

# Ghosts

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Chapter 1 of 1

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When he heard the stifled sobbing for the fifth night in a row, Teddy Lupin knew he could no longer bear it. When everyone else was celebrating the 18th anniversary of the defeat of Voldemort, Hermione Granger was mourning his father.

How he knew this, he couldn't really say. He only knew that for as long as he could remember, Hermione had not been able to look at him when he maintained his natural, primary appearance...because his eyes and hair were exactly the colour of his father's.

From the time he was a little boy, Teddy, a naturally astute child, had recognized an ineffable sadness in the older woman. He was able to pick up easily on the emotions of others, and he knew as certainly as he knew his own name that Hermione had loved his father as more than merely a friend. He picked up on cues from other people around him, like Harry telling him his father had been greatly loved by "the most amazing woman I've ever known." When Teddy was younger, he'd assumed this was his mother, but as he grew to know Harry better, he realized that only Hermione received that accolade from his godfather.

He also knew there had been ghosts in the marriage of Hermione and Ron. They had married right after the war, like so many others, to remind themselves and each other that they were still alive. But the marriage was haunted from the start, and from skulking around Grimmauld Place during his youth, he knew his father was the ghost.

*"It's not as if he even looked at you twice! He was like a father to us, and he loved Tonks with all his heart! All of it!"*

*"Don't you think I know that? Merlin, Ron, don't you think I hate myself for thinking even for a second that I would have gladly ended his marriage if I'd had the power?"*

*"No, I really don't think you do hate yourself. I don't think you can feel anything that strongly, and you haven't since he died! Can't you just let the past be passed?"*

*A long pause in which Teddy's heart was breaking as he crossed the threshold into manhood, and realized his childhood heroes were only human.*

*"No. I'd rather live in the past where heroes are alive and admired, not the present where they are barely remembered amongst the dregs of the living! I'd rather be dead than forget!"*

And thus ended the iconic marriage of Hermione and Ron. Teddy hadn't known what to think at the time, but he knew he wasn't angry. How could he be mad at someone for loving his father? From what he knew, his father was a brilliant wizard and a loving, gentle and compassionate man. He could not fault Hermione for loving that, but he did pity her. She deserved to live in the present. She was needed here, now.

From that day three years ago, Teddy grew to love Hermione in a way that he recognized was dangerous. She stayed at Grimmauld Place with him, Harry, Ginny and the kids for weeks or months at a time when she was between jobs or apartments, or when she just needed to get away. He knew she felt his father's ghosts here...he did too

sometimes. He knew that she sat in his seat at the dining room table, and that she visited his old room, just sitting on the bed or the chair by the window, crying, or smiling, or just looking bereft. He left her alone, but would die just to be able to touch her fingers and convince her to come back to this time.

Teddy was in his last year at Hogwarts, and would be graduating in only a month. He received excellent grades and had perfect attendance, and was therefore permitted to stay at home and Floo to school instead of staying in the dorms. He knew his family was proud of him for his grades, his attitude, and his bright future. But he worried about what would happen to her once he left to find his own path. She was so fragile, and even if he never once spoke to her about what he knew, he felt like his presence somehow helped her, kept her stable. Wishful thinking, to be sure.

These days, he made sure to always change his hair and eye colour into something outrageous so she could not be unnecessarily reminded. In his honest moments, Teddy was blindingly jealous of his father for being on the receiving end of a love that was so bright and pure, so selfless. Hermione knew her love had been unrequited while his father was alive; it would be forever more, now that he was dead, and yet she loved on. There was no respite for her pain. Sometimes his wild hair or backlit eye colour was enough to elicit a small smile from her, but mostly it seemed like she didn't even notice he was alive; that he needed her as much as she needed his father. More.

These are the things Teddy Remus Lupin pondered as he lay in his bed on the fifth consecutive night after the anniversary of his father's death. Her room was two doors down. Her door was shut, but not warded. Hermione trusted them all with her life. He knew his godfather and Ginny heard the sobs, but they did nothing. In the morning, they acted like everything was okay, and Hermione drank tea and worked on her private research at the dining room table in his dead father's chair and acted like her life was perfectly normal. It was beautiful to watch. Agonizing.

He pulled a pillow over his head and tried to shut out the noise. How do you stop listening to that which breaks your heart every night? He was glad someone was mourning his father, he was glad to know his father had been loved. But he wanted her to stop sobbing like her heart was breaking because he was *dead!* And he wasn't coming back, and if he did, it wouldn't be for her. Couldn't she see that? Didn't she care that she was wasting her life on a man who'd only seen her as a friend, an ally, a daughter at best? Teddy groaned and held the pillow tighter.

Soon the sobs would diminish into wrenching gasps. She would wear herself out like she did every night, like the most morbid clockwork. He could set his watch by her misery. Past the gasps, the worst part of the entire night was when she began to breathe deeply in long, unsteady breaths, like she was trying to expel the grief, exorcise it. He knew she was telling herself to stop being so silly, to be strong. She was Hermione Granger, for Merlin's sake! Brightest witch of her age, Order of Merlin, First Class, top of the class at Hogwarts, best marks in half a century! Teddy knew word for word what she was telling herself in the darkness of this house, this tomb, this monument to every dead soldier left behind.

Finally, she was asleep. Teddy could now close his eyes.

Sometimes in the morning, Teddy was too tired to think of Morphing his hair and eyes, and cursed himself violently when he saw the agony in her eyes when they rested upon him. He would immediately shift into electric purple hair with yellow eyes, and she would smile weakly and compliment his sense of style, maybe even inquiring as to what on earth he could wear that would not clash with his current appearance. He would laugh loudly, sharply, in a way that was nothing like his father's, and tell her he would figure something out. Teddy always figured something out.

Thankfully, the next morning, Teddy's mind was focused on the devastation he'd been an auditory witness to for the past week, and he knew all too well how his appearance would shake her fragile grasp on reality. He went with blue.

Blue was her favourite colour, after all.

"Good morning, Hermione." His voice was soft but slightly rough from sleep. Immediately he knew who he sounded like. *Gods damn the ghosts in this house*, he cursed silently.

Hermione started and nearly spilled her tea. She looked up sharply, but smiled widely when the pain withdrew from her features. "Teddy, how are you this morning? It's early for you to be up, isn't it?"

Teddy smiled wanly and said only, "Rough night."

Hermione had the grace to blush and he could see her write on her internal To Do list *Silencing Charm*.

"Me, too," she commiserated.

As always, Teddy ran through his mental list of Things He Will Never Have The Balls To Say:

Hermione, I know you miss him. We all do. But you have to stop this. You're only hurting yourself.

Hermione, I love you. I know I'm not him, but maybe I can help you forget.

Hermione, he isn't real anymore. You have to rejoin the living. I need you.

Hermione Jane Granger, grow a pair, won't you? Wallowing in self-pity already cost you your marriage, what else are you willing to sacrifice? Other people died too, you know! And other people lived! I'm right here!

Hermione, just let me love you. It will never be enough, I know. I'm sorry.

Teddy poured himself a cup of tea and wondered how he would get through another day watching her kill herself with regret and remorse. *Slowly*, he thought, *just like every other day*.

He sat down across from her and opened the book he kept in his back pocket. A Muggle novel *The Turn of the Screw*. His father had loved Muggle books, said that world was almost as fantastical as their own. He had to agree, based on this book alone. He thought it was most fitting; the heroine was haunted by ghosts, if only she could decide if they were real or in her mind. It's always easier to believe the ghosts are actually there. It's when you know they aren't and don't care, that the real trouble starts.

He watched her, like he always did. Gods, she was lovely. She had aged since her Hogwarts days, of course. Not like Harry though, whose face was weathered and showed the signs of a life lived too hard, too fast. He had heard his father looked like that, older than his age. But Hermione was lovelier than she'd ever been, Teddy thought. Her hair was wilder than ever, so thick she couldn't even pull it back and just let it live a life of its own, like it was merely tolerating her and not the other way around. Her eyes were kind, soft, understanding, and her smile, though weak these days, was enough to convince him that hope was not lost. Her gestures were graceful and smooth. He'd heard his mother had been clumsy, he mused. Hermione was brilliant and always spoke to Teddy as an adult, even when he didn't deserve it. She never referred to herself as "Auntie Hermione", or spoke down to him, or over-explained things to him; she seemed to assume he was just as smart as she, and he wanted desperately to deserve that respect.

She was saving the world when he was barely a month old. Now she could barely save herself. Maybe it was time for him to return the favour.

When the crying went on every night for two more weeks, Teddy was ready to murder someone. He hadn't slept in days; the tension in the house was unbearable. Even when she remembered to put up Silencing Charms, he could sense it. It was too quiet those nights, but the house seemed to shift and settle in sympathy with her. Her eyes were red and had blackened circles beneath them. Her hair was a nest that he was sure she'd have to shear to escape. Her hands trembled and she had stopped eating. Her nose was always red, and she left the room abruptly at random times. But she seemed to seek out Teddy more and more. She spoke softly to him about poetry and work and life. She smiled at his concern for her, but made no promises.

And once when he forgot to Morph his hair and eyes, she did not pale and tremble at his appearance. Not until he touched her hand when he reached for the newspaper. Then, she ran and he did not see her for two days.

On the night of the second day, Teddy was reclined on his bed atop the covers, hands behind his head, listening to the symphony two doors down. There was no escaping, so he stopped trying. She was still sobbing and would be for some time. He could not remember it ever being this bad in past years, but this was the first year he wasn't in the dorms at Hogwarts, so maybe he just never knew. Would it ever stop?

Suddenly, he heard nothing. Blissful, tortured silence. Teddy was scared and relieved at the same time. Could it possibly be over? Could his Hermione be back?

He heard her door open cautiously, and hoped against hope she was going to the bathroom to freshen up. They were the only two on this floor; Harry, Ginny and the children were on the second floor, he and Hermione had the third. He knew it could only be her.

But she did not open the bathroom door. She opened his father's. Teddy's heart lurched, knowing she was not in her right mind. Something could happen to her, she might hurt herself. Once that thought entered his mind, he could not stay immobile. He moved with hurried steps to his door and slipped it open, thankful it was the only silent set of hinges in the entire house.

He paused in front of his father's open door. There was nothing in the room but the bed and chair, nothing to remind her, nothing to pain her. But he was sure she could feel the ghosts as much as he could, maybe more.

He stood in the doorway and saw her curled in the armchair, her feet tucked under her, a white nightgown giving her an ethereal glow. She was like a ghost, he thought, like the others. Or maybe an angel.

She slowly turned her head to him, and a shy smile spread across her features, the first real one he'd seen grace her lips for ages.

"Remus." Teddy's heart broke into a thousand Hermione-shaped pieces. "I knew you would come."

He stepped into the room and crossed the floor to her. He knelt before her, taking her hand in his and shaking his head. "No, Hermione, it's Teddy. I'm Teddy."

She shook her head sadly, and said, "You always had the strangest sense of humour. Remus, where are your scars?" Her hand caressed his cheeks and nose, his neck and his hair. Something broke free inside him, and suddenly he did the one thing he promised he would never, ever do to her.

He Metamorphed into his father.

His features aged, and the scars appeared on his face. The lines around his eyes and mouth deepened, and facial hair appeared where there was none. His hair lightened, becoming shocked with grey. His hands became larger and more scars appeared. He knew they were all over his body now.

Hermione smiled and continued to pet his hair. Teddy shook in shame and pleasure, hating himself and loving her and wondering which would win.

She slid to the floor beside him and held his face in her hands, caressing his cheekbones with her thumbs, and passing over his lips. His kissed her fingers and she kissed him.

Her lips were soft and yielding but persistent, and he recklessly kissed her back. She tasted like every thing he'd ever been denied, everything he'd never been good enough to have.

They were both crying as the kiss deepened and his tongue pressed into her mouth, licking her teeth and trying to get deeper. She stroked her tongue against his, and she moaned softly when they connected. He pulled her body against his, both of them of their knees on the hard wooden floor. He stroked her hair and his hand was tangled immediately, but he managed to extricate it. He touched her arms, their silken frailty belying her strength.

He hated himself for not wanting to stop this.

Her skin felt smoother than he remembered, and he knew it was because his father's hands were rougher than his own. He tried not to think about who she was really kissing when he moved his mouth to her throat. She made the most beautiful whimpering noise that Teddy instinctively knew would have appealed to his father's animal side. She bared her throat as if wanting to submit to the wolf and Teddy growled in his throat. She must know, he convinced himself. She had to know Remus was dead!

Teddy kissed along her neck and gently sucked her skin, leaving the tiniest of bruises and feeling pleased that he had marked her. Maybe there was more of the wolf in him than he knew. He licked a trail to her chest and unbuttoned the top closures of her nightgown, bearing her clavicle and the beginning of the soft flesh of her breasts. He kissed lower until he would only need to move the material slightly to bare her to him.

She stopped him with a gentle hand on his cheek and pulled them both to their feet. She led him to the bed and got in. She rested invitingly against the coverlet and he knew he was lost. He climbed into the bed with her, moving over her and kissing her with all the impassioned hunger of a starving teenaged boy. He lifted the nightgown and removed it. She was naked beneath, and Teddy was sure he was the ghost, not his father, for such a sight existed only in heaven. She smiled encouragingly at him, and he moved his hands all over her, touching her like he would be ripped away any second.

To prevent that from happening, Teddy cast the strongest warding and Silencing Charms he knew. She shook her head stoically at him and said, "Remus, it's only us here."

"Only us," he agreed. She moved from her prone position and began to undress him. He couldn't tear himself away from her eyes as she gazed upon his body.

"You are so wounded," she murmured, and he knew she hated and loved the scars.

"We are both damaged," he told her, and she nodded agreeably.

Once he was naked, she pressed him back onto the bed and straddled him. She steadied herself over his pelvis and lowered herself onto him, slowly taking in his hardness, and he couldn't withhold the moan at the sensation. Once he filled her, she remained still, looking at him unfathomably, like she was lost for a second, before his hands smoothed over her thighs and she smiled, gasping slightly as she began to move.

She was bathed in the moonlight, her skin sparkling and eyes glimmering. Teddy duly noted that it was a full moon. His father could never have known her tonight.

Her hands were on his chest and she began to move harder against him, taking him deeper and thrusting herself onto him. Teddy knew he would not last long, and hoped he knew how to hurry her up in case he couldn't hold off. He moved his hands to her hips and caressed between her silken folds, searching for her clit. When he found it, she tossed her head back and moaned, pressing him deeper in her. He gently rubbed circles around her clit and her eyes met his. She began to move with abandon, losing her rhythm as she rode him, gasping softly until finally he felt her tighten and flutter around his cock and she cried out.

"Remus!"

Teddy came just as the woman he loved exclaimed his father's name, and he poured every injustice into her body, spilling himself and wishing, not for the first time, that he was enough, that he could ever be enough.

Hermione slipped off him and onto the bed. She cradled her head on his chest and placed her hand over his heart.

"It's like it beats for me. I didn't think it beat anymore, but now I know it beats for me."

Teddy kissed her hair gently, and quietly asked her to look at him. She obeyed, smiling softly and stealing his breath.

This was his last chance. His only chance, his redemption.

"Hermione, this is very important. I need you to listen to me and never, ever forget what I am about to say. And don't speak until I am finished. Do you understand?" She nodded mutely, her eyes showing her absorption of every word. "Good. Hermione, you need to stop crying every night. I know you think it makes you feel better, but it is killing you. I know you love me and miss me, but I can't have you grieving like this. It's been too many years. You've said your goodbyes; you know I'm not coming back. You need to move on, find someone to love again. Have children. Be brave, be strong. You have so many people who rely on you, who need you. Harry, Ron, Ginny, little James, Albus and Lily. It's not fair to them to have to face the world alone when you've always been on their side before. You need them and they need you. Let them help you, heal you. Heal them. Love them, Hermione."

Teddy paused at the tears glittering on Hermione's cheeks, her eyes open and unguarded, and the pain evident in every feature on her expressive face. She nodded, slowly at first, shakily. But then her nod was vigorous and seemed to be directed at herself more than him.

"Yes, the children. Harry, Ron, Ginny. And Teddy." He didn't see her smile soften as she whispered the last name. "But Remus, you said I said my goodbyes. But I didn't, did I? I've never even seen your grave. I'm so sorry." She loosed a gasping sob, and he held her against his chest.

"Then you will go tomorrow. Don't go alone, though. And say your goodbyes. Never forget this, but do not dwell on it. It is only a dream within a dream, you know. And I will never, ever be back."

His words were gentle and she accepted them graciously, only hitching a slight breath at his last words.

"I won't forget you, Remus. I promise. But I will say goodbye."

"Thank you, Hermione. Goodbye."

Teddy placed one last, soft kiss on her lips, not being able to deny himself since this was the last time he would ever kiss her, he was sure. She kissed him back, but broke the kiss first. Teddy pulled on his clothing and paused at the door, casting one final glance at her. She remained on the bed, glowing in the light of his father's torment, looking more the ghost than him. But happy.

"Goodbye," she whispered as he slipped out the door.

Teddy leaned against the wall in the hallway, shaking. He took down the wards and quickly moved to the bathroom, where he threw up for fifteen minutes. When he passed his father's room on the way back to his own, she was gone, and her bedroom door was opened a crack. Back in his own skin, Teddy felt safe peeking in. She was under the covers of her bed, asleep with the tiniest of smiles on her lips.

Teddy tried not to think that he had just taken the worst advantage of the woman he loved, and thought only of her lips as he slipped beneath his blankets.

Hermione did not come down for breakfast the next morning, and just as Teddy was beginning to get worried, he heard her moving around upstairs. It was nearly noon by the time he saw her coming down the stairs. She was dressed in a black pencil skirt and a blue jewel-toned blouse. She had a black jacket over her arm. The circles were gone from beneath her eyes and her hair was mangled into the semblance of a French braid.

Teddy forgot to Morph in his shock, and felt his throat constrict when she looked at him with only love and affection, no unwanted recognition. The smile she bestowed upon him dissolved all his misgivings of the night before, and he felt a familiar warmth begin in his stomach. He had known her intimately and yet not at all. This was real strength, he told himself. This was bravery, resilience, perseverance.

He smiled back, and she sat across from him, helping herself to some tea and looking at him with no sadness behind her eyes.

"Teddy, would you come with me to your father's grave today? There's something I need to... tell him." There was no misery in her voice, only acceptance.

"Of course, Hermione. I'd be honoured to escort you."

She smiled, and blinked as if seeing clearly for the first time in ages. She leaned across the table and gently touched her hand to his cheek.

"You know, everyone says you look just like your father, but I see so much of your mother in you. They loved you so very, very much."

*Fin.*