

CURLY (+ George, Lennie, Slim,
Carlson, Whit)

7

START CURLEY. (*Explaining.*) Well, I didn't mean nothing, Slim. I jus' ast you.

SLIM. Well, you been askin' too often. I'm gettin' goddamn sick of it. If you can't look after your own wife, what you expect me to do about it? You lay off of me.

CURLEY. I'm jus' tryin' to tell you I didn't mean nothing. I just thought you might of saw her.

CARLSON. Why don't you tell her to stay to hell home where she belongs? You let her hang around the bunkhouses and pretty soon you're goin' have somethin' on your hands.

CURLEY. (*Whirls on CARLSON.*) You keep out of this 'less you want ta step outside.

CARLSON. (*Laughing.*) Why, you goddamn punk. You tried to throw a scare into Slim and you couldn't make it stick. Slim throwed a scare into you. You're yellow as a frog's belly. I don't care if you're the best boxer in the country, you come for me and I'll kick your goddamn head off.

WHIT. (*Joining in the attack.*) Glove full of vaseline!

CURLEY. (*Glares at him, then suddenly sniffs the air, like a hound.*) By God, she's been in here. I can smell — By God, she's been in here. (*To GEORGE.*) You was here. The other guys was outside. Now, God damn you—you talk.

GEORGE. (*Looks worried. Seems to make up his mind to face an inevitable situation. Stands. Slowly takes off his coat, folds it almost daintily. Speaks in an unemotional monotone.*) Somebody got to beat the hell outa you. I guess I'm elected. (*LENNIE has been watching, fascinated. Gives his high, nervous chuckle.*)

CURLEY. (*Whirls on him.*) What the hell you laughin' at?

LENNIE. (*Blankly.*) Huh?

CURLEY. (*Exploding with rage.*) Come on; you big bastard. Get up on your feet. No big son-of-a-bitch is gonna laugh at me. I'll show you who's yellow. (*LENNIE looks helplessly at GEORGE. Gets up, tries to retreat upstage. CURLEY follows, slashing at him. Others mass themselves in front of the contestants: "That ain't no way, Curly—he ain't done nothing to you." . . . "Lay off him, will you, Curly. He ain't no fighter." . . . "Sock him back, big guy! Don't be afraid of him!" . . . "Give him a chance, Curly. Give him a chance."*)

LENNIE. (*Crying with terror.*) George, make him leave me alone, George.

GEORGE. Get him, Lennie. Get him! (*A sharp cry. The gathering of men opens and CURLEY is flopping about, his hand lost in LENNIE'S hand.*) Let go of him, Lennie. Let go! ("He's got his hand!" . . . "Look at that, will you?" . . . "Jesus, what a guy!") LENNIE watches in terror the flopping man he holds. LENNIE'S face is covered with blood. GEORGE slaps LENNIE in the face again and again. CURLEY is weak and sbrunken.) Let go his hand, Lennie. Slim, come help me, while this guy's got any hand left. (*Suddenly LENNIE lets go. Cowers away from George.*)

LENNIE. You told me to, George. I heard you tell me to. (*CURLEY has dropped to floor. SLIM and CARLSON bend over him and look at his hand. SLIM looks at LENNIE with horror.*)

SLIM. We got to get him to a doctor. It looks to me like every bone in his hand is busted.

LENNIE. (*Crying.*) I didn't wanta. I didn't wanta hurt 'im.

SLIM. Carlson, you get the candy wagon out. He'll have to go into Soledad and get his hand fixed up. (*Turns to the whimpering LENNIE.*) It ain't your fault. This punk had it comin' to him. But Jesus—he ain't hardly got no hand left.

GEORGE. (*Moving near.*) Slim, will we git canned now? Will Curley's ole man can us now?

SLIM. I don't know. (*Kneels beside CURLEY.*) You got your sense enough to listen? (*CURLEY nods.*) Well, then you listen. I think you got your hand caught in a machine. If you don't tell nobody what happened, we won't. But you jest tell and try to get this guy canned and we'll tell everybody. And then will you get the laugh! (*Helps CURLEY to his feet.*) Come on now. Carlson's goin' to take you in to a doctor. (*Starts for door, turns back to LENNIE.*)

Let's see your hands. (*LENNIE sticks out both hands.*) Christ Almighty!

GEORGE. Lennie was just scairt. He didn't know what to do. I tole you nobody ought never to fight him. No, I guess it was Candy I tole.

CANDY. (*Solemnly.*) That's just what you done. Right this morning when Curley first lit into him. You says he better not fool with Lennie if he knows what's good for him. (*All leave except GEORGE, LENNIE and CANDY.*)

GEORGE. (*To LENNIE, very gently.*) It ain't your fault. You don't need to be scairt no more. You done jus' what I tole you to.

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