



John Steinbeck



John Steinbeck (1902-1968) grew up in California’s Salinas Valley, an agricultural region 25 miles from the Pacific Coast. After briefly attending Stanford University, Steinbeck worked several jobs—including as a laborer, a reporter, and caretaker of a Lake Tahoe ranch—before finding success as an author. In the 1930s, Steinbeck used the Salinas Valley as the setting for some of his most-acclaimed fiction, including *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). These novels explored the harsh realities of life for common farmers and their families struggling to survive during the Great Depression.

Of Mice and Men follows migrant laborers George and Lennie as they travel the Salinas Valley looking for work. Throughout the novel, George, who serves as both friend and protector for the simple-minded Lennie, refers to his fantasy of owning a farm where he and Lennie will live.

Excerpts from *Of Mice and Men* (1937)

Passage 1

Lennie said, “Tell about that place, George.”

“I jus’ told you, jus’ las’ night.”

“Go on—tell again, George.”

“Well, it’s ten acres,” said George. “Got a little win’mill. Got a little shack on it, an’ a chicken run. Got a kitchen, orchard, cherries, apples, peaches, ‘cots, nuts, got a few berries. They’s a place for alfalfa and plenty of water to flood it...”

...His voice was growing warmer. “An’ we could have a few pigs. I could build a smoke house like the one gran’pa had, an’ when we kill a pig we can smoke the bacon and the hams, and make sausage an’ all like that. An’ when the salmon run up the river we could catch a hundred of ‘em an’ salt ‘em down or smoke ‘em. We could have them for breakfast. They ain’t nothing so nice as smoked salmon. When the fruit come in we could can it—and tomatoes, they’re easy to can. Ever’ Sunday we’d kill a chicken or a rabbit. Maybe we’d have a cow or a goat, and the cream is so God damn thick you got to cut it with a knife and take it out with a spoon.”

Lennie watched him with wide eyes, and old Candy watched him too. Lennie said softly, “We could live offa the fatta the lan’.”

Passage 2

(Dialog is between Lennie and Crooks, a stable hand.)

“George says we’re gonna have alfalfa for the rabbits.”

“What rabbits?”

“We’re gonna have rabbits an’ a berry patch.”

“You’re nuts.”

“We are too. You ast George.”

“You’re nuts.” Crooks was scornful. “I seen hundreds of men come by on the road an’ on the ranches, with their bindles on their back an’ that same damn thing in their heads. Hundreds of them. They come, an’ they quit an’ go on; an every damn one of ‘em’s got a little piece of land in his head. An’ never a God damn one of ‘em ever gets it. Just like heaven. Ever’body wants a little piece of lan’. I read plenty of books out here. Nobody never gets to heaven, and nobody gets no land. It’s just in their head. They’re all the time talkin’ about it, but it’s jus’ in their head.”

(Of Mice and Men—New York: Penguin Books, 1993 reprint edition; Passage 1: Pp. 56-57; Passage 2: Pp. 73-74)