

Life and Death of Lord Voldemort

by chivalric

Tom Riddle, also known as Lord Voldemort, has won the war and rules ever since. But victory hasn't been as sweet as expected. Maybe changing the past is the way to sort out the mess he'd manoeuvred himself into?

One-shot Story

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: Sorry for this. I was in the mood for silliness, and I wanted to write something about the Dark Lord. Not a good combination, especially not when accompanied by a glass of wine. Or two.

Thanks to my betas, Dreamy_Dragon, sampdoria, kickthemoon, and Arabella Bloodgood. I know my commas and tenses are an awful combination to correct.

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Tom Riddle, better known as Lord Voldemort, was depressed, which was no surprise this time of the year. Gloomily, he sat in his armchair, stared into the fire that burned happily in front of him, and wished he were elsewhere. Actually, he wished he were dead. Yes. Dead would be good. At least he wouldn't be so bloody cold if he were dead, and he wouldn't have to face the fact that outside his rooms, everyone was preparing for Christmas.

He hated Christmas. In his opinion, Christmas should not happen anymore in a world ruled by him. But then, his Death Eaters were of a different opinion, and who was he to argue with them? Precisely: no one.

Bored, he threw another book into the fire. A Muggle book. A ridiculous volume about a master detective and his wife. He had read it in the quiet hours of the night because there was nothing else to do anymore. And to be honest, reading about the Dark Arts really could get on one's nerves after a while.

He, the Dark Lord, reading a book written by a Muggle-born witch. How bloody embarrassing.

Oh, hell. No! Written by a *Mudblood*, of course. Damn, he even forgot to think in his own terminology nowadays.

Tom Riddle got up and twirled his wand in his fingers. If only there were someone he could kill. Or at least torture.

Idle wishes. All his enemies were either dead or imprisoned. Torturing his followers was a no-no. They disliked it, and Severus, his dear Severus, had taken him aside some years ago and had told him in a very friendly, caring manner that leaving bloodstains on the carpet was something Lucius Malfoy disliked massively. Especially when there were bits and pieces as well. "It ruins them," Severus had pointed out. "The carpets, that is. There is no spell that can get rid of stains like that. Could you please stop

it or torture us outside? Actually, master, you should consider stopping the torture completely. It's very bad for morale. Sir."

Worth a thought not stopping the torture, of course, but doing it in the garden but impossible to handle. Outside, the world was even colder than inside. Even in the summer, an icy wind blew, and Tom couldn't stand the cold, which was the reason why he stayed in his rooms nearly all the time, close to the fire and with a blanket wrapped around his bony shoulders.

Conclusion: no more torturing. Bugger.

Besides, he couldn't walk more than a step and a half before he collapsed.

Therefore, he stayed inside day and night. Since Nagini was killed, slaughtered by that horrible little boy, life was miserable. No one to speak to. No one to stroke. No one to snuggle up to at night.

A deep, sad sigh emerged from the Dark Lord's lips. Or the place where his lips would have been if he owned a decent body, but he didn't. He was not completely human half reptile, half man, his skin was slightly scaled, his tongue a little bit split, and his eyes awful to look at.

In fact, he had banned all mirrors from his room so he didn't have to look at himself. It gave him the creeps. His image caused him nightmares. In addition, his followers clearly avoided him nowadays. Only Severus visited him regularly and brought him new books. Sometimes, he read to him.

Truly, winning this war had turned out to be something bad. To be precise, it had been the worst thing that could have happened.

Shivering, the Dark Lord held his hands closer to the fire and rubbed them against each other. They made a dry, papery, horrible sound. Small flakes of his skin sailed silently to the ground, and therefore, he stopped doing it.

Bah. Life was overrated. Pity it had taken him so long to figure *that* out. He could have been lying in his grave for years, peacefully sleeping the eternal slumber. Instead, he had to sit here at Malfoy Manor, forced to be quiet because the baby needed its afternoon nap. Damn little thing. Woke up at the tiniest noise. He, the most evil wizard known throughout the world, had to obey and was left alone, wondering how to spend the rest of his days.

A squeak pushed him out of his thoughts the baby had woken up. Draco's baby boy Scorpius. Ridiculous name. He should go and crush the wailing thing under his heels, but then this would possibly be considered bad manners again and they would look at him with this gaze...

Face facts, Tom told himself. *They don't fear you anymore; they just consider you a burden.*

And that even though he had won! He had disarmed the boy, that Potter brat, and had killed him laughing. Dumbledore dead, his arch enemy dead, and the rest of them falling to their knees, begging for mercy. Some of them he had spared. Like that Mudblood Severus had taken a liking to. Helen, or was it Helga? No. Herman... Hermione... Hermione! That was the one. Nosy little bitch. And so very pregnant with Severus's offspring. Disgusting.

He wished he could father offspring. But his body was incomplete. No private parts, so to speak. Otherwise, he was certain of it, he would go around and have an army of little Voldies!

A dark expression on his snake-like face, Tom stared at the wand in his hand. The Elder Wand. The wand to best all other wands. Dumbledore's wand, then Draco's wand in a way, and in the end his wand. Luckily, he, Voldemort, most clever and evil man of all times, had been bright enough to actually ask Malfoy's son what had happened the night Snape had killed the Headmaster. And Draco had told him that he had disarmed Dumbledore and therefore had become the master of the Elder Wand.

With that knowledge, it had been easy to find the wand in Dumbledore's tomb and kill Potter. He hadn't even bothered to take young Malfoy's life. He had just knocked him over the head, which had been enough to make the wand truly his.

Unfortunately, things had gone downhill from there. Everything had gone utterly wrong after his magnificent victory. The whole world was his, and he couldn't use it. He was older than anyone should ever get; his magic was failing, seeping out of him like water out of a broken bucket. There was no one to fight against and nothing to plot anymore. No secrets, no riddles, no enemies. At first he had tried to pretend that there was still work left to do to no avail. He was the king in his universe, and he was bored to death.

Obviously, he hated his so-called life. Only five years since he had killed Potter, but those years seemed an eternity to him. An endless, painful, cruel eternity.

He sobbed a bit. Then a door creaked and light fell onto the carpet. Tom Riddle closed his eyes, hoping the intruder thought him asleep.

No use. This one never gave a flying donkey about his wishes. This one was his nemesis.

But she was so very clever, too. The cleverest witch of her age. In his eyes, she was the cleverest witch ever. Naturally, he would never admit to it.

Severus's wife silently entered his rooms and stopped only inches away from his chair. Trying to hide behind a cushion didn't fool her. One hand on her huge belly, she just looked down at him, pity in her eyes.

Pity! For him!

"What d'you want?" the Dark Lord grumbled, hugging the pillow. If only Nagini was here she would eat this insufferable know-it-all in no time.

"I have a solution for your problem," Hermione Snape said gently and bent to pat his hand.

Voldemort hissed at her. "What would that be? Shove your belly into my face so I suffocate?"

She smiled. "Not quite. It wouldn't be good for your reputation, getting killed by a pregnant woman. It is tarnished anyway; I really don't want to worsen things. I have a better idea. An idea that would guarantee you'd be never forgotten. An idea that would restore you to your full evilness." She came a bit closer and whispered in his ear, "An idea that would unite you with Nagini again!"

The Dark Lord's jaws fell, and involuntarily, he gripped the woman's hand. She didn't shy away well, she was married to Severus *She's possibly used to a hard grip*, Voldemort smirked inwardly. "Nagini?" he gasped and shook her wrist a bit. That was all it took to scare them enough to tell him everything he wanted to know. Legitimacy? Rubbish. Torture? Unnecessary. Shake them and they would spill the news.

On the other hand, she possibly would have told him anyway. That was why she was here, wasn't she?

Hermione took out a tissue.

Good gods, was that necessary? Did she really have to wipe the dribble from his chin?

"How?" the Dark Lord demanded to know, and Hermione pulled a chair close and sat next to him. A bit of rummaging in the pockets of her wide dress, some mumbling, and finally, she said, "Here. Take it. Use it. Make things right!"

Wide-eyed, Voldemort stared at the tiny thing that dangled off her fingers.

A Time-Turner. A strong one, one that could take him back years. One that could take him back to the moment when he had been at the peak of his power the day he had

killed Potter.

Carefully, he took the Time-Turner and swirled it in front of his burning eyes. He coughed the smoke from the fire really wasn't good for his health.

"Have a little chat with myself," he murmured and got up on wobbly legs.

"Right," she said.

"Let the boy kill me. Everyone will be happy, everyone will be glad I'm dead, and everyone will remember me as my most evil self and not as the soft puppy I am now."

"Precisely," she agreed and helped him to take his dressing gown off. A moment later, she knelt and laced his shoes. One final check, a quick brush over his few remaining hairs, then she spat on the reappeared tissue and rubbed some ink off his cheek. "There you go, dear. Show them who's the boss!" Now was there affection in her voice or not, eh?

Tom Riddle turned the Time-Turner and vanished before he could think about it again.

What a pity that I will have to kill Severus, a much younger Lord Voldemort thought and caressed Nagini's cool, dry head. He was in the Shrieking Shack, and it was the night of nights, the night when he would kill Potter.

And his most devoted servant, too. Damn. He didn't really want to kill him.

Maybe he shouldn't, but then, it was necessary. After all, the Potions master had killed Dumbledore. The rules who owned the Elder Wand under which circumstances were still not entirely clear to him. All right, it had been Draco who had disarmed the old fool. So technically, he now should be the wand's master. On the other hand, it might be possible that Snape owned it as well, given the circumstances.

Besides, he was the Dark Lord. He knew no mercy.

Yes. Let's kill him, Voldemort thought. *He's not devoted enough anyway. And I bet he has secrets. I hate secrets. Dinner for Nagini, the wand for me. Perfect.*

Here he came, his most faithful servant, summoned by the mark on his arm. "My lord," Snape said and bowed his head. "I rushed to be at your side."

Voldemort just wanted to say a few things about that when a small noise distracted him as if a curtain had been pushed aside. Before he could locate the source of the sound, a cold, long finger tapped him on the shoulder. He whirled round and faced himself.

Only that it wasn't him. He wasn't that small! He didn't walk so hunched! He certainly didn't have soup-stains all over his shirt.

Oh, yes, and he wasn't that old.

Voldemort raised his wand and hissed a spell, but the man in front of him just grumbled a word and the spell bounced off his chest. "Hehehe," he cackled. "Luckily, my magic works at least sometimes.

"You are... I am... Only I know that spell!" The younger man turned pale.

"Stop staring, boy," his older self commanded with a tremble in his voice. "Take a good look. This is you in a few years time. We didn't age well, one could say."

"But," the young Voldemort squeaked only to be pushed aside by the old man. With a cry, he hobbled towards the corner and hugged the big snake, which had risen to greet him.

"But," the young Voldemort said again. This thing, this caricature of a man, was lying flat on the floor, shedding tears on the snake. His snake, his Nagini. Unnerving, especially because the snake seemed to recognise him. "It's just a snake!" he exclaimed after several minutes. "You don't need to kiss her and tell her how much you love her!"

"She dies tonight," the old Voldemort sobbed. "I have to live without her! I have to *sleep* without her! Can you imagine how big the bed is when she isn't there, coiling her body around me?"

"Erm..." said the young Voldemort and blushed a bit. No one, absolutely no one knew about the coiling bit. With flaming eyes, wand ready to kill, he shot a glance at Snape, but the Potions master was polite enough to camouflage his grin with a pretended cough.

Lord Voldemort, being at the height of his years, stared hard at the wreck on the ground. The posture... the eyes... the lipless mouth... "You are I. You used a Time-Turner to get here. What do you want? What do you need to tell me?"

Wiping tears off his sunken cheek, the old Voldemort got up with creaking joints. He flicked his wand, raising wards around the three of them. "In a few minutes, Potter and his friends begin spying on you," he clarified. "Don't want him to see me." Stabbing his younger self repeatedly into the chest with his finger, he demanded, "Die tonight, fool. Die gracefully or you end up as me."

It took a few moments to consider this, then, "What happened?" young Voldemort wanted to know. "You look about two hundred years old. You are dribbling, you talk nonsense, and you look horrible. I cannot die. I cannot age. I'm going to win the war tonight and why the hell are you bald?"

Old Voldemort grunted and moved his leg a bit so it didn't fall asleep. "Git. I forgot I was that arrogant. Well listen, Tom. Tonight in five years you will have no teeth left worth mentioning. You will look like me a mummy, too old to be believed. Certainly too old to be feared. Your magic will begin to fail tonight, after you kill the boy. You will age far more than a century in less than ten days. In a few weeks, you will be what I am now. And you will have to live without Nagini at your side. No more torturing in the future, after we have won Severus here is allergic to torture. No more terror. No goals to reach. No fucking enemies left! The world is ours, and it is so damn *boring*! You know what? We still live with Malfoy, in the same room as always, but we have to be quiet all the time because of the baby."

"What baby?" young Voldemort whispered, clear horror now showing in his voice.

"Draco's baby. And when *his* brat will be born, it will get worse, I assume." A nod towards the silent Potions master indicated clearly whose brat they were talking about.

Two pairs of snake-like eyes pierced the black-haired wizard accusingly.

"I don't have a baby," Snape sneered irritably.

"You will have. With the Granger girl. She sent me back here to avoid the biggest mistake I ever made winning the war." Exhausted, old Voldemort leaned against a wall for support.

Snape looked as if someone had hit him hard over the head with a particularly large and unyielding object. "I... what? Her? Impossible!"

Young Voldemort looked at his older self. Then he looked at Snape. And back at himself. "I was just about to kill Severus," he mused. "For good measure and to be sure the Elder Wand is really, truly mine. I didn't do it, then?"

Snape raised an eyebrow and took a step back.

"I tried," the old man confessed. "Nagini bit him, and I left him here, bleeding to death. However, after Potter died, I came back and saved him. Wise decision. I'm fond of him, in a way, and Nagini didn't want to eat him anyway. Moreover, he's an excellent servant. I even allow him to marry Granger he will be so much in love with her, it's gut-wrenching. I couldn't stand his nagging any longer. And now they... They've reproduced!"

"Urgh!" Young Voldemort shuddered at the thought. Snape, though, cast a glance over his shoulder as if to find the one standing behind him, the one who this conversation was about.

The old man coughed. "That idiotic Elder Wand is the problem. I kill Potter and end up as a mouldy, moving corpse. You, my boy, should let Potter win. Let him kill you, rest in peace, and enjoy the afterlife hugging our pretty one here." Fondly, old Voldemort smiled at the snake that seemed to smile back at him.

"Hmmm. I'm not sure about all this." Young Voldemort thoughtfully rubbed his chin.

Old Voldemort beckoned him closer. "You will begin to dribble soon," he whispered. "Look at me dribble, dribble, all day long. Your teeth will fall out, and all you can eat is *soup*."

His young self shook his head. "That makes no sense. I cannot age, I told you that. I cannot become you."

"It must be the Horcruxes, my lord," Snape cast in. "Each Horcrux will be, or already has been, destroyed. When they are all gone, all that is left is the tiny piece of your soul inside your body, my lord. I suppose it is too small to keep your magic. Too small to prevent you from aging!"

"Course it's the bloody Horcruxes," old Voldemort grumbled. "Lousy idea to make that many. To create them weakened me; to feel them die weakened me more. Now I can barely make it to the loo on my own. And I *hate* soup!" He glared at his younger self. "Dear Severus here will have to take you to bed each night and hold your hand until you are asleep because you are afraid of the darkness. Nagini is dead, remember? Instead of her, you will snuggle up to a *teddy bear*"

"Good grief!" Young Voldemort began to look slightly green around the eyes.

"Exactly," his older version hissed. "You really want that? I don't. The Death Eaters laugh about me. Fifteen minutes ago, Granger called me 'dear'. This is unacceptable. End it!"

Young Voldemort thought about it; then he flicked his wand, wanting to cast a spell... but sunk unconscious to the floor instead. The Elder Wand rolled across the wooden planks.

"Oops," old Voldemort said dryly. "How impolite of me to Stupefy myself. Idiot, he should have known that I know my own tricks. Severus, my dear boy, would you lend me a hand?"

Snape's eyes grew bigger, seeing one Dark Lord on the ground and the other one standing next to him on shaky feet. He didn't move.

Voldemort became impatient and waggled his fingers. "Come on, come on, I need your arm to hobble along. And if you don't help me now you will have to look after me for a very, very long time!"

"My lord," Snape managed. "I apologise. I was merely surprised at the way you addressed me."

"My dear boy? Oh, goodness, I know that old Albus called you that I have seen it in your mind. I know you always liked it. Therefore, I adopted the habit. Sorry to startle you."

Snape seemed positively at a loss for words. Nevertheless, he stepped forward and took the old man's arm, carefully leading him around his fallen younger self. "You have a plan, my lord?" he asked.

"Actually, it is the plan of your dear wife. I will take his place for tonight he is too young and too stupid to act in his own interest. I mean, think about all the nonsense he came up with a pureblood world! Purebloods are such pricks! Malfoy is a pain in the arse, and it's only because I chat with the servants and your wife every now and then that I've stayed more or less sane. Luckily, you completely ignored my wishes concerning the killing of all Muggle-borns. Shit. Mudbloods, that is."

Snape opened his mouth. Then he closed it again. There was nothing to say about that. Instead, he cast a binding spell on the unconscious wizard, doubled the spells that held him immobilised, and put a Disillusionment Charm over him. "If you die, my lord, he will die as well. Are you certain you want it this way?"

"Oh, definitely. And now a glamour for me, Severus," the old man cackled. "I need to look like him. As far as I remember, I won't have to do much running tonight, so I should be fine."

Snape did as ordered. A small spell, and old Voldemort looked like young Voldemort. "My bloody bones still ache, and I have to go for a piss again," the Dark Lord complained and shuffled out of the door. "Right then let's try and kill the boy, and with him the Horcrux inside him. Will feel horrible, if I remember correctly."

Snape steadied the old man. "You know about the Horcrux?"

"Of course. I know that I created one the night I killed his parents you told me, Severus. And after that, I will allow Potter to kill me. Should be fun. Should take care of the toilet-problem. Lend me your arm, dear boy, and let's go!"

Nagini slithered after them, and the Dark Lord was soothed by her presence. She would have to die as well, of course, if this was to work. Couldn't be helped. At least, they would be dead together.

"Hopefully, the boy is daft enough to come to me even without your memories, dear Severus," the old man murmured whilst shuffling painfully slowly out of the Shrieking Shack. Snape, though, didn't hear him and even if, he wouldn't have understood, now that things went differently than in the original version.

Well, the boy was a hero and once Voldemort dared him to come to him before midnight or else everyone would die, he walked straight into the trap that had been set for him.

"Phew," the old man grumbled and grinned. Good that at least some things never changed. The boy always acted before thinking and had an urge for self-sacrifice. However, as this was what needed to happen, Tom just grinned and fumbled for his wand.

How easy it was to cast the Killing Curse! It seemed as if the Time-Turner and the prospect to right things had strengthened Voldemort's hand and his magic. How wonderful to see the faces of his Death Eaters, all eagerly looking up at him well, right, they seemed a bit puzzled as their lord leaned heavily upon the Potions master's arm, but then, what the hell. "*Avada Kedavra!*" Voldemort cheered and saw the boy fall, knowing that he wasn't dead but only pretended to be. Faintly, he felt the Horcrux wither and die. It didn't hurt half as much as the first time.

The half-giant wailed out his pain, and Narcissa moved to check on the boy.

"He's dead, my lord," she said, and Voldemort coughed to disguise his smile.

"Of course he is," he said, barely able to suppress the grin that spread upon his face. "Dead and gone forever, isn't he!" Leaning towards Snape who now had his arms wrapped around his waist, he whispered, "She's lying, you know. He's not dead. I killed her for her lie, of course. Or hang on did I or did I forget about it? Tell you, my brain is like Swiss cheese nowadays."

Snape said nothing. He seemed overwhelmed by the events and lost in thoughts at the same time.

"You are not already plotting how to sway the Mudblood, are you?" Voldemort asked whilst they made their way up to the castle. "Because it is unnecessary. Not too long after the war, she will decide that it is you she wants. Don't ask me why, but she follows you, stalks you even, she catches you in her cunningly woven web, and before you know it you'll fall into her waiting hands like a ripe plum. I think... yes. I saw it in your mind. She even proposes to you. In about two years you will be married, and nothing, not even an altered timeline, can change that."

Snape remained silent. But maybe he was even a bit paler than usual. Clearly, the thought of being a 'ripe plum' didn't go down well with his pride.

"Let's finish it," Lord Voldemort said, heading for the big gates of Hogwarts, which seemed a lifetime away. "And Severus, please walk slowly. I'm an old man!"

Whilst slouching along, the Dark Lord ordered the fighting to end. Confused, his Death Eaters obeyed, some only seconds before a final kill. "See, Severus, you didn't approve of all the dead," he explained. "When I shrivelled into a raisin with about as much power to control my followers, you took over. And you are so soft-hearted."

"Master!" Snape hissed, insulted. "Surely I am no more soft-hearted than a stone!"

Slowly, Voldemort shuffled along. "Soft-hearted!" he repeated sternly. "And the werewolf's death truly made you sad and very angry at me you refused to speak to me for nearly three months. Awful time. No one to cheer me up. Let's see... Yes, there's Dolohov. Tell him... tell him to go back into the woods to find me... whatever. Just don't let him back into the school. How you can be fond of Lupin is a riddle to me, honestly."

Snape frowned and ordered Dolohov away from the school. Now, they were at the gates, and his master didn't waste time with idle chat. He strolled along, Hagrid behind him, and the students gave way. Unfortunately, Nagini still got killed by that Longbottom boy he jumped out from behind a pillar and beheaded her.

Voldemort froze; tears threatened to leak out of his eyes.

Snape tightened his grip. "My lord, in just a few minutes you will meet her again," he whispered in his master's ear. "Finish this; become a part of legends and tales. No one will ever forget this night, and you will have died at the height of your powers!"

The old man, disguised with nothing but a glamour, gulped, straightened, and walked towards the Great Hall, unchallenged by students or teachers, protected by each and every one of his Death Eaters.

"Tell the half-giant to put Potter on his feet," Voldemort whispered in Snape's ears. "I'm a bit hoarse the night air is poison for a man of my age."

There was no need to. The Boy-Who-Lived jumped out of Hagrid's arms, drew his wand, and aimed at Voldemort. Or at Snape they stood arm in arm like lovers, a fact clearly disliked by the Potions master.

"I don't want anyone else to interfere," Potter began, and Voldemort couldn't do anything else but laugh.

"Stop it, boy," he chuckled, this time wiping a tear of amusement out of the corner of his eye he had heard it before. "I am certain you have most important things to tell me, but truly, I am tired and need a nap."

"Erm," Harry said, slightly confused. His eyes darted to Snape and narrowed in hate. Voldemort saw it and decided that his most faithful follower needed a bit of assistance were he to have a future with that impossible girl.

"My dear boy," the Dark Lord huffed. "Would you tell that brat and everyone else why exactly you killed Dumbledore?"

"Erm..." now Snape said.

"Merlin's beard, do I have to do everything myself!" Voldemort snapped. "Severus Snape is a spy. He acted on Dumbledore's orders, and those orders included a clean kill after the old fool had put on the cursed Resurrection ring. Good old Dumbly even left a will, uncovering the truth it's hidden under his Pensieve."

"My lord!" Snape cast in, though with not much emphasis.

Voldemort turned to him. "You told me afterwards, dear boy," he whispered. "You told me a lot, one quiet night when I couldn't sleep. You confessed that you quickly realised my plans of making this world a pureblood world was utter idiocy and only stayed in my service to spy on me. I was a bit angry at first, but then, there was no one else I could trust. So I granted you power after I had become a useless heap of bones. You took over for me and reorganised the wizarding world to your liking. Equal rights for all. No difference between Muggle-borns and purebloods. You also stayed Hogwarts' Headmaster, and only because you are such a nice person, and I am absolutely helpless without you, I forgave you."

"Ah," said Snape.

Voldemort patted his arm. "I thought you'd need a bit of help to clear your name, Severus. The will is quite specific and frees you of all accusation. I bet you won't have any problems from now on."

"Hello! You, there? We are supposed to fight, you know!" Harry Potter shouted and waved his wand like a drunkard's bottle.

"Now will you kill me sometime tonight, boy? I can't stand on my feet much longer, you little idiot!" Voldemort snapped. Raising his wand and mumbling some words, it was enough threat for Harry to finally manage to cast a spell. Not the Killing Curse a simple "*Expelliarmus*," just like the first time. But tonight, even such a small and harmless spell was too much for Tom Riddle's failing body.

Flashes sizzled. Lord Voldemort, also known as the Dark Lord, felt pain in his head and chest. His knees buckled, and the Elder Wand slipped out of his weak fingers. He hadn't used it. Not this time. "At last!" he sighed and fell to the floor. Hearing the cheers nearly made him smile did those dunderheads really think the boy could best him without assistance? *Imbeciles*, he thought, and died.

Slowly, gracefully, his ghost rose and began seeking his snake, aching for a nice, long snuggle in the afterlife.