

# **Grapes of Wrath**

## ***Commentary By Daniela 8T***

The opening shot in *The Grapes of Wrath* is a huge empty field and a small figure walking in it in the distance. Then it opens up to the next scene in front of a sort of diner and Tom Joad (the man from the distance) is walking towards the diner. There are some trucks parked in front of the diner, and some men too. A woman comes out of the diner (we can tell she's a waitress) and chats with a truck driver, asking when he'll be back. The truck driver gets in his truck, but Tom catches up with him, and requests a ride. The driver insists he isn't allowed to give rides to hitchhikers, but Tom begs him, until eventually the driver gives in and allows him a ride if he crouches down so no one will see him until they're out of the area.

When Tom gets in beside the truck driver, the driver studies him, examining his every detail. The driver notices Tom's stiff coat and wounded hands. He realizes that to have hands roughened like Tom's you would've had to have been working with a pick, or some other tool to work the land. Tom understands that the driver has noticed something that has made him suspicious. Since many times criminals who go in jail work with sledge hammers or other tools, Tom questions the driver on his suspicions, and as he gets off the truck, confirms that he had indeed been in jail for homicide.

After Tom gets out of the truck, he meets Casey. Casey was the town's preacher, who baptized Tom. They talk for a while, sharing memories of some of Casey's ridiculous sermons, and sharing a drink. Casey admits to Tom that he stopped being a preacher because he "lost the call" and because he has nothing to preach about anymore. After their conversation, Tom informs Casey that he's heading towards his house to see his family again. Casey doesn't

really have a place to go, so he follows along, and they walk there together.

When Tom is talking to Casey, he tells him why he only got seven years of jail. The reason is because the man who he killed had a knife in Tom, so they let him off with only seven years. Also, he got out after only four years because he was let out on parole, which means that he could be let out of jail, but had to follow very strict rules such as not being associated with any other crimes until the end of his parole.

Casey says he lost the spirit because he isn't sure of anything anymore. To be someone that everyone else looks up to, you need to be sure of things. You need to know the answer to everything, and you need to be sure of what is what. But he isn't.

When Tom is going through the family's cabin, his eyes are bewildered because of the shock he feels. He is in the home where he has spent all of his childhood, and it is cold, empty, and dark. He was expecting his warm, loving family to be there, waiting for him, with their everyday behavior. But instead, the house is deserted and there is an eerie atmosphere because of how vacant it feels. When he finds something to light the cabin with, he sees that it is in fact unoccupied except for a few scattered things, he supposes that they're all either gone, or dead.

When he looks around in the cabin for a while, he finds some of his family's personal belongings lying on the floor: a clear sign that they are not there. He finds one of his mother's button-up shoes, and a felt hat that used to be his, that his grandfather had given to him.

When Tom and Casey are searching around the cabin for any clues to where the Joad family may have gone, they find a man hiding in the house. This man is Muley, a friend of the Joad family. Muley is a very scared looking man, and looks a

bit crazy, at that. He tells them things like where the Joad family is and why they left their home. Muley is a great source of information to Tom Joad about his family's whereabouts. Muley updates Tom that the "cats" threw everyone out of their homes, including Muley himself. He notifies Tom that the so-called cats are caterpillar tractors, which are run by an expensive company that are shoving families out of their homes to later demolish their houses. Tom immediately asks Muley what he knows about his family, and gets some much needed answers. Muley informs Tom that his family is at his Uncle John's place, but that it won't be long until that house is torn down as well.

John Ford inserts a flashback into the film when Muley is explaining what happened to him and his family. We see this scene happening, obviously from Muley's point of view. Of course, Tom hasn't seen any of this happening because he was in jail, and this was Muley with his family, the Joad family was nowhere near this while it was occurring. During this flashback, Muley is at his house, with his family, and a man in a "cat" comes up to them and tells them that he needs to knock their house down.

Muley is surprised when the driver of the "cat" takes off his goggles because he recognizes the man driving the tractor. Muley gets very upset because this man is fighting against his own people. He is in shock, but threatens to shoot the driver. The driver remains calm and explains simply to Muley that even if he **does** shoot him, it won't do him any good, because they'd just send a replacement.

When Tom and Casey arrive at Uncle John's cabin, they find the Joad family all gathered in the kitchen having lunch together. The family consists of many, and when they first see Tom, they're all excited and overjoyed that he's out of jail.

When Casey and Tom arrive at Uncle John's cabin, the first person who sees Tom is Ma Joad. Ma sees Tom and is immediately comforted. At first she fears that he may have busted out of jail, and that she has to hide him. Relieved when he assures her that he got out on parole, she touches his cheek, and Tom is overwhelmed by love and happiness. She then confirms that they are in fact going to California, although she doesn't want to. Ma has instinctive worry for her son, and hopes greatly that they didn't do anything to him to make him mean.

Tom's homecoming is greeted by the whole Joad family after Pa spots them. The whole bunch of them get up from their lunch to welcome him: Ma, Pa, Winifield, Ruthie, Grandpa, Noah, John, Al, Connie and Rosasharn. Everyone goes except for Grandma, who stays at the table eating.

John Ford manages to create the mood of sadness and longing as Ma is ridding herself of some old things. She has a type of box from which she takes various objects. She looks at each of them, remembering what they meant to her and when and where she got them. Most of the things she throws into the fire in front of her. A couple of things she keeps, like a pair of earrings that she holds up to her face, and then stores in her pocket.

As the Joad family is getting ready to leave, they notice that Grandpa is missing. They figure he's at the outhouse, but when they go looking, he isn't there. They eventually find him, and when they do he sits on the steps firmly. He refuses to go to California. He is too stubborn to have sense talked into him. He is like a headstrong child, and says, *"Muley's livin', ain't he? And I'm \*twicet\* the man Muley is!"*. He then becomes calmer and says, *"And I ain't gonna listen either. I tol' you what I'm gonna do. And I don't give a hoot in a hollow if they's oranges and grapes crowdin' a fella outa bed even, I ain't a-goin' to California! This here's my country."*

*I b'long \*here\*. It ain't no good----but it's mine.*” They then give him some soothing syrup, the one that Ma gave to the children to put them to sleep. She mixes it with Grandpa’s coffee, and as he gets sleepy, they put him in the truck. He later dies of a stroke, and they rip a page out of a bible and write a note in pencil and leave it where they bury him on the side of the road.