Throughout the novella, foreshadowing is used to give the reader clues about the tragic ending. By the third section, Steinbeck has used this technique repeatedly. Read the quotations below and match them with circumstances that become significant to later events. Once you have read the end of the book, come back to this exercise to identify the specific events that are foreshadowed in the third section.

(a) ‘You know how the hands are, they just come in and get their bunk and work a month, and then they quit and go out alone. Never seem to give a damn about nobody.’ (Slim)

1. Carlson shooting Candy’s dog is typical of the migrant workers’ environment, where the strong attack the weak. Lennie is not going to last long in this world.

(b) ‘I’ve beat the hell outa him, and he couda bust every bone in my body jus’ with his han’s, but he never lifted a finger against me.’ (George)

2. Candy regrets not taking responsibility for his dog’s fate. He confides in George, setting up George’s responsibility later in the novel.

(c) ‘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 feel this red dress an’ the girl lets out a squawk, and that gets Lennie all mixed up, and he holds on ’cause that’s the only thing he can think to do.’ (George)

3. George and Lennie travelling together is never going to last, because in 1930s California, each man can only survive by looking after himself.

(d) ‘If you want me to, I’ll put the old devil out of his misery right now and get it over with. Ain’t nothing left for him. Can’t eat, can’t see, can’t even walk without hurtin’.’ (Carlson)

4. Lennie is bewitched by the sense of touch, to the point that he is entranced into gripping hold of the texture. This has disastrous consequences with both the girl in Weed and later with Curley’s wife.

(e) ‘I’m so used to him ... I had him from a pup.’ (Candy)

5. Steinbeck hints repeatedly that George and Lennie’s dream is a fantasy, and even when George seems convinced that it could actually happen, words such as ‘wonder’ and the apparent luck involved suggests that the dream is unlikely to come true.
‘This thing they had never really believed in was coming true. George said reverently, “Jesus Christ! I bet we could swing her.” His eyes were full of wonder. “I bet we could swing her,” he repeated softly.’

When Lennie crushes Curley’s hand, we are made aware of the extent of his strength. The physical damage Lennie inflicts on Curley foreshadows the crime he later commits.

‘I ought to of shot that dog myself, George. I shouldn’t ought to of let no stranger shoot my dog.’ (Candy)

George is capable of violence and Lennie doesn’t know the boundaries of his own strength.

‘Looks to me like ever’ bone in his han’ is bust.’ (Slim)

Candy repeats the reasons for his bond with his dog, which parallels the relationship between George and Lennie. George is forced to constantly justify their companionship in the same way. The similarities in the relationships foreshadow the fate of both.