***Of Mice and Men –* Ch. 2 Excerpt for APMCs**

“You said I was your cousin, George.”

“Well, that was a lie. An’ I’m damn glad it was. If I was a relative of yours I’d shoot myself.” He stopped suddenly, stepped to the open front door and peered out. “Say, what the hell you doin’ listenin’?”

The old man came slowly into the room. He had his broom in his hand. And at his heels there walked a dragfooted sheepdog, gray of muzzle, and with pale, blind old eyes. The dog struggled lamely to the side of the room and lay down, grunting softly to himself and licking his grizzled, moth-eaten coat. The swamper watched him until he was settled. “I wasn’t listenin’. I was jus’ standin’ in the shade a minute scratchin’ my dog. I jus’ now finished swampin’ out the wash house.”

“You was pokin’ your big ears into our business,” George said. “I don’t like nobody to get nosey.”

The old man looked uneasily from George to Lennie, and then back. “I jus’ come there,” he said. “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.”

“Damn right he don’t,” said George, slightly mollified, “not if he wants to stay workin’ long.” But he was reassured by the swamper’s defense. “Come on in and set down a minute,” he said. “That’s a hell of an old dog.”

“Yeah. I had ‘im ever since he was a pup. God, he was a good sheepdog when he was younger.” He stood his broom against the wall and he rubbed his white bristled cheek with his knuckles. “How’d you like the boss?” he asked.

“Pretty good. Seemed awright.”

“He’s a nice fella,” the swamper agreed. “You got to take him right.”

At that moment a young man came into the bunk house; a thin young man with a brown face, with brown eyes and a head of tightly curled hair. He wore a work glove on his left hand, and, like the boss, he wore high-heeled boots. “Seen my old man?” he asked.

The swamper said, “He was here jus’ a minute ago, Curley. Went over to the cook house, I think.”

“I’ll try to catch him,” said Curley. His eyes passed over the new men and he stopped. He glanced coldly at George and then at Lennie. His arms gradually bent at the elbows and his hands closed into fists. He stiffened and went into a slight crouch. His glance was at once calculating and pugnacious. Lennie squirmed under the look and shifted his feet nervously. Curley stepped gingerly close to him. “You the new guys the old man was waitin’ for?”

“We just come in,” said George.

“Let the big guy talk.”

Lennie twisted with embarrassment.

George said, “S’pose he don’t want to talk?”

Curley lashed his body around. “By Christ, he’s gotta talk when he’s spoke to. What the hell are you gettin’ into it for?”

“We travel together,” said George coldly.

“Oh, so it’s that way.”

George was tense, and motionless. “Yeah, it’s that way.”

Lennie was looking helplessly to George for instruction.

“An’ you won’t let the big guy talk, is that it?”

“He can talk if he wants to tell you anything.” He nodded slightly to Lennie.

“We jus’ come in,” said Lennie softly.

Curley stared levelly at him. “Well, nex’ time you answer when you’re spoke to.” He turned toward the door and walked out, and his elbows were still bent out a little.

George watched him go, and then he turned back to the swamper. “Say, what the hell’s he got on his shoulder? Lennie didn’t do nothing to him.”

The old man looked cautiously at the door to make sure no one was listening. “That’s the boss’s son,” he said quietly. “Curley’s pretty handy. He done quite a bit in the ring. He’s a lightweight, and he’s handy.”

“Well, let him be handy,” said George. “He don’t have to take after Lennie. Lennie didn’t do nothing to him. What’s he got against Lennie?”

The swamper considered . . . . “Well . . . . tell you what. Curley’s like alot of little guys. He hates big guys. He’s alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he’s mad at ‘em because he ain’t a big guy. You seen little guys like that, ain’t you? Always scrappy?”

“Sure,” said George. “I seen plenty tough little guys. But this Curley better not make no mistakes about Lennie. Lennie ain’t handy, but this Curley punk is gonna get hurt if he messes around with Lennie.”

“Well, Curley’s pretty handy,” the swamper said skeptically. “Never did seem right to me. S’pose Curley jumps a big guy an’ licks him. Ever’body says what a game guy Curley is. And s’pose he does the same thing and gets licked. Then ever’body says the big guy oughtta pick somebody his own size, and maybe they gang up on the big guy. Never did seem right to me. Seems like Curley ain’t givin’ nobody a chance.”

George was watching the door. He said ominously, “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.” He walked to the square table and sat down on one of the boxes. He gathered some of the cards together and shuffled them.

The old man sat down on another box. “Don’t tell Curley I said none of this. He’d slough me. He just don’t give a damn. Won’t ever get canned ‘cause his old man’s the boss.”

George cut the cards and began turning them over, looking at each one and throwing it down on a pile. He said, “This guy Curley sounds like a son-of-abitch to me. I don’t like mean little guys.”

“Seems to me like he’s worse lately,” said the swamper. “He got married a couple of weeks ago. Wife lives over in the boss’s house. Seems like Curley is cockier’n ever since he got married.”

George grunted, “Maybe he’s showin’ off for his wife.”