

## Forever is an Exceedingly Long Time

**A/N: I don't own Harry Potter and wouldn't particularly care to. I would like a rental agreement with option to buy for Hermione Granger. A short term contract with Nyphadora Tonks wouldn't be turned down. A Long-term agreement with Luna Lovegood would probably be a whole lot of fun. Any time Padma Patil wants to open negotiations, call me and oh for a weekend with Fleur. Oddly Lavender and Padma's sister (despite being her twin) Parvati do nothing for me...**

### Forever is an Exceedingly Long Time

"It's over Tom."

Tom Marvolo Riddle, also known as The Dark Lord, Lord Voldemort, You-Know-Who, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, Lord Thingy, and Snickerdoodle (the last only during pillow talk between himself and the recently late and largely unlamented Bellatrix LeStrange) looked up into the blazing emerald green eyes of the man who defeated him.

"You think you've won, but you haven't Potter!"

Harry Potter's wand tip continued to pulse with a bright purple light as it leeches the magic from Riddle's core. "Yeah, yeah. I know Tom, you cannot be defeated, you are invincible, and you will crush me, have me driven before you and enjoy the lament of my women. Blah blah blah."

"I cannot die, I am immortal!"

"Believe me, I know." Potter said in a conversational tone. "Trying to find your horcruxes was a major pain let me tell you. It was lucky that Lucius Malfoy delivered your diary to us when I was twelve so that I could destroy it and find out about your little keepsakes, Dumbledore found Salazar's ring and destroyed it, Regulus Black stole Salazar's Locket from your hiding place by the sea and hid it in his ancestral home, and I asked the Hogwarts House Elves to search the school for any items related to the founders that you might have hidden, they found Ravenclaw's Diadem in the Room of Requirements, imagine that? I destroyed the Diadem and the Locket with the Sword of Gryffindor just yesterday. You just saw Nagini die."

"Fool!" Riddle gasped, "that's just five. I made six"

"Actually," the blond witch in the Ravenclaw robes said as she came up alongside Potter and wrapped her arm around his waist. "You made seven Horcruxes."

"Rather sloppy of you to have missed that," the brunette witch in Gryffindor robes continued. "I can't imagine how one could manage to create a horcrux and not notice, but you did. Harry's scar."

The blond continued, "It cost several thousand Galleons and a front page ad in the Quibbler, but Mambo Laveau of New Orleans removed your soul fragment from Harry's forehead and placed it in this doll."

The brunette took the small figure from the Ravenclaw and held it in the palm of her hand. The figure began to flail before it burst in to flame and was reduced to ash almost instantly. A dark mist issued from the ash and a faint scream was heard as the soul fragment died. "Oops."

"Then there was Hufflepuff's cup. You actually got sneaky with that one." The large boy in the Gryffindor robes said. "I had to track down and kill Bellatrix so that I could go the Goblins and claim her vault by right of conquest. I mean, I was going to kill her anyway, but still it's the principle of the thing when I went to all that trouble and the only thing in her vault was a booby-trapped replica of the cup."

"Once we figured out that you had dropped the stupid teacup somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean things got a lot easier." The tall redhead boy in Gryffindor robes continued. "That meant we couldn't just kill you." An evil grin spread across his face. "So, we had to get creative."

"You'll never find it. I've won!" Riddle gloated from the ground where he laid. "Time is on my side Potter, sooner or later your attention will waiver and I will be free."

"We're not even going to look for it Tom." The redheaded girl said. "I mean, why bother? As long as your body is intact you can't do the spectral spirit walk thing again, so, we just keep you alive and confined."

"You can't hold me you fools. I'll escape then you will all die."

"That's sort of the plan Tom, only you've got the order backwards." Potter said smiling, finally lifting his wand, Riddle's core having drained completely. "We will all die, and then you'll escape."

"Then I hunt down your children and their children until your lines are extinct."

"Ah, Tom." The brunette said shaking her head. "That was always your problem, you think too small." She pulled a vial from an inside pocket of her

robes. The young woman knelt next to Riddle's exhausted form and poured the liquid into Riddle's mouth.

A look of horror crossed Riddle's snake-like features. He recognized the scent of the potion as it took effect. The Draught of the Living Death!

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Riddle jerked awake. What was happening? Everything was shaking. A deep rumble filled the air. Where was he? Was this an earthquake?

Riddle dimly recalled what you were supposed to do in an earthquake from his time in Persia on his first search for power. He tried to sit up, but found that he could barely move. Riddle struggled against his body's weakness. The walls actually shifted and a jagged hole appeared in the wall to his immediate left. Red tinged sunlight beamed into the darkness of the room.

The shaking stopped, along with the rumble. Riddle lay where he was panting from the effort of trying to move. Suddenly a rune generated image filled the room.

"Hello Tom." The image coalesced to show a much older Harry Potter. "How are you feeling?"

"Potter..." a raspy whisper escaped from Riddle's lips, sounding odd even to his own ears. What had Potter done to him?

"Relax Tom. It will be a while before you can move. Your magic has been powering a stasis charm for a very long time now, and apparating this chamber from the bottom of a played out coal mine to the surface probably drained you dry. It will take your core a bit a while to fill to the point where you will regain muscle control." The image of Potter smiled. "A whole lot of thought went into your incarceration Tom, you should be honored, really you should. My wife and several of my friends spent the better part of fifty years on making sure you could have your immortality and choke on it. Consider this our gift to you."

"The fact that this recording is being played shows that it all worked. If it hadn't other recordings would be played." The image shrugged. "Even with magic how well our gift works if pretty much a crap shoot. There are just too many variables to consider. What if there comes a point where your magic no longer regenerates? What if someone finds you?" Again the image shrugged.

"I don't know how much Muggle Science you remember from your primary school days Tom, but as I'm recording this they estimate the Earth to be just over four and a half billion years old, and project another five billion years until it is swallowed by the sun as it becomes a red giant." Potter smiled. "Cool huh? I wish you could have seen what the Muggles have done Tom, permanent bases on the Moon, two missions to Mars, one on the way to Ganymede, a robot probe to the closest star. Really cool stuff."

"Anyway, if this all worked, and everyone did their jobs correctly you should be waking up to the Earth two and a half billion years into the future from my point of view. Once core of the planet has cooled to the point that it can't maintain the Earth's magnetic field any longer, and once that field collapses completely, a process they tell me might happen overnight or take centuries, all kinds of interesting radiation will be hitting the planet, slowly eroding the atmosphere and irradiating the hell out of you, assuming of course that the current science is correct. The first beginning of the collapse of the magnetic field will open your crypt, again, assuming that your magic lasts that long."

The image of Potter smirked at him. "Humanity as you knew it is almost certainly gone, while there may be life, you undoubtedly won't recognize any of it. I would be careful how you got about treating the natives where you find yourself Tom; they may well be capable of making your immortality unpleasant."

Riddle struggled to move, to speak, and to do anything that would allow him to prove to himself if to no one else that Potter was lying. Doing so exhausted the Dark Lord to the point that oblivion claimed him.

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Once Riddle woke he found his muscles screaming in pain at their lack of use, he brought a trembling hand to his face to wipe... something from it. It was then he noticed the cord wrapped around his wrist and trailing off the bed."

"You're awake then?" Potters image smiled at him. "Just a few more thoughts and I'll let you get on with your immortality. I've left you your wand. I couldn't just send you off into eternity unarmed could I? My friend Hermione, you remember Hermione don't you Tom? The Muggle born Witch you took such an interest in via Draco Malfoy? Hermione suggested that even with the stasis charm, your wand might not survive the long sleep you've enjoyed. So I *preserved* it."

Riddle managed to sit up. He began to pull on the cord that ran from his wrist over the side of the bed.

"Your wand is connected to the cord around your right wrist Tom, sealed in a block of a Muggle substance called Lexan."

Riddle pulled a clear block onto his lap. In the dim light that came through the crack in the wall he saw his wand suspended in the center of the hard transparent substance four inches on a side and eighteen inches long. His wand. So close, yet he could not touch it.

"We secured it to your wrist so that you wouldn't lose it. Of course, you might have a bit of trouble getting it out of the Lexan. Well, good luck Tom, enjoy your immortality, such as it is. Assuming you can survive the radiation, you've got two and half a billion years or so until the Earth is destroyed. Good luck with that." The man in the image grinned one last time. "I wonder what will happen to your soul wraith when the sun consumes the planet?" Potter's laughter rang out before the image faded out.

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It took hours before Riddle deemed himself ready to try to exit his crypt. Hesitant exploration found that lights came on in the room as soon as he

stood from the bed. Once he had lights beyond the red glow that came in from the hole in the wall Riddle found a water cask under heavy preservation and the preserved makings of three meals.

Riddle ate and drank, and then he noticed that the red light coming in from the hole in the wall had faded. That suggested that it was now night time. Did he dare leaving the relative safety of this... crypt to explore in the dark?

No. Best to remain here until the light returned.

The darkness had always been his friend, hadn't it? The darkness had hidden him from the older boys in the orphanage, and then the darkness provided a safe place from which to exact his revenge on the powerless. The Dark had allowed him to explore Hogwarts Castle finding even Salazar's near mythical Chamber of Secrets, hidden for centuries from the small minded fools that had filled the school since the banishment of the greatest of the four founders. He would remain in this chamber until light.

Riddle spent several hours trying to remove his wand from the block of Muggle material. He beat the block against the platform he had woken upon; he swung it by the cord that connected the block to his wrist, slamming it against the chamber's walls repeatedly. His frustration rose when after all that he hadn't even managed to chip the transparent material.

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Riddle crested the hill hoping against hope that he would finally see some indication of food or drinkable water. He didn't. Just more the same leg killing hills that covered the landscape clear to the horizon in every direction.

More than Five years. The minute scratches that he had made on the tree branch that he had fashioned into a walking staff to assist in his travels came to a count of 1913. One for each 'day'.

That was something else that had changed. A 'day' was longer, a lot longer, than it used to be, he wasn't sure why, but it was. Of course he had no way of actually telling time. The sun, huge and swollen in the sky seemed to slowly crawl across the sky, and the nights went on forever, with nightly auroras that dwarfed the displays he had seen while on a trip to Norway early in his first rise to power. But this endless land, wherever he was, had to be further south as hot and humid as it always was. But he couldn't even estimate his latitude, given that on the rare night the sky cleared of clouds and the auroras cleared enough to let him see the stars, he didn't recognize any of them, look as he might, there was not a single familiar constellation in the sky.

Then there was the absence of the moon.

Where was the moon? He had pondered that many of the insanely long nights over the last five years. Potter had said that the Muggles had bases on it, whatever they were. Surely they couldn't move the moon... could they?

Movement caught his eye. Yes, there. It had been two days since he had eaten, and these small burrowing creatures were the only animals larger than insects he had managed to get close to in the entire five years he had been awakened to the so very changed world.

Carefully Riddle started his stalking of the creature, cursing for the hundredth time that day the transparent prison his wand remained stored in. The creatures were... odd. Slightly larger than a European brown rat but utterly without fur. They had toothless beaks and an odd leathery texture to their skin, they were not mammals as he knew them, nor birds, nor reptiles.

And they tasted horrible. There was only one way to make the beasts taste any worse and that was to cook the meat, as Riddle had learned through experience when he had caught and cooked the first one. He had been deathly ill for three days.

Of course taste wasn't all that important really. Riddle raised the squirming creature to his mouth, and using the snake aspect of his homunculus body, unhinged his jaw and set about the slow process of swallowing the beast whole.

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Riddle crouched in the back of the shallow cave he had found, thankful for it as he peered past the small fire he had started for the night at the torrential rains outside. Despite the discomfort, the rain was a gift from the heavens. Riddle hadn't found water in four days. The small bowls he had fashioned from some particularly waterproof leafs had already filled. Riddle drank his fill before setting the bowls back out to refill.

He dug into the pouch he had made from the putrid carcass of some unidentifiable beast. Whatever it had been, it had been huge. In all his travels Riddle hadn't even seen one of these mountains of meat live, but had found several dead, but never soon enough to supplement his diet. He used what was left of the beasts to make himself clothing, including shoes of a sort, three times now. From the light of the fire he inspected his foot wear. Hopefully he would find another soon. Ah, there. From the pouch he drew out the sharpened stone he had found his second day out of the chamber Potter had left him in. Carefully he etched a small line into his walking staff. 1914 days since he had become the absolute master of this world.

Absolute master. Riddle began to laugh. Potter had been right, the immortal reflected through his laughter. Potter had given him his immortality so that he could choke on it. The world was almost devoid of life, and life was the source of magic. Where before Riddle had celebrated his power, now he hardly had enough magic available to him to start the fire in front of him. His wand, that might have made a difference was still sealed in the block of Muggle material and connected to his right wrist, though in reflection of five years of his effort with the sharp stone, one surface of the block was scored and pitted, to a depth of perhaps a eighth of an inch.

The laughing man shook his head. When Potter hated, he did it in style. Riddle was a wizard with almost no magic. Riddle was a ruler without followers. Riddle was a sadist with no one to torture. All thanks to Potter and his followers.

Riddle sat back trying to ignore his hunger. Just when was it that immortality had lost its attraction?

This would be his new base. From here, he would hunt the burrowing creatures until he depleted the local population, just as he had so many times before. A week, perhaps two, then he would have to move on. He would likely always be moving on.

After all, forever was an exceedingly long time.

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**A/N the last: The whole pursuit of immortality never seemed to be all that sensible to me. I don't think Tom really thought through what he was doing.**