

I, CARPENTER by Greg Oliver Bodine

(Wanda Jackson's Country/Pop cover version of "If I Had a Hammer" begins to play as pre-show lights slowly fade to blackout. Sounds of crickets are soon heard under the music as the song shrinks in resonance and assumes the distinctly smaller, "funny" sound of a transistor radio.

At rise, lights fade up to reveal RICK, a carpenter, singing along to the lyrics of the tune on his portable radio as he begins to expertly plane the side of a screen door—braced vertically between his legs at center. Dressed in worn cargo shorts, a sweaty t-shirt, boots and leather tool belt, he works feverishly by the glow of a caged work light that is hooked to one of two saw horses nearby. A worn canvas bag and a hammer lie next to the radio on a gazebo bench upstage; some other tools and hardware are seen scattered on the floor. SCOTT, dressed more leisurely in a t-shirt, baggy gym shorts and flip-flops, enters carrying a flashlight and his car keys—unnoticed by RICK.)

SCOTT. (Softly over the radio:) Rick.

(RICK doesn't hear him. SCOTT shines the flashlight in RICK's face.)

SCOTT. (Louder:) Rick!

(RICK looks up, startled.)

RICK. Sweet Jesus!

SCOTT. What are you doin' here?

RICK. (Over the radio:) What?

(RICK leans the screen door against the saw horses and puts the planer down. He scurries up to the bench to turn off the radio as SCOTT switches off his flashlight.)

RICK. (Jovially:) Hey, Scott. Man, you startled me.

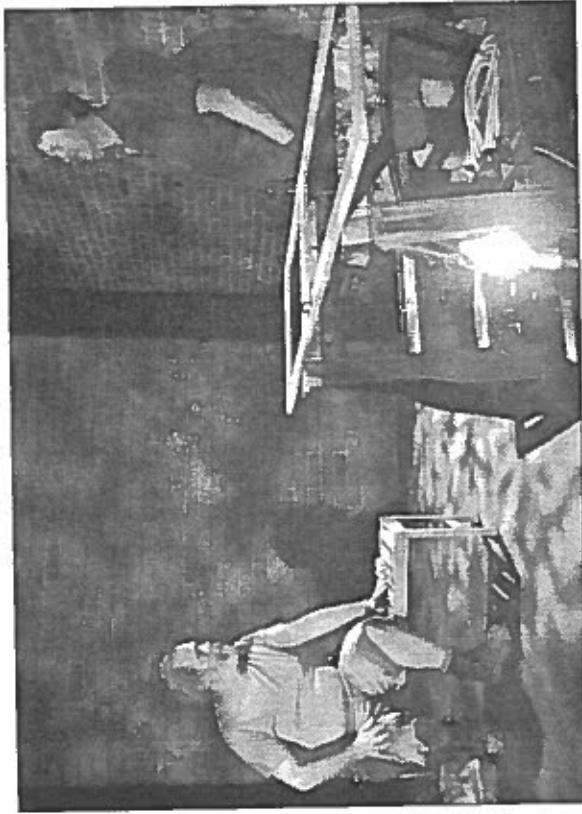
SCOTT. Uh-huh. What are you doin' here?

RICK. I...I know, yeah. (With a nervous chuckle:) It's late. I just wanted—

SCOTT. You wanted to what?

RICK. ...to finish this gazebo before the Jensens get back from their vacation. I'm almost done—just finishing this screen door.

SCOTT. You been working here all day?



Michael Selkirk and Greg Oliver Bodine in *I, Carpenter*, part of the InGenius Short Play Festival at Manhattan Theatre Source, New York City (2011).

Photo: John Watts.

(RICK picks up the screen door and fidgets with it, framing himself as he stands facing SCOTT.)

RICK. (Attempting nonchalance.) Nah. Only since about seven. It's so much cooler here when it gets dark. I get more done by myself too, especially on a Sunday.

SCOTT. Rick...I fired you on Friday.

RICK. I know, but ya see—

SCOTT. No 'buts.'

RICK. Yeah, but—

SCOTT. Hello: Earth to Rick! What part of 'fired' don't you understand? You're gone, done, end of story, capice?

RICK. I know, but I got this thing about finishing—

SCOTT. I don't want to hear it, Rick. You're off the job and off the site, which means you're trespassin' right now. You're breakin' the law.

RICK. Scott, just hear me out. Look, I understand why you had to let me go. I understand, I do—

(SCOTT crosses in to RICK.)

SCOTT. No, I don't think you do, Rick. But that's not my problem. You bein' here—this is my problem.

(SCOTT brushes past RICK toward the bench more to closely inspect the work site. RICK counters.)

RICK. Benny and Juan are good guys. Nice guys. Good workers. I'll give you that. Hard-working [REDACTED]

SCOTT. (Turning around.) Here we go again! Christ. I'm not gettin' into this—not doin' this dance with you again. Come on. Let's go—pack up your shit.

RICK. And cheap to pay! Cheaper than me. No taxes, no workers comp to worry about. Am I right?

SCOTT. That's not why I fired you!

RICK. I understand, Scott. It's OK.

(SCOTT puts the flashlight down on the bench and briskly crosses back down to RICK.)

SCOTT. Rick—pack up your tools and get [REDACTED] off this site or I'm callin' the cops.

RICK. Profanity has never been a good substitute for open dialogue.

(SCOTT roughly takes the screen door from RICK and tables it on the smv horses.)

RICK. I have to tell you, I take some offense to it.

SCOTT. You got ten seconds.

(SCOTT takes out his cell phone.)

RICK. Scott...

SCOTT. Startin' now.

RICK. I came here to finish the job, Scott—

SCOTT. Ten, nine, eight, seven...

RICK. (Overlapping SCOTT's countdown.) Not to hassle you! Just to finish what I started...I have to. I'm not looking to get paid—just let my finish my work, man!

SCOTT. ...three, two, one.

RICK. Wait. WAIT! Ok, OK—I'm leaving Scott. You win! (RICK starts to quickly pack up his tools.) You see? Putting everything away. But Scott? Before I take off, Scott...before I go—look around here and tell me I haven't done a great job. Please, just tell me. Look around this gazebo. If it lasts a year, it'll last a hundred! Look at the framing. Look here—these benches I finished. The workmanship! I counter-sunk bolts into the brace joints and topped them with pine plugs so the hardware doesn't show.

SCOTT. Smart.

RICK. Elegant— (Slaps a bench, sits) but sturdy!

SCOTT. Looks good.

RICK. (Almost giddy.) Right? A freakin' hippo could play musical chairs on this and it wouldn't break! You don't believe me? Have a seat.

SCOTT. (Humoring him.) I believe you.

RICK. Look around and tell me the work here is not A-plus. Scott. Scott? Look me straight in the eye and tell me I don't know my craft. Huh? Tell me the truth...in your heart of hearts.

SCOTT. Rick...your work is fine...better than fine.

RICK. Ya see, ya see? Uh huh!

SCOTT. First class carpentry. Really. You have a way with wood—it's a gift.

RICK. (*Ecstatic:*) I know! Ya see? I know. That's what I'm saying, man. It's God-given.

SCOTT. But it's not gonna get you back on the job.

(RICK *frowns perceptibly.*)

...It's not the quality of your work, Rick. That's not why I let you go.

END