

text. In this scene and in a later scene, it will be noticed that the old blind dog is described as actually on stage. Because getting and using an actual dog may offer real difficulties, the director is urged to consider some simple device whereby the dog is just offstage, at one side of the entrance. To do this will necessitate some slight alteration in the business of the scenes where the dog is now indicated as being actually on stage.

Act II—Scene 1. The tiny puppy referred to in this scene and the puppies referred to in other places throughout the play should not, of course, be real animals. A dummy or a roll of cloth can easily be substituted.

Act II—Scene 2. The setting here should be very small and compact, and dim lighting plays a most important part.

Act III—Scene 1. Although the actual playing space here is extremely small, it is supposed to be laid in a large barn. There is no point in attempting any sort of realistic presentation of the barn. As a matter of fact, all that is needed is a heap of hay down-stage c. The rest of the scene should be kept in shadow for the most part. Even the business of looking between the boards of the barn might be treated unrealistically, no actual sunlight coming in. It also makes little or no difference just from where the characters enter or where they go out.

Act III—Scene 2. Again the same setting as in Act I—Scene 1. Here the stage is almost in darkness at the beginning and at the end night has fallen.

It is suggested that when George shoots Lennie, the audience should see all the preparations for this, but the curtain might actually be down before we hear the shot.

George & Lennie

P. 7-9

OF MICE AND MEN

ACT I

SCENE 1

Thursday night. A sandy bank of the Salinas River sheltered with willows—one giant sycamore up R. The stage is covered with dry leaves. The feeling is sheltered and quiet. Stage is lit by a setting sun.

Curtain rises on empty stage. A sparrow is singing. There is a distant sound of ranch dogs barking aimlessly and one clear quail call. The quail call turns to a warning call and there is a beat of the flock's wings. Two figures are seen entering, L. or R., it makes no difference, in single file, with GEORGE, the short man, coming in ahead of LENNIE. Both men are carrying blanket rolls. They approach the water. The small man throws down his blanket roll, the large man follows, then falls down and drinks from the river, snorting as he drinks.¹

GEORGE. (*Irritably.*) Lennie, for God's sake, don't drink so much. (*Leans over and shakes LENNIE.*) Lennie, you hear me! You gonna be sick like you was last night.

LENNIE. (*Dips his whole head under, hat and all. As he sits on bank, his hat drips down the back.*) That's good. You drink some, George. You drink some, too.

GEORGE. (*Kneeling, dipping his finger in water.*) I ain't sure it's good water. Looks kinda scummy to me.

LENNIE. (*Imitates, dipping his finger also.*) Look at them wrinkles in the water, George. Look what I done.

GEORGE. (*Drinking from his cupped palm.*) Tastes all right. Don't seem to be runnin' much, though. Lennie, you oughtn' to drink water when it ain't running. (*Hopelessly.*) You'd drink water out of a gutter if you was thirsty. (*Throws a scoop of water into his*

¹ See p. 5, Production Note.

face, rubs it around with his hand, pushes himself back and embraces his knees. LENNIE, after watching him, imitates him in every detail. GEORGE, beginning tiredly and growing angry as he speaks.) God damn it, we could just as well of rode clear to the ranch. That bus driver didn't know what he was talkin' about. "Just a little stretch down the highway," he says. "Just a little stretch"—damn near four miles! I bet he didn't want to stop at the ranch gate. . . . I bet he's too damn lazy to pull up. Wonder he ain't too lazy to stop at Soledad at all! (*Mumbling.*) Just a little stretch down the road.

LENNIE. (*Timidly.*) George?

GEORGE. Yeh . . . what you want?

LENNIE. Where we goin', George?

GEORGE. (*Jerks down his hat furiously.*) So you forgot that already, did you? So I got to tell you again! Jeez, you're crazy!

LENNIE. (*Softly.*) I forgot. I tried not to forget, honest to God, I did!

GEORGE. Okay, okay, I'll tell you again. . . . (*With sarcasm.*) I ain't got nothin' to do. Might just as well spen' all my time tellin' you things. You forgit 'em and I tell you again.

LENNIE. (*Continuing on from his last speech.*) I tried and tried, but it didn't do no good. I remember about the rabbits, George!

GEORGE. The hell with the rabbits! You can't remember nothing but them rabbits. You remember settin' in that gutter on Howard Street and watchin' that blackboard?

LENNIE. (*Delightedly.*) Oh, sure! I remember that . . . but . . . wha'd we do then? I remember some girls come by, and you says —

GEORGE. The hell with what I says! You remember about us goin' in Murray and Ready's and they give us work cards and bus tickets?

LENNIE. (*Confidently.*) Oh, sure, George . . . I remember that now. (*Puts hand into side coat-pocket, his confidence vanishes. Very gently.*) . . . George?

GEORGE. Huh?

LENNIE. (*Staring at ground in despair.*) I ain't got mine. I musta lost it.

GEORGE. You never had none. I got both of 'em here. Think I'd let you carry your own work card?

LENNIE. (*With tremendous relief.*) I thought I put it in my side

pocket. (*Puts hand in pocket again.*)

GEORGE. (*Looking sharply at him, and as he looks, LENNIE brings hand out of pocket.*) Wha'd you take out of that pocket?

LENNIE. (*Cleverly.*) Ain't a thing in my pocket.

GEORGE. I know there ain't. You got it in your hand now. What you got in your hand?

LENNIE. I ain't got nothing, George! Honest!

GEORGE. Come on, give it here!

LENNIE. (*Holds his closed hand away from GEORGE.*) It's on'y a mouse!

GEORGE. A mouse? A live mouse?

LENNIE. No . . . just a dead mouse. (*Worriedly.*) I didn't kill it. Honest. I found it. I found it dead.

GEORGE. Give it here!

LENNIE. Leave me have it, George.

GEORGE. (*Sternly.*) Give it here! (*LENNIE reluctantly gives him mouse.*) What do you want of a dead mouse, anyway?

LENNIE. (*In a propositional tone.*) I was petting it with my thumb while we walked along.

GEORGE. Well, you ain't pettin' no mice while you walk with me. Now let's see if you can remember where we're going. (*GEORGE throws it across the water into brush.*)

LENNIE. (*Looks startled, then in embarrassment hides his face against his knees.*) I forgot again.

GEORGE. Jesus Christ! (*Resignedly.*) Well, look, we are gonna work on a ranch like the one we come from up north.

LENNIE. Up north?

GEORGE. In Weed!

LENNIE. Oh, sure I remember—in Weed.

GEORGE. (*Still with exaggerated patience.*) That ranch we're goin' to is right down there about a quarter mile. We're gonna go in and see the boss.

LENNIE. (*Repeats, as a lesson.*) And see the boss!

GEORGE. Now, look! I'll give him the work tickets, but you ain't gonna say a word. You're just gonna stand there and not say nothing.

LENNIE. Not say nothing!

GEORGE. If he finds out what a crazy bastard you are, we won't get no job. But if he sees you work before he hears you talk, we're set. You got that?

Candy, George & Lennie

three, here and there, which can on occasion be used for chairs. The sun is streaking through the windows, u. c. One or two others may be used as needed. NOTE: Articles in boxes on wall are soap, talcum powder, razors, pulp magazines, medicine bottles, combs, and from nails on the sides of the boxes a few neckties. A hanging light from ceiling over table, with a round dim reflector on it.

Curtain rises on an empty stage. Only the ticking of the many clocks is heard. CANDY, GEORGE and LENNIE are first seen passing open window u. c.

CANDY. This is the bunkhouse here. Door's around this side. (Latch on door c. rises and CANDY enters, a stoop-shouldered old man, dressed in blue-jeans and denim coat. Carries a big push broom in his L. hand. His R. hand is gone at the wrist. Grasps things with his R. arm between arm and side. Walks into room, followed by GEORGE and LENNIE. Conversationally.) The boss was expecting you last night. He was sore as hell when you wasn't here to go out this morning. (Points with handless arm.) You can have them two beds there.

GEORGE. I'll take the top one . . . I don't want you falling down on me. (Steps over to one of the bunks, throws his blankets down. Looks into nearly empty box shelf over it, then picks up a small yellow can.) Say, what the hell's this?

CANDY. I don't know.

GEORGE. Says "positively kills lice, roaches and other scourges." What the hell kinda beds you givin' us, anyway? We don't want no pants rabbits.

CANDY. (Shifts broom, holding it between his elbow and his side. takes can in L. hand, studies label carefully.) Tell you what . . . last guy that had this bed was a blacksmith. Helluva nice fellow. Clean a guy as you'd want to meet. Used to wash his hands even after he et.

GEORGE. (With gathering anger.) Then how come he got pillow-pigeons? (LENNIE puts his blankets on bunk and sits down, watching GEORGE with his mouth slightly open.)

CANDY. Tell you what. This here blacksmith, name of Whitey, was the kinda guy that would put that stuff around even if there wasn't no bugs. Tell you what he used to do. He'd peel his boiled

potatoes and take out every little spot before he et it, and if there was a red splotch on an egg, he'd scrape it off. Finally quit about the food. That's the kind of guy Whitey was. Clean. Used to dress up Sundays even when he wasn't goin' no place. Put on a necktie even, and then set in the bunkhouse.

GEORGE. (Skeptically.) I ain't so sure. What da' ya say he quit for?

CANDY. (Puts can in pocket, rubs his whiskers with knuckles.) Why . . . he just quit the way a guy will. Says it was the food. Didn't give no other reason. Just says "give me my time" one night, the way any guy would. (GEORGE lifts his bed tick and looks underneath, leans over, inspects sacking carefully. LENNIE does same with his bed.)

GEORGE. (Half satisfied.) Well, if there's any gray-backs in this bed, you're gonna hear from me! (Unrolls blankets and puts his razor, soap, comb, bottle of pills, liniment and leather wristband in box.)

CANDY. I guess the boss'll be out here in a minute to write your name in. He sure was burned when you wasn't here this morning. Come right in when we was eatin' breakfast and says, "Where the hell's them new men?" He give the stable buck hell, too. Stable buck's a nigger.

GEORGE. Nigger, huh!

CANDY. Yeah. (Continues.) Nice fellow, too. Got a crooked back where a horse kicked him. Boss gives him hell when he's mad. But the stable buck don't give a damn about that.

GEORGE. What kinda guy is the boss?

CANDY. Well, he's a pretty nice fella for a boss. Gets mad sometimes. But he's pretty nice. Tell you what. Know what he done Christmas? Brung a gallon of whiskey right in here and says, "Drink hearty, boys, Christmas comes but once a year!"

GEORGE. The hell he did! A whole gallon?

CANDY. Yes, sir. Jesus, we had fun! They let the nigger come in that night. Well, sir, a little skinner name Smitty took after the nigger. Done pretty good too. The guys wouldn't let him use his feet so the nigger got him. If he could, a used his feet Smitty says he would have killed the nigger. The guys says on account the nigger got a crooked back Smitty can't use his feet. (Smiles in reverie at memory.)

GEORGE. Boss the owner?

Boss & George

CANDY. Naw! Superintendent. Big land company. . . . Yes, sir, that night . . . he come right in here with a whole gallon . . . he set right over there and says, "Drink hearty, boys," . . . he says. . . . (Door opens. Enter the BOSS, a stock man, dressed in blue-jean trousers, flannel shirt, black unbuttoned vest and black coat. Wears soiled brown Stetson hat; a pair of high-heeled boots and spurs. Ordinarily he puts his thumbs in his belt. CANDY, shuffling towards door, rubbing his whiskers with his knuckles as he goes.) Them guys just come. (CANDY exits shuts door behind him.)

BOSS. I wrote Murray and Ready I wanted two men this morning. You got your work slips?

GEORGE. (Digs in his pockets, produces two slips, hands them to BOSS.) Here they are.

BOSS. (Reading slips.) Well, I see it wasn't Murray and Ready's fault. It says right here on the slip, you was to be here for work this morning.

GEORGE. Bus driver give us a bum steer. We had to walk ten miles. That bus driver says we was here when we wasn't. We couldn't thumb no rides. (GEORGE scowls meaningly at LENNIE, who nods to show that he understands.)

BOSS. Well, I had to send out the grain teams short two buckers. It won't do any good to go out now until after dinner. You'd get lost. (Pulls out time book, opens it to where pencil is stuck between leaves. Licks pencil carefully.) What's your name?

GEORGE. George Milton.

BOSS. George Milton. (Writing.) And what's yours?

GEORGE. His name's Lennie Small.

BOSS. Lennie Small. (Writing.) Le's see, this is the twentieth. Noon the twentieth. . . . (Makes positive mark. Closes book, puts it in pocket.) Where you boys been workin'?

GEORGE. Up around Weed.

BOSS. (To LENNIE.) You too?

GEORGE. Yeah. Him too.

BOSS. (To LENNIE.) Say, you're a big fellow, ain't you?

GEORGE. Yeah, he can work like hell, too.

BOSS. He ain't much of a talker, though, is he?

GEORGE. No, he ain't. But he's a hell of a good worker. Strong as a bull.

LENNIE. (Smiling.) I'm strong as a bull. (GEORGE scowls at him,

LENNIE drops head in shame at having forgotten.)

BOSS. (Sharply.) You are, huh? What can you do?

GEORGE. He can do anything.

BOSS. (Addressing LENNIE.) What can you do? (LENNIE, looking at GEORGE, gives a high nervous chuckle.)

GEORGE. (Quickly.) Anything you tell him. He's a good skinner. He can wrestle grain bags, drive a cultivator. He can do anything. Just give him a try.

BOSS. (Turning to GEORGE.) Then why don't you let him answer? (LENNIE laughs.) What's he laughing about?

GEORGE. He laughs when he gets excited.

BOSS. Yeah?

GEORGE. (Loudly.) But he's a goddamn good worker. I ain't saying he's bright, because he ain't. But he can put up a four hundred pound bale.

BOSS. (Hooking his thumbs in his belt.) Say, what you sellin'?

GEORGE. Huh?

BOSS. I said what stake you got in this guy? You takin' his pay away from him?

GEORGE. No. Of course I ain't!

BOSS. Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your percentage is.

GEORGE. He's my . . . cousin. I told his ole lady I'd take care of him. He got kicked in the head by a horse when he was a kid. He's all right. . . . Just ain't bright. But he can do anything you tell him.

BOSS. (Turning half away.) Well, God knows he don't need no brains to buck barley bags. (Turns back.) But don't you try to put nothing over, Milton. I got my eye on you. Why'd you quit in Weed?

GEORGE. (Promptly.) Job was done.

BOSS. What kind of job?

GEORGE. Why . . . we was diggin' a cesspool.

BOSS. (After a pause.) All right. But don't try to put nothing over 'cause you can't get away with nothing. I seen wise guys before. Go out with the grain teams after dinner. They're out pickin' up barley with the thrashin' machines. Go out with Slim's team.

GEORGE. Slim?

BOSS. Yeah. Big, tall skinner. You'll see him at dinner. (Up to this time the BOSS has been full of business, calm and suspicious.

Curley & George

CANDY. (Comes slowly into room. By a rope, he leads an ancient drag-footed blind sheep dog.¹ Sits on box, presses hind quarters of dog down.) Naw . . . I wasn't listenin'. . . . I was just standin' in the shade a minute, scratchin' my dog. I jest now finished swamping out the washhouse.

GEORGE. You was pokin' your big nose into our business! I don't like nosey guys.

CANDY. (Looks uneasily from GEORGE to LENNIE, then back.) I jest come there . . . I didn't hear nothing you guys was sayin'. I ain't interested in nothing you was sayin'. A guy on a ranch don't never listen. Nor he don't ast no questions.

GEORGE. (Slightly mollified.) Damn right he don't! Not if the guy wants to stay workin' long. (Manner changes.) That's a helluva ole dog.

CANDY. Yeah. I had him ever since he was a pup. God, he was a good sheep dog, when he was young. (Rubs cheek with knuckles.) How'd you like the boss?

GEORGE. Pretty good! Seemed all right.

CANDY. He's a nice fella. You got ta take him right, of course. He's runnin' this ranch. He don't take no nonsense.

GEORGE. What time do we eat? Eleven-thirty? (CURLEY enters, dressed in working clothes. Wears brown high-heeled boots and has a glove on his L. hand.)

CURLEY. Seen my ole man?

CANDY. He was here just a minute ago, Curley. Went over to the cookhouse, I think.

CURLEY. I'll try to catch him. (Looking at the new men, measuring them. Unconsciously bends his elbows, closes his hand, and goes into a slight crouch. Walks gingerly close to LENNIE.) You the new guys my ole man was waitin' for?

GEORGE. Yeah. We just come in.

CURLEY. How's it come you wasn't here this morning?

GEORGE. Got off the bus too soon.

CURLEY. (Again addressing LENNIE.) My ole man got to get the grain out. Ever bucked barley?

GEORGE. (Quickly.) Hell, yes. Done a lot of it.

CURLEY. I mean him. (To LENNIE.) Ever bucked barley?

GEORGE. Sure he has.

CURLEY. (Irritatedly.) Let the big buy talk!

¹ See p. 5, Production Note.

GEORGE. S'pose he don't want ta talk?

CURLEY. (Pugnaciously.) By Christ, he's gotta talk when he's spoke to. What the hell you shovin' into this for?

GEORGE. (Stands up, speaks coldly.) Him and me travel together.

CURLEY. Oh, so it's that way?

GEORGE. (Tense and motionless.) What way?

CURLEY. (Letting subject drop.) And you won't let the big guy talk? Is that it?

GEORGE. He can talk if he wants to tell you anything. (Nods slightly to LENNIE.)

LENNIE. (In a frightened voice.) We just come in.

CURLEY. Well, next time you answer when you're spoke to, then.

GEORGE. He didn't do nothing to you.

CURLEY. (Measuring him.) You drawin' cards this hand?

GEORGE. (Quietly.) I might.

CURLEY. (Stares at him a moment, his threat moving to the future.) I'll see you get a chance to ante, anyway. (Walks out of room.)

GEORGE. (After CURLEY leaves.) Say, what the hell's he got on his shoulder? Lennie didn't say nothing to him.

CANDY. (Looks cautiously at door.) That's the boss's son. Curley's pretty handy. He done quite a bit in the ring. The guys say he's pretty handy.

GEORGE. Well, let 'im be handy. He don't have to take after Lennie. Lennie didn't do nothing to him.

CANDY. (Considering.) Well . . . tell you what, Curley's like a lot a little guys. He hates big guys. He's alla time pickin' scraps with big guys. Kinda like he's mad at 'em because he ain't a big guy. You seen little guys like that, ain't you—always scrappy?

GEORGE. Sure, I seen plenty tough little guys. But this here Curley better not make no mistakes about Lennie. Lennie ain't handy, see, but this Curley punk's gonna get hurt if he messes around with Lennie.

CANDY. (Skeptically.) Well, Curley's pretty handy. You know, it never did seem right to me. S'pose Curley jumps a big guy and licks him. Everybody says what a game guy Curley is. Well, s'pose he jumps 'im and gits licked, everybody says the big guy oughta pick somebody his own size. Seems like Curley ain't givin' nobody a chance.

GEORGE. (Watching door.) Well, he better watch out for Lennie.

Curley's Wife & George

I wanted we should get a little stake together. Maybe a hundred dollars. You keep away from Curley.

LENNIE. Sure I will. I won't say a word.

GEORGE. (*Hesitating.*) Don't let 'im pull you in—but—if the son-of-a-bitch socks you—let him have it!

LENNIE. Let him have what, George?

GEORGE. Never mind. . . . Look, if you get in any kind of trouble, you remember what I told you to do.

LENNIE. If I get in any trouble, you ain't gonna let me tend the rabbits?

GEORGE. That's not what I mean. You remember where we slept last night. Down by the river?

LENNIE. Oh, sure I remember. I go there and hide in the brush until you come for me.

GEORGE. That's it. Hide till I come for you. Don't let nobody see you. Hide in the brush by the river. Now say that over.

LENNIE. Hide in the brush by the river. Down in the brush by the river.

GEORGE. If you get in trouble.

LENNIE. If I get in trouble. (*A brake screeches outside and a call: "Stable buck, oh, stable buck!" Suddenly CURLEY'S WIFE is standing in c. door. Full, heavily rouged lips. Wide-spaced, made-up eyes, her fingernails are bright red, hair hangs in little rolled clusters like sausages. Wears a cotton house dress and red mules, on the insteps of which are little bouquets of red ostrich feathers.*

GEORGE and LENNIE look up at her.)

CURLEY'S WIFE. I'm lookin' for Curley!

GEORGE. (*Looks away from her.*) He was in here a minute ago but he went along.

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*Puts hands behind back, leans against door frame so that her body is thrown forward.*) You're the new fellas that just come, ain't you?

GEORGE. (*Sullenly.*) Yeah.

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*Bridles a little, inspects her fingernails.*) Sometimes Curley's in here.

GEORGE. (*Brusquely.*) Well, he ain't now!

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*Playfully.*) Well, if he ain't, I guess I'd better look some place else. (*LENNIE watches her, fascinated.*)

GEORGE. If I see Curley I'll pass the word you was lookin' for him.

CURLEY'S WIFE. Nobody can't blame a person for lookin'.

GEORGE. That depends what she's lookin' for.

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*A little wearily, dropping coquetry.*) I'm jus' lookin' for somebody to talk to. Don't you never jus' want to talk to somebody?

SLIM. (*Offstage.*) Okay! Put that lead pair in the north stalls.

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*To SLIM, offstage.*) Hi, Slim!

SLIM. (*Voice offstage.*) Hello.

CURLEY'S WIFE. I—I'm tryin' to find Curley.

SLIM'S VOICE. (*Offstage.*) Well, you ain't tryin' very hard. I seen him goin' in your house.

CURLEY'S WIFE. (*Turning back toward GEORGE and LENNIE.*) I gotta be goin'! (*She exits hurriedly.*)

GEORGE. (*Looking around at LENNIE.*) Jesus, what a tramp! So that's what Curley picks for a wife. God Almighty, did you smell that stink she's got on? I can still smell her. Don't have to see *her* to know she's around.

LENNIE. She's purty!

GEORGE. Yeah. And she's sure hidin' it. Curley got his work ahead of him.

LENNIE. (*Still staring at doorway where she was.*) Gosh, she's purty!

GEORGE. (*Turning furiously at him.*) Listen to me, you crazy bastard. Don't you even look at that bitch. I don't care what she says or what she does. I seen 'em poison before, but I ain't never seen no piece of jail bait worse than her. Don't you even smell near her!

LENNIE. I never smelled, George!

GEORGE. No, you never. But when she was standin' there showin' her legs, you wasn't lookin' the other way neither!

LENNIE. I never meant no bad things, George. Honest I never.

GEORGE. Well, you keep away from her. You let Curley take the rap. He let himself in for it. (*Disgustedly.*) Glove full of vaseline. I bet he's eatin' raw eggs and writin' to patent-medicine houses.

LENNIE. (*Cries out.*) I don't like this place. This ain't no good place. I don't like this place!

GEORGE. Listen—I don't like it here no better than you do. But we gotta keep it till we get a stake. We're flat. We gotta get a stake. (*Goes back to table, thoughtfully.*) If we can get just a few dollars in the poke we'll shove off and go up to the American River and pan gold. Guy can make a couple dollars a day there.

Slim, George, Lennie, & Carlson

LENNIE. (*Eagerly.*) Let's go, George. Let's get out of here. It's mean here.

GEORGE. (*Shortly.*) I tell you we gotta stay a little while. We gotta get a stake. (*Sounds of running water and rattle of basins are heard.*) Shut up now, the guys'll be comin' in! (*Pensively.*) Maybe we ought to wash up. . . . But hell, we ain't done nothin' to get dirty.

SLIM. (*Enters c. He is a tall, dark man in blue-jeans and short denim jacket. Carries a crushed Stetson hat under his arm and combs his long dark damp hair straight back. Stands and moves with a kind of majesty. Finishes combing his hair. Smooths out his crushed hat, creases it in the middle and puts it on. In a gentle voice.*) It's brighter'n a bitch outside. Can't hardly see nothing in here. You the new guys?

GEORGE. Just come.

SLIM. Goin' to buck barley?

GEORGE. That's what the boss says.

SLIM. Hope you get on my team.

GEORGE. Boss said we'd go with a jerk-line skinner named Slim.

SLIM. That's me.

GEORGE. You a jerk-line skinner?

SLIM. (*In self-disparagement.*) I can snap 'em around a little.

GEORGE. (*Terribly impressed.*) That kinda makes you Jesus Christ on this ranch, don't it?

SLIM. (*Obviously pleased.*) Oh, nuts!

GEORGE. (*Chuckles.*) Like the man says, "The boss tells you what to do. But if you want to know how to do it, you got to ask the mule skinner." The man says any guy that can drive twelve Arizona jack rabbits with a jerk line can fall in a toilet and come up with a mince pie under each arm.

SLIM. (*Laughing.*) Well, I hope you get on my team. I got a pair a punks that don't know a barley bag from a blue ball. You guys ever bucked any barley?

GEORGE. Hell, yes. I ain't nothin' to scream about, but that big guy there can put up more grain alone than most pairs can.

SLIM. (*Looks approvingly at GEORGE.*) You guys travel around together?

GEORGE. Sure. We kinda look after each other. (*Points at LENNIE with thumb.*) He ain't bright. Hell of a good worker, though. Hell of a nice fella too. I've knowed him for a long time.

SLIM. Ain't many guys travel around together. I don't know why. Maybe everybody in the whole damn world is scared of each other.

GEORGE. It's a lot nicer to go 'round with a guy you know. You get used to it an' then it ain't no fun alone any more. (*Enter CARLSON. Big-stomached, powerful. His head still drips water from scrubbing and dousing.*)

CARLSON. Hello, Slim! (*Looks at GEORGE and LENNIE.*)

SLIM. These guys just come.

CARLSON. Glad to meet ya! My name's Carlson.

GEORGE. I'm George Milton. This here's Lennie Small.

CARLSON. Glad to meet you. He ain't very small. (*Chuckles at his own joke.*) He ain't small at all. Meant to ask you, Slim, how's your bitch? I seen she wasn't under your wagon this morning.

SLIM. She slang her pups last night. Nine of 'em. I drowned four of 'em right off. She couldn't feed that many.

CARLSON. Got five left, huh?

SLIM. Yeah. Five. I kep' the biggest.

CARLSON. What kinda dogs you think they gonna be?

SLIM. I don't know. Some kind of shepherd, I guess. That's the most kind I seen around here when she's in heat.

CARLSON. (*Laughs.*) I had an airedale an' a guy down the road got one of them little white floozy dogs, well, she was in heat and the guy locks her up. But my airedale, named Tom he was, he et a woodshed clear down to the roots to get to her. Guy come over one day, he's sore as hell, he says, "I wouldn't mind if my bitch had pups, but Christ Almighty, this morning she slang a litter of Shetland ponies. . . ." (*Takes off hat, scratches his head.*) Got five pups, huh! Gonna keep all of 'em?

SLIM. I don' know, gotta keep 'em awhile, so they can drink Lulu's milk.

CARLSON. (*Thoughtfully.*) Well, looka here, Slim, I been thinkin'. That dog of Candy's is so goddamn old he can't hardly walk. Stinks like hell. Every time Candy brings him in the bunkhouse, I can smell him two or three days. Why don't you get Candy to shoot his ol' dog, and give him one of them pups to raise up? I can smell that dog a mile off. Got no teeth. Can't eat. Candy feeds him milk. He can't chew nothing else. And leadin' him around on a string so he don't bump into things . . . (*The triangle outside begins to ring wildly. Continues for a few moments, then*

stops suddenly.) There she goes! (Outside a burst of voices as men go by.)

SLIM. (To LENNIE and GEORGE.) You guys better come on while they's still somethin' to eat. Won't be nothing left in a couple of minutes. (Exit SLIM and CARLSON. LENNIE watches GEORGE excitedly.)

LENNIE. George!

GEORGE. (Rumpling cards into a pile.) Yeah, I heard 'im, Lennie . . . I'll ask 'im!

LENNIE. (Excitedly.) A brown and white one.

GEORGE. Come on, let's get dinner. I don't know whether he's got a brown and white one.

LENNIE. You ask him right away, George, so he won't kill no more of 'em!

GEORGE. Sure! Come on now—let's go. (They start for door.)

CURLEY. (Bounces in, angrily.) You seen a girl around here?

GEORGE. (Coldly.) 'Bout half an hour ago, mebber.

CURLEY. Well, what the hell was she doin'?

GEORGE. (Insultingly.) She said she was lookin' for you.

CURLEY. (Measures both men with his eyes for a moment.) Which way did she go?

GEORGE. I don't know. I didn't watch her go. (CURLEY scowls at him a moment, then turns and hurries out door.) You know, Lennie, I'm scared I'm gonna tangle with that bastard myself. I hate his guts! Jesus Christ, come on! They won't be a damn thing left to eat.

LENNIE. Will you ask him about a brown and white one? (They go out.)

CURTAIN

Slim & George

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ACT II

SCENE 1

About seven-thirty Friday evening. Same as last scene. The evening light is seen coming in through window, but it is quite dark in bunkhouse. From outside the sounds of a horseshoe game. Thuds on the dirt and occasional clangs as a shoe hits the peg. Now and then voices raised in approval or derision: "That's a good one." . . . "Goddamn right it's a good one." . . . "Here goes for a ringer. I need a ringer." . . . "Goddamn near got it, too."

SLIM and GEORGE come into bunkhouse together. SLIM reaches up and turns on the tin-shaded electric light. Sits down on box at table. GEORGE sits opposite.

SLIM. It wasn't nothing. I would of had to drown most of them pups anyway. No need to thank me about that.

GEORGE. Wasn't much to you, mebber, but it was a hell of a lot to him. Jesus Christ, I don't know how we're gonna get him to sleep in here. He'll want to stay right out in the barn. We gonna have trouble keepin' him from gettin' right in the box with them pups.

SLIM. Say, you sure was right about him. Maybe he ain't bright—but I never seen such a worker. He damn near killed his partner buckin' barley. He'd take his end of that sack—(A gesture.) pretty near kill his partner. God Almighty, I never seen such a strong guy.

GEORGE. (Proudly.) You just tell Lennie what to do and he'll do it if it don't take no figuring. (Outside the sound of horseshoe game goes on: "Son of a bitch if I can win a goddamn game." . . . "Me neither. You'd think them shoes was anvils.")

SLIM. Funny how you and him string along together.

GEORGE. What's so funny about it?

SLIM. Oh, I don't know. Hardly none of the guys ever travels around together. I hardly never seen two guys travel together.

You know how the hands are. They come in and get their bunk and work a month and then they quit and go on alone. Never seem to give a damn about nobody. Jest seems kinda funny. A cuckoo like him and a smart guy like you traveling together.

GEORGE. I ain't so bright neither or I wouldn't be buckin' barley for my fifty and found. If I was bright, if I was even a little bit smart, I'd have my own place and I'd be bringin' in my own crops 'stead of doin' all the work and not gettin' what comes up out of the ground. *(Falls silent for a moment.)*

SLIM. A guy'd like to do that. Sometime I'd like to cuss a string of mules that was my own mules.

GEORGE. It ain't so funny, him and me goin' round together. Him and me was both born in Auburn. I knowed his aunt. She took him when he was a baby and raised him up. When his aunt died Lennie jus' come along with me, out workin'. Got kinda used to each other after a little while.

SLIM. Uh huh.

GEORGE. First I used to have a hell of a lot of fun with him. Used to play jokes on him because he was too dumb to take care of himself. But, hell, he was too dumb even to know when he had a joke played on him. *(Sarcastically.)* Hell, yes, I had fun! Made me seem goddamn smart alongside of him.

SLIM. I seen it that way.

GEORGE. Why, he'd do any damn thing I tole him. If I tole him to walk over a cliff, over he'd go. You know that wasn't so damn much fun after a while. He never got mad about it, neither. I've beat hell out of him and he could bust every bone in my body jest with his hands. But he never lifted a finger against me.

SLIM. *(Braiding a bull whip.)* Even if you socked him, wouldn't he?

GEORGE. No, by God! I tell you what made me stop playing jokes. One day a bunch of guys was standin' aroun' up on the Sacramento River. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turns to Lennie and I says, "Jump in."

SLIM. What happened?

GEORGE. He jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke. He damn near drowned. And he was so nice to me for pullin' him out. Clean forgot I tole him to jump in. Well, I ain't done nothin' like that no more. Makes me kinda sick tellin' about it.

SLIM. He's a nice fella. A guy don't need no sense to be a nice

fella. Seems to be sometimes it's jest the other way round. Take a real smart guy, he ain't hardly ever a nice fella.

GEORGE. *(Stacking scattered cards, getting solitaire game ready again.)* I ain't got no people. I seen guys that go round on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a while they get mean.

SLIM. *(Quietly.)* Yeah, I seen 'em get mean. I seen 'em get so they don't want to talk to nobody. Some ways they got to. You take a bunch of guys all livin' in one room an' by God they got to mind their own business. 'Bout the only private thing a guy's got is where he come from and where he's goin'.

GEORGE. 'Course Lennie's a goddamn nuisance most of the time. But you get used to goin' round with a guy and you can't get rid of him. I mean you get used to him an' you can't get rid of bein' used to him. I'm sure drippin' at the mouth. I ain't told nobody all this before.

SLIM. Do you want to git rid of him?

GEORGE. Well, he gets in trouble all the time. Because he's so goddamn dumb. Like what happened in Weed. *(Stops, alarmed at what he has said.)* You wouldn't tell nobody?

SLIM. *(Calmly.)* What did he do in Weed?

GEORGE. You wouldn't tell?—No, course you wouldn't.

SLIM. What did he do?

GEORGE. Well, he seen this girl in a red dress. Dumb bastard like he is he wants to touch everything he likes. Jest wants to feel of it. So he reaches out to feel this red dress. Girl lets out a squawk and that gets Lennie all mixed up. He holds on 'cause that's the only thing he can think to do.

SLIM. The hell!

GEORGE. Well, this girl squawks her head off. I'm right close and I hear all the yellin', so I comes a-running. By that time Lennie's scared to death. You know, I had to sock him over the head with a fence picket to make him let go.

SLIM. So what happens then?

GEORGE. *(Carefully building bis solitaire hand.)* Well, she runs in and tells the law she's been raped. The guys in Weed start out to lynch Lennie. So there we sit in an irrigation ditch, under water all the rest of that day. Got only our heads sticking out of water, up under the grass that grows out of the side of the ditch. That night we run outa there.

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SLIM. Didn't hurt the girl none, huh?

GEORGE. Hell, no, he jes' scared her.

SLIM. He's a funny guy.

GEORGE. Funny! Why, one time, you know what that big baby done! He was walking along a road — (Enter LENNIE through c. door. Wears coat over his shoulder like a cape and walks hunched over.) Hi, Lennie. How do you like your pup?

LENNIE. (Breathlessly.) He's brown and white jus' like I wanted. (Goes directly to his bunk and lies down, face to wall, knees drawn up.)

GEORGE. (Puts down cards deliberately.) Lennie!

LENNIE. (Over his shoulder.) Huh? What you want, George?

GEORGE. (Sternly.) I tole ya, ya couldn't bring that pup in here.

LENNIE. What pup, George? I ain't got no pup. (GEORGE goes quickly over to him, grabs him by shoulder and rolls him over. Picks up a tiny puppy¹ from where LENNIE has been concealing it against his stomach. LENNIE, quickly.) Give him to me, George.

GEORGE. You get right up and take this pup to the nest. He's got to sleep with his mother. Ya want ta kill him? Jes' born last night and ya take him out of the nest. Ya take him back or I'll tell Slim not to let you have him.

LENNIE. (Pleadingly.) Give him to me, George. I'll take him back. I didn't mean no bad thing, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' want to pet him a little.

GEORGE. (Giving pup to him.) All right, you get him back there quick. And don't you take him out no more. (LENNIE scuttles out of room.)

SLIM. Jesus, he's just like a kid, ain't he?

GEORGE. Sure he's like a kid. There ain't no more harm in him than a kid neither, except he's so strong. I bet he won't come in here to sleep tonight. He'll sleep right alongside that box in the barn. Well, let him. He ain't doin' no harm out there. (Light has faded outside and it appears quite dark there. Enter CANDY leading his old dog by a string.)

CANDY. Hello, Slim. Hello, George. Don't neither of you play horseshoes?

SLIM. I don't like to play every night.

CANDY. (Goes to his bunk, sits down, presses dog to floor beside him.) Either you guys got a slug of whiskey? I got a gut ache.

¹ Can be a dummy or roll of cloth.

SLIM. I ain't. I'd drink it myself if I had. And I ain't got no gut ache either.

CANDY. Goddamn cabbage give it to me. I knowed it was goin' to before I ever et it. (Enter CARLSON and WHIT.)

CARLSON. Jesus, how that nigger can pitch shoes!

SLIM. He's plenty good.

WHIT. Damn right he is.

CARLSON. Yeah. He don't give nobody else a chance to win. (Stops and sniffs the air. Looks around until he sees CANDY's dog.) God Almighty, that dog stinks. Get him outa here, Candy. I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as ole dogs. You got to get him outa here.

CANDY. (Lying on his bunk, reaches over, pats dog, speaks softly.) I been round him so much I never notice how he stinks.

CARLSON. Well, I can't stand him in here. That stink hangs round even after he's gone. (Walks over, stands looking down at dog.) Got no teeth. All stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you, Candy. Why don't you shoot him?

CANDY. (Uncomfortably.) Well, hell, I had him so long! Had him since he was a pup. I herded sheep with him. (Proudly.) You wouldn't think it to look at him now. He was the best damn sheep dog I ever seen.

GEORGE. I knowed a guy in Weed that had an airedale that could herd sheep. Learned it from the other dogs.

CARLSON. (Sticking to his point.) Lookit, Candy. This ole dog jus' suffers itself all the time. If you was to take him out and shoot him—right in back of the head . . . (Leans over and points.) . . . right there, why he never'd know what hit him.

CANDY. (Unbappily.) No, I couldn't do that. I had him too long.

CARLSON. (Insisting.) He don't have no fun no more. He stinks like hell. Tell you what I'll do. I'll shoot him for you. Then it won't be you that done it.

CANDY. (Sits up on bunk, rubbing whiskers nervously, speaks plaintively.) I had him from a pup.

WHIT. Let 'im alone, Carl. It ain't a guy's dog that matters. It's the way the guy feels about the dog. Hell, I had a mutt once I wouldn't a traded for a field trial pointer.

CARLSON. (Being persuasive.) Well, Candy ain't being nice to him, keeping him alive. Lookit, Slim's bitch got a litter right now. I

bet you Slim would give ya one of them pups to raise up, wouldn't ya, Slim?

SLIM. (*Studying dog.*) Yeah. You can have a pup if you want to.

CANDY. (*Helplessly.*) Mebbe it would hurt. (*After a moment's pause, positively.*) And I don't mind taking care of him.

CARLSON. Aw, he'd be better off dead. The way I'd shoot him he wouldn't feel nothin'. I'd put the gun right there. (*Points with his toe.*) Right back of the head.

WHIT. Aw, let 'im alone, Carl.

CARLSON. Why, hell, he wouldn't even quiver.

WHIT. Let 'im alone. (*Produces magazine.*) Say, did you see this? Did you see this in the book here?

CARLSON. See what?

WHIT. Right there. Read that.

CARLSON. I don't want to read nothing. . . . It'd be all over in a minute, Candy. Come on.

WHIT. Did you see it, Slim? Go on, read it. Read it out loud.

SLIM. What is it?

WHIT. Read it.

SLIM. (*Reads slowly.*) "Dear Editor: I read your mag for six years and I think it is the best on the market. I like stories by Peter Rand. I think he is a whing-ding. Give us more like the Dark Rider. I don't write many letters. Just thought I would tell you I think your mag is the best dime's worth I ever spen'." (*Looks up questioningly.*) What you want me to read that for?

WHIT. Go on, read the name at the bottom.

SLIM. (*Reading.*) "Yours for Success, William Tenner." (*Looks up at WHIT.*) What ya want me to read that for?

CARLSON. Come on, Candy—what you say?

WHIT. (*Taking magazine, closing it impressively. Talks to cover CARLSON.*) You don't remember Bill Tenner? Worked here about three months ago?

SLIM. (*Thinking.*) Little guy? Drove a cultivator?

WHIT. That's him. That's the guy.

CARLSON. (*Has refused to be drawn into conversation.*) Look, Candy. If you want me to, I'll put the old devil outa his misery right now and get it over with. There ain't nothin' left for him. Can't eat, can't see, can't hardly walk. Tomorrow you can pick one of Slim's pups.

SLIM. Sure . . . I got a lot of 'em.

CANDY. (*Hopefully.*) You ain't got no gun.

CARLSON. The hell I ain't. Got a Luger. It won't hurt him none at all.

CANDY. Mebbe tomorrow. Let's wait till tomorrow.

CARLSON. I don't see no reason for it. (*Goes to his bunk, pulls bag from underneath, takes revolver out.*) Let's get it over with. We can't sleep with him stinking around in here. (*Snaps shell into chamber, sets safety, puts revolver into hip pocket.*)

SLIM. (*As CANDY looks toward him for help.*) Better let him go, Candy.

CANDY. (*Looks at each person for some hope. WHIT makes gesture of protest, then resigns himself. Others look away, to avoid responsibility. At last, very softly and hopelessly.*) All right. Take him. (*He doesn't look down at dog at all. Lies back on his bunk, crosses his arms behind his head, stares at ceiling. CARLSON picks up string, helps dog to its feet.*)

CARLSON. Come, boy. Come on, boy. (*To CANDY, apologetically.*) He won't even feel it. (*CANDY does not move nor answer.*) Come on, boy. That's the stuff. Come on. (*Leads dog toward door.*)

SLIM. Carlson?

CARLSON. Yeah.

SLIM. (*Curtly.*) Take a shovel.

CARLSON. Oh, sure, I get you. (*Exit CARLSON with dog. GEORGE follows to door, shuts it carefully, sets latch. CANDY lies rigidly on his bunk. Next scene is one of silence and quick staccato speeches.*)

SLIM. (*Loudly.*) One of my lead mules got a bad hoof. Got to get some tar on it. (*A silence.*)

GEORGE. (*Loudly.*) Anybody like to play a little euchre?

WHIT. I'll lay out a few with you. (*They take places opposite each other at table but GEORGE does not shuffle cards. Ripples edge of deck. Everybody looks over at him. He stops. Silence again.*)

SLIM. (*Compassionately.*) Candy, you can have any of them pups you want. (*No answer from CANDY. There is a little gnawing noise on stage.*)

GEORGE. Sounds like there was a rat under there. We ought to set a trap there. (*Deep silence again.*)

WHIT. (*Exasperated.*) What the hell is takin' him so long? Lay out some cards, why don't you? We ain't gonna get no euchre played this way. (*GEORGE studies backs of cards. After long si-*

Whit & George

lence, a shot in the distance. All start a bit, look quickly at CANDY. For a moment he continues to stare at ceiling, then rolls slowly over and faces wall. GEORGE shuffles cards noisily, deals them.)

GEORGE. Well, let's get to it.

WHIT. (Still to cover the moment.) Yeah . . . I guess you guys really come here to work, huh?

GEORGE. How do you mean?

WHIT. (Chuckles.) Well, you come on a Friday. You got two days to work till Sunday.

GEORGE. I don't see how you figure.

WHIT. You do if you been round these big ranches much. A guy that wants to look over a ranch comes in Saturday afternoon. He gets Saturday night supper, three meals on Sunday and he can quit on Monday morning after breakfast without turning a hand. But you come to work on Friday noon. You got ta put in a day and a half no matter how ya figure it.

GEORGE. (Quietly.) We're goin' stick around awhile. Me and Lennie's gonna roll up a stake. (Door opens. CROOKS puts in his head: lean-faced Negro with pained eyes.)

CROOKS. Mr. Slim.

SLIM. (Who has been watching CANDY.) Huh? Oh, hello, Crooks, what's the matter?

CROOKS. You tole me to warm up tar for that mule's foot. I got it warm now.

SLIM. Oh, sure, Crooks. I'll come right out and put it on.

CROOKS. I can do it for you if you want, Mr. Slim.

SLIM. (Standing up.) Naw, I'll take care of my own team.

CROOKS. Mr. Slim.

SLIM. Yeah.

CROOKS. That big new guy is messing round your pups in the barn.

SLIM. Well, he ain't doin' no harm. I give him one of them pups.

CROOKS. Just thought I'd tell ya. He's takin' 'em out of the nest and handling 'em. That won't do 'em no good.

SLIM. Oh, he won't hurt 'em.

GEORGE. (Looks up from cards.) If that crazy bastard is foolin' round too much jus' kick him out. (SLIM follows CROOKS out.)

WHIT. (Examining cards.) Seen the new kid yet?

GEORGE. What kid?

WHIT. Why, Curley's new wife.

GEORGE. (Cautiously.) Yeah, I seen her.

WHIT. Well, ain't she a lulu?

GEORGE. I ain't seen that much of her.

WHIT. Well, you stick around and keep your eyes open. You'll see plenty of her. I never seen nobody like her. She's just workin' on everybody all the time. Seems like she's even workin' on the stable buck. I don't know what the hell she wants.

GEORGE. (Casually.) Been any trouble since she got here? (Obviously neither is interested in game. WHIT lays down his hand, GEORGE gathers cards in, lays out solitaire hand.)

WHIT. I see what you mean. No, they ain't been no trouble yet. She's only been here a couple of weeks. Curley's got yellow jackets in his drawers, but that's all so far. Every time the guys is around she shows up. She's lookin' for Curley. Or she thought she left somethin' layin' around and she's lookin' for that. Seems like she can't keep away from guys. And Curley's runnin' round like a cat lookin' for a dirt road. But they ain't been no trouble.

GEORGE. Ranch with a bunch of guys on it ain't no place for a girl. Specially like her.

WHIT. If she's give you any ideas you ought to come in town with us guys tomorrow night.

GEORGE. Why, what's doin'?

WHIT. Just the usual thing. We go in to old Susy's place. Hell of a nice place. Old Susy is a laugh. Always cracking jokes. Like she says when we come up on the front porch last Saturday night: Susy opens the door and she yells over her shoulder: "Get your coats on, girls, here comes the sheriff." She never talks dirty neither. Got five girls there.

GEORGE. What does it set you back?

WHIT. Two and a half. You can get a shot of whiskey for fifteen cents. Susy got nice chairs to set in too. If a guy don't want to flop, why, he can just set in them chairs and have a couple or three shots and just pass the time of day. Susy don't give a damn. She ain't rushin' guys through, or kicking them out if they don't want to flop.

GEORGE. Might go in and look the joint over.

WHIT. Sure. Come along. It's a hell of a lot of fun—her crackin' jokes all the time. Like she says one time, she says. "I've knew people that if they got a rag rug on the floor and a kewpie doll lamp on the phonograph they think they're runnin' a parlor house." That's Gladys's house she's talkin' about. And Susy says:

Maybe you better go in the washroom and clean up your face. You look like hell.

LENNIE. I didn't want no trouble.

GEORGE. Come on — I'll go with you.

LENNIE. George?

GEORGE. What you want?

LENNIE. Can I still tend the rabbits, George? *(They go out together, side by side, through door.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 2

Ten o'clock Saturday evening.

The room of the stable buck Crooks, a lean-to off barn. There is a plank door up C.; a small square window R. C. On one side of door a leather working bench with tools racked behind it, and on other, racks with broken and partly mended harnesses, collars, hames, traces, etc. U. L. Crooks' bunk. Over it two shelves. On one a great number of medicine cans and bottles. On the other a number of tattered books and a big alarm clock. U. R. a single-barreled shotgun and on floor beside it a pair of rubber boots. A large pair of gold spectacles hangs on a nail over Crooks' bunk.

Entrance leads into barn proper. From that direction and during the whole scene come the sounds of horses eating, stamping, jingling their halter chains, and now and then whinnying. Two empty nail kegs are in the room to be used as seats. Single unshaded small-candle-power carbon light hanging from its own cord.¹

As curtain rises, CROOKS sits on his bunk rubbing his back with liniment. Reaches up under his shirt to do this. His face is lined with pain. As he rubs he flexes his muscles and shivers a little. LENNIE appears in open doorway, nearly filling the opening. Then CROOKS, sens-

¹ See p. 5, Production Note.

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ing his presence, raises his eyes, stiffens and scowls. LENNIE smiles in an attempt to make friends.

CROOKS. *(Sharply.)* You got no right to come in my room. This here's my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.

LENNIE. *(Fawning.)* I ain't doin' nothing. Just come in the barn to look at my pup, and I seen your light.

CROOKS. Well, I got a right to have a light. You go on and get out of my room. I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse and you ain't wanted in my room.

LENNIE. *(Ingenuously.)* Why ain't you wanted?

CROOKS. *(Furiously.)* 'Cause I'm black. They play cards in there. But I can't play because I'm black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you all of you stink to me.

LENNIE. *(Helplessly.)* Everybody went into town. Slim and George and everybody. George says I got to stay here and not get into no trouble. I seen your light.

CROOKS. Well, what do you want?

LENNIE. Nothing . . . I seen your light. I thought I could jus' come in and set.

CROOKS. *(Stares at LENNIE a moment, takes down spectacles, adjusts them over his ears, says in a complaining tone.)* I don't know what you're doin' in the barn anyway. You ain't no skinner. There's no call for a buckler to come into the barn at all. You've got nothing to do with the horses and mules.

LENNIE. *(Patiently.)* The pup. I come to see my pup.

CROOKS. Well, God damn it, go and see your pup then. Don't go no place where you ain't wanted.

LENNIE. *(Advances a step into the room, remembers and backs to door again.)* I looked at him a little. Slim says I ain't to pet him very much.

CROOKS. *(Anger gradually going out of his voice.)* Well, you been taking him out of the nest all the time. I wonder the ole lady don't move him some place else.

LENNIE. *(Moving into room.)* Oh, she don't care. She lets me.

CROOKS. *(Scowls, then gives up.)* Come on in and set awhile. Long as you won't get out and leave me alone, you might as well set down. *(A little more friendly.)* All the boys gone into town, huh?

LENNIE. All but old Candy. He jus' sets in the bunkhouse sharpening his pencils. And sharpening and figurin'.

CROOKS. (*Adjusting glasses.*) Figurin'? What's Candy figurin' about?

LENNIE. 'Bout the land. 'Bout the little place.

CROOKS. You're nuts. You're crazy as a wedge. What land you talkin' about?

LENNIE. The land we're goin' ta get. And a little house and pigeons.

CROOKS. Just nuts. I don't blame the guy you're traveling with for keeping you out of sight.

LENNIE. (*Quietly.*) It ain't no lie. We're gonna do it. Gonna get a little place and live on the fat of the land.

CROOKS. (*Settling himself comfortably on his bunk.*) Set down. Set down on that nail keg.

LENNIE. (*Hunches over on little barrel.*) You think it's a lie. But it ain't no lie. Ever' word's the truth. You can ask George.

CROOKS. (*Puts chin on his palm.*) You travel round with George, don't you?

LENNIE. (*Proudly.*) Sure, me and him goes ever' place together.

CROOKS. (*After pause, quietly.*) Sometimes he talks and you don't know what the hell he's talkin' about. Ain't that so? (*Leans forward.*) Ain't that so?

LENNIE. Yeah. Sometimes.

CROOKS. Just talks on. And you don't know what the hell it's all about.

LENNIE. How long you think it'll be before them pups will be old enough to pet?

CROOKS. (*Laughs again.*) A guy can talk to you and be sure you won't go blabbin'. A couple of weeks and them pups will be all right. (*Musing.*) George knows what he's about. Just talks and you don't understand nothing. (*Mood gradually changes to excitement.*) Well, this is just a nigger talkin', and a busted-back nigger. It don't mean nothing, see. You couldn't remember it anyway. I seen it over and over—a guy talking to another guy and it don't make no difference if he don't hear or understand. The thing is they're talkin'. (*Pounds knee with his hand.*) George can tell you screwy things and it don't matter. It's just the talkin'. It's just bein' with another guy, that's all. (*His voice becomes soft and malicious.*) S'pose George don't come back no more? S'pose he took a powder and just ain't comin' back. What you do then?

LENNIE. (*Trying to follow CROOKS.*) What? What?

CROOKS. I said s'pose George went into town tonight and you never heard of him no more. (*Presses forward.*) Just s'pose that.

LENNIE. (*Sharply.*) He won't do it. George wouldn't do nothing like that. I been with George a long time. He'll come back tonight. . . . (*Doubt creeps into his voice.*) Don't you think he will?

CROOKS. (*Delighted with his torture.*) Nobody can tell what a guy will do. Let's say he wants to come back and can't. S'pose he gets killed or hurt so he can't come back.

LENNIE. (*In terrible apprehension.*) I don't know. Say, what you doin' anyway? It ain't true. George ain't got hurt.

CROOKS. (*Cruelly.*) Want me to tell you what'll happen? They'll take you to the booby hatch. They'll tie you up with a collar like a dog. Then you'll be jus' like me. Livin' in a kennel.

LENNIE. (*Furious, walks over toward CROOKS.*) Who hurt George?

CROOKS. (*Recoiling with fright.*) I was just supposin'. George ain't hurt. He's all right. He'll be back all right.

LENNIE. (*Standing over him.*) What you supposin' for? Ain't nobody goin' to s'pose any hurt to George.

CROOKS. (*Trying to calm him.*) Now set down. George ain't hurt. Go on now, set down.

LENNIE. (*Growling.*) Ain't nobody gonna talk no hurt to George.

CROOKS. (*Very gently.*) Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's comin' back. S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go in the bunkhouse and play rummy, 'cause you was black. How would you like that? S'pose you had to set out here and read books. Sure, you could play horseshoes until it got dark, but then you got to read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody . . . to be near him. (*His tone whines.*) A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who it is as long as he's with you. I tell you a guy gets too lonely, he gets sick.

LENNIE. (*Reassuring himself.*) George gonna come back. Maybe George come back already. Maybe I better go see.

CROOKS. (*More gently.*) I didn't mean to scare you. He'll come back. I was talkin' about myself.

LENNIE. (*Miserably.*) George won't go away and leave me. I know George won't do that.

CROOKS. (*Continuing dreamily.*) I remember when I was a little kid on my ole man's chicken ranch. Had two brothers. They was