

# Lonely Empires

by jawy

Do you ever wish we were more than who we are?

This fic was inspired by a fill-in hbp LJ community prompt back in 2005, regarding Albus Dumbledore's destruction of the second Horcrux (Marvolo Gaunt's ring).

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Every malefactor, by attacking social rights, becomes on forfeit a rebel and a traitor to his country; by violating its laws he ceases to be a member of it; he even makes war upon it... Such an enemy is not a moral person, but merely a man."

- Jean-Jacques Rosseau, *Of The Social Contract*

Butterflies and dust motes laze along peacefully, suspended in humidity and June's afternoon sun. Quiet lies over the English countryside like a tangible veil, shuttering its residents' thoughts and words before they begin.

An elderly man with a white beard shuffles along a dirt path in the outskirts of town, hidden from inquisitive eyes by hedgerows. His gnarled staff props up a dark suit and half-moon glasses, shielding sharp blue eyes and a bulging waistcoat. The shadows of laugh lines and crow's feet betray a cheerful nature, but his lips are now pursed with thought.

The staff rhythmically taps on the dusty earth, followed by his hesitant footsteps. The road beneath him is narrow, following uninterrupted lines of brown, green, and blue. The incessantly buzzing flies are his only companions.

When the lane veers sharply to the left, the old man stops to observe the scene before him. Little Hangleton is a valley dotted with thimble-sized houses. An iron-grey church stands proudly in its midst, overshadowing a formidable graveyard. The old man allows his eyes to roam as it will, repainting his memories with the haze of new ones.

Turning, he follows the path downhill with increasingly lengthened strides. Dirt gradually turns to gravel, but he is sure-footed on the way down. The sun leaves cool, prickly shade as trees overtake the hedge. When the path becomes rockier the man abandons the help of his stick by turning it into a polished twig with an ornate handle with whispered words.

At a copse of trees, he stops again. In the deepest shade stands a decrepit house. Shutters have fallen off in the course of time, but its crumbling moss-covered stone remain. The jagged edges of its broken windows hint at awful happenings from an unknown dread. The entire scene is hung in an uncanny silence, at direct odds to this peaceful summer.

No living thing has called this place home in years. Yet the man watches the ruins as though it is a slumbering snake. Concentration seems to erase twenty years from his face, revealing a cautious man on the verge of discovery. Like a silent conductor, he flicks his twig in the air and mutters garbled Latin. He pauses, then makes different motions and mutters different phrases. The stops and starts continue for half an hour. When he is done, the air is noticeably warmer and the ruins are empty of their horror.

Satisfied, he picks his way through the overgrown grass and weeds to the door, which has been saved from the windows' fate. Nailed to the sun-bleached wood is a mass of grimy string. He ignores the string as he sweeps his gaze over door, methodically repeating his actions with the handled twig and murmuring. Finally, he stops and turns his eyes to the string on the door. Grasping the bunch with his right hand, he yanks it off with a rip and just as quickly drops it with a hiss of pain. His hand is red with blisters as though he held his hand in a fire for too long.

In his pain the man almost does not see the door swing open. Flexing his hand in an attempt to regain feeling, Albus Dumbledore enters the House of Gaunt.

~\*~

The house is alive with shimmering sheets of dust, which are visible in the gaps where the sun's rays have penetrated stone. The littered main room is covered with the debris and cobwebs of its former inhabitants. A moth-eaten armchair stands with its back to him, its stuffing ripped out and mingled with broken pottery on the floor. Rats scuttle unseen in the blackened fireplace while the mantle above moves with crawling maggots. Tattered cobwebs curtain the room in a ghoulish imitation of drapery. The two doors to the other rooms in this house are gone, leaving a clear view to the cracked stone beyond.

It has taken nearly three years of active searching and fortuitous breakthroughs for Albus to stand in this house. He had not known the extent of Tom Riddle's obsession with immortality until 1993, when Harry Potter's descriptions of Tom's essence trapped in a diary stirred Albus's imagination. The tale had immediately inspired fear in the strength of Dark magic required to bewitch the diary. While Tom had always shown proclivities for obscure magic, this was beyond anything Albus himself had studied.

To understand the extent of Tom's abilities, the Hogwarts Headmaster had resorted to new avenues of investigation. Mundungus Fletcher had been vital as a middleman and broker in finding those who Tom himself had *Imperioed* in the First War. Those hidden memories had been fruitful beyond his imagining. Once Bob Ogden had given Albus his memories of his visit to the House of Gaunt, the remaining secrecy surrounding Tom's use of a Horcrux had fallen quickly.

Albus next attempted to track down those Horcruxes. That journey had been far more frustrating; he knew which objects Tom had shown interest in but had no indication to which were Horcruxes. Anyone present at the creation of a Horcrux was dead, as their death was necessary to divide Tom's soul, so Albus could not rely on memories for information.

Yet, as with all things, returning to the first point of understanding had proven to be the correct step. While the present decay in the House of Gaunt is beyond what Ogden's memories had shown, the spells surrounding this house are cleverly designed to prevent notice from outsiders. Any Muggle or magical person who approaches these ruins will immediately remember something else they have forgotten to do, and all memory of the ruins will be erased from their minds. Tom Riddle would not have ensured that amount of privacy for a place he had hated so much, had he not entrusted a portion of his soul here.

Albus's nose twitches at the dust and magic in the air. He learned in his youth that knowledge and a quick mind could not give one the gift to actually see a spell's aura; only the wizards of old had that gift. Yet, Albus has immersed himself in a lifelong magical study that has preternaturally tuned him to magic. It is an instinct for him, like anticipating a breeze in the millisecond before it begins.

Right now, his blood sings. Magic is strong in this room, far stronger than in the other rooms or in the protective spells outside.

Making a shrewd guess, Albus inspects the floor. There, in the midst of the debris are invisible barriers free of dust. A choice spell and a wand flick bring down the first, then the second, like peeling back an onion. As the destruction of each barrier moves him farther into the room, a flicker catches his eye. On the other side of the room, a very ugly toad seated on an overturned cauldron is tracking his movements.

Albus continues to bring down spells, which are now more potent, with one eye on the toad. But the beady-eyed creature simply stares back in unnatural quiet. When he is nearly a foot away, the toad shatters the silence with a deafening croak and hops off the cauldron.

Now Albus studies the cauldron for more protective spells. The cauldron is pewter, standard size 2; it is something a first-year at Hogwarts would use. It is an ignominious choice for hiding a Horcrux, but the magic surrounding it is as dense as brick.

Hours pass as his eyes glaze from concentration and his suit sticks to his back with sweat. He finally ends his study when the sunlight disappears, preventing him from distinguishing the cauldron from its surrounding shadows.

Reaching inside his waistcoat, Albus removes a very crumpled Sorting Hat. He smooths it carefully and turns it upside down, drawing out the Sword of Gryffindor. While Harry had used a Basilisk fang to destroy Tom's diary, he had used the sword to kill the Basilisk; this meant the Sword of Gryffindor had absorbed all the potency of a Basilisk fang. It had been a last-minute decision to bring the sword, but Albus finds something poetic in using a simple sword to demolish a powerful Horcrux.

Tucking the hat back into his waistcoat, Albus reviews his plan. There will be danger, not only from the Horcrux but from the destruction of it. Tom's apparition will probably appear, as it had when Harry destroyed Tom's diary. Albus shifts his grip on the sword, hoping he will remember to perform his duty even if Tom's apparition begins to fight.

In the dark of this moment, his reputation and many accolades are but dust. Albus has nothing but rudimentary knowledge and the potential means to help Harry destroy Tom. It is disheartening knowing that Harry will lose his life faster than he expected.\* But the destruction of Tom is for the greater good.

Albus almost loses his grip on the sword when that phrase flashes through his mind. Once, a boy named Gellert Grindelwald had twisted those words into a mockery of what they truly meant. Ever since Ariana's death and his duel with Grindelwald, Albus has tried to distance himself from the terminology, the vision, the very concept of what 'the greater good' means. Yet somehow he has found himself entrenched in another war with another once-handsome boy, wondering just how much greed the human soul can harbor.

Steeling himself, Albus makes the familiar vow that this will be the last time he intervenes. With the sword in his left hand, he begins drawing slow, graceful arcs with the wand in his right. The spells surrounding the cauldron fall rapidly, almost too easily. Tucking his wand away, Albus flexes his fingers nervously and turns the cauldron over.

With a great crackle and whoosh, the night blinds him with a conflagration of red, yellow, and blue. The house has gone up in flames so powerful the very stones are melting. The heat fills him, spreading from his fingertips up to the hairs of his arm, until they lick his cheeks. It is agony to simply stand there, but he knows that Tom would have made all of this impervious to magic. His eyes smart from the smoke, but he forces himself to focus on the cauldron in his hand, igniting the now reopened wounds from the snake skin on the door. But it is empty.

Albus drops the cauldron in frustration, ignoring his protesting wounds. He swings his gaze around the room, wondering if he has missed some clue in his search for the Horcrux. But all he can see is the fire, which has produced enough smoke to spread hazily over the chair and fireplace.

Disgusted with his own hubris, Albus decides to admit defeat. Perhaps Tom had set up decoy locations to truly hide his Horcruxes. After entrusting his diary to Lucius Malfoy, Tom must have known his followers would grow curious about the significance of these objects. Albus needs to retrench if he is to find a true Horcrux.

When Albus leans down to return the cauldron to its original position, he sees the square of floorboard where the cauldron sat is completely free of fire.

Quickly tossing aside the cauldron, Albus draws his wand and blows open the fire-free floorboards with haste. Immediately the fire and smoke intensifies so he can barely breathe or see for the pain coursing in his veins.

Suddenly, he is choking. Lights flash before his eyes as he reaches for his neck, trying to loosen the grip of whoever is strangling him, but his hands meet nothing but air. The death grip on this neck tightens and Albus falls to his knees, groping for his fallen wand as his vision dims.

A memory surfaces in his waning consciousness. It is another golden summer and a golden-haired Gellert Grindelwald is sitting with Albus on the high wall surrounding the Dumbledore's backyard in Godric's Hollow. Gellert's legs swing like those of an enthusiastic child as he describes his plans for ruling the world; meanwhile, he is occupied with favorite activity: snapping flower heads from the Clematis alpine winding up the wall.

Albus listens in frozen awe. Gellert is everything Albus wants to be handsome, intelligent, and persuasive with an impish grin that no one can deny. While Albus has always known he was attracted to males, he was not prepared to fall for Gellert this hard, this fast. But caught between with Ariana's silence and Aberforth's disdain, he leaned to Gellert's warm attention like a flower to the sun. Though Albus hates the way Gellert carelessly destroys beautiful flowers such as these, and that scone he ruined last week when practicing a metallurgy spell, Albus holds his tongue so he won't lose the only friend he has.

"...in meetings, which will cast a spell that'll prevent the Council members from chattering," Gellert blithely continued as another flower head fell. Below, Ariana reaches for the flower and adds it to the pile in her lap as she makes crowns for Aberforth's goats. She is humming today and smiles occasionally, as though holding her own conversation in her head. Albus is annoyed by her presence, but he cannot force her away when she is looking so stable and happy.

"The gossip and intrigue are the worst, Albus." Snap. "Greatness inspires envy, envy engenders spite, spite spawns lies. It toppled Muggle kingdoms long ago and it'll likely ruin our world..." Snap. "If we don't stop them before they start, Muggles will overtake us all once again." Snap.

Gellert finally looks at Albus while saying, "Of course, it would pain me to use it on you, Albus. But if you work against me, I will have no choice. You do understand, don't you?"

Albus's mind is blank with surprise, but he does notice Gellert's eyes are as cold as steel...

A flame crackles, bringing Albus out of his reverie. Heat still screams through his veins, but anger wells within him. All his life, he has been caught between two tyrants, men who are so alike in their charisma yet so different in their upbringing and motivations, working towards the same goal of worldwide empires. Yet Albus has always stood by, afraid of becoming one of them, until the last minute. It is time this ends.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle!" Albus croaks, voice hoarse from smoke and lack of breath, "Unhand me!"

His anger pushes his magic to the forefront so it spills from his very pores, pushing throughout the room in a mighty tide. The fire ends as quickly as it began, leaving a darkened room with no smell of smoke or fire damage. Albus coughs as the pressure on his throat releases, allowing him to breathe normally again. The burns on his hand still smart, but his clothes and skin feel unharmed.

In the quiet room, Albus finds his determination has returned in full force. He picks up his wand, whispers "*Lumos*," and leans over the exposed hollow beneath the floorboards.

Inside is a golden box, its cover engraved with ornate flowers and vines. Even with wandlight, Albus can see the box is made of real gold. Strangely, there is no magic surrounding it, and he has no sense of what magic may be hidden within. The fire, the pain, and the memories must have disoriented his ability to sense magic, which means Albus won't know what is within until he opens it. After a pause, he reaches into the hollow and gingerly flips open the lid of the box with his wand.

A black smoke slowly rises from the charcoal substance within the box, but this time it is not the by-product of fire. Albus scrambles back to standing, his wand outstretched as the smoke continues to the rise. It takes on human shape, neither male nor female, as though it is an opaque ghost. Before it has completely taken form, it strikes a blow, pushing Albus away from the box. Taken by surprise, he falls onto his back, sliding in the debris until he bumps his head against the armchair's leg. A grass snake hisses as it peeps out from the ruined seat cushion, clearly disturbed at this intruder.

Gathering his strength, Albus propels himself back to standing and begins dueling with this ghost. It is a difficult foe, fighting without a wand and betraying no hint of its intentions before it strikes. But Albus again finds the strength to defeat this new enemy with a simple end a fiery python that wraps around the ghost, constricting until it disintegrates to ash.

Wiping the sweat from his brow, Albus returns to the hollowed space. Inside the golden box is a thick layer of ash, from which protrudes a knobby object. Because Albus cannot detect spells in the ash, he is more cautious as he lifts the box from under the floor.

He lightly touches the object but nothing happens, so he begins brushing off some of the ash. It is a crudely shaped ring.

To his left, someone clears their throat loudly. "Ahh, Dumbledore," Tom Riddle says with a smirk, "delighted you could visit."

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Albus is unaware that he has moved until he finds himself facing Tom with his wand at the ready. But this is not the man who has become Lord Voldemort: before him stands a shadow of Tom Riddle at sixteen. He is handsome with his still-human features, outwardly untouched by the evil festering within.

"Didn't think you'd come," Tom continues with the air of a boy politely discussing the weather, glancing around at the room before he studies his fingernails. "Rather pathetic for a pureblooded family, isn't it?" His manner is still nonchalant, but there is a hidden tension in his words.

Albus is surprised at this start of conversation. Harry had stated Tom's spirit would speak, but it was more focused on overpowering Harry than discussing its surroundings. Albus still grips his wand tightly but decides to answer. "Houses which are no longer homes are empty, but never pathetic."

Tom rolls his eyes and mutters, "Don't patronize me. We both know Slytherin's Heir deserves better than a hovel like this."

"Well Tom..."

"Don't call me that," Tom states flatly.

"Why not?" Albus asks in his most reasonable tone. "It is your birth name. Your mother chose it for you herself."

A look of utter loathing crosses Tom's face. "It's *filth*," he spits out. "I am no Mudblood."

Albus studies Tom for a moment. In all of his research into Tom Riddle's past, he has often wondered at this desire to pretend to be pureblooded. While the orphanage Tom grew up in was not wonderful, it seemed better than Harry's existence in a cupboard below the stairs in the Dursley household. While growing up, Harry had always thought his parents died in a car crash, but at least Tom had known his mother had died in childbirth. Why was there no sympathy in him for a woman who had tried to keep him away from the thankless existence of Morfin and Marvolo Gaunt?

Tom had killed Morfin at the age of sixteen; the memory of that murder would be fresh in this piece of his soul.

"You are not Muggle-born," Albus gently insists, "but a half-blood, Tom. While your mother gave you her magical pedigree, your father gave you your looks and..."

"No!" The look in Tom's eyes is terrifying for one so young. "Those were gifts passed down from Salazar Slytherin to his Heir. I look like Salazar himself! You can see it in the paintings at Hogwarts!"

Surprisingly, Albus pities this version of Tom. While Tom was a student at Hogwarts, he had taken care to avoid Albus whenever he could, so Albus had never witnessed Tom's struggle with his lineage. Strangely, this feels like Albus's own desire to break away from the fetters of a dangerous sister and a disgruntled brother while a youth in Godric's Hollow. But with Gellert's help, he had seen the folly of denying his own lineage.

"Tom, surely you know that your pureblooded friends will despise you when they realize this lie," he reasons. "There is more to leadership than power and fear..."

The sneer on Tom's face is typical of any teenager. "What else is there?" he asks in a mocking voice. "Oh, let me guess...*love*?" He stretches out the word until it sounds ludicrous.

"Yes, love, but love that accompanies empathy and respect for intelligence," Albus returns, unfazed.

"Why respect anyone else when it's clear I'm the best?" Tom scoffs. "No one has ever gone as far as I have into magic. I have already experimented and done so much with my abilities; those fools are not worthy of my trust."

Tom's response frightens Albus. So Tom truly had delved into Dark magic at Hogwarts. Had Albus acted faster in restricting certain books in the library or exerted more effort in encouraging Tom while his teacher, Albus may have prevented the death and evil that now followed adult Tom.

"Is that why you murdered your father and grandparents?" Albus asks quietly. "Did you hope to destroy all evidence of your parentage?"

"He was not my father!" Tom continues to insist, bringing his fingers to claw at his face as though he can remove them like a mask.

"Tom..."

"Do not call me that!"

Even at so high a pitch, the command in Tom's tone is impossible to ignore. But Albus is quickly losing patience. "I will not call you Lord," he states in a flat voice. "What would you prefer instead?"

"I am Lord Voldemort!"

The title is disgusting coming from a sixteen-year-old. "Tom...yes, *Tom*," Albus insists, "you are not that... *thing*, that specter of a human being!"

Tom stares at him open-mouthed. "You dare..."

"Yes, I dare! Your silly grandiose ideas will result in grief and betrayal!" Albus remembers the Longbottoms, the McKinnons, all of those faceless Muggles and magical peoples who suffered needlessly, and on a windy hilltop, a Severus Snape on his knees begging for a woman's life. "Had you ever heeded me..."

"And *loved* them?" Tom laughs.

"Yes, Tom, love," Albus presses on, momentarily forgetting that he is speaking to Tom's soul and not Tom himself. "It has had its effect in your life, no matter how you've pushed it away. Love caused your mother to bring you away from Marvolo and Morfin Gaunt, to give you a chance at a life without physical and psychological abuse. Yet here you are, willing to use those very means against those with no quarrel against you! You shame her memory, Tom, as much as you shame your great lineage and your magical abilities."

Both fall quiet in the aftermath of that speech. Tom's eyes glow with an unholy anger, two bright points in a room lit only by the moon. When he speaks, his tone is barely civil. "Really, Dumbledore, you lend my mother too much credit. She was a coward, more a disgrace to her own magical abilities than I could ever be. But you are wrong in assuming I do not know the sacrifices she made for me."

Albus is gentle in his reply. "I am glad to hear it, Tom." But adult Tom does not seem to have cared about this knowledge.

Tom shrugs sheepishly. "I kept her ashes when they cremated her."

Albus cannot believe his ears. "That's wonderful of you, Tom," he says with a hint of a smile. "I'm glad to hear you keep her memory alive."

At that, Tom laughs a little too wildly, reminding Albus strongly of Gellert Grindelwald. "Yes," he says once calmer, still with a manic smile. "I've kept her memory alive. I have discovered she is no longer a coward."

Feeling as though he has lost the thread of this conversation, Albus begins, "I do not see..."

The mischievousness returns to Tom's eyes. "But Professor Dumbledore," he says politely, "You met her just now."

Albus wonders at this, recalling the figure that arose from the ashes in golden box. Ashes... He is at a loss for words. "That...Tom, what have you done?"

"I brought her ghost back in hopes of giving her a way to atone for her miserable existence," he says vengefully. "That pathetic bitch finally had to live for me, to care for me the way she never did."

Albus is not surprised by this callous disregard for life. But the idea of bringing a soul into ghost form when that person did not leave an imprint before they died is horrifying. The Dark magic Tom used must have required a blood sacrifice. The burns on Albus's hand throbbed again.

Intent on putting sixteen-year-old Tom away for good, Albus wordlessly looks down to the golden box in his hand and digs for the ring, reminding himself of his duty.

"What are you doing?" Tom asks with a hint of alarm.

"I thank you for this chat, Tom," Albus says formally as he brushes off more ash from the ring. "It has truly been enlightening. But I feel we must part ways now."

"So soon?" Tom's eyes are hungry as they watch Dumbledore. "Don't you want to ask me anything else?"

But Albus is mesmerized by the now-revealed stone set in the ring. On it is engraved the sign of the Deathly Hallows the Elder Wand, the Cloak of Invisibility, and the Resurrection Stone, just the way they are carved on the gravestones of the Peverells. The sight brings with it pain and bewildering hope.

"Tom," Albus asks carefully, "do you know anything about this ring?"

Tom is bewildered, and angry at himself for his bewilderment. "It's my coat of arms. What more is there to know?"

That statement is so typically Tom that Albus looks up when he retorts, "There is a wide expanse of magical knowledge that you have closed your mind to, Tom."

"Right," Tom scoffs. "It's a *love* stone, isn't it?"

Albus looks back at what might be the Resurrection Stone, turning the ring slightly to catch the moonlight. "Love has power that hate and greed could never dream of," he murmurs.

"What?" Tom asks, confused.

Ignoring him, Albus thinks of a blond boy snapping off flower heads, a resentful brother, and a girl with a lap full of flowers, humming a stray tune that only she could follow. If this is the Resurrection Stone, Albus will finally find peace in knowing who killed Ariana. When he proves his innocence to Aberforth, perhaps they can rebuild their relationship again.

Making his decision, Albus slips on the ring.

An immediate, excruciating pain starts in his fingers. It feels as though his entire right hand is on fire. He can see the flesh of his fingers burning from within, blackening to the bone. Tom and Gellert's maniacal laughs throb in his ears, overpowered by a moan of such anguish that Albus has never heard before. All three sounds grow in volume until Albus drops to his knees, digging skeletal and human fingers into his head as he tries to stop them.

The ring is cool against his cheek. The sensation brings him back into his own mind long enough to quickly yank off the ring. The pain in his hand is still unbearable but the room has quieted.

*For the greater good...*

The reminder springs from nowhere, but it is enough for him to grope blindly for the Sword of Gryffindor with his good hand.

"I think not, Dumbledore," Tom says reprovingly.

Suddenly, Albus hears hissing that sounds like Parseltongue, and an answering movement in the floorboards beneath him. From the holes where the wooden floors have rotted away, hundreds of poisonous adders emerge, winding their way across the floor towards him.

Eyes widening, Albus remembers Harry recounting how Tom had commanded the Basilisk. He picks up his wand where it has dropped and, with a desperate *Accio*, finally holds the sword in his hand.

Tom lets out a horrified, "No!" and before Albus can blink, he is looking at his sister Ariana and the snakes have disappeared. She is wearing the dress in his memory with a crown of clematises on her head.

"No, Albus, don't send me away!" she pleads in her childish voice.

Torn between exhaustion and grief, Albus can only whisper, "Ariana..."

"Please, Albus!" she urges, holding out her hand. "I missed you so. Let's have a cuppa and a nice visit!"

Albus is transported to another memory, of six-year-old Ariana, before the encounter with three Muggle boys that would change her forever. After all the dolls were seated, Albus was given a seat at the head of the table. Ariana would 'serve' each guest an empty cup, but his cup always held a flower, petals waving in welcome.

*The greater good...*

Remembering the flowers, Albus whispers, "I wanted to leave the Jacqueline du Pre's at your grave, but the vines will no longer flower since you..."

"Yes, Albus," Ariana says more impatiently, hand still outstretched. "You can tell me all about her later. Come let's find a quiet spot outside..."

*Greater good...*

Ariana had loved those flowers like the dear friends they were and spent hours naming each new bud. She had loved their common name, Jacqueline du Pre, most of all. Shutting his eyes, Albus wonders what courage he has left. When he opens them again, he apologizes, "I am so, so sorry, Ariana. Please forgive me."

Ariana's eyes turn red before both she and Tom cry out a tremendous, "No!"

But Albus is numb to pain, to exhaustion, and to the inevitable grief that will follow this moment. Even if the stone can survive its destruction as a Horcrux, he will never use it again.

Without further hesitation, he brings the Sword of Gryffindor down, severing the stone cleanly in two.

Screams echo in his ears as a gale of wind rises from the broken stone, pushing back against the entire room. Albus falls back in its impact, unaware of the tears trickling into his beard. A thick, blood-like substance oozes from the stone, staining the cuffs of his pants as it spreads across the floor.

Feeling his consciousness slipping, Albus closes his fingers over the remains of the ring and the Resurrection Stone, grips his wand and the sword, and Disapparates.

*Finite Incantatem*

\* At this point, Albus Dumbledore only suspects Harry Potter is one of Voldemort's Horcruxes only Horace Slughorn's true memory revealed that Voldemort intended to make seven. It is possible that Albus believes Harry may truly die when Voldemort 'kills' him; after all, there was no evidence that 1) a human could act as a Horcrux, or 2) a human could survive after the destruction of the extra soul they carried as a Horcrux.