

PROLOGUE

Excerpt One

They say he died alone in his bedroom. I wanted to go there and lie in his bed and be alone with him. I'd gone many times to his flat in Belgrade Square, but now London seemed so cold, so damp. It held nothing for me. Now and then I had seen his ghost. He came to me in times of great loneliness, when the burden of the world was in my heart and I could bear it no longer. The sight of his piercing eyes, focused and changeless, unnerved me, but I was quiet inside and filled with love for him. I had fulfilled my purpose to him in life, but I could not ease him in his death.

This flat was our place. It belonged to him—the ghost. He was at times a courageous man, sometimes a child, sometimes my lover and friend. These are all good words to describe him, and yet, not quite. Looking over my shoulder I could see him. I filled out his shape from memory, as if it were embedded in me perfectly. His hands, his face, his eyes. Those haunting eyes that came into focus for me.

I wish I could stop these thoughts of him. Memories can't help me now, yet they are all I have. I came here for a reason. My soul hurt. I wanted to lie with him, just for a while, and then go away. Just for a moment I wanted to cuddle up to his memory. There was a spiritual link between us. He was my teacher. I will forever be his student.

"I'm here, Fiona." The voice was bold, yet gentle and pleasing and it belonged to him. His lips held a trace of the faintest smile. He wore a long coat of an exotic material. It might once have been flamboyant, now faded and heavy with wear. His hair was full of light, embracing all the colours of the rainbow, and fell around his shoulders in a disorderly fashion. His eyes, those wondrous eyes with the steady lustre that rejected any outside colour, were the perfect access to his unchanging soul.

I flushed with lustful longing. The warmth I felt was rising to the surface once again. I looked upon him as if he were the Holy Sacrament. Yet it was a shock being there and I wanted it to be done quickly. I didn't know who I was without him. I didn't want to stay in this place alone. I pleaded with him. I was always scared when he was not by my side. He gave a brief, acquiescent nod and was gone again. Nothing had changed between us. He still listened to what I said, carried it with him to contemplate upon and return with a solution, usually one that was acceptable to the both of us. I think he knew there was no answer this time.

BEYOND MORTAL BOUNDS Memoir of a Ghost
by Gina Easton

He brought me back from the mist with gentle words. "I will be there any time you want me. You know how to find me. I'm not far. I am everywhere, but nowhere. I am everything, but nothing. You will hear me when you want to." He already knew how much I missed his voice, even before I knew.

"Whisper in my ear, in your dreams, and then we will talk together, share this room again for as long as you like."

My throat was suddenly dry, my lips parched. I didn't answer. The emptiness of the room reached out to seize me. In his death, as in his life, I was alone. Slowly the darkness descended over me like a shroud which I knew I was doomed to wear forever, or till God forgave me or I forgave Him. My phantom brushed his lips upon mine gently, and like his heartbeat, he was gone.

I looked off, wanting the quiet, wanting to be with him and press my face against his, wanting his touch. I wanted to take without apology. I wanted the will to carry on. I could never love without giving, yet I've nothing left to give.

I would become a ghost, too, not proficient in the matters of life. No other love would ever touch me, could ever touch me. Was that all that remained—to be left alone with my memories? To commune with the dead and rejoice in the company of ghosts?

Why did he love me? I knew he did, needed to believe that with all my soul, but why? The question would haunt me through the passage of time. I swore I would never leave his side as long as the sun rose and night descended.

I wish I'd asked him when he was alive.

Words. Beautiful. Mournful. Echoes of longing and regret. I read them again, savouring the complex texture and evocative prose. These sorrowful words which I have transcribed. Yet they are not my words. I cannot lay claim to them. And in a way, I am grateful for that. Grateful never to have felt such utter sadness, such desolation of the heart. To pour forth this kind of devastation of the soul one must occupy a very dark place indeed.

I am a ghost-writer. Everyone has heard of a ghost-writer. Someone who writes fiction [sometimes] or more often, a memoir or biography on behalf of another, thus allowing that individual to present the work as his or her own. The ghost-writer's name rarely, if ever, appears in the credits of the book, nor does he or she receive any public acknowledgement. Usually the ghost-writer is employed by a celebrity—an actor, singer, artist, or a well-known personality—a politician, business tycoon or social activist. Someone who believes they have

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an important story to tell but lacks the skill him or herself. Ghost-writers are generally handsomely paid for their efforts and some earn a lucrative living writing for other people.

For most of my career I have published books under my own name, Heather Radcliffe, rather than a pseudonym. You may have read my novels if you happen to enjoy dark fantasy and horror fiction. One of my novels, *Darkest Visions*, was recently adapted into a four-part series for television. So you could say I've achieved a certain amount of success, both financial and personal, from my writing career.

I never imagined I would become a ghost-writer. I wonder who originated the term. Whoever it was I am sure that he or she never dreamed it would describe what I am. You see, unlike other ghost-writers, I don't give my words to another. I am a ghost-writer in the literal sense.

I write for a ghost.

And lest you think that I stumbled across the writings of someone after their death, let me make something clear.

The excerpts in the following pages were not written by a living person. They were given to me by a ghost. A very literate and eloquent ghost, as you shall see, but a ghost nonetheless. You may choose not to believe what I say, but it is my hope that by the end of this tale you will at least entertain the possibility that I speak the truth.

Let's start at the beginning.

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