



THE BERRINGER BROTHERS

ON WHY THEY'RE STILL FEUDING

BEFORE MY MAGIC writer's wormhole collapses completely, I can't help stopping at the Berringer farms, in hopes of getting a bushel of J.W.'s marvelous tomatoes. Unfortunately, I find myself in the middle of yet another of their famous arguments.

Matthew—in a huge faded apron—is busy pinning wet clothes to the line in his backyard. From across the gardens, J.W. stands on his porch, leaning over the ornate railing and hollering something about dadburned chickens.

As I consider whether or not to beat a hasty retreat before somebody pulls out a shotgun, Matthew spies me and waves me over. Since I'm here, I figure I might as well take the opportunity to get a few quotes from them as well.

Would either of you like to go on the record about the shocking events this past August?

Matthew: [He pushes his spectacles up his nose.] Well, now, I'm certain we'd like to help you out, but I don't know what we'd say that hasn't been said before with all these big-city newspapermen swarming down here lately. Was an ordeal, I'll say that. A great ordeal, and we all thank the good Lord we came out of it as well as we did.

J.W.: [Hollering across the gardens.] Well, and some of us came out of it a heap better than others, didn't they? I don't remember *your* tomatoes getting trampled on.

Matthew: And what's that have to do with "events"? That

was before anybody'd even heard of that furrin d'rigible thing.

J.W.: Well, and it was the girl that done it, wasn't it? That was the start of everything.

Matthew: Jael wasn't the one trampling your tomatoes, you old coot. You did most of the trampling yourself and you know it.

Now, gentlemen, I am sorry about the tomatoes, but actually what it occurs to me that my readers might be most interested in is why you two are still feuding. I thought you had a truce or something?

J.W.: Hmp. That was just temporary—for bustin' that young fool Hitch Hitchcock out of jail.

But I thought it might have helped you two to remember what it was like to actually get along. I mean, you don't really have any reason to be squabbling any longer do you? Neither one of you can honestly say you want to marry Ginny Lou Thatcher anymore, can you?

[Embarrassed silence all around.]

Well, then why are you feuding?

J.W.: [Muttering.] Nosy young writer gals anyway.

Matthew: [Finishes pinning up a pair of overalls and turns to face me, hands on his hips.] Now, miss, I should think this was all quite plain to you. Wouldn't you say that an irascible temper is reason enough to make a body difficult to live with?

But you don't have an irascible temper.

Matthew: Precisely.

J.W.: Hah!

Matthew: I'll tell you the truth, I'm all for truces. I like them. But you can't have a truce with a man who won't give you a moment's conversation without bellowing like a stuck bull calf. [He points at J.W., just in case I miss his meaning.]

J.W.: *What?* Now you know that ain't true! [He's very red in the face now. Even in the cool of the evening, I begin worrying about the possibility of a heatstroke. He turns to me, and his eyes bulge just a little.] Now, girl, you just listen to me. You want to know why we're still a-feuding? All right, I'll tell you.

Matthew: [Under his breath.] 'Course he will.

J.W.: Well, and it could just be because some folks is stubborn. They was born stubborn, and they'll die stubborn. Now you just take that baseball game we was playing the other day. You think anybody could tell a certain somebody he couldn't see home plate with or *without* his spectacles? No, I don't think so!

Matthew: Oh, come now, that was weeks ago. You really need to stop chewing these things over. Bad for your health—and at your age too.

J.W.: *My* age? And you're not older'n me, is that it?

You know what, gentlemen, I think my time here is up. I really do need to be going. But thank you so much for your time—

J.W.: Now see what you done? Scared her off is what you've done.

Matthew: The girl says she need to go, she needs to go.

[At which point, I discreetly put my hands over my ears and trudge back down the driveway toward my waiting wormhole.]