

TIFFANY ALLEN

THE NEW GEORGIA WONDER

The people seated in the elegant dimly lit sunken living room have quieted down, a woman with an air of mystique defying her mid-twenties has taken a spot in the center of the room. Flashing the audience a bright smile, she waits as the host of the evening introduces her.

"Ask any man one of the most difficult tasks in the world," he says, "And they probably say 'Picking up a woman.'" The audience laughs politely. "Trust me guys, no manner of wit, charm, sex appeal or money will help you here. Please welcome the hardest woman to pick up - Tiffany Allen." Allen steps forward and begins to tell a story. Roughly 150 years ago, American audiences were greeted by a woman named Lulu Hurst who demonstrated an impossible force that has not since been demonstrated - until tonight. Allen calls two male volunteers up. Both men are obviously larger and stronger than the young magician - she chose them for this, because ... for the next twenty minutes, she will proceed to physically overpower them with inexplicable ease.

To prove the two men could overpower her, should they choose, Allen runs them through some control experiments. At her request, the two men hold their arms straight out, as Allen, comically using a step stool to be level with her assistant's height, attempts to push the arms back down to their sides, predictably failing. She then asks them to lift her hand off of her head. "Like I'm a little teapot" she says with a laugh.

As one last example, the two men lift Allen in the air, "like a ballerina," then set her back down, all with ease. Allen pulls out a tube of bright red lipstick, and applies it while looking in the ornate mirror she has given one of her volunteers. "Did you know lipstick was banned in the 1770's for being a form of witchcraft? Just an interesting



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fact," she says. The smile this time evokes the cat that ate the canary. "Let's try this again," Allen says.

The men hold their arms out again as she steps onto the stool. Obviously resisting her, she pushes their arms down with ease. Then, both men try at the same time to lift her hand off of her head, eventually using both of their hands. Four arms against one, yet she still prevails. Finally, the men go to lift her again. They struggle, both trying to gain more traction, physically shaking from their exertion to budge her. "You can start whenever you like," she quips. The audience laughs, and her volunteers applaud her. The hardest woman to pick up indeed.

This is the Georgia Wonder act presented in the 21st century. Originally performed in the 1880's by a select few women in their early teens, the act has not lost its appeal. Although pieces have been performed by numerous magicians and side-show performers in the years since, the entire act has not been faithfully recreated until recently.

The New Georgia Wonder, Tiffany Allen, became intrigued by the act when she started in magic after watching Ricky Jay's special, *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women*. In it, a petite actress, Megan Reisel, overpowered two Olympic athletes with ease. While working behind a magic counter in Myrtle Beach, Allen researched for two years and began performing the act twice a week in a venue show.

"When people ask me how I learned the act, I tell them it's like putting together a jigsaw puzzle without knowing the picture on the box. I'm still learning it ... honestly! The main source has been Lulu Hurst's autobiography, however, it's more self promotional than practical. I've had to piece a lot of the act together from different sources, not all of them in English.

I was so determined to resurrect the Georgia Wonder that I researched everywhere I could, from physics professors, to finding translators for medical journals of the act in foreign languages, and on a rare occasion I came across a first hand account from one of the 'victims' bold enough to admit they had been overpowered by a teenage girl."

"It's also been difficult to practice, what do you do when the last known performer of something has been dead for over 100 years? To learn a sleight not widely known you can go to an underground master for instruction or possibly have a video chat, but I didn't have that luxury. However, it caught my interest, my passion, because female empowerment should be more than just a lofty notion."

Elaborating on the development of the act, the



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origin of her tagline "The hardest woman to pick up" becomes clear. It's a bit like mentalism, you can't just rehearse by yourself you need an audience. After a while my friends got tired of being my 'victims', so I did what anybody would do. I went to a bar and found my own audience. I would find the biggest man there, and bet him a drink he couldn't pick me up or whatever stunt I was working on that day.



Then, one night when I told a guy I'd buy him a drink if he could pick me up. He gave me a pickup line instead. I love puns and knew there was a place for that in my act."

After two years of research and rehearsals, a local magician asked Allen if she would like to do a show with him at a restaurant. "Magic and Mystery" began in 2015, and the Georgia Wonder Act was performed regularly. Since then, the act has been featured in numerous magic and bizarre shows across the Southeast.

In January 2018, the act was presented alongside four other women performers at East Coast Spirit Sessions. "It's probably my favorite performance. I loved doing the Georgia Wonder at this specific convention because there were a few people in the audience who knew of and studied the act, but hadn't seen it. One heard through the grapevine I would be performing the act and asked if I could use him onstage. Of course I did! It was so rewarding to see other people as excited about this as I am."

