

"Umm," said Slim.

George looked over at Slim and saw the calm, Godlike eyes fastened¹ on him. "Funny," said George. "I used to have a hell of a lot of fun with 'im. Used to play jokes on 'im 'cause he was too dumb to take care of 'imself. But he was too dumb even to know he had a joke played on him. I had fun. Made me seem God damn smart alongside of him. Why² he'd do any damn thing I tol' him. If I tol' him to walk over a cliff³, over he'd go. That wasn't so damn much fun after a while. He never got mad about it, neither. I've beat the hell outta him, and he coulda bust⁴ every bone in my body jus' with his han's⁵, but he never lifted a finger against me." George's voice was taking on the tone of confession. "Tell you what made me stop that. One day a bunch⁶ of guys was standin' around up on the Sacramento River. I was feelin' pretty smart. I turns to Lennie and says, 'Jump in.' An' he jumps. Couldn't swim a stroke⁷. He damn near drowned before we could get him. An' he was so damn nice to me for pullin' him out. Clean forgot I told him to jump in. Well, I ain't done nothing like that no more."

"He's a nice fella," said Slim. "Guy don't need no sense to be a nice fella. Seems to me sometimes it jus' works the other way around. Take a real smart guy and he ain't hardly ever a nice fella."

George stacked the scattered cards⁸ and began to lay out his solitaire hand. The shoes thudded⁹ on the ground outside. At the windows the light of the evening still made the window squares bright.

"I ain't got no people¹," George said. "I seen the guys that go around on the ranches alone. That ain't no good. They don't have no fun. After a long time they get mean. They get wantin' to fight all the time."

"Yeah, they get mean," Slim agreed. "They get so they don't want to talk to nobody."

["Course Lennie's a God damn nuisance² most of the time," said George. "But you get used to goin' around with a guy an' you can't get rid of³ him."

"He ain't mean," said Slim. "I can see Lennie ain't a bit mean⁴."

"Course he ain't mean. But he gets in trouble alla⁵ time because he's so God damn dumb. Like what happened in Weed——" He stopped, stopped in the middle of turning over a card. He looked alarmed and peered over at Slim. "You wouldn't tell nobody?"

"What'd he do in Weed?" Slim asked calmly.

"You wouldn't tell? . . . No, 'course you wouldn't."

"What'd he do in Weed?" Slim asked again.

"Well, he seen this girl in a red dress. Dumb bastard like he is, he wants to touch ever'thing he likes. Just wants to feel it. So he reaches out to feel⁷ this red dress an' the girl lets out a squawk⁸, and that gets Lennie all mixed up⁹, and he holds on 'cause that's the only thing he can think to do. Well, this girl squawks and squawks.

I was jus' a little bit off¹⁰, and I heard all the yellin'¹¹, so I comes running, an' by that time Lennie's so scared all he can think to do is jus' hold on. I socked him over the head with a fence picket¹² to make him let go. He was so

1. people = family

2. nuisance casse-pieds

3. get rid of
debarrasser de

4. ain't a bit mean = is
not mean at all
5. alla = all the

6. peered over at scruta

7. reaches out to feel
tendit la main pour
toucher
8. squawk braillement
9. mixed up confus

10. a little bit off un petit
peu plus loin
11. yellin' cris

12. fence picket piquet
d'une clôture

1. fastened fixés

2. why à vrai dire

3. cliff falaise

4. bust péter

5. han's = hands

6. a bunch un tas

7. a stroke = at all

8. stacked the scattered
cards empila les cartes
éparses

9. the shoes thudded les
fers tombaient avec un
bruit sourd

1. scairt = scared

2. level and unwinking
stables et ne
sourcillaient pas3. rabbits in an' tells
the law she been
raped
force raconter à
la police qu'elle a été
violée4. start a party out
organisent une battue

5. on'y = only

6. we scrambled outta
there on a foutu le
camp7. grabbed me
m'attrapait

8. I can tell je peux sentir

9. hunched way over
penché vers l'avant

10. drew up remonta

scairt¹ he couldn't let go of that dress. And he's so God damn strong, you know."

Slim's eyes were level and unwinking². He nodded very slowly. "So what happens?"

George carefully built his line of solitaire cards. "Well, that girl rabbits in an' tells the law she been raped³. The guys in Weed start a party out⁴ to lynch Lennie. So we sit in a irrigation ditch under water all the rest of that day. Got on'y⁵ our heads sticking out from the side of the ditch. An' that night we scrambled outta there⁶."

Slim sat in silence for a moment. "Didn't hurt the girl none, huh?" he asked finally.

"Hell, no. He just scared her. I'd be scared too if he grabbed me⁷. But he never hurt her. He jus' wanted to touch that red dress, like he wants to pet them pups all the time."

"He ain't mean," said Slim. "I can tell⁸ a mean guy a mile off."

"Course he ain't, and he'll do any damn thing I——"
Lennie came in through the door. He wore his blue denim coat over his shoulders like a cape, and he walked hunched way over⁹.

"Hi, Lennie," said George. "How do you like the pup now?"

Lennie said breathlessly, "He's brown an' white jus' like I wanted." He went directly to his bunk and lay down and turned his face to the wall and drew up¹⁰ his knees.

George put down his cards very deliberately. "Lennie," he said sharply¹.

Lennie twisted his neck and looked over his shoulder. "Huh? What you want, George?"

"I tol' you you couldn't bring that pup in here."

"What pup, George? I ain't got no pup."

George went quickly to him, grabbed him by the shoulder and rolled him over. He reached down and picked the tiny puppy from where Lennie had been concealing it² against his stomach.

Lennie sat up quickly. "Give 'um³ to me, George."

George said, "You get right up an' take this pup back to the nest⁴. He's gotta sleep with his mother. You want to kill him? Just born last night an' you take him out of the nest. You take him back or I'll tell Slim not to let you have him."

Lennie held out his hands pleadingly⁵. "Give 'um to me, George. I'll take 'um back. I didn't mean no harm, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' wanted to pet 'um a little."

George handed the pup to him. "Awright. You get him back there quick, and don' you take him out no more. You'll kill him, the first thing you know." Lennie fairly scuttled⁶ out of the room.

Slim had not moved. His calm eyes followed Lennie out the door. "Jesus," he said. "He's jes' like a kid, ain't he."

"Sure he's jes' like a kid. There ain't no more harm in him than a kid neither, except he's so strong. I bet⁷ he won't come in here to sleep tonight. He'd sleep right

1. sharply sévèrement

2. had been concealing
il le cachait

3. 'um = him

4. to the nest = near his
mother

5. pleadingly suppliant

6. fairly scuttled déguerpi
fissa

7. I bet je parie

alongside that box in the barn. Well—let 'im. He ain't doin' no harm out there."

It was almost dark outside now. Old Candy, the swamper, came in and went to his bunk, and behind him struggled¹ his old dog. "Hello, Slim. Hello, George. Didn't neither of you play horseshoes?"

"I don't like to play ever' night," said Slim.

Candy went on, "Either you guys got a slug² of whiskey? I gotta gut ache³."

"I ain't," said Slim. "I'd drink it myself if I had, an' I ain't got a gut ache neither."

"Gotta bad gut ache," said Candy. "Them God damn turnips⁴ give it to me. I knowed they was going to before I ever eat 'em."

The thick-bodied⁵ Carlson came in out of the darkening yard. He walked to the other end of the bunk house and turned on the second shaded light. "Darker'n hell in here," he said. "Jesus, how that nigger can pitch shoes⁶."

"He's plenty good," said Slim.

"Damn right he is," said Carlson. "He don't give nobody else a chance to win——" He stopped and sniffed the air, and still sniffing, looked down at the old dog. "God awmighty, that dog stinks. Get him outta here, Candy! I don't know nothing that stinks as bad as an old dog. You gotta get him out."

Candy rolled to the edge⁷ of his bunk. He reached over and patted⁸ the ancient dog, and he apologized, "I been around him so much I never notice how he stinks."

1. struggled se déplaçait avec difficulté

2. a slug une gorgée

3. gut ache mal au ventre

4. turnips navets

5. thick-bodied corpulent

6. pitch shoes lancer des fers à chevaux

7. the edge le bout

8. patted caressa

"Well, I can't stand him in here," said Carlson. "That stink hangs around even after he's gone." He walked over with his heavy-legged stride¹ and looked down at the dog. "Got no teeth," he said. "He's all stiff with rheumatism. He ain't no good to you, Candy. An' he ain't no good to himself. Why'n't you shoot him, Candy?"

The old man squirmed² uncomfortably. "Well—hell! I had him so long. Had him since he was a pup. I herded sheep³ with him." He said proudly, "You wouldn't think it to look at him now, but he was the best damn sheep dog I ever seen."

George said, "I seen a guy in Weed that had an Airedale⁴ could herd sheep. Learned it from the other dogs."

Carlson was not to be put off. "Look, Candy. This ol' dog jus' suffers hisself⁵ all the time. If you was to take him out and shoot him right in the back of the head——" he leaned over and pointed, "—right there, why he'd never know what hit him."

Candy looked about unhappily. "No," he said softly. "No, I couldn' do that. I had 'im too long."

"He don't have no fun," Carlson insisted. "And he stinks to beat hell⁷. Tell you what. I'll shoot him for you. Then it won't be you that does it."

Candy threw his legs off his bunk. He scratched the white stubble⁸ whiskers on his cheek nervously. "I'm so used to him," he said softly. "I had him from a pup."

"Well, you ain't bein' kind to him keepin' him alive," said Carlson. "Look, Slim's bitch got a litter⁹ right now."

1. his heavy-legged stride son pas lourd

2. squirmed tremua

3. I herded sheep j'ai gardé les moutons

4. Airedale terrier

5. was not to be put off ne se laissa pas distraire

6. hisself = himself

7. to beat hell comme la mort

8. stubble barbe de trois jours

9. a litter une portée