

Of Mice and Men, written by John Steinbeck, is the story of two simple farm hands,

Lennie Small, who incidentally, really isn't very small, and his better half, George Milton, on

their quest to have "a place of their own," with plenty of furry bunnies, of course. Sound

strange? Read on to get clued in.

The book opens along the banks of the Salinas River a few miles south of Soledad,

California. Everything is calm and beautiful, and nature is alive. The trees are green and fresh,

lizards are skittering along, rabbits sit on the sand. There are no people in the scene. Suddenly,

the calm is broken. Trouble is in the air. Animals begin to scatter. Two men have arrived on

the scene, and the environment seems troubled by their presence. For a moment the scene

becomes "lifeless." Then in walk George and Lennie.

Lennie, a large, retarded, big man who has the mind of a little child, and who loves to pet

soft, pretty things, and George, a little man, who has assumed the responsibility of taking care of

his simpleminded friend Lennie, are walking on their way to apply for a harvesting job on a

nearby farm. The two had been traveling together for quite some time now, which was very rare,

because most farm workers rarely have companions, but George and Lennie have been together

ever since Lennie's Aunt had passed away, and Lennie began to follow George around everywhere.

Instead of hurrying to the farm that night, they stop by a stream to camp in the open, and

they'll arrive at work the next morning. Why? Well, Lennie isn't very bright. George didn't want

him to blow the job opportunity. The logic between waiting until morning until going to work was,

that way, all the other farm hands would be out working, thus they'd have a better chance of

getting the job, since Lennie wouldn't have to confront too many people, which can easily make him "confused."

During that evening, George had to take a dead mouse away from Lennie, who had been

hoarding it because he liked to pet it. George tried to teach simpleminded Lennie that you don't

pet dead things, but Lennie had a hard time remembering.

George is aware that Lennie has difficulty remembering things, so he has to remind him

every time that they went for a job not to say anything, and to let him do the talking. He also

stresses the importance that Lennie returns to the particular place and hide in the stream or

bushes if gets in any trouble, which plays an important role later on in the story. Also in the

forest, we have the story of living "off the fatta' the land," for the first time. They dreamed of one

day having a place of their very own, in which Lennie could tend to as many bunnies as he would

like. Lennie was apparently obsessed with this dream, because all throughout the book, he nags

George to repeat the story over and over, like a child.

The next morning during the job interview, the boss of the farm becomes suspicious

when George answers every question for Lennie. George told him of the situation, how he isn't

very smart, but he makes sure the boss realizes that he is an excellent worker. The boss is a

little suspicious, and believes that George is taking advantage of Lennie, so he had to lie,

and he told the boss that they were cousins, in order to get rid of any suspicion. Then they were

hired.

That night in the bunkhouse, which is where Lennie and George were staying, there is a

conflict over whether or not the old dog which Candy, an old crippled farm hand,

owned should

be killed or not, because it smelled so terrible. After much argument, Candy agrees to let

Carlson, another farm hand, kill the old dog. After making sure that the dog had his head turned,

Carlson shot him. Candy later regrets letting someone else shoot his own dog like that, and

wishes he would have put him out of his misery himself. This is foreshadowing an event that

takes place with Lennie and George later in the book...

Later that night, after the old dog had been killed, Candy realized that he to would soon

be old and unwanted like the dog was, so, wanting to have companions, he decided to join

Lennie and George in their dream of having their own place, where they could all be together.

This becomes an important theme throughout the book, the idea that all people have dreams,

and also that fact that all people need companionship to get along.

Meanwhile, Curley, the arrogant son of the boss, who likes to try and pick on bigger

people that he is, was trying to find his wife, and he couldn't find her anywhere. When he walked

into the bunkhouse and saw Lennie grinning, about the dream of the place that they would one

day have, of course, he began to hit him, thinking that Lennie was grinning towards him. Lennie

did nothing for self defense until George told him to. He then, almost mechanically, reached out

and crushed Curley's hand, with no apparent difficulty at all. This gets Curley all steamed, and

would eventually push him over the edge later in the book...

That weekend, everyone is in town but Lennie, Candy, and Crooks, who is a Negro

stable keeper who keeps to himself, and has no friends. After being really rude towards Lennie

when he tried to walk into his quarters of the bunkhouse, he saw that Lennie was generally

friendly, and let he and Candy in. They talked about their dream of their own place, and Crooks

decided he'd like to join them. He said he'd work for his keep. They all agreed on it, and now

Crooks too was in on the deal, that is, until Curley's wife, who is also just as lonely as the farm

workers, is bored and comes in and begins to harass him, and he realizes that he really has no

hope of these things really happening.

The next day, Lennie receive's a puppy after begging George, but accidentally kills it by

playing too hard with the puppy. Curley's wife, who is really bored, sees what he is hiding, and

tries to talk to him about it, explaining that it was okay, it was only a "mutt." After she discovers

his obsession with petting things, she lets him pet her soft hair. He enjoys it, but doesn't know

how to be gentle, and pets it to hard. She struggles to get loose, but he held her closer. When

she tried to yell, he held her even tighter, because he was tensing up, afraid that he had done

something bad, and if anyone found out about it (he wasn't even supposed to be talking with her

in the first place), he'd get in big trouble, and not get to tend to the bunnies one day,

which was his big goal in life. Knowing this, and not knowing what to do, he grasped her tighter

and tighter, until his strength had snapped her neck, leaving her dead. He was all confused, and

afraid. He knew this was bad. Luckily, he remembered to run to the forest and hide if he was in

trouble, so he did.

When Candy discovered her body, they new immediately that it was Lennie. Curley,

was furious, and in addition to this, he was already mad about Lennie crushing his hand, so he

ordered that all the men go with him to find Lennie and kill him. George was concerned for his

friend, so, while he stalled, he stole Carlson's gun so he wouldn't have it to go

after Lennie with.

Then he ran ahead of the gang to the forest to check on Lennie.

Meanwhile, Lennie was seeing strange things. He saw a huge image of his Aunt, and

she was scolding him for messing things up, and always being a hassle for George. Then he

saw the image of a large rabbit. The rabbit told him that George would beat him, and that

he'd never be able to take care of the rabbits. Lennie, having complete faith in his good friend

George, denied all this, saying that George would never do such a thing.

After a little while, George showed up, and Lennie was relieved. He told Lennie that

everything would be alright. But not even George could deny that Lennie had done something

very wrong this time. While Lennie had George repeat the story of the place that they would one

day have, and Lennie's back was turned, he pulled out the gun and shot Lennie, killing him. The

rest of the workers then caught up and congratulated him for his doings.

Why had George killed his dear friend Lennie? Well, think back to when Candy had to

part with his dog, and he let Carlson do it for him. This was the same type of situation, but

George decided that he'd rather put Lennie out of his misery himself rather than see him

mutilated by the vengeful Curley. It was mainly for his own good, and at least he died happily,

thinking of his long life dream. But George had sacrificed his companion, and he too, like the

other farm hands, would now have to live a life alone in misery, with nobody who cares for him.

