

## The Southerner, Part VIII

Jean Renoir, Dir. (1945)

It's early morning, Sam and Nona are asleep out on the porch, sprawled over the quilt, and the dog is barking furiously. Out in the yard, beyond the bare and twisted trees, Finlay is chasing cows. Sam wakes up to see the dog nipping at Finlay's heels and cows tromping through the vegetable patch.

Sam sits up, bare-chested, waking Nona, who immediately cries out, "Our vegetable garden!" "That's Finlay," Sam replies. "And them's Devers cows!" He runs out to the yard.

Finlay is swinging at the plants with a big stick, mowing them down. His pigs are rooting around and eating the vegetables. Sam tries to chase the cows away.

The pigs are having a feast. By the time Sam runs them off, it's too late. The damage is done; the vegetable garden is ruined. Nona arrives, dismayed by what she sees.

In a frenzy, Finlay rips up plants. The cows flatten the garden.

As Finlay runs off, Sam and Nona struggle to put their fences back up. But it's too much: they drop the planks in frustration, and Sam decides to take care of business. "You go on back in the house, Honey." He tucks his shirt in and heads out.

When he finds Finlay, he grabs him roughly by the shoulders. "Finlay! What do you know about this?" "I don't know nothin'! I didn't do it!" "No, not by yourself, but we both know who did! C'mon, we're goin' to your place."

Finlay drives the cows and pigs on with a stick until they reach the farm, where Sam runs straight over to Devers.

"Devers, why did you do it?!"

"What do you mean why did I do it? You can't prove nothin'. The law'd call it an act of God! As for your garden, you can plant it again, can't you?"

"Plant it again!?"

They face off in front of the well. Devers taunts Sam. "Did you come to borrow some seed?"

"I wouldn't borrow –"

"Wait a minute!" Devers walks over to the well and grabs the rope. "This rope's plumb ruined. Remember what we agreed on when you first come and asked for water?"

"You mean about replacin' it?"

"Yeah, it's time for you to do it now. I don't aim to use this one no more." He cuts the rope with his jackknife. "And I'm sick and tired of you comin' around askin' for water!"

Sam has just about had it. "And now Devers, I'm gonna break your neck!"

Holding the open knife in one hand, Devers replies grimly, "I'm mighty glad you started this, Tucker. 'Specially with Finlay here as a witness. That makes two of us can talk to the law."

Sam grabs Devers' hand and punches him in the face. Recovering, Devers jabs at Sam with the knife.

They continue to fight, as Finlay watches. The cows, oblivious, munch on grass.

Devers has Sam on his back and is about to plunge the knife into his chest when Becky yells. "Pa, don't!"

"Shut your mouth! Get back in the house!" Sam takes advantage of the distraction to sock Devers again and manages to pin him down.

Once they're back on their feet, Sam takes a stick and knocks the knife out of Devers' hand. He pushes the older man hard against the fence.

"You'd like to see me leave here, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah!"

"Why?"

"Course I would!"

"What did I ever do to you?"

"I told you first time you come to ask for water. Just don't like to see folks tryin' to be better than they are. This world has got to be them what gives orders and them what takes 'em."

"And you figure it's you to give 'em and me to take 'em. That right? Why?"

"Cause I worked hard all my life."

"I worked hard too. You know that!"

"Why here, and not someplace else? Before you come, I was alone in this place. Everything was mine! I was figuring on buying your farm. It was cheaper then. Now, if things goes on like this, everything's going to be yours."

"All I ever see is you, everywhere I go! In the woods, killin' the varmints, at the river, catching the fish. Finlay even told me that you set a line for Lead Pencil."

Finlay sneaks up behind Devers and hands him the knife.

Becky screams, "Sam! Sam!"

Alerted, Sam disarms Devers, picks him up and tosses him head first into the pigpen.

Shirt ripped open, chest bleeding, Sam strides out of the farm, as the residents stand and watch.

When Sam has gone, Devers climbs out of the pen and calls Finlay over. "Get my gun!" Finlay hurries to the house and Becky runs off.

Devers, rifle in hand, sets off for the Tucker farm. Finlay, running on ahead, suddenly stops and points with a stick. "Uncle Henry!" It's Sam, sitting by the river. He's strung a line for Lead Pencil from a log on the shore!

Sitting on a fallen tree trunk, Sam washes the cut in his chest.

Over his head, the fishing line twitches! Sam spins around, looking out at the spot where Lead Pencil likes to find his dinner. He crouches down for a better look.

Wading into the water, he grabs the line and pulls it in, as Devers and his nephew watch from afar. The image is framed as another river idyll, the calm water, the steadfast trees.

Devers brings his rifle up to his shoulder and aims at Sam, who is struggling with the line as Finlay looks on.

Suddenly a huge fish jumps up out of the water!  
Slowly lowering his rifle, Devers cries out, "Holy smokes! It's Lead Pencil!" Without thinking, he passes his weapon to Finlay.

He leaps out of hiding and runs to the river, Finlay behind him.

They watch as Sam struggles with the heavy fish.

Devers rushes over. "Can I help you?" he asks.  
"You can grab hold of that line." Devers moves in closer to Sam. Pulling the line in unison, they wade out into the water, toward Lead Pencil.

The big fish lies exhausted on the riverbank. "Tucker," says Devers. "That's my fish."  
"So you own the river, too, eh? Well, maybe the law will call my hook and line an act of God."  
"You give me the fish and swear never to say you caught it, and... I'll give you a dollar."

"I don't want no dollar. My folks likes fish," replies Sam, coiling up the line.  
"Well, all right... let me take it and keep it for a day or two and show it at the store. And then you can have it back."  
"Folks likes fresh fish, Devers."

"Well, let me take it, and... You can use out of my garden." Sam doesn't say anything. "Well, you can have the whole garden."  
"The well rope...? How we gonna draw water?"  
"Oh, I got another rope in the barn," Devers admits.

Nona arrives, with Becky at her side. "What happened, Sam? Becky told me..."

"It ain't nothin', honey. I was just helpin' Devers pull this big old catfish here out of the river. He done caught Lead Pencil."