Chapter 1

John Steinbeck introduces us first of all to a place: a clearing on a wooded riverbank where a path ends up at a deep, green pool (p. 7). In the evening of a hot day, two men appear in the clearing (p. 8). When Lennie drinks thirstily from the pool, George warns him sharply that the water may not be fresh. They sit by the pool (p. 9).

Complaining about Lennie’s bad memory, George reminds him that an employment agency has sent them into the country to work (p. 10). Lennie has been playing with a dead mouse and George takes this away from him. George also tells him not to open his mouth in front of the boss at the ranch where they are to work (p. 11).

Lennie is sent to get wood for a fire (p. 12) but comes back holding only one small stick. Realizing that Lennie has gone in search of the mouse, George makes him give it up, and throws it far away (p. 13). George reminds Lennie how, when he had mice as pets, he used to kill them by accident (p. 14).

After Lennie has fetched more wood, George lights a fire and starts to heat some cans of beans. Lennie says that he likes beans with ketchup and George loses his temper (p. 15). He accuses Lennie of being a burden on him and always getting him into trouble, like when people thought Lennie had attacked a girl (p. 16). Lennie offers to go away, alone, to the hills; but George tells him that he wants him to stay.

Lennie then asks George to tell him “about the rabbits” (p. 17). Telling what is clearly a familiar story, George describes to Lennie how one day, unlike other ranch hands, the two of them will have a little place of their own (p. 18). While they have supper, George tells Lennie to come back to the clearing if he gets into trouble again (p. 19). They lie down to sleep (p. 20).

Chapter 2

It is ten in the morning (p. 20), and an old man is showing George and Lennie which bunks to take at the ranch’s sleeping quarters. George complains that the bunk-house isn’t clean but the old man denies it (p. 21). He also tells them that the boss is angry because they didn’t turn up for work that morning (p. 22).

When the boss comes into the bunk-house he complains to George and Lennie about their lateness. George offers an excuse for this (p. 23). The boss becomes suspicious of the fact that George is doing most of talking (p. 24); and, after warning George not to be “a wise guy”, the boss leaves (p. 25). While George is telling Lennie off for opening his mouth in front of the boss (p. 25), he discovers the old man outside the door. The old man denies the charge of eavesdropping.

A young man, Curley, comes into the room looking for the boss, his father (p. 26). Catching sight of Lennie, he becomes aggressive and tries to make him talk (p. 27). After Curley leaves, the old man tells George that Curley is an experienced boxer (p. 27); but George replies that Lennie could make short work of him (p. 28). According to the old man, Curley’s recent marriage has made him even more aggressive. His wife, apparently, still has an eye for other men (p. 29). When the old man has gone, George tells Lennie to try to avoid Curley (p. 30); but, if he gets into any kind of trouble, to go back to the clearing by the river (p. 31).

Curley’s wife appears in the bunk-house, saying that she’s looking for Curley. Lennie thinks that she’s pretty but George doesn’t like the way she talks to them (p. 32). After she has gone, George gives Lennie a fierce warning to stay away from her.

Slim, the leader of one of the work teams, comes into the bunk-house and speaks in a friendly way to George and Lennie (p. 34). When another man, Carlson, joins them, it comes out in conversation that Slim’s bitch has just had puppies (p. 35). Curley suggests that the old man, Candy, should shoot his dog and take one of Slim’s puppies. When Carlson and Slim leave the room, Lennie and George discuss the possibility of Lennie’s getting one of the
Chapter 3

It is evening in the bunk-house and George and Slim sit down to talk (p. 37). George thanks Slim for giving a puppy to Lennie; he is then drawn into talking about how he and Lennie have ended up travelling together (p. 38). He and Lennie, he says, have got used to each other (p. 39) - although Lennie does often get into trouble, like on the recent occasion when a girl mistakenly accused him of attacking her (p. 40). Lennie comes in and goes straight to his bunk, hiding the puppy that he is carrying. Undeceived, George sends him away to take the puppy back to its mother (p. 41).

When Candy and Carlson come in from playing horseshoes, Carlson starts complaining about the smell from Candy's old dog (p. 42). Carlson claims that it would be kinder to the dog to shoot it now rather than let it linger on. But Candy is reluctant to take this decision. Slim agrees with Carlson (p. 43).

The discussion is interrupted by the entrance of another ranch hand, Whit, who is anxious to show Slim a magazine (p. 44). Refusing to be distracted, Carlson presses Candy to agree to the shooting of the dog; he produces his Luger pistol in readiness. When Slim says nothing, Candy agrees, miserably (p. 45).

After Carlson has taken the dog, several attempts to engage Candy in conversation fail; George and Whit sit down together at the card table (p. 46). Eventually, the sound of a shot is heard (p. 47).

Crooks, the black ranch hand in charge of the stable, appears, and asks Slim to go with him to the barn. While playing cards, Whit and George talk about Curley's wife (p. 49). They agree that her presence seems likely to cause trouble on the ranch. Whit then asks George to join himself and the others the following night on a visit to the local brothel (p. 49). A few minutes after Carlson and Lennie return to the bunk-house, Curley bursts in, asking if anyone has seen his wife or Slim (p. 50). When he hears that Slim is in the barn, he dashes out, closely followed by Whit and Carlson (p. 51).

Lennie tells George that Slim has told him not to pet the pups so much; he also says that Curley's wife hasn't been in the barn. George expresses his worry about the set-up on the ranch (p. 52) and goes on to describe in detail the place which he and Lennie hope to get someday (p. 53). Lennie asks George to tell him exactly how he, Lennie, will care for the rabbits they will keep (p. 54). When Candy joins in the conversation, George is suspicious at first but listens quietly to Candy's proposal that he should contribute his savings and join in the scheme (p. 55). After doing some calculations, George realizes that their dream may now be within their grasp (p. 56). Greatly excited, the three decide to leave the ranch after a month; but George cautions them against telling anyone of their plans. Candy adds sadly that he should have shot his dog himself (p. 57).

Slim returns to the bunk-house, accompanied by Curley, Carlson and Whit. When Slim warns Curley to leave him alone, Curley looks around for someone to vent his rage on. He picks on Lennie (p. 58). Lennie is reluctant to fight back but, urged on by George, he seizes Curley's fist and crushes it; the fight is finished (p. 59). Before Curley is taken away to a doctor, Slim makes him promise not to tell anymore that it was Lennie who hurt his hand (p. 60). George reassures Lennie that he is not in trouble this time (p. 61).

Chapter 4

Crooks, the "stable buck", has his living and sleeping quarters in the harness room (p. 61). Lennie comes to this room on a Saturday night and, unsuccessfully at first, tries to make friends with Crooks (p. 62). After Lennie has explained that the others have gone into town and that he, Lennie, has been looking at the pups in the stable, Crooks softens a little and tells Lennie to sit down (p. 63).

In conversation, Lennie lets slip the secret of the planned-for land (p. 64); Crooks reacts
by mocking Lennie’s friendship with George (p. 65). When Crooks mentions the possibility of George’s not coming back, Lennie advances threateningly on him; but is slightly placated by Crooks’s explanation that loneliness lies behind his mockery (p. 66). Crooks reminisces affectionately about his childhood on his father’s ranch, but casts scorn on Lennie and George’s dream of land of their own (p. 67).

Candy joins the two men in Crooks’s room (p. 68) and the talk turns again to the dream of land. Fiercely, Candy defends their plans against Crooks’s mockery (p. 69). Impressed despite himself, Crooks offers to come and help.

On the appearance of Curley’s wife, the men fall silent and sullen - apart from Lennie who is fascinated (p. 70). When Curley’s wife tries to find out what happened to Curley’s hand, Candy tells that he got it caught in a machine; a lie which she rejects angrily (p. 71). Stung by the insults which she has directed at them, Candy tells her that they have land of their own. Unconvinced, she notices the bruises on Lennie’s face and works out that it was he who hurt Curley (p. 72).

Candy tells her to leave Lennie alone; and Crooks demands that she leave his room. Curley’s wife turns viciously on Crooks, threatening him with terrible punishment (p. 73). Telling her that he has heard the men coming back, Candy urges her to go away; but, after she has gone, Crooks has lost all heart for the project (p. 74). George appears and scolds Lennie and Candy for talking about their plans (p. 75).

**Chapter 5**

It is Sunday afternoon and all the ranch hands except Lennie are playing horseshoes outside. Lennie is sitting in the barn looking sorrowfully at the puppy, which he has just killed by accident (p. 76). Worried that George will punish him, he debates what to do until, suddenly, Curley’s wife appears beside him and tries to draw him into conversation (p. 77).

Although Lennie attempts to avoid talking to her, Curley’s wife wins him over by sympathizing about the puppy’s death (p. 78). Going on to talk about her earlier life, she expresses resentment over lost hopes and opportunities (p. 79). The conversation turns to Lennie’s dream farm and rabbits; Lennie explains that he likes rabbits because they are soft to touch (p. 80). Curley’s wife then invites him to feel her hair but, when his hand is heavy on her head, she gets angry and screams (p. 81). In a panic, Lennie tries to silence her but, when she continues to scream, he shakes her angrily. This breaks her neck (p. 82).

Frightened at what he has done, Lennie remembers what George said about going back to the clearing and he leaves the barn (p. 82). Curley’s wife lies undisturbed, peaceful in death, until Candy comes into the barn; in discovering the dead body, he leaves again, quickly (p. 83).

Candy returns to the barn with George, who immediately realizes how Curley’s wife has met her death; the two men discuss what is to be done (p. 84). George decides that the other men must be told what has happened; but he asks Candy to give a few minutes’ start before the news is broken (p. 85). After expressing his rage and disappointment over his lost dreams, Candy fetches the other men. Curley immediately identifies Lennie as the killer and goes off to get his shotgun (p. 86). He returns to the barn with Carlson, who says that his Luger has been stolen; assuming that Lennie has taken it, Curley expresses his intention of shooting Lennie on sight (p. 87). George is forced to join the hunting party; while Candy is told to stay with the dead woman (p. 88).

**Chapter 6**

It is late afternoon in the clearing by the river and Lennie comes out of the brushwood to drink from the pool (p. 88). Sitting by the river, he wonders to himself how George will treat him now; in his imagination his Aunt Clara scolds him for being a burden on George (p. 89). An imaginary giant rabbit then appears to him (p. 90) and threatens that this time George will leave him.

When George himself comes to the pool, he calms Lennie down and they sit silently while the shouts of the searching men come from a distance (p. 91). Puzzled
that George doesn't seem angry with him, Lennie encourages him to tell the familiar stories about the two of them, together and alone (p. 92). George asks Lennie to turn his head and look across the river while he, George, tells him how things will be; meanwhile, unseen, George takes Carlson's Luger out of his pocket (p. 93).

The distant voices come nearer and, after reassuring Lennie that he isn't angry with him, George shoots him in the back of the head (p. 94). The other men from the ranch burst into the clearing; George pretends that he has taken Carlson's gun away from Lennie in a struggle. Understanding something of what George is going through, Slim leads him gently away (p. 95).