

Lexis Logos Lord

by White Eyebrow

In the beginning was the word...

Lucius

Chapter 1 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

A/N: This story was written for the Bellatrix Lestrange Forum's fourth fic exchange.

Prompts assigned (I got the most difficult ones):

- 1. Voldemort returns after the final battle because there was another Horcrux: Ginny.*
- 2. Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol.*
- 3. SQUIDDLEDORE.*

Chapter 1

Lucius

As a pure-blood, Lucius Malfoy never thought he would be susceptible to the ravages of ageing. Though only in his late forties, he looked considerably older than his father did at his age. He discarded his hair brush...leaving copious strands of grey trapped within the bristles. He briefly massaged the puffy sacks under his eyes, though he neglected the coarse beard that irritated the skin on his face. He shook the ash off of his velvet evening jacket and put it on over his shirt; the top button remained undone for lack of a proper tie. Satisfied, he gave regard to the elf, who waited patiently by the door, and he commanded, "Send him in."

The elf obeyed and exited the parlour room. A moment later, a young man with blond hair walked through the doors. He was Lucius' spit and image from twenty years ago, and Lucius eagerly shook his hand when he approached.

"Father," Draco greeted. "You're looking rested."

"Thank you." Lucius noticed that Draco had not bothered to remove his gloves. "I was just about to have dinner; the elves would be happy to set you a place at my table."

"Don't trouble yourself, father. I shan't be staying long," Draco said. "I'm here on a matter of business, actually."

Lucius arched a curious eyebrow. "What sort of business?"

"You're probably not aware that I'm applying for the Wizengamot internship program..."

"I *am* aware." Lucius was quick to interrupt.

Draco nodded in apology. "Then you should know that, in spite of my best efforts, I have been unable to broker a sponsor to fund my continued education."

"Then by all means, take whatever you need from the family vault at Gringotts."

"It's not that simple." Draco averted his eyes, unable to look at his father directly. "I suspect that I haven't been able to secure a sponsor because my last name is ~~id~~*Malfoy*."

"I see." Lucius lowered his head, pondering the completeness of his failure as a father...to learn that his name had become a liability to his son.

"I was hoping you could persuade one of your foreign subsidiaries...preferably one of which you are *asilent* investor?"

Lucius smiled at his son's ingenuity. If there was one thing a Malfoy understood, it was prudence. "I'll send an owl first thing in the morning to one of my American enterprises. You'll have a sponsor by week's end."

"Thank you, Father."

The two men stood in silence, neither one knowing what to say next...or if further discussion was even necessary.

As the elder of the two, Lucius put the onus upon himself to break the silence. "Are you sure you won't stay?"

"Sorry, but mother's waiting for me back at the manor. She doesn't know I'm here."

The two said their goodbyes, and Draco departed without further pretence. Lucius removed his jacket and retired to his study. He locked the door and searched his pockets for his lighter, preferring candlelight to bright incandescent bulbs. As such, he lit the candelabras at his desk and poured himself a generous amount of Firewhisky. He swished it slowly in his glass so as to let it breathe.

"Pity that your own son can't stand to be in the same room with you for five minutes."

Lucius, startled by the unfamiliar feminine voice, dropped his glass; it shattered upon striking the floor. "Who's there?"

"It is I."

The response was unsatisfying and cryptic. He retrieved the revolver from his desk and pointed it at the ominous shadow standing next to the window. "Show yourself, or I'll shoot!"

"That won't be necessary, my slippery friend."

The mysterious figure stepped into view. Her face remained concealed under a cowl, so the first things Lucius noticed of this uninvited guest were her bare legs. They were long, smoothly muscular...like a dancer's...and were painted an ethereal pallid hue by the moonlight shining through the windowpane.

She removed her hood, and her red hair floated down to just past her shoulders. The intensity with which she regarded Lucius made the gun in his hand tremble. In stark contrast, her gentle familiar features were without blemish, save for a blood-stained bandage wrapped around her forehead.

Lucius' eyes narrowed in recognition. "You're Weasley's brat! What are you doing in my home?"

"Oh, Lucius, have you fallen so far that you fail to see beyond the flesh?"

The colour drained from Lucius' cheeks, and the gun fell at his feet. It was indeed a woman's voice; however, it was spoken with the inimitable meter and inflection of someone who he thought long dead. Thus spake the former Death Eater, "Is that you, My Lord?"

The Dark Lord's reply was a dull wicked smile. He extended his puppet's arm, and the gun levitated to her waiting hand. "Such a crude and useless implement... Why have you not replaced your wand after all this time?"

Lucius averted his eyes. "No wand will have me." He fell to his knees in shame and prostrated himself before his former master, using his own tears to wash her feet and his own hair to dry them. He kissed her perfectly manicured toes, painted red as blood, before he was bidden to rise.

"There is nothing more damaging to a wizard than for him to lose his self-respect. Poor Lucius, how have you managed to live with yourself in such a state?"

"I don't know."

Lord Voldemort placed a gentle hand on his disciple's haggard, unshaven cheek. "You used to be so beautiful, Lucius... like an angel." He sat Lucius down in the chair. A wand was drawn, and various implements from around the house magically gathered onto the desk. From among them, a small brush was selected that was then whisked into a bowl of water mixed with powder. The resulting frothy solution was liberally applied to Lucius' face using that same brush. "It is a shame that shaving has become a lost art. It remains as one of the most elegant demonstrations of the limits of magic, for to be done properly, it must be done by hand." He then opened the desk drawer where he knew Lucius kept his dagger. He wetted the cursed blade in the wash bowl, stood behind his former pupil and slowly shaved off a small section of scruff.

Lucius sat still but objected, "You mustn't do this, My Lord, for you are greater than I."

"How can I be greater when I myself have never served?"

"I don't understand, My Lord. I have failed you... betrayed you."

"And you were right to do so, dear Lucius."

Lucius closed his eyes. The clock on the mantle ticked the seconds away quietly, supplanted only by the intermittent sound of sharp metal scraping skin. The woman's hands were skilled and gentle, and she smelled strangely of antiseptic.

"My magic and cunning has kept me alive all this time, yet I persist in a state that has rendered me a mere spectator to the events of recent history. The piece of my soul, trapped as an outsider looking in, has had the unique opportunity to witness the folly of my designs..." Voldemort paused to regard his reflection in the mirror across the room, and he scowled. "However, it has been a challenge to sift through the perceptions and feelings of this... *limited* female that houses my essence."

The Dark Lord laid the knife atop the desk and came about to stand before him. "Verily, it is I who have failed you. Will you forgive me, Lucius?"

"O-of course, My Lord."

Voldemort smiled playfully and removed the travelling cloak his body was wearing.

Dressed solely in a hospital gown, the candlelight accentuated her skin's fleshly tones and served to reveal the silhouette of her perfect figure underneath the sheer fabric. She lowered herself onto Lucius' lap and retrieved the blade to get at the last piece of scruff under his chin. Her hand, guided by the will of Voldemort, expertly removed the last of Lucius' unkempt beard.

Lucius continued to grip the chair's armrests tightly, sure that at any time, the Dark Lord could easily slit his throat. Yet, he would welcome such a fate so long as this supple young body remained pressed against his. It had been so long since his wife had left him that he had forgotten how warm and inviting it was between a woman's legs. Yearnings long dormant now started to rise to the surface, making it painfully evident just how simply shaggable a nineteen-year-old woman could be.

Lucius' natural reactions to his Lord's ministrations were not lost on Voldemort. The master sneered and whispered seductively, "Does this 'shell' please you, Lucius?"

"Y-yes, My Lord."

"I regret that I don't have much time before my host regains consciousness. Otherwise..." Voldemort beckoned Lucius' hands to explore underneath the gown, and her young body shuddered at Lucius' competence. "Do you remember when I loved you best, Lucius?"

"I remember, My Lord."

"That is because you served me like no other." Using a cold wet towel, she started to clean his face. "Serve me again, and we can both start anew. We will redefine the limits of *all* magic... together. "

"Forgive me, My Lord, but I still don't understand how you survived."

"That is what I need you to suss out for me." She put her finger to Lucius' lips, shushing him from further inquiry. "It is up to you, Lucius, to find the key to making me whole again...to making us *both* whole again."

Ginny

Chapter 2 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 2

Ginny

Ginevra Weasley awoke from her peaceful slumber to the gentle touch of small fingers stroking her crown. She opened her eyes and rested her gaze upon the tall red-haired man who she had known all her life. However, for some reason, his name escaped her recollection.

The well-dressed, dapper young man stood tall and folded his arms, sporting an all too familiar grin on his face. "Well, well, the sleeping beauty finally awakes. If you had languished for much longer, sis, I would have given serious thought to commissioning the services of a frog."

"What nonsense are you talking, Fre—er—George?" Ginny replied. "And what are you doing in my room?"

George snorted and regarded the figure standing on the other side of the bed. "She must've bumped her head harder than we thought, Luna."

This prompted Ginny to take notice of the slight figure standing over her who had been stroking her hair. Luna Lovegood smiled when Ginny's bright brown eyes met hers. "Good morning, Ginny. Do you know where you are?"

At first the question seemed innocuous until Ginny got a lay of the tiny sterile room. The smell of antiseptic lingered in the air. "What am I doing in St Mungos?" She sat up and winced as the blood rushed from her head. She put her hand to her forehead and took notice of the bandage dressing a painful wound thereon.

Luna grabbed her friend's shoulders and eased her head back onto the pillow. "Easy, Ginny. I want you to lie still while I have a look at you." She retrieved a pair of oddly coloured spectacles from her pocket and put them on, seemingly unaware of George's amusement in that the glasses made her look like a demented, multi-coloured owl.

Ginny smiled; her friend's eccentricities reminded her of why she loved Luna so. "So, do you see any Nargles about?"

"That's a silly thing to ask when everybody knows that Spectrespecs are used to detect wrackspurts," Luna replied as she examined Ginny through the coloured lenses. "What's the last thing you remember?"

Ginny closed her eyes and concentrated for several seconds. "The Quidditch finals!" she gasped. Did we win?

"Did. You. Ever!" George said; his grin returned. He tossed a copy of today's *Quibbler*—hot off the press—onto his sister's bed.

Ginny picked up the newspaper as the magically animated picture on the front page immediately caught her attention. There she was, making the game-winning catch of the elusive Golden Snitch, when she lost control of her broom and took a header into the opposing team's goalpost. She grimaced: the picture looped over and over, prompting her to revisit the bandage on her forehead. She frowned when she read the headline:

HARRY POTTER'S GIRLFRIEND TAKES A TUMBLE

"How long have I been unconscious?"

"Only since last night," George said. "The healer said your surgery went very well, but they want to keep you here for a couple of days to make sure you don't suddenly drop dead from an aneurysm, or something to that effect."

Ginny rolled her eyes, quite immune to her brother's unconventional wit after nineteen years. "I have to sit in this dreadful room for two days?"

"Not to worry, sis. I took the liberty of grabbing a few things from your flat, including some fresh reading material, bibliophile that you are." With that, George took out his wand and invoked, "*Accio suitcase!*"

So commanded, the luggage by the door levitated to the centre of the room and magically unzipped itself, allowing the contents therein to egress and settle into their assigned places.

Ginny folded her arms, akimbo, while she waited for the spell to run its course. "So... you broke into my flat and rummaged through my things, did you?" she said with a reprimanding glare toward George.

"That's what brothers are for, dear sister; there's no need to thank me."

She bolted upright. "THANK YOU?" The pain from the effort immediately reminded her of her head injury.

"You're welcome," he teased. "And don't worry, I *did not* see the whips and chains stowed under your bed, nor did I see the pictures of Harry, bound and gagged, with you laying into him with an eight inch—"

"Shut up, prat!" She then looked to Luna, horrified, and said, "Luna, he's joking!"

"I know that." Luna giggled. "You're lucky to have had a brother to grow up with. I always wanted one of my own."

Ginny snorted and waved George off dismissively. "Take this one... I've got five others." When her brother levitated the books atop the end table, Ginny regarded them with renewed interest, and she removed the topmost one from the stack. "Actually, George, how *did* you know that I haven't gotten around to reading these yet?"

"Elementary, my dear sister: those books were still in pristine condition—not one of their pages are folded inward."

Luna's brow furrowed at George's observation, and she questioned, "What do you mean by, 'folded inward'?"

"Rather than to dog-ear her pages—like a *normal* person—my sister has this annoying habit of folding her pages lengthwise into the spine when she wants to mark her place."

"Well, it's better than dog ears, i'n't it?" Ginny said in defence. "Folding on the corners warps the book, whereas folding evenly along the spine allows the book's very weight to maintain its shape even after folding and unfolding multiple pages."

Luna regarded Ginny with a blank stare. "Why don't you just use a bookmark?"

At that, George threw up his arms in righteous exasperation. "Thank you, Luna! I only wish Harry had the stones to ask her that!"

Undeterred, Ginny began thumbing through her novel, saying, "If it bothered Harry so, I imagine he would tell me directly."

"Not if he wants to keep shagging you." George's grin had never been broader. "He'd've learnt to keep his mouth shut, wouldn't he?"

"Damn right, he would," Ginny replied absently, no longer paying her brother any mind as she delved into her new novel.

George's expression soured at the new found thought of *any* bloke getting a leg over his baby sister. Retreating to the foot of the bed, he decided to change the subject. "Well, seeing as how you'll live, sis, I think I'll tell the rest of the clan that you're all right."

"Shit," Ginny cursed under her breath. "Wait! Do me a favour, and tell everyone that I'm still sleeping it off, will you? I can't deal with mum and dad flipping out on me right now."

"What about Harry?" George said.

"That goes double for Harry," she snapped.

George shrugged. "Whatever you say, Gin." It was an odd request, but he was not one to dwell on such things. "Say, Luna, how about I take my newly adopted sister out for brunch, eh?" Smiling, Luna joined George at the foot of the bed and eagerly accepted his proffered arm.

Ginny eyed the two of them over the top of her book when her gaze was drawn to her uncovered feet. "Er, why am I wearing my shoes in the bed?"

"I took the liberty of putting your boots on," Luna answered matter-of-factly. "It'll keep your feet warm in case you were to walk about in your sleep."

Ginny chortled at the fact that she had failed to notice that she was wearing shoes all this time. "That's a nice gesture, Luna, but I know for a fact that I don't sleepwalk." She then kicked off her boots—exposing the dirty, blackened soles of her feet.

Unawares, Ginny returned to her book, while George and Luna shared a knowing look as they left the room together.

"Er, planning on keeping those glasses on, are you?"

"Of course I am, George."

"Next time bring an extra pair." His grin returned. "You wouldn't want me to stick out like sore thumb, now, would you?"

Lucius

Chapter 3 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 3

Lucius

"You sure you weren't followed, Lucius?"

"I am no stranger to stealth, Tavin." Lucius grinned. "Unlike your breath."

The tall, lanky wizard smirked in response to Lucius' rebuff. He brandished his wand, and the large rusty doors to the Ministry's Magical Artefacts Division squeaked open. "I can't imagine why you'd want to go rooting about in 'ere, Guv'nor. It's not like these relics have any magic left in 'em."

"Call me sentimental." Lucius followed his escort inside the dimly lit warehouse. "You know how I like to collect my toys."

"Aye, particularly the kind that gets you thrown in Azkaban, yeah?"

Tavin led his longtime associate to a small unmarked door. He whispered the password into the keyhole, and the lock disengaged with a click that echoed inside the empty chamber. Having fulfilled his part of the bargain, Tavin deftly caught the purse Lucius tossed his way. He peeked inside the drawstring bag and smiled. "If you get caught, you don't know me, yeah?"

Lucius nodded, and Tavin left him at the door's entrance. Lucius closed the door behind him and listened intently until he was sure that he was alone. Satisfied, he looked about the room; the signpost above the entrance read, "Tom Riddle Exhibit." He retrieved the modified Sneakoscope from his pocket. It remained dormant in his palm which suggested that Tavin was correct in his claim that all the artefacts herein were bereft of any Dark Magic.

He sighed. *Looks like we'll have to do this the hard way.*

He walked by several rows of filing cabinets, trinkets and other minutiae, most of which had very little, if anything, to do with Lord Voldemort. It was almost laughable, the Ministry's inclination to record every facet of the Dark Lord's life—as if cataloguing him would beget a level of control.

He stopped in his tracks when he spied the remains of Nagini, Lord Voldemort's pet snake, preserved for all time in an oversized glass jar. The shelf was otherwise nondescript and would have been easily overlooked unless one knew what to look for.

Tom Riddle's Horcruxes.

Lucius rolled the ladder over from the end of the aisle and started to ascend the upper tiers. The items were all housed in simple metal containers with a small catalogue card attached. Lucius was impressed by the Ministry's meticulousness, for many of the items, having been destroyed, hardly bore any resemblance to their description, namely: a locket, a ring, a diadem, a cup and an odd turban. He paused, however, when he came upon an unmarked leather-bound book.

Tom Riddle's Diary....

He held the tome with reverence as he descended the ladder. Once again, he found himself entrusted to that which his master held most dear: the first Horcrux. Holding it in his hands, he knew it was no coincidence that Lord Voldemort had approached him last night in the guise of Ginny Weasley.

Lucius examined the book. It was withered and desiccated, suffering a hole starting from the front cover and ending in a small dent in the back cover with every page between being pierced. He brought out his special Sneakoscope in the hopes that its close proximity would elicit some sort of response.

Nothing.

Undeterred, he opened the book and flipped through every page one by one, looking for nothing—and everything. Agonizing minutes passed, but his persistence was rewarded when, toward the end of the book, he noticed a gap between two of the pages, prompting him to open the location in the book ever wider.

His jaw dropped.

Inside there was a single page folded inward toward the spine—folded in such a way that allowed it to escape being pierced like the other pages. With great care, he used the tip of his pen to unravel the bindings. His patience paid off when he was able to remove the page completely from the rest of the diary without tearing it. A follow up examination revealed that no other pages were spared.

His fingers trembling, Lucius unfolded the lone page and smoothed it out across his lap. Using his pen, he wrote three words on the blank page:

"Are you there?"

The words simply stared back at him. He eyed them for several minutes, looking for the slightest signs of life, but he was denied. Unfortunately, his time had run out. After he replaced the diary, Lucius folded the page with care and stowed it in the lining of his jacket. He left the room and proceeded to the antechamber of the Artefacts Division where Tavin waited by the lift. Both men shared a knowing look, but said nothing otherwise—though Lucius was tempted to ask Tavin for a refund.

After being discreetly escorted away from the restricted levels, Lucius promptly left the Ministry building and summoned his driver. His mind raced, pondering on how he would confront Lord Voldemort with nothing to show for his efforts but an empty page. Surely his master's patience would not suffer another failure on his part.

In waiting for his ride, he almost yelped when he felt the Sneakoscope flitting about in his pocket. His heart racing, he recovered the hidden page and unfolded it. The words that he had written previous were gone; in their place was inscribed:

"I AM."

He smiled; after all, Malfoys hate to waste money.

Ginny

Chapter 4 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 4

Ginny

I AM

Ginny bolted upright, grabbing her forehead. It felt like someone had driven a railroad spike into her brain. Her teeth clenched so hard that tears started to stream out of the corners of her eyes. Paralyzed, she had no choice but to bear it.

It would be several minutes before the pulses of pain lessened to a degree that allowed her to think straight. The reprieve was short lived, however, as the pain in her head was replaced with a sudden wave of nausea. She threw off the covers and hurried to the loo, making it to the toilet just in time.

She flushed the contents of her stomach away and proceeded to rinse her mouth in the sink. It felt good to splash some cool water on her face. She naturally looked into the mirror above the sink and gasped in terror when the reflection she regarded was that of a young man with deathly eyes. She lost her balance and stumbled backward, slamming into the opposite wall.

"Fuck!"

She rose slowly to her feet, massaging her shoulder, and defiantly looked into the mirror again. She saw her face and sighed in relief—then laughed at her own expense. She exited the loo, smiling and embarrassed, when she stepped on her book. She must have dozed off while reading it because it was still opened on where she left off. She picked it up and carefully folded the page that marked her spot—folding inward toward the spine.

I AM

She massaged her forehead, still finding it difficult to concentrate, and convinced herself that the strange sound was an artifact of the wind whistling through the half-open window. She glanced at the clock. It was well after midnight, yet she wasn't sleepy. Rather, she felt compelled leave her room. She opened the door and ventured out, wearing nothing but her gown.

The hallway was bare; the nurse on duty was not at her station, so Ginny felt emboldened to explore more of the hospital, all the while searching for the source of the mysterious sound:

I AM

She found herself at the entrance of a thick aqua-green door that was in desperate need of a fresh coat of paint. In spite of her misgivings, she went inside.

The hiss of the airbrake at the door's closing was deafening given the dim quiet confines of room. Shuddering, she hugged her chest and looked to her bare feet as she walked on the cold floor.

I AM

She stopped and took notice of the array of square lockers that lined the right side of the room stacked four rows high. She reached out and grabbed the handle of the one that gave her pause—locker number seven.

She pulled the slab out of the wall, begetting a long protracted creak.

A white sheet was draped over a still form atop the slab. Like a moth to a flame, Ginny was drawn to see who, or what, was under the sheet. She whipped the cover off, and her heart raced when she recognized the body with its serpentine features.

"Voldemort," she whispered.

Was it real? She cautiously neared and gently poked his chest with her finger. The last time she stood this close to the Dark Lord was after the Great Battle, when she oversaw the group that had removed his fallen body from the main hall. Looking upon him again, she was just as sure now that Lord Voldemort was dead.

I AM

She heard an odd sound of skin slapping against skin. Her eyes darted to the source to see that the corpse had grabbed her arm. It took her several seconds to process what was happening—hastened by the fact that its grip was tightening. She struggled to pull herself free, but her strength was useless.

I AM

In a panic, Ginny drew in as much air as her lungs could manage and screamed as she never had before.

Bunbley

Chapter 5 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 5

Bunbley

The old elf scribbled tirelessly at his desk when his attention was diverted by bloodcurdling screams coming from the morgue. He placed his quill into the inkwell, hopped down from his chair and left his office to investigate. He came upon a giant witch—a patient given her state of dress—who was standing over the corpse in locker seven, screaming at the top of her lungs.

He approached with trepidation, as humans have a tendency toward mental instability. The nearer he approached, the more wary he became in regards to the sight of her statuesque frame with its grotesque, hourglass proportions. He grimaced at her hideously taut alabaster skin and shiny red hair.

When he deemed it safe, he ventured to look into her eyes; it appeared as if she were in a trance. When he snapped his fingers, she blinked and stopped screaming.

The human continued to stare at the corpse in locker number seven. To the elf's annoyance, she started to poke the corpse rather brusquely with her finger, as if she were sure to evoke a response from the cadaver.

He cleared his throat.

She snapped her head in the elf's direction, looking rather shocked. "Who are you?"

The elf's features betrayed no emotion on his part. "Considering that this is *my* mortuary, I believe the onus on you to identify yourself."

"D-did you say *mortuary*?"

She turned to face him, and the elf now had a clear view of her hospital bracelet. "That is correct, Miss Ginerva Weasley." He had excellent eyesight. "I am Healer Bunbley, magical medical examiner for all of Wizarding Britain."

"Healer?" Ginny's eyes narrowed as she looked down on his three-foot frame. "But you're a house-elf."

"I see that that head injury has done nothing to diminish your powers of perception. However, appearances to the contrary, I am a forest-elf."

In her current state Ginny was remiss to acknowledge the distinction, being more concerned with getting a proper lay of the room. "How did I get here exactly?"

"How should I know, girl? I was notarising death certificates when I was interrupted by screams loud enough to *wake the dead*...." He chuckled. "My, that was a poor choice of words on my part, wasn't it?"

After surveying the room, Ginny's attention returned to the cadaver in locker seven. "This is Lord Voldemort's body."

Bunbley sighed at her penchant for the obvious. He waved his hand, and a step ladder levitated before him. He climbed it so as to get a better view of the body in order to make sure this ugly witch had not damaged it. "Tom Marvalo Riddle, Jr—also known as Lord Voldemort. Cause of death: magical cessation of life functions consistent with a self-inflicted Killing Curse."

"W-what is he doing here?"

"For study, of course," Bunbley said, nonplussed.

"For study?"

"Tom Riddle's remains provide a unique opportunity to study firsthand the long-term effects of Dark Magic on the human body." He presented the corpse's arm, and Ginny retreated a few paces. "Notice how well preserved the body is: as fresh as the day it was wheeled in here." Satisfied, he hopped down from the step ladder and pushed the locker closed.

"You should burn it," Ginny said under her breath. Trembling, she hugged her chest.

Bunbley took notice, and he retrieved a blanket from the closet. "You shouldn't be wandering around in such a state. You could *catch your death*." He snorted as he draped the blanket over her. "Forgive me; that was another poorly chosen turn of phrase."

"Thank you, Mister Bunbley." Ginny sat down when the elf offered her a seat.

"You're very welcome... Ginerva Weasley?" He began to ponder the name as it sparked a memory. "Where have I heard that name, anyway?"

Ginny frowned and sighed. "Probably on account of me being Harry Potter's... girlfriend."

"No! That's not where I've come across that name." He snapped his fingers, and a folder from a nearby file cabinet magically flitted to his waiting hand. He started reading and smiled in remembrance. "You, Ginerva Weasley, were involved in the destruction of the first Horcrux! Amazing!"

"Y-you know about Voldemort's Horcruxes?"

"It was hard to miss given how fractured his soul was." He released the file, and it obediently flew back into the cabinet. Ginny's quizzical expression urged him to continue. "Besides, in my line of work, you take novelty whenever you can get it."

She nodded. "I can imagine."

"When I first deduced Voldemort's unique Horcrux implementation, I was eager to interview you."

"What would you want with me?"

"As far as Riddle's Horcruxes go, the first is sure to be the most powerful of the lot since it was created from a theretofore unblemished soul," he said. "It must have been exceptionally difficult to destroy."

"It was."

Bunbley stared into her eyes, searching. "Even so, I was always curious if echoes of its dark influence remained."

"Professor Dumbledore himself examined me," Ginny recalled, blushing. "He assured me that Tom Riddle was gone from me."

"If Dumbledore said so, then it must be true," Bunbley replied with his usual lack of expression. "Er, sorry, why were you standing next to Lord Voldemort's corpse again?" He sneered.

Ginny shifted in her seat uncomfortably. She could not dismiss the elf's logic. "What's wrong with me? Am I going mental?"

"I'm sure you're fine as Wizarding standards go." He pulled up a chair and hopped on. He was loath to admit that he was starting to enjoy this witch's company. "In my eighty-four years of service, it has been my experience that you humans have this annoying outlook that the body, mind and spirit are separate in that one can be treated without regard for the other two." He then gestured toward locker seven. "Case in point: Lord Voldemort—a prime example that you can't ravage a soul without leaving indelible traces of such trauma in the mind and body."

"So, what should I do, Healer Bunbley?"

"Pardon?" For the first time, the elf's features betrayed his emotions. "You want medical advice from the likes of me?"

"Why wouldn't I? You're a healer, aren't you?"

"Right." Bunbley sat up straight, his eyes beaming. "Well, given your history with Tom Riddle, I am of the opinion that it's no coincidence that you found your way down here."

She touched her head wound. "But the surgeon did say I might hallucinate."

He snorted. "Yes. As I am sure that he also gave no thought as to monitor the nature of your hallucinations," he replied with a disapproving frown. "I've spoken with you for

less than five minutes, and already I sense a duality about you that yearns to be reconciled." He gently took her hand. "You need closure, my dear, in order to bring your body, mind and soul back into alignment."

"A duality?" she whispered in apprehension. "How do we fix it?"

"Your heart has already prescribed a course of treatment. All *you* have to do is listen, and follow it."

She bit her lip. "Will you help me?"

"Of course, child." Bunbley hopped off his chair and beckoned her to follow. He led her to an examination table just past the lockers and commanded, "Up you go." He smiled at her reluctance. "Don't worry. It's more comfortable than it looks. I haven't lost a patient yet."

Ginny was not amused. "You know, your bedside manner needs work."

"Sorry, my usual staple of patients don't tend to complain." He waited until she was comfortable enough to ease herself onto the dull metal slab. He stood at the head of the examination table and began to massage her temples, saying, "Now, I want you to relax, child. Breathe and focus on the sound of my voice...."

Bunbley continued to speak to Ginny reassuringly, suggesting her into an altered state of mind.

Her eyelids closed.

Ginny

Chapter 6 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 6

Ginny

Ginny opened her eyes and breathed deep the sweet air that hinted of roses. Her bed was soft and warm, which tipped her off that she was no longer at St Mungo's. She yawned and rubbed the sleep from her eyes. When she sat up, she was greeted by the loving faces of her parents.

"Mum, Dad..." She gasped. *That's not my voice.*

Before her parents could respond, Madam Pomfrey approached carrying a cup resting atop a saucer.

Ginny smiled knowingly. *I'm at Hogwarts!*

Pomfrey handed Ginny the cup. "There you go, dearie, a nice cup of hot chocolate, complements of the headmaster."

"Thank you, Madam Pomfrey." Ginny reached for the cup and noticed how tiny her hands were. She threw off her bed sheet and saw that her bodily proportions were likewise smaller...no, younger. Ginny looked again to the adults gathered around her; her parents and Madam Pomfrey were years younger since she last saw them. Then the memory came flooding back; she knew not only *where* she was, but *when* she was. "This was after Harry rescued me from the Chamber of Secrets," she thought aloud.

"You mustn't blame yourself, Harry Potter's girlfriend," her mother, Molly, said. "After all, older and wiser wizards have been hoodwinked by Lord Voldemort."

Ginny snorted, "What did you call me, mum?"

"Don't fret over it anymore, dearie," Pomfrey interrupted. She reached into her pocket. "Here. Have another marshmallow."

Ginny's father was not as forgiving. "Didn't we warn you what would happen if you went about cavorting with boys in strange books?"

Ginny blinked. "I-I wasn't."

"*Don't* lie to us, Harry Potter's girlfriend."

"That's enough, Arthur," Molly said.

"Yes. There's no need to upset the girl who loves the boy who lived," Pomfrey added. "She's been through enough."

Young Ginny eyed the three of them suspiciously. "Why aren't you calling me by my name?"

"What's in a name," Pomfrey answered. "It's your legacy that people care about." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a scalpel. "Now, lift up your skirt, that's a good girl..."

Ginny could feel the blood leaving her extremities. "W-whatever for?"

"Why, it makes disembowelling you easier, of course"

Pomfrey leaned in with the scalpel, and Ginny leapt off the bed before she could cut her. Her father made a grab for her, and she dove between his legs. The adults worked together in an effort to corral her, but Ginny was too quick for them.

"WHAT THE BLOODY HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU PEOPLE?"

Molly regarded her daughter with a saccharin smile. "It's for you own good, Harry Potter's girlfriend." She inched closer, likewise brandishing a scalpel. "Now, come over

here so mummy can cut the fruit of your whoring out of your belly."

Ginny glanced at the window nearby. When the adults made a second go for her, she flung her body through the glass. Falling through the air, she realized that jumping to her death was not an ideal solution to her predicament.

Ginny hit the ground...hard. After a few seconds of stillness, she stirred, surprised that she was still alive, and she rose to her feet. She regarded her hands and saw that they had returned to their normal dimensions. She was an adult again, dressed in her hospital gown.

She looked back to the window high above. Thankfully, Pomfrey and her parents were not following her. Still looking up, she spied a fast approaching object. It was then that she realized that she was without her wand. Fortunately, when the object came within view, she saw that it was her faithful broom. It descended and levitated beside its mistress, and Ginny mounted it, telling it, "Ten seconds ago would've made for better timing."

A glint of metal made her turn her head. A shiny buzzing object taunted her as it flitted about and around her person.

The Golden Snitch!

She made a grab for it, and it darted out of reach. "Right." And she gave chase. It led her away from the castle and along the periphery of the Great Lake. No matter how fast she went, the Snitch managed to stay just beyond her grasp.

"Arresto Momentum."

The Snitch halted in midair. However, the spell seemed to have the same effect to Ginny's broom: it likewise halted, and Ginny flew off. She landed at Dumbledore's feet, he being the author of the spell.

On her hands and knees, Ginny looked to him and said, "Professor... you have to help me."

Dumbledore's expression remained aloof. "It was foolish of you to come here tonight, Tom." He reached into his pocket to retrieve a large scalpel, and he approached her.

Ginny tried to rise, but she slipped on the wet grass and landed on her bum. "Don't you know me?"

The blade glimmered as he brought it to bear. "The Aurors are on their way."

The old wizard made a swipe at her, but he was no match for Ginny's speed. She scrambled to her feet and ran to the pier at the edge of the lake and untied the boat. The oars magically paddled in the water, and she soon disappeared into the fog. The boat stilled in the quietest part of the lake. Ginny looked over the edge; the water was black and murky. For now, she was safe.

BAM!

The crack of the teleportation spell revealed Professor Dumbledore standing calmly before her, brandishing his scalpel. Ginny gasped and retreated to the head of the small boat.

"Wait!" Ginny protested. "Y-you can't Apparate on the grounds!"

The old Wizard's thin lips curled into a hint of a smile. "You can if you happen to be Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, my dear."

The air whistled when a long tendril-like object shot out of the water. It latched onto Dumbledore's arm, causing him to drop the scalpel. Three more such objects assailed him, each fiercely latched onto one of Dumbledore's limbs. Ginny immediately recognized the pale, sinewy tentacles from the squid that lived in the lake.

Quartered, Dumbledore was hoisted into the air, unable to get at his wand and struggling in vain to free his arms and legs.

A fifth tentacle of superior girth appeared out of the water. Its movements were more methodical than the other four. It leveraged its many suction cups to move with deliberation higher up Dumbledore's leg, unseen beyond the hem of his robe. Dumbledore continued to struggle, but the squid would not be denied, relentless in pursuit of its dark goal. The tentacle reached the apex of its ascent, and Dumbledore's body involuntarily seized, enduring a sensation without precedent. A second and third tentacle joined their twin under the crowded robe.

The wizard's legs parted. "Oh, my...." And he relented.

Ginny couldn't bear the display, and she covered her eyes. Unfortunately, this did nothing to spare her ears...like a spoon stirring oily pasta.

Embracing and entwined with his pulsating prison, Dumbledore was content to slip quietly into the water.

All was peaceful again on the open loch. Ginny waited for several minutes; there was no sign of the squid or Dumbledore. She reached for the oars and started to turn the boat around.

The oar disturbed the water.

She was startled by a lone tentacle that broke the surface and landed inside the boat. The pale tentacle, stained brown and red, probed blindly and angrily. It raked close to Ginny's foot, and she retreated to the end of the boat, being careful not to rock it lest it give her away. The probe continued to explore the boat...it knew she was there.

In epiphany, Ginny called for her broom again. As she had hoped, Dumbledore's spell had worn off, so the broom obeyed her command and raced her way from the edge of the bank. Meanwhile, a second tentacle ascended from the water and came down hard, slicing the boat in two. The piece she was in started to sink. The broom would never make it in time, so she took a deep breath and dove into the water with the squid in pursuit. A tentacle lashed out at her; she grabbed it and bit into it as hard as she could.

This only angered the squid. It caught Ginny by the ankle and pulled her in.

Ginny's broom plunged into the water and quickly found its mistress fighting a losing battle. Like a torpedo, it rammed into the squid, causing it to release Ginny. While the squid recovered, Ginny was able to grab a hold of her broom, and she was off just as the squid made another grab for her.

Ginny made a dash for the sewer as the squid was hot on her heels, its tentacles probing the bowels of Hogwarts to exact revenge on its elusive prey.

I hate being the bloody Snitch!

Ginny was running out of air, but she trusted her broom. There was a hint of light at the end of one of the pipes, and the broom knowingly made a dash for it. A tentacle grasped at Ginny's hair, and she screamed, expelling the last of her air just as she broke through the grate.

She flew through the air and landed on the hard dry ground. She spat out the remnants in her mouth that tasted of sewage and managed to her feet. There was no sign of her broom, but upon surveying the area, she soon discovered that she was no longer in the castle; she wasn't even on the grounds.

How did I end up in Diagon Alley?

She was ready for this nightmare to be over, but not before discovering why she was here. The street was dark and deserted at this hour. There was no sign of life save for the lights being on in the shop at the corner. She approached the modest building. The sign over the door read, 'Flourish and Blotts.'

Ginny opened the door and ventured inside. The small shop was as she remembered, with every shelf and every baseboard lined with books of every flavour. She proceeded to the common area and smiled when she saw the man whom she loved.

"Harry!" she screamed.

Harry opened his arms and Ginny leapt into them.

A full breath later, she parted from his kiss, saying, "I've missed you." She rested her head on his shoulder. "What are you doing here?"

Harry kissed the top of her head. "I have to cut him out of you, Gin." And he plunged the sword of Gryffindor into her belly.

A barely audible gasp escaped her lips as her beloved turned the blade...his elbow going back and forth in a sawing motion.

o~o~o~o~o~o~o~o~o~o

Ginny half-awoke from her trance screaming.

Bunbley tried to restrain her to no avail. "Miss Weasley, it's all right! You're safe!" Her flailing arms knocked the elf off the examination table. He hit the floor, his foot twisting at an odd angle. Though in pain, he managed to snap his fingers, and Ginny stopped screaming.

She sat up from the table cradling her belly. When her heart returned to its regular rhythm, she looked to the elf who lay still on the floor. "Healer Bunbley?" He did not respond. She hopped off the table and went to his side. "Are you alright?"

Bunbley stirred. "My leg," he said weakly.

Ginny picked him up and placed him gently on the table. "It's sprained. Let me help you."

Wincing, he quickly sat up. "No way, I'll manage." He chortled through the pain, saying, "You have issues."

Ginny smiled. "Thanks to you I know what I have to do." She stroked the little grey tuft at the top of his head. "Will you be all right?"

"Of course." He eyed her warily. "What are up to, now?"

"*Patient heal thyself, right?*" She turned to leave.

"You should be in bed," he called out to her; however, she had already left.

Tom

Chapter 7 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 7

Tom

The bell above the entrance to Flourish and Blotts chimed, marking the entrance of Ginny Weasley. She levelled her wand, and the lights inside the shop magically illuminated.

She was more circumspect this time around, keeping her wand at the ready, and dressed in full Quidditch gear. Her uniform was pristine, save for a few splotches of days-old blood that stained her lapel. She paused at the threshold of the common area, her prey in clear view...Lord Voldemort, the Heir of Slytherin and the most powerful Dark Wizard of the modern age, known to Ginny simply as:

"Tom Riddle," Ginny greeted. "It's been a long time."

The sixteen-year-old incarnation of Tom Riddle smiled. "Actually it hasn't been that long at all, not for me, anyway."

"I can only surmise that by the time Harry destroyed the diary, you had already incorporated enough of yourself into my psyche to leech off of me all these years."

Tom pursed his lips in thought. "Hmm... I'll give you partial credit for that one, but you're not entirely correct. Ten points awarded to Gryffindor!" Tom approached closer.

Ginny's wand fired a warning shot, and Tom stopped. "Why here at Flourish and Blotts, Tom? Really, a rhinoceros would've had more subtlety."

"Because, my dear Ginerva, this is where our story begins," Tom said. "And while we're on the subject, let me just say that that bit with the squid was absolutely brilliant! Truly, a psychosis after my own heart."

"It ends tonight, Tom. You don't belong in this world." She aimed her wand.

But Tom was not impressed. "And what makes you think you can stop me, little girl?"

"That's where you're wrong." A spell ejected from her wand that sent Tom flying clear across the room. Ginny made no attempt to hide her satisfaction. "I'm not a little girl anymore. You have no power over me, and I know precisely how to hurt you."

Tom slowly rose to his feet and wiped a trickle of blood from his lip. "It appears as if we've both underestimated each other." His eyes gave away a figure standing behind her.

Ginny turned to face him, but Lucius was already in position. His cane came down hard on her wrist, and she dropped her wand. Lucius pushed her, and she slammed into the bookcase. Ginny started to rise, but Lucius had recovered her wand, and he pointed it directly at her.

Tom sneered. "I forgot to mention that Lucius also has an interest in our little drama, for if he hadn't've slipped you my diary in the first place, history would've been written very differently." He clapped his hands together and rubbed them together briskly. "So, now that we're all together, shall I tell you the spectacular series of events that brought this all to a head?"

Ginny glared at him while she massaged her sore wrist. "Don't tell me that you're going to start monologuing, Tom?"

"True, it is a tad cliché, but look at it from my perspective: I've had years to work all of this out in my head with no foil to bounce it off of. So, you'll forgive me if I exercise a little therapeutic release to bring the old body, mind and spirit into synch, will you?"

"Go to hell! Both of you!" Ginny spat.

"Hell wouldn't have me," Tom replied with a grin. "So, as I said, you are partially correct: before Potte*attempted* to destroy the diary, I had indeed transplanted a piece of myself into your psyche, but not enough to sustain me. If Potter had succeeded, I would've surely perished in the Chamber of Secrets."

"No." Ginny shook her head. "Harry *did* destroy the diary. I saw it with my own eyes."

Tom turned to his comrade. "Show her, Lucius."

With the wand still trained on Ginny, Lucius reached into the lining of his jacket and presented the artefact therein. "A single page remains intact; it was folded inward into the spine."

Ginny's eyes fell.

Tom clapped his hands. "Pay attention, Ginny, this is the fun part. It is my belief that *you* and that page from my diary formed a *Binary Horcrux*: neither one alone being viable...only when taken in the plural was I able to stay anchored to this world."

A single tear rolled down her cheek. "No. I don't believe you."

"Such lies, Ginny."

The daughter of Gryffindor wiped her cheek on her sleeve. "So, you had to wait until I was *incapacitated* before you could take control of my body and orchestrate your resurrection. It must've been my being comatose after the accident that gave you the window that you needed."

Now Tom was impressed. "Observe, Lucius, how even now she struggles to piece together that which she does not fully understand. Her resolve is remarkable, don't you agree?"

"Yes, My Lord."

"As it turns out, Ginny my dear, you are wrong yet again. The problem with a Binary Horcrux is it split my essence in twain, thus diluting my consciousness. That's why Dumbledore found no trace of me when he examined you after your rescue from the Chamber of Secrets. It's also the reason why I never resurfaced until now."

"I don't understand." Ginny said. "What's changed?"

"The Horcruxes have ravaged my soul. I now know that Dark Magic is not the key to eternal life. Verily, I say unto you, dearest Ginerva, that the true cure for death is *ew* life."

Rising to her feet, Ginny clenched her fists and held fast. "You know I'll kill myself before I let you take my body!"

Tom snorted. "You still don't get it, do you? It is not *your* life force that brought me back. As for your injury, someone in your condition had no business playing Quidditch in the first place... *Mother*."

The revelation, inspired by Tom's words, struck Ginny to the core of her being: the loss of focus that caused her to collide with the goal post, last night's nausea, the duality that Bunbley sensed in her...

Ginny fell to her knees. "You don't want to be resurrected. You want to be reborn."

"Only this time I will be born into a full blood family. With proper parents."

"Harry stopped you before; he'll find a way to stop you again."

Tom laughed out loud. "Harry couldn't zap his way out of a paper bag were it not for all the help he's gotten, especially from me!" He approached closer and knelt in front of her, concluding with, "It's only fitting that he...my enemy...played such an... *intimate* part in my return."

"I'll never love you, Tom," Ginny whispered with venom.

Tom's amusement left him. "Don't say such things, Mother."

"You're delusional if you think I'll be a mother to you." The pain in her head returned, and she instinctively put her hand to her forehead.

"That's where you're wrong, Mother dear. Once you are reunited with the page, the Horcrux will be complete. As a result, my essence will be whole again, whereby, I'll be able to graft myself fully onto your unborn foetus, but not before I use your wand to trigger an aneurysm in your brain." His sneer returned. "Don't worry, it won't do any real damage, but it will tweak your psyche to the point where you will be a stranger to your family and friends. You will alienate them...even your dearest Harry. Fortunately, Lucius will be there for you; he'll love you and cherish you as much as I.... We will be an honest-to-Merlin real family!"

"You're... insane." Ginny said, breathless.

Tom's response was merely a reassuring smile. She flinched at his touch when he brushed aside a lock of hair that dangled over her brow, saying *Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence...whether much that is glorious...whether all that is profound...does not spring from disease of thought...from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect.*"

"I think Edgar Allan Poe would've considered *the question* answered definitively in you, Tom," Ginny said in defiance.

Tom continued to regard her with that same empty smile. "Mother, you'll see... I will make you proud of me. Mother, you'll know... how I dearly love you so." His smile faded. "Mother, when you awake... your child you'll never forsake."

Ginny's chin quivered, and she shied away under the intensity of Tom's gaze. "How could you be a party to this, Lucius?"

"You will come to know that the bonds of family are irresistible, my love." Lucius replied.

Tom rose, and he put a confident hand on Lucius' shoulder. "Well said, my loyal friend. We all need a fresh start...even you, Mother."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"Don't pretend, Mother. Have you forgotten that I know your fears intimately? You fought your whole life to stay out of your brothers' shadows only to become a footnote in history: the girl who loved the boy who lived."

"Tom, please don't do this."

Tom frowned, seeing her entreatment as a weakness. "It's time, Lucius. Give her the page."

Lucius approached and knelt next to Ginny. Being a true Slytherin, it would have been apropos to rub his enemies defeat in her face first. "Do you know why you lost, Miss Weasley? It's because you didn't have a plan. Winning a battle is about sizing up an enemy and striking only when he is most vulnerable." He presented the object. "Now take it."

Ginny blinked. She obeyed, and Lucius returned to his master's side.

"Now the wand, Lucius...." Tom held out his hand, and Lucius obliged him. "Is she not magnificent, Lucius?"

Lucius regarded the young woman. "She is, My Lord."

"She will make a choice wife for you. I'll be sure to make her submissive and appreciative."

"You are most kind, My Lord."

With a sneer, Tom aimed the wand at Ginny, but nothing happened. He tried to invoke his dark spell again to no avail. Upon examining the wand, he sensed that something was amiss. The deception exposed, the visage of the wand was magically replaced by its true form: a rolled up piece of paper. He unrolled it...it was the page from the diary. Tom then glared at Lucius, for the only magic capable of such a deception is:

"A Confundus Charm!" Tom spat. "What is the meaning of this, Lucius?"

Lucius carefully returned Tom's glower. "Well, My Lord, I was curious to see if Miss Weasley would be willing to take a bit of Slytherin advice."

"*I AM!*" Ginny presented the page in her hand, and it magically regressed to its true form: her wand.*Avada Kedavra!*

The spell pierced the page in Tom's hand and hit him square on the chest. He fell to his knees, clutching at Lucius. "Why?"

Lucius beheld Tom's beautiful face, the tears welling in his eyes. "I already have a family, My Lord."

Tom fought the Killing Curse like no other. Blood streamed from his mouth, eyes and ears. "Do you think they'll ever accept you, Lucius? You will always belong to me!" However, he was forced to accept the reality that even he is not a god. At the end of his will, he abandoned Lucius and crawled his way toward, Ginny.

"Please, Mummy...."

Ginny clenched her teeth. *Avada Kedavra. Avada Kedavra! AVADA KEDAVRA!*

Tom Riddle was no more.

After a brief stillness, Ginny found the wherewithal to rise and approach Lucius. She aimed her wand at the page, and it magically burst in ashes along with Tom's remains. "Cut it a little close, didn't you?"

"Sorry to scare you like that," Lucius said. "But, I had to wait until I was sure he could be killed"...he gave her a sideways glance..."and when you had the will to kill him."

"I can assure you the will was forthcoming."

"Take it from someone who knows," he said plainly. "The best Killing Curses come by desperation."

Ginny suppressed a smile, hiding the fact that for the first time in her life, she could actually stand to be in the same room with a Malfoy. The notion was fleeting, however, when she felt an odd sensation...a tinge...at the base of her abdomen. She looked to that area; a spot of red appeared between her legs that got larger as it bled through the fabric.

She collapsed, and Lucius caught her. "Are you all right, Miss Weasley?"

"I don't know," she said, grabbing her belly. "It h-hurts."

That was the last thing she said before she fainted.

Ginny

Chapter 8 of 8

In the beginning was the word...

Chapter 8

The rays from the early morning sun shone through the window and fell upon Ginny's gentle face. She stirred and opened her eyes. She heard a scratching sound and turned toward the source to see Healer Bunbley seated in a high chair and writing on a clipboard.

She rubbed her head; the bandage was gone. "What time is it?"

"Five Twenty AM," the elf answered without looking up from his clipboard. "Do you know where you are?"

"My room at St Mungo's."

Bunbley nodded in approval. "Are you feeling any better?"

"Yes, actually."

"You're lucky. The psychic surgeon missed the formation of an aneurysm in your brain. I went back in and repaired the damage."

"Thank you." Ginny sat up. It gave her pause to notice that she was wearing an adult diaper. "What about my baby?"

"I'm sorry, there was nothing that could be done," Bunbley said matter-of-factly. "Were you aware that you were pregnant?"

"No." She shook her head, her lips quivering. "I killed my baby."

"You mustn't blame yourself. You've been under tremendous stress." His response was genuine, but his bedside manner still needed work.

"How did I get here?"

"Lucius Malfoy brought you in with some rubbish story," Bunbley said with a frown. "The Aurors are questioning him now."

"He's telling the truth," Ginny said. Hesitant to volunteer specifics, she added, "I... was hallucinating, and he helped me."

For the first time, Bunbley looked up from his clipboard. "Well, I suppose even a Death Eater is bound to tell the truth on occasion. I'll inform the authorities."

"May I speak with him, please?"

"As you wish." Bunbley hopped off the chair and grabbed his cane. "Can I get you anything?"

"Yes. I would like a bookmark, if it's not too much trouble."

The elf gave her a curious look, but he acknowledged the odd request and left.

Ginny took the novel from the end table. She found the first folded page therein and carefully smoothed it out, ignoring her trembling hands. She repeated the process for the rest of the markers. By the time she was finished, she heard a knock at the door; it was Lucius.

Ginny bade him to enter, and Lucius obeyed, though he stayed a respectful distance from her bed.

"I have to know," she said. "Was that really Tom Riddle we defeated?"

The former Death Eater hesitated to answer. "If you're asking whether this all fell under the purview of the naturalistic or under the supernatural, I cannot say."

Ginny was not in the mood for cryptic answers. "Take a guess."

"I choose to take comfort in the fact that, either way, Tom Riddle is dead once and for all," Lucius said with finality. "We'll both be a lot better off if *you* decide to do the same." Having no desire to linger, Lucius turned to leave.

"By the way, this changes nothing between us, Malfoy."

He paused. "I understand. For what it's worth, you have my deepest sympathies, madam."

The door closed, and the room fell silent. Massaging her empty belly, Ginny took out her wand:

"Muffliato."

And she wept.