

The Carpenter

Once upon a time two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in forty years of farming side by side, sharing machinery, and trading labor and goods as needed without a hitch. Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning, there was a knock on Jack's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days work," he said. "Perhaps you have a few small jobs here and there?" "Yes," said the brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbor. In fact, it's my younger brother. Last week there was a meadow between us and he took his bulldozer to the river levee and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll go him one better. See that pile of lumber curing by the barn? I want you to build me a fence, an eight-foot fence, so I won't need to see his place anymore. Cool him down anyhow."

The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the stain, I'll be able to do the job that pleases you."

Jack had to go into town, so he helped the carpenter get all the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day, measuring, sawing, nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished the job. The farmer's eyes opened wide and his jaw dropped. There was no fence at all. Just a bridge stretching from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of work, handrails and all, and his younger brother was coming across, hand outstretched.

"You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all I've said and done." The two brothers stood at each end of the bridge and then they met in the middle, taking each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I have a lot of other projects for you," Jack said.

John D. Grange, April 5, 2004