

BOB

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“**F**or my next trick, I would like a volunteer from the audience”
As was usually the case when an audience heard these words, everyone started to nervously look at their feet hoping against hope that it would not be them that got picked.

“How about you sir?”

Having chosen what appeared to be a linebacker for a professional football team, Bob pointed to him and continued with his act.

“Aw c’mon now, a big fella like you shouldn’t be afraid of a little magic” This of course elicited the usual response of laughter from the crowd, now happily engrossed in the show once more, having themselves not been picked to be made a fool of.

“What’s your name sir” Bob asked as the man came out from the crowd into the circle created by the crowd around Bob and his gear.

“Greg” he all but whispered.

“Speak up sir, you’re about to be humiliated in front of all your friends!”

This of course got everyone giggling.

“Greg” he repeated a little louder.

“Good afternoon Greg. Are you prepared to be dazzled and amused and generally made fun of by The Great Bendini?”

Greg shrugged forward in an embarrassed chuckle as the crowd laughed in appreciation of poor Greg’s predicament.

“Good!”

Walking around Greg’s back, Bob went to his fold up stand and retrieved a crowbar from beneath the black cloth which covered the stand.

As he turned back to face his embarrassed assistant, he added a little flare to his spin so that his cape would spin dramatically around him. He knew the cape looked ridiculous on him, but the kids loved it. He supposed the archetypal image of the magician was what first attracted people to his little street show, but he still hated the cape. He felt It made him look like an idiot..

Idiot or not, this gig paid the bills. What’s more, he didn’t have to breath fire or ride a unicycle or anything really dangerous, and he didn’t have to make balloon animals or dress like a clown. Sometimes he felt like a clown in his magicians cape, but at least he didn’t have to do the face-makeup thing. There were some things in life to be thankful for, and as far as Bob was concerned, not having to wear makeup was one of them.

As his cloak finished its grandiose swing, he held the crowbar high above his head for the now substantial crowd to see.

“I assume everyone here knows what this item is”

He paused for dramatic effect. Most people nodded. A few mumbled that yes, they knew.

“Hasn’t anyone but me ever had a flat tire?” The crowd chuckled. “It’s a tire iron ladies and gentlemen, just like the one you used to have in your cars before they turned into the little toy cars with little toy jacks” This always got an appreciative nod from those old enough to remember the good old days of big cars, big jacks, and big tire irons.

“Greg; I would like you to take this tire iron, and verify for the audience, that it is in fact a real, iron bar.”

Greg took the tire iron from Bob as he handed it to him, and examined it closely, as if he were looking for the manufacturer’s name on a fine piece of china.

“Greg...” Again Bob paused for dramatic effect.

“Greg, this isn’t your mother’s favorite tea set” Another chuckle from the crowd at poor Greg’s expense.

With a pronounced stage whisper, Bob leaned up close to Greg and put his arm around his shoulder: “Work with me here Greg, people are watching”

Waiting for the crowd to stop laughing and for Greg to straighten his shoulders again after some embarrassed chuckles of his own, Bob took the tire iron from Greg and started to strut with it high above his head walking in a circle just inside the circle of people that had formed around him and his impromptu stage.

“What you’ve got here, ladies and gentlemen, is a genuine American made iron bar in the form of a tire iron. It weighs approximately 6 pounds and is impervious to most forms of abuse short of a nuclear attack.” As he spoke, he feigned a small trip and dropped the tire iron to the ground. The iron bar, having slipped out his hand in an end over end fashion, clanged to the ground on its end and then continued to bounce, clanging as only a two foot bar of solid iron can.

When the bar finally came to a rest on the ground, the crowd looked to Bob as if they had caught him in a blunder that no performer should ever make. Of course the trip was a fake, designed to let the crowd hear the sound of the bar falling on the cobble stones in the street. This gave the crowd, without realizing it, subconscious proof that the bar was indeed iron. Of course this also made Bob look like a fool, so with the clanging of iron still echoing through the street, Bob remarked sheepishly: “Of course it also survives clumsiness too.”

As the crowd laughed at the release of tension Bob’s joke allowed, he walked over to the bar and picked it up, bringing it once again over to Greg. Bob’s assistant seemed to be feeling a little better, knowing that he wasn’t the only one that made dumb mistakes in front of people he had never met before.

Loud enough for the whole crowd to hear, Bob addressed his assistant: “O.K. Greg, now’s your big chance to redeem yourself.” Pretending to whisper to Greg he continued: “And hopefully me along with you” Another chuckle from the crowd.

Resuming his stage voice he continued: “Greg, please take the iron bar in your hands and strike it against the ground as hard as you can.”

Greg, having taken the tire iron by its end, bent over and dutifully whacked the bar three times on the cobblestones. The bar clanged with each strike and on one strike rewarded Greg with a nice set of sparks for all those lucky enough to be in the front row of the crowd to see. Having completed his task he stood up straight and slowly slapped its weight into his left hand, making him look like someone who was contemplating murder.

“Greg, would you say this bar is in fact made of iron?”

Greg looked at the bar again as if he now truly appreciated the value of a wondrous artifact, and nodded. “Yeah, feels like an iron bar to me”

Someone in the crowd thought this was funny and let out a short laugh, which made everyone else laugh with them.

“Good, Greg, I’m glad you finally see things my way”

Greg smiled, having apparently gotten used to being picked on,

“Greg, you look like strong man. Do you work out?”

Greg blushed a little, but stood a little straighter and said “ Yeah, I guess a little”

“What do you think folks, does Greg here look like a strong guy?” Accentuating his question with light clapping, the crowd followed suit and start to applaud, agreeing that Greg did indeed look like strong. In truth he looked like a monster to Bob, but that’s what made this next part work so well for the crowd.

“Say Greg, how much can you bench press?”

Greg, now in his element, stood nice and straight and proudly stated: “I can push three fifty on a good day”

The crowd uttered a moan of appreciation at Greg’s statement. After a pause to let the crowd soak this fact in, Bob went on: “Greg I would like you to try something for me. I would like you to try and bend that bar.”

At this, the audience got a little quieter and eagerly awaited Greg’s response.

“Do you think you can do it Greg?”

Greg hefted the tire iron in his hands and gave it a test bend. “I don’t think so” he declared a little disappointed.

“I tell you what Greg, I don’t know if you can or if you can’t, but I would like for you to try.” He turned his attention to the crowd and in a loud clear voice said “What do you say folks, shall we see if he can bend the iron bar?” As usual, the people wanted to see the assistant try and bend the bar.

“Greg, the floor is yours. When you are ready, please try with all your great strength to bend the tire iron.”

“O.K. but no promises”

Grabbing the bar with both hands on either end ,Greg lifted the tire iron in front of his massive chest and tried to bend it in half. After about ten seconds of obvious strain, he released his tight grip and repositioned his hands so as to get a better grip. The crowd started to cheer him on by yelling and clapping and calling out his name.

Wanting nothing more than to bend the bar, Greg strained hard against the unrelenting iron. The muscles in his chest started to stretch his shirt and a bead of sweat started to form on his brow. The crowd started to rhythmically chant “Greg...Greg...Greg...”

Greg stopped trying to break the bar in half and decided to try a different tack. He took the bar by one hand and put the other end on the ground. Holding the other end about a foot off of the ground, he then put his foot in the middle of the bar and tried to pull the bar's one end, while pushing with his foot. Even with the crowd's enthusiastic support, Greg was unable to budge the stubborn bar.

Bob gave him about three minutes to try and accomplish his all but impossible goal, and finally walked up and touched Greg on the shoulder with one hand, while raising his other hand to the crowd to silence them.

"O.K. Greg, you gave it your best shot, What do you say?"

Now obviously winded, Greg breathlessly admitted defeat and nodded to Bob, handing over the tire iron in disgust at his own weakness.

Loud enough for all to hear, Bob addressed his tired assistant: "Don't worry Greg, in all my years, no one has ever been able to bend a tire iron with his bare hands."

Turning to the crowd he continued: "How about a nice round of applause for Greg's great attempt?"

The crowd went wild, encouraging Greg to take a deep breath, and a very dramatic bow.

As the crowd calmed down, Bob went into the final speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have just seen that the iron bar in Greg's possession is indeed made of iron, and is —as you would expect— quite solid in it's construction."

Turning to Greg he continued.

"Greg, I require of you one last piece of assistance."

Greg's breathing had returned to normal, and he was now ready to help again.

"Greg please hold the rod in your right hand with the rod pointing straight up at the sky."

Greg obliged looking like a cleric wielding his holy cross at an oncoming demon.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, what you are about to see, you will say is impossible. You will go home and say amongst yourselves over dinner: 'He must have switched tire irons when we weren't looking'. You will convince yourselves that I have somehow duped you. That is your right. However I ask of you only this: Consider for at least a moment that what you are about to see is in fact real. Consider that there are forces in this life that you cannot understand. Consider that there may be things in life which are so wondrous and unexplained as to evoke a feeling of childlike awe in even the strongest of unbelievers. Consider that perhaps science does NOT have all the answers. Consider that maybe, just maybe, magic exists."

"Will you do that for me ladies and gentlemen?"

The crowd applauded as if to say 'whatever, just get to the point'.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, please bring your attention to the iron bar in Greg's hand"

With a flourish Svengali would have been proud of, Bob, The Great Bendini, pointed to the iron bar from across the circle of people that made his stage.

"Ladies and Gentlemen behold, the true power of magic"

Bob thrust his hand out in Greg's direction and while slowly forming a fist with his outstretched hand, concentrated on the Iron Bar.

Slowly, as the crowd watched, and much to the chagrin of Greg, the tire iron seemed to begin to melt. The top of the bar, which was shaped like a chisel, slowly started to droop away from Greg's body.

Greg watched wide-eyed as the bar of iron which only moments before was unyielding to his great strength, bent as if it could not support its own weight.

Silence quickly overcame the once rambunctious crowd, so that each one of them could hear the creak of tortured iron as the bar was forced into its new shape.

Slowly, as if the iron had somehow become clay in the hands of a child, it started to curl. At this point it became apparent to all those watching that the bar was not just melting, but was somehow being shaped creaking in protest the whole time. The bar curled itself into a tight spiral up unto the point where Greg's hand held it. When it reached this point the iron bar stopped moving, as if it had always been in this shape and could never have been coerced to become a shape other than a spiral.

In the crowd Bob could hear moans of "Oh my God" and "Did you see that?" Greg, on the other hand, was so mesmerized by the whole thing that he just stared, slack-jawed, at the entire spectacle. When the bar stopped moving, and Bob's hand had become a tight fist, he made a great show of bringing his hand down to the side of his body, and then shooting it straight up in the air. As he did this, the bar started to unwind, slowly at first, then picking up speed until it snapped back into its original form. This time the noise generated by the forced movement of cold iron was louder. The bar seemed to sing as it shot straight up into its original form, faster than the crowd thought possible, and warmer than Greg expected.

The bar, having been tortured into moving in ways it was not designed to handle, heated and vibrated to the point where Greg's nervous system decided it was not safe to hold onto any more. With a gasp, he dropped the bar onto the street, where it once again clanged and bounced, in the fashion that one would expect of a tire iron.

Greg rubbed his hands together unconsciously. He was not burned, but rather having felt the increased heat and hum of the rod, had quite wisely decided that holding the rapidly heating thing, was not worth the momentary fame he was receiving.

The crowd was silent, as if they weren't sure what to do, or of what they had just seen.

Bob had to walk over to the bar retrieved it. Taking the Iron bar in his own hands, he held it high in the air for everyone to see. The Crowd, knowing a cue when they see one, burst into applause and cheering so loud, that even the people in the shops along side the street stopped to see what was going on outside.

After a minute or so of applause, The Great Bendini raised his hand to silence the crowd.

"Ladies and Gentlemen thank you. But please, how about a round of applause for my assistant Greg?" As they started to clap again, Bob showed Greg his way back to his friends.

"One last note my friends. Please remember that we street performers are here for a reason, and that reason is we hate having real jobs." As he spoke he walked to his fold up stand and pulled a hat out from under the cover. "Please find it in your heart to make a donation to my cause which I affectionately call eating and remember to tell your friends about The Great Bendini!"

One after another people came up to Bob and dropped money into his top hat. Most added one word critiques like “Awesome” or “Excellent”. Some would ask how the trick was done. His only response would be “Magic”