

Two Out of Three Ain't Bad

The man who had once been called Tom Marvolo Riddle felt a great surge of triumph in what remained of his soul. Harry Potter, his nemesis, crouched at the other end of the room, disarmed and defeated. His right arm hung uselessly at his side. He held a silver dagger awkwardly in his left hand, but Lord Voldemort knew he could easily defend himself against such a puny Muggle toy.

"Soon," he breathed, looking at the boy hungrily. "Soon it will all be mine... eternal life, unlimited power, and everlasting fame... as soon as you die. So say good night, Harry."

Potter lifted his head, then, with an obvious effort, got to his feet, using the wall behind him for balance. His eyes were the right color for the Killing Curse, Voldemort mused whimsically, and the boy obviously wished they could kill, but they lacked the power to do what he was about to...

He raised his wand. "*Avada Kedavra!*"

It happened in a flash. Potter swept the dagger into salute position in front of his heart, the flat of the blade facing Voldemort – the spell impacted the blade rather than Potter, and instead of knocking it from his weak wrong-handed grip and blasting on through him, was reflected back towards its caster –

That's impossible!

He barely had time to think it before the curse struck him and proved that no, it wasn't.

He thinks he has killed me – but my Horcruxes protect me –

To his horror, he suddenly realized that no confining grasp held his soul to the earth as it had the last time this had happened to him. In fact, he was beginning to see a bright light –

NO! I will not, I CANNOT die like this! I am the Heir of Salazar Slytherin! I am the greatest wizard in a hundred years! I am –

"You are a loony," said Potter tiredly. "And boring, too. Shut up, will you?"

Voldemort blinked and looked around. Nothing much had changed. Potter was still leaning against the wall, now with his eyes closed, his dagger gripped professionally in his left hand. He looked taller somehow...

Nonsense. A trick of the light. I must keep him talking, off guard while I recover. "I thought that you favored your right hand, Harry. How is it that I was mistaken?"

"You weren't. My godfather's left-handed, so I learned to fight both ways. He thought it might come in handy sometime. Guess he was right."

Voldemort spotted his wand, lying on the ground near a polished boot. *Perfect. I can have it in my hand before the little fool opens his eyes.* He bent down to pick it up, feeling again slightly uneasy at the way the floor seemed much closer than usual...

His hand passed through the wand.

He blinked and looked down at himself. He was silver-white and translucent.

No. No! I refuse to believe what I am seeing! It is not true!

"Of course, I'd love to know how you're still talking, seeing as you're supposed to be dead." Potter turned his head and opened his eyes, focusing after a moment on something behind Voldemort. "Oh," he said with some satisfaction. "You *are* dead."

Voldemort turned to look. There, lying on the ground, was his body, face twisted into an expression of disbelief and rage, an expression he could feel his face mimicking now.

This is impossible, unthinkable! Potter was never supposed to win! Let him in, play with him a little, then kill him! How could such a simple plan have gone wrong?

"Looks like we did get all the Horcruxes, then," said Potter with some relief. "I was worried we'd missed one, but it seems not."

Voldemort spun to glare at Potter, and was confronted with another puzzle. *Why am I looking at his knees?*

He looked up. And up, and up, until he finally saw Potter's face far above him, leaning over and looking down at him with an expression composed of equal parts amusement and disgust. "You make an awfully small ghost," he said. "But I suppose that's what happens when you have only one-seventh of a soul left."

Voldemort backed away a few paces and found himself standing in the middle of his own body, a body which seemed more suited to a troll or a giant from his current standpoint. He must be about the same size as a house-elf, if not smaller.

No, no, no... how could this have gone so wrong?

“What was it you said you wanted again? Eternal life, unlimited power, and everlasting fame?” Potter laughed weakly. “Well, eternal life you have. And everlasting fame. I think you might just be the smallest ghost in the world, so you ought to get pretty famous over the next few centuries. Or millennia. Power... not so much. But it’s like the song says.” He grinned. “Two out of three ain’t bad.”

And Harry Potter, The Man Who Won, turned and walked out of the empty manor house.

An eternity with its roots in popular music.

The World’s Smallest Ghost, formerly known as Lord Voldemort, howled in anguish and despair.

Hell exists after all.

Two Out of Three Ain't Bad No Dignity for You

Inside a dank and dusty wall filled with cobwebs and mouse droppings was not the ideal place to spend eternity. But it was preferable to the fate that awaited outside it...

The World's Smallest Ghost, once known as Lord Voldemort, hovered dismally about a foot off the floor and listened to the footsteps and voices.

"And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the room in which the actual battle took place," said the trained voice of a tour guide. "Stay behind the ropes, please, and photography without flashes only."

"Oh, hello, everyone," said a different voice, young and female and rather whining. Voldemort shrank a little farther into himself. She hadn't thought to look here yet, and he hoped she never would.

"Ah, a special treat for us, ladies and gentlemen," said the tour guide. "Above your heads, please greet Miss Myrtle Thompson, once of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and now one of our resident ghosts here at the Voldemort Wars Museum."

"He killed me, you know," the little-girl voice said over the sounds of cameras going off. "Or his snake did. I was crying in the bathroom where the Chamber of Secrets was, and I heard him talking Parseltongue to open the Chamber, and when I opened the door to tell him to go away, I saw its eyes and I *died*."

The crowd on the tour oohed and aahed. "Do you ever see him now, Miss Thompson?" asked a wizard. "I mean, since you're both ghosts haunting this building."

Myrtle giggled. Voldemort flinched at the sound. "Well, he's the reason I asked if I could come here," she said. "Because I always thought he was cute, and now that he's so little, he needs someone to look after him properly. We have lots of fun together. We play games, like hide-and-go-seek. He doesn't always tell me when he wants to play – he just goes and hides – but I always find him in the end." Another giggle.

"Where does he usually hide?" asked a witch.

"Oh, anywhere. Under the furniture, inside the floors, up in the chimneys... it's nice being a ghost, because we don't have to worry about running into things, or being in tight places... I can't go through things as easily as he can, because he's so small, but I do all right." Voldemort could tell by Myrtle's tone that she would be smiling coyly at the crowd. "He wants me to find him, you see, so he's careful never to be too clever. Because he wouldn't have any fun if I wasn't here."

"Are you playing a game now?" asked a different witch.

"Yes, we've been playing for nearly a month. It's the longest he's ever hidden from me. Do tell me if you see him, please. I miss him dreadfully." Myrtle sniffled, and then broke into the wailing sound that had given her the nickname she'd owned at Hogwarts.

"And next on our list, the room where Lord Voldemort once murdered his father and grandparents," said the tour guide hastily. "Right this way, please..."

Myrtle kept moaning until the last tourist had left the room, then let her noise trail off into silence. "Tommy," she crooned, swooping around the room. "I know you're in here. I can feel it. Come out, come out and play!"

Voldemort held completely still, staring fiercely at the inside of the wall. *I'm not here*, he willed. *I'm not here... just go away, go somewhere else, I'm not here...*

A glowing head poked through the wall directly in front of him. He shrieked.

"Tommy!" Myrtle cried happily, her arms following her head through the wall and snatching Voldemort's robes as he tried to flee. "Uh-uh, you know better. I found you, and now we're going to play. Come on."

Voldemort let out a despairing groan as Myrtle cradled him against her chest like a baby doll and rose through the ceiling.

A few minutes later, Myrtle swooped out of an upper window with her perambulator in time to catch the tourists as they filed out. "Yoo-hoo!" she called. "Look, I found him! We're playing house, and it's time for our walk!"

The group gathered around, and Myrtle lowered the hood of the perambulator with a fatuous expression that any mother might be proud of. Voldemort lay within, wearing a sulkily expression, a striped dress with a lacy pinafore, and a frilly baby bonnet tied with a bow under his chin.

"After our walk, we'll have tea," Myrtle told the tourists. "And then it's baby's naptime. I sing him lovely lullabies to send him off to sleep."

Voldemort shut his eyes in pain. Myrtle's singing voice was only a half-step removed from her moaning, and less tuneful. And she kept an eagle eye on the nursery she'd been provided in one of the museum's attics. It would be at least a month, probably two, before he could hope to escape again.

Nothing I ever did was nearly bad enough to deserve this for all eternity.