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English 1 Honor

Rough Draft

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The Path of Never Ending Despair

“The things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling, are the concomitants of failure in our system. And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest, are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second.” (John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*). During the Great Depression, many people in America were forced into a state of poverty, injustice and hopelessness. These people were often the subject of John Steinbeck’s novels. In the novels *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck conveys Lennie and Tom Joad's shared dream of owning a home dissolves because society ignores and suppresses the needs of the mentally ill and the landowners unjustly refuse to provide surplus resources to the destitute.

For instance, Lennie’s dream of owning a home dissolves because society ignores the needs of the mentally ill. Lennie’s co-workers suppress him as a result of his mental incapacity causing his co-workers to feel dominant in nature. For example, when Curley picks a fight with Lennie, “ Curley glared at him. His eyes slipped on past and lighted on Lennie; and Lennie was still smiling with delight at the memory of the ranch. Curley stepped over to Lennie like a terrier. ‘What the hell you laghin’ at?’ Lennie looked blankly at him. ‘Huh?’ Then Curley’s rage exploded. ‘Come on, ya big bastard. Get up on your feet. No big son-of-a-bitch is gonna laugh at me. I’ll show ya who’s yella.” ( John Steinbeck *Of Mice and Men* 62), Lennie lacks the ability to process peoples emotion leaving him defenseless in situations where he is vulnerable to people who take advantage of others such as Curley.  When Curley mocks Lennie, Lennie fails to feel provoked,  instead he feels confused revealing his lack of people skills. Curley, being a power driven man, views Lennie as a lower class being and forces his superiority on Lennie expressing his incompassionate personality. Lennie’s co-workers recognise his mental disability but they choose to offer no assistance and instead shun him. In addition, Lennie’s co-worker like to play jokes on him because he is gullible, “ I used to have a hell of a lot of fun on im’. Cause he was too dumb too take care of ‘imse. 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. Why he’d do any damn thing I tol’ him. If I tol’ him to walk over a clif, over he’d go…. He never got mad about it neither. I’ve beat the hell outta him, and he coulda bust every bone in my body jus’ with his han’s, but he never lifted a finger against me.” said George (*Of Mice and Men* 39). Lennie becomes a victim of bullying because of his lack of awareness in the world; this lack of awareness makes Lennie an innocent child with wearing a mask of a grown man. George and his co-workers have hearts clouded with darkness that easily take them over leading to the intentional suffering of Lennie and the lack of compassion expressed for him. To emphasize, Lennie’s dream falls due to his lack of awareness and the evil in men taking over the innocence represented in Lennie.

Tom Joad’s dream of owning a home dissolves because society values land and monetary needs over human justice and dignity. The landowners refuse to help the Okies because they are greedy and do not consider their employees as people, rather as animals or machines. For example, when the landowners waste food, “Carloads of oranges dumped on the ground…. How would they buy oranges at twenty cents a dozen if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit- and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains… Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people out….. There is a failure here that topples all our success.” (Steinbeck *The Grapes of Wrath* 477), the landowners refuse to give the poor migrant workers the excess food. The landowners not only waste the food but destroy the surplus food to a point where it is inedible to any biological organism representing the landowner’s hatred and lack of compassion toward their employees including people like Tom Joad. This waste of food by the landowners taunts the migrant labors and consequently creates a tremendous buildup and a desire of rebellion within Tom Joad. Misleading the migrants, the landowners cheat the already diminished spirits causing the Okies state of hopelessness to worsen. To demonstrate, when the Joads met a ragged man on the side of a road, he says “It don’t make no senese. This fella wants eight hundred men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an’ maybe twenty thosan’ people see ;em. An’ maybe two-three thousan’ folks get movin’ account a this here an’bill. Folks that’s crazy with worry…. You’ll see him, or somebody that’s workin’ for him. You’ll be a-campin’ by a ditch, you an’ fifty other famblies…. An’ of you got nothin’, he says, ‘Wanna job?’ An’ you’ll say, ‘When do I start?’…. The more fellas he can get, an’ the hungrier, less he’s gonna pay.” (*The Grapes of Wrath* 259). The hopes of the immigrants disappear because they become slaves of the cycle of poverty which discourages them to escape. The remaining pieces of hope in these immigrants become mere shadows in their life’s and further become non- existent after the landowners cheat not only their hope but their rights as a human being. To conclude, Tom Joad’s dream may perhaps be an optimistic one, but because of the horrific deeds that the landowners commit to profit from people such as Tom, causing this dream to become impossible.

Overall, both George Milton and Tom Joad share a common dream of owning a home and face similar problems which result in the landowner repressing the destitute causing their dreams to become out of reach. Many fellow migrants share similar dreams and likewise the evil landowners crush them down. Each crushed dream results in a little speck of hope becoming extinct. How much longer will the hope last to continue the dream?