

End of the Matter

by Alison

Voldemort had an unsuspected eighth Horcrux. So is the Final Battle really the end of him?

One-shot complete

Chapter 1 of 1

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The small object lay, warm and heavy, in Tom Riddle's palm. Although his face remained a careful blank, just for an instant his eyes gleamed a covetous red.

With a shake of his head, Tom placed the amber paperweight back on the counter top and turned his attention to the pungent bundle of filthy clothes in front of him that was 'Flotsam' Fletcher.

"I'm afraid we can't make you an offer for this. You must be aware, sir, that Borgin and Burkes specializes only in magical objects. This bauble," and he flicked it dismissively with his forefinger, "is certainly pretty, I'll grant you. But so far as I can see, it contains absolutely no magic whatsoever."

Flotsam wet his lips nervously. There was something about this new young salesman that made him nervous. He preferred dealing with Burke to fence all his goods. Burke might be a cockroach, but at least Flotsam could understand him...

Flotsam adopted a wheedling tone. "Ah, go on, young sir, my old granny owned this trinket for years an' years! It must be magical. Howsabout you gimme, ooh, ten Galleons for it, eh? Can't say fairer than that."

Tom smiled coldly. "Five Knuts," he answered.

"What? Five Knuts! You must be bleedin' well joking!"

Tom turned away dismissively. "I'm not in the habit of doing so. The door is over there. Take your piece of Muggle junk and go."

"Oh, listen, mister, come on, you know it's worth more than that! 'Ere, my li'l boy Mundungus, 'e's sick, his mam wants me to get 'im some medicine for his chest. You give me one Galleon, just one, sir, and you can have this, though it's been in my family for generations, and breaks me bleedin' heart to sell it so cheap ..."

Tom picked up the object again and held it up to the light coming in through the windows at the front of the shop. The amber was beautiful, a rich clear orange. And suspended within, its stinger raised as if about to strike, was the perfectly preserved body of a tiny scorpion.

"Go on, mister," Flotsam wheedled. "A Galleon and it's yours!"

Tom gave Flotsam a piercing look. "As I already told you, Borgin and Burkes have no use for non-magical items." He handed the paper-weight back to the thief dismissively. "Good day to you."

Flotsam pocketed the object and exited the shop, muttering darkly to himself as he turned off into a noisome alley at the end of the street. He stopped and dug a hip flask from his other pocket. "Bleedin' uppity young wizard, thinkin' himself too good to deal with ol' Sam Fletcher ... "

He heard a whisper, and started to turn, before a flash of sickly green lit up the alley, and turned Flotsam Fletcher's world forever dark.

Lord Voldemort gazed again at the amber with its small entombed passenger. As he'd told the thief, it was not by itself intrinsically magical. But age seemed to roll off it in waves, telling of the eons that had passed since the scorpion was alive and the fossilized resin now encasing it had been liquid, unchanged since the time of the dinosaurs. That was what appealed to Voldemort it was a type of immortality.

Of course, it was not magical, but he'd always been a collector, and this stone had rested in his pocket when he'd come to the cave to hide his seventh Horcrux, Slytherin's locket. He'd had a sudden urge to keep the amber safe, as safe as any of his Horcruxes.

He tapped his wand against it lightly, and the levitated amber was bathed in a golden glow, eerie in the dark cave. The glow faded, and the paperweight again settled into his palm, this time encased in magical rock.

With a twisted smile, he carefully stashed it away in the niche he'd found at the entrance to the cave. Now it looked like a simple rock. Unprotected by Inferi or magical charms, who would pick up a simple rock, indistinguishable from all the others scattered along the coastline?

The object had called to him from the first moment he'd seen it. And what Lord Voldemort wanted, he always got ... eventually.

"So it all comes down to this, doesn't it?" whispered Harry. "Does the wand in your hand know its last master was Disarmed? Because if it does ... I am the true master of the Elder Wand."

A red-gold glow burst suddenly across the enchanted sky above them, as an edge of dazzling sun appeared over the sill of the nearest window. The light hit both of their faces at the same time, so that Voldemort's was suddenly a flaming blur. Harry heard the high voice shriek as he, too, yelled his best hope to the heavens, pointing Draco's wand:

"Avada Kedavra!"

"Expelliarmus!"

The bang was like a cannon-blast and the golden flames that erupted between them, at the dead centre of the circle they had been treading, marked the point where the spells collided. Harry saw Voldemort's green jet meet his own spell, saw the Elder Wand fly high, dark against the sunrise, spinning across the enchanted ceiling like the head of Nagini, spinning through the air towards the master it would not kill, who had come to take full possession of it at last. And Harry, with the unerring skill of the Seeker, caught the wand in his free hand as Voldemort fell backwards, arms splayed, the slit pupils of the scarlet eyes rolling upwards. Tom Riddle hit the floor with a mundane finality, his body feeble and shrunken, the white hands empty, the snake-like face vacant and unknowing. Voldemort was dead, killed by his own rebounding curse ...

Pain beyond pain! He was ripped from his body, less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost ... but still, he was alive. Powerless as the weakest creature living, without the means to help himself, for he had no body.

But memory flickered still; he knew, somehow, that he had endured this once before and that one of his Horcruxes had kept him alive. He needed to take on a body of some sort, so that when a faithful Death Eater, or even an unwary Muggle, stumbled upon him, he could take him or her over, and from there perform the magic to restore him to a wizard body. For Lord Voldemort could not, would not, die!

So he forced himself to endure, and searched for his Horcruxes, the ones he could still weakly remember. But all, all of the remaining Horcruxes had disappeared! He swooped, incorporeal, from one hiding place to the next, Ravenclaw's tiara gone, Hufflepuff's cup! The ring, destroyed! No, this could not be! Desperately, he arrived at the cave, for surely his Inferi would have kept Slytherin's locket safe?

But the magic had been breached. The locket, too, was stolen; his Inferi reduced once more to unbiddable corpses! The horrible pain returned, as he realized the awful truth: all his Horcruxes had been utterly destroyed, and had been since before his death. So what was sustaining this form? And the pain grew worse, worse still, unendurable! Just as he was about to scream wordlessly, he saw a faint amber glow, coming from within a rock in a niche of the cave's entrance. And he realized how he had again survived, against all the odds.

Pure age had infused the ancient amber of the hidden stone with a sort of magic. And the fossilized resin had protected this last ripped and weak fragment of his soul, and was beckoning to him as a place of rest. And he was not at all sure that he could endure as a bodiless spirit much longer.

Sobbing soundlessly, Voldemort dove towards the faint glimmer of salvation, feeling the pain numb and consciousness mercifully dim as he settled himself within the tiny body of the preserved scorpion ...

Time...

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The sea levels rose as Antarctic and glacial ice melted due to global warming. Humans retreated to Antarctica, one of the few remaining lands still safely above the water

and cool enough for survival.

The cave on the coast of England was inundated, the piece of amber rolled and buffeted by the action of the waves over the seafloor for centuries before being buried under tons of sedimentary mud, which gradually hardened into rock under the massive pressure of dark water above.

Eons passed, and the sea bottom reared up into a massive mountain range, cresting upwards and upwards until its summit was well above the waterline. Humans migrated from their high Antarctic continent to these new lands, and built mighty city-rafts, living once more off the bounty of the oceans.

More Deep Time, merely an eye blink in cosmological outlook, but long enough in geological outlook for the sun to expand hugely as it neared the end of its life. The humans, all now both magically powerful and technologically savvy, built huge deep-space Arks. Loading the animals and plants that would be doomed if they stayed, and with DNA of all species stored, they left the dying planet, stopping at each of their colonies on the outer planets of the Solar System, collecting whole populations before making the jump into interstellar space, to seek their fortune amongst the stars ...

The sun grew and grew, into a great bloated mass of churning gas, swallowing the planets of Mercury and Venus before the massive expansion halted. Earth survived, but orbited the sun as a hot cinder, sullenly resisting as its surface seethed and bubbled in the merciless heat. Rocks melted in vast lava flows, cooled only by the occasional fall of sulphuric rain.

And a small piece of amber was finally delivered once more to the surface. The magical rock that had coated it had long since been worn away, and now the howling wind flung sand at the orange rock, scouring its cracked and pitted surface, hungrily reaching for the tiny preserved scorpion protected agelessly within ...

Lord Voldemort felt his sleep disturbed. What had wakened him? How long had he slept? There was the vague feeling of time passed, and as his consciousness slowly returned, he hoped vindictively that Potter was still alive, so that he could take revenge on the so-called "Boy Who Lived".

He felt an uncomfortable sensation, and realized suddenly that the amber which had protected the scorpion's body and his fragment of soul must somehow have been breached. That was why he had awakened the ancient magic that had infused the amber could no longer protect the tiny body once it was exposed to the outside world.

But the rest had rejuvenated him; the pain was all but gone, and his consciousness had returned in full force. So now was the time to leave his sanctuary and seek a new body to possess, so that Lord Voldemort could once more rule the world, his birthright as the most powerful wizard ever!

He left his stone in a gloating swoop, and then hesitated. Though almost blind in this bodiless state, he could still make out enough of the land to realize that it was vastly different from the coastline where he had hidden the amber how long ago?

Obviously, he thought, while he slept, somebody must have picked up the stone, either by accident or design, and brought it to this ... place. Was it a desert? Even in his disembodied state, it felt hot, parched and empty. But there was always something alive, even in a desert.

He would have preferred a forest, of course, like the one he had hidden in the first time he had been forced from his body; there had been an abundance of animals there, rats, snakes, more than enough until Quirrell had shown up for Voldemort to possess.

But no matter; he had only to keep moving until he found the small spark that indicated life. He swooped on, low over the surface, growing increasingly worried. For how big was this desert? Nowhere was there anything, not so much as an ant!

How long he continued, he didn't know, but it had to have been hours. He was beginning to panic; he couldn't return to his stone, it was broken and unable to protect him. Finally, he made out a bleary patch and realized that it was a stand of rock, casting a shadow over the baking land, and at the base, hidden deep in the shadows at last! a small blue spark indicating life!

With deep relief he swooped on the life form like an evil shadow, and the world sprung into sharp focus as he peered out of its compound eyes. He felt it struggle against him briefly, but stayed where he was by force of will alone, and after a time, the creature stilled and returned to what it had been doing. Voldemort could see that it was using pincers or claws to scrape away at the surface of the rock. Looking closer, he managed to make out dry patches of lichen clinging to the rough surface. The animal was pulling off miniscule pieces and pushing them into its mouth, eating with single-minded purpose. Voldemort could feel its desperate hunger.

Suddenly he recognised what the animal was no wonder its contours felt so familiar! It was a scorpion! Well, this was a desert, and one would expect to find scorpions living here. He decided to allow the creature to eat its fill. A creature as hungry as this one seemed to be would be easier to guide once sated. Later he would guide it out into the world to search for a more appropriate body to inhabit. After all, the desert couldn't go on forever, could it? He chuckled silently at the thought.

Settling down, the most powerful wizard in the world waited as the last animal alive ate the last patch of vegetation on the planet.

The End.

Author's note: If you liked this story, please have a read of my original story "Love Inhuman" at this link:

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=11932>

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