

Telephone rings

John Steinbeck ✕ :

Hello, John Steinbeck here. Yes, hello Elizabeth the book is coming on fine. Virtually finished it. I'll send the manuscript up as soon as it's ready for you publishers! O.K. Carol sends her love. Money-wise we've enough money to live and write for three years if we are careful, and I can get a hell of a lot of words down in three years! Bye then.

(DOG NOISES AND CAROLS VOICE SAYING YOU LET GO OF THAT? HOW DARE YOU TOUCH THAT. YOU ARE GOING OUT RIGHT THIS INSTANCE? D'YOU HERE ME!)

CAROL what's going on out there? I've been thinking about hte book. It only needs a few touches to it and I think it's more or less done. We've done a pretty good job on it. We make a good team. It kind of wrote itself. I ~~thx~~ was just thinking about the first scene with Lennie and George in their safe place by the river. Do you think its clear that George is stopping there for the night so 's they get out of the next morning's work?

CAROL

John.

JS.

I think the symbolism of the stream is quite clear now. Water is so important to everybody now with the drought and dust bowls, that they must see that George and Lennie's safe place is a kind of Garden of Eden. It's a moment of calm and refuge before stepping out into the world, into the bunkhouse.

C.

John. Where did you keave the manuscript last night?

JS

In the kitchen I think. Why what's up? You've done a marvellous job typing it up Carol.

C

I've told you not to leave it lying around. I'm afraid Toby's been at it. (BRINGS OUT TATTERED M/S FROM HER SIDE)

JS

~~That's God's dog.~~

Jesus Christ. What's he done to it?. It's like confetti! T I don't believe it. 2 months work gone down the jaws of a setter pup. Why the hell did you leave him in the kitchen for for? You know he's been chewin' things up. 2 months work The thing almost finished!!!. I'm gonna kill that blasted animal. Shoot it right in the back of the neck where it won't feel a thing.

C.

You'll do no such thing

JS.

I was only kidding. Alright alrifht. I just feel so mad at him. 2 months of work for nothing. I'm going to shove this right under his nose and spank him with the fly-swatter. Maybe we can make out some of this. I guess it is too shredded up.

C

JS

Here am I trying to write a book about man's dreams, and pleasures , hopes and aspirations, and one of the characters of the book, ~~xx dogx~~ A pup, goes and chews it up. Chews up all my dreams and aspirations. Perhaps I'll appoint him my litereary agent and critic.

C.

Poor Toby, I'm sure he wasn't intending to make any comment on the play. I think his ~~teethx~~ gums just got kinda ticklish and that lovely gooey papre was just sitting there waiting for him.

JS No Carol. It's definitely fate. I'm not sure the manuscript is good at all. I think Toby's right.

C. You mean you're just gonna leave it? A You can't. All it's proven is that next time you make a duplicate drought. You 're just gonna have to start all over again¹. Maybe it'll come out better this time. You've got plenty of time to do it in. Next week I'm going up to Los Gatos and start work building our house. I'll take Toby with me, which means you'll have no problems and no excuses not to get down to writing it. After all you said yourself it kind of wrote itself.

JS Maybe I was wrong to try and get all aspects of the world and life into the ranch and a bunkhouse maybe it can't be done. The world's a big place. I don't know if it'll squeeze itself into a bunkhouse.

C. Look around you John. You can see the Carlson's and Candy's and George's and Slim's of this world lining up outside Murray and Ready's everyday. You can see the travellers from Oklahoma packing up and leaving ever ~~one~~ thing they've known of as home. You can see the loneliness of Crook's and Curly's wife on every ~~to~~ street corner, boring into you, desperate ~~that they're~~ ^{for} some recognition of their plight. "Guy's like us that live on ranches..."

JS "...are the loneliest guys in the world"

C. You see you know what it's like. You've met and worked with the bindle bums yourself, on your Aunt's ranch, and times when you had to make a buck for yourself to keep going at university. If you're gonna ~~write~~ write about the microcosm, a kind of view of life under the microscope, then who better to base it on than the ranch hands, the kind of life you know so well.

JS I guess you're right. Besides this is the one book I can see really see on the stage..... a play with the physical technique of a novel I wonder if that's such a new idea as I think it is? It's teaching me to write for the theatre, and it sets the whole tone of the piece far more ~~effectively~~ powerfully.

C. Hey! That's the idea. I meant to show you this earlier - it's a copy of a Robert Burns poem I was reading. I thought it had a lot about the manuscript in it, ~~and it's some how connected with Toby~~ but it kinda says something about Toby too!

JS (reads out loud) But Mousie thou art thy lane (alone)
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid ~~plans~~ schemes o' mice and men,
Gang aft a-gley (often go astray)
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

Of Mice and Men? of Mice and Men..... Carol how about that for the title instead of "Something that happened" The best laid pland of Mive and Men.....

C. What sort of mood are you in today. An HB or ~~1/2~~ 2H,
JS No 2B, I think. 2B or not ¹/₂ 2B that is the question. (laughs)

C. I'll fix you a cup of coffee. You have to start ~~writing~~ (exits)
JS. (quietly) and I'm scared to death as usual.that miserable sick feeling of inadequacy.

Perhaps if I think of one of the characters..... George and Lennie get stuck into the ranch, meet the Boss, and Candy, Curly and Curly's wife. Curly's wife. Let me think about her.

J.S.

rolled

She has full, rouged lips and wide-spaced eyes, heavily made-up. Her fingernails are red. Her hair hangs in little clusters, like sausages. She wears a cotton house dress and red mules on the insteps of which are little bouquets of red ostrich feathers. (The sort Carol wouldn't be seen dead in!) Outwardly she appears a floozy. But she isn't. Oh no, she's a nice kind girl. She grows up in an atmosphere of fighting and suspicion. Quite early she learned that she must never trust anyone, though a natural trustfulness breaks through constantly, and every time it does, she gets hurt. She comes from a background of threats from parents and from kids around. She learns to put on a hard front, though inwardly she's quaking but she's learnt not to let it show - she puts on a hard front. If only someone would treat her like a normal person, break down all the thousand little defences she has built up, you would find her a nice person, an honest person, and you would end up by loving her ~~xxxxxxx~~

ACT 1 SCENE 2 PLAYED AS PER BOOK I'm looking for Curly.....Jesus what a tramp. So that's what Curly picks for a wife

Curley's wife(rushes back in) Who you callin' a tramp? I come from a nice home. I was brung up by nice people. Nobody never got to me before I was married. I was straight. I tell you I was good. I was.

George: Don't talk to me about it, I ain't the guy who wrote this. I'm just a character written into some dumb book by some dumb son of a bitch. He puts the words into my mouth. I ain't responsible.

CW. Then who is? (George indicates Lennie/Steinbeck) That dum-dum?

JS: I'm John Steinbeck. What's troubling you?

C.W. Why have you written me like this when you was saying such nice things about me before? I'm a nice kind girl, you said. Well how do you expect them to find that out, if you introduce me leaning against the wall like that? And before that even you get Candy saying I'm a tramp! Why no-one will see the good bits about me.

JS I don't want them to see the good bits, as you put it, yet. I want people to read and see you as the floozy the men see. Of course they're wrong, blinkered to see you just as that. But George and Lennie don't know any better, nor does Candy or any of the men. That's how they see most women - 'cept their mothers maybe, or in Lennie's case, an aunt. And let's face it, you're hardly a mother figure!

CW I could be if I wanted -- if you wanted. (Sidles up to John in her sexy way) That way at least I could get to talk to someone in this goddam play or book or whatever it is.

JS Well I certainly seem to have written into you the prick - trash side of you!

CW. Mr. Steinbeck! I won't have you say such things I'm a nice girl, I come from a nice home.....

JS: You see I know it already. I wrote your words! And you don't come from a nice home, you were brought up in a tough mean street with no education and nothing to sell except your virginal body. Oh yes virginal, I said. You were brought up morally strict, but ~~as most women~~, the only thing you know how to talk through is your sex. It's the only way you know how to be noticed and appreciated.

CW It's the only way you know how to make me noticed! Why can't you write about that time in Salinas when the travelling show

that actor

CW contd.

come through and I nearly went with ~~him~~? He was such a nice boy and said I had real good bone structure, and a voice just right for an actress. But no, you had to make ~~myxxxx~~ Ma stop stop me from going. This book seems to be all about ~~h^{er}~~ them bindle bums dreams, but no-one hears about mine, not properly. Why can't it be about my dream, my dream of making it into the movies. A second Ginger Rodgers, the victim for King Kong, hell ~~justx~~ why not a first me!? I ~~can't~~ You haven't even given me a name! Can you imagine.. ~~JamesxGagnexx~~ The Long Night, starring James Cagney and Curley's wife!!? Give me a name

JS
CW

Alright. May. Let's think, what month is it? May? Typical - named after a month. O.K. Now the scene is t this, my home town Salinas, the Riverside Dance Palace. Enter Mr.

JS
CW

Goldstein?
He's the answer to all my dreams, he's gonna make me a star.

(Enter Mr. Goldstein, a real smarmy bastard who one wouldn't trust with a barge pole.)

GOLDstein: Excuse me I couldn't help noticing what wonderful eyes you have. Have you ever been for a screen/test? I can't imagine that no-one's noticed you before

CW
Goldstein:
CW

Why MR - er-
Goldstein

Whatever are you talking about? Course I've never been fer n no screen test. Mind you I was told by some travelling player a while back that I had good bone structure and should go into acting.

Goldstein: So I'm not the only one who notices a good bit of ar-. .tistic talent.

CW

Do you have something to do with movies Mr, Goldstein?

Goldstein: Do I have.... my sweet young lady, I come straight from the inner circles of Hollywood.

CW

You do! Why it must be so ~~w~~xciting. Do you know Clark Gable?

Goldstein: Sure I do, why he gave me this cigar only last week. Here you keep it.

CW

o I couldn't. Course I know it's awful hard work filming, just think of all the practisin' that must go into something like Gold-diggers with all the girls dancing in perfect time an all. Course I haven't had dance classes cept when I dance here. But I can sing nicely and speqk real fine when I want to. Soon as

Goldstein: Course you can honey. You're a natural. ~~When~~ I get back to Hollywood I'll mail yer to come down for a screen test. You'l have no trouble. ~~xxxxxxx~~ No trouble at all. Now how about a little ...

CW

Dancin'. Why yes. Then you'l^{la} be able to see how good I coul ~~xxxxxxx~~ can really be...

£

(To Steinbeck) That's not how it was supposed to be. Giv ve me some music, goddam you.

(Music comes up and the two dance togetjer in a Fred Astaire/ Ginger Rodgers manner. At the climax of this dream sequence Steinbeck swaps the director for the Curly Dummy, which CW does not realise till the dance is over)

CW

Aaaaagh! So you kill my dream off and I have to end up with this dummy ^{Cy}! He can't dance, he can't sing, never takes me out nomore, just sticks me on ~~xxxxxxx~~ my own in a ranch and only talks about fighting all the time. One- two. One -two Well I8m going to "One-two" you John Steinbeck

(Steinbeck laughs)

Curley: Come on you big ~~son-of-a-bitch~~ bastard. Get up on your feet. No big son-of-a-bitch is gonna laugh at me. I'll show ya who's yella.

(Enter George)

~~George~~Lennie : George make ~~sum~~ ~~let~~ let me alone george

George: Get him Lennie. Don't let him do it

(Scene continues as in book, but missing out other characters lines)

CW That's what I like to see. Curly gettin his just desserts. He had it comin' to him.

Steinbeck: Curly had his dream same as everyone else. Only his ~~wasn't~~ ^{isn't} the movies, or a piece of land- he already had that!- it was in his fighting. Being the top fighter, the real tough guy, that no-one can beat, no matter what size they are.

George: Well his dream nearly gets in the way of our dream. We nearly get canned for this.

CW At least people get the hang of your dream, your piece o' land. Mine they only glimpse right at the end¹/₂.

JS: Listen the two of you. Everyone has the right to dreams. They make it all worthwhile, keep you going. I chose the piece of land because so many people these days are after it. They've been moved out of their homes by the drought, their crops turned to dust, they are travellin' all the time, just hoping against ^{hope} to find their own place again, somewhere to call home, to scratch their own livin'. Where you won't get turfed out soon as you're old or crippled and you won't feel so useless you gotta be shot.

Georgez Sometimes I get to talkin' about it so much to Lennie I almost believe it will happen. It kinda helps thinkin' about it. It's ten acres, Got a little win'mill, Got a little shack on it an' a chicken run

(Continues as in book p.42/3 in play)

CW SINGS WANDERIN'

All look at her.

CW Don't think I'm getting sentimental. I just like singin' that s all! Anyway, we still haven't sorted out why I'm so hard done by in this thing and how I'm blamed for mussing up their precious little dream.

JS: No-one blames you. They shouldn't anyhow. It ain't your fault. If a guy steps on a round pebble an' falls down an' breaks his neck, it ain't the pebble's fault, but the guy wouldn't of did it if the pebble wasn't there.

CW What you talkin' bout pebbles? No-one cares about pebbles, they're dead, lifeless. As far as they're (pointing at audience) concerned I'm dead already. You goddam son of a bitch, you killed me off even before Lennie has!

JS

George: What did you have to finish off Lennie for anyway. Without him the dream' vanished, dead and gone. It dies with Lennie. You're just leavin' me to a life of wanderin', chucking barley and cat-houses. Goddam it I need him!

JS: If he didn't die ^{now} ~~then~~, he woulda have to later, either that or be shut in the booby hatch. Is that ^{now} ~~what~~ you would want him to end up, in an asylum.

George: It doesn't have to be like that. We could have kept going, worked up a stake and with Candy's help, swung ^{that} place. Then it would've worked, he'd have been safe, ^{as} ~~in~~ that cave of his he kept talkin' about.

CW: And maybe I could've left Curly, got clear away and thumbed a ride to Hollywood.

George: But no, you have to ruin evrybody's dream.

CW: How would he like to feel so persecuted. Have his dreams took away from him?

George: Worst of all have no dreams at all

CW: The bottom of the bottom, the pits.

George: Like Crooks maybe.

CW: Yeah, treated like a dammed nigger. ~~Let's shut him up in Crooks' little shed, the harness room.~~ Let's shut him up in Crooks' little shed, the harness room.

George: Here's his books - a tattered dictionary, and the mauled copy of the California civil code 1905.

CW: And here's his dirty books and magazines.

George: Don't forget his ~~glasses~~ spectacles. And his liniment for the back.

CW: (toJS) yeah you got a real pain in your back. Now sweep the floor, nigger John, cos that's all that's left you after your work's done. Just keeping yer room tidy and neat and thumbing through those same old books.

George: All your dreams are left far behind on that chicken ranch, white kids coming to play an all, and sometimes you going to them. But now there's no coloured man on this ranch, you only kept on because of yer back, and fer someone to raise hell out of when the boss is angry.) Sleeping with yer two brothers, turnin' the chiskens out in the alfalfa, keeping of them off of the strawberry patch.....sunny mornings with the white chickens

CW: And now, nothin' . You don't have anybody, any more than I do. S'pose you couldn't go into the bunkhouse and play rummy, cause you were black. How would you like that? S'pose you had to set out here and read books. Sure you could play horseshoes until it got dark, but hten you got to read books.

George: ^{And} Books are no good. A guy needs somebody to be near him. I tell you, a guy gets too lonely, he gets sick.

JS: I see what yer trying to do. O.K. Nobody never gets to heaven and nobody gets no land. It's just in their head. Just like heaven. They're all the time talking about it, but it 's jus' in their head.

~~CW~~ ~~Shut up.~~

CW: oh Shut up.

JS: I had enough. You got no rights comin' in a coloured man's room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now just you get out, an' get out quick. If you don't....

CW: Listen Nigger. You know what I can do if you open your trap? You know what I ~~could~~ could do?

JS: Yes ma'am

CW: Well you keep your place then Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy, it ain't even funny.

JS: Yes Ma'am.

CW: Yes ma'am, yes ma'am, you see nigger John it ain't very nice being on the other end of it is it?

JS: Hold it! You've got it all wrong. I'm not saying veeryone should be like Crooks. Nor should he be treated like that.

Carol contd.:

to you about his film version.

JS:

Oh hell. I've got to start collating that work on the migrant camps ~~today~~. sometime today. Oh well show him in.

(Exit Carol, enter Lewis Milestone)

LM:

John, how nice to see you again. (Sits down)

JS:

Take a seat!

LM:

I'll keep this brief. I have to shoot back to 'Frisco to meet up with our producers. I can see no problems with this at all none at all. Just a little re-organising here and there. Now I want you to think about this real hard. No w don't say anything till you've heard my idea. Scene is the barn, Lennie nursing his dead pup in his hands. Curly's wife enters and hides the suitcase under the straw. Starts talking to Lennie. Now this is it. Enter Curly. Sees His wife talking to Lennie knocks her about a bit, keeps out of the way of Lennie after what happened before. Lennie panics and runs, tripping up on the suitcase, as he goes. You got it so far? The suitcase is exposed and Curly, getting mad, at the thought of May leaving him, kills her. Now don't say anything yet. 'Course then he rushes out hte barn saying he's just discovered her, and that it was Lennie. George tells Lennie to hide in the brush. Believes Curly and as in the book, gets there first and shoots him. What do you think? Neat ain't it. That way we don't lose the audiences sympathy for Lennie. (Lennie stays as the big innocent pup) and we build on their hatred of Curly. Kinda puts you in mind of one of those Greek tragedies don't it. What was it called now, Hamlet? Anyway what do you think?

JS:

Shit.

LM:

I beg your pardon?

JS:

I said Shit. This isn't supposed to be a huge great tragedy it's just, just "something that happened".

LM:

Yes er well er Mr. Steinbeck, of course I see your point. Oh my is that the time. I've got to be going. I'll just leave it with you for now, for you to think over and we'll talk further on it.. . (exits)

(Curley's wife appears)

CW:

Well he certainly didn't get it ~~right~~. *your point.*

JS:

Oh. It's you again. Look I've tried to write you in, better in the play. We here more of your side of the story and I took up your idea of leavin' Curly and thumbing a ride for Hollywood.

CW:

Jesus Christ, John, you've haven't altered nothin'. People still cry more over that damned dog og Candy's than they do about me. Look you've got a chance again with this film. Why have me killed at all? They could get canned for some other reason, or Lennie could get shot on account of Curly's rage or somethin'. But I could escape this time. Take my suitcase from the barn and just take off. But not die. Please John, not again (JSTAKES UP POSITION OF LENNIE IN BARN) ~~NO!!!~~

~~XXXXXXXX~~

AND CHANTS THE OPENING DESCRIPTION OF THE BARN)

JS:

In the barn it was quiet and humming and lazy and warm. Only Lennie was in the barn, and Lennie sat in the hay beside a packing case under a manger in the end of the barn that had been filled with hay.

CW:

NO, please don't, no

Lennie: (miss out

first part if scene and start at :) We're gonna have a liittle place We gonna have a house and a garden.....

~~JS~~ George: What you talkin' about? A nigger's jus' a nigger.
JS: In the same way a Curly's wife's is just a tart, or you is just a bindle bum? No way. People have got to ~~reaxixs~~ stop persecuting each other just because of their sex or their colour or their job. I want them to read it and see their own prejudices in you characters, apply it to their own lives, ~~and~~ ~~learn~~ learn through it and treat everyone as true human beings.

CW: ~~Well~~ What? All yer doing is makin' people think yeah that's the right thing to do. That's the way of the world and nothin' can change it. That you, John Steinbeck, actually agree with them calling me a tart.
JS: And Crooks as a nigger?
George: Seems to me that's what you're saying.
JS: No!
CW: Sure you are. "Look, ther's Curly's tart"
~~George~~ JS: No!
George: There's the nigger
JS: No!
~~George~~ CW: Jesus, what a tramp
JS: No!
George: Stable buck's a nigger
CW? George, and JS: Nigger! no! tart, tramp! busted-back nigger etc
(CW AND GEORGE BACK OFF BEHIND FLATS TO LEAVE STEINBECK ALONE ON STAGE)

JS: No. It wasn't meant to be like that. ~~They~~ You don't really think I feel like that about Crooks and Curly's wife do you? The ranch was supposed to represent the world, including all its prejudices, mixed up twists of fate, dreams, survival. But not to say "well, what a swell place this is." It's not supposed to say that at all. It atkes place in the drought. A desert. The drought is a ~~simple~~ symbol of evil. In the same way that watre is a symbol of security. Lennie and George's safe place..... Lennie. People think he's supposed to represent insanity, btu he is the inarticulate and powerful yearnings of all menn.... The microcosm is difficult to handle and apparently I've not got it over at all well. The book isn't that good I'm not sure Toby didn't know what he was doing when he ate the first draft. It was an experiment ^{and} in what it set out to do ~~and~~ it was a failure.

(Enter Carol)

Carol: John, are you O.K.?
John: Oh sure, sure. You know how it is. Sometimes in working the people in my head become much realler than I am! Curly's wife and George were just telling me what a failure I'd written.
Carol: Well I hope you didn't listen to them. After all it's not every book that wins the Book of the Year Award and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, is a success as play book and ~~fixmx~~ now ~~xxfixm~~ has Hollywood interested. Fancy James Cagney seeing himself as George!
JS: At least it was an honest experiment. Why has it attracted so much fuss? I could defend myself against attack. I wish I were as sure I could defend myself against flattery.
Carol: The mail was full of fan-mail again- people wanting you to sign books, make speeches, ordeers, money.
JS: Well I'm through. ~~with~~ I'm signing no books for anyone except friends. IT's getting worse all the time.
Carol: Well, cheer up, Lewis Milestone's waiting ~~for you~~ to talk