

Losin' It

By Rick Cogbill
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I stared out the front office window, scavenging my brain for any hint of recognition. “Hurry up, Quigley!” I whispered fiercely, giving him the license number of the vehicle that had just pulled in. I was sure I recognized the customer, but for the life of me I couldn't put a name to his face.

My service writer looked at his computer screen and scratched his head. “I dunno, Slim. That plate number isn't coming up. Are you sure you read it right?”

“I may be forgetful,” I growled, “but I ain't blind!” By this time, the front door was opening. “Er...ah, good morning, Mr...” Thankfully, Quigley jumped to my rescue.

“Mr. Shambles, how are you! It's been a long time.” Brushing by me to shake hands with the newcomer, he hissed in my ear, “It's your uncle Bob, Slim. Don't tell me you've forgotten!”

I don't know if that incident started it, but we began to have seniors' moments all over the shop, even from my apprentice. “Hey, Beanie,” I said, walking by the car he was lowering. “Are you sure you tightened the drain plug?”

He looked surprised. “Of course I'm sure! I...” Suddenly his face blanched and he began to raise the hoist again. “Great! Now that you ask, I can't remember.”

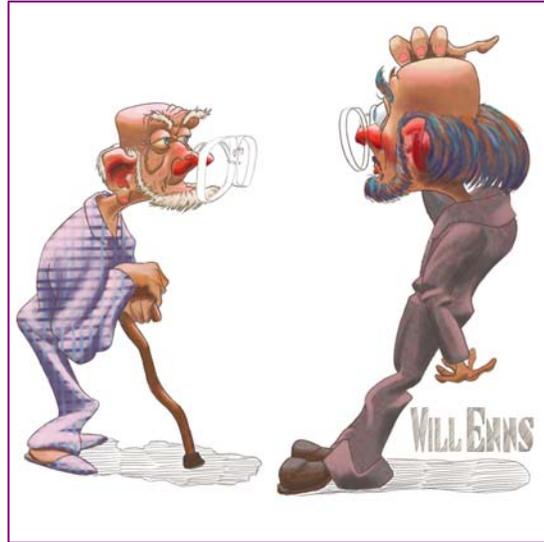
Later I came upon Basil getting ready to road test his alignment job. “Say, did you remember to put cotter pins in all the ball joints you replaced?”

His laughter died on his lips. “Slim, will you stop doing that! You know yourself how some jobs are so routine that you can't recall every step of the operation. Now I'll have to crawl underneath this car and recheck all my work!”

I shrugged. “Hey, I'm only trying to help. You know how easy it is to forget things.”

He glared at me. “You're the one who couldn't remember your own uncle, not me.”

Things weren't much better the next day. Tooner crawled out from underneath the 1-ton truck he'd been working on and exhaled a few choice words. “I've never had to fight so



hard with a tranny in all my life! If that clutch ever has to come out again, I sure ain't doing it." He started cleaning grease and dirt from the cuts on his hands.

"Uh, Tooner, just a thought...did you get the clutch disc facing the right way? You know how easy it is to confuse it on these models..." A hasty exit suddenly seemed to be in order, and I'm happy to report that most of the flying wrenches fell short of their intended target.

At lunchtime, Beanie was looking glum. "Anybody got any ideas? This '95 Cadillac DeVille has me stumped."

Basil looked up. "The one you put the new distributor in yesterday? I thought I heard it running already."

"It was. But when I tried it later, the module was blown." Beanie described how he had put in a second module, only to have die after a few starts.

Suggestions came thick and fast: Did you use lots of dielectric grease? Are you using only GM modules? How is the alternator output voltage?

Keeping an eye out for flying objects, I nervously put my hand up. The whole crew glared at me. "What!"

"Beanie, did you reinstall the small metal grounding strap when you changed the coil in the distributor cap? You know, the one that attaches to the mounting screws. Without it, the coil will spike and kill the module on its way to ground." The stunned silence was only momentary.

"Who could forget the strap!" cried Tooner.

"Even I know about that," groaned Quigley.

Basil was fed up. "Slim, you've really got to stop this..."

"Wait," said Beanie. "I think he has something. I didn't think that piece was important, so I chucked it out."

"What!" Now they stared down the The Bean.

He shrugged. "Hey, those HEI distributors are old school. I've hardly worked on them!" Fortunately, we had a spare ground strap lying in the ignition cabinet, and putting it back in the system solved our GM module problem.

Things were still testy by afternoon break, so I decided to share some good news. "Boys, I'm happy to report that we haven't had one comeback all week long, thanks to my

effective quality control measures.” I pulled out a large box of donuts. “So dig in; I got all your favorites!”

Basil peered into the box. “Where are my raspberry-filled long johns?”

“Yeah, and I don’t see my apple fritters,” complained Beanie. He looked again. “As a matter of fact, all I see here are bran muffins!”

I stared into the box. “Hmm. Well, I must have been thinking about your health. I hear that bran is good for your brain, and we all know how bad everybody’s memories have been recently...”

It was time for another hasty exit, and just so you know, flying bran muffins are a lot softer than flying wrenches.