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A Hopeless Dream

Is dreaming worthwhile? Many people say, "Dream big, reach for the stars!" However, there are just as many people who remind others to be realistic about their aspirations, warning them not to fall on their face. In John Steinbeck's novella, *Of Mice and Men*, the protagonists George and Lennie struggle with this tension between accepting their lot in life and dreaming of more. The two characters are in a monotonous cycle, traveling from ranch to ranch, narrowly avoiding being fired or arrested. Yet, they hope to break this pattern, fulfilling their dream of owning their own property "'an' liv[ing] off the fatta the lan,'" even inspiring other characters, like Candy, to believe in their dream (Steinbeck 14). However, their dream ends in tragedy after the death of Curley's wife at the hands of Lennie. Ultimately, John Steinbeck's novella suggests that dreams give people false hope through George's unrealistic promises, Lennie's obsessive belief in the farm, and Candy's desperate investment.

Firstly, false hope in dreams can be seen in the novella through George's unrealistic promise that someday George and Lennie will own their own farm. George and Lennie are poor, migrant workers, yet George frequently tells Lennie about the unrealistic dream of the farm as if it could be a reality. Even at a discount, the small farm is "six hundred bucks," and out of reach since George and Lennie have "ten bucks between" them (59). Saving six hundred dollars to buy land is nearly impossible for two migrant workers, yet George's false hope in buying the farm creates an unrealistic promise for both himself and Lennie. Later in the novella, after Lennie kills

Curley's wife, George admits that the dream was unrealistic: "I think I knowed from the very first I think I knowed we'd never do her. He usta like to hear about it so much I got to thinking maybe we would" (94). This admission reveals that deep down, George always suspected the dream would not come true. Even though he knew deep down that it was not possible, throughout the novel, he continually describes it in detail and acts as if it is possible to point out that Lennie, Candy, and even skeptical Crooks believe in the possibility. This contradiction shows that George creates and maintains false hope by promising a dream he himself knows will never happen.

Lennie obsessively believes that the dream of the farm will come true. At the clearing in chapter 1, when Lennie asks where they are headed, George becomes furious at Lennie's forgetfulness, to which Lennie responds, "'I remember about the rabbits, George.' 'The hell with the rabbits. That's all you ever can remember is them rabbits. O.K! Now you listen and this time you got to remember so we don't get into no trouble" (4–5). George is expressing his frustration with Lennie and how he can only focus on the rabbits. George wants Lennie to forget about the rabbits because they are a distraction; in contrast, George uses the phrase "this time" when telling Lennie they cannot get into trouble, implying that they have gotten into a dangerous situation before and not had an action plan. Lennie is so obsessed with the dream of having a farm with his own rabbits that this false hope in its reality prevents him from being capable of focusing on important information given to him. Much later in the story, Lennie is in a barn on the ranch and accidentally kills one of the puppies. Candy's wife peers into the barn, and Lennie and she begin talking. Lennie tells her the story of what happened in Weed, and Curley's wife lets him feel her hair. She gets nervous and tries to pull her head away, but Lennie holds on tight. Lennie is worriedly talking to himself, whimpering, "George gonna say I done a bad thing.

He ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits" (91). The "bad thing" Lennie is referring to is that Curley's wife is now going to get him in trouble; as a result, Lennie thinks that if George finds out what he is doing, George will not let him tend the rabbits. Lennie's logic is that if Curley's wife escapes, then she will get him in trouble, but if he doesn't let her go, she won't be able to say what happened. Lennie ends up accidentally snapping Curley's wife's neck because his fear of not being able to tend the rabbits on the farm clouded his judgment. Lennie does not understand the severity of the situation and can only focus on the rabbits. If Lennie were not obsessive over tending the rabbits, Lennie would not be worried about Curley's wife telling Curley what he did, and would not have killed her. Lennie is so obsessed with the false hope of the dream of tending rabbits that it makes him forget critical information and misjudge situations.

Finally, Steinbeck suggests in the novella that dreams give people false hope through Candy's desperate investment. When Candy overhears George and Lennie talking about the farm, Candy eagerly wants to believe that this dream can be a reality. He joins the conversation saying, "S'pose I went in with you guys. Tha's three hunderd an' fifty bucks I'd put in," continuing with, "They'll can me purty soon. Jus' as soon as I can't swamp out no bunk houses they'll put me on the county" (59–60). Candy is hearing George and Lennie's dream of owning a farm for the first time, yet he is almost immediately offering up hundreds of dollars to George, a stranger he met just this week. During the 1930s, it was not impossible that land could be purchased for a couple of hundred dollars, but it was still not common for migrant workers to do so; moreover, Candy's admission that he'll be "canned," meaning fired, reveals how desperate he is to avoid loneliness and uselessness. He's willing to offer his life savings to help them purchase the property to live out the dream of working for themselves. After the tragic deaths of Curley's wife and Lennie, the dream of the farm has been killed; however, Candy still holds on to false hope. He is fearful the

dream will not come true, asking, "You an' me can get that little place, can't we, George? You an' me can go there an' live nice, can't we, George? Can't we?" (94). Even though Lennie is going to get in trouble or killed for his actions, Candy still believes that the dream is possible. His repetition of the question "can't we?" three times reveals his desperate hope that the dream of the farm is still a reality. Even in the face of tragedy, the death of Curley's wife and Lennie's inevitable punishment, Candy focuses not on these characters but on his own plans of a "little place" where they can "live nice." He falsely believes that the farm can really happen. All in all, Candy's behavior proves that dreams can make people believe in something so strongly that they ignore reality.

All in all, Steinbeck suggests that dreams give people false hope that makes characters in the novel act unrealistically, obsessively, and desperately. George is unrealistic about the reality of the dream, giving himself and other characters like Lennie and Candy false hope about actually achieving the dream. Lennie becomes so obsessed with the farm and tending rabbits there that he acts dangerously. In addition, Candy so desperately wants hope of security and companionship that he is willing to give up all his savings to be a part-owner in the farm. While the dream gives George, Lennie, and Candy something to look forward to, it ultimately leads to tragedy and intense disappointment. Overall, Steinbeck conveys through these characters that although dreams can provide hope, they can also blind people to reality and leave them with a depth of disappointment when they do not come to fruition. This message explains to readers that they may need to be cautious with their dreams. Dreams may give them something to look forward to. However, if people are going to dream big, they also need to be able to handle the disappointment of the dream not coming true.