with Halmea, and he is horrified to see any similarity between himself, and his brutal, cruel uncle. After the rape, slaughtering all the cattle seems like an aftershock after an earthquake.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Granddad wakes Lonnie up very early, so they can get started on the day's work. Granddad cooks breakfast for all the men, except Hud, who has not been seen since he attacked Halmea. They head out and drive the cattle into the pits, each man taking up a strategic position for the monumental task. Lonnie is in charge of keeping any cows from trying to escape a pit. The entire day is hellish, a storm of blood and noise and dust and heat, with cows and calves bawling their protests before they are gunned down in a pile. The work is over sooner than Lonnie expects, and he and Granddad go back to the barn. In the barnyard are Granddad's three prize longhorns, which he has raised himself. He has always kept them around as a reminder of the old days when cowboys didn't need to worry about what the government thought. The two steers and bull even have names, and since Granddad raised them himself, he also wants to kill them himself.

While the government men burn the carcasses of the herd, Granddad sends Lonnie and Jesse to get gasoline to burn the three longhorns. They discuss whether or not Granddad will be able to go through with it or not. Soon they hear the shots, and they come back so they can haul the longhorns away. Lonnie thinks to himself that it would be better if Granddad were dead along with his first wife and his herd. Granddad remarks that there is enough bad in life that everyone can be sure that they will have a hard time.

Chapter 10 Analysis

At his young age, having not lived through tragedy yet, Lonnie thinks that tragedy takes a person down forever. Halmea and Granddad know otherwise. They are tough, and know that they lived through other heartbreak, and will probably live through this current heartbreak too. Both have had time to settle into a pleasant situation, and would like to stay where they are, but they know that it is not possible. Rather than giving up, or mourning helplessly, they both do what they have to.



Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary

In the evening, Lonnie heads back to the rodeo. His friend Hermy asks him about the deal that Hud has worked, and Lonnie asks him what he is talking about. Hermy says that he heard a rumor that Hud intends to sell the ranch. Hermy is waiting to ride a bull for the first time, so Lonnie leaves him and goes to find Hud. Hud is making out with another man's wife in his car, but he tells Lonnie to get in if he wants to talk. He confesses that he has swindled the woman's husband by betting part of the ranch in a card game, and boasts that the man will never be able to get the land. Lonnie decides that he had better go warn Granddad, and find out if Hud really has any power to sell the ranch. At home, he manages to wake Granddad and warn him, but Granddad is not worried about it. He seems to still be dreaming, mistaking Lonnie for his son. Granddad assures Lonnie that he owns the land, and Hud has no power to sell it.

The next morning, Lonnie finds out that Granddad has fired Jesse and Lonzo, since he has no work for them to do for a year. Granny insists that Lonnie help her find a cook to replace Halmea, although Lonnie does not like the stupid, lazy white girl that they hire. He returns to the final night of the rodeo, no longer excited about it. Lonnie finds out that a bull has stepped on Hermy's stomach, and that Hermy has been taken to the hospital in Wichita for treatment. At the end of the evening, Lonnie finds a drunken Jesse, who has missed the one event he signed up for. Jesse talks about how he always ruins everything, and always gets too drunk to succeed. Since he is now jobless, he is going to hitch a ride out of town with an old rodeo buddy, so Lonnie waits with him for his ride to pick him up. Jesse counsels Lonnie to stay at the ranch for a while, to support Granddad. Jesse feels that he has made a mistake in moving around so much, because he has not created anything that lasts. Lonnie points out that Granddad has stayed in one place, and made something good, but it did not last. Jesse says that Granddad still has plenty worth having.

Chapters 11-12 Analysis

There is quite a contrast between the attitudes of Jesse, and those of Granddad and Halmea. Jesse has failed so many times, that he assumes that he will always fail, and sets himself up for failure. Knowing that drunkenness ruined his rodeo career, Jesse chooses to get drunk right before the event that he has entered. Jesse blames all of his misfortune on bad luck, not noticing that bad things happen to all the people around them, and some of them fight through it. Jesse thinks of his failures as major tragedies, not realizing that far worse things happen to others. Granddad and Halmea know that the only way to survive tragedy is to get up and continue fighting. Although Halmea initially wants to run away to Oklahoma City after being raped, she decides to stay in Thalia, where she knows people. When Lonnie asks Granddad if the cattle dying is the worst thing that has happened to him, Granddad answers that this is certainly not the

worst. He points out how much worse it was when his wife died. Granddad thinks about what he still has and although he does not know whether he can pick himself up again, he intends to try.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

After saying goodbye to Jesse, Lonnie heads back to the ranch. He sees a car coming up behind him very fast, so he starts to swerve to let them pass, as he realizes that it is Hud's car. In an instant, Lonnie sees Granddad crawling in the weeds at the side of the road, and swerves to miss him. Hud rams into Lonnie's truck, pushing him off the road, and wrecking his own car. They get out and find Granddad seriously hurt in the grass, wearing only his nightshirt. Granddad is confused, and calls out for people who have died many years before. He thinks he is all right, but he is badly injured. Hud cradles Granddad in his arms, and tells his new girlfriend to go for help. The girl is useless, so Lonnie goes to the road to try to flag down a car. There is little traffic, and as Lonnie tries in vain to get someone to stop, he hears a gunshot in the distance.

At first, Lonnie is sure that Hud has shot the girl, or that her husband has shown up, and Hud has shot him. When he arrives back at the scene of the accident, he finds Granddad dead, with clothes spread out on top of him. Hud admits that he shot Granddad, but tells Lonnie that it was the best thing to do. Hud insists that Granddad was so badly injured, that he would want to be put out of his misery, so Hud sent him to join the people he was calling out for. When Lonnie asks what he will do now, Hud tells him that he will have to do without, just like everyone else when they lose something. Hud seems compassionate for once, and the three of them load Granddad into the back of the pickup. They take Granddad to the hospital in Thalia, and drop off the girl. When Lonnie asks Hud what the police will say about Granddad's death, Hud says that they had better accept the story he gives them. Lonnie is no longer sure whether Hud killed Granddad out of mercy, or out of greed.

Chapter 13 Analysis

When Lonnie says goodbye to Jesse, he remarks that he feels like he is losing people right and left (Halmea, Jesse, Lonzo, Hermy). This foreshadows the impending catastrophe, in which Lonnie will lose the person who is the most stable anchor in his life. His uncertainty about Hud's motives is a sort of metaphor for confusion about the meaning of bad events in life. Just as Lonnie can not really tell whether Hud had Granddad's best interests in mind, so also he does not know why life sends the problems that it does. The reason Lonnie is experiencing so much loss, is because he has had so many blessings to lose.

Hud remarks that he and Granddad have gone around and around over the years, fighting about all sorts of things, but that he feels that they helped one another equally. This is reminiscent of the way Granddad feels about his longhorns that he raised. He wants to spare them, or at least let them go with dignity, because their years of strife

and struggle have led to a respect for these ornery beasts. In both cases, Lonnie only hears the shot, and understands the hard job that someone has made himself do.



Chapter 14 and Epilogue

Chapter 14 and Epilogue Summary

The next day, Lonnie hides in the hayloft in the barn all day, because he does not want to talk to anyone. He watches as many people come to the house, most of them with food. From the window, Lonnie can see that Hud now acts like he is in charge of everything, since he no longer has Granddad to stop him. When Lonnie emerges in order to eat, he tries to avoid the group of Granny's relatives who have showed up. There is a spot on the porch where it is clear that Granddad fell off, probably causing his confusion. Lonnie drives into Thalia, hoping to talk with Halmea. Her friends tell him that Halmea has moved to Detroit.

In the morning, Lonnie waits at the back of the church while the mourners come in for the funeral. Hud makes him sit with the rest of the family, while they listen to the preacher spout lies about Granddad. The preacher, whom Granddad ran off the ranch multiple times, claims to have been close friends with Granddad, and talks about how Granddad is in a much better place, ranching at that range in the sky. He also talks about how much everyone loved Granddad, which Lonnie knows is false, since Granddad was a tough man, with few friends. Lonnie and Hud decide not to laugh out loud at the eulogy. When everyone leaves to go to the burial, Lonnie escapes and runs away, so that he will not have to go with the crowd of people. He thinks about how much Granddad loved the land, and he decides that it is good that Granddad will soon rot, and join the land that he took such good care of. Now that Granddad is gone, Lonnie is not worried about who will get the ranch.

Lonnie gathers a few possessions, and gets his money out of the bank. He hitches a ride to Wichita, so he can go see Hermy in the hospital. The trucker recognizes Lonnie's last name, and asks after Granddad. Lonnie decides not to tell the driver that Granddad is dead. Lonnie considers doing what Jesse does, and letting the driver take him as far as he is going. Instead, he decides to stop and see Hermy.

Chapter 14 and Epilogue Analysis

In the final sentence of Chapter 14, Lonnie thinks about "the horseman that had passed" (Chapter 14, p. 174). This phrase, and the title of the book, have a double meaning. The obvious meaning is a literal reference to a cowboy, and "Pass By" could indicate allowing another rider to ride past, or it could mean "pass on" or "pass away," meaning "to die." The horseman who has just passed is Granddad. Another meaning for "Horseman" is the four horsemen of the apocalypse, from the Bible. The fourth horseman is a personification of Death. Thus, the phrase "Horseman, Pass By" could be a plea for Death to spare someone, rather than taking their life.



Characters

Lonnie Bannon

Lonnie is a young man of seventeen, growing up in rural Texas in the 1950s. Lonnie probably represents Larry McMurry, the author of the book. Lonnie is generally a good kid, and if he ever gets in trouble it is generally because he craves excitement. Lonnie is good at working with the farm animals, and he works hard, understanding that by this age he is expected to work like a man and help support his family. Lonnie never says where his parents are, but he lives on a ranch with his grandparents.

Lonnie likes to pester Halmea and hang out with her, trying not to let on that he is turned on by her. When he sees that Hud is attacking her, Lonnie wants to stop Hud, but he feels helpless, like a child. Even though he brings a gun with him, Lonnie is too weak to overpower Hud, and he feels doubly guilty when he thinks about how he himself wanted to have sex with Halmea before Hud raped her. Lonnie seems surrounded by tragedy with no obvious way to help. He considers living the life of a drifter, like Jesse, but realizes that he should be happy about the people he still has in his life. When practically everyone he loves dies or leaves him, Lonnie decides that he had better go visit Hermie in the hospital. Lonnie faces his restlessness, and realizes that connecting with other people, and making something of oneself, are important goals in life.

Homer Bannon (Granddad)

Granddad is an interesting character, because he is elusive, yet the story seems to revolve around him. In a way, Granddad functions as the stake holding Lonnie's leash to the ground. Once Granddad is dead, Lonnie has no reason to stick around. Granddad seems like a kind, good man from his treatment of Lonnie and his cattle. It is somewhat surprising, at Granddad's funeral, when Lonnie points out that Granddad has few friends, because he is not a kind man at all, but a hard, rugged cowboy.

Granddad, rather than practicing religion or social obligations, believes in integrity, doing things right the first time, and helping out someone in need, when he can. He is a hard worker, only happy when he is taking care of his herd. Once they have to shoot the entire herd of cattle, Lonnie worries that Granddad will see no reason to live, now that he can no longer care for the cows. Although it takes a lot out of Granddad, he comments that it is certainly not the worst thing that has ever happened to him. He says that it was much worse when his first wife was accidentally killed by Lonnie's father. Granddad represents the old way of life for Texas cowboys, having raised several longhorn cattle from the old days. Lonnie thinks that it is good that Granddad is buried under his own land, so that he will never have to leave it.



Hud

Hud (whose real name is Scott) is Granddad's stepson, and Lonnie's uncle by marriage. Hud is a brutal, devious man. He's a rapist and a thief. He is determined to get whatever he can take.

Grandma

Grandma is a grouchy old lady, and Lonnie's step-grandmother. Halmea is the only one who can keep her happy, with good cooking.

Halmea

Halmea is the African-American cook, who lives out back in a tiny house. Although she is friends with Lonnie and Jesse, she leaves the ranch after Hud rapes her.

Jesse

Jesse is the new hired hand on the ranch. He is a drifter who has allowed alcohol to ruin his life.

Lonzo

Lonzo is the other hired hand, and he is a bad cowboy. He is both lazy and stupid.

Hermey

Hermey is Lonnie's high-school friend. Hermey gets stepped on a bull the first time he tries riding in the rodeo.

Jimmy Burris

Jimmy Burris is the state veterinarian who is called in to look at the cattle. He is the one who says that all the cows have to die.

Newt Garrett

Newt is the first vet that Granddad calls in to look at the herd. Although he means well, he foolishly cuts open the dead cow, allowing the disease to easily spread to the rest of the herd.

Marlet

Marlet is an annoying teenager that Lonnie meets at the stockyards.



Objects/Places

Granddad's Ranch

Granddad has a large cattle ranch in rural Texas, where the family lives.

Thalia

Thalia is the nearest town, ten miles away. The only time of year that there is any excitement there is when the rodeo comes to town.

Fort Worth

Fort Worth is the only city that Lonnie has ever been to. He thinks of it as the most exciting place ever.

Hoof-and-Mouth Disease

Hoof-and-mouth disease is an extremely contagious disease that usually affects farm animals, primarily cattle. Although it is not always deadly, it is so contagious that if the disease occurs to one head of the herd they must all be slaughtered to protect other animals within a fifty-mile radius.

Halmea's House

Halmea lives in a small, one-room house on the ranch, until Hud attacks her there.

Chinese Checkers

Called "marble checkers" in the book, this is a game similar to checkers, but played with marbles instead of flat discs. Halmea is always trying to get the others to play a game with her.

The Church

The day of Granddad's funeral, the church is filled with people who pretend that they were Granddad's friends. Hud makes Lonnie sit in the front row with the family.



The Rodeo

Every year, the rodeo comes to Thalia on its circuit, bringing noise and merriment to the quiet town for four days.

Detroit

After quitting her job at the ranch, Halmea goes to Detroit to start over.

Granddad's Herd

Granddad's herd of cattle represent most of what he has accomplished in his life. He takes very good care of them, and they give him a reason to get up in the morning. When they are destroyed, he does not know how to go on.

Wichita

After Hermy is stepped on by a bull, he is taken to a hospital in Wichita.



Themes

Coming of Age

The summer that the cows get hoof-and-mouth disease, Lonnie is no longer truly a child, yet not quite a man yet. He is finished with high school, but he has no plans for the future. Mainly he just wants to get out of the slow-moving, sleepy community around Thalia, feeling that he has never experienced the world outside of a ranch. "The old cows bawling in the horse pasture kept me awake till nearly morning, and I lay in bed with my eyes open, thinking about all the girls in Thalia, and those in Oklahoma City I didn't know, all of them with nightgowns on, asleep somewhere and breathing in the night" (Chapter 4, p. 58).

It is interesting that Lonnie is so inexperienced about life, since he has already faced many adult issues. Lonnie does not see this as a process of growing up, however, equating adulthood with privilege, travel, and sex. Lonnie does not realize that the hard work, disappointment, death, injury, and rape that he has encountered are the stuff that adulthood is made of. It does not occur to Lonnie that in dealing with these painful issues, he has grown up, by acting like a man. Lonnie only accepts the role of adult when there is no one else left to treat him like a child. Lonnie thinks about how different adults deal with life, noting how some settle down and create a home for themselves, while others only drift from place to place, accumulating nothing. In the end, Lonnie has not decided how he will live his life, but he is thinking of doing something in between.

Life is Hard, So You Just Have to Keep Trying

Lonnie's family and friends are no strangers to tragedy. Many of them have lived through the Great Depression and wars, and the life of a farmer is hard no matter what. In the course of about a month, Lonnie and those around him face disaster upon disaster, and he tries to make sense of it. Although Jesse tends to despair, feeling that it is useless to keep trying, since everything always falls apart anyway, Granddad and Halmea see things differently. They have both been through some horrible times, but they have learned to pick themselves up and salvage what they can. This does not mean that they have a happy-go-lucky view of life, however. When Granddad is thinking about the destruction of his herd, he says, "There's so much shit in the world a man's gonna get in it sooner or later, whether he's careful or not" (Chapter 10, p. 127).

Granddad does not pretend that Lonnie will not also face terrible things in life. The important thing is to be sturdy enough to take a blow, and then keep going. This idea is illustrated by the varying degrees of cow-inflicted injuries on each of the cowboys. The older they are, the worse shape their bad leg tends to be in, as though it is simply a matter of consequence that herding cattle leads to permanent injury. This is a symbol for the physical and emotional damage that the hardships of life can inflict, and how strong people keep going in spite of their wounds.



The Cowboy Way of Life is Passing Away

The events in the book are a sort of metaphor for how the old way of doing things was passing away, making room for the modern era. Granddad represents the old guard of cowboys, who lived off the land until the land took them violently, who did not need government, but appreciated the sweat from good hard work, and liked to watch a beautiful Texas sunset. Granddad's cattle represent the wealth of those days, cultivated over many years of caring for the crop. Granddad even has several longhorn cattle, of the old-fashioned variety no longer used, to remind him of the old cowboy days. However, with the way times change in the twentieth century, cowboys on horses are no longer the most efficient way to raise food, and the children of ranchers would rather go off and get good jobs in the cities, than stay around on the ranch for another season.

When technology connected the United States so that people could finally move around as they pleased, the modern conveniences crowded out the community spirit that used to be evident in farm communities. Although it was an exciting time for the youths that felt trapped on their family farms, it was sad for the farmers who had invested their entire lives in this dream. When confronted with the possibility of mass slaughter of his herd, Granddad says, "I don't doubt I'm contrary and old-fashioned, and wrong about a lot of things, but I don't intend to have my cattle shot out from under me on account of no schoolbook disease" (Chapter 3, p. 45). Sadly, all the cattle are shot and Granddad does not last long after that.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the first-person point of view of Lonnie Bannon. Lonnie is a high-school senior growing up on his Granddad's ranch in rural Texas, in the 1950s. It seems likely that the book is semi-autobiographical, since Larry McMurtry also grew up working on his family's ranch, and since Larry and Lonnie are both nicknames for the name Lawrence. Interestingly, although it is a story about growing up, McMurtry was only twenty-four when he wrote this, so he had just grown up himself. Thus, the book offers a unique perspective on growing up, since the author has just been through it. It is very important that Lonnie sees things from the viewpoint of a modern (1950s) youth, because a lot of the character development has to do with contrasting his viewpoint with an older, more old-fashioned view. Lonnie represents the transition from the olden days to the days of technology. Although Lonnie understands skills like taking care of cattle, he longs for the neon lights of the city. He feels trapped by his rural life, until that life falls apart, and he realizes that there are more important things to worry about than a lack of excitement.

Setting

The book takes place on a large ranch in Texas. It is the 1950s, so many people are happy to be out of the Great Depression and both World Wars. It is a time of transition: the older ways of farming are still practiced, but new technology is changing the way farming is done, and the youths are no longer happy to settle down in their parents' community. Granddad's ranch is ten miles away from the tiny town of Thalia, which never has anything going on, except when the rodeo comes to town once a year. Otherwise, there is a small movie theater and a pool hall, the only entertainment left over from the oil boom, which abandoned Thalia years ago. The teenagers around Thalia have nothing to do except get drunk, fight, and sexually abuse cows. Granddad's ranch has five different pastures, a barn, a farmhouse, a bunkhouse, and a cabin for the cook. The buildings are old, but not falling down, because Granddad likes to keep the ranch well-maintained. Until hoof-and-mouth disease destroys his herd, Granddad has a ranch that he can be proud of. Hud threatens to find some way to steal the ranch out from under Granddad, and Lonnie is determined to somehow stop him. However, once Granddad is dead, Lonnie does not see much point fighting Hud, so he leaves, letting Hud take the ranch.

Language and Meaning

Since this is a cowboy book, the characters talk like cowboys. Even the most refined, educated characters speak with a drawl and with poor grammar. This is only natural in an area like Texas, especially since the narrator himself is a cowboy. Most of the



dialogue is spelled to indicate the country accents, with "of" often written as "a" and words like "running" spelled "runnin'." For those not familiar with farm terms, some of the words might be confusing, like "heifer" and "stock," but in general, the story makes sense even to those who do not understand exactly what the ranchers are doing in each scene.

Additionally, the characters swear freely, as cowhands often do. Some readers might be offended by this strong language, but it adds realism, and it is appropriate to use unpleasant words when dealing with tragic, violent events, like death and rape. When Lonnie thinks about the excitement of life that he is missing, he does not have very descriptive words for what he seeks, since he is seeking the unknown. When he talks about the ranch, though, he knows exactly what words to use, since it is very familiar to him.

Structure

"Horseman, Pass By" has a Prologue, fourteen chapters, and an Epilogue. The Prologue introduces Lonnie and his family, and shows what ordinary daily life is like on the ranch. It also talks about the restlessness of teenagers, a new phenomenon in the 1950s, and how this attitude went counter to the conventional farm mindset. In chapter one, Lonnie's family is enjoying a summer evening, and the only foreshadowing that things are about to get ugly is when someone casually mentions that a cow died unexpectedly that day. In chapters two and three, the problem really begins to show itself, and Lonnie and Granddad start getting worried about the cattle. In chapters four and five, the men round up all of Granddad's cattle, and test them for hoof-and-mouth disease. In chapters six and seven, Lonnie feels restless, and wishes for excitement, bored with farm life, while Hud threatens to take Granddad's ranch from him. Chapters eight and nine are the climax of the book. In chapter eight, they find out that the herd is definitely diseased, and in chapter nine Lonnie is helpless to stop Hud from raping Halmea. In chapters ten through twelve, they kill the entire herd and Lonnie goes to the rodeo where his friend is maimed by a bull. In chapter thirteen, Granddad is hit by Hud's car, and Hud shoots Granddad to put him out of his misery, or so Hud claims. In chapter fourteen and the epilogue, Lonnie accepts Granddad's death, and finally goes out into the world.



Quotes

. . . he told me that nature will always work her own cures, if people would be patient enough, and give her time. (Prologue, p. 3)

It's a way older people have: without even meaning to they let people younger than them know that they aren't in the same club. (Chapter 1, p. 16)

I could listen all night when Jesse got to going back over his life, but the story never lasted long enough, and it always ended with him getting tired and more sad. (Chapter 1, p. 20)

I had got where I would rather go to Thalia and goof around on the square than listen to his old-timy stories. (Chapter 1, p. 22)

Granddad had got so he would walk a mile rather than involve himself with the government offices, and even so, compared to Hud he thought they were little darlings. (Chapter 2, p. 30)

"I spent all my time following a couple a work mules around that field, and all day long folks would whiz by in their cars, going places I wanted to go." (Chapter 2, p. 37)

He had got in the habit of dreading things. (Chapter 4, p. 50)

It hadn't been long since half the boys in town had had a wild soiree with a blind heifer, out on a creek one cold night. (Chapter 4, p. 55)

"But I ain't young enough to count on what I think bein' right, either, an' I ain't fool enough to figure on things turning out the way I expect 'em to." (Chapter 7, p. 93)

"I know there's a lot of times when a man is helpless—I've been in plenty of 'em. But a man's got to go on and do what he can, that's the only way he's got a finding out whether he's helpless or not." (Chapter 8, p. 104)

"If the time's come when I got to spend my time lookin' back, why, I'd just as soon go under." (Chapter 10, p. 126)

Granddad was on the other side of a high barbed fence, with each wire a year of life, and I couldn't go over it and I couldn't crawl through. (Chapter 11, p. 137)

All of them wanted more and seemed to end up with less; they wanted excitement and ended up stomped by a bull or smashed against a highway; or they wanted a girl to court, and anyway, whatever it was they wanted, that was what they ended up doing without. (Chapter 12, p. 145)

I had watched a good many trials in Thalia, and I'd seen a lot dumber people than Hud get away with doing a lot worse things than he had done. (Chapter 14, p. 163)

He had always held the land, and he would go on holding what he needed of it forever.
(Chapter 14, p. 174)



Topics for Discussion

How has farming changed over the last hundred years? Have you ever been on a farm or ranch? What was it like?

Why do so many bad things seem to happen one after another? How do the different characters deal with these things?

What sort of person is Hud? Why does he act the way he does? Do you think he murdered Granddad?

What role does sex play in the story? How does Lonnie view sex?

Why is Lonnie so restless to get to the city? Do you think that his attitude changes during the book?

Hank Hutch is Granddad's neighbor, who always has trouble feeding his family. Do you think Jesse or Hank has a more fulfilling life? What would Jesse and Hank say?

How is Jesse's attitude toward life different from Granddad's or Halmea's? How do you think Lonnie's attitude is going to turn out?

Do you think that Granddad's death is related to the death of his cattle? Why or why not?