**Chapter One**

As they eat, Lennie asks for ketchup. This request launches George into a long speech about Lennie's ungratefulness.

George complains that he could get along much better if he didn't have to care for Lennie. He uses the incident that got them chased out of Weed as a case in point. Lennie, a lover of soft things, stroked the fabric of a girl's dress, and would not let go. The locals assumed he assaulted her, and ran them out of town.

Lennie stops to drink from the river, and George warns him not to drink too much. It becomes clear that Lennie has a mild mental disability, and that his companion looks out for his safety.

As night falls, George tells Lennie that if he encounters any trouble while working at the ranch, he is to return to this clearing, hide in the bushes, and wait for George to come.

The novel opens with the description of a riverbed in rural California. Two men walk along the path. The first, George, is small, wiry, and sharp-featured, while his companion, Lennie, is large and awkward.

Afterwards, George feels sorry for losing his temper and apologizes by telling Lennie's favourite story, the plan for their future happiness. Someday, as soon as they manage to save enough money, they will buy a farm together. This familiar story cheers both of them up.

George decides that they will stay in the clearing for the night, and they prepare their supper of tinned beans. Lennie's Aunt Clara used to give him mice to pet, but he tends to “break” small creatures unintentionally when he shows his affection for them, killing them because he doesn't know his own strength.

George complains about the bus driver that dropped them off a long way from their ranch where they are about to start work. George notices that Lennie is holding a dead mouse and takes it away from him. George warns Lennie that he must behave himself when they meet the boss of the ranch. George does not want any trouble of the kind they encountered in Weed.