

The Initiation – Part 4

By Peter Grehan

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The fire was burning vigorously in the empty house. An interior door crashed open and a terrified Tom came running through. He looked around and saw that the dilapidated house was empty of furniture once more. Of Jo, there was no sign.

‘Jo! Jo where are you? If you can hear me let me know!’ he cried out

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Despite the storm outside, Jo could hear Tom shouting. ‘That’s Tom!’ she cried.

‘You can do nothing for him,’ said Elizabeth

‘But I have to help... He’s... He’s my friend.

‘Do not be deceived as I was,’ said Elizabeth with despair in her voice.

‘I have to go,’ said Jo and headed out into the blizzard once more. Almost immediately the storm enveloped her and all she could do was follow the sound of Tom’s voice. Just as she was wondering if she would ever find her way back to the house a door emerged from the swirling snow in front of her.

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Tom was building up the fire as high as he could, taking what comfort he could from it when a door further down the hallway bursts open. Tom gasped and carelessly dropped the log he was holding on top of the stack in the grate. He turned, holding his breath in fear, then sighed with relief when he saw Jo running towards him. 'Jo?' Tom said hardly daring to believe it was her.

Jo rushed over to him and they hugged. 'Tom! Oh, Tom, it's so good to see you.'

'Is it you Jo. You're not a... Ghost are you?'

'If I was a ghost could we hug like this?' said Jo

'I never thought I'd be so glad to see anyone,' said Tom.

'What happened to you?'

They pulled apart as Tom recalled what he had been through. He looked at the floor embarrassed at showing the fear and the tears welling in his eyes. 'I was with Josiah Perry. He tried to make me watch his hanging.'

'God that's awful.' Jo paused a moment, then said, 'So is that the end of him?'

'I can't say. I hope so. I just ran and ran and I found myself here.' Tom paused for a moment then and then said, 'What happened to you?'

'I was with Elizabeth Perry. She wants to help us find the way out.'

'There's a way out?'

'Yes, but you have to find it through one of her memories.' Jo could see from the expression on Tom's face that he didn't understand. 'It's too difficult to explain. Come on I'll show you.'

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Jo opened the door into the empty room. 'I don't understand. This is the door I came out of I'm sure.'

'Yeah, I kinda figured it was something like that. These ghosts are tripping us through their bad memories,' said Tom who seemed to have reached the point where he didn't want to get his hopes up.

'But I know Elizabeth wanted to help, I know she did.'

Maybe, but do they know what's going on? But supposing she was leading you through this part of the house because this is where the way out is? Maybe we could follow your tracks back.'

'Tom that's brilliant!' said Jo

Tom blinked with surprise, 'Gee thanks,' he said glowing from the praise.

'Well, since you've got the flashlight, you'd better lead on.'

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A short while later and the two teenagers opened one of the downstair doors and cautiously, nervously entered. 'Where do you think we are?' Tom half-whispered.

'It looks like the kitchen,' said Jo

There was a short pause while they examined the dusty floor then Tom said, 'I can't see any of your tracks here either Jo.'

'Oh it's hopeless!' said Jo in despair.

Again there was a pause and then a thought occurred to Tom. 'Hey, shouldn't the police be here by now?'

'Yeah, it was ages ago I called. Shine the flashlight onto my watch.' Tom did so and they both looked at the time. 'My watch must have stopped. What time does yours say?'

Tom looked at his watch and said, 'That's weird?'

'It's the same as mine?'

'It's only been about fifteen minutes since you called the police. But Jo, all that time when we were with the ghosts. It was much longer than that.'

'They must exist outside normal time.' She thought for a moment, then added, 'You know I read once that time slows down when you're near something massive, like a black hole? What if, in the spirit world, there is no mass? Wouldn't time speed up?' She sighed then said, 'oh I don't know.'

'It doesn't matter much why it happened. Important thing is that it did,' said Tom. 'Anyway, the police should get here soon so why don't we just wait for them near the front door?'

'Yeah you're right, why are we wasting our time here?' she said heading out the door.

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Tom walked through the door to discover a furnished house once more. Before he could fully realise the implications he heard a familiar voice. 'Ah, Thomas! So good of you to join me once more,' said Josiah.

Tom looked around desperately for his friend. 'Jo! Jo, can you hear me?'

Your friend is out of earshot I'm afraid, but I'm sure you'll see each other later.'

'What do you want with me?' Tom shouted as much in fear as in anger.'

'Now, now Thomas, manners maketh man you know?' Josiah said calmly.

Tom wasn't placated, 'Why don't you just leave me alone!?' he screamed

Josiah seemed angry now. 'How often must I tell you? You must bear witness!'

'I don't understand what you mean,' Tom was pleading now.

Josiah's tone became softer once more and he sighed. 'All I want is for you to understand that I am innocent.'

'Innocent?' Tom was incredulous. 'I saw you, man! I saw you batter your woman.'

Do you not see? It was the house... this house that made me do it. I was... am in its thrall. A serf, a slave, a mere plaything with which it amuses itself.'

A house? What are you talking about? All a house is bricks. It don't think, it don't turn people into slaves.

Perhaps you are right. The house is just another victim, possessed like the rest of us. Possessed by that thing buried in the foundations.'

'What thing?'

Josiah became upbeat, jovial even. 'Evil, pure evil. Something I discovered on my travels. Or was I discovered by it? It's so difficult to be sure now. It was something that could not quite die but was never quite alive. And yet it was something that should never have been disturbed.'

'You did it! And you gotta take the heat for it.'

Excellent! Exactly the reaction I would expect. Prejudiced, judgmental, ill-informed, and illogical. You rely on the evidence of your eyes alone yet refuse to see reason.

Josiah considered Tom for a few moments and then became officious and aloof. 'You leave me no choice. I can see that I shall have to give you some first-hand experience.'

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Jo couldn't recognise where she was. It was an unearthly place overlaid with strange frequencies. 'Tom! Tom, can you hear me?' She paused, there was no reply. Then she thought, If not Tom then maybe, 'Elizabeth! Elizabeth, are you there? If you are, say something. Please!'

'Save your breath child,' said Josiah

'You!' Jo gasped.

'Yes me,' said Josiah. 'I feel that this place is not conducive to civilized discussion. Shall we adjourn to somewhere more comfortable?' Another room, a familiar room seemed to solidify around them. 'This room is comfortable enough is it not?'

'It's the room you murdered her in!'

'You dare to judge me?'

'I know your sort! A bully... a coward!'

'I will not be spoken to like this in my own home!' Josiah took the candlestick from the mantelpiece. You recognize this do you not? You saw how I used it to punish my wife.'

'You... you don't frighten me. I know ghosts can't hurt me.'

'You are, of course, correct and yet the house demands blood.' Josiah began to laugh in an evil laugh as though the joke was on Jo, only she hasn't seen it yet.

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'Just leave me be!' said Tom.

But I need your understanding Tom.

'Sure, you got it. Now let me be.'

Josiah chuckled then. 'It won't be that easy I'm afraid. You have been chosen, Tom. Chosen to have a true understanding of my innocence. The house approves, it shall have what it wants and I shall have what I want. That is how the house uses us do you see? It uses our desires and fears against us.'

'Just let me be.'

'You want to be free of this house, but you must earn that freedom. There is the front door to this house.' As he watched Tom saw the front door opening slowly. From outside he could hear distant city traffic. He began to head towards it. 'Not so fast my young friend. You must earn your passage.'

'What do you want?'

'How badly do you want your freedom?'

'Stop playing games with me, you know I want to get out bad.'

'Good, now tell me, what is that you are carrying?'

'This? My flashlight, what of it?'

'A suitable weapon.'

'What?'

'You must fight your way past me, Tom.'

'Now wait a minute...'

'If you do not Tom you will just become another of my victims.'

'Where'd you get that?'

'Do you recognize it, Tom? It still has my wife's blood on it. You don't want your blood left on it as well do you? Come along Tom, be a man. Remember the gang. You wouldn't want them to think you were a... Chicken would you?'

The goading was working on Tom who was beginning to lose his temper. 'You watch your mouth!'

'That's it, Tom, try to be a real man!'

'I said you watch your mouth! Watch your mouth!' Tom screamed a raised the flashlight ready to use it as a club, eager to release all the pent-up fear and anger in a surge of violence against his hated tormentor. Just as he was about to charge Josiah he heard the sound of a cello playing a happy joyful tune. Tom stopped dead in his tracks. Josiah screamed in rage and he and the room faded from view. Now he was in the empty hallway once more. Jo stood there staring at him. Were it not for the cello breaking the spell he would have battered her to death the way Josiah had battered his wife. Instead, he rushed forward and hugged her.

As they stood there, afraid to let go in case they might be parted again, the front door was kicked in. Exterior sounds flooded the hallway, distant city traffic, the police car engine ticking over, the hum and

click of flashing police light motors as they rotated, and the radio static voice of the radio dispatcher sending and receiving information to other police cars. At the same time, the headlights and flashing blue and red lights flowed into the dark house.

A police officer cautiously moved into the hallway, one hand on his holstered service pistol, and shouted, 'Police! Who's in here?'

'Thank God,' said Jo sobbing.

'It's just us two,' said Tom.

'What the hell are you kids doing here?' the officer said

'Some of our friends lock us in here as a joke,' said Tom, unable to bring himself to admit to it being part of an initiation.

'Well, you sure have some fine friends locking you in this of all places. Come on, let's get you out of here.' The police officer it seemed knew all about the house's reputation and was none too eager to remain there himself. he led the teenagers back to the patrol car and a short while later they drove away.

The house was alone once more but not silent. Elizbeth spoke from everywhere and nowhere. 'I know your weakness now.' And she laughed as the joyful cello music began to play once more. As it did so the house began to shake like some great creature trying to dislodge a flea. The only effect of this was to dislodge Tom's carelessly dropped log from the fireplace. The burning log rolled out from the hearth and settled amongst the ragged possessions that had been left by the tramp sometime before. These began to burn and within a short time, the fire had spread to consume the entire house producing such intense heat that the entire structure was destroyed.

End