

## **The Southerner, Part IX**

Jean Renoir, Dir. (1945)

The Tuckers are at a party in town when it starts to rain. As Nona stands outside holding the dog, lightning flashes. "What's gonna happen to our cotton?"

The rainstorm rages on. The town is deluged: water flows everywhere. In front of Harmie's General Store, a telephone pole falls on a car.

Nona gazes out the window, helpless and despondent. She glances toward Sam.

She strides over to the bed, where Sam is passed out, next to his pal Tim. "Sam! Sam! Sam... wake up!" He finally sits up.

Hearing the rain, Sam leaps up and runs to the window. He understands the threat to their farm. "We've got to go home!" Nona exclaims.

The camera pans across from the farmhouse to the field, showing the devastation. As their truck approaches, the Tuckers see that the house has been damaged, the ground flooded.

Sam gets out of the truck and surveys the property. As the children sleep in the cab, Nona climbs out, and walks over to Sam. He holds out a soaked cotton boll and they gaze down at it, wordlessly.

Waking, Granny and Tim emerge from the truck. Sam shows Tim the same cotton boll. "Boy, it's good and ruined, Tim." The two men stand solemnly still in their dark suits and ties from the party the night before.

Then they head out through the flood behind the house to find the cow. The water comes up to their knees.

Tim asks, "Where do you reckon she might be?"

"Ain't no tellin'... But I just gotta find her, Tim. Pasture down there by the river is all under water."

Behind them, the roof has lost most of its shingles. The two twisted trees rise leafless toward the sky. "Sure hope she ain't in that river... Ain't no cow worth gettin' drowned for."

"I'm not asking you to help, Tim."

"I'll go with you."

The men wade through the rushing water. At times, it reaches almost to their hips.

Suddenly, Sam turns, at the sound of a cow's mooing.

"There she is!" he hollers, pointing. "I'll go over and get her."

Tim cautions him, "Why don't you wait until the water goes down?"

"The river'll never stop rising."

As the river grows deeper, Sam dives in and begins to swim. By now jacketless, Tim goes in after him.

Out of shape, Tim struggles to keep up with Sam.

The men grab hold of a stump of tree, to rest. Tim strains to catch his breath.

Sam says, "I'm goin' on alone."

"Oh no... I'm goin' along with you."

"You stay here," Sam instructs his friend and swims off.

But, still exhausted, Tim follows anyway. In a closeup, we see the troubled water and its burden of tumbleweeds and broken tree limbs.

Drenched, Sam is leading the cow to shore when he hears a call, "Sam!... The current!... Help!"

Not hesitating, Sam lets go of the cow and swims toward his friend, who is clinging to a floating log.

As Sam swims as hard as he can, he sees the current carrying Tim rapidly away.

The land is flooded to the top rail of the fences. Exhausted, Sam reaches Tim at last and grabs the log, but the current is carrying them both away.

Somehow, they survive. Sam helps his friend to reach the shore.

On dry land, Sam declares, "I'm comin' to town with you, Tim. Gather up my measly belongings that's left and pack up my whole bunch and get out! All them fields and trees and the river, I just can't look at 'em no more! I give 'em everything I had to give, and what did they give me back? Nothing. Nothing but trouble and misery." He casts a hard stare at the water. "Be crazy to stick any longer. A fella ought to know when he's beat. When he ain't wanted on the place, ain't nothin' for him to do but to pack up and get out!" Tim looks on sadly, one hand placed on his dangling tie.

The men head back through the flooded fields. At the farmhouse, they slosh through ankle-deep water, stepping past bunches of soaked cotton bolls.

Grim-faced, Sam steps up onto the porch. Nona calls out cheerfully, "Sam! I can hardly believe the house is still standin'!" Still in her party dress, she laughs.

She moves about the front room, chattering and holding a bucket in her hand. "Sam, your gun is safe... and lots of other things, too."

"Most of Jotty's vegetable jars are still whole. Of course, the pictures got kind of broke... But once I get 'em hangin' straight on the wall, they won't look so bad." In closeup, the calendar shows that it's autumn, September.

Sam looks on, confused.

“Course, the worst thing of all was the stovepipe...” She walks over and looks up appraisingly. “But I got it back up again, and I think it’ll work all right now.” She’s beaming, pleased with her work. “How do you like that, Sam?!”

“I like it fine, Honey.”

When Nona kneels down and lights the stove, Sam smiles.

He looks up at the roof, then turns and starts to put the porch roof back in place.

“Sam...”

“Yeah, what is it, Tim?” Sam sits down on the porch next to him.

Tim looks over at his friend. “You said you was comin’ to town with me.”

“Yeah... yeah, I said it.”

“You said it, but you ain’t comin’ now, huh?”

“I was so plumb wore out for a while, I didn’t seem to believe in nothin’ no more. But now my clothes are startin’ to dry... I’m beginnin’ to believe again. I guess that’s the way the earth feels, when she’s wet. But the sun’ll start dryin’ her out and she’ll start callin’ to me again just the way Nona does sometimes.”

Tim says, resigned, “I knowed it all along, you’d never leave this place. If there was only one farmer left on this earth... It’d be you.”

Sam smiles, happy.

“Them machines o’ yourn, they’re fine. I realize that. But you sure can’t eat ‘em. Once in a while, you gotta have a hunk o’ beef and a few ears o’ corn to fill up your belly. Oh, you city folks are mighty smart. But I’m afraid without us farmers, you’d get kinda skinny.”

“And without us workers,” Tim responds, “I just wonder what’d happen to you all. Your plow, she sure didn’t grow on no tree. And your gun that you feed your bunch with in the winter, you didn’t plant no seeds to get that. Some day, like, I hope you get yourself a tractor. Where do you reckon that’ll come from? Believe me, friend... it takes all kinds to make up this old world.”

“You love your farm. That’s right. You stay. I like to work in a factory. And that’s why I come here to take you back with me, Sam. Well, you know what I’m talkin’ about. I don’t mean no harm. I’d just like to help you.”

Sam puts his arm around his friend. “Yeah, I know, Tim. Thanks!”

From the kitchen, Nona calls out, “Coffee’s all ready!”

The two men get up from the porch. Grannie and the kids come in from the wet field.

Nona gives Sam an encouraging smile as he walks in, while the dog looks on.

The kids jump up and down, clamoring: “I want honey! I want honey!”

“Boy, nothin’ could taste better than this!” says Tim sipping the coffee.

Sam walks to the stove and warms his hands over the tea kettle. Nona hands him his coffee.

The family gathers round the stove, much as they did when they first moved in.

The sun is shining, the land is dry. Sam arrives with the horse-drawn plow.

Nona is in jeans and shirt, holding a rake. She says to Granny, "Tomorrow I guess we'll be through with the plowin'."

Sam puts his arm around Nona, looking out at the fields. "Yeah... spring'll be here before we know it, Honey. I reckon we can start our seedin' a little early this year."