

Of Mice and Men



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck, widely regarded as one of the most influential voices in American literature, enjoyed a comfortably middle-class upbringing in and around Salinas, California. The son of a schoolteacher and a local politician, Steinbeck spent his summers as a young man working on nearby ranches and migrant farms—an experience that provided him with the material for some of his most famous works, including *Of Mice and Men*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *East of Eden*. Steinbeck studied literature at Stanford but failed to graduate, and in 1925 moved to New York City to pursue a career as a writer. He struggled to publish, and returned to California in 1928, where he and his wife lived humbly while receiving financial support from Steinbeck's parents throughout the Great Depression. Steinbeck published his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, in 1929, and in the 1930s hurtled to success as a chronicler of both California's history and its contemporary struggles through fiction and nonfiction. The anti-capitalist, pro-worker sentiments of his major works—most prominently displayed in *The Grapes of Wrath*—made Steinbeck a controversial figure who drew the ire of the CIA, the IRS, and J. Edgar Hoover. The winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize for Literature, Steinbeck has been inducted into the California Hall of Fame and his work is hailed to this day for its realism, empathy, and enduring sociopolitical relevance.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Following World War I, crop prices plunged, forcing farmers to expand their farms and buy more equipment to make up for the shortfall. This situation was exacerbated when a severe drought crippled much of the American West. When the stock market plummeted in the historic crash of 1929, an already difficult situation for farmers and farm workers quickly grew considerably worse. When the market crashed, farmers could not pay back the debts they had built up in buying more land and equipment. As a result, many farmers and farm workers migrated to California in hopes of finding enough work to live. Laborers often worked for pitiful wages, without the support of unions or the stability of knowing their job would be secure in the future. Families were torn asunder, while at the same time strange new allegiances were made, such as the intense but difficult-to-describe bond between Lennie and George.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

John Steinbeck is widely regarded as the great American

chronicler of the Great Depression. His novels *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* stand alongside *Of Mice and Men* as pillars of Depression literature, representing the gritty realism and unforgiving social atmosphere of the time. Woody Guthrie, an American songwriter, chronicled the Depression from another angle, releasing *Dust Bowl Ballads* in 1940. The album sought to give voice to the impoverished and disenfranchised people and laborers living in the “Dust Bowl” in the American West in the early 1930s. Many novels have been written over the course of the 20th and 21st century which seek to explore the social, political, and economic devastation of the Depression and investigate its lasting impact on American society—the young adult novels *Esperanza Rising* and *Bud, Not Buddy* explore the period through the eyes of children swept up in the chaos and uncertainty of the times. Beyond its historical context, the novella empathetically details the struggles of several physically and mentally-disabled characters, which was uncommon for its time. Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*, Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* also feature complex and nuanced characters who are dealing with mental disorders.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Of Mice and Men
- **When Written:** 1930s
- **Where Written:** Salinas, California
- **When Published:** 1937
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Novella
- **Setting:** Depression-era Salinas and Soledad, California
- **Climax:** Lennie shakes Curley's wife to death and flees the ranch.
- **Antagonist:** Curley

EXTRA CREDIT

Stage and Screen. *Of Mice and Men* has been widely adapted into plays and films. The first theatrical performance took place in 1937 at the Music Box Theater on Broadway, while the novel itself was still topping the bestseller list. Notable revivals of the play include a 1974 Broadway production which featured James Earl Jones as Lennie Small, and a 2014 production featuring James Franco as George Milton. The novel has also been adapted for the screen twice—once in 1939, in an adaptation which garnered five Academy Award nominations, and once in 1992.

Poetic Origins. The title of *Of Mice and Men* is drawn from a Robert Burns poem titled “To a Mouse, on Turning up in Her Nest with the Plough, November, 1785,” which features the line “The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men, / Gang aft agley.” The poem describes its speaker’s shock and regret upon realizing they have disturbed a mouse in her nest while plowing a field. The speaker tries to assure the mouse they mean no harm while at the same time lamenting the unpredictable nature of the future—and the futility of planning ahead. “Gang aft agley,” a Gaelic phrase, translates to “go oft awry”—and Steinbeck uses his own novel to show the devastating effects of future plans that go horribly wrong.



PLOT SUMMARY

George Milton and Lennie Small, two itinerant workers from Auburn, California, make their way across the state’s harsh landscape on their way from one ranch job to another. As they close in on a job just outside the town of Soledad, they stop for the night at a pool off the Salinas River to enjoy one last night of freedom. As they prepare dinner and form a plan for their arrival at the ranch, the dynamic between the men becomes clear: George is a sharp, wiry man with dreams of saving enough money to buy land for a **farm** and become the master of his own destiny. Lennie is a hulking but simple-minded man who has short-term memory problems and a fascination with stroking soft objects. This habit has resulted in both George and Lennie (who have traveled everywhere together since their youth) being chased out of Weed, the town where their last job was, after Lennie grabbed the soft hem of a woman’s skirt in order to feel the fabric. George feels burdened by Lennie, but knows he must keep the man with him if they’re both to survive. He tells Lennie that if Lennie should ever get into any trouble at their new ranch, he should return to this very spot and hide in the brush until George comes for him. They drift off to sleep as George tells Lennie about how their future will be, describing the lush, secluded farm with its vegetable garden, animal pen, and best of all, a hutch full of soft **rabbits** for Lennie to pet.

The next day, the men arrive at the ranch. Candy, an elderly swamper missing a hand, shows them to the bunk house where they’ll sleep alongside the other laborers. The boss of the ranch comes to greet the men and agrees to allow them to stay on, though he’s disappointed that they’re late for their shift and skeptical of two men who travel together. Candy fills George and Lennie in on the dynamics of the ranch, warning them that the boss often takes his anger out on the black stable hand, Crooks, while the boss’s son Curley, a short and pathetic man, is always desperate for a fight in which he can prove his strength. Candy also mentions that Curley’s new wife has “the eye,” and is constantly hanging around the laborer’s quarters trying to flirt with the ranch hands. Sure enough, when Candy steps out to ready the wash basins and tend to his elderly **dog**,

Curley’s wife pokes her head into the bunk house, gives Lennie and George the once-over, and asks where Curley is. Another laborer named Slim, a mule driver, enters the bunk house and shoos Curley’s wife away. As Slim introduces himself to George and Lennie, he, too, expresses his surprise at two men sticking together as they travel around. As the other ranch hands, Carlson and Whit, come in to wash up, they ask Slim about his dog’s new litter of puppies. Lennie becomes excited, and Slim tells him that he can have one. Curley comes by the bunk house, fuming and in search of his wife. After Curley leaves, George tells Lennie that he’s worried about trouble with Curley.

That evening, after dinner, the men enjoy some leisure time. George and Slim play cards in the bunk house while some of the other laborers play a game of horseshoes outside. Lennie is in the barn, playing with the new **puppy** Slim has given him.

George thanks Slim for his generosity and explains that he has been looking after Lennie ever since Lennie’s Aunt Clara, his former caretaker, passed away. George vents his frustrations about traveling with Lennie and even tells Slim about their troubles in Weed. The horseshoe game ends and the other men come into the bunk house. Candy brings his dog inside, and Carlson comments on the dog’s disgusting odor. He suggests Candy put the dog, who is blind, lame, and mangy, out of its misery. Carlson offers to shoot the dog with his pistol, and Slim promises Candy a new puppy from the litter. After much persuading, Candy reluctantly agrees. Carlson takes the dog outside, and soon the others hear the sound of a gunshot. Crooks enters the bunk house and beckons Slim to the barn to help care for a mule with a bad hoof. After Slim leaves, Whit invites George to come along to a whorehouse the following night. George replies that he’s trying to save his money. Carlson and Lennie return to the bunk and crawl into their beds. Curley comes by looking for his wife—he is suspicious to see everyone in the bunk house except Slim and goes out to look for him. Carlson and Whit follow him, hoping for a fight. Lennie asks George to tell him about their farm, and George gets lost in his own reverie as he talks aloud about their little plot of land. Candy interjects to tell them that he can help make their dream a reality if they’ll let him join them on the farm—he’ll pitch in the money he has saved up from the accident that cost him his hand. The rest of the men return to the bunk house. Slim and Curley are in the midst of an argument when Curley spies Lennie smiling, still lost in daydreams of the farm. Curley begins hitting Lennie, but Lennie refuses to fight back even as Curley bloodies his face. George orders Lennie to stand up for himself, so Lennie seizes one of Curley’s hands and crushes it. Slim urges Curley to tell everyone he’s gotten his hand crushed in a machine, warning him there will be trouble if he tries to get Lennie and George fired. Curley agrees. The other men hurry Curley away to the hospital. George assures Lennie that he’s done nothing wrong.

The following night, the men are in town visiting billiards halls

and warehouses. Lennie plays with his puppy in the barn for a while and then pays the stable hand, Crooks, a visit in his room, which is separate from the bunk house and just off the stable. Crooks claims that he doesn't want Lennie's company—just as he isn't allowed to fraternize with the white ranch hands, he doesn't want any of them coming into his space. But when he sees how innocent and well-meaning Lennie is, he agrees to let the man in. As Crooks tells Lennie about his painful past marked by racism, discrimination, and loneliness, Lennie seems not to understand the gravity of anything Crooks is telling him. Crooks continues talking to Lennie and asking him questions, but when Crooks asks Lennie what he would do if George never came back from town, Lennie becomes confused and angry. Crooks apologizes for scaring Lennie, and insists he was just trying to get Lennie to understand his own loneliness. Lennie tells Crooks about his and George's plan to buy a farm, and Crooks tells Lennie that while every man who passes through the ranch has dreams of his own land, not one of them ever gets it. Candy comes to the doorway looking for Lennie, and Crooks invites Candy to come in and sit down. Candy and Lennie discuss their plans for a farm, but Crooks predicts their dream will never come to fruition. Curley's wife comes to the door, claiming to be looking for Curley, though she quickly admits that she knows he's in town and is simply looking for company. Crooks urges Curley's wife to leave, claiming she'll only cause them trouble. Curley's wife notes Lennie's bruises and thanks him for beating Curley up. Crooks orders Curley's wife to leave. She turns on him, threatening to have him lynched if he speaks to her again. She leaves the barn after thanking Lennie again for roughing Curley up. Crooks tells Lennie and Candy to leave, and though Candy tries to comfort the clearly-shaken Crooks, Crooks admits that what Curley's wife said was true—she could have him murdered at any time. George comes to the doorway—all the men have returned from town. He asks Lennie to come with him back to the bunk house, and they leave together. Candy leaves, too, and Crooks is alone once again.

The next afternoon, Lennie is in the barn alone while the men play horseshoes outside. He holds his puppy in his hands—he has accidentally killed it by hitting for nibbling at his fingers. Lennie is angry at the puppy for dying, and worries that if George learns what has happened, he won't let Lennie tend rabbits in the future. Curley's wife comes into the barn and approaches Lennie. When she sees that the puppy is dead, she tries to soothe Lennie by assuring him he'll be able to get another one. Lennie tells Curley's wife he isn't supposed to be talking to her. She laments her unending loneliness, and states that she should have had a different life—she says she should have been a movie star. Lennie doesn't seem to comprehend anything she's saying, and instead continues worrying aloud about his rabbits. Curley's wife asks Lennie why he's obsessed with rabbits, and he replies that he likes to touch soft things. Curley's wife says she, too, likes the feeling of soft things, and

offers to let Lennie stroke her soft curls. Lennie begins stroking her hair, but when his touch becomes too rough, she screams for him to stop. Frightened, Lennie puts his hands over her nose and mouth. When she continues screaming, he shakes her until her neck snaps. Realizing what he's done, Lennie pushes some hay over Curley's wife's body and runs away for the pond to wait for George. Candy comes into the barn looking for Lennie and discovers Curley's wife's body. He fetches George, who looks with horror upon the mess Lennie has left. Realizing their dreams of a farm are shattered and that the other men will kill Lennie when they realize what he's done, Candy and George quickly devise a plan that will keep George from looking suspicious. George returns to the bunk house, and Candy goes out to tell the other men what he's discovered. As Candy brings all the men—including Curley—into the barn, Curley orders Carlson to fetch his gun so that they can hunt Lennie down and kill him. Carlson goes to the bunk house, but returns without his gun, claiming Lennie has stolen it. George comes into the barn, pretending to see Curley's wife's corpse for the first time. He begs Curley to spare Lennie's life, but Curley remains determined to murder Lennie.

Lennie sits by the pool off the Salinas, worried about getting in trouble with George and tortured by visions of his Aunt Clara, who turns into a giant rabbit and harasses Lennie for his stupidity and cruelty. George comes crashing through the brush and embraces Lennie. Lennie apologizes for what he's done, but George insists that it doesn't matter and says he isn't mad at Lennie at all. As the sounds of the other men's voices can be heard approaching, George urges Lennie to look out at the river so that he can picture their future on their farm together. George tells Lennie about the vegetables, animals, and rabbits they'll tend, and Lennie happily looks forward to living "on the fatta the lan." As George hears the men's footsteps approaching, he pulls Carlson's pistol from inside his jacket, aims it at the back of Lennie's head, and fires, killing Lennie instantly. The other men arrive at the pool, and Curley thanks George for dispatching with Lennie. George is visibly shaken. Slim tries to comfort him, insisting that he did what he had to do. As Slim helps a nearly-catatonic George back toward the ranch, Carlson and Curley wonder aloud what could be "eatin' them two guys."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Milton – George Milton is one of the protagonists in *Of Mice and Men*. A small, wiry, and wily hustler who's quick on his feet and sharp to boot, George travels around the countryside with his childhood companion, Lennie, looking for work on ranches and migrant farms across California. George has cared for Lennie for years, and though he has increasingly come to see his lumbering, simple-minded companion as a burden, he

finds himself incapable of abandoning Lennie and leaving him exposed to the cruelties of the world. At the start of the novella, George and Lennie are on the run after escaping a ranch in a town called Weed, where Lennie got them into trouble after grabbing the hem of a young woman's dress because he wanted to touch its soft fabric. George is determined to make their next position their last—he wants to save up enough money to buy a spit of land all his own, **farm** it, and live there with Lennie free of the responsibilities and indignities of working for a different ranch boss each month. George is clearly weary and resentful of the way he's been living, but doesn't know how to seize his fate and change his circumstances. After arriving on the ranch in Soledad and meeting Candy—an old man who offers to use the settlement he received for an injury years ago to help George buy some land—George begins to believe that he and Lennie are at last going to be free from their rootless and directionless lifestyle. When Lennie kills the wife of the boss's son, Curley, however, George is forced to admit that his dream of a free, plentiful life on his own farm was never going to be a reality. And, moreover, he must kill Lennie in order to save his companion from an undignified, torturous death (and himself from suspicion of having aided Lennie in the killing). Proud, crafty, and empathetic in spite of a decidedly selfish streak, George Milton is a portrait of a man at war with himself—desperate to appear strong, capable, and independent even as his love for Lennie, his hopes for a better future, and his frustration with the worst parts of himself threaten his ability to survive in a harsh world that is only getting harsher.

Lennie Small – Lennie Small is the secondary protagonist in *Of Mice and Men*. He is a huge, lumbering man whose bearlike appearance masks a sweet, gentle disposition. Lennie has an unnamed mental disability—according to George, this is the result of an accident as a child, though this is likely untrue. His childlike disposition, fallible short-term memory, and fascination with stroking and petting soft things are markers of the ways in which his strong exterior conceals a side of Lennie that many people, were they to witness it, would see as weak and seek to exploit. George is intensely protective of Lennie, and though the other ranch hands perceive their traveling together as strange or even suspect, it becomes clear over the course of the novella that the two men are only able to survive in the harsh landscape of the Depression-gripped American West with one another's help. Lennie is a hard worker capable of lifting incredible weights, but the side of him most often shown throughout the book is the side obsessed with raising soft **rabbits**, petting **puppies**, and fantasizing about a comfortable and idyllic future alone on a **farm** with George. Lennie clearly doesn't grasp his own strength, a fact that is evidenced by his repeated killings of animals including mice and puppies. Later, this leads to him accidentally murdering Curley's wife, which occurs when he shakes her too hard after she begins screaming as a result of Lennie grabbing her hair—something she invited him to do in an attempt to allow

him to touch something soft. Lennie flees the ranch and hides in a meeting-spot he and George chose before arriving at the ranch, believing George will come save him so they can flee together. Instead, George distracts Lennie with a story about how they'll soon get their farm before shooting him in the back of the head in order to save Lennie from the wrath of the other laborers, who are out for revenge. Gentle but fearfully strong, insecure but gregarious, and trusting to a dangerous degree, Lennie is a mess of contradictions whose arc ties in with the novella's major themes of the strong and the weak, male friendship, and marginalization and scapegoating.

Candy – Candy is an elderly “swamper” in charge of odd jobs around the ranch. He is missing a hand after losing it in an accident years ago, but remains employed in spite of his limited capabilities as a physical laborer. Candy is, at the start of the novella, deeply attached to a mangy, stinking, blind old **dog** which he's raised from infancy into old age. Candy's attachment to the dog and his unwillingness to accept that it needs to put down is a symbol of his own fears about aging out of his usefulness, his position on the ranch, and indeed his very life. When Candy overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans for the **farm** they hope to buy one day, he offers to give them a large sum of money he received as a settlement for his injury if they allow him to join them on the farm—they agree, and all three of them find their hopes bolstered for a few days as they consider a life of freedom and plenty. Ultimately, Candy is left alone and despondent on the ranch after the other laborers go off in search of Lennie, who has just killed Curley's wife and run away. Candy must reckon with the fact that his dreams are never going to come true, and instead his very worst fears may be what come to fruition.

Curley – Curley, the son of the ranch's boss, is a mean and power-hungry individual obsessed with securing the respect and submission of the individuals beneath him. Short in stature, nervous, and yet obsessed with proving his strength and masculinity, Curley is constantly being undermined by his flirtatious wife even as he tries harder and harder over the course of the novel to make himself seem socially and sexually dominant. The laborers on the ranch don't respect Curley at all, and go so far as to call him a “yella” coward to his face. Still, they're forced to support Curley in his struggles against Lennie, and follow Curley when he plans to retaliate against Lennie for killing his wife—even though he knows, on some level, that Lennie did not kill her out of any ill intent, but rather by accident.

Curley's Wife – The only woman on the ranch, Curley's wife is viewed as a “tart” by the men who surround her. Young, lonely, and desirous of attention, Curley's wife spends her days roaming around the ranch looking for someone to talk to—even though she knows that the men all around are reluctant to talk to her for fear of incurring the wrath of her jealous husband, Curley. Curley's wife regrets the path her life has taken, and

laments having missed her chance to move to Hollywood and become a movie star. To make up for her misery and loneliness, she tries to connect with other people, but finds herself thwarted at every turn. She even attempts to bond with Lennie by trying to connect with him over their shared love of soft, nice things. But when she lets Lennie stroke her hair, she becomes frightened by his strength and starts screaming, prompting Lennie to suffocate and shake her until she dies. Curley's wife, like Lennie and Crooks, lives an existence defined by solitude and marginalization.

Slim – A tall, strong, quiet, and craggy-faced laborer on the ranch who works as a mule driver. Slim has an ageless, inscrutable face and a reserved disposition, and his physical power and commanding nature make him something of an authority figure to the other ranch hands. In spite of his intimidating appearance, Slim has a sensitive side, and is the only one to comfort George after the death of Lennie.

Crooks – The only black laborer on the ranch, Crooks the stable hand is a sensitive but “aloof” man who is ostracized due to his race. Crooks suffers from a crooked spine, an injury sustained in an accident with a horse years earlier. Due to his identity as a black man and a disabled individual, Crooks is doubly marginalized by the people around him. He resents being treated so poorly so often, but he also knows there's little he can do other than keep to himself and try to avoid the ire of Curley and the boss. Lennie's poor understanding of social norms and his intense desire for friendship lead him to come to Crooks's room one evening in search of company. As Crooks slowly and uncertainly lets Lennie into his private world and innermost thoughts, he finds someone who is willing to listen to him for the first time in years—even if Lennie is unable to truly understand the intense frustration and loneliness Crooks feels each day.

Carlson – A laborer on the ranch. Carlson is an aggressive man who owns a Luger pistol which he prizes and cherishes. He leaps at any opportunity to use his gun, including when he shoots Candy's old dog and offers to try to shoot Lennie after he kills Curley's wife. A dimwitted man with little empathy or capacity for self-reflection, Carlson often acts as a flunkey to Curley.

Whit – A laborer on the Salinas ranch where George and Lennie go to work. Whit enjoys a good time, and regularly spends all his money at the whorehouse in town. Aggressive, nosy, and always looking to be where the action is, Whit seems to seek out and enjoy any drama or tension on the ranch.

Aunt Clara – A kindly old woman back in Auburn, who may or may not have been Lennie's biological aunt. George and Lennie both remember the deceased Aunt Clara fondly, though George seems to think she coddled Lennie too much in his youth. Toward the end of the novel, Aunt Clara appears to Lennie in a vision which seems to represent the worst parts of his conscience and self-doubt, reprimanding him for his “bad”

and foolish nature and attempting to make him believe that George is going to abandon him. Aunt Clara's appearance and the cruel things she says to Lennie complicate George's remembrances of her, and possibly suggest that there was tension, resentment, and cruelty in the way Aunt Clara treated Lennie.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Boss – The boss of the ranch and Curley's father.

Andy Cushman – An old schoolmate of George and Lennie's who is locked up in San Quentin for getting into some kind of unnamed trouble with a woman.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



BROKEN PLANS

Of Mice and Men takes its title from a line in a famous poem by the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

Burns's poem “To a Mouse, On Turning up in Her

Nest with the Plough, November, 1785” contains the lines, “The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men,/ Gang aft agley.” “Gang aft agley” is a Gaelic phrase which translates to “go oft awry,” and the poem's concern with the difficulty—and the futility—of preparing or planning for the future is reflected in the pages of Steinbeck's novella. Nearly all of the main characters in *Of Mice and Men* harbor dreams that never come true and plans that never come to fruition—through their stories, Steinbeck carries the torch of Burns's poem's thesis and ultimately argues that more often than not, life's twists, turns, and tragedies have a way of interfering with even the “best laid” plans.

The most profound example of broken plans within the novella is represented by George and Lennie's shared dream of saving up enough money to buy a small piece of land of their own to use as a homestead and **farm**. At the start of the novella, it's clear that George and Lennie have been dreaming of their own place for a while. Lennie loves hearing George “tell about” the future they'll have together raising vegetables and livestock and tending **rabbits**, and though George claims to be weary of repeating the details aloud to Lennie over and over again, he often can't stop himself from getting swept up in his own reveries. Every time he describes the way he and Lennie will “live on the fatta the lan,” he elaborates on the fantasy further, adding sumptuous details of the food they'll grow and eat themselves and the fruitful alfalfa patch that will feed Lennie's scores of soft, cute rabbits. George and Lennie expand this

private fantasy as they arrive on the ranch in Soledad, involving a couple of the other laborers in their dreams. First, Candy overhears George and Lennie discussing their plans, even though George has forbidden Lennie of letting anyone else know about them. Candy tells George that he has money left over from being compensated for the accident that took his hand—and though George is reluctant to bring someone else into the fold, he knows that with Candy’s money, the little patch of land could go from being a far-off dream to a reality. Lennie also brings Crooks into the “scheme” one evening when he visits the stable hand in his room—though Crooks, a black and disabled man who has been shunned and isolated by his fellow laborer years, tries to tell Lennie that the dream will never happen, once he hears that Candy is in on it he, too, seems convinced that the plan could actually come to fruition. Candy asks timidly if he could join the men on their land—but later tells Curley that he was just joking, and wants no part of whatever they’re planning. Crooks, a man who has been disappointed and let down by the world and the people around him repeatedly, seems to know how often things have the potential to go awry, and wants to head off his own disappointment and sadness before it has the power to hurt him.

Eventually, it becomes clear that George and Lennie won’t get their land after all: George struggles with the temptation to spend his wages in town on whisky, billiards, and the company of women, as Crooks warned Lennie he would. When Lennie kills Curley’s wife, it becomes clear to both him and George that their dreams were never going to be a reality. George admits to Candy that he knew all along he’d never really get to have a place of his own. Things beyond his control—or Lennie’s—have come between them and their dream. Though Lennie’s actions are the most direct reason that their plan is dead in the water, George’s sad admission that he never really believed in the dream at all shows that he is aware of the ways in which fate acts on people and interferes with their “schemes” and plans. He is doubly aware of the unforgiving socioeconomic climate he’s living in, and the disadvantage that this climate has created, not just for him, but for dreamers of all sorts.

Other characters reckon with broken plans and thwarted dreams: Curley’s wife laments that she never was able to star in “pitchers” like she wanted to, and alludes repeatedly to dreams of Hollywood stardom that were crushed when she married Curley. Curley’s wife continues to dress glamorously, curl her hair, and make up her face each and every day, seemingly out of an inability to accept that she is not a beautiful movie star, but instead the wife of a powerless, disrespected ranch hand. Though Curley’s wife had big plans for herself, they’ve all amounted to nothing—and she cannot come to terms with the fact that she had to put her dreams away in order to make a sensible financial decision that would allow her to survive the throes of the Great Depression.

Steinbeck shows, over the course of *Of Mice and Men*, how his characters’ schemes and plans “go awry” not because of their own mistakes or follies, but because of unpredictable, uncontrollable forces beyond their control. Any life is subject to uncertainty and disappointment—but in the landscape of the Great Depression, Steinbeck illustrates, dreams and plans are a luxury few can afford.



THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream of every individual’s right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” has been ingrained within American society since the writing of the *Declaration of Independence*, when the phrase made its first appearance. George and Lennie’s dream of working hard and saving enough money to buy their own **farm** and “live off the fatta the lan” symbolizes the concrete ways in which the American Dream serves as an idealized goal for poor and working-class Americans even in the darkest and hardest of times. Through *Of Mice and Men*, however, Steinbeck argues that while throughout American history—and especially during the Great Depression—the American Dream has at best been an illusion and at worst a trap, unattainable dreams are still necessary, in a way, to make life in America bearable.

The Great Depression represented the end of an era of the American Dream—the artistic and economic innovation and prosperity of the “Roaring Twenties” came to a short, decisive stop, and American society went into crisis mode. In the midst of this sudden shift, many felt like the rug had been pulled out from under them—this sentiment and perspective is echoed in George and Lennie’s insistence on pursuing their dream of a peaceful, sustainable life of ease and independence even as they are in the depths of an economic crisis which threatens not just their plans, but their very lives. Though little is known of George and Lennie’s background, it is clear that they grew up together in Auburn, a Gold Rush town that boomed in the late 1800s but suffered by the 1920s as gold prices dropped. Families hoping to make their fortune in gold continued to flock to Auburn, and soon Auburn was overrun by people camping by the river, hoping to pan for gold in the water in light of the closed mines in town. George and Lennie, then, appear to be fleeing a town where there’s nothing left for them, chasing their own dream even as they shut out the knowledge that there are countless people like them—many in their very own hometown—pursuing dreams just as broken and hopeless as their own.

George and Lennie encounter hostility and calamity, it seems, nearly everywhere they go. In this way, Steinbeck portrays the gritty reality of trying to make it in America as a poor itinerant worker. Their struggles are almost always as a result of Lennie’s inability to function normally within the bounds of social codes and contracts. His childlike nature draws him to soft, pleasant, cute things—but his immense strength and huge physical frame

make him an object of fear. Lennie is unable to understand why people keep rejecting him, or why he keeps killing the mice, **puppies**, and other soft animals he enjoys holding and stroking. George, rather than helping Lennie to control his strength or his impulses, continues stoking Lennie's dream of having limitless **rabbits** to tend and pet whenever he wants. George knows, on some level, that for either him or Lennie to confront the truth about Lennie—that he is a burden, and a dangerous one at that—would tear them apart. As a result, he retreats into a dream of he and Lennie having their own farm: a distinctly American dream of self-made independence, plenty, and harmony. Candy, another laborer on the ranch where George and Lennie find work, is also swept up in the romantic vision of owning a farm, offering up his savings to help secure a plot of land. This dream is unrealistic by any standards, and in light of George and Lennie's financial insolvency and social struggles, impossible. In order to make their rootless, dangerous, and directionless existence more bearable, however, George and Lennie cling tightly to the dream of America they've manufactured together. Lennie and George were raised on promises of prosperity and independence tied to a sensibility rooted in the expansiveness of the American West—but the dreams they were led to believe could be their reality have evaporated as the West has turned from a place of potential and riches to one of dust, emptiness, and squandered potential.

Even though George and Lennie never achieve their dream, it is what keeps them going in the darkest of times. Indeed, even as George prepares to execute Lennie with Carlson's rifle in the novella's final pages, George urges Lennie to stare off into the distance as George narrates the familiar details of their shared dream: a "little place" all their own. Steinbeck closes the novella with George shooting Lennie to protect him from a worse death at the hands of the angry ranch laborers who are out for vengeance. This tragic act of violence in the midst of George and Lennie's "dream" shows that for George, this vision of the America he was promised is ultimately just a fantasy—unattainable yet necessary in order to bear the difficult reality of life.



MALE FRIENDSHIP

During the Great Depression, American society was plunged into uncertainty and chaos as jobs disappeared and the economy plummeted. Families were uprooted and scattered as people moved around the country in search of work that would allow them to survive—work that was often physically demanding in nature and necessitated grueling hours. As bunk houses on ranches like the one George and Lennie travel to in search of work filled with men—often men traveling alone, separated from their families—male friendship became a necessary distraction (and often even survival mechanism) in the face of social upheaval and economic devastation. *Of Mice and Men* explores male

friendship, and through the relationships contained in the novella, Steinbeck argues that "a guy needs somebody"—even when society seems to value or demand solitude and independence.

Lennie and George's friendship is the central focus of *Of Mice and Men*—even as it is presented as a total anomaly in a world where individualism, distrust, and the struggle for survival define the social landscape. "Ain't many guys travel around together," says Slim, a mule driver on the Soledad ranch where George and Lennie travel for work; "I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other." Slim's simple, straightforward assessment of the American landscape during the depression reflects the mistrust and selfishness of the time period and shows how unusual—and even suspect—George and Lennie's devoted friendship is to the men around them. Their partnership confuses and surprises many of the men on the ranch—Slim, of course, but also Crooks and Curley, the latter of whom George actually lies to in order to explain why he and Lennie travel together and to seem less suspicious. George tells Curley, the boss's son, that he and Lennie are cousins in order to make it seem like they are bound to one another out of familial duty. Any other responsibility to one another would, in the midst of the Depression, seem odd—the landscape is such that allegiance and solidarity are unexpected and even suspicious.

George explains to Slim that he and Lennie "look after each other"—their friendship, the novella slowly reveals, is not just for the sake of Lennie's survival, but rather for both their mutual benefit. While George has a sharp mind and is able to help Lennie avoid social mishaps and the cruelties of the wild American West, he is small and wiry. Lennie, whose huge frame and immense strength are regarded as remarkable by everyone he meets, is in many ways just as responsible for George as George is for Lennie. George warns Lennie never to pick a fight, and as a result, Lennie is hesitant to defend himself—even, for instance, when Curley begins beating him in the bunk house one evening. At the same time, though, George clearly relies on Lennie's strength to get them both out of tough spots. The minute George tells Lennie that it's okay to fight back during the bunk house altercation, Lennie stops Curley's blows by grabbing the man's hand and crushing it until it is unrecognizable. George and Lennie need one another in very different ways, but their traveling around together is as necessary on a practical level as it is on an emotional one.

George and Lennie's arrival changes the atmosphere on the ranch in Soledad, however slightly. When the other laborers and ranch hands see George and Lennie's mutual trust, they're skeptical at first—but slowly, over the few days that George and Lennie stay, the social dynamics on the ranch begin to change. Lennie's insistence on spending time with Crooks makes the black stable hand, who is daily isolated from and ridiculed by his fellow workers, suspicious at first. But after Crooks relents and

lets Lennie come into his room one evening to chat, Crooks himself begins to open up about the lack of male friendship he's experienced on the ranch and admits that "a guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody." Candy, too, who has been isolated from the others due to his age and his disability, finds himself envious of George and Lennie's friendship, and seeks to buy his way into their arrangement by offering them the money from his accident toward their pursuit of a **farm**. Candy and Crooks's desires for friendship, companionship, and the feeling of mutual trust demonstrates just how profoundly they've been lacking in male friendship in spite of being surrounded by men who are, in all likelihood, just as lonely as they are.

Throughout *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck shows just how important friendship, companionship, and mutual trust really are—even for a group of men who have been told and shown that helping one another or sacrificing one's own well-being for another's makes them weak or vulnerable. Especially in the midst of the Depression, the idea of putting one's own life on the line for another was antithetical to American values of individualism and independence. But in *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck argues that without common decency among men, society will crumble.



THE WEAK AND THE STRONG

Though many characters in *Of Mice and Men* long for friendship and compassion, they live in fear of each other. As Carlson's unsentimental shooting of Candy's **dog** early on in the novella makes clear, during the Great Depression the useless, old, or weak were inevitably destroyed as the strong and useful fought for survival. This constant struggle between the weak and the strong is one of the novella's defining conflicts, and Steinbeck seeks to subvert traditional notions of strength and weakness as he argues that a society which values only strength, as American society did during the Depression, is doomed to fail.

Everyone on the ranch in Soledad where George and Lennie go to find work is trying to look strong—even (and especially when) they feel weak. Showing even a shred of physical, intellectual, or emotional weakness is a liability that many can't afford even in a normally-function society. In the midst of the Great Depression, when work and resources are scarce, this desire to afford looking or acting weak intensifies even more. People like Candy and Crooks—physically-disabled individuals who survive only at the mercy of others—have developed cynical worldviews, social anxieties, and an "aloof" detachment in cultivated attempts to cling to a different kind of strength. Crooks, for example, puts down George and Lennie's dream of buying their own **farm** to cover up his own disappointments, while Candy allows Carlson to shoot his dog in order to appear detached and emotionally "strong" in the face of death. Steinbeck thus demonstrates how the desire to crush any form of weakness warps people's very souls, causing them to act

cruelly toward others and even devalue life itself. Individuals like Carlson and Curley, who detest weakness and seem to have a pathological desire to prey upon it, attempt to puff themselves up often by inciting physical violence. Even those lowest on the totem pole of power on the ranch, like Curley's wife, attempt to resist looking weak or vulnerable—Curley's wife threatens to have Crooks lynched because he is the one person on the ranch over whom she has power, and she has been conditioned to learn that power over another person, even in the depths of one's own subjugation, is the only way to survive. The cruel, almost inhuman ways in which the characters on the ranch speak to one another and constantly attempt to intimidate each other in a struggle to assert their own dominance shows Steinbeck's contempt for social systems which value strength—and which force people to prey upon one another in order to scrape by.

Lennie, as a character, encapsulates through his own inner struggle the constant battle between strength and weakness. Lennie is physically imposing—a huge, hulking man whose frame is compared in size to that of a bear. George is constantly boasting about his companion's strength, resilience, and ability to undertake any physical task required of him. At the same time, however, Lennie is weak on the inside. Mentally-disabled with a poor memory and an intensely naïve, childlike disposition, Lennie needs a companion to help him navigate the rough, unforgiving world around him. Lennie's strength is a gift in George's eyes, but a curse when seen through Lennie's own. Lennie loves soft, small things like **puppies**, mice, and **rabbits**, and is driven by a compulsion to stroke any soft texture he comes across. His strength, though, means that he kills the small animals he tries to love—and gets himself to trouble in other ways, such as when his solid grip on the soft hem of a young woman's beautiful dress leads her to report Lennie for attempted rape. Lennie's strength and weakness are constantly at war with one another—and thus Lennie, in many ways, comes to represent the struggle within all human souls. Vulnerability was particularly dangerous to admit to during the Great Depression, when weakness meant ostracization and even danger.

The characters in *Of Mice and Men*—even, to some extent, George and Lennie—feel they are constantly in a fight for survival with one another. Suspicion, mistrust, and chronic one-upmanship are so commonplace in broader society that these dynamics trickle down and impact people on an individual level. Though George and Lennie, for a time, seem to prove that such distinctions and struggles for power are not only unnecessary but cruel, even their relationship dynamic falls prey to the battle between the weak and the strong. George begins to realize that Lennie is a burden which weakens his chances of survival. When push comes to shove, he knows he must kill Lennie if he himself is to continue eking out an existence, however miserable, in the unforgiving landscape of the

Depression-gripped American West.



MINORITIES, MARGINALIZATION, AND SCAPEGOATING

Of Mice and Men is set in the 1930s—a period during which women, racial minorities, and disabled individuals had few rights. The oppressive nature of the period was further compounded by the socioeconomic instability of the Great Depression. Throughout the novella, Steinbeck argues that hard times necessitate scapegoats—and that the individuals who bear the brunt of society’s frustrations, suspicions, and uncertainties are those already marginalized by the world around them.

There are several marginalized groups within *Of Mice and Men*. The first character who is marginalized and scapegoated throughout the novella is Lennie, whose large, hulking frame stands in contrast to his delicate, childlike nature. Lennie is mentally-disabled, and as such his actions and intentions are often misunderstood. At the start of the novel, Lennie and his companion George have been chased away from a ranch in Weed because Lennie, longing to stroke the fabric of a young woman’s dress, seized the girl’s hem, leading her to tell the police he tried to rape her. Due to Lennie’s appearance (and societal attitudes towards the physically and mentally disabled at the time), his desire to touch and stroke soft things is entirely misunderstood. Lennie’s immense strength—and his inability to control it—make him both a marvel and a threat, and in the end, George must reckon with the fact that he, too, has been complicit in Lennie’s demise. In attempting to ignore, gloss over, or even ridicule Lennie’s disability, George has prevented Lennie from understanding his own nature, isolating and marginalizing his friend even further.

The second and arguably most marginalized character on the ranch is Crooks, the black stable hand, whose bosses and fellow laborers alike refer to him using cruel racial slurs. Even Crooks’s nickname pokes fun at his crooked spine, the result of an accident with a horse. Crooks is doubly marginalized: he is black, which, in the 1930s, makes him a second-class citizen in the eyes of his peers and of society more largely. He is also disabled, which has the dual function of rendering him weak and making him an object of his peers’ derision, and of serving as a constant reminder of the very real danger that accompanies many of the jobs on the ranch—jobs that, in the Depression, are necessary to maintain even in the face of injury or death. Crooks spends most of his time in his room, which is segregated from the bunk house in a small, hay-lined nook off the barn. Crooks reads, keeps to himself, and refuses company even when it’s offered. Crooks explains to Lennie that as a child, he and his family were the only black family in their entire California town—now, as the only black worker on the ranch, he faces the same isolation and marginalization he has faced all his life. Crooks understand well how the system of marginalization

and scapegoating works and does his best to avoid any and all situations in which he could possibly be misjudged or mistreated any more than he already is.

Candy is yet another marginalized character. Due to his age and his missing hand, which he lost in an accident, Candy is relegated to work as a “swamper”—a man in charge of odd jobs. Candy is kept on only, it is implied, due to his boss’s pity. Candy’s plight is made manifest in the symbol of his **dog**—an old, stinking sheepdog who is blind and lame. Candy keeps the dog around because it’s been with him all its life, but as it becomes clear that the dog is suffering and needs to be put down, Candy agrees that the best thing for the dog is death. While Carlson, another laborer, takes the dog out back to shoot it, Candy stares at the ceiling in a silent state of denial or even dissociation as he listens to his companion meet a fate for which Candy knows he himself may one day be destined. Candy is well-enough liked among the other laborers, but the idea that he is living (and working) on borrowed time eats at him. He is aware that he is not like the other men on the ranch, and must find an alternative before he is scapegoated, attacked, or disposed of.

Curley’s wife, though white and able-bodied, is the only woman on the ranch, and she is marginalized due to that fact. Curley’s wife dresses glamorously, curls her hair, and makes up her face each day. She hangs around the bunk house under the pretense of looking for her husband, when really it’s clear she wants to talk to and flirt with the men on the ranch. The men quickly label her as a promiscuous “tart,” and refuse to associate with her. Curley’s wife, however, later reveals that she is miserable on the ranch and always dreamed of being a big movie star in “pitchers” on screens around the world. Curley’s wife only wants company and an escape from her social ostracization—and yet all she gets in return is suspicion and judgement.

The marginalized characters in *Of Mice and Men* represent the larger stratifications in American society at the time, and speak to the fear, instability, and distrust that permeated the atmosphere. With jobs so few and far between and even white, able-bodied men unable to find work, society began to buckle under the weight of so many people’s disillusionment. The scapegoating of minorities—disabled people, people of color, and women—gave socially dominant groups someone to blame, and thus easier to shoulder their shame about their own failure to thrive in a crumbling system. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck cuts to the heart of these problems—and warns against any society picking on its weakest members in order to soothe the hubris of its most powerful.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and

Analysis sections of this LitChart.



GEORGE AND LENNIE'S FARM

George and Lennie dream of buying a patch of land of their own to use as a farm—a farm where they'll build a self-sustaining life and “live off the fatta the lan.” Their hypothetical farm represents the failures of the American Dream, an especially dark reality given the Depression-era setting of the novella, when dreams of peace, stability, and harmony were the only things keeping most people going. George and Lennie's farm is a pipe dream from the start—it is a “scheme” destined to go awry and leave “nought but grief an' pain” in its wake. Candy, an old man they meet at their ranching job, is also swept up in the idea of the farm and is willing to contribute his savings to secure the land. But, sure enough, George and Lennie never get to see the farm come to fruition—George's habit of irresponsibly spending all of his earnings, as well as Lennie's death at the end of the story, ensure that their dream will never happen. George even admits to Candy that he knew the farm would never pan out, despite his daydreaming. The farm is thus a symbol of an unattainable fantasy of paradise and plenty whose only purpose is to keep those generating the fantasy alive—and remotely hopeful—in the midst of a time defined by struggle, failure, and scarcity.



RABBITS

For Lennie, rabbits represent an escape from the obstacles he faces as a mentally-disabled man.

While George fantasizes of his and Lennie's future **farm** as an alternate reality where he can be free, independent, and beholden to nobody, Lennie's major fantasy about the farm is that it will be a place where he can tend and raise rabbits. Due to his unspecified mental disability, Lennie has long had a preoccupation with touching and stroking soft things—a fixation which, due to the overuse his great physical strength, has killed the animals he's pet and gotten him in trouble time and time again. But when Lennie dreams of raising rabbits, the fantasy is that he will be able to indulge in his greatest pleasure without doing the objects of his affection any harm, or bringing any upon himself. However, Lennie is never able to realize this dream, as he accidentally kills Curley's wife after stroking her hair too forcefully, and is then mercifully shot to death by George to escape the wrath of the other laborers. Rabbits, then, are a symbol of the hope for freedom—both from society's expectations, and from one's own personal limitations. The fact that Lennie never gets his rabbits, however, darkly implies that those who are marginalized or disabled can never truly be free of the difficulties and judgment they face, and that these limitations are often impossible to overcome.



CANDY'S DOG

The dog of Candy, the elderly, disabled swamper on the ranch in Soledad, is a parallel to Candy himself as well as to the relationship between George and Lennie. After losing his hand in an accident several years ago, Candy has been allowed to stay on, but is relegating to doing odd jobs devoid of physical labor. Similarly, Candy's dog, which he has raised from puppyhood, was once a star sheep herder—now, though, Candy's dog is old, lame, and blind, and carries with it a horrible stench everywhere it goes. On the evening of George and Lennie's arrival on the ranch, Carlson, another laborer, decides that enough is enough, and all but forces Candy into letting him put the dog back outside using his pistol. Candy's reluctance to put down the dog reflects George's own reluctance to abandon and ultimately kill Lennie—George is attached to his mentally-disabled friend despite the very real danger and liability of Lennie's weaknesses in much the same way Candy is attached to the dog despite its nuisances. Candy eventually relents, however, just as George eventually relents to putting Lennie out of certain misery by shooting him at the end of the novella. Candy enters a silent state of dissociation as he listens to his best friend's execution. For Candy, his dog ultimately represents Candy's fear of being singled out for his own weakness—and, more largely, the unforgiving atmosphere at the ranch (and across the American West during the Depression more generally), which favors the strong and despises the weak.



LENNIE'S PUPPY

The puppy Lennie adopts on the ranch in Soledad represents the futility of the strong trying to care for the weak, and the inevitability of fate. The days-old puppy symbolizes the inescapability of doom and suffering—after narrowly surviving being drowned by Slim, it dies at Lennie's hands after he accidentally smacks it too hard when it tries to playfully bite him, perhaps as it was even suckling Lennie's fingers in search of milk. Lennie, a physically strong character, inadvertently kills the tiny, weak puppy while trying to care for it, leading it to the same fate it initially escaped. Similarly, the cunning George looks out for the Lennie, who is mentally disabled, yet must ultimately kill Lennie to protect him from a worse death at the hands of the vengeful ranch laborers. The puppy and its death represent the brutal fate that ultimately bely the weakest creatures, and the inescapability of this fate despite stronger people's attempts to protect the weak. It is yet another one of the ways in which “the best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men” are shown to go hopelessly awry over the course of the novella.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *Of Mice and Men* published in 1993.

Part 1 Quotes

☞ Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached, drew back, approached again.

Related Characters: George Milton, Lennie Small

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

After escaping from Weed, where Lennie was falsely accused of raping a girl, Lennie and George trudge to another ranch seeking work. George realizes that Lennie has been keeping a dead field mouse that he found in his pocket. When Lennie picked it up, it was alive, but his powerful grip killed it.

In this quote, Lennie reluctantly approaches George to give him the mouse, which George then throws away. Lennie's internal weakness, intellectual vulnerability, and love for all things soft and his powerful strength are a dangerous combination that plague him throughout the story. In Weed, he is accused of raping the girl after holding onto the soft hem of her dress for too long; at the ranch, he kills a puppy, and ultimately kills Curley's wife after holding on to her soft hair. This quote also reveals the dynamic of the relationship between George and Lennie as one that is not dissimilar to a dog and his owner. George takes care of Lennie and brings him from ranch to ranch for work, until Lennie misbehaves and they must run away. Though Lennie's antics frustrate George, they are loyal to one another, and stick together regardless of hardships.

☞ “Well, we ain't got any,” George exploded. “Whatever we ain't got, that's what you want. God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble....An' whatta I got,” George went on furiously. “I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time. An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out.”

Related Characters: George Milton (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis


While eating a dinner of canned beans, Lennie complains about the lack of ketchup to spice up the meal. In this quote, George complains about Lennie's attitude in retaliation. Though Lennie is large, strong, and a good worker, he is mentally disabled and often misbehaves, getting the two of them into trouble and often causing them to lose their jobs. However, though George here complains that he would be better off if he were not stuck with Lennie, the fact that he is still with Lennie after so many mishaps is a testament to his loyalty to his friend—and it also suggests that George depends on Lennie for companionship just as much as Lennie depends on George for guidance.


George is all talk, and for him, venting his frustration is Lennie's punishment for being ungrateful about the meal. George would never actually act on any of these claims. Though he acknowledges that Lennie does “bad things” that he must then bail him out of, the fact remains that he does, consistently, bail Lennie out, again and again. His irritation with Lennie is sincere, but his statements that he will abandon him never are. While the two men differ in many significant ways, they are bound by their unyielding loyalty toward one another.

☞ “Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world. They got no family. They don't belong no place. [...] With us it ain't like that. We got a future.”

[...] Lennie broke in. “*But not us! An' why? Because...because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you, and that's why.*”

Related Characters: Lennie Small, George Milton (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 13-14

Explanation and Analysis



After George finishes complaining about Lennie as a burden, Lennie offers to leave George and run away into the woods. George tells him to stop, and that he wants him to stay. In this quote, George repeats a refrain about his and


Lennie's friendship that he often uses to calm Lennie down when they get into an altercation like this one.

Here, George explains that though ranching is a lonely line of work, he and Lennie are special because they have each other. Though they live a nomadic life, working from farm to farm like other ranchers, they look out for each other, and have a future planned together: they want to buy a ranch of their own someday. George sticks with Lennie because he knows Lennie would never make it alone in the world, and he reciprocates Lennie's undying loyalty towards him. Lennie trusts George without question, since George has been his only support system since his Aunt Clara passed away. Though other ranchers might be technically richer since they aren't constantly running away from their jobs, like George and Lennie have to do when Lennie gets in trouble, they are rich in something other ranchers don't have: a friendship that functions like a family.

“Well,” said George, “we'll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we'll just say the hell with goin' to work, and we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an' listen to the rain comin' down on the roof.”

Related Characters: George Milton (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

When George repeats his refrain about why he and Lennie, as two traveling friends, are different than other ranchers, Lennie asks George to tell him about the farm that they are going to have together. Lennie often asks George to repeat this story, as a sort of verbal security blanket that calms him when he is upset.

In this quote, George repeats yet another refrain about a piece of land that he and Lennie will own, with their own livestock and crops. As ranchers, they are constantly doing backbreaking labor to harvest the crops that someone else owns, for meager pay. If they were to own their own land, they could “live off tha fatta the lan,” as Lennie is fond of saying—they can be sustained entirely by the food they grow. They would effectively be their own bosses, and therefore “say the hell with goin' to work” whenever they please, rather than risk being fired by an employer. The

repetition of this dream keeps both men going even when times are hard. The belief that their future will be better than their current situation is one that they must furtively believe if they are to continue to endure the repercussions of Lennie's antics on various ranches across California.

Part 2 Quotes

“Ain't many guys travel around together,” he mused. “I don't know why. Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.”

Related Characters: Slim (speaker), Lennie Small, George Milton

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

On the ranch, George and Lennie are introduced to Slim, a skinner whom everybody respects. In this quote, Slim, like many of the other ranchers, expresses his surprise that two men like Lennie and George travel around together. Historically, ranchers in the American West tended to be nomadic workers, moving from ranch to ranch whenever and wherever they could find work. It was seen as lonely, individual work, and men rarely traveled together. Therefore, a pair like Lennie and George was seldom seen at these ranches. Slim, as an experienced rancher, has seen many men come and go, and in this quote, he observes that these men are usually alone—perhaps, he reasons, “the whole damn world is scared of each other.” The lonely life of a rancher perpetuates feelings of animosity against other ranchers who could be potential competition for jobs and can often inspire meanness, creating a circle of loneliness. What George and Lennie have, particularly in their line of work, is a rarity.

Part 3 Quotes

“Carl's right, Candy. That dog ain't no good to himself. I wisht somebody'd shoot me if I got old an' a cripple.”

Related Characters: Slim (speaker), Carlson, Candy

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 45



Explanation and Analysis


Candy, an old swamper on the ranch who lost his hand to a machine, has an old dog whom he adores. However, the other men whom he bunks with complain that it is useless and smelly. When Slim's dog gives birth to a litter of puppies, Carlson proposes that he put Candy's dog out of its misery and replace it with a puppy. In this quote, Slim agrees. He attempts to sympathize with the dog by saying that if he were "old an' a cripple," he would want someone to shoot him, but unfortunately, this statement seems to bear more resemblance to Candy's situation: he is no longer an efficient worker due to his age and disability, but he has kept his job out of pity from the boss. The fact that all the workers get together to convince Candy that he should let his dog go makes Candy nervous that he, too, will one day be ousted—or worse—for a younger worker.

☞ "Maybe it'd hurt him," [Candy] suggested. "I don't mind takin' care of him."

Carlson said, "The way I'd shoot him, he wouldn't feel nothing. I'd put the gun right there." He pointed with his toe. "Right back of the head. He wouldn't even quiver."

Related Characters: Carlson, Candy (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 45


Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Slim, Carlson, and some of the other laborers on the ranch are trying to pressure Candy into letting Carlson put his old sheepdog out of its misery at long last. Candy is resistant to the idea on several levels—on a practical level, he loves the dog and doesn't want to "hurt him." On a deeper level, Candy knows that the dog's longevity—or lack thereof—is tied to his own. As a disabled ranch hand, he knows his tenure on the ranch is only limited to the amount of time the boss takes pity on him—just as his dog's life is only going to last as long as the other laborers tolerate him. At this point, it seems like they won't put up with the dog for much longer. As Carlson discusses how he'd kill the dog in an attempt to comfort Candy and assure him the animal will feel no pain, he is, unknowingly, giving advice

to George about what to do when the time comes to put Lennie out of his misery. The method of execution Carlson describes in this passage is exactly how George kills Lennie at the very end of the novel—George even uses Carlson's pistol to do the deed. The novella's focus from its early pages on the constant struggle between the weak and the strong for power, as well as the ways in which society marginalizes and blames those who are different and differently-abled, foreshadows the fact that George will have to kill Lennie in order to assert his own strength and keep Lennie from hurting (or killing) himself due to his mental weakness and inability to follow societal norms.

☞ "We could live offa the fatta the lan!"

Related Characters: Lennie Small (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57


Explanation and Analysis

Lennie asks George to repeat the story of their dream to own a farm together, and in this quote, Lennie chimes in with one of his favorite lines: "We could live offa the fatta the lan!" Rather than working from ranch to ranch to harvest other people's crops, the two men dream of having their own plot of land from which to sustain themselves and to sell harvest from. They both relish the idea of staying in one place, and working hard for something that they own and is theirs to eat or sell, rather than to turn over for a meager day's pay for backbreaking labor. Lennie and George only have each other, and they cannot get enough of the idea that they could one day have a piece of land to call home.

☞ "S'pose they was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing." Old Candy nodded in appreciation of the idea. "We'd just go to her," George said. "We wouldn't ask nobody if we could. Jus' say, 'We'll go to her,' an' we would. Jus' milk the cow and sling some grain to the chickens an' go to her."

Related Characters: George Milton (speaker), Candy

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 60-61


Explanation and Analysis

Candy overhears Lennie and George talking about the farm they one day want to own and pipes up that he, too, would love to get in on the deal. He says that he has money saved up from the settlement when he was injured, and that he would work on the land for no pay. In this quote, George and Candy both relish the idea that if they owned their own farm, they would not have to answer to anyone—if there was something they wanted to do, they wouldn't have to worry about losing their jobs if they left the ranch for a day. Both men are tired of working to harvest crops that they don't own for very little money, and are seduced by the idea of being their own bosses and owning the fruits of their own land. This reflects the general aspirations of the American Dream that people held during the Great Depression in order to help them cope with the difficulty of their circumstances. Given the hard lifestyle of itinerant laborers, then, finally having a place to call home is an especially tantalizing proposition.

“I oughtta of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn't oughtta of let no stranger shoot my dog.”

Related Characters: Candy (speaker), George Milton

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis


Overpowered by the collective agreement of the men that his dog needed to be shot, Candy reluctantly consents to letting Carlson shoot it outside. In this quote, Candy tells George that he regrets not shooting the dog himself. Of course, Candy would have never even thought to kill the dog due to old age if he hadn't been egged on by the other men. Candy reared the dog since it was a pup, and was very attached to it. He feels residual guilt for not killing the dog himself due to this attachment, even though he would never have had the courage to put a gun to the old dog's head. Much of this guilt and regret is related to the fact that Candy feels that he has little control over his life on the ranch. Due to his age and disability, he has no other job

prospects, and worries that his employment will abruptly end one day when the boss decides he is a financial burden. Even though it would have been incredibly painful for him to kill his own dog, it would have at least given him a degree of control in his life.

Part 4 Quotes

“I seen it over an' over—a guy talkin' to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is, they're talkin', or they're settin' still not talkin'. It don't make no difference, no difference...It's just the talking.”

Related Characters: Crooks (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

One evening while the rest of the men on the ranch are in town, Lennie wanders over to Crooks' room in search of puppies to pet. As the only black man on the farm, Crooks is excluded from every aspect of ranch life besides his work. At first, he is angry at having his own space invaded, but he soon warms to Lennie's affable demeanor and allows him to sit in his room. Crooks attempts to engage with Lennie, but soon realizes that Lennie has a mental disability and cannot fully reciprocate in the conversation.

In this quote, Crooks acknowledges that he has actually seen most men engage in this way: talking at each other, instead of to each other. As the only black man on the ranch, Crooks can only say that he has seen this happen, rather than experience it himself, since he is largely ignored by all of the men and constantly feels lonely. He is grateful for Lennie's presence so that he, too, can enjoy "the talking," no matter how one-sided the conversation is.

“A guy needs somebody—to be near him.” He whined, “A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody.”

Related Characters: Crooks (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In an attempt to make Lennie understand how lonely he is, Crooks asks Lennie what he would do if George did not return from town that day. Not understanding the thought experiment, Lennie flies into a rage and demands to know what happened to George. Crooks finally calms him down, and in this quote, he further tries to impress upon Lennie how difficult it is to be as isolated as he has been on the ranch. As a black man, Crooks has been shunned in this part of California, which is largely white, his whole life. He longs for a companion, the way Lennie and George have each other. This sentiment further reinforces how lucky the two men are to have such a strong friendship and attachment to each other. In this passage, Crooks is admitting to the depths of his loneliness in spite of his earlier protests against Lennie's company and experiencing a real moment of honest and vulnerability with another person for the first time in what the book implies is a very long time.

“A guy sets alone out here at night, maybe readin' books or thinkin' or stuff like that. Sometimes he gets thinkin', an' he got nothing to tell him what's so an' what ain't so. Maybe if he sees somethin', he don't know whether it's right or not. He can't turn to some other guy and ast him if he sees it too. He can't tell. He got nothing to measure by. I seen things out here. I wasn't drunk. I don't know if I was asleep. If some guy was with me, he could tell me I was asleep, an' then it would be all right. But I jus' don't know.”

Related Characters: Crooks (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Crooks' isolation on the farm stems from the deeply entrenched racism of society. Because he is black, none of the ranchers will speak to him or let him play their games. As a result, he is given his own room while the other men sleep in bunks, but he feels incredibly lonely all the time.


In this quote, Crooks' acknowledges that he has seen many strange things on the ranch, but never knows if he has truly seen these things because he has no one to bounce ideas off of. Crooks is so isolated that he does not know whether his conceptions about the world are real or not, because he is so cut off from human contact. Crooks longs for someone, anyone at all to speak to, and is happy to have Lennie visit him. His line of thinking underscores why George and Lennie stick together: in the lonely life of a rancher, having a

friend who is always by your side is a precious thing. Even though Crooks has his own living space, and a number of possessions that he has accumulated in his room, he would likely trade it all for companionship—similar to the reason why George travels with Lennie, even though he believes he could make more money alone.

“I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an' on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads [...] every damn one of 'em's got a little piece of land in his head. An' never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Ever'body wants a little piece of lan'. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land.”

Related Characters: Crooks (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

Despite being warned by George to keep quiet, Lennie proudly tells Crooks of the plan to purchase a farm. Crooks, like Candy, is immediately enticed by the idea of a farm and a place to call home, where he might be treated better than he has been on the ranch. Years of isolation, however, have made him very cynical (for a good reason) and he is scornful of the idea. In this quote, he tells Lennie that though he sees many men come through the ranch with similar ideas, none of them ever follows through with it.


Crooks' statement helps explain why George wants Lennie to keep the land a secret—if another rancher with more money in the bank hears about it, they might poach it before he gets a chance to purchase it. It also shows how similar the lives and dreams of ranchers are—they all long for their own piece of land to call home, and to no longer live a nomadic existence, traveling from ranch to ranch searching for work. Yet, despite the similarities in their sentiments and dreams, there remains very little interpersonal connection.

Part 5 Quotes

“Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely.”

Related Characters: Curley's Wife (speaker), Slim, Lennie Small

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

On a Sunday, Lennie sneaks into the barn to play with Slim's puppies. The puppy Slim gave to Lenny tries to bite him and, not knowing his strength as usual, he accidentally kills it. Curley's wife wanders into the barn, and seeing that Lennie is upset, tries to speak with him. Lennie remembers that George told him she was bad news, and tells her he can't speak to her. In this quote, Curley's wife complains that she feels lonely on the ranch. She is the only woman on a farm of many single men, and though she attempts to speak to the ranchers, her overt sexuality makes them uncomfortable—particularly due to the fact that Curley is the boss's son. This quote reveals that her flirtatious demeanor is only due to the fact that she is starved for affection, which she does not receive from Curley. She is drawn to Lennie because of his affability, and is surprised when he, too, shuns her like the other men. Tragically, it is this desperation for friendship that leads to her offering Lennie to touch her hair, and as a result, leads to her death.

●● He pawed up the hay until it partly covered her.

Related Characters: Lennie Small, Curley's Wife

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Curley's wife offers Lennie to touch her hair to feel how soft it is. Enjoying the feeling, Lennie continues to pet her hair even when she yelps for him to stop. Concerned that George will be mad at him, Lennie tells Curley's wife to stop yelling, shaking her to try and make her stop. The shaking breaks her neck, and she dies instantly. In this quote, Lennie realizes that he has done a bad thing—like in Weed, but worse—and hastily attempts to cover up his crime. Due to his disability, Lennie does not understand that partially covering the body in hay not only does not conceal it at all, but actively shows that someone tried to cover it up and

was present, revealing the death as a murder. This further shows how Lennie, though physically at fault for the murder, truly does not understand his own strength or the repercussions of his actions. As George repeats to the other men, nothing that Lennie does is ever out of "meanness"—only careless accidents that stem from his mental impairments.

●● "I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would."

Related Characters: George Milton (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

When George realizes that Lennie has killed Curley's wife, he immediately knows that his dream of owning his own farm, too, has died. The farm was the collective dream of both George and Lennie, and it would never be the same without Lennie.

In this quote, George painfully recalls how much Lennie loved to daydream about having the farm. The story, he now knows, has become one of myth rather than of a future reality. Here, George attempts to convince himself that he had never really believed it would happen—that he had only started to believe it because Lennie made him recite the story so many times, since it delighted him to imagine their own farm (particularly the rabbits George has promised him). Like with his fake scorn of Lennie, to make his friend feel badly when he misbehaves, George tells himself it would have never really happened, so he feels less disappointed about no longer holding onto the dream of the farm. Even though he could still potentially buy the farm on his own with Candy, and even with Crooks, he knows he could never bring himself to do it without Lennie. Rather than bringing the peace and freedom he hoped it would, it would only carry with it memories of pain and sadness.

Part 6 Quotes

●● A water snake glided smoothly up the pool, twisting its periscope head from side to side; and it swam the length of the pool and came to the legs of a motionless heron that stood in the shallows. A silent head and beak lanced down and plucked it out by the head, and the beak swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically.

Related Characters: Lennie Small

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

After killing Curley's wife, Lennie escapes to the brush that George told him to hide in if he ever were to get into trouble.

In this quote, Steinbeck uses the fauna of the environment to paint an ominous picture foreshadowing what is about to happen to Lennie. The water snake—which Steinbeck uses to illustrate the same spot at the beginning of the story—is killed by the heron in a moment when it does not even know it is in danger. This is a metaphor for Lennie: when George finds him in the brush, he thinks he is perfectly safe, now that he is by the side of his friend. He complies with George's requests to turn his head—like the snake does, searching for danger, and finding none—and then is shot in the back of the head by his best friend and only companion in the world. However, while the murderous search party led by Curley would have certainly led to torture (like the snake's tail waving frantically), George kills Lennie instantly with a shot to the back of the head, sparing him moments of misery before his death.

●● “No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know.”

Related Characters: George Milton (speaker), Lennie Small

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis


After killing Curley's wife, Lennie goes and hides out in the

brush, just like George told him to if he ever got in trouble. George accompanies the murderous search party, but sneaks away to find Lennie in their chosen spot. Lennie tells George he knows he is probably angry over what he has done, and in this quote, George tells Lennie he is not mad at him—nor has he ever been mad at him. Though Lennie frequently misbehaves and gets both himself and George in trouble, and George acts as if he is very angry and on the verge of abandoning Lennie, George is never truly furious with his friend. He understands that Lennie has a disability and simply does not comprehend his own physical strengths, mental weaknesses, or the actions that result from the dangerous combinations of the two. It is in this heartbreaking final goodbye that George tells Lennie he has never been really mad at him. Rather, this statement implies that he has been truly grateful to have Lennie, who is faithful to a fault, by his side for so many years.

●● “Never you mind,” said Slim. “A guy got to sometimes.”

Related Characters: Slim (speaker), Slim, Lennie Small, George Milton

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

With Curley's armed and murderous party approaching, George asks Lennie to look out at the water as he describes, for one last time, the dream of their shared farm. Before the party can find them in the brush, George shoots Lennie in the back of his head, killing him before the other men have a chance to. In this quote, Slim finds George and Lennie and realizes what has happened. He attempts to console George by telling him he had no choice—had the men found Lennie first, there was no telling what they might do to him, but it was certain to end in death. Similar to the way Candy wishes he, instead of Carlson, shot his dog, George wanted to be the one who killed Lennie because he knew he was the only person who could do it in the most merciful way possible, even though it was an act that would surely haunt him for the rest of his life.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

In the slow-cooling evening of a hot day just south of Soledad, California, two men arrive at a warm, green pool off the Salinas River. Though the area around the pool appears still and “lifeless,” there are tracks from rabbit, racoons, lizards, and other animals, and an ash pile left behind by the fires made by ranch hands and tramps who frequent the pool. The first man, George, is small, thin, and quick with “restless eyes.” His companion, Lennie, is a huge man who moves like a hulking bear.

Lennie runs to the edge of the pool and begins drinking from the surface in huge gulps. George reprimands Lennie for drinking the questionable water, reminding Lennie that he was sick from doing the same thing just the night before. Lennie insists the water is good and urges George to take a drink. George samples the water and admits that it seems potable, but tells Lennie that he should never drink stagnant water even if it looks all right.

George complains that they have had to walk over four miles in the heat after their bus driver let them off on the highway in the wrong place. Lennie shyly asks George where they’re going. George gruffly reminds him of the purpose of their journey: to find work on a nearby ranch. When George reminds Lennie of how they secured their work cards, Lennie becomes worried that he has lost his, and searches in his pockets for it. George reminds Lennie that he himself has Lennie’s work card.

When Lennie keeps one of his hands in his pocket, George becomes suspicious and asks what Lennie’s holding onto. Lennie reluctantly tells George that he has a dead mouse in his pocket and insists he “found it dead.” George demands Lennie hand the mouse over, and Lennie reluctantly does so. George tosses the dead mouse into the brush and asks why Lennie would hang onto such a thing. Lennie replies that he enjoyed petting its soft fur.

Steinbeck begins the novella by placing his two main characters in the midst of a bustling wilderness whose appearance is deceptively still and calm. This suggests that George and Lennie are up against the forces of nature both within themselves and around them, and will have a reckoning with these forces sooner rather than later.



This passage establishes that George must look out for Lennie at every turn, since Lennie doesn’t know—or can’t remember—which things are safe, and which things will hurt him. George is clearly frustrated with the constant burden of monitoring Lennie’s actions.



This passage further delves into Lennie’s complete dependence on George, and expands upon the small burdens George face in caring for Lennie that slowly add up over time.



Lennie’s obsession with soft things—and the unfortunate ways it gets him into trouble—is one of the novella’s defining metaphors. Lennie doesn’t know his own physical strength, and his warmth and affection ironically lead him to crush the things he loves or otherwise get himself and George into trouble.



George tells Lennie that when they arrive at the ranch, Lennie is to keep his mouth shut when the two of them meet with the boss. George goes over the plan with Lennie again and again. George then reminds Lennie that he must not do any “bad things” like he did at their last job in a place called Weed. Lennie, however, seems unable to remember what “bad things” George is talking about. George laments that if he didn’t have Lennie with him, he could “get along so easy and so nice.”

Dusk begins to fall, and George announces to Lennie that the two of them will stay by the river for the night. Lennie asks why they can’t go ahead to the ranch, where there will surely be supper waiting. George replies that he knows the work on the ranch will be hard and wants to take advantage of one last night of freedom. Lennie asks what they’ll do for supper, and George replies that if Lennie gets a fire ready, they’ll be able to cook some cans of beans George has left in his bindle. Lennie says he only likes beans with ketchup, but George tells Lennie to stop “fool[ing] around” and gather firewood.

Lennie runs off into the brush and comes back with some firewood. George tells Lennie to hand over the dead mouse he collected from the brush. Lennie reluctantly hands over the mouse, insisting he wasn’t doing anything bad with it—just stroking it. George tosses the mouse into the brush once again and then washes his hands in the pool.

Lennie begins crying. George tells Lennie to stop “blubberin’ like a baby,” and agrees to let him keep a “fresh” mouse if he finds one. Lennie says that he used to know a woman who gave him mice to play with. George tells Lennie that the woman he’s remembering was Lennie’s own Aunt Clara, and that she stopped giving them to him because he killed them all. Lennie says that if the two of them had **rabbits**, he’d be able to keep them alive because “they ain’t so little” as mice.

George starts heating up their supper of beans. Lennie says again that he likes beans with ketchup, and George chides Lennie for always wanting things the two of them don’t have. George again begins talking about how well he could live if he didn’t have Lennie to look after, lamenting that he can’t spend his monthly wages on drinking and women. He chastises Lennie for losing them both every job George finds them and for keeping them “shovin’ all over the country” in search of work.

George’s constant need to remind Lennie of the events of their past—as well as the demands of their future—wears on him, and he struggles to keep his temper in check when Lennie forces him to revisit painful memories or repeat anxiety-inducing plans about the future.



This passage establishes George’s yen for freedom from work, from the demands of others, and from the constraints of his itinerant lifestyle. Lennie is oblivious to these qualms—but clearly he yearns for more, too. This is indicative of American society’s general mood during the Great Depression, as people yearned for the better opportunities and economic security promised by the stereotypical American Dream.



Again, it’s clear that Lennie accidentally killed the mouse due to an underestimation of his own strength. Lennie’s obsession with soft things is profound and unshakeable—and, moreover, as this passage shows, Lennie is determined to outfox George in pursuit of clinging to his powerful preoccupation.



This passage shows how George always indulges Lennie in the end. George has clearly been caring for Lennie for a long time, and they’re connected by people and places from their past. George verges on running out of patience with Lennie, but ultimately finds himself compelled to let Lennie have his way out of pity, frustration, or both.



Even though George indulges Lennie as if he’s a child, it’s clear that George harbors a lot of resentment towards Lennie and the position in which Lennie has put both of them. This constant struggle between wanting to shelter Lennie and wanting to be rid of him is one of the driving forces behind George’s decision-making throughout the novella.



George begins remembering aloud the incident that got them both kicked out of Weed. Lennie wanted to feel the soft fabric of a girl's dress—but when Lennie touched her hem, she thought he was trying to assault her, and jerked away. Lennie, frightened, held onto her hem, leading the woman to start screaming, and forcing Lennie and George to flee town to escape all the men looking for them.

Lennie quietly says that he was just “foolin’” about wanting ketchup, and insists that even if there were ketchup, would give it all to George. He asks if he should go away and leave George alone. George apologizes for being “mean” to Lennie, and insists he wants Lennie to stay with him. George adds that Lennie's Aunt Clara, though dead, wouldn't like Lennie being on his own.

Lennie asks George to tell him “about the **rabbits**.” George says he doesn't want to, but when Lennie begs to hear about them, George relents. He begins describing the lonely lives of wandering ranch hands who “ain't got nothing to look ahead to”—but insists that he and Lennie are different because they have one another. When Lennie interjects, George tells Lennie he knows the speech “by heart” and should tell it himself, but Lennie wants George to be the one to “tell about how it's gonna be.”

George continues spinning a story about how someday, he and Lennie will save up enough money to buy a little **farm** of livestock and **rabbits**. Lennie excitedly says they'll soon “live off the fatta the lan.” George continues describing an idyllic life in the countryside which he and Lennie exist simply by enjoying the fruits of their own land and the company of some animals. George soon stops himself, insisting he hasn't “got time” to tell any more of the tale.

As the men eat more beans, George quizzes Lennie by asking him what he's going to say tomorrow when the boss of the ranch starts asking him questions. Lennie replies that he's not going to say a word. George congratulates Lennie for remembering so well, and tells him that if he continues behaving, he'll be allowed to tend the **rabbits** on their land someday.

George tells Lennie to remember the spot they're at right now. He urges Lennie to come straight here and hide in the brush if he ever “happen[s] to get in trouble.” George promises that if there's trouble, he'll come for Lennie and help him—but reminds him that if he does something bad, he won't be allowed to tend the **rabbits**. Lennie promises to stay out of trouble.

This passage shows that there are real consequences to Lennie's obsession. George is the only one with the patience to understand Lennie—but to the rest of the world, Lennie is a danger and a menace, and George is often the only thing standing between Lennie and certain death.



Lennie clearly feels guilty, on some level, about the frustration he causes George. Lennie is always offering to leave George alone, but George is unable to cut ties with Lennie and selfishly put himself first.



This passage makes clear the fact that George has told Lennie the story about their shared dream so often that Lennie, in spite of his memory problems, remembers it “by heart.” But it also suggests that Lennie likes hearing George imagine aloud a future in which they're still together.



Though George clearly likes indulging in this fantasy up to a certain point, this passage also suggests that doing so is painful for uncomfortable for him—perhaps because he worries or even knows it will never come true.



George dangles his plans for the future over Lennie as a motivator and incentive, even though George seems to know on some level that he and Lennie will never reach the dream. This suggests that their aspiration serves as more of an escape rather than a concrete, attainable plan for the future.



This passage shows that George is nervous about their new job on this ranch, and is so used to Lennie making mistakes that necessitate their escape that he's making an escape plan for them with the expectation they'll need it.



As the fire begins to die down, Lennie and George make small beds on the ground out of their bindles. As they drift off to sleep, Lennie imagines aloud the many different-colored **rabbits** he'll have one day.

Lennie clings to his vision of rabbits as a symbol of the freedom from societal expectations and judgment he'll one day enjoy on his and George's farm.



PART 2

George and Lennie arrive at the ranch. An old man named Candy, who is missing a hand, shows them to their lodgings. The bunkhouse where all the laborers stay is a “long, rectangular building” with eight bunks consisting of straw beds and wall-mounted apple crates for storing possessions. The room has a stove and a card table. It is about 10:00 in the morning, and Candy tells George and Lennie that the boss was expecting them last night. The boss, Candy says, was “sore as hell” about the fact that they weren’t present and ready to work earlier in the morning.

Candy will soon become George and Lennie's closest ally on the farm—from this passage alone, it's clear that he wants to help them, look out for them, and warn them about any impending trouble that might be coming their way, no matter how large or small.



George spots a yellow can of insect poison above his allotted bunk and asks Candy whether the beds are full of lice. Candy insists that the last man who occupied the bunk was a blacksmith who was positively obsessed with cleanliness and kept the repellent only as a precaution. George remains skeptical, but after inspecting the mattress closely, he decides to unpack his bindle and make up the bed.

This passage demonstrates George's skepticism about his new surroundings. Even though working on the ranch will provide George and Lennie with a necessary income, George is still looking for any excuse, it seems, to escape and continue wandering in search of something better.



Candy tells George and Lennie again how angry the boss was that they didn’t arrive in time to start work earlier, and says that the boss took his rage out on all of them—especially the “stable buck.” George is amazed that even the stable hand, whose job is removed from their own, would catch hell for their lateness, but Candy, using a racial slur, informs him that the stable hand is the only black man on the ranch. Candy adds that in spite of the stable hand having a quiet, reserved disposition and a “crooked back” due to being kicked by a horse long ago, the boss always takes his rage out on him due to his race.

This passage demonstrates the unforgiving nature of the place in which Lennie and George have found themselves. The boss is shown to be a cruel man who scapegoats the only black laborer on the farm for the other ranch hand's failures. The term “stable buck” is an offensive racial slur for a black stable hand. This is clearly a world that is hostile to minorities and other marginalized people—which spells trouble for George and Lennie, too.



George asks more about “what kind of a guy” the boss is. Candy insists he’s “pretty nice” except for when he’s angry, and once even brought the laborers a whole gallon of whisky to share on Christmas. The men were in such a good mood, Candy says, that they even let the stable hand celebrate with them—but the evening turned calamitous when one of the men began attacking him.

The atmosphere at the ranch seems very eat-or-be-eaten. Even though Candy is himself marginalized due to his missing hand, he knows he's still better off than the stable hand, who is doubly vulnerable due to his race and his own physical disability.



The door of the bunk house opens, and a “little stocky man” in jeans, flannel, and “high-heeled boots and spurs [which] prove he [is] not a laboring man” enters. George understands immediately that this man is the boss. The boss steps into the room and demands to see George and Lennie’s work slips. He asks why the two of them weren’t at the ranch earlier. George explains that the bus driver let them out too early—he says they had to walk over 10 miles to the ranch. The boss asks for George and Lennie’s full names. George introduces himself as George Milton and says Lennie’s name is Lennie Small.

The boss asks why Lennie doesn’t speak for himself. George insists Lennie isn’t a “talker,” but is “strong as a bull.” Lennie echoes George and happily says he’s “strong as a bull.” George gives Lennie a look. The boss asks Lennie what he can do as a worker. George answers that Lennie can do anything the boss needs. The boss asks why George won’t let Lennie speak for himself. George replies that Lennie is not “bright,” but makes up for his lack of mental acuity in physical strength. The boss remains skeptical, demanding to know why George would “take so much trouble for another guy.” George insists Lennie is his cousin and was kicked in the head by a horse as a child—George says he’s been taking care of Lennie since his “old lady” died.

The boss is satisfied by this explanation but warns George not to try to pull anything over on him—he says he’s got his eyes on both Lennie and George. He orders the men to start work after dinner with Slim’s team—Slim, the boss says, is a skinner, or mule driver. The boss takes his leave, but not before looking “for a long moment” at Lennie and George.

After the boss leaves, George chastises Lennie for talking. Lennie apologizes, insisting he forgot to stay quiet. George orders Lennie to remain quiet from now on. Lennie timidly asks George if he was really kicked in the head once—and if they are really cousins. George replies that if he was Lennie’s blood kin he’d shoot himself.

George goes to the front door and opens it—Candy is standing there with an old, blind, and lame **sheepdog**. George accuses Candy of eavesdropping. Candy insists he wasn’t listening in, and was just petting his dog. The dog drags himself into the bunk house, sits down, and starts licking his coat. George marvels at the dog’s rough shape. Candy says that he’s had the dog since he was a puppy, and that he was a great sheep-herder in his prime.

The boss’s suspicious attitude toward George and Lennie suggests the level of scrutiny they’ll be subjected to while working on the ranch. The boss runs a tight ship and lets nothing slip past him, demanding total control over and submission from his workers. This no-nonsense attitude reflects the dire circumstances the men are facing during the Great Depression, when exhibiting weakness or failing to do one’s duties could very well lead to destitution or starvation.



The ranch is a microcosm of the landscape of the American West in the midst of the Great Depression. In a dog-eat-dog world where every man is out for himself, the boss is suspicious of two men who actually look out for one another. George has to tread lightly as he navigates the fine line between explaining why he and Lennie need to travel together without making Lennie seem weak, or like a liability.



This passage further emphasizes just how odd it is for two men to look out for one another the way George and Lennie do—so strange as to make them targets of suspicion and even ire.



George is growing even more frustrated with Lennie’s dependence on him, and worried by Lennie’s inability to remember the truth of the connection between them. It’s clear that, although George genuinely cares for Lennie and wants to protect him, he also realizes that putting his friend first may put George himself at risk.



Candy and his dog are a symbol of the relationship between George and Lennie. Just as Candy can’t bring himself to abandon his dog or put the thing out of its misery, George can’t find it within himself to separate from Lennie, even though he knows that Lennie is becoming more and more of a liability.



A young man with sun-browned skin and curly hair comes into the bunk house. He has a glove on his left hand and is wearing high-heeled boots—just like the boss. He asks Candy if he has “seen [his] old man,” and Candy, addressing the man as Curley, says the boss has gone to the cook house. Curley approaches Lennie and asks if he and George are the men the boss has been waiting on. George says they’ve just arrived, but Curley urges him to “let the big guy talk.” Lennie quietly echoes George’s statement that the two of them have just arrived. Curley warns Lennie to answer when spoken to before storming out.

Candy tells the men that Curley is the boss’s son. Candy says that “like a lot of little guys,” Curley wants to show dominance over bigger men. Candy says men like Curley never fight fair—if he wins in a fight against a big guy, everyone will talk about how surprisingly strong he is, but if he loses that same fight, everyone will talk about how unfair the advantage was. George says that Curley had better watch himself—Lennie is big and strong, and “don’t know no rules.”

George and Candy sit down at the card table and begin shuffling up a deck. Candy secretly tells George that Curley has been in rare form lately—he got married a couple weeks ago, and has been “cockier’n ever” recently in an attempt to show off for his wife. Curley’s wife, Candy whispers, has “got the eye”—in other words, she’s flirtatious, and has been making eyes at Slim and a worker named Carlson ever since arriving on the ranch.

Candy stands up and says he’s got to ready the wash basins for the men coming in from the fields. He asks George to keep their conversation confidential, and George promises he will. After Candy leaves, George warns Lennie to be careful around Curley—if Curley and Lennie “tangle,” Lennie and George will both get the boot. Lennie insists he will do whatever it takes to avoid trouble. George reminds Lennie of the plan they made should any trouble arise—Lennie says he remembers that he should go and hide in the brush.

George hears someone calling for the stable hand. When he looks up into the doorway, he sees a beautiful girl in heavy makeup, a house dress, and red shoes standing there. Her hair is curled and her fingernails are painted red. She says she’s looking for Curley—George demurely tells her without looking directly at her that Curley just left the bunk house a minute ago. When Slim comes by, Curley’s wife greets him flirtatiously and says she’s trying to find Curley. Slim says she isn’t trying very hard—he’s just seen the man go into the ranch house. Curley’s wife bids the laborers goodbye and scurries away.

The visit from Curley, the boss’s son, echoes the boss’s visit just moments before. This ranch is an unforgiving place, and people like Lennie—people who are different—are suspect and liable to be singled out and scrutinized.



This passage foreshadows the conflict among Curley, Lennie, and George. Curley seems hungry for a fight, and while George wants to protect his and Lennie’s new position, he doesn’t plan to take any guff from Curley or let Lennie do so either.



Candy’s gossip about Curley’s wife—and the unstable relationship between the two of them—foreshadows even more calamity on the ranch. It suggests that the weakness of people’s underlying insecurities, instability, and suspicion could easily take over the outwardly strong and stoic demeanors they put forth.



This passage continues to foreshadow the burgeoning tension George feels on the ranch. He doesn’t want to rock the boat—but is ready for a disaster after so many troubles with (and because of) Lennie.



The introduction of Curley’s wife demonstrates that Candy’s earlier warnings were true—it seems that she is clearly looking to stir up trouble, or at least get herself some attention, without any consideration for what her actions might mean for the men with whom she’s toying.



After she's gone, George calls Curley's wife a tramp, but Lennie insists she's "purty." George warns Lennie never to say anything like that again. Lennie begs George to let the two of them leave, stating he has a bad feeling about the ranch. George insists they should stay until they get a "stake" in the property, but admits he himself would like to leave.

Slim enters the bunk house. He is a grave, strong man with an "ageless face." He sits down across the card table from George, who is lazily playing solitaire. He asks George if he and Lennie are the new guys, and whether they travel around together. George says they do—he must take care of the slow Lennie. Slim says not many guys travel around together, and laments that "ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other."

A large man with a big stomach comes into the bunk house. Slim introduces him to George and Lennie as Carlson. Carlson asks Slim whether his dog had her litter of puppies yet, and Slim says she gave birth last night. Nine puppies were born, he says, though he drowned four of them for fear she wouldn't be able to feed them all. Carlson says that Slim should do Candy a favor and shoot his lame, smelly old **dog**, then give him one of the new puppies to raise. Before Slim can answer him, the dinner bell rings, and Slim and Carlson hurry to leave the bunk house.

Lennie excitedly asks George if he heard the men talking about the puppies, and if George can ask Slim to give Lennie a brown and white **puppy**. George tries to calm Lennie down by urging him to hurry and wash up for dinner. Curley enters the bunk house again and demands to know whether the men have seen his wife. George says she was just at the bunk house, looking for Curley. Curley asks which way she went, and George replies that he doesn't know because he "didn' watch her go." Curley hurries out the door.

George and Lennie leave the bunk house as George confides in Lennie that he himself is worried about "tangl[ing]" with Curley someday. **Candy's dog** remains in the bunk house alone, raising its head for a moment when it senses someone at the door again—it is Curley, who pops his head in quickly before "jerk[ing] out" again.

George, spooked by Lennie's having gotten them in trouble with a woman in the last town, is worried the same will happen here. Lennie also seems worried about the potential for disaster—but George knows if they pick up and move again, they'll be even further from achieving their dream of stability.



Slim, like the boss, is surprised by George and Lennie's friendship and mutual care for one another—but rather than expressing suspicion, he expresses something like envy. This suggests that despite (or perhaps because of) the rough environment of itinerant laborers' lives in the American West, many men are looking for companionship despite their initial skepticism and reservations toward trusting others.



The potential for Slim's dog's new puppies to replace Candy's old, lame dog mirrors George's underlying, forbidden desire to rid himself of Lennie and focus only on prospering himself.



Just as Curley's wife seems to be looking in on the men as a provocation, Curley's demands of the men to know whether they've seen his wife seems like a deliberate trap. George knows how to handle the situation calmly and coolly—for now.



Candy's dog senses trouble but can't directly look it in the face—just as Lennie knows something is wrong on the ranch, but is uncertain of what it is and unprepared for how to avoid trouble.



PART 3

That evening, after dinner and barley bucking in the fields, George and Slim return to the bunk house and sit together at the card table while the rest of the laborers enjoy a horseshoe game outside. George thanks Slim for giving Lennie one of the new **puppies**, and says Lennie is probably so excited about his new pet that he'll want to sleep in the barn with the litter. Slim says he was happy to give Lennie a pup, and remarks on how strong and hardworking Lennie is.

Slim remarks how strange it is to see two men traveling and working alongside each other like George and the “cuckoo” Lennie do. George remarks that he himself isn't so bright, either, and that he and Lenny need each other. He explains that they were both born in Auburn. Lennie's Aunt Clara took him in when he was a baby and raised him as her own. After Aunt Clara died, George explains, Lennie started working with George, and they “got kinda used to each other.” George admits that he used to play jokes and pranks on Lennie, enjoying how Lennie's slowness “made [him] seem God damn smart”—but after one of his pranks nearly resulted in Lennie's death, George resolved never to mess with him again.

George begins playing solitaire. He confesses to Slim that he doesn't want to get rid of Lennie and go around alone like most ranch workers, even though Lennie is a “nuisance” who often gets them in trouble. George begins telling him the story of what happened in Weed—the story of how Lennie got them run out of town after he seized a girl's soft dress. The girl told the police she'd been raped, and a band of local men tried to hunt Lennie down to punish him. Lennie and George hid out in an irrigation ditch until nightfall—at which point they “scrammed” and didn't look back. George insists Lennie would never have hurt the woman—he only wanted to touch her dress, just as he longs now to pet mice and **puppies**.

Lennie comes into the bunk house, breathless with joy over his new **puppy**, and lies down on his bed. George tells him he's not allowed to have the puppy in the bunk house. Lennie insists he doesn't have the pup, but George approaches Lennie and wrestles the puppy out of his arms. George warns Lennie that he'll kill the puppy if he keeps it from his mother, and threatens to have Slim take the puppy away again if Lennie doesn't treat it right. Lennie takes the puppy back and hurries to return it to the barn. Slim remarks that Lennie is just like a child. George agrees and says that while, like a child, Lennie doesn't want to do any harm, the problem is his immense strength.

Whereas the boss and Curley are skeptical of the arrangement George and Lennie have, Slim seems touched by their friendship. He likes Lennie and wants to help him feel welcome, suggesting that he, too, yearns for genuine connection amidst the hostility of life on the ranch.



While it seems like Lennie is the one entirely dependent on George for support and survival, this passage makes it clear that George feels, at times, just as in need of Lennie as Lennie is of him. He's become Lennie's protector—but Lennie has also served to protect George from his darker impulses. Their relationship challenges societal ideas at the time about what makes someone weak, and what makes someone strong.



Even though Lennie's preoccupation with stroking soft things seems odd to other people, George understands it, and knows that Lennie truly doesn't have any other nefarious desires in mind, contrary to how things might look. George knows he needs to defend Lennie against people who misunderstand him and would seek to alienate, harm, or even kill him for his off-kilter obsessions.



Protecting Lennie from others isn't the extent of George's duties to his friend—this passage makes it clear that George must also protect Lennie from himself. George knows that Lennie doesn't understand his own strength, and might hurt himself or the things he loves if left to his own devices.



Candy comes into the bunk house, his old **dog** trailing behind him. Carlson, another laborer, comes into the bunk house, lamenting at having lost at horseshoes to the black stable hand. Carlson sniffs the air and urges Candy to get his stinking dog out of the bunk house. Candy says he's around the dog so much he doesn't notice the smell. Carlson suggests Candy put the dog out of his misery and shoot him—if Candy aims "right in the back of the head," he says, the dog won't know feel pain. Candy says he could never do such a thing—he's had the dog too long and is too "used to him." Carlson retorts that Candy is being unkind to the dog by keeping him alive.

Slim offers to give Candy a new pup from his bitch's litter if Candy shoots his old **dog**. Candy says he's worried about hurting the dog. Carlson promises that if Candy lets him shoot the dog, he'll hit it right in the back of the head and make sure it feels no pain. Candy's face is tight and tense as he considers what he should do.

Another laborer named Whit comes in and brings Slim a magazine to read. There is a letter inside by Bill Tenner, a laborer who used to work on the ranch. Carlson refuses to be distracted by Whit's remembrances of Tenner, and continues hounding Candy about putting down his **dog**. Carlson offers to shoot it with his Luger. Though Candy suggests they wait until tomorrow, Carlson insists on doing the deed now. Candy at last relents, lying down on his bunk and staring at the ceiling. Carlson leads the dog outside, and Slim calls after him, reminding him to "take a shovel."

The room falls silent, and Slim tries to make conversation to ease the morbid mood. He talks about his mule, who's in need of some tar on its hoof, and reminds Candy that he can have any puppy he wants. Candy does not reply. George asks if anyone wants to play some euchre, and Whit says he'll play. After he sits down at the table, though, he and George simply sit in silence. It is so quiet that the men can hear a scratching beneath the floorboards—a rat. Whit orders George to shuffle the cards and deal. As George does so, the men hear a single shot ring out. Everyone looks at Candy, who rolls over and faces the wall.

The door opens, and the stable hand peeks his head into the room. Slim greets the man as "Crooks," and asks him what the matter is. Crooks replies that he has some tar ready for Slim's mule's foot. Slim stands up and says he'll come take care of it. Crooks warns Slim that the "big new guy" is "messin' around" with the **puppies**. George tells Slim to kick Lennie out of the barn if he's making trouble.

Again, Candy's inability to imagine hurting his dog—in spite of the dog's own misery—mirrors George's reluctance to abandon or endanger Lennie in spite of the difficulties Lennie creates for them both.



This passage foreshadows and in a way ultimately dictates what will soon happen between George and Lennie. George will have to dispatch Lennie for both their sakes, and he will take a lesson from Carlson in the specifics of how to do it and the ethics behind it.



This passage continues the parallel between Candy's relationship with his dog and George's relationship with Lennie. Carlson's insistence that the deed be done now implies that while distractions may pop up or George may try to avoid dealing with Lennie, he will eventually have to cut ties with Lennie in order to survive.



Even though George tries to distract from the solemn mood in the bunk house and make some noise to drown out the noise of what's happening outside, this passage shows, once again, that there's no turning away from the truth of what has to be done in such dire circumstances.



Crooks is perhaps so worried about Lennie being in the barn because the stable is the one place where Crooks—the most marginalized and unfairly-treated person on the ranch—feels in control. He doesn't want Lennie threatening his space or getting him in trouble, although Lennie's intentions are naively innocent.



After Slim and Crooks leave, Whit makes small talk with George about Curley's wife, remarking on how "she got the eye goin' all the time." Whit admits that though there hasn't been any real trouble with her yet, it's clear to everyone that "she can't keep away from guys"—and Curley is anxious about it. George agrees that the girl sounds like trouble. Whit invites George to come with him and the other men to a whorehouse the following night, which is a Saturday. He assures him it's a "clean" place where the prices are good and there's always fun to be had. George says he might tag along, but is planning on saving his money so that he and Lennie can buy some land.

Lennie and Carlson come into the bunk house together. Lennie gets into bed, and Carlson begins cleaning his pistol. Curley bursts in, asking for his wife. Whit says she hasn't come by. Curley looks around the room and asks where Slim is. George says he's at the barn, tending to his mule's hoof. Curley blusters away. Whit says he hopes Curley won't go after Slim, but at the same time, wouldn't put it past him. Whit and Carlson decide to go over to the barn and see if the two men will fight one another.

George asks Lennie why he's come back from the barn, and Lennie says Slim told him that petting the **puppies** too much wouldn't be good for them. George asks if Curley's wife went by the barn, and Lennie says she didn't. George again reminds Lennie to stay out of any fights he does happen to hear about or witness. George remarks on how much trouble a "tart" can make, and tells Lennie that one of their old friends from grammar school, Andy Cushman, is in prison now "on account of a tart."

Lennie asks George how long it will be until they get their piece of land. George says he doesn't know—he's heard of a place, but even though it's relatively cheap, they still have a lot of saving to do. Lennie asks George to tell him about the place. George protests that he just told Lennie about it last night, but Lennie asks to hear about it again. George relents, and again tells Lennie a romantic story about the lush, fertile **farm** they'll live on. They'll plant alfalfa, harvest an orchard, and raise **rabbits**. As George goes deeper and deeper into detail about the imagined place, he gets lost in his own reverie.

Whit clearly loves drama—and women. Though George tells Whit he's trying to save money, focus on the future, and ignore distractions like whorehouses and billiard halls, Whit represents the temptation that threatens to derail George and Lennie's plans.



Whit and Carlson are just as quick to suspicion and anger as Curley. They want to see blood—someone else getting beat up and scapegoated means that they are safe in the dog-eat-dog world of the ranch for a little while longer.



George is just as willing as the other men on the ranch to make a scapegoat out of Curley's wife rather than consider why the men on the ranch are unable to control themselves around her. It's clear that, as the only woman on the ranch, she is marginalized and judged as being promiscuous merely because she wants attention.



Even though George uses his stories about the hypothetical farm he and Lennie will move to largely placate and distract Lennie, he can't help believing that one day they'll come true. He is usually able to resist getting to swept up in his own stories, such as when he pulled himself out of the reverie back at the river—but tonight, he needs the fantasy just as much as Lennie does.



Lennie continues focusing intensely on the fantasy of raising—and petting—as many **rabbits** as he wants. Both Lennie and George are so lost in their reverie that when Candy speaks, they both jump. Candy asks if there really is a place like the one George is describing—George insists there is, and that it could be his for \$600. Candy states that he has \$300 saved up from the accident that took his hand, and would be happy to go in with George and Lennie on the property. In exchange, he says, he'd cook, tend chickens, and work in the garden.

George is skeptical of Candy's offer, and says he'd always conceived of himself and Lennie working the **farm** on their own. Still, as he begins doing the math, he realizes that he and Lennie will be able to get their place sooner with Candy's contribution. George becomes excited and emotional. He continues daydreaming aloud, lost in thoughts of being able to be the master of his own destiny and do whatever he wants whenever he wants. As the other men's voices can be heard approaching the bunk house, George asks Lennie and Candy to keep their plan a secret. Candy agrees, and solemnly remarks that he should have been the one to shoot his own **dog**.

Slim, Curley, Carlson, and Whit all enter the bunk house. Slim and Curley are arguing—Slim says he's sick of Curley constantly asking him about his own wife's whereabouts. Carlson urges Curley to get control of his wife before he has trouble on his hands. Curley threatens to fight Carlson, but Carlson accuses Curley of being "yella." As tensions between the three men escalate, George realizes with a horror that Lennie is smiling and laughing—still lost in thoughts of their little plot of land. Curley notices Lennie's smile and challenges him to a fight. As Curley begins hitting Lennie, Lennie keeps his hands at his sides, paralyzed with fear and unwilling to even defend himself.

George, angered by Curley's attack on the vulnerable Lennie, urges Lennie to fight back. As Curley reaches a fist back and swings at Lennie, Lennie catches Curley's fist in one of his hands and begins crushing it. Curley starts crying in pain, but Lennie doesn't let go until George tells him to. Slim and Carlson stand over Curley, and remark that they need to get him to a doctor—it hardly looks like he has a single bone in his hand left intact. Lennie cries, stating that he didn't want to hurt Curley. Slim urges Curley to tell the boss, when asked what happened to his hand, that he got it caught in a machine. Slim warns Curley that there will be consequences if he tells the truth. Curley promises he won't try to get Lennie or George fired.

George and Lennie have been alone in their fantasy for so long that when a third person expresses interest in joining them, it's destabilizing. It makes the fantasy more real—which is just as frightening as it is motivating and exciting, since Candy's expectations and investment will force George and Lennie to make concrete plans rather than continuing to aimlessly dream.



George perhaps never let himself really believe the farm was something he and Lennie could ever achieve—but now, with Candy on their side, George lets himself indulge the dream a little more seriously for the first time in his life. In spite of George and Lennie's excitement, Candy remains disturbed by what he's done to his dog, foreshadowing that George and Lennie will still have to face unpleasantness and strife even in the face of their new lease on life.



Even when provoked, Lennie refuses to fight back. He is the opposite of Curley in every way, but most notably in terms of his temperament. Lennie could crush Curley—but his gentle demeanor, fear of trouble, and childlike mindset mean that he tries to avoid violence at any cost. Curley, on the other hand, has no problem victimizing and scapegoating Lennie in order to release his own frustrations.



This passage shows that in spite of Lennie's reluctance to use it, he is in possession of immense physical strength. When he focuses it on something, he becomes powerful and even dangerous. Even in the face of this realization, the other men remain on Lennie's side and threaten Curley with further pain and retaliation if he tries to make things worse for the poor Lennie.



Carlson takes Curley away to go to the doctor in town. George tells Lennie to wash his bloody face. Lennie asks George if he's in trouble, and whether he'll still be allowed to tend the **rabbits**. George assures Lennie that he's done nothing wrong.

This passage shows how truly reluctant Lennie is to resort to violence of any kind for fear of upsetting George—or of revealing that he is, in fact, too strong and powerful to gently tend rabbits.



PART 4

Crooks, the stable hand, doesn't sleep in the bunk house with the other laborers—instead, he has a bunk in the harness room, a little shed leaning off the wall of the barn. His room is both his sleeping quarters and his workshop, and he makes his bed on the straw-covered floor. Crooks has more possessions than the other men—he owns books that reflect a wide range of interests, many pairs of shoes, and medicines for both himself and the horses. Crooks keeps his room neat and never has visitors.

Crooks is as physically isolated as he is socially and emotionally isolated. He is not welcome among his fellow laborers because of the color of his skin, and has been forced to live a solitary existence segregated from the rest of the workers on the ranch. It's clear that, although he does equal work, he is not treated equally—whereas the white workers on the ranch can find companionship amongst themselves and dream of better lives, Crooks is entirely excluded from this.



On Saturday night, Crooks sits on his bunk alone, rubbing liniment into his sore back, when Lennie appears in the open doorway and looks in on him. Though Lennie smiles amiably at Crooks, Crooks warns Lennie not to come into his room. Lennie says he simply came to visit his **puppy** and wanted to say hello to Crooks when he saw the man's light on. Crooks says that just as he isn't wanted in the bunk house, Lennie isn't wanted in his room. Lennie asks Crooks why he isn't wanted, and Crooks replies that he isn't wanted because he's black.

Lennie doesn't understand any of the social and societal constrictions that make him different from Crooks. He wants to be friendly to Crooks, and though Crooks is suspicious of Lennie's curiosity about him, he decides to give the man the benefit of the doubt and let him into his small, insular world.



Lennie says he's all alone and wants company—everyone else except for Candy has gone into town, and Candy only wants to sit in his bunk and budget for the place they're going to buy. Crooks tells Lennie to go visit his **puppy** if he wants company, warning him to stay out of places he isn't wanted. Lennie says he's already looked at his puppy and is afraid to pet it too much. Crooks softens and agrees to let Lennie come in and sit with him awhile. Lennie thanks Crooks for letting him come in.

Crooks is reluctant to open to Lennie, but after he sees how truly ignorant the man is—not to mention how lonely—Crooks decides to invite him in. This suggests that Crooks recognizes that Lennie, like Crooks himself, is disabled and looked down upon by society, and therefore feels a sense of connection and sympathy with him.



Crooks begins telling Lennie about his past, explaining that he grew up in California—his family was the only black family “for miles around.” Now, Crooks feels similarly isolated—he is the only black man on the ranch, and no one listens to him, takes him seriously, or respects him, all because of his race. Lennie, having seemingly absorbed nothing from Crooks's story, asks how long it will be before the **puppies** are “old enough to pet.” Crooks marvels at Lennie's inability to understand or remember anything anyone says to him, and remarks that too often, men just talk at one another without listening to each other.

Crooks begins opening himself up to Lennie, believing, perhaps, that he has a shot at friendship or at the very least connection with another person for the first time in a long time. He is disappointed, then, when Lennie seems to have no ability to grasp the gravity of what Crooks is telling him.



Crooks asks Lennie what he'd do if George never came back from town. Lennie insists George wouldn't leave him—but at the same time begins to fear that maybe Crooks is right, and George has abandoned him on the ranch. Crooks continues messing with Lennie, coming up with different hypothetical reasons why George might never return to the ranch. Lennie asks Crooks what he's doing. Crooks responds that he's trying to show Lennie that without George, he's nothing—they'd "tie [him] up with a collar." Lennie grows hysterical—and a bit angry—and asks where George is. Crooks assures Lennie that George will be home soon.

Lennie calms down. Crooks urges Lennie to see things from his point of view—he is alone all the time because he's not allowed to spend time with the white laborers. "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody," Crooks says. He tells Lennie once again that he didn't mean to scare him and was just trying to talk about his own situation. Crooks continues lamenting his profound loneliness and wishing he had someone to talk to and draw comfort from, the way Lennie has George.

Crooks continues reminiscing about his childhood, telling Lennie about how he and his two brothers used to all sleep in the same bed, tend chickens, and grow alfalfa. Lennie says that he is going to grow alfalfa for his **rabbits** when he and George have a **farm** of their own. Crooks calls Lennie "nuts" and tells him that every laborer who passes through the ranch has "a little piece of land in his head," but "never a God damn one of 'em ever gets it."

A horse whinnies in the stable, and Crooks calls out to ask if Slim has come into the barn. Candy answers, saying he's come looking for Lennie. Crooks tells Candy that Lennie is with him. Candy comes to the doorway but makes no attempt to come inside. Crooks invites Candy in, stating that if Lennie has come in, Candy might as well, too. As Candy enters the room, he remarks that though he and Crooks have both been at the ranch a long time, it's the first time he's ever been in Crooks's room.

Candy tells Lennie that he's been doing some figuring and has found a way for them to turn a profit on the **rabbits** once they move onto their **farm**. Crooks "brutally" interrupts Candy to tell him that he and Lennie are kidding themselves—he predicts that they'll never get any land, that Candy will work on the ranch until he's carried "out in a box," and that Lennie will have moved on in a couple weeks' time. Candy insists that he, George, and Lennie are going to work hard and get their land, but Crooks points out that George is out at a whorehouse as they speak, wasting his money.

Lennie is unable to understand Crooks's attempt to get Lennie to see things from his point of view. Lennie merely becomes confused and agitated by the suggestion that George would abandon him, and as his unrest escalates, Steinbeck shows just how desperately Lennie feels he needs George.



Crooks is jealous of the fact that George and Lennie have one another and look out for each other so steadfastly. Crooks has no one in the world to look out for him—and admits that this fact is driving him "nuts" slowly but surely.



Crooks is frustrated with Lennie's inability to understand him—and perhaps angry that Lennie gets to maintain faith in his ludicrous dreams when Crooks has had to abandon all comforting fantasies just to survive.



In spite of his veneer of indifference, Crooks seems happy for the company. He was reluctant to let Lennie in at all, but now welcomes Candy in relatively warmly. Crooks is perhaps beginning to believe that maybe friendship of some kind could be possible for him—yet another one of the "broken plans" the novella will soon unravel.



Crooks's weariness and cynicism make him a voice of reason. He is the first person who's told Lennie that the dream of a farm is an impossibility—and though Candy tries to push back against Crooks, it's clear that Crooks is the only one of the three of them who's able to face reality due to his own experiences with disappointment. This distinction raises an interesting ethical dilemma of whether it's more compassionate to allow someone to hold onto their fantasies, or to be harshly honest with them about the unrealistic nature of their plans.



Candy says that he's spent his whole life working other people's land and harvesting other people's crops, and is determined to finally work his own land and reap for himself what he sows. Crooks seems touched by Candy's resolve, and offers to "lend a hand" to the three of them if they should ever realize their dream.

A voice from the door startles the men. It is Curley's wife, asking if any of them have seen Curley. Candy tells her they haven't seen him, but Curley's wife doesn't move from the doorway. She says she knows where all the men have gone. Candy, looking demurely at the ground, asks why Curley's wife is asking after him if she already knows where he is. Curley's wife remarks that all the men on the ranch will only talk to her one-on-one—they're so scared of one another, and of someone else getting dirt on them, that they won't talk to her in front of one another.

Crooks urges Curley's wife to go back up to the house—he tells her they don't want any trouble. Curley's wife says she doesn't want any trouble, either—she just wants someone to talk to. She is sick of Curley and his ridiculous bravado, she says. She asks the men to tell her what really happened to Curley's hand, but Candy insists Curley simply got it caught in the machine. Curley's wife laments her horrible circumstances, and states that she could've had a career in the movies if she'd wanted to. Candy gets upset, stating that he, too has options—he'll soon have his own **farm**. Candy tells Curley's wife to run along and leave them alone.

Curley's wife looks at Lennie's battered face and asks where he got his bruises. Lennie, staring into his lap, replies, "He got his han' caught in a machine." Curley's wife continues messing with Lennie, prompting Crooks to "coldly" order her out of the barn. Curley's wife turns on Crooks, cruelly telling him that if he talks coarsely to her once more, she will have him "strung up on a tree." Candy warns Curley's wife that if she does anything to get Crooks hurt, they'll tell on her for framing him. Curley's wife tells Candy that no one would listen to him.

Candy warns Curley's wife that the men will be back soon and urges her to get up to the house before her husband catches her in the barn. Before leaving, Curley's wife looks at Lennie and thanks him for "bust[ing] up Curley a little bit."

Just as Candy was moved by Lennie and George's fantasy, Crooks is moved by Candy's desire to make something of himself and control his own destiny. Crooks wants those things, too—and for the first time in a long time, is allowing himself to believe they might be possible for him despite society's ill treatment of him.



This passage makes it clear that Curley's wife is never really trying to discern her husband's whereabouts when she comes around the bunk house looking for him—she's just trying to seek out some company, attention, and validation.



Curley's wife is on to the lies and deception all around her—and she's sick of being in the midst of it. She hates the direction her life has taken, and wishes that her dreams had not been broken so irreversibly.



Steinbeck has established that the ranch is a dog-eat-dog place, and that everyone on it is out for themselves. Curley's wife is, as the only woman, a minority and a marginalized individual—but even so, she is white, and being able to threaten and silence Crooks makes her feel more powerful and capable. Even though Curley's wife is weak, she will take advantage of any opportunity to make sure she's not the lowest in the ranch's pecking order.



Curley's wife resents her husband for isolating her to the point that she's happy to see him hurt by someone else. She can't do anything to retaliate against him—but the others can, and perhaps that's what she's been trying to provoke all along.



Crooks, clearly shaken by Curley's wife's words, tells Lennie and Candy that they should go. Candy tries to comfort Crooks, but Crooks plainly states that what Curley's wife said is true. A voice in the barn calls out for Lennie—it is George. Lennie calls back, and George appears in the doorway. He chides Lennie for bothering Crooks, but Crooks insists he doesn't mind Lennie visiting. Candy excitedly begins telling George what he's figured about the **rabbits**. George reminds Candy that he was supposed to keep their venture a secret. Candy retorts that he only told Crooks. George tells Lennie it's time to return to the bunk house, and the two of them leave.

As Candy stands up to go back to the bunk house, too, Crooks asks him to stay back a minute. Crooks tells Candy that he wasn't serious about lending them a hand on their land—he says he wants to stay where he is. Candy bids Crooks goodnight and leaves. Crooks reaches for his liniment bottle and rubs the medicine into his back.

PART 5

The next afternoon, while the other men play horseshoes outside in the bright sun, Lennie is alone in the barn. He is staring at his **puppy**, which is dead on the hay in front of him. Even though Lennie knows the puppy is dead, he continues stroking it heavily. He talks to the puppy as he pets it. Lennie is worried that if George finds out he has killed the puppy, he won't be allowed to tend **rabbits** in the future. In a fit of anger, fear, and frustration, Lennie picks the puppy up and throws it against the wall of the barn.

Lennie feels badly and goes over to retrieve the **puppy** so he can hold it in his lap. As he sits stroking it some more, continuing to worry about what George will say and do when he finds out the pup is dead, Curley's wife comes into the barn. She approaches Lennie and asks what he has in his hands. The startled Lennie replies that George told him he isn't meant to talk to her. Curley's wife says she's lonely and asks Lennie how he would feel if he never had anyone to talk to. Lennie maintains that talking to Curley's wife could get him in trouble.

Curley's wife asks Lennie what he's holding. Lennie shows her the **puppy**, and she is surprised to see that it's dead. Lennie explains that he was playing with the puppy when it "made like [it was] gonna bite," so Lennie smacked the puppy and killed it. Curley's wife tells the distressed Lennie not to worry—the puppy was just a mutt, and he can easily get another.

When Candy assures George that he's only told Crooks about their plans, it implies that Crooks doesn't really count as a person to them. Candy wanted to defend Crooks against Curley's wife and comfort him in a moment of fear and pain, but still has trouble seeing the man as a full, complex human being.



Crooks knows that it's too dangerous for a disabled black man like him to participate in the dreams of the people around him. He resigns himself again to loneliness, insisting he never wanted to be a part of something larger in the first place.



Once again, Lennie has killed something small and defenseless due to his intense strength—strength he can't control or predict. As sad as this is, it is just the start of worse things yet to come for Lennie. Having strangled the puppy represents his inability to escape the patterns of his life which have made things so difficult for him—even as he envisions freedom from his past, symbolized by the rabbits he hopes to one day tend.



Curley's wife walks in on Lennie at a difficult, vulnerable moment. Her arrival at a moment of such chaos and calamity within his psyche implies that only more pain will befall both of them.



Curley's wife tries to comfort Lennie, but Lennie is unable to understand that he'll be able to get another puppy. He can only focus on how he's failed this one—and the consequences for his actions that are sure to come.



Lennie grows quiet and repeats that if George catches him talking to Curley's wife, he'll be in trouble. Curley's wife laments the fact that none of the men on the ranch will talk to her. She says she hates living the way she's living and wishes she could have made something of herself. Curley's wife launches into memory, recalling how, in her teenage years, she met a man in a traveling show who told her she could be in movies. Her mother interfered with her dreams, however, and so she wound up married to Curley even though she doesn't like him one bit.

As the sounds of the horseshoe game echo in from outside, Lennie wonders aloud if he could avoid trouble with George by throwing the **puppy** away. If George doesn't know about the dead puppy, Lennie reasons, he won't stop Lennie from tending the **rabbits**. Curley's wife asks Lennie why he's so obsessed with rabbits, and Lennie replies that he likes to "pet nice things." Curley's wife says she, too, likes touching soft things, and enjoys touching her own hair as she brushes it each night. She invites Lennie to stroke her hair. He does so, touching her hair gently at first but growing increasingly rough with his strokes. Curley's wife calls for him to stop, but Lennie closes his fingers around her hair and holds on.

As Curley's wife begins screaming, Lennie panics. He puts his hands over her nose and mouth to stop her from screaming, and she begins struggling violently and writhing in the hay. Lennie begs her to stop yelling, or else George will be mad at both of them. When Curley's wife doesn't stop her muffled screams, Lennie shakes her until her neck snaps. Lennie whispers to himself that he's "done another bad thing." Lennie covers Curley's wife in some hay, picks up the dead **puppy**, and resolves to go hide in the brush until George comes for him.

Candy comes into the barn looking for Lennie, excited to tell him more about some of the figuring he's done about their piece of land. He spots Curley's wife lying on the ground half-covered in hay, and calls out to her to chastise her for sleeping in such a strange place. As he gets closer to her, though, he sees that she is dead. Horrified, he runs out of the barn, fetches George, and brings him back inside to see what's happened.

Candy and George stare in horror at Curley's wife's dead body. Both of them realize that Lennie is responsible for her death, though neither of them will say the truth aloud. Candy asks what they should do, and George says they'll have to fetch "the poor bastard" and let the boss lock him up—if Lennie runs away on his own, he'll starve. George hopes the owners of the ranch will have compassion for Lennie and let him live, but Candy tells him that Curley will surely have Lennie killed. George sadly agrees.

Curley's wife is yet another individual in the novel whose broken plans and misadventures in pursuit of an ideal of the American Dream have made her into a lonely, tragic figure.



Just as Lennie was unable to understand the depths of Crooks's pain, he is unable now to internalize, respond to, or empathize with what Curley's wife is telling him about her life, her pain, and her loneliness. Curley's wife continues trying to get through to him and connect with him—not realizing the extent of Lennie's disability and that she is therefore likely getting in over her head.



This passage shows how Lennie's immense strength—and childlike need to avoid getting in trouble—conspire against him and lead him to commit a serious crime. Though Lennie only ever wants to indulge in petting and touching soft things, his own strength betrays him and gets him into situations that force him past the point of no return.



Candy is the one to discover Curley's wife's corpse—and seems to immediately know that Lennie is the only one that could be responsible. The fact that he tells George first, rather than immediately running to the boss or Curley, suggests that he has established a level of loyalty George and Lennie.



George tries to stave off the inevitability of what's about to happen even as he's confronted with the full truth of what Lennie has done. He doesn't want to believe that his and Lennie's time is really up, and that their travels, friendship, and plans are all about to come to an end due to the inevitable consequences of Lennie's actions.



Candy asks George if they'll still be able to get their "little place." George admits that all along, deep down, he knew that they'd never get their **farm**. George laments that he'll now live like an ordinary ranch hand, spending everything he makes each month in a whorehouse or a poolroom.

Candy says he can't believe Lennie would do something so violent. George insists Lennie didn't do it out of meanness—out of all the bad things Lennie has done, he's "never done one of 'em mean."

George tells Candy that they need to devise a plan to keep George from looking suspicious. He says he's going to sneak over to the bunk house and asks Candy to wait several minutes before coming back out of the barn and telling the other men what he's found. Candy agrees to the plan, and George hurries out of the barn.

Alone with Curley's wife's corpse, Candy curses the "lousy tart" for messing everything up for him. After lamenting aloud all that he has lost because of her death, he goes out to tell the other men. The game abruptly comes to a stop, and Slim, Whit, Curley, and Crooks all rush into the barn. Candy follows them, and then George arrives. Curley is furious, and vows to kill "the big son-of-a-bitch" before running from the barn. Carlson runs out to get his pistol.

Slim asks George where Lennie might have gone—he seems sad at the prospect of hunting the man down and killing him. George asks if Lennie could be captured but not killed, but Slim says it'd be "no good" to keep Lennie in a cage for the rest of his life. Carlson runs back into the barn, shouting that Lennie has stolen his Luger. Curley suggests they use Crooks's gun to hunt down Lennie, and orders Whit to go into town to get the sheriff. Slim suggests Curley stay back with his wife's body, but Curley is determined to go out and kill Lennie himself.

Slim tells Candy to stay with Curley's wife, and Candy agrees to do so. All the other men, including George, follow Curley out of the barn. As the men's footsteps recede and the light in the barn grows dimmer, Curley lies down in the hay and covers his face with his arm.

George's tragic admission in this passage reveals that he's never really believed he and Lennie would get their dream—he was always expecting something like this to happen. The vision of the farm, then, is more of an escapist fantasy than a concrete plan, suggesting that striving toward the American Dream is more of a coping mechanism than an attainable goal.



While Candy sees before him nothing but a violent act, George knows that with Lennie, there's always more to the story—Lennie would never intentionally hurt someone. This once again emphasizes the ongoing conflict between Lennie's outer strength and his inner vulnerability.



George knows that Lennie is doomed—but is desperate to try to save himself from being dragged down with his companion. It's cruel, but it's the only way George knows how to survive, and he knows he must do so in order to have a chance at surviving and bettering his own circumstances in the future.



Candy scapegoats Curley's wife—one of the book's marginalized characters—for his own pain and suffering. He is therefore complicit in the system and dynamic that has devalued him for his age and disability, yet he is so desperate for someone to blame that he doesn't notice this.



Just as George tried to keep the dream of his and Lennie's farm alive in the face of irrefutable evidence that it would never happen, he now tries to kid himself into believing that Lennie can still be spared in spite of what he's done.



Candy's hopes have been dashed. Just as when his dog was shot, his response is to slink into himself and try to detach from what's happening around him.



PART 6

Lennie sits at the edge of the green pool on the Salinas River, drinking thirstily from the water. Out of the corner of his eye, he notices a heron devour a water snake. When he's finished, he hugs his knees to his chest and faces the trail, waiting for George. He is nervous that George will "give [him] hell," and wonders aloud if he should go find a cave in which to hide. A vision of Aunt Clara, a woman in thick glasses and a large gingham apron, appears before Lennie.

Aunt Clara reprimands Lennie for ignoring her advice, doing "bad things," and pushing George away. Aunt Clara points out how patient and generous George has always been. Lennie says he's going to go away and live in a cave. Aunt Clara calls Lennie's bluff, telling him that he'll never leave George. Lennie says there's no point in staying with George, because George will never let him tend **rabbits** now.

Aunt Clara morphs into a giant **rabbit**. The rabbit tells Lennie he "ain't fit to lick the boots of no rabbit," and would only hurt or starve any rabbits he did tend. Lennie insists he'd be good at raising rabbits, but the rabbit retorts that George will never let Lennie do such a thing now, and will probably beat Lennie with a stick and leave him for dead. Lennie puts his hands over his ears and begins screaming, trying to block out the rabbit's cruel words.

George comes crashing through the brush to find a hysterical Lennie screaming and rocking back and forth. Lennie embraces George, and begs him on his knees not to abandon him. George promises he isn't going to leave Lennie. Lennie tells George he's done a bad thing, but George insists it doesn't matter. There is the distant sound of men shouting.

Lennie asks George if George is going to give him hell like he always does when Lennie does bad things. George "woodenly" begins reciting the reproaches he always uses on Lennie, stating that if he was alone he could "live so easy" and describing all the things he'd do if Lennie weren't his to worry about. Lennie offers to run away into the hills, but George insists he wants Lennie to stay with him.

As Lennie witnesses the heron eat the water snake, the violent workings of nature foreshadow what is about to happen to Lennie out here in the wilderness.



While Lennie has always seen the idea of leaving George as a selfless act, "Aunt Clara"—some deep-seated part of Lennie's consciousness—calls Lennie out on wanting George's attention. Lennie wants George to want him to stay, and is constantly trying to win George's affection, suggesting that their bond is central to his wellbeing.



This frightening look into Lennie's consciousness continues as his worst fears about himself materialize before him. Lennie must struggle intensely and daily with these feelings of guilt and self-loathing, and to see them projected as visions of the things he loves most denigrating him is unbearably painful.



George knows that comforting Lennie is the main point of the interaction they're about to have. With the men from the ranch thundering towards them, ready to murder Lennie, all George can do is make his friend's final moments as free of pain and guilt as he can.



George knows there's no point in railing against Lennie—there never was. Even though he tried to help Lennie get along in the world, behave correctly, and fit in, tragically, no amount of "hell" George could give Lennie would ever change his nature.



Lennie asks George to tell him again how the two of them are different from other ranchers. George tells Lennie they're different because they have one another. George can hear the shouts of the men in the distance, closer than before. George urges Lennie to take off his hat and enjoy the evening breeze; Lennie does so. He asks George to tell him some more about "how it's gonna be." George orders Lennie to turn and look out across the river, so that he can better imagine the details of the story George tells him.

George begins telling Lennie about the "little place" they'll soon have in a gentle voice. Behind Lennie's back, George pulls Carlson's pistol out of his own pocket and cocks it. He stares at the base of Lennie's skull as he continues spinning the familiar yarn about a **farm** with animals, **rabbits**, and a big alfalfa patch. He assures Lennie that Lennie will get to tend the rabbits all by himself, and Lennie giggles as he thinks happily about living "on the fatta the lan."

George hears the men's footsteps coming nearer. He assures Lennie that they are going to go to their little **farm** soon and will have "no more trouble" for the rest of their lives. Lennie says he thought George was mad at him. George replies that he's not mad at Lennie, and never has been. Lennie asks George if they can go to their special place right away, and George says they can. George lifts the pistol, points it at the back of Lennie's head, and pulls the trigger even as his hand shakes violently. Lennie falls forward and lies still on the ground, dead.

George tosses the gun away from himself and stares down at his right hand, the one that pulled the trigger. The men crash through the brush. Curley sees Lennie dead on the ground and congratulates George on getting him. Slim sits down beside George and, seeing his distress, tries to comfort him. Carlson asks George if Lennie had his gun, and George says that he did. Carlson asks if George got the gun away from Lennie and then killed him, and George agrees that that's what happened. He continues staring at his right hand.

Slim pulls George to his feet and tells him they should all have a drink. George robotically agrees. Slim again tries to comfort George by telling him that he did what he had to do. He gingerly leads George back through the brush. Curley and Carlson stare after them as they go, and Carlson asks what in the hell could be "eatin' them two guys."

Lennie takes comfort in the idea that he and George are united against the world up until his final moments—even as George is trying to distract Lennie so that he can kill him and put them both out of their shared misery.



George's decision to distract the simple, trusting Lennie by telling him about their farm—a dream that neither of them will ever realize—at first seems cruel. Upon closer examination, however, it is clear that George is trying to distract Lennie and give him the gift of ignorance.



George is distraught over what he must do to Lennie in order to protect them both. He tries to send Lennie off in the kindest way possible—by allowing him to spend his final moments lost in a reverie of their shared American Dream of prosperity, safety, and plenty.



George is horrified by what he's done—at the same time, he knows that he had no other option. To watch the other men kill the misunderstood and defenseless Lennie would have been too painful. Even though George is unable to stand himself, he has, in a way, done Lennie one final act of kindness.



Though Slim has empathy for George and understands the magnitude of what he's done in killing Lennie, Curley and Carlson have none. Two men are fueled only by their shared desires to prove their strength, and have never understood Lennie and George's connection, or the subversion of the "the weak vs. the strong" stereotype it represented.





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