

## **The Southerner, Part III**

Jean Renoir, Dir. (1945)

Now that they've lit the first fire in their house, Nona says happily, "Won't be long before we'll have a good hot cup of coffee!" and she picks up the kettle. "You get some water, Sam. Jotty, Daisy... get the cups and put 'em on the table."

Outside, the clouds grow darker. Thunder rumbles. We see Granny in silhouette, still in the back of the truck, rocking.

Lightning flashes at the Tuckers as they bustle about in the kitchen.

"You reckon Granny's gonna stay out there all night?" asks Nona.

"I'd say she'll be too cowardly," replies Sam, laughing.

Out on the porch, Daisy looks up worriedly at the roar of thunder.

"Granny," she calls. "Do you want some good hot coffee?"

"No, sir!" Her fierce stare seems taken from a gargoyle on a Gothic church.

The rain starts and Daisy extends her hand out over the edge of the porch to feel the drops.

As Nona puts on her apron to prepare dinner, the kids rush in. "Mama, it's raining and Granny won't come in!" they say, jumping up and down.

"Well, we'll have our coffee anyway."

"Sit down, Honey," says Sam. "I'll get it."

As Sam pours the coffee, Nona and Daisy look up at the ceiling. Rain is dripping on Daisy. She holds out her hands to block it. "Oh, Papa!" she exclaims. "There's a hole in the ceiling!"

Nona and Sam move the table away from the leak. Sam gets a pan and sets it on the floor to catch the rain. "Well," he says. "We don't have to ask our neighbor for good water today!"

The family sits back down to enjoy their coffee. Granny is plainly visible through the door, stubbornly sitting in the rain.

Under the downpour, Granny peeks out from the shawl over her head and sees the family in the warm house. That does it! She climbs down off the truck.

Daisy jumps up. "Granny's changed her mind!"

The old woman makes her way into the house. "Come on, Granny," says Sam, guiding her to the chair that Nona holds out for her. "Here, I've got your good blanket. Now put it around you before you catch your death of cold!"

Nona pours some hot coffee into a mug and Granny, shivering, drinks it up. We notice her wedding ring and her arthritic knuckles.

In close-up, we see the bucket catching rainwater close to the kids' bed. Daisy looks peaceful under the patchwork quilt. The camera pans across the room to Granny, tucked under a quilt, and stops at the wood stove as it warms the room.

Reclining, Nona arranges her hair. Sam rolls a cigarette, hands it over and lights it for her.

“Think we can spare a cover, Honey?” he asks her.

“With the fire going, it's nice and warm in here,” she replies.

In response, Sam picks up one of their covers and hangs it up, blocking their bed from view, to give them some privacy. He turns out the light.

The next morning, at the riverside, Nona is scrubbing clothes on a washboard that rests on her lap. She stands to empty a basin and we see Jotty, playing at the water's edge; the dog sits quietly behind. The shot has the quiet composition of a landscape painting.\*

*\*It is fascinating to compare this shot with the oil painting of a similarly composed scene by Pierre Auguste Renoir – the father of Jean Renoir, who directed this film.*

Nearby, Sam stands in the water up to his waist, gazing downward. With a sudden splash, he plunges into the river, nearly submerging himself. When he stands again, he's holding a big fish. He looks over toward the others with a broad grin.

“Nona!” he cries, walking towards her. She looks up from the washtub. “Nona! Come on over here!” She and Jotty run over.

Sam sets the fish down on the ground and puts his boots on.

Nona sits down on a log. “Oh, that's a pretty one, Sam!”

“Yeah, Honey. That's a mighty fine fish!”

“It'll make us a good dinner!”

“Well,” he answers. “I figured I'd take this one to Denvers, our neighbor down the road, with a good well. That little one in the bucket's for us.” She peers into the bucket.

“Aren't you gonna put on dry clothes?” she asks

“Oh, I'll dry it off walkin' over. I won't be gone long.”

Nona picks up the fish by its tail. “This one ain't so big, Honey,” she comments.

“Well, I'll catch us another tomorrow – a big one. And we'll keep it.”

Nona holds Jotty's hand as they walk to the house. Set on the ragged horizon line of trees and brush, the house seems frail, with an ominous tilt, in the great expanse of land and sky.

Zoomy jumps up as if to grab the fish in Nona's other hand. Nona will make this small fish stretch for their family of five. The other, if Sam is successful, will persuade the neighbor to share the water from his well. With that water, they just might have a future.