He kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs.

His body was bent over to the left by his crooked spine, and his eyes lay deep in his head, and because of their depth seemed to glitter with intensity.

Crooks said sharply, “You got no right to come in my room. This here’s my room. Nobody got any right in here but me.”

“Why ain’t you wanted?” Lennie asked.
“’Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black. They say I stink. Well, I tell you, you all of you stink to me.”

Crooks said, “Well, you been takin’ ‘em out of the nest all the time. I wonder the old lady don’t move ‘em someplace else.”

“You’re nuts,” said Crooks. “You’re crazy as a wedge. What rabbits you talkin’ about?”
“The rabbits we’re gonna get, and I get to tend ‘em, cut grass an’ give ‘em water, an’ like that.”
“Jus’ nuts,” said Crooks. “I don’t blame the guy you travel with for keepin’ you outa sight.”

Crooks continued. “Sometimes he talks, and you don’t know what the hell he’s talkin’ about. Ain’t that so?” He leaned forward, boring Lennie with his deep eyes. “Ain’t that so?”
“Yeah . . . . sometimes.”
“Jus’ talks on, an’ you don’t know what the hell it’s all about?”

He laughed. “If I say something, why it’s just a nigger sayin’ it.”

His voice grew soft and persuasive. “S’pose George don’t come back no more. S’pose he took a powder and just ain’t coming back. What’ll you do then?”

Crooks bored in on him. “Want me ta tell ya what’ll happen? They’ll take ya to the booby hatch. They’ll tie ya up with a collar, like a dog.”

Suddenly Lennie’s eyes centered and grew quiet, and mad. He stood up and walked dangerously toward Crooks. “Who hurt George?” he demanded.
Crooks saw the danger as it approached him. He edged back on his bunk to get out of the way. “I was just supposin’,” he said. “George ain’t hurt. He’s all right. He’ll be back all right.”

Lennie growled back to his seat on the nail keg. “Ain’t nobody goin’ to talk no hurt to George,” he grumbled.

Crooks interrupted brutally. “You guys is just kiddin’ yourself. You’ll talk about it a hell of a lot, but you won’t get no land. You’ll be a swamper here till they take you out in a box. Hell, I seen too many guys. Lennie here’ll quit an’ be on the road in two, three weeks. Seems like ever’ guy got land in his head.”

She stood still in the doorway, smiling a little at them, rubbing the nails of one hand with the thumb and forefinger of the other. And her eyes traveled from one face to another. “They left all the weak ones here,” she said finally. “Think I don’t know where they all went? Even Curley. I know where they all went.”

She regarded them amusedly. “Funny thing,” she said. “If I catch any one man, and he’s alone, I get along fine with him. But just let two of the guys get together an’ you won’t talk. Jus’ nothing but mad.” She dropped her fingers and put her hands on her hips. “You’re all scared of each other, that’s what. Ever’ one of you’s scared the rest is goin’ to get something on you.”

The girl flared up. “Sure I gotta husban’. You all seen him. Swell guy, ain’t he? Spends all his time sayin’ what he’s gonna do to guy she don’t like, and he don’t like nobody. Think I’m gonna stay in that two-by-four house and listen how Curley’s gonna lead with his left twicet, and then bring in the ol’ right cross? ‘One-two,’ he says. ‘Jus’ the ol’ one-two an’ he’ll go down.’” She paused and her face lost its sullenness and grew interested. “Say—what happened to Curley’s han’?”

“Awright,” she said contemptuously. “Awright, cover ‘im up if ya wanta. Whatta I care? You bindle bums think you’re so damn good. Whatta ya think I am, a kid? I tell ya I could of went with shows. Not jus’ one, neither. An’ a guy tol’ me he could put me in pitchers . . ..” She was breathless with indignation. “—Sat’iday night. Ever’body out doin’ som’pin’. Ever’body! An’ what am I doin’? Standin’ here talkin’ to a bunch of bindle stiffs—a nigger an’ a dum-dum and a lousy ol’ sheep—an’ likin’ it because they ain’t nobody else.”

Crooks had retired into the terrible protective dignity of the Negro.

He stood up suddenly and knocked his nail keg over backward. “I had enough,” he said angrily.

Crooks stood up from his bunk and faced her. “I had enough,” he said coldly. “You got no rights comin’ in a colored man’s room. You got no rights messing around in here at all. Now you jus’ get out, an’ get out quick. If you don’t, I’m gonna ast the boss not to ever let you come in the barn no more.”

Old Candy was watching her, fascinated. “If you was to do that, we’d tell,” he said quietly. “We’d tell about you framin’ Crooks.”
“Tell an’ be damned,” she cried. “Nobody’d listen to you, an’ you know it. Nobody’d listen to you.”
Candy subsided. “No . . . .” he agreed. “Nobody’d listen to us.”