



Tom Joad's speech

John Steinbeck
The Grapes of Wrath
(1939)

Chapter 28

While Ma Joad is cooking dinner, Winfield comes home and tells her that Ruthie, during a fight with other children, boasted that her brother had killed a man and was hiding. Ma goes to warn Tom, who leads her into the cave where he has been hiding. He tells his mother he has been thinking a lot about Jim Casy and his teachings.

'Hm-m,' he said. 'Lookie, Ma. I been all day an' all night hidin' alone. Guess who I been thinkin' about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me¹. But now I been thinkin' what he said, an' I can remember – all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he
5 jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good, 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less² it was with the rest, an' was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn' think I was even listenin'. But I know now a fella ain't³ no good alone.'

'He was a good man,' Ma said.

Tom went on, 'He **spouted out** some Scripture once, an' it didn' soun' like no hell-fire
10 Scripture⁴. He tol' it twicet, an' I remember it. Says it's from the Preacher.'

'How's it go⁵, Tom?'

'Goes, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will **lif' up** his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up." That's part of her.'

15 'Go on,' Ma said. 'Go on, Tom.'

'Jus' a little bit more. "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall **withstand** him, and a three-fold cord⁶ is not quickly broken."

'An' that's Scripture?'

20 'Casy said it was. Called it the Preacher.'

'**Hush** – listen.'

'On'y the wind, Ma. I know the wind. An' I got to thinkin', Ma – most of the preachin' is about the poor we shall have always with us, an' if you got nothin', why, jus' fol' your hands⁷ an' to hell with it, you gonna git ice cream on gol' plates when you're
25 dead. An' then this here Preacher says two get a better reward for their work.'

'Tom,' she said. 'What you aimin'⁸ to do?'

He was quiet for a long time. 'I been thinkin' how it was in that gov'ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an' if they was a fight they fixed it theirself; an' they wasn't no cops⁹ **wagglin'** their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin' why we can't do that all over. Throw out the cops that ain't our
30 people. All work together for our own thing – all **farm** our own lan'.

'Tom,' Ma repeated, 'what you gonna do?'

'What Casy done,' he said.

'But they killed him.'

35 'Yeah,' said Tom. 'He didn' duck¹⁰ quick enough. He wasn' doing nothin' against the law, Ma. I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow¹¹, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hundred thousan' good farmers is **starvin'**. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' **yelled**, like them fellas yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch¹² –'

40 Ma said, 'Tom, they'll drive you¹³, an' cut you down like they done to young Floyd.' 'They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin' all our people.'

'You don't aim to kill nobody, Tom?'

'No. I been thinkin', long as I'm a outlaw anyways, maybe I could – Hell, I ain't thought it out clear, Ma. Don' worry me¹⁴ now. Don' worry me.'

45 They sat silent in the coal-black cave of vines¹⁵. Ma said, 'How'm I gonna know 'bout you? They might kill ya an' I wouldn' know. They might hurt ya. How'm I gonna know?'

- 1 Used ta bother me. Mi irritava.
- 2 'less. Unless.
- 3 a fella ain't. A fellow isn't.
- 4 didn' soun' like no hell-fire Scripture. Non faceva paura come la Bibbia.
- 5 How's it go. Cosa diceva.
- 6 three-fold cord. Corda a tre capi.
- 7 fol' your hands. Fold your hands: incrocia le braccia.
- 8 you aimin'. Intendi.
- 9 cops. Poliziotti.
- 10 He didn' duck. Non si è scansato.
- 11 lan' layin' fallow. Terra giace abbandonata.
- 12 ranch. Fattoria.
- 13 they'll drive you. Ti daranno addosso.
- 14 Don' worry me. Non mi assillare.
- 15 vines. Viti.



Tom laughed uneasily, 'Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one – an' then –'

50 'Then what, Tom?'

'Then it don' matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where – wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why¹⁶, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' – I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build – why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.'

'I don' un'erstan', Ma said. 'I don' really know.'

60 'Me neither,' said Tom. 'It's jus' stuff I been thinkin' about. Get thinkin' a lot when you ain't movin' aroun'. You got to get back, Ma.'

'You take the money then.'

He was silent for a moment. 'Awright¹⁷, he said.

'An', Tom, later – when it's **blowed over**, you'll come back. You'll find us?'

65 'Sure,' he said. 'Now you better go. Here, gimme your han.' He guided her toward the entrance. Her fingers **clutched** his wrist. He swept the vines aside and followed her out. 'Go up to the field till you come to a sycamore¹⁸ on the edge, an' then cut acrost the stream. Good-by.'

'Good-by,' she said, and she walked quickly away.

16 why. Be'.

17 Awright. All right.

18 sycamore. Albero di sicomoro.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted verbs with their meaning.

- 1 be silent
- 2 dying from lack of food
- 3 raise, pull up
- 4 cried, shouted
- 5 cultivate
- 6 forgotten
- 7 resist, oppose
- 8 held tightly
- 9 said in a pompous manner
- 10 moving up and down or from side to side

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the text again and answer the following questions.

- 1 Where does the conversation between Tom and his mother take place?
- 2 What has Tom been doing while hiding?
- 3 Where had Casy once gone and why?
- 4 What had he found out instead?
- 5 What did Casy use to preach?
- 6 What does Tom intend to do?
- 7 What is Ma worried about?
- 8 What does Tom promise his mother?
- 9 Does she understand what he means?
- 10 What does she give him before leaving?



➤ COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

- 3 **SAY** what kind of narrator is used by Steinbeck.
- 4 **FOCUS** on the dialogue. What concept does it deal with?
- 5 **DESCRIBE** the development of Tom's character from 'self' to 'community', from 'I' to 'we'.
- 6 **EXPLAIN** the symbolical meaning of the cave.
- 7 **TRY** to explain what Tom means in lines 51-57.
- 8 **STATE** the main theme in the text.

➤ COMPETENCE: LINKING THE TEXT TO THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE AGE

- 9 **DISCUSS.** Trace the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Transcendentalism (→ 5.9) on Tom's idea of people not having individual souls, but just being part of one great soul shared by humanity.

➤ COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

- 10 **DISCUSS.** Has this text changed the way you look at people or at the world? Is the message of the novel still relevant today? Does the spirit of Tom Joad still live on in the world?