

Of Mice and Men is a novelette (it's called that because it is so short that it is just barely a novel rather than a short story.) It was written by John Steinbeck and was first published in 1937. It was made into a play by the author in the same year, the only play he ever published.

Here's the story:

George Milton and Lennie Small are migrant farm workers who have come to work on a Salinas Valley ranch in central California. They have a job "bucking Barley," (loading bags of barley oats on to wagons.)

The story begins in a grove of trees on a river bank where they rest after running from the last town they were in to avoid a lynch mob-- Lennie has this way of getting into trouble because he's not real smart. He had been petting some girl's dress, and she took it wrong. He was so scared that he froze while holding her dress.

At the close of the first chapter, George tells Lennie that if anything goes wrong at the new place, he is to come back to this spot and hide. He tells him this right after George makes him throw away a mouse Lennie killed by petting.

Lennie has tremendous strength but a feeble mind, and he has a compulsive 'need' to touch soft things-- remember the dress and the mouse? George makes up for Lennie's lack of smarts by leading him around and using their mutual dream of a small farm to buck-up his own loneliness. The farm of their dreams would give them in-

Of Mice and Men -- *the story*

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dependance and "a place" of their own-- for these wanders, this would be a kind of promised land.

Curley, the son of their boss, is a little puffed-up bully whose lack of self-confidence is agravated by a new bride who is too pretty and too friendly with the help. It's this jealousy and his size which causes him to pick a fight with Lennie. Lennie doesn't fight back but does grab Curley's hand-- which ends up crushed, showing just how strong Lennie is.

There is this old dog which belongs to one of the ranch hands. Another ranch hand 'puts it out of it's misery' because it's useless and can't cope

with the world.

Lennie is given a puppy, and so is Curley's wife, which is what brings them together in the barn while everyone else is playing horseshoes on a warm Sunday afternoon. Lennie's just accidently killed his puppy because it nipped him and hidden its body. He admires her hair, which she prompts him to stroke. But he's too rough, she trys to scream, frightening him. He breaks her neck trying to shhh her; he runs away.

George, with a friend who serves as a device to avoid narration, discovers her body half-hidden under the hay. George hurriedly follows, just ahead of the mob led by Curley. Finding Lennie beside the river, George calms his fears with the frequently repeated description of the farm of their dreams. While Lennie looks off into distance, "I can almost see it George," George puts a gun to the back of Lennie's head and puts him out of his misery.

George survives, alone, with a shattered dream and no one to share it. Not exactly a 'happily ever after' story-- huh? Thus comes to ruin "the best laid plans of mice and men"-- *Robert Burns*