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Grand Chapter State of New York, Royal Arch Masons

# The Peculiar Stone



**A Short Play to Introduce the Royal Arch Degrees**

**Composed by the Grand Chapter, State of Ohio,**

**Modified by the Grand Chapter, State of New York, June 2012**

## **Background**

### **Setting:**

Daytime in the stone quarries near King Solomon's Temple during its construction. The adaption of the Peculiar Stone is designed to be presented at a meeting of Master Masons as a Royal Arch membership recruitment tool. However, it can be used for almost any occasion: an education night, ladies night, friendship night, etc. for either Symbolic Lodge or a York or Scottish Rite body. There are no secrets; therefore, it can be used in either a tiled or non-tiled meeting.

Hiram Abif is now a character in this dramatization. Therefore, all references to "the substitute" in the original version have been removed since Hiram Abif is still alive.

This version also removes the use of an actual Candidate. The Candidate character is actually another cast member portraying a craftsman for the Mark Master Degree.

This short play should be followed by a brief talk by a well versed speaker. While the topics will vary according to the audience and nature of the meeting, the talk should include the purpose and symbolism of the York Rite: how it fits into the Masonic system of degrees and directly ties into the Symbolic Degrees; how the degrees improve Masonic education, develop officer and leadership abilities, thereby making better lodge officers and members. The skit also broadens Masonic friendships and associations. York Rite meeting times, locations, and upcoming events as well as York Rite philanthropy will become available to the uninitiated. Depending on the audience, the interesting ending, (swapping of the stones) may be pointed out and that is a prelude – or segue – into the Mark Master Degree.

## **Costumes:**

All cast members are clothed as working craftsmen – clothed as Fellowcrafts with brown leather aprons, hats, and sandals. Varied hairpieces and beard styles are encouraged. Hiram Abif wears a red or blue hat (not purple), king's robe and crown or turban under which is a Fellowcraft costume with leather apron as the other cast members.

## **Paraphernalia:**

- Tables and working tools (square, chisel, mallet) for the three craftsmen and candidate in the west.
- A table and working tools on the southeast side of the room for Adoniram, the Mark Master.
- Rough and perfect ashlars are placed on the craftsman's tables.
- A perfect ashlar with a Mark inscribed on upon it is placed on Adoniram's table.
- A table with a Keystone upon it is placed in the northeast, along with a chisel, mallet and compasses.
- A trestle board with a chalk drawing of the Keystone is also placed in the northeast corner. The trestle board is covered with a white sheet.

## **Cast:**

**Adoniram:** An enlightened Mark Master. Intelligent and authoritative.

**Reuben:** A Craftsman; somewhat skeptical, animated & unrefined.

**Enoch:** A Craftsman: most philosophical of the craftsmen.

**Shadrack:** A Craftsman; curious and inquisitive – wants to learn.

**Hiram Abif:** One of the Grand Masters and chief architect of the Temple.

**Candidate:** A Craftsman, he is an inquisitive fellow, eager to learn. A seeker of knowledge who quietly listens and observes carefully to what is going on around him, almost as if lurking in the shadows.

## The Peculiar Stone

*Three craftsmen (Reuben, Shadrack, and Enoch) along with the candidate enter and go to the west side of the room where tables are set up with ashlar (rough & perfect) and working tools (square, chisel, and mallet). They begin working on the rough ashlar. They can optionally have the paraphernalia on the floor kneeling to perform their work rather than using tables. A few moments later, Adoniram and Hiram Abif enter and go to the east side of the room where tables are set up with ashlar, the keystone, trestle board, and working tools. As they pass they point to and acknowledge to each other the working craftsmen in the west. The craftsmen don't notice or acknowledge their entrance, but rather are busy working. As the two arrive in the east, they confer briefly and the Adoniram takes his place in the southeast and Hiram Abif takes his place in the northeast. Hiram Abif removes and lays aside his kingly robe and crown, revealing the fellowcraft's clothing and leather apron underneath. He then removes and lays aside the white sheet from the trestle board, revealing the chalk drawing of the Keystone.*

*They then begin to work separate from each other. They act very studious and meticulous in their work. During the skit, Hiram Abif occasionally takes the keystone to the trestle board to compare it with his drawing, using the compasses to check dimensions, etc.*

*After a few moments of labor, Reuben (the most animated & unrefined) stops working. He wipes away the perspiration with a groan, sets his work aside and says to the other craftsmen and candidates.*

**Reuben:** We have been working here in the quarries for more than four years now making stones for King Solomon's Temple. Will we ever finish this work?

*Shadrack, Enoch and the Candidate take the opportunity for a short rest. All set their work aside except the candidate and assume postures of repose. During the following conversations, Adoniram and Hiram Abif continue their work in the east end of the room.*

**Reuben:** (*Waits a moment for the other craftsmen to stop working*) Right angles! Square work! Chip, chip, chip! I've worn out a dozen chisels and mallets! I imagine it will be dozens more by the time our labor on the Temple is completed.

**Shadrack:** (*Most curious and inquisitive*). It takes a lot of work and a lot of time to produce a perfect ashlar, (*points to or holds one up*) but it's certainly worth it! Have you seen the Temple? Every sixth day of the week when I go up to the South Gate to present my work, I observe its finished parts. It's going to be beautiful when it's completed! Fit for a King: or even God to dwell in.

**Enoch:** (*The most philosophical*) Brother Reuben, the results of our labor will be viewed by future generations with wonder and admiration. Look: (*Enoch and other craftsmen stand up and Enoch points*) there are thousands of Craftsmen at labor, all are working toward the completion of their portion of the work. I would like to participate in other parts of the project so I can see how our work is being used in the construction of the Temple.

**Reuben:** I wonder about that too, Enoch. None of us really know how our work is used in the Temple. The Masters gives us a trestle board with designs upon it and we do our best to produce it, perfect and square. I don't know what's going on in the other parts of the quarry. (*Points toward Adoniram*) I wonder what that Craftsman is doing over there?

**Shadrack:** I have no idea. Well I know our work is good because it has never been rejected by the Overseers as unfit for use! Even so, we should always strive to learn more and do better – to improve ourselves in Masonry.

**Enoch:** (*Focusing on Adoniram*) I've been watching that Craftsman over there for quite a while Shadrack. He seems to be putting a mark of some sort on his stones. I've noticed he has done that with each piece of work he has wrought.

**Shadrack:** I have too. (*brief pause, then points to Hiram Abif*) Why is our Grand Master, Hiram Abif working in the quarries? Isn't that a bit unusual? He's working on a very peculiar stone; a design of which I am unfamiliar.

**Reuben:** (*Nodding in agreement*) I've had my eyes on him too. It's not oblong or square like ours. It's a singular piece of work. Look how beautiful it is! I've never seen anything like it before! What could it possibly be used for? He must be on a special assignment for King Solomon.

*During the next lines, Hiram Abif gives a final check of the Keystone and drawing on the trestle board, nods in approval and sets down the Keystone on the table then he replaces his King's robe and crown and then exits the room leaving the Keystone behind.*

**Shadrack:** Seeing him here makes me wonder about another thing also. When are we to receive the secret of a Master Mason?

**Enoch:** I asked about that one time and was told that all those who are found worthy will receive the secret when the Temple is completed.

**Shadrack:** I have also heard King Solomon, Hiram King of Tyre, and Hiram Abif must all be present to give us the secret. What would they do if something was to happen to one of the three Grand Masters?

**Enoch:** I don't want to think about that. Look, Grand Master Hiram Abif is gone; and he left that peculiar stone behind! Should one of us take it to the Temple?

**Shadrack:** Not me! He'll probably come back for it.

**Reuben:** Yeah.

**Shadrack:** Let's find out what that craftsman is doing over there.

**Enoch:** Yeah, and let's find out what that mark is all about.

*During Shadrack's and Enoch's following discussion, Reuben acts somewhat skeptical about the whole matter, but goes along with it nonetheless. Craftsmen and Candidate walk toward Adoniram. The Candidate, carrying his ashlar lags slightly behind, listening intently during the discussion. Throughout the entire skit, he is the loner, present in the action, but does not participate directly in the conversations. The other Craftsmen act almost as if he is not present)*

**Shadrack:** Hail Brother! We wondered if you would be kind enough to answer some questions for us. (*Adoniram stops working*) We've noticed that you are a very skilled Craftsman, and are curious about the mark you place on your work.

**Enoch:** And we are curious about the peculiar stone which we have seen our Grand Master Hiram Abif working on. It forms a shape we are unfamiliar with. We're interested in gaining additional Light in Masonry in order to be of better service in the building of the Temple. What can you tell us?

**Adoniram:** I'm pleased that you're interested, and will certainly try to answer any questions you have. A Brother should always be eager to assist another in gaining more Light in Masonry.

**Shadrack:** (*Inquisitively*) You appear to be a Master. Are you a Craftsman?

**Adoniram:** Brethren, we are all Craftsmen laboring to complete our Temple. You saw Grand Master Hiram Abif here earlier. Even though he is our Grand Master, he too, is still a Craftsman. To answer your question, I am a Royal Arch Mason.

*Craftsmen look and nod at each other as if they're impressed by this.*

**Shadrack:** (*very fast and excited*) Wow! What is a Royal Arch Mason? Can I become a Royal Arch Mason? How do you.....

**Adoniram:** Hold on! (*Chuckles*) One question at a time! First Royal Arch Masons are a group of Master Masons who have continued their search for more Light; and through hard work and dedication to the

Craft have been duly rewarded. There are four degrees conferred in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons: The Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and the Holy Royal Arch Degrees. These degrees build upon your Masonic education and provide more Light, knowledge, and information to the Master Mason to help him better understand and appreciate lessons received thus far. The Mark Master Degree amplifies upon the Fellowcraft Degree and teaches the importance of industry, fidelity, skill, and honesty. The Past Master Degree teaches that he who would rule must first learn the lesson of self-discipline and obedience; and that leadership qualities are developed through service to others. The Most Excellent Master Degree teaches us how to complete the moral and spiritual edifice within the Temple of our own heart. Finally, in the Holy Royal Arch Degree, out of the ruins of a destroyed Temple is found that for which we have so long wrought, symbolizing the ultimate victory over death and the rewards received from the hands of the Supreme Grand Architect of the Universe, as promised us as a right and key to it, by our Most Excellent King Solomon upon the completion of the Temple – the secrets of a Master Mason. The Royal Arch Degrees are called Capitular Degrees, as they represent the Capstone of Freemasonry.

**Reuben:** I had no idea there was so much to learn in Masonry beyond what I have already been taught.

**Enoch:** Are you telling us that we may never receive the Secret of a Master Mason?

**Adoniram:** That is correct. You may never receive it. The prophets have told us that this Temple we are now building will at some future time be destroyed. It therefore becomes necessary for us to preserve the secret of a Master Mason for future generations to rediscover and bring to light, in the event that the catastrophe the prophets foretell comes to pass.

**Shadrack:** Wow! There is so much more to learn! (*Pointing toward the Keystone*) I almost forgot. What is that peculiar stone upon which our Grand Master Hiram Abif was working? Do you know?

**Adoniram:** What I *can* tell you is that that stone is of great importance and is required to complete the Temple – but more than its physical necessity, it has a moral spiritual significance.

**Enoch:** We were complaining a little while ago that we didn't know what is going on with the building of the Temple. Now, we are finding out that the work of our hands is being used to safeguard a precious and important secret for future generations – a secret that we may never learn, unless we become Royal Arch Masons

*Adoniram nods in concurrence with Enoch's revelation.*

**Shadrack:** (*Pointing toward Adoniam's ashlar*) I have another question. Why do you put marks on all your work? (*Candidate looks inquisitively at Adoniram's ashlar and alternatively at his own and during the following line by Adoniram*).

**Adoniram:** When you become a Mark Master, you will be given the opportunity to choose your own personal mark to place upon your work. No one will have a mark like yours. It identifies you and relates to your work. (*Pauses and looks around for any questions*).

**Enoch:** Let's get back to work. (*Pause and states reflectively*) Brother Adoniram we thank you for your information. (*Pauses for another instant*) I have just one more question. How do we become Royal Arch Masons?

**Adoniram:** You just took the first step by asking and wanting to learn more. I have work at the Temple tonight, so I have to go, but I will be in touch. (*Pause*) Thanks for asking. We need more zealous craftsmen like you.

*Craftsmen begin to return to their work area in the west by way of the northeast, passing the work area of Hiram Abif, with the Candidate*

*again quietly lagging behind. Adoniram exits the room along the south side. The Candidate stops at Hiram Abif's work area examining the Keystone and trestle board while the others continue on.*

**Reuben:** (*He's a convert now. Musing*) Just think that years from now, people will find stones in the Temple with my mark on it and they'll know that I'm the one who did the square work.

**Enoch:** (*Playfully pushes Reuben*) Hey, Reuben, you're not a Mark Master yet!

**Reuben:** Maybe not, but I will be!

**Shadrack:** Yeah, me too! (*Shadrack playfully knocks Reuben's hat off. They begin to run out like children playing, but then Shadrack holds out his arm to stop Reuben*).

**Shadrack:** Hey! It's the end of the sixth day of the week! We had better get this work up to the Temple for inspection.

*Everyone takes up their work and begin to exit. Shadrack and Reuben move ahead and chase each other as they playfully leave the Lodge room. The Candidate remains at Hiram's work station, pondering his work and the Keystone.*

**Enoch:** (*Enoch stops, turns back, walks a few steps toward the Candidate. Annoyed he says*) Hey are you coming?

**Candidate:** Yeah, I'll be right along. (*Enoch turns and exits, shaking his head*)

*The Candidate starts to walk out, stops and returns. The Candidate picks up the Keystone and compares it with his own work, then says:*

**Candidate:** I am too new here to know the impressive man who was working on this strange stone, but it looks very important, more important than my work. I should take it up to the Temple in case they need it. Hey wait for me!

*The Candidate places his ashlar where the Keystone had been, and carrying the Keystone with both hands, he runs to catch up with the other Craftsmen.*

**The End**