

"The Sorcerer's Stone! Of course — the Elixir of Life! But I don't understand who —"

"Can you think of nobody who has waited many years to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting their chance?"

It was as though an iron fist had clenched suddenly around Harry's heart. Over the rustling of the trees, he seemed to hear once more what Hagrid had told him on the night they had met: "Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die."

"Do you mean," Harry croaked, "that was *Vol* —"

"Harry! Harry, are you all right?"

Hermione was running toward them down the path, Hagrid puffing along behind her.

"I'm fine," said Harry, hardly knowing what he was saying. "The unicorns dead, Hagrid, it's in that clearing back there."

"This is where I leave you," Firenze murmured as Hagrid hurried off to examine the unicorn. "You are safe now."

Harry slid off his back.

"Good luck, Harry Potter," said Firenze. "The planets have been read wrongly before now, even by centaurs. I hope this is one of those times."

He turned and cantered back into the depths of the forest, leaving Harry shivering behind him.

Ron had fallen asleep in the dark common room, waiting for them to return. He shouted something about Quidditch fouls when Harry roughly shook him awake. In a matter of seconds, though, he was wide-eyed as Harry began to tell him and Hermione what had happened in the forest.

Harry couldn't sit down. He paced up and down in front of the fire. He was still shaking.