

CANDY, CURLEY (+ George, Lennie) ③

CANDY. (Comes slowly into room. By a rope, he leads an ancient drag-footed blind sheep dog.¹ Sits on box, presses hind quarter 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 noseys guys.

START

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.

Lennie ain't no fighter. But Lennie's strong and quick and Lennie don't know no rules. (*Walks to table, sits on box near it. Picks up scattered cards, pulls them together, shuffles them.*)

CANDY. Don't tell Curley I said none of this. He'd slough me! He jus' don't give a damn. Won't ever get canned because his ole man's the boss!

GEORGE. (*Cuts cards. Turns over and looks at each as he throws it down.*) This guy Curley sounds like a son-of-a-bitch to me! I don't like mean little guys!

CANDY. Seems to me like he's worse lately. He got married a couple of weeks ago. Wife lives over in the boss's house. Seems like Curley's worse'n ever since he got married. Like he's settin' on a ant-hill an' a big red ant come up an' nipped 'im on the turnip. Just feels so goddam miserable he'll strike at anything that moves. I'm kinda sorry for 'im.

GEORGE. Maybe he's showin' off for his wife.

CANDY. You seen that glove on his left hand?

GEORGE. Sure I seen it!

CANDY. Well, that glove's full of vaseline.

GEORGE. Vaseline? What the hell for?

CANDY. Curley says he's keepin' that hand soft for his wife.

GEORGE. That's a dirty kind of a thing to tell around.

CANDY. I ain't quite so sure. I seen such funny things a guy will do to try to be nice. I ain't sure. But you jus' wait till you see Curley's wife!

GEORGE. (*Begins to lay out a solitaire hand, speaks casually.*) Is she purty?

CANDY. Yeah. Purty, but —

GEORGE. (*Studying cards.*) But what?

CANDY. Well, she got the eye.

GEORGE. (*Still playing his solitaire hand.*) Yeah? Married two weeks an' got the eye? Maybe that's why Curley's pants is fulla ants.

CANDY. Yes, sir, I seen her give Slim the eye. Slim's a jerk-line skinner. Hell of a nice fella. Well, I seen her give Slim the eye. Curley never seen it. And I seen her give a skinner named Carlson the eye.

GEORGE. (*Pretending very mild interest.*) Looks like we was gonna have fun!

CANDY. (*Stands up.*) Know what I think? (*Waits for answer.*)

GEORGE *doesn't answer.*) Well, I think Curley's married himself a tart.

GEORGE. (*Casually.*) He ain't the first. Black queen on a red king. Yes, sir . . . there's plenty done that!

CANDY. (*Moves toward door, leading dog out with him.*) I got to be settin' out the wash basins for the guys. The teams'll be in before long. You guys gonna buck barley?

GEORGE. Yeah.

CANDY. You won't tell Curley nothing I said?

GEORGE. Hell, no!

CANDY. (*Just before he goes out, he turns back.*) Well, you look her over, Mister. You see if she ain't a tart! (*He exits.*)

END

GEORGE. (*Continuing to play out solitaire. Turns to LENNIE.*) Look, Lennie, this here ain't no set-up. You gonna have trouble with that Curley guy. I seen that kind before. You know what he's doin'. He's kinda feelin' you out. He figures he's got you scared. And he's gonna take a sock at you, first chance he gets.

LENNIE. (*Frightened.*) I don't want no trouble. Don't let him sock me, George!

GEORGE. I hate them kind of bastards. I seen plenty of 'em. Like the ole guy says: "Curley don't take no chances. He always figures to win." (*Thinks a moment.*) If he tangles with you, Lennie, we're goin' get the can. Don't make no mistake about that. He's the boss's kid. Look, you try to keep away from him, will you? Don't never speak to him. If he comes in here you move clear to the other side of the room. Will you remember that, Lennie?

LENNIE. (*Mourning.*) I don't want no trouble. I never done nothing to him!

GEORGE. Well, that won't do you no good, if Curley wants to set himself up for a fighter. Just don't have nothing to do with him. Will you remember?

LENNIE. Sure, George . . . I ain't gonna say a word. (*Sounds of teams coming in from the fields, jingling of harness, croak of heavy laden axles, men talking to and cussing horses. Crack of a whip and from a distance a voice calling.*)

SLIM'S VOICE. Stable buck! Stable buck! Hey! Stable buck!

GEORGE. Here come the guys. Just don't say nothing.

LENNIE. (*Timidly.*) You ain't mad, George?

GEORGE. I ain't mad at you. I'm mad at this here Curley bastard!