

Something that happened Just South of Solitude

**An exploration of
John Steinbeck's novella
'Of Mice And Men'**

By Bob Wallbank

A TIE project, developed by Theatr Powys

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**Something that happened
Just South of Solitude**

Theatr Powys – March 2003

Ceri - Danie Croft

Steinbeck - Reg Stewart

George - Darren Stokes

Lennie - Alan Grice

Directed by Ian Yeoman

Musical Director - Dan Lawrence

Designer – Jill Rolfe

Stage Manager – Chad Hind

**Script by Bob Wallbank
From an idea by Ian Yeoman**

Something that happened

Woody Guthrie ballad. Ceri stands on the edge of the space downstage. Lennie and George and Steinbeck upstage. As music starts, Steinbeck is working, thinking, toying with props etc. Ceri makes no eye contact with the audience. She is scared, and that makes her angry, blustering. She has been drunk, but is sobering up. As music fades out:-

Ceri I hope you can hear, you bastards. I wish I'd broken more bloody shop windows. I wish I'd smashed the whole street in. Why should I care about a bastard shop! What's the point. I don't care about nothing no more. D'you know what that bastard Carl did? Smashed me in the bastard face. I only asked Gareth for a fag, and Carl came over and smashed me. Said I'd been on Gareth all evening. As if I'd fancy a mong like him! Carl's a thick shit. What did he think he'd been doing all effing evening? Then Kirsty and Helen took his side. Some bastard friends they are. An when I screamed at them all they chucked me out - as if it was my effing fault. I'm the one with a smashed face. You're on your own - d'you know that? You're always on your own. You think you've got friends but you're on your own, and no bastard give a shit whether you're alive or dead. Kirsty's supposed to be coming round tomorrow. Let her show her bastard face and I'll tear it off. She can do her own bastard coursework. I havn't read the book anyway, you stupid cow! Gareth said he looked it up on the computer and it's all about a load of blokes being shitty to each other.

George and Lennie move onstage and mime the scene where Lennie drinks from the river. Music underscoring

Ceri Some bloke shoots his best friend in the head – I could do that - and the only girl in it's a tart. What a shit book! Exam's shit. Everything's shit. The whole world's shit. Seen the telly? Them bastard gyppos coming into the country – they want getting. You know that? Then they're going to bomb all them babies. Does my head in... It's scary. There's no point in nothing no more. Scary that is. Nobody cares about me so why should I care about no-one. That's scary. It's scary being alone. I hate it. I really hate it. I hate it Charlie. Oh little Charlie I hate it. You don't mind, do you Charlie. *(Removes a small toy rabbit from her pocket and strokes it)* No-one else gives a shit - you don't hate me, Charlie, you don't smash me in the gob. Oh Charlie what's the matter with them all - why do they hate me?

Behind her, unseen by her, George and Lennie move towards the centre of the stage, George stops takes off his hat, wipes sweat from his forehead, then stares into the

distance and shielding his eyes. Lennie copies his every move. George sits down, drawing up his arms round his knees. Lennie does the same.

Watching them, Steinbeck moves slowly along the edge of the space towards Ceri, with a script in his hand. George looks quizzically at him as if waiting for instructions. Steinbeck motions silence. He reaches Ceri, standing behind her.

Steinbeck I'm kinda scared too.

Ceri Who the hell are you

Steinbeck Someone who writes stories

Ceri You a perv or what?

Ceri backs away a little, but she has nowhere to go

Steinbeck I had a dog called Charlie once

Ceri Charlie's my rabbit

Steinbeck Charlie was a good dog... You like stories?

Ceri They're for kids

Steinbeck He sure made a mess of your face... Yeah, I'm kinda scared too

Ceri Why you scared?

Steinbeck Scared the way the world's goin'

Ceri sees the centre of the triangle for the first time

Ceri Where am I?

Steinbeck Somewhere south of Solitude

Ceri What?

Steinbeck You're in a story

Ceri I don't have a story - I'm just a little shit living in a shit town

Steinbeck Then my story'll be 'bout little shits who don't have no story - 'bout blokes bein' shitty t'each other.

Ceri I said that

Steinbeck Believe you did - 'bout my book. I've a lot to say to you - 'bout this place - 'bout what happened here

Music underscoring. Ceri follows Steinbeck's gaze towards George and Lennie. She perches precariously by the portal, absentmindedly petting her toy rabbit.

Steinbeck motions to Lennie, patting his pocket, points to Ceri and the rabbit, and back to Lennie. Lennie stands and surreptitiously removes something from his pocket

George What'd you take outta that pocket

Steinbeck *(reading his script and whispering to Lennie)* Ain't a thing in my pocket

Lennie Ain't a thing in my pocket

George I know there ain't. You got it in your hand. What you got in your hand - hidin' it?

Lennie I ain't got nothing, George.

Steinbeck *(Whispering)* Honest, George, honest.

Lennie Honest, George, honest

George Come on, give it here

Lennie It's only a mouse, George

George A mouse? A live mouse?

Lennie Uh-uh. Jus' a dead mouse, George.

Steinbeck I didn't kill it

Lennie I didn' kill it. Honest! I found it. I found it dead

Ceri Is this your st---

Steinbeck Uh huh.

George Give it here!

Lennie Aw, leave me have it, George

George Give it here!

Lennie slowly obeys. George throws the mouse across the pool

George What you want of a dead mouse anyways?

Ceri *(Drawn in, in spite of herself)* He can stroke it

Lennie I could pet it with my thumb while we walked along

George Well you ain't pettin' no mice while you walk with me

Ceri Let him stroke it.

George rounds on Steinbeck

George Why've you stuck me with this crazy bastard?

Steinbeck Jus' how it is

George What kinda' answer's that?

Ceri They get shot

George He plays with us then kicks us in the head.

Ceri Is it the big one gets shot?

George We never get no farm.

Steinbeck But you get yer dream

Lennie George, do I still get ter keep rabbits?

Steinbeck You know what would'a happened if you'd got ya farm. The roof'd leak, Lennie'd forget the rabbits

Lennie I'd never forget no rabbits

Steinbeck You'd go hungry, then you'd be out on the road again, or starve.

George That's because he team me up with this crazy bastard

Steinbeck But as it is ya dream's unspoilt. Always there, always perfec'

Music underscoring

Lennie We're goin to have a big vegetable patch an chickens, an fluffy rabbits in the cages jus' like I see in Sacramento, an' I get to tend the rabbits an' cut the alfalfa, and when it rains we'll say

George & Lennie To hell with goin' to work

George An we'll build up a fire in the stove and set around it an listen to the rain comin down on the roof

Lennie We got a future. Because I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you

Ceri It's the small one kills the big one isn't it

George Little fat iron stove. We'd jus' live there. We'd belong there

Lennie, sensing George's attention is elsewhere, tiptoes off to retrieve his mouse

Steinbeck I've given you more'n most - I give you a dream. Or would ya rather be like the others? Lonliest guys in the world, workin' up a stake on some farm to blow it all in a bar in town 'cause there's nowheres else to go? Then on to pound their tails on another ranch. Year after year the same. They ain't got nothin to look forward to, but I give you a dream

Ceri What use is that?

George He jus' lifts us up so's he can punch us all the harder

Steinbeck If dreams happen, they ain't dreams no more

Ceri Why can't they happen? Whose fault is it?

George *(indicating Steinbeck)* Ask him

Steinbeck Jus' how it is

George Jus' how you want it you mean

Ceri *(to Steinbeck)* It's your fault, isn't it?

Steinbeck Ain't no-one's fault - jus' how it is - jus' flows on like the river here - jus' flows on. See the little water snake twisting an' turnin his periscope head, see him swim the length of the pool lookin for food. Ain't he jus' perfec'? till he fetch up by that heron. An' the heron, he lance straight down with his beak, an' all that snake can do is wave his tail frantically till he's gone.

George catches sight of the returning Lennie

George Awright, gi' me that mouse

Lennie What mouse, George, I ain't got no mouse

George Come on, give it to me. You ain't puttin' nothing over

Lennie retreats, looking wildly around as if contemplating a dash for freedom

George You gonna give me that mouse or do I have to sock you?

Lennie I don't know why I can't keep it. It ain't nobodies mouse. I didn't steal it - I found it lyin' right besides the road

Ceri Let him keep it George.- it won't do no harm

George What d'you know?

George holds out his hand Lennie approaches and retreats, back and forth with his hand. George snaps his fingers. Lennie lays the mouse in his hand

Ceri He was just stroking it

Lennie I wasn't doing anything bad with it

Lennie wimpers

George Blubberin' like a baby! Jesus Christ! a big guy like you!

Ceri You mean bastard

George I ain't mean

George puts his hand on Lennie's shoulder

George Aw Lennie, I ain't takin' it away jus' for meanness. That mouse ain't fresh Lennie, and besides, you broke it pettin it

Steinbeck Show him you ain't mean

George You get another mouse that's fresh and I'll let you keep it a little while

Lennie stares dejectedly at the ground, and George looks wretched.

Lennie I don't know where there is no other mouse

George I ain't mean

Ceri looks at the two men for a moment, then approaches Lennie tentatively. She holds out her toy rabbit to Lennie, who takes it off her, without really seeing her

Lennie I remember a lady used to give mice to me – ever' one she got. But that lady ain't here

Lennie pets the rabbit as Ceri watches

George Lady huh! You don't even remember who that lady was. That was your own Aunt Clara. An' she stopped giving 'em to ya'. You always killed 'em.

Lennie They was so little. I'd pet 'em, and pretty soon they bit my fingers and I pinched their heads a little, and then they was dead - because they was so little

Lennie pets the rabbit some more

Lennie I wish we'd get the rabbits pretty soon, George, they ain't so little

George The hell with rabbits. You ain't to be trusted with no live mice. Your Aunt Clara gave you a rubber mouse, and you wouldn't have nothing to do with it.

Lennie It wasn't no good to pet

Lennie drops the rabbit as his thoughts change

Lennie George, ain't we gonna have no supper?

Ceri picks up the discarded rabbit and cradles it. She walks back through the door. George and Lennie busy themselves with a fire and three cans of beans.

Ceri Some boys at school pulled Charlie's ears off once when they found him in my bag. That was mean. They'd do it to a real rabbit too. Lennie don't mean to hurt things like that - it just sort of happens.

Steinbeck I guess that's how we're all mean - jus' sorta' happens. *(To Lennie)*
You want ketchup with your beans

Lennie I like beans with ketchup

George Well we ain't got no ketchup

Steinbeck Beans are better with ketchup

George Why've you got to stir him up? I've enough beans here for four men

Steinbeck He likes beans with ketchup

Lennie I like 'em with ketchup

Ceri I like 'em with brown sauce

Music underscoring

George Well we ain't got any. 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. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why I could stay at a cat house all night, I could eat any place I want and order any damn thing I could think of. An' I could do all that every damn month. Get a gallon of whisky, or set in a pool room and play cards or shoot pool.

Lennie watches in terror

George And whatta got? 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 gotta get you out. You crazy son-of-a-bitch you keep me in hot water all the time. *(Mimicking)* Jus' wanted to feel that girl's dress -- jus' wanted to pet it like it was a mouse.. Well how the hell she know you jus' wanted to feel her dress? She jerks back and you hold on like it was a mouse. She yells and we got to hide in an irrigation ditch all day with guys lookin' for us and we got to sneak out in the dark and get outta the country. I wish I could put you in a cage with about a million mice and let you have fun.

Lennie has crept round close to George

Lennie George, you want I should go away and leave you alone

George Where the hell could you go?

Lennie Well I could go off in the hills there. Someplace I'd find a cave.

George Yeah? How'd you eat? You ain't got sense enough to find nothing to eat.

Lennie I'd find things, George. I don't need no nice food with ketchup. I'd lay out in the sun and nobody'd hurt me. An' if I found a mouse, I could keep it. Nobody'd take it away from me.

George suddenly rounds on Steinbeck

George Why d'you make me mean? why d'you make me angry?

- Steinbeck** You ain't no sain't, George. You jus' a man like any other.
- Lennie** If you don' want me I can go off in the hills an' find a cave. I can go away any time
- George** No -- Look I was jus' foolin', Lennie. 'Course I want you to stay with me. Trouble with mice is that you always kill 'em. Tell you what I'll do, Lennie. First chance I get I'll give you a pup. Maybe you wouldn't kill it. That'd be better than mice, and you could pet it harder.
- Lennie** I'll go off in those hills right there -- right up in those hills and live by myself
- George** Jesus Christ, somebody'd shoot you for a coyote if you was by yourself. No, you stay with me
- Ceri** If George isn't mean, why's he shoot Lennie?
- Steinbeck** You's sure hung up on the shootin'
- Ceri** But he likes him
- Steinbeck** Sure, he cares for him one hell a lot
- Ceri** I don't understand
- George** I'm dammed if I do
- Steinbeck** Jus' listen to the story
- Ceri** Why
- George** I gotta set here an' tell him what to do an' tell him what to do an' tell him what to do, an' then he forget an' I gotta tell him again. I gotta think for him all the damn hours of the day. I could maybe have a girl, have my own place, but you've got me stuck with this crazy bastard
- Steinbeck** He's all you got, George. Think you'd keep a girl? Anyways, he needs you.
- Ceri** That's more'n I got - no-one needs me.
- Ceri cuddles her rabbit*
- Steinbeck** What ya godda do tomorrow, Lennie

Lennie Tomorrow I... tomorrow...

George Tomorrow, when we sees the boss at the new ranch-

Lennie *(delightedly)* We go to a ranch tomorrow

George When we sees the boss, what you gonna say when he asks you questions?

Lennie I... I ain't gonna... say a word

Lennie beams at his success

George Good boy! That's fine Lennie! Maybe you're getting' better. When we get the coupla acres I can let you tend the rabbits all right. 'Specially if you remember as good as that

Lennie I can remember

Music underscoring

George Look Lennie. I want you to look around here. You can remember this place, can't you? The ranch is about a quarter mile up that way. Jus' follow the river?

Lennie Sure, I can remember this. Di'n't I remember about not gonna say a word?

George Course you did. Well look Lennie - if you jus' happen to get in trouble like you always done before, I want you to come right here an' hide in the brush.

Lennie Hide in the brush

George Hide in the brush till I come for you. Can you remember that?

Lennie Sure I can George. Hide in the brush till you come.

George But you ain't gonna get in no trouble, because if you do, I won't let you tend the rabbits

Ceri *(to Steinbeck)* But he will get into trouble, won't he. You set him up. He doesn't stand a bastard chance. You know he doesn't.

Steinbeck shrugs as if to say 'jus' how it is'

George You're sure right, Maam. He wouldn't waste them pages describin' that scene if he didn't know we'd be in trouble an' have to come back there.

Ceri But why go on if you know you'll just get in the shit

George Ain't nowheres else to go. We gotta eat

Ceri Do you get food at the ranch?

George Three meals a day and a roof to keep out the rain

Ceri You scared of what'll happen tonight?

George No worse tonight than any other night.

Ceri Then why not go there – get some food – get your head down?

George Ever been in a bunkhouse, Maam?

George and Lennie settle down to sleep by the river. Steinbeck walks over and sits on a box. Music underscoring

Steinbeck A man's possessions in a little box. His whole damn world inside a box. A box nailed to the wall above two blankets on some lumpy straw. Two shelves, the top and bottom of an apple box. And on it all a man has in the world. A razor, shaving stick, a jar of liniment, a necktie, soap, a Western magazine, a comb, a shirt. Rings of long gone bottles stain the thin pale wood. A dead fly lies feet up.

The morning sun throws narrow bars across the bunkhouse, trapping the room in darkness... and in and out the beam flies shoot like rushing stars. Cards litter a table, a game of solitaire abandoned in disgust. Dust settles gently on the coloured faces, washing them out. A man's whole damn world in a box

Ceri Is that really all they've got?

Steinbeck stands and walks back towards Ceri

Steinbeck Jus' so much as they can carry to the next ranch

Ceri So little

Steinbeck What they want more for? Most of the world manage with little else

Ceri I havn't much - can't afford it. Mum gave me nothing once I started working Saturdays - said she was pissed off with paying for me. I lost that job now.

George stands, puts on his hat and walks across to the boxes. Lennie follows, copying

Steinbeck Hows that?

Ceri You wouldn't want to get out of effing bed for what they paid me. They don't want no cafe work in the winter anyway... I havn't got nothing... But I got more than will fit in an apple box.

George looks into one of the boxes and pulls out a small carton.

George What the hell's this? Says 'positively kills lice, roaches and other scourges. What the hell kind of bed they giving us anyways. We don't want no pants rabbits.

George searches suspiciously round the boxes. Lennie copies him

Steinbeck 'Bout time they met the boss

Steinbeck puts on the rancher's boots and Stetson hat and enters through the doorway as the boss, reading from his script to start with. Music underscoring.

Steinbeck (*brusquely*) You're late. I wanted two men for work this morning.

George Bus driver give us a bum steer. We hadda walk ten miles.

Steinbeck Well I had to send the teams out short two buckers. What's your name

George George Milton

Steinbeck And what's yours?

George His name's Lennie Small

Steinbeck Where you boys been workin'?

George Up around Weed

Steinbeck You too?

George Yeah, him too

Steinbeck He ain't much of a talker, is he

George No he ain't, but he's sure a hell of a good worker, strong as a bull

Lennie Strong as a bull

Steinbeck Listen Small, what can you do?

Lennie looks at George in a panic

George He can do anything you tell him. He's a good skinner, he can rassel grain bags, drive a cultivator. He can do anything, just give him a try

Steinbeck What you trying to put over?

George Oh I ain't saying he's bright. He ain't. But I say he's a God damn good worker

Steinbeck Say -- what you selling?

George Huh?

Steinbeck I said what stake you got in this guy? You taking his pay away from him?

George No, course I ain't. Why d'you think I'm sellin' him out?

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

Ceri He's just looking after him

George He's my. . . cousin. I told his old lady I'd take care of him. He got kicked in the head by a horse when he was a kid. He's awright. Just ain't bright

Steinbeck Well God knows he don't need any brains to buck barley bags. But don't try to put anything over, Milton. I got my eye on you. Go out with Slim's team after dinner. He's the big tall skinner.

Steinbeck leaves through the doorway and removes his hat, beckoning to Ceri to watch the result of his intervention.

George So you was gonna leave your big flapper shut and leave me do the talkin'. Damn near lost us the job.

Lennie stares hopelessly at his hands

Lennie I forgot, George

George Yeah, you forgot. You always forget an' I got to talk you out of it. Now he's got his eye on us. Now we got to be careful and not make no slips. You keep your big flapper shut after this

George glares morosely at the ground. Lennie fidgets.

Lennie I wasn't kicked in the head with no horse, was I George

George Be a damn good thing if you was. Save ever'body a hell of a lot of trouble

Lennie You said I was your cousin, George

George That was a lie. An' I'm damn glad it was. If I was a relative of yours I'd shoot myself

Ceri That was a good lie

George I'm God damn fed up with lyin' to save this cuckoo

Ceri They're all good lies. I'm always lying to keep people off my back. But that's real lying, it's different

Steinbeck Hell, all lyin's different. Ain't never two lies the same

George Lyin's lyin

Ceri It's not so much I lie -- it's more like telling a story -- a story they want to hear

Steinbeck We all gotta story

Music underscoring

George *(to Steinbeck)* Get on with it then.. Ain't you gonna introduce us to no-one else?

Steinbeck Sure, there's Candy the old swamper with the smelliest dog this side a hell. Lost his hand in an accident and paid off with 250 bucks. They'll can him soon as he can't sweep the bunkhouse out no more an' he'll go on the county to die.

George Aw great

George starts to loose interest and lays out a hand of solitaire. Lennie watches

Steinbeck There's Curley, the boss's son - little guy - with a big chip. Jus' got married to a girl he can't handle. Spends his whole life sizin' guys up for a fight. Likes to jump big guys, then if he licks them, ever'one says what a game guy Curley is, and if he get's licked, ever'one gangs up on the big guy for pickin' on someone small. Wears a glove fulla vaseline to keep his han' sof' for his girl...

Ceri That's disgusting

George What a punk. That the best you can do?

Steinbeck There's Carlson. He's gotta gun. A dog smells. Carlson don't like the smell. Simple answer — shoot the dog

George He's a cold bastard. Why's he get to shoot Candy's dog? Ain't this story depressing enough without that?

Steinbeck puts a glove on his left hand, enters through the doorway and leans on it, regarding George and Lennie pugnaciously, his elbows bent out

Steinbeck (to Lennie) You the new guys the old man was waiting for?

George We jus' come in

Steinbeck Let the big guy talk

Lennie twists in embarrassment

George S'pose he dont want to talk

Steinbeck By Christ, he's gotta talk when he's spoke to. What the hell are you gettin' into it for

George We travel together

Steinbeck Oh, so it's that way

George Yeah, it's that way

Steinbeck And you won't let the big guy talk, is that it?

George He can talk if he wants to tell you anything

George nods at Lennie

Lennie We jus' come in

Steinbeck Well next time you answer when you're spoke to

Steinbeck gives Lennie a final glare then exits through the doorway

George Look Lennie! You gonna have trouble with that Curley guy. He figures he's got you scared and he's gonna take a sock at you the first chance he gets.

Steinbeck *(prompting)* I don't want no trouble

Lennie I don't want no trouble. Don't let him sock me, George

George I hate that kinda bastard. If he tangles with you Lennie, we're gonna get the can. He's the bosses son. You try to keep away from him, will you? Don't never speak to him.

Lennie I don't want no trouble. I never done nothing to him. You ain't mad George?

George I ain't mad with you. I'm mad at this here Curley bastard. I had hoped we was gonna get a little stake together -- maybe a hunderd dollars. You keep away from Curley, Lennie

Lennie Sure I will, George. I won't say a word

George Look Lennie, if you ever get into any kind of trouble, you remember what I told you?

Lennie's face contorts with thought, then fixes George sadly

Lennie If I get into any trouble, you ain't gonna let me tend the rabbits

George That's not what I meant. You remember where we slep' last night? Down by the river?

Music underscoring

Lennie Yeah, I remember! I go there an' hide in the brush

George Hide till I come for you. Hide in the brush by the river. 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

George returns to his solitaire game

- Ceri** Don't get into trouble, Lennie. Remember those rabbits
- Lennie** I get to tend rabbits
- George** Why the hell you landed us with this Curley punk? What the hell's he got on his shoulder?
- Steinbeck** Only jus' married. Wife lives over in the bosses house. Strikes me this is a helluva place to keep a new wife - 'specially a purty one - with this bunkhouse fulla guys
- George** Why? She got the eye?
- Ceri** Maybe she's lonely
- George** What do you know about it?

George returns to his cards. Steinbeck hands Ceri a pair of girls shoes from the stage edge, and when she has put them on, hands over a section of script. Ceri looks briefly at the script and moves to the door. She speaks tentatively, like someone who has been given a part cold.

- Ceri** I'm lookin' for Curley
- George** He was in here a minute ago, but he went
- Ceri** Oh

Ceri, relaxing into the part, leans against the doorframe with her body thrown forward. Lennie watches intently

- Ceri** You're the new fellas that's just come, ain't ya
- George** Yeah

Ceri is aware of Lennie's gaze, and looks down at her fingernails

- Ceri** Sometimes Curley's in here
- George** Well he ain't now
- Ceri** Nobody can't blame a person for lookin'

Steinbeck walks up behind her to take the script back

- Ceri** *(losing confidence)* Bye boys

Ceri steps back out the doorway removes her shoes, and hands the script to Steinbeck

George Jesus, what a tramp

Lennie She's purty

George Yeah, and she's sure hidin' it Curley's got his work ahead of him. Bet she'd clear out for twenty bucks

Lennie Gosh she was purty

George looks at him, then grabs him by the ear and shakes him

George Listen to me you crazy bastard. Don't you ever take a look at that bitch. I seen em poison before, but I never seen a piece of jail bait worse than her. You leave her be.

Lennie I never done nothing, George

George No you never. But when she was standin in the doorway showin her legs you wasn't lookin' the other way, neither

Lennie I never meant no harm, George. Honest, I never

George Well you keep away from her 'cause she's a rattrap if I ever seen one

Lennie I don't like this place, George. This ain't no good place. I wanna get outta here

George We gotta keep it till we get a stake, Lennie. We'll get out jus' as soon as we can. I don't like it no better than you do. If we can get jus' a few dollars in the poke, we'll shove off and go up the American River and pan gold. We can make maybe a couple of dollars a day there, and we might hit a pocket

Lennie Let's go, George. Let's get outta here. It's mean here

George We gotta stay. Shut up now, the guys'll be comin in for dinner

Lennie picks up a card and studies it. Turns it upside-down and studies it

Lennie Both ends the same. George, why is it both ends the same?

George I don't know. that's jus' the way they make them

Ceri George understands Lennie

Steinbeck Well as any man

Ceri But he shoots him

Steinbeck Can't ya get that shootin' out your head.

Ceri Well no, I can't

Steinbeck Why you so beat up? What you see?

Ceri does not answer

Steinbeck I'll tell you what you see. You see a man with a gun to the back of his head. What else you see?

Ceri still does not answer. She begins to back off

Steinbeck You see his skull smashed open as he hits the sand. What else?...

Ceri is in full retreat

Steinbeck You see all kinda disasters same as me, don't ya... Everywhere you look ya see disasters. Ya see airplanes crashing, ya see them babies bombed like Mussolini bombed them Abyssinians... It's jus' how the world is. It ain't your fault. It ain't your fault

Ceri stops retreating, but does not really connect with Steinbeck

Ceri It's all you ever see on telly...

Steinbeck Ain't nothin' new in destroying the world. You see them boots? They each gotta story. Ever'one of them walked from someplace. Most of em walked 'cross the mountains from the dustbowl. Millions of tramping feet. You watch one place long enough, and some guy bobs to the surface, a guy with his story, but blink your eye, and he's sunk again and all you see is tramping boots, trampin out the dustbowl.

Ceri What's the dustbowl?

Steinbeck Listen to the story

Ceri I am listening. I'm not such a thick shit, you know. Tell me about the dustbowl then

George speaks without looking up from his game. Music underscoring

George Don't want to hear about no dustbowl

Steinbeck Sure ain't nothin' new in destroying the world. Poor folks don' even know they're doin' it. Settlers, they marched out the East, made their bargain with Uncle Sam and took the land from the Indians. They ploughed it up and planted corn. And the corn swayed across the prairie from one claim shanty to the next. And the new land gave enough to let them shanties grow. The sons became fathers and they took from the land, and the Indians watched. They became grandfathers and their sons took from the land, and the Indians watched. And the old land gotten sick of this take take all the time and it dried up, and the wind blew, and they didn't know what to do 'bout it. . And the Indians watched from the reserves, and they knew. The farmers borrowed money to live, and planted more corn to pay it back, and it dried up worse, and the wind blew and the dust rose, and the money grew thin so they mortgaged themselves to the banks till the banks owned all the land, and the wind blew and the dust rose and lungs choked. And the banks found makin money off the people too hard, so they got ridda the people. Just like that. You don' own ya house no more, don' own the land - so the banks sell them to the big grain companies. And the wind blow and the dust rise and lungs choke, and the tractors come in and flatten the shanties an' all the little claims are gone. An the people? The people who own the boots are thrown outdoors and they get in their beat up old trucks an' they rattle west. Ain't nowhere's to go but west.. An' the wind blow. An' the tires come off the trucks an' the trucks run on the rims, and then the rims flatten' an' the trucks are pushed off the edge of the road and left. Left with three generations of memories thickening in the dust.

Steinbeck starts to put on Slim's boots

Steinbeck But the boots go on, boots trudging West, an army of boots. Ain't nowheres else for them to go. Behind them the wind blow and the dust rises. In front the mountains and beyond a life trudging from farm to farm, where your possessions can be laid out in an apple box...All them boots, all fulla guys. Armies of guys trampin' facelessly from farm to farm..

George The only guy's you given us so far are an old cripple with a smelly dog and a coupla punks

Steinbeck I ain't given you Slim yet. He's the jerkline skinner. Ain't no-one can handle a team like him. He can drive twenty mules with a single line on the leader. He can kill a fly on a wheeler's butt with a bull whip without touchin' the mule. He don't talk, he listens, and he don't jus' listen, he thinks, and he don't jus' think, he understands -- like George... But understand's beyond thought. Understandin's what a man needs more'n anything.

Steinbeck moves slowly and majestically through the doorway

Steinbeck It's brighter'n a bitch outside. Can't hardly see nothing in here. You the new guys? I'm Slim

George Just come

Steinbeck Gonna buck barley?

George That's what the boss says

Steinbeck studies the solitaire hand upside down

Steinbeck Hope you get on my team. Gotta pair of punks on my team that don't know a barley bag from a blue ball. You guys ever bucked any barley?

George Hell yes - I ain't nothing to scream about, but that big bastard there can put up more grain alone than most pairs can.

Lennie smiles at the compliment and Steinbeck nods approvingly

Steinbeck You guys travel around together?

George Sure, we kinda look after each other. *(He indicates Lennie)* He ain't bright. Hell of a good worker, though. Hell of a nice fella, but he ain't bright. I've knew him for a long time.

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

George It's a lot nicer to go around with a guy you know

Steinbeck Ain't no one else here does that. Candy and I got our dogs, but that's all.

George Candy's dog can't hardly walk. Boys say it stinks the bunkhouse out

Steinbeck Carlson say it'd be kinder to shoot it. Perhaps he's right, though I don't reckon he's thinkin' of the dog. Jus' himself. My bitch slang her pups last night. Perhaps Candy could have one of them.

Lennie suddenly lights up

George You gonna keep the pups?

Steinbeck Have to keep em a while so's they can drink the bitch's milk

A dinner triangle sounds

Steinbeck You guys better come on whilst they's still something to eat. Won't be nothing left in a coupla minutes

Slim exits through the door with dignity. Lennie looks at George with childish excitement

George Yeah, I heard him, Lennie. I'll ask him

Ceri You will let Lennie have a pup, won't you

Steinbeck Ain't he better jus' dreamin' of his pup?

Ceri He must have a pup. George promised him.

Steinbeck You ain't got a real rabbit - jus' a dream one

Ceri I had a real rabbit once, but Mum made me give her away. Said she weren't having no smelly pets about. I loved that rabbit, and I don't think she was well looked after once I gave her away

George has scuffed up his hand chucked it on the box and approached the doorway

George That Slim's too good to be true. He's you, ain't he. He's what you wish you'd been. Prince of the ranch. He always talks kindly, always thinks of other guys, always fair.

George snatches Steinbeck's script from him and reads

George 'He moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and master craftsmen.' 'There was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love.'

George thumps the script back at Steinbeck

George Aint't never been no guy as good as that

Steinbeck He ain't me, George. I aint that good.

Ceri I never met a man like that

George Bet you dream 'bout a man like that – an' spend your life disappointed 'cause you ain't met him

Ceri There's no harm in dreaming. I've gotta dream, stuck where I am. You havn't seen my town. Nothing happens. The boys idea of a good time is to get rat-arsed on a Friday night and puke up. Drinking in the club, talking dirty with their mates is all they earn their money

for. They think girls is only there so they can talk about shagging or to marry so's they got someone to do their stinking washing and cook their effing meals.

Steinbeck S'pose those guys don't think they have a story - jus' like you

Ceri strokes her rabbit

Ceri Slim'll give Lennie a pup, won't he.

Music underscoring

Steinbeck Aw he'll give Lennie a pup. They'll spend the afternoon in dust and heat and noise, heaving barley bags that tumble off the threshing machine, bucking them on top the waggons. Above them hangs the rocky curve of the Gabilan mountains, but they aint seein' them. They jus' see the next barley bag comin off the belt, and the swing of their partner's hands. Grab and throw, grab and throw. And the chaff blows out in clouds and settles on them, turnin' them the colour of the land, cakin' with the sweat that trickles in their eyes. A belt's bust - God amighty 'bout damn time - find the shade behind the waggon. Bastard engineer fixes it too quick. Lennie never takes a breather—

George You crazy bastard

Steinbeck Lennie stands there in the sun, waitin', smiling to himself about the pup that George will ask for.

Riding home, perched upon the swaying waggons, George climbs down beside the Skinner as he feels the reins to guide his team, asks him 'bout his bitch.

Ceri Of course he'll let him have a pup

Steinbeck Ain't nothin'. Woulda had to've drowned most of 'em anyways if I couldn't find no-one who wants 'em

Ceri Thank you, Slim

Ceri walks over to Lennie and hands him her rabbit

Steinbeck The waggon brake screeches in the yard, Crooks the stable buck unhitches mules, as men tumble and jest each other to the washroom. Here, underneath the gaze of Candy and his smelly dog, the basins rattle and the cold water turns brown with chaff dust.

Pause

Steinbeck Wanna play horseshoes?

Ceri What's that?

Steinbeck What they all play ever' summer night. Pitching horseshoes at two iron stakes. Score if the shoe hooks round it, but mostly it jus' thuds into the earth, sendin' up a clout of dust

Ceri Must get boring every night.

Steinbeck A guy gotta do something. Ain't nothin' else to do

Ceri Just like home

Steinbeck You play horseshoes?

Ceri No. We all wander round, pretending to be great mates... but we hate each other's guts, 'specially Kirsty's. Buy a few cans down the Spar if we have some dosh. Nothing else to do, just wander round. And you can't wander round by yourself. D'you reckon Slim's right? Is everyone scared of each other. Are they scared of making friends?

Steinbeck Those guys playing horseshoes sure are scared of friendship... But they're desperate to belong. Playin' a game of horseshoes makes you belong but without no commitment

Ceri Do what everyone else does. Wear what everyone else wears. Swear about the same things. Wander up and down the same streets together, stand in the same doorways. Gotta be like everyone else or you're a freak

Steinbeck That's jus' as lonely as bein' on your own

Lennie sits on the floor and plays with the rabbit

Ceri Always worried about being a freak. Wore rubbish clothes when I first went to high school. Kids said I smelt... Ha! Soon stopped when I got my tits out.

Lennie curls up on the floor with the rabbit

George Hey Slim! He'll want to sleep right out in the barn with 'em. We'll have trouble keeping him from getting right in the box with them pups

Steinbeck enters the doorway as Slim

Steinbeck 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. There ain't nobody can keep up with him. God awmighty, I never seen such a strong guy.

Steinbeck Funny how you an' him string along together

George What's funny about us bein' together?

Steinbeck Jus' seems funny a cuckoo like him and a smart little guy like you travelin' together

George He ain't no cuckoo. He's dumb as hell but he ain't crazy. And I ain't so bright, neither, or I wouldn't be buckin' barley. I used to have a hell of a lot of fun playin' jokes on 'im, makin' myself seem Godamn smart. But he was too dumb to even know I done it. Wasn't so damn much fun after a while. Tell you what made me stop. One day a bunch of guys was standin' around up on the Sacramento river. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turn to Lennie and says 'jump in'. An' he jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke. He damn near drowned before we could get him. An he was so damn nice to me for pullin' him out. Well I ain't done nothing like that no more.

Steinbeck He's a nice fella. Guy don't need no sense to be a nice fella. Seems to me sometimes it jus' works the other way around. Take a real smart guy and he ain't hardly ever a nice fella

Steinbeck and George sit on the boxes and George lays out a solitaire hand.

Ceri That's so mean telling him to jump in.

George And I suppose you never been mean in your life?

Ceri *(defensively)* It's pretty mean

George Look what I gotta put up with. He damn near got us both lynched when he pulled that girl's dress off in Weed

George crosses to Lennie, very deliberately

George I tol' you you couldn't bring that pup in here

Lennie What pup, George? I ain't got no pup

George grabs Lennie by the shoulder and rolls him over and picks up the toy rabbit he had been concealing

Lennie Give 'um to me, George

George You get right up an' take this pup back to the nest. He's gotta sleep with his mother. You want to kill him? Just born last night and you take him out of the nest. You take him back or I'll tell Slim not to let you have him

Lennie Give 'um to me, George. I'll take 'um back. I didn't mean no harm, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' wanted to pet 'um a little.

George Awright, you get him back there quick, and don' you take him out no more. You'll kill him the first thing you know

Lennie scuttles off with the rabbit and lays it down near Ceri on the edge of the triangle and sits by it

Steinbeck Jesus. He's jus' like a kid, ain't he

Steinbeck stands and exits slowly through the doorway

Ceri I like Slim

George You're meant to. He's one o' them heroes out them Western Magazines. Tall an' silent. Girl's love 'em

Ceri I don't mean like that. I like him 'cause he doesn't tell you what to do. He just listens

George *(to Steinbeck)* Shame you ain't made me more like Slim. Perhaps I'd make good then, instead of being teamed up with a crazy fool who get' me into trouble ever' week

Steinbeck I make you as you are, George

George Aw yeah? Jus' how it is?

Steinbeck Jus' how it is

Ceri But you look after Lennie. Loads wouldn't. Most people wouldn't give a toss what happened to him

Steinbeck Like Carlson

Steinbeck picks up the revolver. There is a pause

Ceri Poor dog. Candy needs his dog

George Ain't got no-one else – had it from a pup

- Steinbeck** Aw the dog's keepin' the guys awake with his smell. Besides, he don't have no fun anymore an' he ain't got no teeth an' he's stiff with rheumatism. Be kinder to shoot him
- Ceri** He doesn't give a shit about the dog. You can't put something down that wants to live
- Steinbeck** Carlson don't like the smell so he shoot the dog. All them other reasons' to get the other guys on his side. He jus' says them. Believin' them ain't his concern
- George** He don't even give Candy time to think
- Steinbeck** They can't none of them sleep with him stinkin' round the bunkhouse. Why wait another night?
- Ceri** Them're just excuses
- Steinbeck** He decides what he wants to do, then he make up reasons so's people'll agree with it. Just like them banks in the dustbowl. Best thing is sell up, they say. Then you've no more worries, no more payin' interest on the mortgage, might even be enough left for you to buy yourself an old truck, then its off to California and a new beginning. All turned out for the best, they say
- George** The hell it did
- Steinbeck** People like Carlson ever'where
- Ceri** They're telling us lies all the time. Telling us the shitty things they want to do and prettendin' it's best for us.
- Steinbeck** It's all for our own good.
- Ceri** Yeah that's it. They say it's all for our own effing good

Steinbeck puts on Carlson's boots and a paunchy jacket and walks into the space

Steinbeck The way I'd shoot him, he wouldn't feel a thing

Steinbeck walks over to where Lennie is playing with the rabbit on all fours. He puts an im'aginary gun to the back of Lennie's head

Steinbeck I'd put the gun right there. Right back of the head. He wouldn't even quiver. I'll put the old devil out of his misery right now. Ain't nothing left for him. Let's get it over with.

Steinbeck drops his hand and turns slowly out of the space. George follows, so only

Lennie is left upstage

Ceri Does Candy let him?

Steinbeck *(tired)* Yeah, Candy lets him. We always let them. That's why I'm scared. We let them go. Let them do what they want

George All us guys settin' in the bunkhouse watchin' Carlson tie a rope roun' the old dog an' lead him outside into the night, an' close the door

Ceri We shouldn't let them go

Steinbeck But we do.

George An' all we can do now is wait for the gunshot

Pause

George All us guys settin in our bunkhouse doin' nothin' 'cept waitin' for the gunshot

Pause

George Wait for the gunshot

Silence for as long as we can get away with. Lennie is on all fours upstage, George Steinbeck and Ceri indulge in displacement activities - rippling a deck of cards, chewing nails, putting one hand repeatedly on top of the other etc

George What the hell's takin' him so long.

More silence. Slowly Steinbeck, Ceri and George turn to look at Lennie.

Steinbeck Waiting

Pause

Lennie leaps to his feet with the rabbit

Lennie Bang! There - you ain't scairt. Yous a good dog.

*This is a possible **INTERVAL** position if the split needs to be earlier in the play*

George continues staring

George Curley's lookin' for his girl again. Spoilin' for a fight. Reckons she's with Slim an' all the guys followed him out to watch. But if she ain't with Slim, I guess them guys ain't gonna see no fight. If there's any fightin', Lennie, you keep out of it

Lennie I don't want no fights

George You give me a good whorehouse every time. A guy can go an' get drunk and get ever'thing outta his system all at once an no messes. An' he knows how much it's gonna set him back. Jail baits like Curley's girl are just set on the trigger of the hoosegow (*jail*).

Ceri You seem to reckon all girls are tarts

George Mos' the one's I come across are

Ceri You blokes make us into tarts. You sit there and eye us up, you think we're only after one thing. You think we haven't got a life of our own. You think we should just give you what you want when you want it, and the rest of the time we should bog off. And if we give you what you want, you call us tarts. It's okay for blokes to look at girls, but not the other way around. Maybe Curley's wife's lonely. Maybe she just wants someone to talk to. Maybe she knows the only way she'll get you to even see her is to show her tits.

Steinbeck puts on Candy's boots

George Maybe she is lonely. I sure would be if I was stuck with that Curley bastard

Ceri Exactly

George But it still don't give her no right to come pesterin' round this bunkhouse

Steinbeck picks up the empty lead and looks at it, then gradually becomes Candy, with the stump of an arm as he speaks. Music underscoring

Steinbeck I ain't fair on old Candy. Poor old bastard. He's got nothing goin' for him no more.. He's goin' stiff like his old dog. Ain't much longer he'll be able to push a broom... An' makin' Carlson shoot his dog... That were jus' mean

Steinbeck walks into the space as Candy, dragging his feet.

Steinbeck I ought to have shot that dog myself. I shouldn't ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog.

Steinbeck lies down, curled up, facing upstage away from George and Lennie

Lennie drums on a box with his fingers

Lennie George?

George Huh?

Lennie George, how long's it gonna be till we get that little place an' live on the fatta the lan' — an' rabbits?

George I don' know. We gotta get a big stake together. I know a little place we can get cheap, but they ain't givin' it away

Lennie Tell us about that place, George

George I tol' you jus' las' night

Lennie Go on, tell again, George

George Well it's ten acres. Got a little win'mill. Got a shack on it, an' a chicken run. Got a kitchen, orchard, cherries, apples, peaches, 'cots, nuts, got a few berries. They's a place for alfalfa and plenty water to flood it. They's a pig pen —

Lennie An' rabbits, George

George No place for rabbits now, but I could easy build a few hutches and you could feed alfalfa to the rabbits

Lennie Damn right I could. You God damn right I could

George abandons his cards as he grows more enthusiastic. Steinbeck rolls over and watches him. Ceri too is drawn into the dream and moves closer with her rabbit

George An' we could have a few pigs. I could build a smoke house like the one gran'pa had, an' when we kill a pig, we can smoke the bacon and the hams, and make sausages an' all like that. An when the salmon run up the river we can catch a hunderd of 'em an' salt 'em down or smoke 'em. We could have them for breakfast. They ain't nothing so nice as smoked salmon. When the fruit come in we could can it — and tomatoes, they're easy to can. Ever' Sunday we could kill a chicken or a rabbit. Maybe we'd have a cow or a goat, and the cream is so God damn thick you got to cut it with a knife and take it out with a spoon

Lennie We could live of the fatta the lan'

George Sure. All kin's vegetables in the garden, and if we want a little whisky we can sell a few eggs or something, or some milk. We'd jus' live there. We'd belong there. There wouldn't be no runnin' round the country and getting' fed by a Jap cook. No Sir, we'd have our own place where we belonged and not sleep in no bunkhouse

Lennie Tell us about the house, George

George Sure, we'd have a little house an' a room to ourself. Little fat iron stove, an' in the winter we'd keep a fire goin' in it. It ain't enough land so we'd have to work too hard. Maybe six, seven hours a day. An' when we put in a crop, why, we'd be there to take the crop up. We'd know what come of our planting

Lennie An rabbits. An' I'd take care of 'em. Tell how I'd do that, George

George Sure You'd go out in the alfalfa patch an' you'd have a sack. You'd fill up the sack and bring it in an' put it in the rabbit cages

Lennie They'd nibble and they'd nibble, the way they do. I seen 'em

Ceri draws closer and closer to George and Lennie, entranced

Ceri He can't take this off you. He can't.. he can't

George Ever' six weeks or so, them does would throw a litter so we'd plenty rabbits to eat an' to sell. An we'd keep a few pigeons to go flyin' around the win'mill like they done when I was a kid. An it'd be our own, an' nobody could can us. If we don't like a guy we can say, 'Get the hell out,' and by God he's got to do it. An' if a fren' come along, why we'd have an extra bunk, an we'd say, 'Why don't you spend the night?' an by God he would. We'd have a setter dog and a couple stripe cats, but you gotta watch out them cats don't get the little rabbits

Lennie You jus' let 'em try to get the rabbits. I'll break their God damn necks. I'll... I'll smash 'em with a stick

George Lennie and Ceri are entranced by the picture. Steinbeck gets up slowly behind them. Throughout the following, Ceri is with them but unseen by them, drawn totally into their dream

Steinbeck You know where's a place like that?

George S'pose I do. What's that to you?

Steinbeck You don't need to tell me where it is. Might be any place

George Sure. That's right. You wouldn't find it in a hunderd years

Steinbeck How mush they want for a place like that?

George (*suspiciously*) Well I could get it for six hunderd bucks. The ol' people that own it is flat bust an' the ol' lady needs an operation. Say — what's it to you? You got nothing to do with us?

Steinbeck I ain't much good with on'y one hand. I lost my hand right here on this ranch. That's why they give me a job swampin'. An they gave me two hunderd an' fifty dollars 'cause I lost my hand. An' I got fifty more saved up right in the bank, right now. Tha's three hunderd, and I got fifty more comin' the end of the month. Tell you what — s'pose I go in with you guys. Tha's three hunderd an' fifty bucks I'd put in. I ain't much good, but I could cook and tend the chickens and hoe the garden some. How'd that be?

George I gotta think about that. We was always gonna do it by ourselves

Steinbeck I'd make a will an' leave my share to you guys in case I kick off, 'cause I ain't got no relatives nor nothing. You guys got any money? Maybe we could do her right now

George (*disgustedly*) We got ten bucks between us. Look, if me an' Lennie work a month an' don't spend nothing, we'd have a hunderd bucks. That's four fifty. I bet we could swing her for that. Then you an Lennie could go get her started an' I'd get a job an' make up the res', an' you could sell eggs an' stuff like that

They fall into silence, looking at one another amazed

George Jesus Christ! I bet we could swing her... I bet we could swing her

Steinbeck They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunkhouses they'll put me on the county. Maybe if I give you guys my money you'll let me hoe in the garden even after I ain't no good at it. You seed what they done to my dog tonight? They says he wasn't no good to himself nor nobody else. When they can me I wisht somebody'd shoot me. I won't have no place to go, an' I can't get no more jobs

George stands up

George We'll do her.

Ceri You'll do her

He sits again and they all gaze, bemused. Music underscoring

George S'pose there was a carnival or a circus come to town, or a ball game, or any damn thing. We'd jus' go to her. 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 at the chickens an' go to her

Lennie An' put some grass to the rabbits.

Ceri Them rabbits'll love you. They'll come jumping up at the wire when they see you

Lennie I would never forget to feed them. When we gon'ta do it, George?

George In one month. Right squack in one month. Know what I'm gon'ta do? I'm gon'ta write to them old people that owns the place that we'll take it. An' Candy'll send a hunderd dollars to bind her

Steinbeck Sure will. They got a good stove there?

George Sure, got a nice stove, burns coal or wood.

Lennie I'm gonna take my pup. I bet by Christ he likes it there by Jesus

Steinbeck stands slowly and goes out through the door, leaving George and Lennie entranced. Ceri catches his eye as he passes

Ceri *(turning to Steinbeck)* You're going to spoil it aren't you. Right here, you're going to start spoiling it.

Steinbeck Jus' how it is

Ceri That's always your excuse. You can't use it for everything, otherwise what's the point in living if you can't change anything?

Steinbeck I can't alter what is.

Ceri But it isn't. You're writing it

Steinbeck I'm writing for those boots. Those thousands of boots. All those boots are marching on dreams. And all those dreams come to nothing. Why those boots want to know about a dream that comes true?

Ceri It's them I care about, not all those boots!

Steinbeck That's cause you know their story. I told yer — each one of them boots has a story too. Jus' you don' know it. If you knowed an understood all them boots...

Ceri If their stories are all like this one I'd go effing mad

Steinbeck So then, you jus' listen to this story

Steinbeck changes his boots back to Curley's high heeled boots

The following is quiet, slow, deliberate and rhythmic

Steinbeck Hate

George leaves his dream and sleepwalks towards Steinbeck.

George Hate

Ceri Hate?

George Curley's fulla it

Steinbeck Laughed at by Carlson

George An' scairt by Slim

Steinbeck Hate

George Curley hates us

Steinbeck Don't understand no-one

George Don't see us as guys

Steinbeck We ain't people

George Jus' bindle bums

Steinbeck Buckers

George Jus' somethin' he's lookin' to fight

Steinbeck He hates us 'cause we're different

George He hates us 'cause he's scairt

Steinbeck He hates us 'cause he's threatened

George He hates — us — all —

Steinbeck Believes his lies

George Don't see no truth

Steinbeck Lost his reason

George Lost his mind

Steinbeck All is blind

George To hate

Ceri He's a bully

Steinbeck Bullies hate

George Bullies shoot

Ceri Bullies bomb

Pause

Steinbeck slowly puts on Curley's glove. George and Ceri watch horrified and immovable. Lennie is grinning to himself upstage

Lennie Rabbits. All them little rabbits nibblin' an' nibblin' the alfalfa. Nibblin' like I seen 'em. I sees 'em now. We'll go there now. We'll buy them rabbits and start right now. I sees em nibblin' an' I pets em so soft——

Steinbeck hurls himself through the doorway apoplectic with rage

Steinbeck What the hell you laughin' at?

Lennie Huh?

Steinbeck Come on, ya big bastard. Get on your feet. No big son-of-a-bitch is gonna laugh at me.

Lennie looks helplessly at George who has come into the space, and retreats upstage. Steinbeck slashes left and right. Lennie cries with terror. I think this fight needs to be realistic, not stylised if we are going to do it at all. Blood on Lennie's face etc if possible. It should appear an uncontrollable explosion after the build up of the last scene. It does not need to last very long!

Lennie George. Make um leave me alone, George

George Get him, Lennie. Don't let him do it

Lennie covers his face with his hands and bleats with terror

Lennie Make 'um stop, George

Steinbeck winds Lennie

George (*cupping his hands*) Get 'im, Lennie!

Lennie takes his hands away from his face and looks about for George. Steinbeck slashes at his eyes

George I said get him!

Lennie grabs Steinbeck's fist as he swings it and Steinbeck flops around like a fish

George Leggo of him, Lennie. Let go

Lennie watches with terror, but cannot release his grip. Steinbeck's struggling becomes weaker

George Leggo his hand Lennie Leggo. Leggo his hand. Leggo his hand. Someone help me while the guy got any hand left

Lennie suddenly lets go and cowers upstage

Lennie (*miserably*) You tol' me to, George

George We gotta get him to a doctor. Looks like ever' bone in his han' is bust

Steinbeck released, takes off his glove and kicks off the shoes, walking back to Ceri

Steinbeck This is only a story, so the bully is beaten

Ceri But the bully gets his way after

Steinbeck Oh yes. Jus' how it is

George turns to Lennie

George It ain't your fault. You don't need to be scairt no more. You done jus' what I tol' you to. Maybe you'd better go to the washroom an' clean up your face. You look like hell.

Lennie I didn't want no trouble... George?

- George** What do you want?
- Lennie** I can still tend the rabbits, George?
- George** Sure. You ain't done nothing wrong
- Lennie** I didn't mean no harm, George
- George** Well get the hell out and wash your face

Steinbeck sits back at his typewriter. Ceri goes up to him. George and Lennie leave the space. Interval playout music.

INTERVAL

At the top of the second half, Lennie is playing with his pup (the rabbit), Steinbeck is at his desk, and Ceri is in the space. George sits a few rows back in the audience, slumped over a bourbon

- Ceri** They blame Curley's wife for acting like a tart. Bet he beats her up
- Steinbeck** The guys don' like her
- Ceri** Look what she's got to put up with. Stuck here with a load of thick blokes and a bastard for a husband. She can't join in nothing. I'll bet she could do something decent if she wasn't stuck in a dump. She's just like me at home — stuck in a dump. What else is there to do but show your arse? How else can you get blokes to see you?
- Steinbeck** Maybe the guys don' want to see her
- Ceri** Curley's never home — she's got nobody to talk to. What's she meant to do? Just hang around looking for him and waiting for him to come back? She's going to go out and see the blokes. Why not? She just wants to see somebody and talk to them. There aren't any other girls on the ranch. I want to tell her to get the hell out. Go somewhere they don't try to cut her out of everything
- Steinbeck** Then you tell her that when you get the chance

Steinbeck puts on Crooks' boots, and begins to rearrange the space to become Crooks' room, eventually adopting Crooks' posture

- Steinbeck** You ain't met Crooks yet, the stable buck. He's cut out of most things, too.
- Ceri** Why's that?

Steinbeck He's a Negro, didn't I tell ya? He has a bunk in the harness room at the side of the barn. Smells of saddle soap and tar in there, and manure from the heap under the window. Rooms fulla broken harness, bits of leather, tools, an' a few books. He don't travel roun' like the other guys. Bein' a cripple, ain't nowhere else'd take him. Kicked by a horse in the back. In his apple box is liniment for him and for the horses. Always rubbin' it into his back but it don't make much difference

Steinbeck has sat and is rubbing his back. Lennie approaches good-naturedly and smiles helplessly in an attempt to make friends

Steinbeck You ain't got no right to come in my room. Nobody got any right in here but me

Lennie I ain't done nothing. Just come to look at my puppy an' I seen your light.

Steinbeck You go on get outta my room. I ain't wanted in the bunkhouse, and you ain't wanted in my room

Lennie Why ain't you wanted?

Steinbeck '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, you all of you stink to me

Ceri They said I stink when I went to high school 'cause they didn't like me. Same as they said about those gyppo kids who came to the school. Funny how they say you stink when they don't like you

Lennie approaches nearer still

Lennie Ever'body went into town. Slim an' George an' ever'body. George say I gotta stay here an' not get in no trouble. I seen your light

Steinbeck Well, what do you want?

Lennie Nothing — I seen your light. I thought I could jus' come in an' set

Steinbeck I don't know what you're doin' in the barn anyway. You ain't got nothing to do with the horses

Lennie The pup. I come to see my pup

Steinbeck Well go see your pup then. Don't come in a place where you're not wanted

Lennie backs off

Lennie I looked at 'em a little. Slim say's I ain't to pet 'em very much

Steinbeck Well you been takin' them out of the nest all the time. I wonder the old lady don't move 'em someplace else

Lennie moves nearer Steinbeck again

Lennie Oh she don't care. She lets me.

Steinbeck Long as you won't get out an' leave me alone, you might as well set down. All the boys gone to town, Huh?

Lennie All but old Candy. He just sets in the bunkhouse sharpening his pencil and sharpening and figuring

Steinbeck Figuring? What's old Candy figuring about?

Lennie *(almost shouting)* 'Bout the rabbits!

Steinbeck You're nuts. You're crazy as a wedge. What rabbits are you talkin' about?

Lennie The rabbits that we're gonna get, and I get to tend 'em, cut grass an' give 'em water, an' like that

Steinbeck Jus' nuts. I don't blame the guy you travel with for keepin' you outta sight

Lennie It ain't no lie. We're gonna do it. Gonna get a little place an' live of the fatta the lan.

Steinbeck Set down

Lennie You think it's a lie. But it ain't no lie. Ever' word's the truth, an you can ast George

Steinbeck You travel aroun' with George don't ya?

Lennie Sure. Me an' him go ever'place together

Steinbeck Sometimes he talks and you don't know what the hell he's talkin' about. Ain't that so? Ain't that so?

Lennie Yeah, sometimes

Steinbeck Jus' talks on, an' 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

Steinbeck laughs

Steinbeck A guy can talk to you an' be sure you won't go blabbin'. Couple of weeks an' them pups'll be all right. George knows what he's about. Just talks an' you don't understand nothing. This is just a nigger talkin', an' a busted-back nigger. So it don't mean nothing, see? I see 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. It's just bein' with another guy. That's all

Ceri That's what I want. Talking. That's why I hang around with the same bunch of shits all the time. Talking talking, then you can pretend you ain't lonely

Pause

Steinbeck S'pose George don't come back no more. What'll you do then?

Lennie What?

Steinbeck I said s'pose George went into town tonight and you never heard of him no more. Just s'pose that

Lennie He won't do it. George wouldn't do nothing like that. I been with George a long time, he'll come back tonight

Steinbeck S'pose he get's killed or hurt so he can't come back?

Lennie stands dangerously and approaches Steinbeck

Lennie Who hurt George

Steinbeck I was just supposin'. George ain't hurt. He'll be back all right

Lennie What you supposin' for. Ain't nobody goin' to suppose no hurt to George

Steinbeck Maybe you can see now. You got George. You know he's goin' to come back. S'pose you didn't have nobody. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunk house and play rummy 'cause you was black. How'd you like that? S'pose you had to sit out here and read books. Books ain't no good. A guy needs somebody — to be near him. A guy goes

nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you. I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick

Lennie I got George and George got me. George won't go away and leave me. I know George won't do that

Steinbeck I remember when I was a little kid on my old man's chicken ranch. Had two brothers. They were always near me, always there. Used to sleep right in the same room, right in the same bed — all three. Had a strawberry patch. Had an alfalfa patch. Used to turn the chickens out in the alfalfa on a sunny morning — white chickens they was.

Lennie George says we're going to have alfalfa for the rabbits

Steinbeck What rabbits?

Lennie We're gonna have rabbits an a berry patch

Steinbeck You're nuts. I seen hunderds of men come by on the road with their bindles on their back an' that same damn thing in their heads. Hunderds of 'em. They come, an' they quit an' go on, an' every damn one of 'em 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. It's just in their head. They're all the time talkin' about it, but it's jus' in their head. I seen guys crazy with loneliness for land, but ever'time a whorehouse or a blackjack game took what it takes. Where's George now? In a whorehouse

The conversation lapses into silence. Lennie grins and Steinbeck scowls, consulting his script. He looks up at Ceri. He points at the pair of girls shoes. Ceri puts them on, then leans seductively on the doorpost. She is much more assured in her role than before

Ceri Any you boys seen Curley?

Ceri polishes her fingernails

Steinbeck Curley ain't here

Ceri They left all the weak ones here. Think I don't know where they all went. Even Curley. I know where they all went

Steinbeck Curley ain't here

Ceri Funny thing. If I catch any one man, and he's alone, I get along fine with him. But just let two of the guys get together an' you won't talk.

You're all scared of each other, that's what. Ever' one of you's scared the rest is goin' to get something on you

Pause

Steinbeck maybe you'd better go along to your own house now. We don't want no trouble

Ceri Well I ain't giving you no trouble. Think I don't like to talk to somebody ever' once in a while? Think I like to stick in that house alla time?

Steinbeck You gotta husband

Ceri Sure I gotta husban'. You all seen him. Swell guy, ain't he? Spends all his time sayin' what he gonna do to guys he don't like, and he don't like nobody. Think I'm gonna stay in that two-by-four house and listen how Curley's gonna lead with his left twice, and then bring in the ol' right cross? One-two he says. Jus' the ol' one-two an' he'll go down... Say, what happen to Curley's han'?

Steinbeck Why... Curley... he got his han' caught in a machine, maam

Ceri Baloney! What you think you're sellin' me? Curley started som'pin' he didn't finish. Caught in a machine — baloney! Why, he ain't given nobody the ol' one-two since he got his han' bust. Who bust him?

Steinbeck Got caught in a machine

Ceri Awright. Awright, cover 'im up if ya wanta. Whatta I care? You bindle bums think you're so damn good. Whatta ya think I am, a kid? I tell ya I could of went with shows. Not jus' one, neither. An' a guy tol' me he could put me in pitchers... —Sat'iday night. Ever'body out doin' som'pin. Everbody! An' what am I doin? Standin here talkin' to two bindle stiffs - a nigger an' a dum-dum — an' likin' it because they ain't nobody else

Lennie We gonna keep rabbits... I gonna feed them the alfalfa an' they'll nibble an' nibble. George gonna let me tend the rabbits. George an' me an' Candy gonna buy our own place an' keep rabbits

Ceri Baloney! I seen too many you guys. If you had two bits in the worl', why you'd be in getting' two shots of corn with it and suckin' the bottom of the glass. I know you guys

Ceri stares hard at Lennie until he drops his eyes in embarrassment

Ceri Where d'you get them bruises on your face?

Lennie Who — me?

Ceri Yeah, you

Lennie looks round for help, saying eventually:-

Lennie He got his han' caught in a machine

Ceri Okay, Machine. I'll talk to you later. I like machines

Steinbeck I heard the gate bang. The guys'll be comin' in. You'd better go home. If you go right now, Curley won't know you was here

Ceri I ain't sure you heard nothing

Steinbeck You'd better take the safe way

Ceri I'm glad you bust up Curley a little bit. He got it comin' to him. Sometimes I'd like to bust him myself

Ceri turns and leaves through the doorframe

Steinbeck Maybe you'd better go too. I ain't sure I want you in here no more. A coloured man got to have some rights even if he don't like 'em. You're a nice fella, Lennie. You ain't mean. But you best go find George now

Lennie moves back across to where he had left the rabbit and starts playing with it. The playing becomes gradually more boisterous. Lennie growls and makes it jump, though he is silent during the middle of the next speech. Steinbeck removes Crooks' shoes and tidies up the stage. Turning it into the barn

Steinbeck Sunday afternoon in the big barn. Halter chains rattle in the stalls as mules chase the last few grains of barley, and shouts an' distant horseshoes clang and thud outside. A mountain slope of new mown hay towers to the roofjoists. Over it, a mouse scuttle for seeds, whiles all around her motion ceases, sounds are stilled. She live in this moment, live for the seeds about her. Past and future are as nothing. Want or plenty simply are. She live nowhere else

Ceri *(quietly)* Just like Lennie...

Steinbeck Flies buzz in the sunlight that slice through cracks in the barn wall, a horseshoe rings an' time moves on again.

Steinbeck turns to Ceri

Steinbeck You were God damn good as Curley's wife

Ceri I just said how she feels, that's all. She feels like me, so it isn't very hard.

Steinbeck You understand her, jus' as George understands Lennie. She got a story too

Ceri I know. It's my story as well

Lennie is jumping around growling and barking at the rabbit. Steinbeck and Ceri turn to look. Suddenly he stops. The rabbit lies in front of him. He puts a finger out to it. He watches it. He picks it up and looks at it. He shakes it. He lays it down again and watches it for a while. Then he puts his hand out and strokes it from one end to the other

Lennie Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice. I didn't bounce you hard. *(He picks the rabbit up and speaks straight into its face)* Now maybe George ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits, if he fin's out you got killed

Lennie tries to hide the rabbit/bury it in straw

Lennie This ain't no bad thing like I got to go an' hide in the brush. Oh no. This ain't. I'll tell George I foun' it dead

He unburies the rabbit and strokes it again

Lennie But he'll know. George always knows. He'll say. 'You done it. Don't try to put nothing over on me.' An he'll say, 'Now jus' for that you don't get to tend no rabbits... God damn you! Why do you got to get killed? You ain't so little as mice

Lennie hurls the rabbit from him and turns his back on it, rocking in sorrow

Lennie Now I won't get to tend the rabbits. Now he won't let me

Lennie fetches the rabbit back and lays it down in front of him

Ceri *(to Steinbeck)* You can't leave him all sad like

Steinbeck You going to do something about it?

Ceri enters through the doorway

Ceri What you got there, Sonny boy?

Lennie hides the rabbit

Lennie George says I can't tend no rabbits if I talk to you or anything

Ceri He's scared Curley'll get mad. Well, Curley got his arm in a sling — an' if Curley gets tough, you can break his other han'. You didn't put nothing over on me about getting it caught in no machine

Lennie No sir, I ain't gonna talk to you or nothing

Ceri kneels beside him

Ceri Listen, all the guys got a horseshoe tenement goin' on. It's on'y about four o'clock. None of them guys is goin' to leave that tenement. Why can't I talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awful lonely

Lennie Well I ain't supposed to talk to you or nothing

Ceri I get lonely. You can talk to people, but I can't talk to nobody but Curley. Else he gets mad. How'd you like not to talk to anybody?

Lennie Well I ain't supposed to. George's scared I'll get into trouble

Ceri moves closer

Ceri Don't you worry about talkin' to me. Listen to the guys yell out there. They got four dollars bet on that tenement. None of them ain't gonna leave till it's over

Lennie If George sees me talkin to you he'll give me hell. He tol' me so

Ceri Wha's the matter with me? Ain't I got the right to talk to nobody? Whatta they think I am anyways. You're a nice guy. I don't know why I can't talk to you. I ain't doin' no harm to you

Lennie Well George says you'll get us in a mess

Ceri Aw nuts. What kinda harm am I doin' to you? Seems like they ain't none of them cares how I gotta live. I tell you, I ain't used to livin' like this. I coulda made somethin' of myself. Maybe I will yet. I lived right in Salinas. Come there when I was a kid. Well, a show came through, an' I met one of the actors. He says I could go with that show. But my ol' lady wouldn't let me. She says because I was on'y fifteen. But the guy says I coulda. If I'd went, I wouldn't be livin like this, you bet.

Lennie We're gonna have a little place — an' rabbits

Ceri Nother time I met a guy, an' he was in pitchers. Went out to the Riverside Dance Palace with him. He says he was gonna put me in the movies. Says I was a natural. Soon's he got back to Holywood he was gonna write me about it. *(She peers closely at Lennie)* I never got that letter. I always thought my ol' lady stole it. Well, I wasn't gonna stay no place wher I couldn't get nowhere an' where they stole your letters. I ast her if she stole it, too, an' she says no. So I married Curley. Met him out the Riverside Dance Palace that same night. You listenin'?

Lennie Me? Sure. We're gonna keep rabbits

Ceri Well, I ain't told this to nobody before. Maybe I ought'n to. I don't like Curley. He ain't a nice fella.

Ceri moves yet closer

Ceri When this guy was gonna put me in pitchers I thought about Greta Garbo. I gotta girl fren' wants to be like Greeta. But Greeta's always rich. I think I'd rather be like Joan Blondell. She's always poor an' she meets this poor guy an' falls in love...

Lennie I get to tend them rabbits and cut them alfalfa ever' day

Ceri Coulda been in the movies an' had nice clothes — all them nice clothes like they wear. An' I coulda sat in them big hotels, an' had pitchers took of me. When they had them previews I coulda went to them, an spoke in the radio an' it wouldn'ta cost me a cent because I was in the pitcher. This guy says I was a natural

Ceri makes a grand gesture, sticking her little finger out from her hand

Lennie We gonna have a little place. We gonna have a house an' a garden and a place for alfalfa, an' that alfalfa is for the rabbits, an' I take a sack and get it fulla alfalfa and then I take it to the rabbits

Ceri What makes you so nuts about rabbits

Lennie moves cautiously closer to her until he is touching

Lennie I like to pet nice things with my fingers. Sof' things. Once at a fair I seen some of them long hair rabbits. An' they was nice, you bet. Sometimes I've even pet mice, but not when I could get nothing better

Ceri You're nuts. But you're kinda nice fella. Jus like a big baby. But a person can kinda see what you mean. When I'm doin my hair sometimes I jus' set an' stroke it 'cause it's so soft.

Ceri runs her fingers through her hair

Ceri Some people got kinda coarse hair. Take Curley. His hair is jus' like wire. But mine is soft and fine. 'Course I brush it a lot. That makes it fine. Here — feel right here.

Ceri takes Lennie's hand and puts it on her head

Ceri Feel right aroun' there an' see how soft it is

Lennie begins to stroke her hair

Ceri Don't you muss it up

George comes running in, straight at Steinbeck and grabs his script, shaking it

George Stop it! Stop it you gotta stop it!

Steinbeck I gotta tell the story, George

Lennie Oh that's nice. Oh that's nice

Ceri Look out now, you'll muss it.

George Stop it! You kept me out the way, didn't you - first havin' a slug in the whorehouse, then playin' bastard horseshoes

Ceri (*Angrily*) You stop it now, you'll mess it all up

George Stop it 'fore he kills her. I can save ever'thing — save the rabbits an' the stove an' the rain. Stop it now

Ceri jerks her head sideways and Lennie's fingers close on her hair

Ceri Let go! You let go!

Lennie starts to shake Ceri, his hands across her mouth

George grabs hold of Steinbeck and attempts to shake him

George Jesus Christ can't you stop it you stupid bastard writer
Steinbeck rips a sheet out of his script and screws it up. Lennie freezes

Steinbeck Yeah I'll stop it, 'cause this next bit ain't Ceri's story. It's Curley's Wife's story. 'Cause Ceri's still alive — an' Curley's Wife's dead

Ceri disentangles herself from the frozen Lennie.

Ceri Dead.

Steinbeck Yeah. Lennie broke her neck. She screamed an' it scairt him. Didn't want George to be cross an stop him tendin' the rabbits. He was scairt, he held on, tried to quiet her, broke her neck

Ceri He damn near killed me. Curley's wife don't stand a chance

George Why don' you tell some other God damn story? Why this one?

Steinbeck 'Cause this is the one that floated to the top of the pond.

George I think I knowed from the very first. I think I knowed we'd never do her. Never get our place. Lennie usta like to hear about it so much, I got to thinking maybe we would

Ceri You musn't give up

George I'll work my month an' I'll take my fifty bucks an' I'll stay all night in some lousy cat house. Or I'll set in some poolroom till ever'body goes home. An then I'll come back an' work another month an' I'll have fifty bucks more

Ceri Candy'll be canned and go on the county. You mustn't give up. You don't have to be lonely. You're all of you lonely 'cause you're all too scared to make friends. Too scared to give nothing, in case you loose it.

George You could'a teamed me up with anyone - with Slim. Hey me an' Slim could'a made some bucks - done most anything.

Steinbeck An' Slim would'a sat all winter in your little tin shack jus listenin' to the rain?

George Sure

Steinbeck You's a crazy bastard

Steinbeck deliberately turns another page in his script and Lennie unfreezes

Steinbeck *(prompting)* I done a bad thing

Lennie I done a bad thing. I done another bad thing. I shouldn't of did that. George'll be mad... An'... he said... an' hide in the brush till he come. He's gonna be mad. In the brush till he come. Tha's what he said.

Lennie picks up the rabbit and puts it under his coat

Lennie I'll throw him away. It's bad enough with the girl

Lennie shambles over towards the river clearing

George (to Ceri) You ever seen a lynch party?

Ceri They can't lynch him

George Can't they hell.

George goes into the space and rifles around in a box, taking Carlson's Luger

Steinbeck stops checking his script, and puts on Slim's boots

Ceri Why don't they get the Sherriff? Why do they want to lynch him?

Steinbeck Jus' how guys behave together. By themselfe' they might understand him, but put 'em together and they turn him into the divil himsel' They've found out now. Curley's after blood, they're runnin' roun' lookin' for guns — 'cept Slim. All excited, all mad, all shoutin' what they'll do, all tryin' to be wilder'n the next. Men ain't human when they get mad together

Steinbeck puts on Slim's hat

George returns

George Couldn' we maybe bring him in an' they'll lock him up? He's nuts, Slim. He never done this to be mean

Steinbeck We might. If we could keep Curley in we might. But Curley's gonna want to shoot him Shoot him in the guts with a double barrel. Painful as he can make it. Curley's still mad about his hand. An' s'pose they lock him up an' strap him down and put him in a cage. That ain't no good, George

George I know, I know

Steinbeck An now they think Lennie stole Carlson's gun, none of 'em won't give him any chance

Steinbeck removes Slim's hat

- Ceri** George's going to shoot Lennie now, isn't he.
- Steinbeck** What would you do?
- Ceri** I'd try to escape with him. Hide like they did in Weed
- Steinbeck** You reckon you could hide with Lennie when the whole county's lookin' for you?
- Ceri** I'd try something — anything... Anything's better'n...
- Steinbeck** He's killed Curley's Wife - a young girl your age. A story like yours. Ain't never done nothing wrong 'cept be lonely. She's lyin' there in the straw goin' cold
- Ceri** He isn't mean. He was frightened. Why can't they see that? Why only George an' Slim.
- Steinbeck** George an' Slim understand'. The other guys jus' hate, jus' see him as a killer
- Ceri** It's their fault—
- Steinbeck** Ain't no-one's fault. Jus' how it is. Jus' somethin' that happened
- Ceri** You can't keep sayin' that! If you keep sayin' that then there's no point in any of us doing anything, feeling anything, caring about anything, cause we can't change nothing. Just wait for it to happen. We just got to sit there while people shit on us.
- Steinbeck** No I ain't tellin' you to jus' set there an take it. I'm tellin' ya to listen to ever'one's story an' ta understand', and to tell ever'one you can about your story, so they understand' too. Then in the end, maybe men'll see their targets ain't jus' spots on the map, but guys like them, guys lost in a great sea of marchin' boots, guys who if you watch' em long enough, and put on their boots will tell you their story.

Pause

Steinbeck holds out his script

- Steinbeck** So are you goin' to run away with Lennie? You can try rewritin' it if ya want
- Ceri** No, No...

Lennie throws the rabbit away, then kneels down at the pools edge and drinks. He sits down on the bank, embracing his knees as before

Steinbeck The heron has flown from the deep green pool. The little water snake has gone, and the ripples die away. Soon there'll be no sign the pool has been disturbed

Lennie I di'n't forget, you bet, God damn. Hide in the brush an' wait for George.

Lennie pulls his hat low over his eyes

Ceri moves round to retrieve the rabbit, picks it up and cuddles it as she did at the start

Lennie George gonna give me hell. George gonna wish he was alone an' not have me botherin' him. I can go right into the mountains an' find a cave — an' never have no ketchup — but I won't care. If George don't want me... I'll go away. I'll go away... I might jus' as well go away. George ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits now... Wha's you!

Lennie (as Rabbit) A big bastard rabbit come to get ya. Crazy bastard. You can't tend no rabbits. You ain't fit to lick the boots of no rabbit. You'd forget 'em and let 'em go hungry. That's what you'd do. An' then what would George think?

Lennie I would not forget

Rabbit The hell you wouldn't. If you think George gonna let you tend rabbits, you's even crazier'n usual. He ain't. he gonna beat hell outta you with a stick, that's what he's gonna do

Lennie He ain't neither.

Steinbeck George won't do nothing like that-

Lennie George won't do nothing like that. I've knew George since — I forget when — and he ain't never raised his han' to me with a stick. He's nice to me. He ain't gonna be mean

Rabbit Well he's sick of you. He's gonna beat hell outta you an' then go away an' leave you

Lennie *(frantically)* He won't. He won't do nothing like that

Steinbeck He's gonna leave you...

Rabbit *(softly)* He gonna leave you, ya crazy bastard. He gonna leave you all alone. He gonna leave ya, crazy bastard. He gonna leave ya

Lennie puts his hands over his ears

Lennie he ain't, I tell ya he ain't. Oh George — George — George!

George comes quietly up behind him. Over this final section there should be a background of occasional sounds from the lynch party getting gradually closer and more threatening

George What the hell you yellin about?

Lennie You ain't gonna leave me are ya, George? I know you ain't

George No

Lennie I knowed it. You ain't that kinda guy

George is silent

Lennie George?

George Yeah?

Lennie I done another bad thing

George It don't make no difference

George is silent again

Lennie George

George Yeah?

Lennie Ain't you gonna give me hell?

George Give ya hell?

Lennie Sure, like you always done before. Like 'If I di'n't have you I'd take my fifty bucks—

George Jesus Christ, Lennie! You can't remember nothing that happens, but you remember ever' word I say

Lennie Well ain't you gonna say it?

- George** *(woodenly)* If I was alone I could live so easy. I could get a job an' not have no mess...
- Lennie** Go on. An' when the enda the month comes—
- George** An' when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go to a cat house...
- Lennie** Ain't you gonna give me no more hell?
- George** No
- Lennie** Well I can go away, find a cave
- George** No, I want you to stay with me here
- Lennie** Tell me 'bout the other guys an' about us
- George** Guys like us got no fambly. They make a little stake, an' then they blow it in. They ain't got nobody in the worl' that gives a hoot in hell about 'em—
- Lennie** But not us. Tell about us, now
- George** But not us...
- Lennie** Because—
- George** Because I got you an'
- Lennie** I got you. We got each other, that's what gives a hoot in hell about us
- Pause*
- George** Take off your hat, Lennie. The air feels fine
- Lennie removes his hat and lays it beside him*
- Lennie** Tell how it's gonna be
- George** Look across the river, Lennie, an I'll tell you so's yu can almost see it. We gonna get a little place...
- George brings out the Luger from his pocket and snaps off the safety catch. Hand and gun lie on the ground behind Lennie*
- Lennie** Go on

George raises the gun with a shaking hand, then lays it down again. Steinbeck hovers behind George, superficially as a director about to break in and give advice, but actually mirroring the threatening approach of the lynch party

George We'll have a cow. An we'll have maybe a pig an' chickens... an' down on the flat we'll have a... little piece alfalfa—

Lennie For the rabbits

George For the rabbits

Lennie An' I get to tend the rabbits

George An' you get to tend the rabbits

Lennie giggles with happiness

Lennie An' live on the fatta the lan'

George Yes

Lennie turns his head round

George No, Lennie. Look down there across the river, like you can almost see the place

George looks down at the gun

Lennie Go on, George, when we gonna do it?

George Gonna do it soon

Lennie Me an' you

George You... an' me. Ever'body gonna be nice to you. Ain't gonna be no more trouble. Nobody gonna hurt nobody nor steal from 'em

Lennie I thought you was mad at me, George

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

George raises the gun, listening to the approaching voices

Lennie Le's do it now. Le's get that place now

George Sure, right now. I gotta. We gotta

George puts the gun to the back of Lennie's head. George senses Steinbeck's oppressive presence

George I'm doing it myself and no God damn writer's goin' to help me

Ceri moves round to Lennie, in a trance. As she speaks, Lennie stands slowly and faces her, holding both her hands.

Ceri You're there, aren't you. You're there in the little house, tending those rabbits, and they're coming bouncing up to the edge of the cage to say hello to you as you bring them their alfalfa, and you're putting your hand over the wire to pet them and stroke their soft fur. They love you, Lennie, 'cause you look after them so well. There isn't nothing they want. You're there, aren't you, and behind you the smoke's rising from the little stove in the house where George is frying up some bacon for breakfast. You're there with your rabbits. You'll always be there. Ain't nothin' gonna stop you now

Lennie and Ceri break apart, Ceri moves through the portal and Steinbeck, George and Lennie move back to their starting position, waiting for the next reader.

* * * * *

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