

OF MICE AND MEN

John Steinbeck

Now the light was lifting as the sun went down, and the sun-streaks climbed up the wall and fell over the feeding-racks and over the heads of the horses.

Lennie said: 'Maybe if I took this pup out and threwed him away, George wouldn't never know. An' then could tend the rabbits without no trouble.'

Curley's wife said angrily: 'Don't you think of nothing but rabbits?'

'We gonna have a little place,' Lennie explained patiently. '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 all fulla alfalfa and then take it to the rabbits.'

She asked: 'What makes you so nuts about rabbits?'

Lennie had to think carefully before he could come to a conclusion. He moved cautiously close to her, until he was right against her. 'I like to pet nice 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.'

Curley's wife moved away from him a little. 'I think you're nuts,' she said.

No, I ain't,' Lennie explained earnestly. 'George says I ain't. I like to pet nice things with my fingers, sof' things.'

She was a little bit reassured. 'Well, who don't?' she said. 'Ever'body likes that. I like to feel silk an' velvet. Do you like to feel velvet?' Lennie chuckled with pleasure. 'You bet, by God,' he cried happily. 'An' I had some, too. A lady give me some, an' that lady was - my own Aunt Clara. She gave it right to me -'bout this big a piece. I wisht I had that velvet right now.' A frown came over his face. 'I lost it,' he said. 'I ain't seen it for a long time.'

Curley's wife laughed at him. 'You're nuts,' she said. 'But you're a kinda nice fella. Jus' like a big baby. But a person can see kinda what you mean. When I'm doin' my hair sometime I jus' set an' stroke it 'cause it's so soft.' To show how she did it, she ran her fingers over the top of her head. 'Some people get kinda coarse hair,' she said complacently. '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.' She took Lennie's hand and put it on her head. 'Feel right aroun' there an' see how soft it is.'

Lennie's big fingers fell to stroking her hair.

'Don't you muss it up,' she said.

Lennie said. 'Oh! That's nice,' and he stroked harder. 'Oh, that's nice.'

'Look out, now, you'll muss it.' And then she cried angrily: 'You stop it now, you'll mess it all up.' She jerked her head sideways, and Lennie's fingers dosed on her hair and hung on. 'Let go,' she cried. 'You let go.'

Lennie was in a panic. His face was contorted. She screamed then, and Lennie's other hand closed over her mouth and nose. 'Please don't,' he begged. 'Oh! Please don't do that. George'll be mad.'

She shrugged violently under his hands. Her feet battered on the hay and she writhed to be free; and from under Lennie's hand came a muffled screaming. Lennie began to cry with

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fright. 'Oh please don't do none of that,' he begged. 'George gonna say I done a bad thing. He aint gonna let me tend no rabbits.' He moved his hand a little and her hoarse cry came out. Then Lennie grew angry. 'Now don't,' he said. 'I don't want you to yell. You gonna get me in trouble jus' like George says you will. Now don't you do that.' And she continued to struggle, and her eyes were wild with terror, He shook her then, and her eyes were wild with terror. He shook her then, and he was angry with her. 'Don't you go yellin',' he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck.