

The Loss of the Seal of Solomon

Like a deliberate shark on the hunt, Larry Capstick circled the packed mall parking lot in his red Ford Ranger looking for an easy walk to the entrance doors. He had finally lined up a parking spot and was about to back in when a small noisy hatchback that looked like it shouldn't have even been on the road darted into it nose first. Momentarily angry, Larry took a breath and smiled. Then waved. He wasn't in hurry. In fact, Larry had all day. Maybe more. Two teenage boys jumped out, their caps on backwards and oversized jackets hiding part of their neck tattoos. They smiled and waved at him with too much effort to show sincerity, and scurried to the mall's entrance. Three more times Larry circled the lot in his truck before finally settling into a recently opened spot. *Ahh, still warm*, he thought.

Beside him, his wife Tawny caught his grin out of the corner of her eye and smiled. She counted herself fortunate to be able to have a guy who didn't just comply with taking her to the mall as she wrapped up last minute gift ideas, he took her with a smile. Mind you, it hadn't always been like this. But the last five years or so he seemed to take a real shining to spending time with her on weekend errands instead of tinkering in his shed. And he didn't even put up a fuss when she needed to make a trip to the mall for the second time this week.

Larry turned off the ignition, as Tawny put some lip balm on herself. The two recent retirees each gave themselves the once over in their mirrors and stepped out of the truck into the frosty December air. He glanced around the parking lot as they walked, taking note of anything of consequence. As he did so, Larry ran his hand on the

outside of his pocket and smiled. The voices, ever constant, whispered incomprehensible commands to him that only he could hear, but he hardly took notice. He had long ago gotten used to the headaches the voices brought with them.

They walked in, almost side by side, through the automatic doors. The blasting heat of the foyer greeted them, easing the chill from outdoors. Larry wouldn't stay with Tawny much longer but he wasn't in any big hurry either. He remained observant of his surroundings as he slightly trailed his wife. She told him of her plans step by step with calculated thought. Larry just continued smiling, not listening, throwing the odd "I see" in the mix.

As predicted, the mall was busy with pre-Christmas scuttle. Over the chatter of a thousand people hustling and bustling about with bags and boxes, Bing Crosby crooned over the PA system about making it home for Christmas.

Over the last five years or so Larry had become very astute at observing people. What they did, what they said. Even little mannerisms they may have. He did it now.

Not far from the washrooms, he slowed his walk, pretending to be preoccupied with window browsing. He watched and listened as a young man dressed too fancy for Larry's respect barked at someone talked on his cell phone about ordering two sets of bouquets, one for his wife and one for a woman named Nancy. Guys like that, Larry and his buddies called dandies. The type of guy that never missed a morning at the latte counter but couldn't change a tire without calling AAA. Clean shaven, he wore a navy blue sporty overcoat with a red scarf draped around him that was more about fashion

than staying warm. The overly long shoes, no doubt Italian, only reaffirmed Larry's thoughts. This was a guy that was used to getting what he wanted.

A bit further down, in a coffee shop, two couples in their fifties were seeing each other for the first time in many years. All groups loaded with bags, they shifted from foot to foot updating each other on jobs, kids, and other aspects of their lives only they cared about. Certainly the young barista awaiting their orders didn't care. One couple looked like life had given them easier times compared to the other. They looked a tad smug in Larry's opinion.

Near them, a woman in her mid twenties walked by in crisp form fitting clothing and a diamond accented leather purse. She was so engrossed on her phone she ignored the meaningful glances of another man of similar age with humble aesthetics. Any more meaningful, he would have been drooling.

There were a brother and sister in a corner, perhaps ten and twelve years old, pooling their money together as they tried to buy the perfect gift for their mother. Between them they had two fistfuls of fives and a few tens hoping to buy a pendulum clock.

As Larry walked and observed, he almost walked into the path of a rather rough looking fellow well over six feet tall. He could have been the brother of Grizzly Adams abandoned at birth and raised on the wrong side of the tracks. Larry pictured him on a Harley down the freeway, wind blowing his hair while the police chased him. "Good way to get hurt," the ruffian muttered as he refused to break stride. As he passed Larry noticed inside the man's unzipped vest a large hunting knife in its scabbard on his hip.

“Shouldn’t you be wrestling somewhere? Or in jail stealing someone’s pound cake?” Larry uttered, taking care not to be heard.

With Tawny still in sight, he thought this was as good a time as any. He darted down to the washrooms and went into a stall. Locking the door behind him, he dug into his pocket and took out his secret. The whispers became much louder.

The legend of the Ring (or Seal), of Solomon has more falsehoods to it than truths. But truths do exist.

Every malady in the origins of human history was attributed to one demon or another. Controlling the malady meant one was controlling the demon. It was said, some demons and fates could be influenced by mediums touched by God Himself. Whereas it’s true there was mention of such a mystical ring during the first century, its existence was enshrined long before this, even before Christ. Its beginnings go back before to the very origins of mankind, with left over material when the sun moon and stars were built (with a hint of brass and iron).

Gold encrusted words emblazoned on it spoke commands in a long-ago lost language to the spirits of the earth, moon, sea, and sky. This seal, or bond, meant possession of the ring meant possession of great power. The only problem was spirits came a-knocking with demands when the ring was worn causing the door of creation to be reopened.

The ring had made its way around the earth for an eon before landing in the hands of Solomon, with whom it is most often associated. As legend stated the ring was indeed thrown into the sea by Asmodeus himself, then swallowed by a fish. However, despite such legend, a fisherman did not find this fish or this ring and return it Solomon. Desperate to retain his power over others, Solomon had merely ordered a replica made and presented it as real to keep enemies at bay.

The ring made its way around the oceans of the earth for millennia in the stomach of one fish then the other. Finally, on Sunday, August fifth, two thousand and twelve, the Seal of Solomon landed indirectly in the possession of a Larry Emerald Capstick in upstate New York while in the stomach of a white striped bass. Up to this time, Larry's favorite pass time was fishing. But that was soon to change.

Larry had taken his catch home and didn't see the ring until he was gutting the day's catch. He had wiped it clean then put the ring on his finger to check sizing. It was a perfect fit. He went to show it off to Tawny only to find her seemingly frozen in time.

Larry put The Ring of Solomon on his finger. The whispers began. Had Larry ever been able to understand them, they could have unveiled a great deal more power than Larry ever realized. As it was, he was quite content with what he had. Time didn't

freeze, but it slowed down. A lot. Past wearings of the ring had shown Larry one second in the real world gave him about forty-five minutes in his time while wearing the ring. That said, a thought can be perceived in the blink of an eye, so Larry had to be calculated in what he did and for how long.

He set his stop watch to show nanoseconds and got to work.

First thing he did was go down the hallway of the mall to the food court. He grabbed a few fries from a carton a hotdog vender was handing to a customer. He then took a sip of the root beer on the tray to wash it down. He walked behind the counter of a Chinese food kiosk and helped himself to some beef and broccoli still in the chafing dish. He then took one more slurp of the first customer's soda and retraced his steps towards to the fellow with the red scarf and sport coat.

Larry felt for the man's car keys. A Mercedes, which was hardly surprising. Larry then pilfered his wallet. Eight-hundred-and-ten dollars cash. Not bad. Larry left the cards, taking only the bills. He was into and away from the man in under four minutes of Larry's time, a fraction of a nanosecond to the real world. He trotted to the kids contemplating the clock and placed a hundred dollars in twenties in each of the kids' hands. That took all of thirty seconds on his watch.

He then walked with purpose to the rough biker guy and pulled out the man's knife. He proceeded to cut the man's belt, then strips in the top of the man's jeans and underwear, allowing the ribbons of clothing to stand frozen in time prior to freefall. He then quickly rendered the same attention to the man's vest and shirt, thus making him naked down to his work boots. Larry decided to keep the man's knife for the time being

and tucked it under his jacket. He looked at his watch. Two and a half minutes in on this guy. Larry pulled out a black permanent marker he had long ago learned to always keep on hand then drew multiple penises, then happy faces on the man's torso. Done with the marker, he put it back in his own vest pocket beside his lipstick (another handy little tool to have at times as such.) He took three steps away then went back to the man as an afterthought and snipped half of his long hair with three quick snips.

Larry looked at his watch again, four and a half minutes. He hastily walked away.

He came up to the woman with the diamond accented purse. Close enough to smell her hair, he quickly took her purse, emptying the contents. He then turned the purse completely inside out, refilled it, and put the purse back on the woman.

He continued walking down the hallway, taking steps into stores to hopefully catch a cash register open mid purchase. Three were, and he scored over six hundred dollars in the process. He only took some from each till so as not to arouse immediate suspicion when the ring would inevitably come off and restore time to normal. As a rule, Larry tried to stick with the big chains and leaving the little business owners alone. The way he saw it, the fat cats could handle a few bills go missing.

Larry continued down the hallway overlooking The Outdoor Store sporting goods store on the level below. He walked down the escalator having to maneuver his way around clusters of people that in their own time were coming up. At times he had to duck under arms. Other times he had to squeeze through people as if he were a car in a carwash. In Larry's time there was no down or up in an escalator, just stairs.

He walked into the Outdoor Store and went straight to the men's boots. He saw a model of insulated rubber boot he liked then proceeded to the back where the assorted sizes were. It wasn't his first time doing this, and in three minutes his time he was walking back out with a pair in hand. He proceeded to walk up the escalator, down the hallway, towards the doors leading outside.

The man in the sport coat was still on his phone in the same position as earlier. Nearby the biker guy's eyes had shifted and were just in the moment before they would look down. It takes nanoseconds for the human mind to realize something is amiss, the body soon to follow.

Moving on, the boy and girl hadn't yet noticed the surplus cash in their hands. The woman with the inside out purse had taken a tenth of a step forward, still seemingly oblivious to her admirer.

He went outside to his truck, unlocking the cap on the box and throwing his boots in there. He continued on to where the youths had stolen his parking spot and slashed all four of their tires with the biker guy's knife. Larry then tried the door, not surprised the car wasn't locked. It wasn't as if there was anything of any value in it. Larry then popped the rear hatch and slashed the spare tire. Just so there wasn't any chance of this coming back on him, Larry proceeded to slash the tires on six more cars around the Hyundai. In a war like this there would always be casualties.

Panting after his fill of hillbilly justice, Larry made his way back into the mall towards Tawny. He wanted to slip a few hundred dollars into her purse. After that he planned to return the hunting knife to the general proximity of the biker guy. Forty-three

minutes had gone by on his watch, meaning nearly a full second in real world time. Anyone able to have caught a glimpse of him wouldn't even have time to register the thought process before discounting it as imagination. Like this, Larry was nothing more than a ghost. He didn't exist. Cameras, at least cameras of the era and general requirement of stores with average security, weren't able to capture him to his knowledge.

He quickly found Tawny and slipped two hundred dollars into her purse in a spot she wouldn't find till later. He then kissed her on the cheek and made his way towards the thug to return the knife. Then he'd return his ring to his pocket and restore the world to normal.

By now the biker's eyes were attempting to process what was taking place. He hadn't yet thought to cover up his groin and look for possible refuge.

Something was amiss with the whole scene and it took Larry a few moments (in his time of course) to figure out what was wrong. It was the girl and boy that had been been standing near the reuniting couples. They were gone. There was a small drop of what could have been blood near where they had been standing.

There was no way by Larry's calculations and experience, that they should be at any significant distance. At most, two seconds had passed in their time, and that wasn't nearly enough time for them to get out of sight. Larry kept his ring on and looked around. There was a twenty dollar bill on the floor up the hallway. Larry stealthily made his way towards it. Before he could pick it up, there was a faint crash from the level above him.

In his seven years of manipulating time, nothing like this had ever happened.

Larry went to an escalator and slowly made his way to the top. He stopped just as his head was to the height to scan the floor, cautiously looking around the base of a decorated artificial Christmas tree. Still on the still escalator, Larry peeked around the corner.

Across the hallway four stores down he saw a large brown burlap bag sitting on the floor. The odd small sound came from within a nearby trendy clothing store. Larry knew right then and there the thing for him to do was get back down to the sporting goods store and get himself a carbine or rifle, but his curiosity got the better of him. He pulled the thug's knife from his belt and crept up to the bag. Kneeling, he felt the limbs of what he discerned to be one of the kids. He didn't really want to know what was in the store moving around without some type of serious weapon.

He took the knife, frantically cut the draw strings of the bag and peeked inside. Both of the missing kids plus one more, a boy similar in age, were in it. Larry gave it a tug, but the bag was far too heavy for him to haul. It was all he could do to drag the bag behind the counter of another store. Larry then hastily made his way down the two sets of escalators to the sporting goods store. He threw glances over his shoulder to see if there was any sign of being discovered, tripping down the last few steps of the lower escalator almost killing himself in the process.

With the voices in his head continuing in their foreign tongue Larry made his way into the Outdoor Store and limped as quickly as he could to the gun section. *I bet THEY know whats going on*, he thought somewhat bitterly. With no time to scan for a key, he

broke a glass case and tried to remove a rifle. The thin cable through the trigger guards wasn't as easy as he thought it would be to break. He desperately looked for bolt cutters out back and settled on some pliers. As much as he tried, he couldn't cut the cable. Then there was the issue with the trigger lock. He cut his losses and smashed another nearby glass case to obtain a crossbow and arrows.

He limped out of the store, still no sign of any upstairs activity taking place.

Larry worked his way up the first escalator, then the second, cautiously creeping around as he went. Peeking at the top of the final escalator to make sure the coast was clear, Larry cocked the crossbow and made his way to the store where the noise had come from.

At first, he thought he may have been too late. Aside from clothes and the odd mannequin strewn about on the store floor, everybody else was frozen in time, seemingly not accosted.

Larry cautiously made his way as quietly as possible around the displays of clothing. At the far corner of the store he saw a scarf then hat get tossed without any sign of the cause. He knelt down making his way to the commotion.

Still twenty-five feet away, he stayed low and through a reflection in a sizing mirror was finally able to see the cause of the mess.

At that distance, it could have been a man. It was hard to say. If it was, he was no more than three feet tall and nearly just as wide. He had long disheveled hair down to his shoulders that looked like it had never seen a brush. Over this he wore a vintage style leather aviator cap with ear covers. Aviator goggles draped across above his

forehead. He wore a full length opened up tan brown leather jacket with an over size hood that draped over his upper back. A belt at waist height of the jacket dangled down on both sides. Under the jacket he had a white shirt with ruffles down the center, held together with buttons. This undershirt popped out through the sleeves of his jacket ending where large hairy clawed hands began. The man's dark pants were nothing of consequence, aside from the fact they were quite baggy and the hem at the bottom was jagged rips as if they had been cut to fit. Where the pants ended, a pair of very large feet protruded, with sharp long toe nails. At the heel, there was an additional claw facing backwards.

The man was trying on multiple scarves, tossing them one after the other over his shoulder after checking himself out with them in a mirror. He whistled and hummed to himself as he did so. Larry looked at his watch. They were several minutes into the ordeal. People would be starting to move enough to see slight motion.

The strange man seemed to settle on a bright red scarf with red tassels on the end. It was identical to what the ransacked man in the blue sport coat in the hallway had been wearing.

Finally satisfied with his choice in accessories, the short man whistled his way out of the store, fortunately a few rows over from Larry who by now was hidden as best he could well under a rack of winter jackets. He watched the odd little man leave and deftly followed him out to keep track on him.

The man stood in the hallway where his burlap bag had been left and looked around for his goods. The burlap bag was nowhere to be seen. He stopped whistling.

Larry decided to make himself known.

“Hi,” he stammered from inside the store, his loaded crossbow still hanging down.

The little man jumped at the voice. “Who the bloody hell are you?” he asked in a clear British accent.

“I’m just a guy with a crossbow,” Larry tried to sound more confident than he really was.

The little man glanced at the weapon and smiled. “A lot of good THAT’ll do you when you’re bending time like this. Unless you plan to club me with it. Which I don’t recommend, you’ve got the collywobbles as it is. Now, where did you put my bag? I’m knackered enough without this lot affair.” He slowly stepped towards Larry.

Larry lifted the crossbow in the little man’s direction. “I don’t want any trouble,” Larry was asking more than telling.

“Ahh, this is how it’s gonna be. Well, ‘guy with the crossbow’. Let me ask you this. Is this the fastest you can go?” The little man scanned Larry with eagle acuteness. “With what, your Seal of the fabled Solomon? That’s cute. Jesus, who by the way is the only guy missing here, I already know your answer.”

“Excuse me?” Larry wondered how this man knew about the ring. He instinctively slid his ring hand from the little man’s view.

“You know, bending time. Right now, as I’m sure you know, you can take a ten from a transaction at a cash register and both the customer and clerk will blame each

other for being short without knowing it was you. You have time to take an order of French fries out of a bag in the drive thru letting the customer swear they got ripped off and the worker to think the customer is pulling a scam. Both cute little cheeky parlor tricks. Don't get me wrong. But, are you fast enough to make me stop from taking your crossbow and making you doubt you even had it in the first place?"

Larry looked down and saw his hands were empty. He was didn't know what was happening.

"The bag with the chavs. Don't make me ask you again. I know they can't be far. I have a plane to catch. My plane. And I need to catch it when I fly it out of this shithole. Because I'll be the one flying it." The little man was so close to Larry that Larry could smell his halitosis and see the golden stubble on his weather beaten arrogant little face. The little man smiled, showing sharp looking teeth and raised an intimidating eyebrow.

Larry took a step back. "Who are you? How do you move so fast? I can't let you take them kids. What do you even want them for."

"Who am I, you ask?" The man laughed. "Why, I am the wind. Nothing more than a spook," as the man waved his hand through the air. "A mere figment of your imagination. Kidding," he handed Larry a business card that read, 'Gerhardt Blythe, head hunter/ recruiter /odd jobs. +85 754 3747 6534 6 6575'

Then the little man continued, "I see you are experienced. Call me if you are ever looking for work. As far as the kids are concerned, well, some things are best unspoken. Best to forget about them altogether. And, now you will be seeing what happens when a

plonker messes with the wrong man. Count yourself lucky I'm sparing you with your life and don't have any room left in my bag. When I find it."

With this, the little man disappeared. The mall was back to its normal speed. For just a flash of a fragment of a moment, Larry could have sworn that looking up to the top of the upper floor escalator, he saw a trace view of a brown burlap bag disappear out of view on the floor above him. But it couldn't have been. His ring, Solomon's one and only Seal, was gone from his finger. Replaced with a cheap plastic one from a vending machine. As he fumbled frantically for the real ring, Larry barely took notice as he heard the biker swear as people pointed and gasped.

Larry's black marker and lipstick had been lifted off him. Neither did he notice the two couples tense up as it was noticed the smuggler of the two men was wearing poorly applied lipstick.

Not far off from the couple, the yuppie still on his phone hadn't noticed his wallet had just been lightened of its cash a second earlier. He didn't notice a ring had been slipped into one of his jacket pockets. And he sure as hell didn't notice somebody had drawn a fake mustache on him with black marker. As he was on the phone, he thought he could hear light whispers. He blamed it on the radio waves of the overly congested phone communications, or some other excuse.

If anybody had been looking to the skies as all this was taking place, they would have seen a silver de Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth, still RAF color scheme, take off from the mall roof and make its way north. In the rear open cockpit of the biplane, Gerhardt Blythe kept his head down and his face behind the cold air stream coming over the wind

guard. If he caught a good tailwind, he could be at the North Pole by suppertime. If not, well, he just may have one less chav to deliver to Santa's workshop. Santa didn't approve of Gerhardt's tactics for staffing the workshop, but he also never complained either as long as numbers were met.

In the cockpit in front of him, three scared kids in the bag were already getting cramps from being jammed into too tight a space. They couldn't see anything in the darkness, but whispered to each other. They were very cold, and very scared.

That day, three kids went missing from the mall, never to be seen again.

With his ring now long gone, Larry wasn't so happy to make further trips to the mall with Tawny. He still took her with a smile, but now just sat in the truck reading his newspaper.

He didn't miss the voices in his head but the bending time- immensely.

If he outlived Tawny, Larry figured he would indeed call Mr. Gerhardt Blythe. And see if he were still hiring.

