

Shane Notes Chapters 1–2

Source: SparkNotes.com

Summary

Chapter 1

The book opens with a description of Shane riding into town. The narrator Bob Starrett watches him with a child's fascination. He first notices Shane's clothing: dark pants, boots, a belt, coat, and hat. The clothing is predominantly black and retains "magnificence." As Shane approaches, Bob notices that his clothing pales in comparison with his affect and stature. Although Shane is a slender man, Bob observes "endurance" and "quiet power." The lines of Shane's face are hardened, suggesting a long and hard past. Bob is struck with the chills when looking at Shane.

Shane stops at the house and asks for some water for himself and his horse. Bob's father, Joe Starrett, invites him to take all he needs. Bob continues to observe the magnificence of the stranger. Bob's father talks Shane into staying overnight and letting his horse get some rest. Shane meets Bob's mother, Marian Starrett, and sits down to one of her home-cooked meals. Both Marian and Joe question Shane throughout dinner and he answers their questions without providing much information about himself. Bob notices the easy way Shane seems to fit in with the three of them. Soon they begin talking about Joe's plans for the farm, and Joe explains that Fletcher, a rancher in the area is trying to take over all the farms to use as his own cattle grounds.

After dinner Bob overhears his parents talking about Shane. His mother calls him "peculiar" and says she "never saw a man quite like him before." They talk about how mysterious it is and the fact that he would not reveal information about himself. Marian says he is dangerous, and Joe says he is not dangerous to them.

Chapter 2

In the morning they all eat Marian's special flapjacks. It begins to rain, and Joe tells Shane that he cannot leave yet because of the weather. Joe suggests that Shane stay over once again, because even when it stops raining the roads will be a mess. Joe and Marian convince Shane to stay, and Marian asks him about ladies' fashion where he has traveled. After the storm, Joe takes Shane around the grounds of the farm. Shane notices the old big stump on the grounds, and Joe explains it has been the bane of his existence for years and that he's working on uprooting it bit by bit.

The town peddler comes while Shane and Joe are on the grounds. The peddler has a new cultivator for Joe and tries to overcharge him for it. Shane steps in, saying that he just recently saw a new cultivator for almost half as much as the peddler is asking. The peddler gets offended and angry with Shane, but Joe sides with Shane, telling the peddler that he believes Shane is right. The peddler ends up reducing his price.

Shane gets an ax from the barn and begins to work on the stump. Bob describes the sound as one of the most memorable of his entire life. Shane says something about needing to repay his debts

and slices away at the stump. Joe gets the other ax and begins working with him, the two men swinging away at opposite sides of the stump.

Analysis

Schaefer represents Shane as a hero from the very first description. Using a child as a narrator helps make Shane look heroic and admirable, as seen through a child's wide, adoring eyes: "[A] kind of magnificence remained and with it a hint of men and manners alien to my limited boy's experience." Shane has the tough look of a cowboy who has traveled, fought, shot guns, ridden horses and lassoed steers. He looks as if he has been through the kinds of events of which Bob has only read or dreamt. Shane rides right out of a boy's dreams onto his street and into his house, and Bob is smitten with him instantly. Despite his hard look, Shane is gentle and kind to all three of them, playing around with Bob and complimenting Marian on her cooking. It is surprising that a man would fit in so easily; but Shane does, and the Starretts all realize it.

There is something dichotomous about Shane's hard appearance and his gentle manner, and Bob and Marian talk about this after Shane heads off to bed. "He's so nice and polite and sort of gentle ... [b]ut there's something about him ... Mysterious. But more than that.

Dangerous." This is the quality that Bob initially reacts to with a child's awe. This is the quintessential cowboy quality—not just in costume, but also in attitude and the undeniable history that accompanies it. Joe Starrett clues us into another aspect of Shane's personality: "He's dangerous all right ... [b]ut not to us, dear ... In fact, I don't think you ever had a safer man in your house." Joe eludes to Shane's loyalty and to the fact that unless pushed or threatened Shane is the nice and polite man Marian described. The dangerous part comes about in the face of a threat.

The family's immediate bond to Shane is apparent in the fact that they ask him to stay again. They latch onto the rain as an excuse, and Shane knows it. Shane seems to understand that the Starretts have convinced him to stay not because of the weather, but simply because they want him to. The incident with the peddler is a chance for Shane and Joe to demonstrate their new loyalties to one another. Shane refuses to let Joe get swindled, and Joe takes Shane's word over the peddler's. Joe reacts with surprising conviction when the peddler questions him: "I can figure men for myself. I'll take his word on anything he wants to say any day of God's whole year."

The symbolic gesture of Shane's help in removing the stump is a thank you for allowing him to stay and for trusting his word as well as a suggestion that Shane wants to help improve Joe's farm. When the two men work together it is clear that they function impressively and immediately as a unit. Together they work to take out the one consistent annoyance Joe has not been able to remedy by himself. This marks the union of the two men on behalf of the farm and each other.