

## The Southerner, Part II

Jean Renoir, Dir. (1945)

In the company office, with a tall water tower looming in the window behind them, the boss says to Sam, "It's OK with me, Tucker. I ain't interested in that piece of land. It's too far away from my other property. But just remember this: if I ain't satisfied with the way you're workin' it, I aim to break that contract any time I like." He walks away, lighting a cigarette. Even indoors, both men are wearing their wide-brimmed hats.

Sam turns to him. "It's all right with me, boss."

"I like you, Tucker. You're a good, hard worker. And that's why I'm bothering to warn you." He regards Sam steadily through wire-frame glasses. "Now, I'm tellin' you again: if you're working for a big outfit, maybe you don't get rich, but you still get your pay, even if the crops are bad. But the little guy, who's growing his own, if his crop is ruined, he's got nothin' left."

Finally, the boss gives up: "I see you've made up your mind. Got some way of moving your things?"

"Yes, sir. Coreo said I could borrow his truck."

"Okay! Good luck, Tucker!" The boss offers his hand and Sam shakes it.

"Thank you, sir."

According to the calendar on the wall behind them, it's September 21, the first day of autumn. Sam's shadow crosses the date as he leaves, beginning his passage out of the cotton fields to his new life.

With all their belongings strapped onto the truck – to the roof, to the front bumper, wherever there's an inch of space – the Tuckers drive through the company camp. Their vehicle closely resembles the Joads' in *The Grapes of Wrath* (right, above).

Above the roofs of the one-room wooden houses around them, cross-shaped poles hold electrical cables.

From the side of the road, men wave goodbye. Children run out and chase the Tuckers' pickup as it leaves. Exuberant music plays as if to cheer the family on. Granny sits on her rocker in the back amidst all the furniture.

The Tuckers are driving to their new home.

"How far is our house from the river, Papa?"

"Why, it's almost just right next to the river, Honey!"

"Oh, goody... goody!" After living in that cotton field camp, the kids are looking forward to being by water.

They drive through scrubby desert land, stirring up dust as they pass.

As at last they approach the house, Sam squints at it: it's a ramshackle wooden structure that looks near to collapse.

As Sam and Nona walk through the dusty house, we see it through their eyes. Nona comments, disappointed, "I always hoped we could have a room to ourselves, some day."

"We can have... when summer comes. Let Granny and the kids sleep in here and move our bed out on the porch, and have everything real nice."

"Oh, Sam..." Nona begins, as a bird flies through the room in front of them. "The house don't seem like nothin' special..."

"I reckon I was thinkin' too hard about the land. I plumb forgot about the house. There'll sure be some patchin' to do!"

Sam and Nona inspect the outside of the house, accompanied by lively instrumental music.

"What about the well, Sam?"

"Let's go look at it."

The masonry of the well is broken and there is no mechanism to raise and lower the bucket. Debris lies all around.

"I was crazy to think we could live in this place," Sam says. "Why, it'd take me at least two weeks to dig this well again!"

"Without even talkin' about the money the planks and beams would cost!"

Back at the house, Nona sits dejected on the porch. Standing, Sam casts a long shadow behind her. He says, "Water from that river for the kids would just be like servin' them up a dish of typhoid."

As Sam kneels down, we notice the holes and disorder in the shingled roof. "Look, Honey, we can still go back to the camp, if you want to. The boss couldn't have knowed how bad the place is. I could talk to him again, and still maybe get my bulldozing job for the winter."

Nona scrapes her heel into the earth. "Well... How's the ground?"

Sam looks around. "Oh, it's good earth all right... You know, with dirt like this, a fella could raise the best crop in the country. Been layin' out all these years."

"But how about all this brush and weeds? You'll kill yourself gettin' rid of it before the plantin'."

"I ain't all alone, Honey. I ain't like Uncle Pete. Every time I get plumb wore out, I think of you and Jotty and Daisy – and I ain't quite so tired anymore."

"Oh, Sam! I just could never get along without you."

"Me too, Honey." He gazes deep into her eyes. "I couldn't live without you."

Nona muses, "The thing that'd be good about it is we could always work together. When you did the plowin', I could lead the mules. And when you clean up this brush, I could burn it for you. And in the summertime, we could lie in the grass and watch the kids swimmin' in the river."

"Yeah... that'd be fun, Honey!" He smiles. But then he remembers: "But what worries me is that busted well."

"Oh, Sam... we could surely borrow water from the neighbor, yonder. Nobody refuses water."

"Yeah... I hear he's got a good well."

"Sam... I reckon we ought to stay!"

"You really mean that?" He takes her hand. "You ain't just sayin' that to make me feel good?"

"I'm sayin' it because I believe you're as good as any man, and it's right for you to be your own boss."

They get up from the porch, and Sam calls out to the kids who've been running around in front of the house: "Hey there! We're moving in! Give me a hand!"  
Granny is still sitting on her rocker, high up in the back of the truck.

They start to unload the truck. "You take the pictures, Sis, and mind you don't drop 'em!"  
"I want to take the teddy bear!" yells Jotty, as Sam hands Nona the rifle.

Sam starts to unload the furniture. Frowning, Granny refuses to get off the truck: she doesn't like the looks of the house.

"All right," Sam replies. "But you better be down before morning, or you'll go right back to camp with this truck. Old man Coreo mightn't like it too much, neither."

In a long shot, we see the family run back and forth with their possessions. Bare trees point at the sky, where light clouds float over the rundown house.

As night approaches, dark clouds move low in the sky. Granny remains stubbornly in the truck, rocking, while Sam struggles to raise up the porch roof.

Just as Sam has braced the porch roof, Nona peeks out from the house. She comes outside and they embrace.

Sam says, "To me it's the porch that makes the house a home!"

"Sam, I think I got the stove working!" He follows her inside.

The children are kneeling in front of the stove.

"We'll all light it together!" says Nona.

Handed a match by Daisy, Sam strikes it against the wood stove and lights the fire. The family gazes together at the fire, contented.

After a close-up of the flames, we see the roof, where smoke from the chimney billows out across the broken shingles.

"Our first fire in our own house!" says Nona.

The Tuckers are home.