

Politics of Academic Murder

by Lady Strange

A 6 chapter murder mystery and sequel to "Christmas Presents Undisguised" where Severus and Hermione are sleuths. Someone important is murdered in the University where Severus and Hermione are. They are roped in to find out who did it. Readers may find plot violent and the politics described herein distasteful.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 6

A 6 chapter murder mystery and sequel to "Christmas Presents Undisguised" where Severus and Hermione are sleuths. Someone important is murdered in the University where Severus and Hermione are. They are roped in to find out who did it. Readers may find plot violent and the politics described herein distasteful.

Author's note: I own nothing, and just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

After nearly two years' hiatus from the fandom, I bring you a tale. This is the second in the series of AU murder mystery story starring HG and SS as detectives. The first was *Christmas Presents Undisguised*. Some readers may find my characterisation OOC, but I assure you, this is how I see them in this dark AU world. In the first story and in this story, the following are assumed:

- (a) Voldemort managed to take over wizarding Britain for two years before he was overthrown by Harry
- (b) Muggle Saints in the Catholic tradition are actually wizards and witches. They are known as the "Sainted Few" in the wizarding world. These wizards and witches are also venerated in the wizarding world, hence the existence of chapels and shrines to the "Sainted Few"
- (c) Albus Dumbledore's death in HBP was staged,
- (d) Harry Potter is a somewhat draconian Minister of Magic,
- (e) Ronald Weasley is the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory,
- (f) Hermione Granger a D.Mag.A holder and assistant professor in Arithmancy in St John's College in Cambridge, and
- (g) Severus Snape a D.Mag.A holder and associate professor in Alchemy in the same institution
- (h) the world in the *Christmas Presents Undisguised* and in this story is intentionally dystopic.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

To my patroness, JuneW

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 1

One may try to escape from the past, but its long, bony, icy fingers can stretch out and touch you whenever and wherever one least expects. It certainly seemed to have touched the robed gentleman who emerged with hunched shoulders from the Old Library of St John's College Cambridge, not Oxford. Eschewing the pavements overlooking the River Cam, he walked briskly on the mid sized grass rectangle, the fastest route back to the Alchemy fellows' offices in the Fourth Court, which was completely invisible to Muggles. As he did so, his hood was forcibly thrown back thereby blowing aside his collar length raven hair, displaying his pallid, lined brow of anxiety, hard obsidian eyes, and hooked aquiline nose wrinkled slightly in disdain to all and sundry. Likewise, his undress gown, billowed furiously around him, protesting at his speed. The open-fronted gown would have fallen off his shoulders if his arms were not presently occupied with several large, leather bound tomes. The wizarding students of St John's College, who knew the Fellow by sight and reputation as a man who did not suffer fools at all, quickly scampered off the grass where they knew they had no business loitering unless they wanted to be severely reprimanded and locked up in the allegedly haunted room in Merton Hall. Though the Fellow was monstrously displeased with the students' blatant disregard for the rules, he chose to do nothing but scowl at the vulgarity of the students. He had more pressing matters to attend to, and taking time to reprimand errant students would only waste time. For the moment, he was determined to return to the sanctity of his office where he could be at leisure to think.

His past, as he had lately discovered, had caught up with him. He had thought himself free and clear, reborn and reinvented as the New Wizarding Britain of the Potter Administration of seven years ago. His past as Potions Master of Hogwarts and his past as a Death Eater had been left behind, or so he thought. Voldemort, the Dark Lord, who had been so fortunate as to take over wizarding Britain for two and a half years in 1997, had fallen seven years ago. He, presently the venerable Professor of Alchemy of St John's College, had been publicly pardoned for his involvement with the Death Eaters and for the alleged murder of one Albus Dumbledore when it was revealed the old man was still alive and well. Even the current Minister of Magic, Harry Potter, condescended to be civil to him after he and Dr Hermione Granger of the Arithmancy department in St John's solved the mystery of the rash of murders Discedes, Alkane and Morosia areas of wizarding London two years ago. Solving that mystery and bringing the murderer, Neville Longbottom, to justice had ostensibly freed him from his duties as an Unspeakable Unspeakable. Albus "Sweet-tooth" Dumbledore, Secret Head of the Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables (now retired from his august position), and Minister Potter had released him from his duties of that office. Those two veritable powers behind wizarding Britain had even freed Dr Granger from her duties as an Unspeakable Unspeakable.

The two academicians had been left alone and free from the toils of Ministry politics for the past two years. He had conducted his own lectures and research. He had even come to have a kind of friendship with Dr Granger where they co-wrote two books and several papers in the inter-disciplinary uses of Arithmancy in Alchemy and vice versa. He had settled down into a pleasant habit of educating dunderheads in Cambridge, afternoon tea, and the occasional dinner and supper with Dr Granger.

Indeed, he had planned for a fruitful day. He was supposed to give a lecture on the Philosopher's Stone and the elixir of life in the morning, and conduct some research at the Old Library in the late morning. Up to that point, his schedule and his desires were completely aligned. He had intended to drop by lecture theatre two where Dr Granger would be completing her lesson for the day so as to formally request her company for dinner that evening, and he would have done so had not his carefully scheduled plans been so unjustly upset. So why in bloody Merlin's name was he dragging himself back to his office while darkly muttering abuses under his breath?

Blame was apportioned, as it must in situations entirely out of one's control, to the higher-ups. In this case, the "higher-up" was not a Wizarding deity, but the Chancellor of the Wizarding Division of the University of Cambridge, Filius Flitwick, who had been appointed to the position a year and a half ago.

The Alchemy professor continued to storm his way through the grass as he reviewed the incident leading to his receipt of the Minister's rudeness. He had been happily conducting his research on his half of a new paper he was co-writing with Dr Granger when an owl flew into the library, landed in front of him, and proffered a message. That message from the Chancellor's office had completely put him out of countenance because it was accompanied with the Minister of Magic's seal, calling on him to don his role as an Unspeakable Unspeakable as an especial personal favour for his former Hogwarts colleague. It stated that Flitwick had sought and obtained from Minister Potter a temporary reissue of all the Professor Severus Snape's and Dr Hermione Granger's former powers, rights and authorities as investigators with the British Wizarding Criminal Prosecution Ministry.

A nerve twitched at the corner of his mouth as he considered the current state of the Ministry. The Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables and the Auror Department must be terribly slipshod now if the Minister himself was requesting for the assistance of two former Unspeakable Unspeakables. Damn it! His past had bloody caught up with him and he could not escape. He could not turn down the request if that thinly disguised order could be politely termed. The Minister had only begun to be civil to him. If he offended the great Minister to whom Flitwick had applied for assistance, or even suggested that the light did not shine out of the arse of the Dolt-Who-Saved-Wizarding-Britain, it was likely that he would be incarcerated in Azkaban at the slightest hint of misbehaviour. Thus, as much as he would have liked to throttle the "Great Leader" as Minister had come to be dubbed by impressionable fangirls, and as much as he would like to permanently leave behind his career as an Unspeakable Unspeakable, it would behove Alchemy Professor to gently toe the line and see what the confounded Minister-endorsed Chancellor of the University's Wizarding Division wanted. Still, he could not help cursing his fate *and* his past for catching up with him.

'But you should have known better. You can never be safe,' he muttered to himself as he scowled at other student gambolling on the grass under the shadows of the Fourth Court. He smirked wryly at himself. It was true. He could never be safe so long as Harry Potter exercised the power to move heaven and earth in Wizarding Britain; rather no one was safe in the Potter Administration and its morally bankrupt notion of politics. He frowned at the thought as he climbed the stairs to his office. Hisrown became further etched into his brow when he saw the petite figure of a witch in an undress gown and a loose hair bun of brown leaning on the door of his office.

'Professor Snape,' she greeted without preamble as she took the books from his arms so that he could open his door.

'Dr Granger,' he returned the usual greeting he often exchanged with her when they first met for the day.

'We need to talk.'

'Why?' he asked suspiciously, opening the sturdy door and indicating with a delicate bow of welcome at her presence into his chamber.

'Because,' she said brusquely, setting the books down on his desk as he closed and locked his door. 'I received an owl from Professor Flitwick in the middle of lecture. It seems Harry has endorsed whatever it is he wants us to do.'

'I expected as much.' Though his expression was impassive, his eyes flickered the slightest hint of surprise at the Chancellor's blatant disregard for the private lives, careers, and schedules of others. 'I had the honour of receiving a similar epistle myself.'

'He wants us to investigate something.'

'Your powers of observation, Hermione, have astounded me yet again,' he deadpanned, holding out some papers to her as she settled into a chair opposite his.

'Don't tease,' she answered, swatting him playfully before taking the papers. However, the smile on her lips died as soon as she perused the documents. 'Full investigative rights granted! I was of the impression that we were no longer Unspeakable Unspeakables.'

'So was I.' He inclined his head closer to hers. Though a smirk played at the corner of his mouth, his voice remained grave. 'What exactly does the Chancellor want us to do? He's becoming almost as annoyingly incorrigible as Albus Dumbledore, who at least has enough sense to leave us alone since his retirement to Cambridgeshire.'

Hermione Granger, who was long used to her colleague's truculent manner, knew perfectly why he referred to Filius Flitwick as the Chancellor, namely, it was to prevent him from being slapped with a fine or worse for slandering the good name of head of the Wizarding Division of the University of Cambridge. 'In any case, we have to see Professor Flitwick in half an hour. I'm sure he will offer some kind of explanation.'

'What I want to know is why the Chancellor sought for the Minister's approval? If he needed our assistance, he could ask us directly. Let's say he needs us to have complete Unspeakable Unspeakable powers, he could have asked Dumbledore instead of the Minister. The old goat would have jumped at the chance to poke his nose in our business. So, why didn't Dumbledore come to us directly if he wanted us to conduct some investigation or the other?' he murmured thoughtfully, tracing his lower lip

with a tapered finger. 'It's not like he would find it dashedly awkward to ask two people no longer in his employ to conduct an investigation after he had previously freed them from their obligations for apprehending a vicious murderer that preyed on the unsuspecting in the dodgy ends of Wizarding London. The Chancellor would be relieved of the uncomfortable duty of telling us why he needs us, and Dumbledore would step up all excited. Where is meddling Dumbledore?'

She raised a brow as she digested his comments. 'Now that you mention it *Why didn't* Dumbledore contact us? Why did Professor Flitwick send for us, and ask Harry to reinstate our powers instead?'

'I believe he would call it *"requesting our presence"*,' pointed out her companion with a smirk.

'Quite right, Severus.' She nodded then stood up suddenly. 'Let's go the Chancellor's office and see if we can talk our way out of this. The person who successfully gets us off this imposition buys dinner.'

His lips curled into a faintly triumphant smirk. 'Oh, so you're buying tonight? Really, your generosity is most moving.'

'So sure I'll be paying?' she challenged.

'Your methods of persuasion are more effective than mine.' He bowed slightly. 'Now, if only we were having curry...'

'Yes, curry,' she smiled, and they Disapparated in a loud pop.

Their arrival at the diminutive wizard's office in Christchurch College, as it would seem, was anticipated, and they were duly ushered into the presence of Filius Flitwick, Chancellor of the wizarding division of the University of Cambridge.

As soon as everyone had gotten the obligatory how-do-you-dos out of the way, and had settled into their seats in an uncomfortable and rancorous silence, Flitwick revealed that the retired Secret Head of the Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables was also the Head of Department of the Transfiguration department (on secondment) of the University. Apparently, Dumbledore had passed away under mysterious circumstances in his chambers above the Transfiguration department in Merton College. Flitwick cleverly looked between the two younger wizards before him and said that he would very much appreciate it if the two best minds to come out of the said Ministry Department and Hogwarts were to launch an inquiry into the matter.

'The Minister of Magic has personally conducted a thorough investigation of the circumstances,' began Flitwick, as he handed them each a statement of the investigation. 'Albus died three days ago in his rooms at Merton. The Minister investigated the death with the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory, and this is the resultant report. He gave me to believe that the matter, is, sadly, a simple one.'

'I cannot understand why you, Chancellor, feel that Dr Granger and I have to interfere in this matter,' said Severus blandly on steeping his hands. 'If the Minister had already investigated the matter and published a Ministry report, you clearly have no need for us.'

Hermione, who was also evidently of the idea that her time had been wasted, regarded the Flitwick with a mild expression of reproach.

'When such a respected man as the venerable Albus Dumbledore has met with an unnatural death, it is the duty of his colleagues to inquire into it?' Flitwick rebuked gently. 'Portraits of Albus Dumbledore hang in many of our great wizarding institutions. He has become an icon; he represents everything that is good.'

Though Hermione chuckled wryly and Severus snorted derisively at Flitwick's devotion to Dumbledore, they exchanged intelligible glances when they realised he had said Dumbledore's death was unnatural.

'Unnatural death?' they simultaneously gasped; rather, one gasped and coloured, the other narrowed his eyes and hissed.

'How did you manage to persuade Harry to let you open another investigation after he had conducted his own?' Hermione quizzed.

'I told him the University would want a private investigation and not one with Ministry overtones. The Minister then suggested I ask the both of you for help as you were certain to come to same conclusions as the Ministry,' explained the Chancellor with a pleading look in his eyes.

'Which means to say,' growled Severus in displeasure as he tossed the report carelessly on the desk. 'The Minister is ordering us to draw the same conclusions as his! Bah! Accidental death and/or suicide indeed!'

Realising that he estimable colleague and friend was caught up in the raptures of his justified resentment, Hermione quickly silenced him with a firm hand on his elbow, and addressed Flitwick in a lower whisper. If what she thought was going on was indeed going on, they had to tread carefully. It might very well mean that they were going against the wishes of the Great Leader of Wizarding Britain. 'The fact that you are asking us means that you do not trust the official version of the story.'

Hogwarts' former Charms Professor coloured a little and shifted his weight in his chair. 'I did not mean to imply a censure of the Minister nor his authority,' he replied softly, his eyes darting from Hermione to Severus in a silent plea. 'It is just that I would like a true thorough investigation and report done by members of the faculty of the University. Within the report, you will find that the Minister and the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory had listed the circumstances and relevant details. I believe there is much more to be said, if there are culprits of course. I believe the itinerant undesirables are responsible. However, it could also be that the report is right and he did take his own life.'

'Dumbledore, take his own life?' sneered Severus disbelievingly into Hermione's laughing eyes. It was evident that she too did not adhere to the idea of the great all-knowing Dumbledore committing suicide, or "accidentally" falling prey to footpads.

'Well, that leaves us with the robbery and accidental murder theory,' declared she decisively when she caught the Chancellor frowning his brow. As soon as the laughter was extinguished from her eyes, she continued, 'Seriously now, there is nothing more to be said unless we can track down the culprits if any, and that would be impossible unless, in some fit of repentance or remorse compelled them to confess.'

'If there are culprits,' Severus reminded her cautiously.

'But I know so,' Flitwick insisted. 'Interestingly, I noted things missing from Dumbledore's rooms. It is likely that the culprits have long departed with their ill gotten spoils.'

'How convenient,' muttered Severus, tracing his lips again.

Hermione, however, chose to gaze thoughtfully at the Chancellor for a moment or two, before returning her gaze to the statement in her hands. 'It is puzzling. Harry's and Ron's report, I must confess, has puzzled me exceedingly.'

As she tilted the papers in her hand towards Severus, he saw that her index finger was tapping lightly on a particular section. He exchanged another knowing look with his colleague. 'I hasten to add that they puzzle me too.'

'As they do me,' whispered Flitwick. 'That is why I have authorised you, as former Unspeakable Unspeakables to see whether or not the questions arising from the report might be clarified.'

'What do you expect us to do?' scoffed Severus. 'Investigate whether the so-called culprits were itinerant footpads?'

'That may be an avenue worth exploring,' answered Flitwick vaguely. 'The undesirables are desperate individuals.'

Hermione laughed a little. 'The only kinds of itinerants around are members of the wizarding religious order trying to restore the old ways that Voldemort sought to obliterate

during his brief rule over our world, and dispossessed members of society." However when Flitwick cast her a grave look and stared straight into her eyes, her laughter died. 'You don't expect me to believe that squibs and wizards rendered wandless by the state for some alleged crime against the national security of Wizarding Britain who have banded together out of necessity for survival decided to kill Professor Dumbledore after committing petty theft?'

'Given their place in society, that is a possibility,' said Flitwick. 'They are now deemed useless and unwanted in our world. No one would give them jobs and they have no means of earning bread.'

'Yes, what else can they do but pillage and murder?' Severus broke in a dull monotone. It was not lost on him that he was very nearly one of those unfortunate wizards who were rendered wandless by the Potter Administration.

The Arithmancer and Alchemist nodded their acceptance of the investigation, one with an aggressively raised jaw, the other with a thinly pursed smile. As Severus offered his arm to Hermione, he knew that they would have a long weekend trying to figure out what in blazes happened to Dumbledore while not overtly upsetting the Potter Administration's official position on the matter.

FOOTNOTES:

In Cambridge and Oxford, 'college' is used to describe an institution that has its origins in the Middle Ages. In the 1200s, when the University of Cambridge was just a fledgling thing, scholars organised themselves into small residential communities. In those early days, the University was not really a formal institution, but rather a collection of independent academic and religious bodies that became the first colleges. Over time, a central system was set up for such tasks as setting examinations and conferring degrees. Other systems were created for coordinating scholars working in the same fields at different colleges: these became the faculties and departments. Thus, they continue to exist as separate institutions with their own administrations, sources of funding, educational practices and even separate libraries and sporting facilities. The University, then, is an umbrella organisation collectively run by its own bureaucracy, as well as officials from the various different institutions.

The 'Fellows' are the permanent members of the college (as opposed to the students) and they have special rights. For example, they are allowed to walk on the grass in the courtyards and they sit on a special, raised platform (the high table) when they eat in Hall. Most Fellows are academics, ranging from postdoctoral researchers to professors, in various departments of the University.

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up.

D.Mag.A stands for Doctor of Magical Arts. It's a made-up wizarding PhD.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story *Christmas Presents Undisguised*, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

Dphil/PhD holders in Cambridge and Oxford have three forms of academic dress: undress, full dress and convocation dress. The only one we are concerned with here is the *undress gown*. It is a black lay-type gown with a flap collar and closed sleeves, decorated with black silk lace.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 6

In which Hermione and Severus discuss the case at her flat over green tea and a game of Go.

Author's note: I own nothing. I just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

As to why the world is the way it is in this story, please c/f to author's note in chapter 1.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery on which it are based are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

Long footnotes follow chapter. You have been warned.

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 2

'Did you get the sense that Chancellor Flitwick seemed particularly keen to forward the idea that there was a robbery by the undesirable elements of society leading to Professor Dumbledore's death?' asked Hermione when they Apparated to her door of her flat at Victoria Road. 'I know age had been catching with Dumbledore, but I highly doubt he would be that much incapacitated as to be caught unaware by robbers.'

Her flat was a lived-in place on the third floor of an Edwardian building with a drawing room that doubled up as Hermione's study of sorts. Persons entering the modest flat would find two large, tall bookshelves at right angles to one another against the walls. A functional writing desk stood at the corner, on which were books, measuring implements, a calculator, an abacus, a welter of papers and a tray containing student essay scripts. Further into the room, on the same side, was a lovely fireplace of brick, with two comfortable black cushioned single-seat sofas at the side of the hearth nearest the door, and a coal-scuttle. A clock, photographs of her parents, and a jar of floor powder stood on the dust-free mantelpiece, and a convenient magazine stand remained well-placed between the fireplace and the desk. On the other side of the door, to the left of the entrant was a short book cabinet on which stood a telephone and a stack of books on Arithmancy and Potions. In the corner beyond was the side wall and three full-length windows adorned with floral print curtains at the furthest end of the door. Before the windows stood a polished *goban* of the traditional Japanese make, which in turn had two *goke* atop it. Two cushions by the sides of the *goban* and a low side-table containing a dessert dish with sweets and chocolates completed this pleasant picture.

'It seemed to me,' input Severus musingly as Hermione locked her door, 'that he did not know whether he wanted to endorse the robbery-cum-murder idea or the suicide idea. That in itself is remarkable odd. What is he hiding? Just what is the report hiding?'

'Which is to say Professor Flitwick knows Harry is hiding something but is uncertain as to how he should proceed without offending the Great Leader,' agreed the young Arithmancer as she slipped out of her court shoes and into a pair of beaded at-home slippers. 'Just what makes the Chancellor think we can pull off such a coup? It's like playing white and trying to win a *Go* match by one *moku* and one *moku* only.'

'You know,' he responded thoughtfully, removing his shoes and striding purposefully to the *goban* before the full-length windows overlooking the street. 'I think that is exactly what we are supposed to do. We are to conduct our investigation as prescribed by the law for Unspeakable Unspeakables and depart when we have finished. Shall I illustrate with a game with a three stone handicap?'

As his words penetrated her mind, she raised a brow in interest. 'One can only be *inatari* for so many moves,' she said, pottering into the kitchenette on the left. 'Will green tea do?'

'Only if you stick a *nori* piece into it,' he answered, sitting cross-legged on the cushion before the *goban* and reviewing the Potter-Weasley report on Dumbledore's unfortunate death. 'Do you know what else is odd with this account?' he continued when she returned with a pot of tea and two cups.

'Surprise me,' she intoned as she sat *inseiza* on her cushion. 'If you are going to rattle on about the ineptitude of the Aurory, spare me. I am already acquainted with the pungent terms with which you use to describe the Potter bureaucratic machine. We are, or at least, *were* Unspeakable Unspeakables, Harry would have to accept our findings however reluctantly.'

Instead of answering her, Severus opened the *goke* containing the black *go-ishi* and pushed it towards her. 'A three stone handicap place them where you like.'

She sniffed indignantly, her eyes flashing. 'I think it monstrously unfair that you should be giving me a handicap. Playing black already has its advantages *ido*. If you weren't illustrating your point of winning this investigation with a certain number of *moku*, I would be offended.' Severus laughed at her and made a gesture for her to place the stones on the board before he would continue. 'You had better not be evading my questions!'

'I would not dare!' he declared in a monotone, pouring out the tea with the tiniest hint off a smirk. 'You are undoubtedly wondering why a three stone handicap?'

'Would it crush you if I said I already know?' she asked on setting the stones close to three corners of the board in the *komoku* positions.

He sipped his tea and stared unblinkingly at her. 'Terribly so, Dr Granger.'

'Well, be crushed then,' said she with a playful smile. 'From their report, you think Harry and Ron are three steps ahead of us: One the official report on suicide, Two Harry letting us investigate, Three the pervasive smell of cover-up in the air. Furthermore, since black always moves first in *Go* it is an apt representation of them and whatever it is they did in their statement. Quite fitting really, since this assumption places them as mildly suspicious characters.'

He nodded. 'They think they can play in permanent *inatari* as you mentioned earlier, but we will surprise them, with *atsuke*, thereby demonstrating that we dare go next to them or rather, we dare to be directly next to the Minister's stone but only briefly.'

'So that we are only in contact with his manoeuvres one manoeuvre at a time,' she said, before bringing the subject back to the matter of their investigation. 'Let us begin by recounting the general details of Dumbledore's death.'

Severus inhaled and made his move on the board with a white stone. 'It was on the morning of the bank holiday, three days ago. As Head of Department of the Transfiguration department of the University, he had lodgings within Merton College. He resided there, which is not surprising, given that he is a stingy old bugger. His manservant, Filch went to rouse him. As we know, his age was catching up with him, and he was no longer the sprightly Headmaster and Secret Head of the Unspeakable Unspeakables we know so well.'

He paused when she placed a stone in the *hoshi* position to counter his move. He placed a stone down with a smart click and went on. 'Aside from the point that his decrepitude was finally taking a physical toll on his aged body now that he has run out of the elixir of life he pinched from the late Flamel all that years ago. Also, it is a well-known fact that he has relied on the aid of a walking stick for the past year. It would come as no surprise that he required some assistance to rise in the morning. Filch would help him rise and dress and then escort him to the halls for breakfast and whatever duties he needed to attend. If we are to believe Messrs Potter and Weasley, Dumbledore was also becoming increasingly frail in the past year, so much so that he was needful of the helping hand of Filch.'

She responded with a stone on the board *innobi* before taking the report and reading it for herself. 'So Filch went to the chamber that morning. The facts seem too straightforward if they are to be believed. Filch enters stage right and found Dumbledore hanging from a beam just above his desk. There were indications that his possessions had been rifled and a valuable person item, namely a jewelled magnifying glass, had been taken. Some valuable objects were also reported stolen from the Merton College wizarding chapel, which coincidentally adjoins Dumbledore's chambers.'

'Too bloody conveniently,' muttered Severus, staring at the board when she met his move with *aratari*. 'Bloody Gryffindors are so transparent! How many times must I tell you not to move into the offensive too soon. When will you learn that doing so shows your opponent that which you have in mind too early in the game!'

'Rubbish,' she retorted coldly with a dismissive flick of the wrist. 'I'm playing as the boys would. From the way they have behaved in their investigation, I would be tempted to say they believe they are invincible. Only those sure of their invincibility will dare to attempt to take another's stone so early in the game.'

'What about building up the game? *Go* is not about offence versus defence. It is about the *joseki*,' he hissed, placing a stone on the board.

'Your *joseki* is old!' she snorted scornfully. 'The *kosumi* has not been used for at least two hundred years and you bring it back into play?'

'That's because I'm thinking at least eight moves in advance. That's what we need to do if we are going against the Minister and his freckled underling!' he snarled testily.

'Ron is not an underling!'

'Oh, forgive me!' he snapped, putting down his cup lightly. 'The Minister who cannot even play wizarding chess to save his life places someone who can near him to bail him out of trouble and bolster his legitimacy if need be. That someone must be a comrade rather than an underling.'

'Just what are you trying to say?' She glowered at him upon making her move on the board.

He made a move and as he did so, a nerve jumped at the corner of his mouth. 'If it was the Minister playing at this whole situation, he would want to be in permanent *atatari*, permanently on the verge on taking his opponent's stones without pause and without regard for *joseki*. But the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory can play and will play to cover up the inevitable mess left by the Minister's habit of charging in without thinking.'

'That is a grave accusation, Severus,' she warned, looking up at him worryingly. 'One wrong move and you could end up like Lucius Malfoy.'

'That is the whole point of our investigation,' he purred lowly, causing a chill to run down her spine. 'The Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory knows he cannot keep attacking for the sake of taking more stones, so he launches into the attack you just did.'

'But the *keima* attack does not mean he is looking to control the board or the situation,' protested Hermione.

'In controlling the situation, he controls the Minister. It is simple politics,' stated Severus, his eyes glittering strangely in thought. 'You will note that those discoveries were made after Filch had roused the other wizarding scholars and Fellows of the college having found the body of the much-beloved Dumbledore.' He paused to place a stone in *ate* upon receiving the official account from his companion. 'The brilliant deduction of Messrs Potter and Weasley hinted that it was theft and murder.'

'A reason Professor Flitwick seemed both keen and frighten to accept,' pointed out Hermione with another move.

Carelessly tossing aside the report as if it were as offensive as the articles published in the *Daily Prophet*, Severus responded on the board and looked up at her, his eyes boring into hers. 'Remind me of their wild theory.'

'But you've read it!' she protested both his verbal request and at the manner in which their game had unfolded.

'Talking helps to make the whole convoluted mess seem more comprehensible to the eyes of the mind.' He gestured broadly to the set up on the *goban*.

Hermione let out a long suffering sigh. Knowing that their early game play had already reflected the situation outlined in the report whereby the vulnerability of the University of Cambridge was outlined. The statement claimed that the lack of walls around the university and each college made it prone to any itinerants who wished to besiege the inhabitants of the institution. That much was true. The idea that no one would wish to enter and cause any harm to the students and Fellows of the university had carried over from the late Middle Ages, and it would be all too easy for an outsider to enter and create havoc within the institution. That theory did signify the death of the cluster of white stones at the top left hand corner. Yet, in that small truth, there was a bigger lie. The lay of the board thus far would suggest that the black player (as Severus had taken to represent the official Ministry Inquiry) had control over the left corner of the board and that one avenue of investigation was now closed to her and Severus.

However, it also indicated to her, as it would to any experienced Go player, the white player had thrown away that cluster of stones. Black had not taken that sector; it only thought it had. It made sense of course, the whole itinerant-causing-havoc through theft and accidental murder theory was rubbish. If the Ministry and the Aurory wanted the investigators appointed by the university's wizarding division to believe that little lie, she and Severus would believe it behind knowing winks, nudges and smirks. But it not change the fact that they had control over the centre, and that could potentially work to their benefit.

As she lifted her eyes from the board to meet his cynical, dangerously glinting ones, she swallowed hard on seeing that which she had not earlier foreseen. 'We have to test them and trap them,' she said slowly in realisation. 'We may privately doubt the report's claim that itinerant mercenaries and the dodgy elements of our society entered Merton College at night to rob the chapel of its valuables, then robbed Professor Dumbledore and then hung him. We may even doubt Professor Flitwick's story that Professor Dumbledore had been disturbed by them, went to investigate, thereby incurring their wrath so much so that they turned on him, hanged him from his own roof beam and robbed him for good measure.'

'A masterful display of the Aurory's logical deduction from the facts,' deadpanned Severus in a bored tone with the slightest hint of sarcasm.

'Doesn't it strike you as odd that Professor Dumbledore, an aged wizard who needed the aid of a walking stick, needed help to rise in the morning, and needed help to be escorted to the hall for his meals, would rise in the night on discerning the presence of intruders and head to the chapel, alone, to investigate matters,' Hermione said, placing a stone on the board to further her attempt to control the centre.

His narrowed his eyes and responded to her move. 'According to Messrs Potter and Weasley, people in extremis have been known to perform many extraordinary things. If we are to believe our venerable Minister and his less venerable lackey, Dumbledore, though increasingly frail with age, was a very determined wizard. He had, as we are reminded in the report led the battle against the Dark Lord nearly ten years ago.'

Hermione suppressed a sigh of irritation. 'All Britain knew of Dumbledore's greatness. His greatness is only one notch lower than that of the Greater Leader Harry Potter! And since everyone in the British Isles knew of Dumbledore's campaign against Voldemort, it is no surprise that his name has come to be associated with fortitude in adversity.'

'Just like how the Minister's name had come to be a byword for moral and physical courage throughout the United Kingdom, as if he were the only morally upright and courageous one. What about those of us who spied and lied through our teeth for the cause?' commented the Alchemist bitterly, placing his stone on the board with more force than was necessary.

'All that is immaterial,' comforted she, reaching forward and patting his hand until he jerked it away from her. 'We have to concentrate on the matter at hand. Surely, it must have occurred to Harry and Ron that their report would strike us as odd. Are we expected to believe that these disposed squibs and wizards-deprived-of-wands-turned-robbers, who were so unfortunate to be disturbed, pounced on Dumbledore, took him back to his chamber and hanged him there? Granted, Professor Dumbledore had bent a little in age, but it is farfetched to insinuate the frail and aged wizard was such a threat that they would kill him. If I were a thief caught off guard, my first instinct to be knock the fellow unconscious and run. And given Professor Dumbledore's recent spate of ill health, his aged frailty, he could not have prevented the robbers' escape or even pursue them or take them on en masse. Why should they even bother to take him, order him to lead them back to his chambers and kill him there?'

'To quote the words of the Chancellor, "Who knows the minds of thieves and murderers? I have recorded the facts. I do not attempt to understand the minds of such lowlifes." Very succinct of him to make such a declaration,' Severus snorted. 'Additionally, we are told, despite being ordered to investigate into the "wherefore", that any signs of the itinerants or dispossessed members of the wizarding community were gone the day after the theft and murder. How very convenient for the Minister and the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory!'

'Conveniently, they did not interview Filch even though he was the first to discover the body,' Hermione said quietly, making *ahasami* move on the board.

'Why should they? They would only look on him as a squib - an unimportant person, and a useless freeload being within wizarding society, unable to contribute to the community in anyway or serve the growth of the wizarding economy.' His lips curled contemptuously at the current administration's blatant prejudice of the less fortunate and he placed a stone right before her on her side of the board. 'That is also exactly how the Ministry views the wizards who have been stripped of their wands, their properties and dignities - useless, freeloaders who are better off dead. But since they are clearly not dead, they would have to be shunned and left to shift for themselves. These non-contributing elements of our society should not be spoken of or addressed. Our "beloved Great Leader" said so in his latest speech to commemorate the founding of the Ministry of Magic.'

Her eyes flickered up, accompanied by a small gasp. While she had been affronted by his direct portrayal of the Potter Administration's socio-economic stance (a stance for which she had nothing but disgust), she was more surprised by his move on the board. He had just placed a stone into her territory, the lower centre of the board, which was directly before her. The *hiraki* at this point - what was he trying to accomplish? Unable to fathom his reason, she lifted her astonished eyes to meet his level, challenging gaze. 'That's not the smartest move or the strongest move,' she managed to whisper.

'Are you speaking of the official report's failure to consider the possible contributions of Filch's testimony, my take on Ministry policy, *or are you*, by any chance commenting on the move I just made.' His lips twitched into a knowing smirk.

'All three, if you must know,' she replied, with an edge of annoyed dissatisfaction in her voice. 'Are you testing me to see how I would respond, or are you measuring from strength from a far higher position? What have I done that you are playing *shidou go* with me? I thought we had agreed to respect each other's abilities and capabilities.'

'I would not dare to confront you in such a manner,' was the quiet purring reply. He received a snort of disbelief in return. 'However, I was thinking we could use this in our dealings with Messrs Potter and Weasley.' His eyes narrowed and he lowered his voice, making his tone even quieter. 'I don't see why we can't play tutoring *Go* with them. They are fifty years too young to play politics against me.'

'And we will do that by playing old *joseki* against them?' enquired she, tapping the side of her cheek thoughtfully.

'By interviewing Filch and determining what he has to say, before going after the Minister himself,' Severus announced when she set a black stone down. He surprised her by closing his *goko*. 'It may be easier to win with black, but it is possible for white to survive even after loosing the cluster on your top left hand side.'

'That is risky.' She stared at the stone he had placed in *hiraki*, in that position she had earlier considered neither smart nor strong.

'I know.' His lips curled again, complimenting the excited glittering of his obsidian eyes.

'We have made the assumption that Harry, Ron and even Professor Flitwick may be suspects.'

'Indeed.'

'The most the Chancellor did was cover something up. The bigger fishes in this game are the Minister and the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory. All outcomes must have causes. We will uncover the causes.'

'Going against Harry and Ron if they are indeed the culprits will be difficult.'

'Well,' he said, the nerve at the corner of his lips pulsed a little, his eyes not leaving hers. 'They would not expect us to invade the territory before them. You said it yourself a *hiraki* in that position appears foolhardy, but they will not expect it. But I sincerely doubt they will even know that we are playing *shidou Go*. They will think they have control of the board until we win at the minute. They won't even have time to resign the game.'

'You mean we metaphorically decapitate them?'

'No, we threaten to decapitate them, hold what we know above them and then leave.'

'Do we have any other option?' she asked softly, imploringly.

'This is murder, Hermione. We cannot pat Messrs Potter and Weasley gently on the heads,' said Severus slowly and deliberately. 'Remember the way the Chancellor reacted when he all but begged us to investigate. They have bared their fangs to him. They will be baring their fangs upon us, *upon you* and disregard the many years of friendship. I can see it in them. They are capable of it. What will you do when they bare their fangs at you? Pat them gently on the heads or dodge their fangs? We have to play the way it unfolds on the board.'

That was all the assurance Hermione needed to hear, for she reached across the side table for a post-it note to indicate that Severus had the next move on the *goban*. Sticking the note by the side of the board, she rose and took up a medium-sized canvas bag containing pens, papers and notebooks. 'Let's go find Filch then, we'll finish the game by and by as our findings dictate and events unfold.'

FOOTNOTES:

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story *Christmas Presents Undisguised*, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

Nori is Japanese dried seaweed. I like putting a thin piece of nori in a pot of Japanese green tea as I believe it gives the tea depth of flavour. I have decided that Severus would share this taste.

Seiza is the name for the way they Japanese people kneel when they 'sit'.

Go is a board game for two players. Its Chinese name *weiqi* is significant because it translates into 'encircling chess', meaning you encircle your opponent's stones and capture them. I have used the Japanese name for the game because I am more familiar with the Japanese rules than Chinese rules. In Japanese, it may be referred to as both *Igo* and *Go*. *Go* is noted for being rich in strategic complexity despite its simple rules. *Go* is played by two players alternately placing black and white stones on the vacant intersections of a line grid. The standard size of this grid is 19 × 19, although the rules of *Go* can be freely applied to any size: 13 × 13 and 9 × 9 are also popular choices for more simple and tactic-oriented games as well as a way to introduce *Go* to new players. The objective of the game is to control a larger part of the board than the opponent. To achieve this, players strive to place their stones in such a way that they cannot be captured, while mapping out territories that cannot be invaded by the opponent without being captured. A stone or a group of stones is captured and removed if it has no empty adjacent intersections, the result of being completely surrounded by stones of the opposing color. Generally, placing stones close together helps them avoid capture, whereas placing them far apart allows a player to surround more territory. Part of the strategic difficulty of the game stems from finding a balance between these two conflicting interests. The game ends and the score is counted when both players consecutively pass on a turn, indicating that neither side can increase its territory nor reduce its opponent's.

Basic Rules

- (1) Two players, Black and White, take turns placing a stone (game piece) on a vacant point (intersection) of a 19 by 19 board (grid). Black always moves first. A 19x19 board is the standard size. Once played, a stone may not be moved to a different point.
- (2) A vacant point adjacent to a stone is a liberty for that stone.
- (3) Adjacent stones of the same color form a chain (also called a group) that shares its liberties in common, cannot subsequently be subdivided, and in effect becomes a single larger stone. Only stones connected to one another by the lines on the board create a chain.
- (4) Chains may be expanded by playing additional stones of the same color on their liberties, or amalgamated by playing a stone on a mutual liberty of two or more chains of the same color.
- (5) A chain must have at least one liberty to remain on the board. When a chain is surrounded by opposing stones so that it has no liberties, it is captured and removed from the board.
- (6) If a stone is played where it has no liberties, but it occupies the last liberty of one or more opposing chains, then such chains are captured first, leaving the newly played stone at least one liberty.
- (7) A stone cannot be played on a particular point, if doing so would recreate the board position that existed after the same player's previous turn.
- (8) A player may pass instead of placing a stone, indicating that he sees no way to increase his territory or reduce his opponent's territory. When both players pass consecutively, the game ends and is then scored.
- (9) A player's score is the number of empty points enclosed by his stones plus the number of opposing stones which he has captured. Points which are occupied by stones do not count for scoring purposes. The player with the higher score wins.

This is the essence of the game of *Go*. The risk of capture means that stones must work together to control territory, which makes the gameplay very complex and interesting.

Go allows one to play not only even games (games between players of roughly equal strength) but also handicap games (games between players of unequal strength). Without a handicap, even a slight difference in strength will generally be decisive.

Goban is the *Go* board. It is made from solid wood and is about 10 to 18 cm thick (1 inch=2.5 cm)

In the Japanese style, stones (*go-ishi*) are kept in matching solid wood bowls (*goke*), and are made of clamshell (white) and slate (black)

Komi rule In *Go*, black makes the first move, so black has the advantage. Since black has the advantage, white has 5 ½ moku to start with. This means if white has 50 moku on the board, black needs 56 moku to win.

Moku the point scoring in Go.

Tsuke Where you place your stone next to your opponent's stone. But the stone that you have placed can only be in contact with the opponent stone at the time it is played for it to be a tsuke.

Hiraki A move where you place a stone deep into unclaimed territory from an area that you can control. In so doing, you claim the unclaimed territory as your own.

Atari When you only need one more move to capture a stone, it is known as atari.

Ate pronounced (ah-tay). It is the process of placing a stone so that an opponent's stone is in atari.

Komoku An opening move in Go where you place a stone under a star point. It captures less territory but is a great deal safer

Hoshi A move deployed at the beginning of the game where you mirror your opponent's move on the other side of the board on the star points so that your stones are parallel to your opponent's. The star points are traditionally intersections marked with a small dot on the board

Nobi A move that extends a stone you already have on the board.

Joseki is a set pattern of moves that brings benefit to both sides. Like chess openings, although it benefits both players, it can benefit one player over another if play is extended.

Keima A keima attack in Go is similar to that of a knight's move in chess. This occurs when you go two units in one direction and another unit in different direction.

Kosumi A standard Go response to the keima attack in the Edo period. It is rarely used now due to the komi rule. For komi rule, see above.

Hasami An alternative to kosumi where you attack a stone from two sides instead one in kosumi.

Shidou Go is 'tutoring Go' whereby a player of higher skill plays against someone of lower skill by taking it easy on the lower skilled chap and making moves that will the teach the worse player some concepts of the game. The purpose of shidou Go is to lead the lower skilled player in the right direction. The teacher, of course, cannot make moves for the sake of winning.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 6

Where our favourite academicians go a-sleuthing, and uncover some interesting titbits...

Author's note: I own nothing, and just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

As to why the world is the way it is in this story, please c/f to author's note in chapter 1.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery on which it are based are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 3

As Filch had just lost his employer, he was understandably distraught. As with most distraught men in mourning, Filch was drowning his sorrows in drink. After a few discreet enquiries, our former Unspeakable Unspeakables found Argus Filch in a pub named the Dodgy Monkey. The Dodgy Monkey, tucked into a nondescript corner of Cambridgeshire, directly outside the University of Cambridge, attracted a unique clientele of mainly squibs, criminal elements of wizarding society, as well as down-and-out members of wizarding society. Though the area was not gloomy as the Discedes, Alkane and Morosia areas of wizarding London, it was sufficiently grimy to disconcert Hermione who was clinging onto Severus's arm for dear life. Whether it was because she feared the buildings leaning on each other would collapse on her, or whether it was because she feared being separated from him in a place she rather not patronise, he did not know. He allowed her to do as she chose so long as she remained silent and even ventured to pat her hand once or twice.

'Why do our witnesses always frequent such establishments?' Hermione groaned, tightening her grip on the arm of her companion.

Deeming that question to be a rhetorical one, he did not answer. Instead, he nodded grimly at her in what could best be described as an encouraging manner and exerted all his willpower not to pry her digits from their perch. He settled instead for patting her hand again. The interior of the pub was thankfully not as noisome and bleak as its exterior. It would have presented a pleasant aura if not for all the eyes trained on them as they entered.

'Filch,' greeted Severus smoothly, ignoring the stares in his direction. 'May I buy you a drink?'

'What do you want?' snapped Filch, his foetid breath making Hermione wrinkle her nose.

She glared at her colleague's tactics and clicked her tongue in disapproval. He gave her an eloquent shrug and indicated with a jerk of his head that she should have a go to try her luck. She did not need to be told twice. Casting a sympathetic smile at their witness, she sat next to him and offered her condolences. 'I am so sorry for your loss, Mr Filch. I know you were very attached to Professor Dumbledore.'

He snorted at her, and rubbed his nose on his sleeve.

'We, that is, Professor Snape and I, heard that you found Professor Dumbledore three days ago. I am sorry that you found him in such a state. Like you, we feel his loss keenly,' she murmured with a look of deep grief etched on her features.

Severus, who did not know his colleague to be so proficient in the arts of disassembling, raised a faint brow of approval at her methods and tried his best not to smirk. He knew only painfully well how his esteemed colleague truly viewed Dumbledore. In fact, he shared her sentiments that he was a presumptuous, overbearing arse who meddled in everything even in things that were none of his business. It was not good *ton* to speak ill of the dead, that much he knew. His mother had brought him up to have a modicum of propriety, so he reminded himself that Dumbledore his sometime emotional blackmailer, had a knack for looking for the best in people. There, that was charitable enough.

'Too right, Missy,' answered the squib in a shaky voice brimming with emotion. 'He gave me a place in a world. He didn't cast me out. He was good to me. Merlin knows what will happen to me and Snape here if he didn't take us in.'

'Please,' protested Severus with a heavy scowl. 'You make us sound like stray kittens.'

'Easy for you to say,' hollered Filch, slamming his mug of ale down on the table violently. 'You're established now with your fancy Cambridge Fellowship. What about me, I ask you? You know how people like me are looked upon in society.'

Hermione and Severus exchanged intelligible glances. Oh yes, they knew how the Potter administration viewed squibs. Although the reprehensible policy of a pure-blooded wizarding Britain of the Voldemort era had been abolished, there was now a new subtle kind of discrimination in place. Where previously Muggle-borns were weeded out, now the non-functional members of wizarding were targeted. Hermione who had faced the bigotry of the pure-blood campaign (her exceptional ability notwithstanding), and Severus who had experienced the anti-Death Eater campaign at the beginning of the Potter Administration (his loyalty to Dumbledore's cause to overthrow Voldemort notwithstanding) both could readily enter in Filch's feelings of insecurity and fear.

'There, there,' cooed Hermione as she would to a child who had lost his mother at the shopping centre. On handing him a packet of tissue paper so that he could dab his tears, she continued, 'I understand how you feel. Professor Dumbledore was a friend to Professor Snape and to me. Why don't you tell us what you saw, and maybe we will find the person who did such a horrible thing.'

Filch wiped his eyes on the back of hand and blew his nose loudly into a piece of tissue paper.

'Tell us... no, better yet, show us, how and where you discovered his body,' Hermione added.

Filch nodded and their party Apparated to Merton College. The manservant and former caretaker of Hogwarts led the way towards the chapel of the wizarding division of the school and past the corridors to Dumbledore's rooms. Outside the door of his former employer, the squib paused.

'Each morning, I came here to rouse and dress Professor Dumbledore,' he began.

Severus scowled heavily in impatience. 'And on that morning? Take us through the events when you found him dead.'

'I came up to the door. It was locked and shut up. That was strange. I knocked and not being able to get any answer, I went to a side window.'

At this revelation, the two former Unspeakable Unspeakables exchanged an intelligible glance.

'Are you trying to say, man, that you did not possess the key to Dumbledore's chamber?'

'No,' said Filch, nervously wringing his hands. 'There was only one key and Dumbledore always kept it himself.'

Hermione looked straight into Filch's eyes. 'You intimated that it was unusual in the extreme for him to lock his door.'

'So the door was locked!' Severus interjected, tracing his lower lip with a tapered finger in thought. 'You say you went to a window. Was it open?'

Uncertain what to make of that question, Filch looked to Hermione who nodded for him to answer. 'It was closed.'

'Warded?' asked the Alchemy professor in a slight bark.

Filch hesitated, his eyes darting from one investigator to the other. Severus, using the skill he had developed as a spy and double agent, swooped down on him and inched his face close to the caretaker's. That further disconcerted Filch, for he swallowed hard and sputtered, 'I... had to smash the glass to open it and squeeze in.'

'Go on,' encouraged Hermione with a hand on his shoulder and a mighty glare of disapproval at her colleague. 'What did you see inside?'

'I saw him hanging on the beam,' gasped Filch in horror as he recalled the incident.

'Where?' Severus snapped. 'Show us.'

Filch opened the door and conducted them into a spacious chamber which had been Dumbledore's living quarters and study. He pointed up to the rafters at the roof. Great beams of wood at 2.7 metres from the ground crossed the room.

'That one,' said Filch in a strangled voice as he pointed unsteadily at a beam 'The one near the bed. He was hanging from it. a rope was twisted round it and one end was tied in a noose around his neck like the show executions of years ago. I remember thinking he had been dead for and so I went to get Chancellor Flitwick.'

The two investigators looked at each other one frowned and began pacing the room, the other rubbed his jaw thoughtfully.

'Did you search the room?' Severus asked casually.

'My thoughts were to tell the Chancellor the news so that he would get the Aurors.'

Hermione tilted her head up to study the beam where Dumbledore was allegedly hung and spun around to face Filch. 'You said the door was locked. Was the key on the inside?'

The withered old man shook his head slowly as if the oddity of that which had just crossed his mind had suddenly dawned upon him. 'There was no sign of the key. I had to squeeze back out of the window. The wizarding smithy then came and picked the warded lock when Chancellor Flitwick arrived. It was the missing key that confirmed Chancellor Flitwick in his theory that thieves had done the deed, locking Dumbledore in his own room after they had hanged him.'

Severus examined the lock and felt the vibration of magical energy where it had been picked. There was little else to decipher from it, except that the lock had not been forced and the spell on the door had not otherwise been tampered. As he moved to the window, Hermione went to the bed and gazed up. She frowned and called out to him but he was not attending to her. He was preoccupied with examining the broken glass and the scrayaching on the frame which might have been made by a body pushing through the aperture. That much was certainly consistent with Filch's story, so he turned his attention to his colleague. 'What is it, Dr Granger?'

'The beam there are some scoring on it,' she said simply. On leaving the alchemist to examine it, she directed the following question at Filch, 'Is the bed in the same position?'

'Eh?' croaked the old man. 'Methinks it is.'

She made some mental Arithmantic calculations and nodded to herself. 'Let me get this straight,' she continued, staring unblinkingly at Filch. 'You say that the door was locked and there was no key in the lock on either side of the door? You also say that the window was secured and to gain entry to the room, you had to break in from the outside?'

'Yes,' confirmed the squib.

'What do you make of it, Professor Snape?' she queried, directing her gaze to his thoughtful expression at the beam from which Dumbledore was found to be hanging. 'We know that the wards had not been meddled with, and now there appears to be a locked room mystery on our hands.'

He smirked absently more to himself than her. 'It just means the game is just beginning. It's all about the *Joseki*, as a witch reminded me.'

After a brief harrumph at his opaque comment, Hermione returned to her questioning of Filch. 'Let me put this question to you, as Professor Snape and I have put to Chancellor Flitwick: He forwarded a theory that Professor Dumbledore was disturbed by footpads in the night. He went to the chapel to investigate. They overpowered him, brought him back here, hanged him and then robbed him. Do you see anything amiss with this course of events?'

Filch looked distinctively uncomfortable. 'I don't understand.'

Hermione made a tsk-tsk sound, folded her arms and tapped her foot on the ground in exasperation. 'Come now, Mr Filch. You have been his helper ever since he retired from the Ministry and suffered from ill-health. You helped rise in the morning and had to accompany him on his duties lest he collapses. Would such a frail, old, sickly wizard suddenly jump up from his bed in the dead of the night and trundled off to face marauders? And why would these same marauders bring him back here to hang him? All they would have to do was cast some spell on him if they are wizards or knock him unconscious if they were non-magical. They would not have to kill him in this elaborate manner. All they would have to do is render him beyond hindrance to them.'

'That is not for me to say, Dr Granger,' stammered Filch, lowering his eyes to the ground. 'If the Chancellor says so, and the Ministry report by the Great Leader and the Aurors say so, it is not for me to say...'

She cut into his explanation, taking in his flustered expression. 'We know what the Chancellor said. We are also fully aware of what the Ministry thinks. I want to know what you say.'

'It is not for me to question the Ministry's report. The Great Leader wrote it himself. He and the Aurors came to their conclusion after making strenuous inquiries.'

It was Severus's term to be annoyed now and he glided towards Filch, took him firmly by the shoulders and shook him firmly. 'Of whom, other than yourself, could the Ministry make such inquiries?'

'It was Dr Penelope Clearwater of the Charms department who told the Ministry and the Chancellor about the itinerants,' revealed Filch.

'Then bring her here!' hissed both investigators waspishly in perfect unison.

As Filch scurried off, Severus turned his attention to the chamber and Hermione wandered around the chamber. In their respective corners of the room, they looked over the manuscripts, books and wizarding paraphernalia that lined the walls. Dumbledore had indeed been a keen scholar in transfiguration and the other magical arts. There were books on every possible wizarding subject in nearly every language imaginable.

'Do you notice something strange?' asked Severus, breaking the silence.

'Everything is too neatly arranged,' she concurred. Dumbledore was not for being a methodological and tidy person, and it did strike her as odd that even his desk was clean and free from books. 'The place after the Aurors had completed their investigation.'

She made her way to the desk and lightly touched the vellum and quills Dumbledore would have sat writing textbooks on transfiguration. Now his voice and his presence in the wizarding world would be heard no more. His death at the hands of so-called thieves had robbed wizarding Britain of one of its greatest innovators and leaders. How could anyone be satisfied with the Ministry report? Hermione glanced down at the vellum and frowned. 'Severus,' she called out, 'Here's something else that's strange. The parchment is pristine.'

'That's nonsense!' he replied, loping his way towards her. 'He was always writing down some crackpot idea whatever his health and state of senility.' He frowned when he saw that his colleague had spoken the truth. Everything on the desk from the papers to the quills were laid out too neatly. They were too carefully placed and too much in order.

'Another curious thing has surfaced,' commented Hermione, when her wandering eye caught something on a nearby shelf.

Severus looked up to see her biting her lip in consternation with her head cocked to one side. He followed her gaze and found it levelled at a small sheepskin-bound book on the shelf nearest to the desk. There appeared to be something tucked inside the book and it had just jutted out above the pages.

'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' she enquired, reaching forward and drawing out the book.

His lips curled into a catlike smirk. 'That the book is incongruous. Why would a slip of parchment be sticking out of a book when everything else was so neat and tidy? That very untidiness ruins the prospect.'

'Precisely,' she murmured. The slip of parchment fluttered awkwardly in her hands and made a slow glide to the floor.

Both the arithmancer and the alchemist bent down to retrieve it. As they did so, they noticed something protruding behind one of the stout legs of the desk. Hermione flicked her wrist in the direction of the desk and picked up the parchment. Severus grumbled at being ordered about and eased the object from its hiding place.

'Well, well,' he purred in faint interest. 'We have a cold, greasy iron key.'

Hermione leaned over his shoulder and propped her chin there, staring at the object in his hand. 'Let's try the door,' she suggested, rising purposefully before he could protest her blatant use of a part of his body.

A long suffering sigh later, Severus joined her at the door. To neither of their astonishment, the key fitted into the lock. Hermione uttered a pensive 'hmmm' and he raised a brow when he turned the key slowly in the lock.

'You know what this means?' he said, pocketing the key.

'Massive government conspiracy in this cover-up?' she replied, studying the piece of parchment. It was a brief note. A half constructed paragraph that was it. It read: *The administration should know that the truth and acceptance of that truth is the only means of ensuring the survival of our world. By despising the other sectors of the wizarding world that are not deemed profitable or useful to society or the economy, and by disavowing their existence, we will simply teach this and future generations to despise our beliefs and way of life.*

Hermione handed the note to Severus and frowned once again. Before she could ask him for his opinion as to its meaning, a voice intruded into the room.

'You asked for me?'

The academics-turned-investigators turned around and saw a thin, auburn haired witch with thin lips staring pointedly at them.

Severus pocketed the piece of parchment before addressing the new arrival. 'Dr Clearwater,' he began, not bothering with pleasantries. 'We were told that you informed the Chancellor about the itinerants camping in the woods near the river on the night of Dumbledore's death.'

Penelope Clearwater nodded readily. 'I did. I had noticed them, in fact, a day before the tragic occurrence. I merely thought they were squib beggars, or wizards who had been stripped of their wands and forced to beg for alms and employment. I don't see why the Ministry doesn't execute the lot of them. No one would employ those wretches or go near them with any charity in mind anyway. They are an eyesore to the community.'

'The wizarding community would be too small to warrant a Ministry if we executed the lot of them,' sneered Hermione coldly. Clenching her fists into angry balls to contain her anger at this parroting of official Ministry lines, she would have harangued Dr Clearwater had Severus not stayed her by playing a steadying hand on her shoulder.

'Indeed,' sniffed Dr Clearwater dismissively.

'What made you think they were responsible for the theft and murder of Albus Dumbledore?' asked Severus quickly before Hermione could give the head of the Charms department a severe tongue lashing.

Dr Clearwater shrugged as if it were a matter of little importance. 'Who else but desperate elements of our society would commit such a dastardly act against one of the greatest wizards in our time?'

'Are you so sure that these "desperate elements" would kill when all they wanted was food and warm clothing?' responded Hermione waspishly, much to Severus's amusement.

Dr Clearwater shrugged disinterestedly again. 'No well-adjusted individual in our world who is one with the ideals set down by the wizarding state would dare deprive our world of a brilliant wizard, especially one who was as elderly, frail and senile as Dumbledore had become in recent years. It is a well-known fact that squibs and wandless wizards are willing to do anything to bring the rest of us down.'

'I think you should learn to separate propaganda from fact,' Hermione said coldly.

'The truth is that they have robbed and killed in this case,' riposted a frosty Dr Clearwater.

Severus interjected at this point in a low purr, 'Now is not the time for a political discussion. Dr Clearwater, is there any proof that these itinerants robbed from the wizarding chapel?'

'The proof is that an icon of St Lucy and two gold chalices from the altar are gone. The proof is that Dumbledore's silver goblet for the high table has also gone. The proof is that Dumbledore's jewelled magnifying glass is gone. The proof is that Dumbledore was found dead hanged. The proof is that the former Death Eaters remain loyal to their Lord's cause even though they are now wandless. Emboldened by the Ministry's decision not to put them to death, they continue Voldemort's policy of eliminating the old ways through defacing the wizarding shrines and stealing from the chapel. This persistent perpetuation of Voldemort's policy is behind Dumbledore's death. The proof is there if you are willing to see it,' snorted Dr Clearwater in disdain at the investigators.

'But nothing you have said is proof that these itinerants were the culprits,' Severus pointed out in a low, quiet voice. 'Is there any proof that is absolute?'

'These undesirables were camping in the woods near the river across the university. They were there on the day before Dumbledore's death.' Dr Clearwater wrinkled her nose scornfully at the thought of this underclass of wizarding society. 'On the morning that Dumbledore was discovered and the items were declared missing, I told the Chancellor, the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory and the Minister of my suspicions and was sent to observe these savages and retrieve the chapel's valuables. But they had gone when I returned to the area. To me, that is proof that guilt made them hurry away from the scene of the crime. As former Death Eaters, I expect them to be smart enough to know that they should not return to the scene of the crime. I did find the leader in charge of that motley community though and he said he would help as if.'

'It is circumstantial proof only and that is not absolute proof in law. Did you inform the leader of these itinerants of your suspicions?' Hermione harrumphed, folding her arms.

'He said everyone was accounted for and that no one did the deed. Lies, of course,' said Dr Clearwater with great conviction.

Noticing that Hermione's eyes had darkened in rage, Severus saw that it was best to drop the issue of the itinerants for the time being. 'Did anyone observe anything strange during the night when these events allegedly occurred?'

Dr Clearwater shook her head firmly with a defiant toss of her hair. 'The only person who must have been roused by the undesirables was poor Dumbledore.'

It was now Severus's turn to be put out and he narrowed his eyes on hearing his former employer and emotional blackmailer being called 'poor'. Hermione had mastered her emotions by this time and could look coldly at her former schoolmate. 'Does it not seem strange to you,' she began in a slow and deliberate voice, 'that an elderly wizard, who was getting increasingly frail with illness and dementia would be the only one disturbed during the night?'

'Haven't you noticed the obvious?' Dr Clearwater looked down her nose at Hermione. 'This chamber is next to the chapel. Dumbledore always kept late hours while working. There is nothing strange about anything.'

'What about the fact that Chancellor Flitwick's chambers are next door to Dumbledore's?' enquired Severus. 'Why should one wizard hear something and the other not?'

'The Chancellor is a sound sleeper,' answered Dr Clearwater simply.

'By that statement, you imply that Dumbledore is not a sound sleeper,' Hermione pointed out with a knowing smirk.

'I do not understand.'

Both investigators exchanged glances at her apparent confusion as if to say that they had uncovered yet another clue.

The alchemist decided to seize the opportunity afforded by Dr Clearwater's confusion and cracked what could pass for a forced smile. 'No matter. When was it discovered that the artefacts were stolen?'

'Filch discovered the body of Dumbeldore and raised the alarm. A search was made and the cups were found missing.'

'And no physical or magical damage was done in the chapel nor this room before Mr Filch had to break in?' queried Hermione in an ironic lilt.

'None,' replied Dr Clearwater, licking her lips as though she was mentally deciding what she should next say. 'As far as I am aware, there was no damage to anything. Had there been, it might have roused the transfiguration staff and the Chancellor, and we might have saved Dumbledore.'

Severus curled his lips contemptuously as he mused on that which had just been revealed. 'Tell me, was Dumbledore known in Cambridge as an exceptionally tidy person?' he asked, knowing full well that the contrary was the case.

Dr Clearwater blinked at the abrupt change of question, uncertain as to what should make of her former potions master. 'He was not especially so. It is a well-known fact.'

Severus gestured broadly to the room and his eyes glittered as he affected a nonchalant look. 'Was this how the chamber was found?'

'Obviously not,' sniffed she laboriously. 'It has been tidied after his body was removed. I think that his papers were tidied and his clothes put away until it was decided what should be done with them.'

'Which house elf did the tidying?' quizzed Hermione, inclining her head forward in interest.

Dr Clearwater's eyes widened slightly in surprise as if an utterly ludicrous question had been put to her. 'Chancellor Flitwick himself.'

The alchemist and the arithmancer exchanged another intelligible glance. One shook his head and the other sighed. 'That is all, Dr Clearwater,' they announced.

Hermione hesitated a moment after Penelope Clearwater had left, and looked at the area where Dumbledore would have been working, examining the books and papers carefully. 'What now? There appears to be some kind of cover-up by both the Ministry and the University.'

'We uncover the truth,' he said simply, tracing his lips musingly. 'This is like an elaborate game of Go; the black player thinks he has the advantage of moving first, but we shall see. Come, let's go to the chapel. We might find something else to aid our game play.'

Footnotes:

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up. It may be disturbing but I assure you, I write what I know.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story *Christmas Presents Undisguised*, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

Joseki is a set pattern of moves in Go that brings benefit to both sides. Like chess openings, although it benefits both players, it can benefit one player over another if play is extended.

St Lucy was mentioned in chapter 4 of *Christmas Presents Undisguised* as the Muggle patron saint of blindness and wizarding saint of foresight. She is traditionally depicted as balancing two eyeballs on a scale, make what you will on that.

My beta also alerted me to the fact that my use of "Enquire" as opposed to "Inquiry" may throw some readers off. The way I use it is as follows:

"Inquiry" is to investigate something. Example: The auditors launched an inquiry into the state of the company's financial situation.

"Enquire" is to ask (a question). Example: May I enquire whether Malaysian Airlines flight 8 has arrived?

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 6

In which our sleuths find themselves furnished with some news which may or may not be the truth.

Author's note: I own nothing, and just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

As to why the world is the way it is in this story, please c/f to author's note in chapter 1.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery on which it are based are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 4

They left Dumbledore's chamber and went into the Merton College wizarding chapel. It was small and possessed a few icons of the sainted wizarding few. Two candles burnt on the altar, which was strangely empty. A roughly smelted pewter chalice had been positioned in obvious replacement of the stolen ones. The investigators examined the interior of the chapel for a few minutes before deciding that it would tell them nothing. They then left the wizarding chapel and paused for a moment in the central courtyard looking at the buildings and judging their position to the chapel. Again, it merely confirmed that which Filch and Dr Clearwater had revealed, namely Dumbledore's chamber was closest to the chapel.

Hermione was frustrated and plainly told her companion so when a gaggle of students emerged from the transfiguration lecture hall at Merton College. 'There is something that isn't right at all, but I can't put my finger on it.'

'Then think simply,' he offered sardonically, stuffing his hands in his pockets to render himself more streamlined and thereby minimise any contact with laughing and happy students. 'You may just bang your head on it.'

'That's not funny,' she said, struggling to keep up with his long strides as they persisted in going against the sea of human traffic.

'I am not trying to be facetious,' he answered, but on hearing no reply he darted his eyes quickly to either side of him. He could not help but roll his eyes as he stopped in his tracks. A few seconds was all it took for her to catch up with him, and when she did so, he automatically jutted an elbow out to her.

It was a gesture she had come to appreciate in her acquaintanceship with him, and she accepted the use of his elbow gratefully.

'Why do you always get borne away by crowds? Haven't I told you my arm is at your service?' he muttered lowly so that he was barely audible above the chattering of the students.

'At my service only in a mad crush of people,' riposted Hermione, holding on tightly to her perch at his elbow.

Looking up at the heavens in the hope of finding a suitable reply to her sally and finding none, he looked to the throng of students around them. The wizarding students knew the identity of the two academics by reputation, and most of them either avoided the eyes of the two professors or nodded greetings to them, each according to their characters. The pair stopped when they came to river Cam closest to the Transfiguration department. There was a small woods in the area, and nothing to contradict the idea that a band of thieves could easily have infiltrated the Transfiguration department at Merton and entered the chapel. A short distance away from the woods was a small hill where there was a clearing. It was there that Dr Clearwater had indicated that the alleged undesirable elements of wizarding society congregated. It was in that direction that Hermione and Severus moved towards. Their movement was purely automatic; after all, it was not as though they expected to find any evidence in the remains of the itinerant camp. It was more of an opportunity to walk and think over matters.

They had barely crossed the river when Severus noticed a figure a short distance behind them. He alerted his companion to the fact that they were being followed and she turned her head to the side. She saw a figure moving behind one tree to another in a manner that would have passed for surreptitious were it not so ridiculously executed. Upon exchanging a nod, they increased their speed imperceptibly up the path into the woods and entered it quickly. The path immediately opened on to the clearing where it was obvious that there had been an encampment not too long ago. There were signs of a fire, the grey ashes spread in a circle, and some of the ground had been turned by the shuffling of human feet. The investigators were in the process of sitting on a log when a voice cried out, 'You won't find anything here.'

Severus and Hermione turned and regarded the ginger red hair and greenish-blue eyes of Ginny Weasley.

Though Severus scowled at the unwanted presence of the newcomer (whom he considered an intruder), Hermione inclined her head forward into a nod of acknowledgement and invited the youngest Weasley of her generation to join their party. 'How may we help you Ginny?' Hermione asked, incurably straightforward.

'It's more whether you can help us,' Severus interjected before the interloper could speak. 'You followed us here. That can only mean you wish to talk with us. Please feel free to prove me correct.'

Long used to his acerbic wit, Hermione settled for shooting him a mock poisonous glance before turning her attention to Ginny. 'Is there something you want to tell us?'

'Dumbledore was an excellent wizard, almost as good as Harry,' said Ginny with a twitchy smile.

Hermione and Severus rolled their eyes at this. 'I think you mean Harry's almost as good as Dumbledore,' reminded the arithmancer.

'No,' Ginny insisted, her lips firmly pressed together. 'Harry is the best thing to happen to wizarding Britain.'

'The same was said about Kim Jong Il, look what that did for North Korea,' Severus muttered sotto voce, as he circled the ginger-haired witch in the standard manner approved by greasy bats everywhere prior to the beginning of a long and tedious interrogation.

That seemed to have sufficiently disconcerted Ginny, for she shuffled towards Hermione. 'I was Dumbledore's personal assistant at the Ministry. Harry asked me to continue in that capacity when Dumbledore retired here. I know things about him that most of the wizarding world doesn't.'

'And I thought the Minister was the only one who suffers from delusions of grandeur. I wouldn't have pegged his wife to be a party to such delusions. But seeing how she is a Ministry appointed personal assistant, it is only natural,' whispered Severus snidely in Hermione's ear. As soon as she quelled him with a cold look, he proceeded to direct himself at Ginny. 'Surprise us, Mrs Potter. What do you know about Albus Dumbledore that most of the wizarding world doesn't?'

'That he hungered for truth no matter if the truth was unpalatable to the world,' revealed Ginny. To her surprise, the two academics looked blankly at her.

'Most academics uncover unpalatable truths that the world cannot stomach,' replied Severus blandly. 'If memory serves me correctly, the Minister used to have a penchant for uncovering palatable truths and broadcasting them to the world. He did so in his fifth year at Hogwarts, I believe.'

'And was roundly set down by the public as a lunatic,' continued Hermione in a thoughtful voice. She knew as well as Severus that Ginny's position as a Ministry-appointed personal assistant was little more than a polite way of saying she was a spy for the Minister's Office under the Wizarding Internal Security Act. It had been part of the Minister's policy to allocate to powerful wizards and witches within the various ministry departments "personal assistants" known for their fierce loyalty to anything Potter-related. These powerful wizards and witches were deemed potentially subversive and were thus kept very close to the ministry even after their retirement from that august institution. They would be closely watched by their "personal assistants" who also vetted the bulk of their official paperwork to ensure that all they said and did were in line with the Potter Administration. These "personal assistants" would also follow the notable witches and wizards into the private sector and continue to monitor them lest they let slip some ministry secret or started thinking that their distance from the ministry granted them the latitude to espouse views contrary to the official Potter Administration proclamations.

It was only a stroke of happenstance that Severus Snape did not have such a "personal assistant" hovering around him. The Minister had thought that since his old friend, Dr Granger was also in the University of Cambridge, she would be able to report on the "potentially subversive" former Death Eater's movements to him. If he had expected any information of his former potions master and sometime adversary committing some dastardly deed or concocting a scheme to overthrow his regime, the Minister was sorely disappointed to learn that Hermione always had nothing interesting to report other than the fact that he liked South Indian curry, kept to himself and his books, and engaged in a game of Go every now and then.

Likewise, the object of this lax surveillance, Severus Snape, felt his good fortune in having Hermione as his "watcher" as he deemed her. She had revealed all that Harry had expected her to do on behalf of the administration where the alchemist was concerned. She never bothered to keep tabs on him, and had no need to. She told him she had trusted him. Besides, she had better things to do than to keep a hawk's eye on Severus. It was also a happy coincidence that her views on the Potter administration matched his own. As the alchemist reflected this, he tapped his lips lightly and ventured to press Ginny for more information. 'So Dumbledore believed that truth however unpalatable would set the academic world free from its preconceived notions. I cannot see anything egregious in that.'

'What if Dumbledore had gone one step further,' suggested Ginny with a generous toss of her hair in boredom at what she perceived to be Hermione and Severus's obtuseness. 'He believed not just in academic freedom, but in freedom of society. He believed that the truth whatever the truth was to him, even if it went against everything that was for the good of our world would set wizarding Britain free.'

'That is hardly a crime, Ginny,' answered Hermione, masking her contempt for her friend's lack of catholic thinking with a forced smile. 'Most academics want to contribute to society, but their ideas are hardly practical, let alone implementable. Most academics are idealists. Dumbledore is was an idealist.'

Ginny snorted in an unsuccessful attempt to stifle a laugh. Very soon, her rich pealing laughter filled the air. 'You? The brightest witch of our time?' she burst out chortling in amused disbelief. 'Don't you know that truth breeds hatred?'

Severus narrowed his eyes at the redhead, and placed a placating hand on his esteemed colleague's shoulders. He need not have worried. Though Hermione was none too pleased to be object of scornful laughter, she was mistress enough of herself to know that it would be utterly pointless to disabuse a person who already had deeply entrenched preconceived notions of others. Instead, she settled for following Severus's fine example and narrowed her eyes at her schoolmate. 'Was Professor Dumbledore uncovering a truth that would have caused hatred?'

'I think so,' came the ready reply.

The dark alchemist raised a contemptuous brow at the late Dumbledore's personal assistant, and Hermione noted with faint delight that no one did contempt quite as well as Severus Snape. When the faintest of knowing smirks crossed her features, he turned his gaze on her with a scowl. But long years of being his student and years of acquaintanceship with Severus had immunised Hermione to such an expression, which had always succeeded in squelching the student population into a quivering mass of meek obedience. Ginny was feeling the effects of his contemptuous brow and had just gone into the huddling-in-fear stage when Severus enquired, 'Perhaps you should tell us what you know.'

She nodded dumbly. 'I know little but I will impart to you what I know.'

Hermione, who had then settled on a fallen tree trunk, motioned for Ginny to sit next to her. 'I gather that Professor Dumbledore was working on a new tract or treatise for publication?'

'He was. I know this because I acted as his scribe. Sharpening his quills for him or getting him new ones, and mixing his inks made it easier for me to see what he wrote. As his personal assistant, it was my task not only to watch over him but to make sure that his manuscripts were properly handled, dispatched the publishers and so on. Occasionally I helped him rebind his old books in the style favoured in the Middle Ages.'

Severus and Hermione nodded at each other. Many rare and precious books in the Middle Ages were enshrined in metal boxes or were covered with plates of gold or silver, or some precious gem sewn on their leather covers. Dumbledore was known to reset the book covers of old tomes in his collection and was known to be one of the few wizards privy of this ancient special art. From Ginny's conversation, it seemed that Dumbledore had taught the art to Ginny so that she would be able to assist him. Severus flicked an impatient wrist indicating to the redhead that she should continue.

'We sometimes worked closely together and Dumbledore would often say to me that truth was the academic's food but was often bitter to the taste. Most people preferred the savoury lie.'

'Yes, yes,' hissed Severus impatiently as he glared at her. 'We know all that. Just tell us who he was annoying by his truth.'

'To be frank,' Ginny said, staring at her feet as if they were the most fascinating things in the world. 'He was annoying himself. I went into his chamber here in Cambridge once, and I was going to clear his things today, which was when I saw you and decided to tell you the little I know. As I was saying, I went into his chamber when he was alive and once saw him poring over some texts in Latin I think it was. It was all gibberish to me; I can't decipher the scripts and the glyphs.'

Instantly, the ladies were alerted to a cough from the alchemist. Hermione, who knew what that signified, indicated to Severus that he should keep his low opinions of Ginny's intellect to himself with a harrumph and nodded kindly at her friend to continue.

'I think it was in Latin. Unfortunately, I don't have knowledge of it to decipher what it said. But anyway, when I saw him at that time, he suddenly threw the book away from him, looked up from his writing and exclaimed, "Alas! The value of the well is not known until it has evaporated!" Then he saw that I had come in and smiled at me like how he used to smile at Harry and apologised for his temper. But I tell you, Hermione, it was not really temper. In all the years that I served as his personal assistant, I can tell you that Dumbledore had no temper. It looked more to me like sadness more than temper.'

'Sadness at that which he was reading?' ventured Hermione.

'No. Sadness at what he was coming to realise through his great knowledge and having lived so long,' said Ginny with conviction.

Severus, whose eyes had become veiled in thought, momentarily leaned against a tree and asked. 'Do you believe in the official Ministry report of the itinerant wandless wizards being responsible for Dumbledore's death?'

Her bluish-green eyes shimmered with unshed tears as she glanced swiftly at Hermione, then at Severus. 'I do not point fingers of accusation at anyone. As my mother frequently says the bird has little affection that deserts its own brood,' she proudly declared, her chin quivering.

Severus curled his lips in disdain at her evasion of his question. 'However, it is a given that one bird flies away from every brood. I am not asking you to desert your own brood or betray the Minister. I am asking you to help in tracking down the person responsible for Dumbledore's death.'

'As his personal secretary, you are ideally situated,' added Hermione earnestly.

'I cannot betray *that person*,' said Ginny in a small voice.

'Then you do know who it was?' asked Severus, leaning forward from his tree.

Ginny licked her lips nervously. 'I suspect but suspecting would cast doubt on the good name of Dumbledore.'

As Hermione's hand collided with her brow in exasperation and Severus frowned slightly at hearing those words, they both riposted in unison, 'I fail to understand that.'

Ginny, who obviously thought herself very clever to elicit the response that she did from the investigators, smiled. 'The explanation of every riddle is contained in itself,' she said, rising. 'Dumbledore was fond of reading the work of a blini.'

'Surely, you mean Pliny,' interjected Hermione helpfully.

'Whatever.' Ginny shrugged. 'It sounds the same to me. Something like "Historicae de Nature", I think.'

'You mean Naturalis Historia?' queried Severus for confirmation, shaking his head at the woeful butchering of the classic work by an ignorant dunderhead.

'Something like that,' nodded Ginny. 'Dumbledore once told me that he echoed Pliny in acknowledging nature's gift to humanity.'

Before either investigator could pose further questions, the ginger-haired witch Disapparated. It seemed to them that she had gone before either of them could have pointed out to Ginny that she could be ordered to explain by law under pain of fine all that she had intimated. Yet, somehow, they did not think it was appropriate (in light of her status as the Minister's wife) nor that they would have been able to discover her suspicions in that way.

They sat side by side on the log for some time, turning matters over in their minds and discussing their points of view. Severus pulled up the piece of parchment from his pocket, reread it again and frowned as he considered it carefully. When he rose abruptly to pace, Hermione saw that his mouth was set in a grim line. 'It seems whoever did Professor Dumbledore in is enjoying the protection of the ministry, otherwise there would not be this kind of a massive cover-up. It may very well be that Ginny suspects someone both powerful and dear to her. That could be why she is unwilling to do anything.'

'The black player may have had the advantage of beginning first but there is always the *komi* rule that could turn the tide of the game to the benefit of the white player,' muttered Severus obliquely as he traced his lips with his fingers. 'One *moku* is all we need, unlike the black player.'

'I speak of ministry cover-ups and you speak of *Go*, is there something you're not telling me?' quizzed Hermione.

Severus spun sharply on his heels and made his way purposefully towards the arithmancer. 'The murderer thinks this is a game, and from the way he, she or it has done it suggests that it is treating the whole issue of the murder, covering it up, and leading us around the nose while we conduct our investigation a game of strategy. *Go* is the best representation of strategy as our game earlier today must have indicated to you. Think, Hermione, think! The black player who has had the first move believes it has bested us. It allows part of its territory to die on the board so as to give us false hope that we have managed to uncover part of whatever it is doing.'

'You should know you are speaking of the perpetrator as an object,' she pointed out, flicking a dismissive wrist.

He caught the hand that she had used to pooh-pooh his theory. 'Recall, if you will, our game of *Go* this afternoon. Doesn't it strike you that we are playing against a player who seeks to recklessly place us in permanent *atar*?'

'What do you suggest we do then?' she challenged, her eyes flashing when he did not relinquish the grip on her wrist. 'We go in any deeper into this investigation and if that whom we suspect is true, it will be out heads on the platter!'

'We play just as the black player has played. We let it think it has outfoxed us. We voluntarily give up territory on the board to control the centre of the board,' he hissed, meeting her glare with a penetrating glower as he inched his face closer.

'Make up your mind, Severus!' she snapped, jabbing at his nose with a finger from her free hand. 'You speak of *Go* as if it were philosophy. This case can't be a stratagem revolving around philosophy.'

'*Go* mirrors philosophy, if you haven't already noticed! The mention of Naturalis Historia hints at that. We need to have some idea of why we are playing *oljibseki*. Old

joseki is like philosophy. We will prove to the black player that It cannot sustain its game play and win. Look at life,' began Severus. 'It is built by human ambition, innovation and skills. Go is meant to be played innovatively, skilful and with just a hint of ambition. The implications of this on modern existence should disturb you.'

'I am disturbed enough living under this kind of wizarding administration; and presently, I am disturbed with you. Will you let go of my wrist!'

He did so and flopped angrily down on the log next to her. 'We are living in some political scientists would call a soft-authoritarian state. The Ministry has rules, regulations and so on for nearly every aspect of our lives. That entails going into society and compelling the people therein to be like the head of the Ministry and his policymakers. It is tantamount to teaching the young people in our world that all paths leads to a single mode of thought and way of living that will be common to everyone. Such a system cannot sustain itself.'

A gust of wind blew by and Hermione shivered while tilting her head to the side with a speculative look. 'You seem to be saying that Harry wants politics to have the character of a certain kind and of that kind alone without the improvements that it may receive from external sources, namely the citizenry.'

'So you do see!' Severus answered, handing her the gloves he fished out of his pockets. 'The Minister thinks he is doing all he kind for the good of the wizarding population by rendering everything uniform. In so doing, he forgets that the members of society whether wandless wizards, squibs or people like us are our own people separate and individual. The kind of politics of the current ministry entails large-scale cooperation with the network from the Aurory, the "personal assistant" spies and what have you.'

'That does not sound like a bad thing,' Hermione rejoined, 'if anything, it smells like cooperation. I cannot think of cooperation as a bad a thing.'

Severus pinched his nose and held her curious gaze, 'Too much cooperation is a bad thing. When men cooperate, they become dangerous. When men cooperate their ambitions know no bounds. Human aspiration as the biblical Tower of Babel story evinces is dangerous. It leads to conquests and it cannot hold an empire or a government together. Do we really know for certain that the Minister can resolve all the wizarding world's problems through the auspices of his own reason and his team of trusted doers?'

'All right, I conceded that progress seems to be hand-in-glove with destructiveness, but I don't see how this has any connection to why we should proceed in this as you did with a stone in *hiraki*.'

'The ambition to create is accompanied by the ambition and the capacity to destroy. We have come a long way from our past where we had poor sanitation and all that, but our ability to destroy has also increased. It should chill your soul when the Minister espouses the belief that we can create whatever we want to if we come together for the sake of preserving his government in his speeches. Can we really help ourselves when we come together, or will we end up destroying ourselves?'

Hermione's eyes lit up. 'You mean to say that if the murderer and the people covering up for him or her continue to place us in permanent *atari*, they would destroy themselves?'

'Precisely,' Severus intoned lowly. 'Look at the way they put obstacles in our way while granting us leave to investigate they are sure of themselves. They are moderately successful for they have momentarily confounded us. But that only emboldens them, and as a result, their ambition rises, and they try to push us into a corner. Why do they so? Because their ambition is accompanied not just destructiveness but the desire for recognition. However, they will not expect us to go through with the investigation and check this ambition.'

'Do you mean that Dumbledore...' she allowed her voice to trail off.

'Why else was he murdered?' He cracked a knowing smirk.

'Then it means...'

His lips curled faintly. 'But, of course.'

'That is shocking.'

'Such things often are.'

She looked up at the sky and sighed. 'Will you have us do what you did on the board? Place *hiraki* on the lower centre of the board and shock them till they are petrified?'

'Thereby buying us time for both a *kosumi* and a *tsuke* where we will be directly next to the murderer's next move, blocking *Itsatari*. But we will only be in position briefly so much so that It would not even know we had been near. Once there, in position, we strike,' announced he with some aplomb. 'For now, it looks like the murderer has gotten the better of us. It will rest easy tonight, expecting us to declare on the morrow our resolution to solve the case. But come tomorrow, we will be in direct confrontation with our nameless, shapeless black player.'

Footnotes:

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up. It may be disturbing but I just write what I know.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story *Christmas Presents Undisguised*, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

Naturalis Historia is written by Pliny the elder.

Komi rule In Go, black makes the first move, so black has the advantage. Since black has the advantage, white has 5 ½ moku to start with. This means if white has 50 moku on the board, black needs 56 moku to win.

Moku the point scoring in Go.

Tsuke Where you place your stone next to your opponent's stone. But the stone that you have placed can only be in contact with the opponent stone at the time it is played for it to be a *tsuke*.

Hiraki A move where you place a stone deep into unclaimed territory from an area that you can control. In so doing, you claim the unclaimed territory as your own.

Atari When you only need one more move to capture a stone, it is known as *atari*.

Joseki is a set pattern of moves that brings benefit to both sides. Like chess openings, although it benefits both players, it can benefit one player over another if play is extended.

Kosumi A standard Go response to the *keima* attack in the Edo period. It is rarely used now due to the *komi* rule. For *komi* rule, see above. But in skilled users of today, the *kosumi* is a very effective strategy.

For usage of "Inquiry" vs "Enquiry", please refer to footnote in previous chapter.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 6

Our investigators make a serious accusation and make some startling discoveries in the process.

Author's note: I own nothing, and just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

As to why the world is the way it is in this story, please c/f to author's note in chapter 1.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery on which it are based are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 5

The next morning, Severus and Hermione retraced their steps to Chancellor Flitwick's office. The Chancellor was seated at his desk and looked up in annoyance as they entered.

'Have you two finished your investigation yet?' came the inevitable question.

'Not as yet,' replied Severus, and without waiting to be asked, sat down with Hermione.

A frown crossed the Chancellor's brow but before he could admonish the pair before him, Hermione cut in with a bored voice, 'I would remind you that Professor Snape and I are former Unspeakable Unspeakables and are considered advocates of law under the Potter government. So if you are about to lecture us on protocol for calling on you before you are ready to face the world, do not bother.'

Unused to being spoken to in such a manner by Hermione, Flitwick swallowed hard, evidently caught off guard by the harshness of her tone. As it transpired, he had, indeed, been about to point out that a mere associate professor and a lowly assistant professor were not allowed to sit in the presence of a University Chancellor without being invited.

'You are a clever wizard, Chancellor,' Severus suddenly began, but in such a manner that Flitwick missed the patronising bite in his voice.

The Chancellor settled for staring at the two investigators before him, not knowing how to interpret their words.

'We need your advice,' continued Hermione with a forced smile.

Flitwick shifted his weight in his chair, bewildered by the pair's abrupt and constant changes of attitude towards him.

'I will be happy to help.'

'Nothing much, Chancellor,' said Severus blandly. 'It's just that you have been able to reason out an explanation to a matter which is beyond both our understanding.'

'As such,' Hermione interjected, 'We would like you to explain it to us.'

'I will do my best.'

'Excellent,' nodded Hermione to Severus. 'Tell me, Professor Flitwick, how these itinerants were able to overpower and hang an ailing, old, frail wizard in his chamber...'

'And leave the room, having secured the window on the inside,' ventured Severus quietly.

'And locking the door behind them, leaving the key in the room?' Hermione went on with a little smile playing on her lips.

Chancellor Flitwick stared at them in astonishment for a while, his puzzled eyes fixed on the pair. Then, when he had collected himself, he began to chuckle, 'You have been misinformed. The key was never found. The undesirables must have taken it with them, as suggested in the Ministry report.'

'We were told that there was only one key to Dumbledore's room, which he kept himself. Is that correct?' queried Severus in the same even, quiet tone.

Flitwick nodded slowly. 'There was no other key. The wards to repel those whom Albus did not recognise were still in place. Our smithy had to pick the lock and un-ward the chamber for us to gain entrance into the room.'

Hermione opened her handbag, reached into it and gently placed the key before him. 'We tried it on Professor Dumbledore's lock, and wonder of wonders it works. We found the key on the floor behind his desk.'

'How can that be? I don't... that is, I can't... Why?' The Chancellor stumbled over his words.

The two investigators curled their lips sharply into smiles.

'Somehow I didn't think you would be able to offer any explanation,' said Severus coolly.

Flitwick ran a distracted and shaky hand through his hair, choosing to remain silent.

'Where are the writings Professor Dumbledore was working on before he was murdered?' pursued Hermione.

'Destroyed,' Flitwick replied limply in a colourless voice.

'I told you so,' purred Severus to his colleague, who rolled her eyes. 'Tell me, Chancellor, did you destroy them?'

'I own up to that responsibility,' swallowed the diminutive wizard.

'You must have hated what he had been writing to have destroyed them,' Hermione said softly.

'I did not hate Albus. He was just... misguided, shall we say. As he became increasingly misguided, the more difficult he became, and more stubborn too. Ask Harry Potter. Even Ginny Weasley-Potter who worked closely with him, refused to help him rebind a book or cast a mould for a bookplate which carried a classical Latin title because she thought Albus had misinterpreted it.'

Hermione and Severus exchanged a quick, surreptitious glance on hearing that piece of information, but managed to keep straight faces in front of Flitwick.

'So, you felt that Dumbledore was so very "misguided" that you had to destroy his work?' queried Severus, an edge of embittered annoyance creeping into his tone.

'You do not understand,' Flitwick cried out.

'We are all academics in this room,' Hermione said testily. 'What can you say about another academician's writings that will leave us scratching our heads in incomprehension? I already think we do understand it.'

Flitwick sighed. 'I doubt it. You could not. You would not. Albus Dumbledore was like a father to wizarding Britain before the Potter administration took over. He is venerated for that role; and his behind-the-scenes work for the Harry Potter government. He had always protected young Harry and our world has applauded him for doing so. I was protecting Albus. I was protecting his reputation!'

As Severus raised a brow in disbelief, Hermione rolled her eyes with a light shake of her head.

'It is the truth,' insisted Flitwick vehemently, jumping on his seat. 'Those papers on which he was working, I hoped he would never release to the world. He was the great thinker and shaper of our world. He had groomed Harry Potter to defeat Tom Riddle and lead wizarding Britain into a new epoch of peace and development, and yet he grew senile and began to doubt Harry and his policies.'

'In what way was he senile?' enquired Hermione.

'What other reason was there for his doubt of Harry, especially after his defeat of Riddle and rebuilding our world? When I reproved Albus for his doubt, he told me that one must question even the Minister of Magic and the Sainted Few, and their purpose on this mortal plan. According to him, the Minister of Magic should want to serve all of humanity, and as such, the Minister, should be like the Sainted Few before him, approve of the homage of reason and truth, rather than fear born out of ignorance or a desire for more power.'

Severus tapped a thoughtful finger on his cheek and Hermione shook her head ruefully.

'Indeed, he was a wise old wizard,' murmured the arithmancer.

'Did you kill him for those doubts?' asked Severus, his free hand clutching to his wand just in case.

Flitwick, much affronted, sprang to his feet, his face ashen. 'What?' he protested. 'Do you accuse me of his murder? It was either suicide or the doing of the undesirables!'

'We do not believe the footpad or itinerant murder theory,' opined the alchemist.

'Neither do we subscribe to the suicide theory,' added Hermione.

The Chancellor of the wizarding division of the University of Cambridge slumped back in his seat with hunched shoulders. Guilt was written on his features as he groaned softly, 'I only tried to protect Albus Dumbledore's reputation. I did not kill him.'

'Ah,' cautioned Severus with a warning smirk, 'but you yourself have demonstrated that you have a suitable motive for his murder.'

'I did not kill him!' protested Flitwick. 'I tell you, I did not!'

Severus would have pressed his perceived advantage and shook Flitwick until he had an answer to his satisfaction, but Hermione would have none of that. She placed a gentle hand on his elbow and addressed Flitwick, 'We will leave you for a moment to reconsider your story. When we return, we want the truth.'

They turned out of his office and made their way slowly to Merton College.

'Are you certain Professor Flitwick would not have fled by the time we return?' queried Hermione slowly. 'Maybe we should have confiscated his wand. What if he attacks us when we go back?'

'I have two reasons why he would not make such foolish attempts,' explained Severus, holding out a wand that was clearly not his. 'One I have pre-empted your second hypothesis by pinching his wand that he had carelessly left on the desk while you frightened him with your questions. Two this is just our *hiraki*, if the Chancellor had indeed committed the deed and we have just confronted him with it, he would be bound to respond in some way, and that way would not be flight. That would be too simple. We have laid out psychological traps for him already, don't you see? By giving time to reflect and the opportunity to flee, we have created the illusion that we trust him to do the right thing. Secondly, by giving him time to himself to reflect upon matters, we have created the illusion that he will confess out of his own will rather than through any coercion.'

'Little does he know that we have already tried to coerce him,' Hermione smiled as they came to the Merton College wizarding chapel.

The pair had just been on the point of passing Dumbledore's door when Severus paused and inclined his head towards it. Without warning grabbed her hand and dragged her into the room as his instinct bade him. If truth were to be told, he did not know what made him enter until he saw the shelves of books. Hermione, when she had recovered from being forcefully drug into the Dumbledore's chamber, noticed her companion's steady and intent gaze at the books. Making her way across the room, she peered along the line of books until her eyes lighted upon the book where they had found the scrap piece of parchment.

'It's here,' she muttered, as her eyes rested in the book she and Severus had unconsciously been looking for. 'I found it.'

She made room for Severus on her left as she began to flip through the pages, seeking the half forgotten passage. Finally, they found the passage and read it through. The passage contained what they expected it would. They exchanged a grim intelligible look of determination before flicking their eyes around the room. She pointed the bed, and he understood. Hermione watched as Severus climbed on it and stood at the edge, reaching his hands up towards the beam above the same beam where Dumbledore had been hung. It was, for Severus, within easy arm's length. He stepped down again to the floor and frowned, wiping his hands on a handkerchief she offered.

'The chapel then,' she suggested.

Accordingly, they made their way there and stood briefly beside the door as they had done earlier. 'The only logical conclusion,' he commented.

'The most obvious place and we overlooked it,' she reproached herself as her gaze swept around the interior.

Severus, who appeared to be guided some intuition, stalked up to the altar and went down on his hands and knees, but it was not to pray. He bent forward and lifted an edge of the drape across the altar.

A low gasp escaped Hermione as she saw what was hidden therein. Beneath the altar stood a silver goblet and two gold chalices; in one of them, was Dumbledore's gem-

encrusted magnifying glass, in the other, was the icon of Saint Lucy, whose halo was done up in gold leaf. Severus reached forward and took them out. Together, the academicians-turned-investigators regarded them for a moment before one heaved a sigh and the other narrowed his eyes.

Gathering the bounty in their arms, they retraced their steps to Chancellor Flitwick's office. He was still seated at his desk. He rose when they returned, and then his eyes fell to the objects they carried. He paled and slumped back into his seat.

'Look what we found,' began Severus silkily.

'Where... Where did you...' Flitwick stammered, trying to summon some residue of sharpness by which he hoped to control the situation.

'No, you listen,' Hermione interrupted harshly, neatly pre-empting anything he could have said. 'We told you that the itinerant undesirables breaking in and killing Professor Dumbledore and then hanging him in a room secured from the inside theory is impossible to accept.'

'Then we discovered a short while ago that you disapproved of the work Dumbledore was doing and after his death destroyed it,' contributed Severus helpfully glowering at the small wizard behind the desk. 'Tell us how these matters add up to a more reasonable explanation?'

Flitwick mopped his brow with a handkerchief. 'It was wrong to blame the undesirables. I realise that. It seemed to be the only excuse I could make. As soon as I realised the gravity of the situation, I distracted Argus Filch and the smithy, and quickly went into the wizarding chapel and removed the first things that were on hand the chalices. These I placed under the altar where you doubtlessly discovered them. I returned to Albus's room and seized the opportunity to take his silver goblet, and the magnifying glass. Then it was easy to carry through the rest. I could now claim that the chapel and Dumbledore had been robbed.

'Then you destroyed his work,' pointed out Hermione.

'I only collected the papers that Albus had been working on at the time and destroyed them lest they corrupt the minds of those loyal to the Potter administration. Surely, it was better to remember Albus Dumbledore in the vigour of his earlier years when he was not so infirm and senile, when he was in a position to conceptualise plans to defeat Riddle and install Harry as Minister of Magic? Why remember him as he was before he died a senile, old, embittered wizard filled with self-doubts?'

Severus raised a brow. 'Is that how you saw him?' he asked quietly, his eyes narrowing.

'That is how he became, and this I say even though he had been everything good and kind to me. He showed us what Riddle had done to our world. Indeed, Riddle had instituted a state of war of all against all in our society when he came to power. Under the Voldemort administration, "anything goes" as the saying went. There was no justice, and no true laws. The only means of survival was to steal and rob the Death Eaters and each other. That administration led us into a horrifying scenario of war of all against all just so that we could preserve our lives. If anything, it brought our fear of dying and dying horrifically to the fore. Albus knew this. He has often said to all of us in the Order of the Phoenix that such an administration as Riddle's was irrational. He wanted us to achieve our mutual wants, needs and desires, and showed us how we could meet those desires and so on without losing our lives. He taught us that justice means obeying a covenant, and that the only person capable of making us a covenant of peace while giving society the prosperity and stability it deserves is the Minister of Magic.'

'What if these laws are unjust?' reasoned Hermione, tapping her foot in a bid to keep in check her annoyance with Flitwick's pontificating.

'How can it be unjust?' cried the diminutive wizard. 'Under a regime like Voldemort's, we were all deprived of everything. But under Harry, and his laws, we have all that we could ever want peace, economic growth, a solid infrastructure, political stability.'

'Under a one-man government,' reminded Severus darkly.

'But don't you see? This covenant that we entered into with the Minister, that is, Harry, is a very beautiful thing. It respects our need to preserve ourselves. Indeed, Harry's policies have all justly demonstrated that in order to have the peace, stability and prosperity that we now enjoy we have to obey his laws,' Flitwick rambled on, wringing his hands.

'Instead of justice being equated with living a good and noble life, justice in the Potter administration has come to mean obeying the law^{his} law,' Hermione patiently elucidated. 'In this government, the contract between our society not to meddle in politics and the Minister will deliver the peace, stability and economic prosperity you spoke of IS the law. Have you not noticed that this covenant, as you call it, has to be policed to make sure we all stick to it? Have you not noticed that those who so much as oppose it become wandless or if they are powerful enough, retired far from the Ministry and civilisation in general, and watched by so-called "personal assistants"? Harry's government may be an agency making us perform our duties to the state and society. Yet it is all a lie. We are not his equals. Under this administration, we are constantly reminded of that. Look at the itinerant undesirables just because they are squibs and wizards who have been rendered wandless, it is assumed that they are useless members of our world, unable to contribute to our economic growth and should be left out, high and dry and starved to death. Harry has disarmed us and rendered us metaphorically wandless because his laws demonstrate that he is in a position to exploit us. He exploits our desire to avoid another war on the scale of that which we fought with Voldemort. He made us surrender all our political rights, and since he is the acknowledged hero of the war and the saviour of the wizarding world as we know it, et cetera, et cetera, we give up our political rights to him, allowing him to rule over us. After a few fancy speeches, this does come to pass. What happens? He lays down the law and we all listen. Now, what are the consequences of this? So what happens when we put down our political rights to an arbiter and permit him all the power and all the ability to regulate us? You effectively have the rule of one man. This is what our Ministry of Magic has become.'

'That is just a necessary evil if we are to continue to enjoy all that we have now under the Potter administration,' demurred Flitwick. 'If Abus Dumbledore did not approve of this coming about, he would not have endorsed Harry to become Minister. Albus put into place our present system of governance into place behind the scenes and Harry operated the machinery.'

'In so doing, it teaches wizards and witches to despise, denigrate and destroy all who are deemed "useless", "incomplete", "unable to contribute", "subversive" and "pariahs"? And what do we do? We ban some books about politics and philosophy even ancient texts on wizarding philosophy! Continuing to endorse such a state will only teach this and future generations to despise our present way of life!' Hermione burst out, slamming her palms on the desk.

The Chancellor stared at her quizzically, then at Severus. To his surprise, both were levelly scowling at him. 'How do know all that?'

Severus cleared his throat. 'You did not destroy all Dumbledore's notes. Towards the end of his life, Dumbledore suddenly began to realise the cultural and socio-political wealth he had been instrumental in destroying. It began to prey on his mind that instead of bringing peace and shaping the future of our world, he was destroying thousands of years of learning and killing the soul of political thought in wizarding Britain.'

'It is only right that texts dangerous to Harry's administration be burnt, and the undesirables expelled from our society. Who knows what havoc these dangerous elements would do to wizarding Britain!' protested Flitwick.

'To a true scholar, especially one skilled in wizarding philosophy and the development of political thought, burning and banning books would be sacrilegious. The same could be said for repressing human spirit, ingenuity, and the need to give voice to our reason,' Severus stated plainly.

'Albus was wrong,' insisted Flitwick firmly.

'The destruction of knowledge and past learning, restricting the growth and development of the human spirit and soul, are great crimes against humanity. No matter in whose name it was done,' replied Hermione impassioned. 'Professor Dumbledore saw that. He knew he was partially responsible for instituting our current state of affairs into being. He knew he was partially responsible for the crime of burning ancient texts, and encouraging the development of this police state against our culture as magical peoples and the learning of our society.'

Flitwick fell silent for a brief moment and then slowly said, 'I did not kill him. He took his own life. That was why I tried to blame the itinerant undesirables.'

To which statement, the investigators looked up calmly at him and said, 'We know you are not a murderer.'

Footnotes:

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up. It may be disturbing but I just write what I know.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story, Christmas Presents Undisguised, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

The state of war of all against war argument used herein is culled from Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) Leviathan, which forwards an absolutist theory of governance, especially government by one man. In the Leviathan, he justifies the absolute power of the sovereign. The basic premise is that men are machines who are driven by two things: (1) desire for power, and (2) fear of death. The desire for power leads to the state of nature where the life of man is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". Civilisation is, in turn, based on thus fear of death. For men are led by this overwhelming fear to construct a common, the Leviathan recommends an artificial machine for the enforcement of social rules and for the provision of security against sudden death. Why is this so? Because "covenants without the sword are but words and of no strength to secure man at all". The threat of civil war and a possible lapse into the state of nature is ever present unless men, in constructing the Leviathan, follow the logic of the geometer and institute an absolute monarch to keep the peace with a rule of iron.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 6

The final denouement to the murder mystery where everything (or almost everything) is revealed.

Author's note: I own nothing, and just happen to have the habit of borrowing characters and playing around with them.

As to why the world is the way it is in this story, please c/f to author's note in chapter 1.

Description of murder(s) and politics herein may be gory and unpalatable to readers. If blood and gore offends you, and if depictions of any kind of non-western or non-modern-democratic government offends you, this story and the original AU murder mystery on which it are based are not for you. I do not say this to alienate my readers. I am merely giving fair warning.

Politics of Academic Murder

Chapter 6

The unsettled anxiety on both the arithmancer's and alchemist's faces lifted when they Apparated to the Ministry of Magic. Where any other investigator would be pleased on solving a murder and uncovering the suspect, our pair was much chagrined by what they were about to do. After much cover-up by the Ministry of Magic, the investigation on the true nature of Dumbledore's death had finally come full circle, and our pair was now face-to-face with the person who had commissioned and endorsed final account Harry Potter. It would not be easy speaking to the Minister who had officially sanctioned the theory that itinerant undesirable elements of wizarding society had done away with the venerable Dumbledore, but the two academics managed to keep their equanimity when ushered into the Minister of Magic's office.

Upon the briefest of salutations, Hermione started the ball rolling by apprising the Minister on their findings and their late encounter with Chancellor Flitwick.

'You mean Flitwick didn't do it and that it was suicide?' exclaimed Harry in disbelief as he leaned forward in his chair. 'I was sure the undesirables had killed off Dumbledore.'

'Filius Flitwick's insistence on his innocence was confirmed by Legilimency,' admitted Severus, declining the Minister's offer of a seat and settled for leaning on the wall next to his companion and fellow academic.

'So it was suicide then?' ventured a nonplussed Harry.

Hermione, who was looking out on the London skyline from his office sighed in dissatisfaction. 'Professor Dumbledore was murdered. But not by *your* undesirables. He was murdered by a member of the Ministry and a person with whom we are intimately acquainted.'

'It's fine if the Undesirables didn't do it *this time*, but how can it be anything other than suicide? Dumbledore was hanging from a beam!' reiterated Harry, pushing his spectacles up his nose bridge.

'The Chancellor had sought to cover up what he thought was Dumbledore's suicide and hide the nature of his work. The Chancellor did not kill Dumbledore,' expounded Severus in a slow and bored voice in a manner that expressed his opinion of the Minister possessing sub-par intelligence.

'How did you realise that?' pursued Harry. 'There was little enough to go on to start with!'

'As Professor Snape and I had discovered, the thing that misled us was the fact that Professor Flitwick and the real killer both shared a fear of the nature of Professor Dumbledore's work. I dare say you would have feared his work too if you had known the nature of his current research and writings which disparaged the political philosophy of your regime.' Hermione paused and exchanged a faint ironic curling of the lips with Severus. 'When the killer struck, he or she wanted to make it appear that Professor Dumbledore had committed suicide; and in so doing, discredit him. However, Professor Flitwick, believing that Professor Dumbledore's suicide was genuine, feared that the suicide would therefore bring discredit upon both wizarding Britain and the wizarding division of the University of Cambridge. Accordingly, he then tried to disguised the perceived suicide and blame the itinerant undesirables for murder.'

'I don't follow. Who killed Albus Dumbledore then?' demanded the Great Leader, Harry Potter. 'And how? There was only one key and according to Snape, you guys said you found it in the room.'

Severus eased himself by the edge of the desk nearest to the Minister. 'Still can't follow the tapestry of this intrigue? Very well, let me first explain why Dr Granger and I do not think Dumbledore took his own life. The obvious point was that it was physically impossible for him to do so. His health had been failing for the past two years. He was old and frail, and needed help even to rise from bed and go for breakfast. I stood on the bed and reached to the ceiling beam holding up the roof. Since I am a tall person, I was able to reach it with ease. But for an elderly and frail wizard, and one who was a half head shorter than me, it was impossible for him to stand on the bed, tie the rope and hang himself.'

Hermione chose this moment to break in after nodding vigorously at her colleague's surmises. 'Yet, someone very close to Professor Dumbledore had gone to considerable and elaborate lengths to draw attention to the nature of the work in which Professor Dumbledore was then engaged. This person was so cunning as to feign approval while hinting that Professor Dumbledore was so overawed by his discoveries and regrets that he could not bear to face the fact of his complicity in the destruction of ancient texts on wizarding philosophy and political thought as well as the eradication of a society with soul, creativity and verve, that cared more for meaningful pursuits and socio-political engagement than economic prosperity. This person even said that Professor Dumbledore had approved of a quotation by Pliny, which this person cunningly left for us to find, having whetted our curiosity. The book *Naturalis Historia* contained a piece of parchment in Professor Dumbledore's hand. The killer was very cunning.'

Severus interjected at this juncture since his colleague was not getting to the point. 'Because this same book also contained a passage where Pliny famously stated, "Amid the suffering of life, suicide is the gods' best gift to men." A happy coincidence? I think not.'

'Then who murdered Dumbledore, if you two are so smart and already know everything?' snapped Harry waspishly.

'Your wife,' Hermione declared in a bored voice.

'Ginny?' Harry looked at her in amazement. 'But she was only there as Dumbledore's personal assistant, to make sure he did nothing to contrary to the policies of my government.'

'Precisely because she was his personal assistant, she knew all about his work,' lectured Severus, narrowing his eyes at the paling Minister. 'One of the mistakes Mrs Potter made was in pretending she had no knowledge of Latin when, as Chancellor Flitwick had testified, she knew enough to accuse Dumbledore of wrong interpretation.'

'But there is one thing you cannot explain,' Harry pointed out unsteadily, 'and in this your whole argument falls apart. There was only one key and that you confessed earlier to finding instead Dumbledore's room.'

Hermione smiled knowingly. 'I think you will find a second key.'

'And where will I find this key?' snapped Harry irritably, pointing a menacing finger at his old school friend.

'Please put aside your finger, Minister, it is not nice to point at a lady,' mocked Severus with scorn in his eyes and vitriol in his voice. 'The answer to your question, Minister, lies in your wife's duties as Dumbledore's "personal assistant". Or did she not report that to you?'

'On top of checking whether he was publishing seditious material and reporting his movements to me, she had to be his peon,' spat the Minister, who was evidently displeased at his wife being used in this fashion. 'She even had to help him rebind books. What has that got to with it?'

'I don't mean to be pejorative, Harry,' said Hermione with another knowing smile, 'but you don't know what occurs in the old medieval way of binding books, do you?'

'What?' His voice trembled as if he were trying his best not to scream.

'I think he doesn't know what pejorative means, Dr Granger,' sneered Severus with a mocking look in his eyes.

'Oh?' Hermione raised a brow at her colleague. 'Then I shall educate you on the book binding process. A medieval book binder makes metal book plates and book shrines, casting them from moulds in silver or gold. The whole process may be done magically save one the actually casting of the book plate. This is because the book plate may be set to magically close the book to all but its owner. In her role as overall scribe and assistant to Professor Dumbledore, and given that he had taught her how to bind and rebind the old books, it would not be beyond her capability to cast a second key, having made a mould from the first. You simply take the key and press it into wax to form the mould from which you will make your cast. Since this would be a magically bespelled key, magically creating another key would be unacceptable as the old key would be rendered null and void. This key was also bespelled by Dumbledore so that it was necessary to unlock the door. A simple Alohomora would not have worked on the door. Furthermore the wards were not undone in Professor Dumbledore's room because they had recognised her. The wards only worked to keep out visitors whom he did not know.'

Severus curled his lips disdainful at Harry. 'The key that I am now handing you Dumbledore's own key. You will note, as we did, the key was covered in grease. A search of Mrs Potter's chamber or study...'

'Or her kiln where she makes pottery for your office,' cut in Hermione. 'Or her person should bring the second key to light if she does not confess when faced with the rest of the evidence.'

'I see,' came the defeated voice of the Minister as he slumped backwards into his seat. 'I thought it was...; that it was an accident, so...'

'Still,' ventured the alchemist, 'I must say it was wrong of either you or the Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory to disguise the manner of Dumbledore's death.'

'What do you mean?' gasped Harry as he trembled in shock, his eyes widening alarmingly. 'You mean Ron assisted Ginny in the murder?'

Hermione settled into a window seat, crossing her legs and looking at Severus. 'Judging from his reaction, it seems that Ron *indeed* covered up for her.'

A nerve throbbed at the corner of his mouth. 'I will be the judge of that,' he snarled. 'Now, Minister, if you please, I need to access your memories.' Harry could only nod his assent dumbly in shock. When the task of using legilimency was done, Severus turned to Hermione. 'He's clean. It *is* Weasley.'

'It makes sense,' muttered Hermione, neatly folding her hands in her lap.

'Will you two stop talking among yourselves and tell me what is going on?' demanded Harry.

Severus spun around to face the Minister. 'Yes, gladly,' he quietly said. 'Flitwick genuinely believed that Dumbledore had committed suicide. In believing this, he thought that if news of the suicide got out, the nature of Dumbledore's work would be revealed. His rationale was, "Would you rather wizarding society know that one of its greatest movers and shakers committed suicide in protest at being responsible for the destruction of the socio-political order and the destruction of higher education?" A not altogether unsound rationale.'

'Professor Snape and I are of the opinion that it was better for British wizarding society to learn from such acts of destruction,' Hermione stated.

'I think it is a greater offence of Flitwick to fabricate false evidence,' announced Harry in his holier-than-thou speech giving tone.

'You must understand that he thought so doing would save Professor Dumbledore from condemnation,' explained the arithmancer.

'Bah!' Severus flicked a stray lock of hair away from his face. 'Had Dumbledore truly resorted to suicide, then he would have been condemned for his action what an ignoble way of dying.'

'Please don't tell me you are going to quote Martial,' pleaded Hermione with laughter in her eyes.

'Marshall? What has a military got to do with any of this?' enquired the bewildered Minister loudly.

'Don't encourage him, Harry,' cautioned Hermione with a kindly smile.

Severus took that as his cue to go ahead with that which he wanted to say. 'Not Marshall the rank, Martial the person. The lines go:

When all the flattery of life is gone,

The fearful steal away to death,

The brave however live on.'

'I don't see what this has got to do with anything?' demanded Harry, thumping his desk in frustration.

'Dumbledore was a brave man,' reasoned Severus with a narrow glare of contempt for the younger wizard. 'He would have lived to argue his case before the Wizengamot and to you if he had not been murdered.'

'But what was the case he would have argued? What did he write that was so offensive that Flitwick had to burn his papers and Ginny had to kill him?' asked Potter, his voice hoarse in desperation.

Hermione rolled her eyes and answered, 'The note we found in Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* in Dumbledore's handwriting, which read, *The administration should know that the truth and acceptance of that truth is the only means of ensuring the survival of our world. By despising the other sectors of the wizarding world that are not deemed profitable or useful to society or the economy, and by disavowing their existence, we will simply teach this and future generations to despise our beliefs and way of life.*' That in itself should tell you enough.'

'That he was opposed to your draconian policies and the way in which you manage wizarding Britain as if it were a police state. He was deeply opposed to it and a part of him regretted putting you in power and grooming you to what you are now,' Severus simply said, brushing a speck of non-existent lint from his robes. 'Flitwick burnt Dumbledore's notes to prevent a more extensive paper on this tirade against your government from getting out for fear of what you could do to the wizarding division of the University of Cambridge.'

'Ginny knows all your policies by heart and is your most fervent believer. To her, you can do no wrong,' Hermione added, as she rose from the window seat and took Severus's arm. 'She objected vehemently to Professor Dumbledore's writings and must have had an altercation with him. She must have threatened to report his "potentially subversive" writings as your government would have put it. Knowing Professor Dumbledore, his eyes would have twinkled annoyingly as he told her to do what she thought right just as he would go ahead and do that which he thought right. In her mind, Dumbledore failed to heed her reason.'

'And so, she took it upon herself to murder Dumbledore lest he make known his views to the Wizengamot, and thence wizarding society. This would give rise to much questioning over the way you have led wizarding Britain and could lead to widespread protests. If the junta in Burma are unable to quell the people who are undeterred by the high cost of getting involved in social movements, why should the people of British wizarding society? Where the people of Burma had monks playing a major role in Burma's politics because monks are traditionally considered influential community leaders, we have Albus Dumbledore,' continued Severus in his professorial voice.

'Exactly.' Hermione nodded in agreement. 'In Burma, the political behaviour of the people are in part fundamentally shaped by the socio-political character of monks, whose *dajaka* or lay disciples they are. The same may be said for us in the United Kingdom. Professor Dumbledore is to British wizarding society what the monks are to the Burmese peoples.'

'Mrs Potter must have feared something similar happening, for should the wizarding population of Britain rise up against you, you could be overthrown from power. While this would be most inconvenient to you, it would be extremely distressing to her,' Severus explained in a sneer.

'Because she would no longer be the wife of the Great Leader, enjoying all the power and privileges she now has,' Hermione concluded. 'Question Ginny and you will know this to be true.' When Harry remained dumbstruck with his head cradled in his hands, she softened her voice, 'We have concluded our investigation. All that remains for you to do is the right thing, namely

'Arrest Mrs Potter and her brother, and let the course of the law take its course,' recommended the older wizard as he bowed to the Minister.

The two former Unspeakable Unspeakables smiled sadly at Harry; rather, one smiled sadly at him, and the other looked pittingly at the man as they turned towards the door.

'Must it all come out?' called out Harry in a strangled voice. 'Must all be revealed?'

'That is for the law and the courts to decide,' replied Hermione, glancing back. 'Professor Snape and I are academics. It is not in our purview to make such moral judgements on what took place. I hope that you will do the right thing.'

As they stepped out of the Minister of Magic's office, they heard a muffled cry of dismay.

'Well,' said Severus, his visage expressionless when they stepped into the street and met with a blast of rain. 'This means I would have to flee from Britain. I doubt the Minister will let me off for insulting him this afternoon.'

'It is as if you have foreseen it,' replied Hermione, transfiguring her pen into an umbrella and opening it. 'Easter term lapses in two days, and you are free to head the alchemy school at the Paris-Sorbonne University.'

Taking the umbrella from her and checking to ensure that she was at her usual perch by his elbow, he riposted, 'The same may be said for you. I heard you have been offered an associate professorship in the *Assas* arithmancy department for the August term.'

She turned to him with a smile and huddled close to him under the umbrella. 'Touché, Severus,' she laughed. 'You were right. We did win by *onemoku*; your *hiraki* and old *joseki* paid off. You do know what this means.'

He affected a mock groan of dissent. 'I will be plagued with your company and your insistence that we compare notes of the dunderheads we teach in Paris.'

* * *

'Have you read this?' enquired Hermione, setting down her copy of the Daily Prophet to Severus as they sat outside sipping coffee before the medieval structure of the original Collège de Sorbonne.

'What?' came his terse reply. He did not look up from his marking and was still scowling over his students' papers when he continued, 'Are you going to tell me, or will I live through the happy experience of never finding out?'

The arithmancer donned her best BBC newscaster guise and began to read aloud, 'The time now is fifteen hours GMT. This is "Wizarding Britain Today", broadcasting from the basement of Bush House, London. In a surprising move, the Minister of Magic, Harry Potter, has stepped down from office and announced his retirement from politics. The news came after the verdict of guilty was issued on his wife, Ginny Weasley-Potter and his brother-in-law, Ronald Weasley, the former Deputy Commissioner of the Aurory. Mrs Potter had been apprehended two months ago for murdering Albus Dumbledore, one of the key shapers of wizarding Britain, with a modified killing curse.

'The trial, which had just concluded this morning, sentenced her to death for planning and executing a murder. With Potter no longer Minister of Magic, it is very likely that the Wizengamot will commute her sentence to life imprisonment in Azkaban instead. Her brother, Ron Weasley was sentenced to life imprisonment for the charges of colluding to make the murder resemble a suicide by hanging the body from the ceiling, publishing a false report on Dumbledore's death, and hiding the truth from Minister Potter. As it surfaced in the trial, Dumbledore's murder stemmed from Mrs Potter's fear that he would stir dissent in her husband's administration and undo all the good he has done therein for our society. Some of Dumbledore's secret papers uncovered in the course of the trial revealed that he had become disillusioned with the Potter administration and its severe curtailment of socio-political freedoms.'

'The various social movements in wizarding Britain rallied around this fact and had called for the Minister to resign, and resign he did today in a press conference immediately upon the verdict of his wife's trial. Harry Potter, former Minister and saviour of the British wizarding society expressed his wish to retire to a cottage in Ayr, Scotland where he would be able to visit his wife frequently should her sentence be commuted to life imprisonment at Azkaban. Fresh elections for the position of Minister of Magic will be held in three month's time. In the meantime, wizarding Britain will be administered by a caretaker government formed from members of the Wizengamot.'

'You could have made broadcasting your alternative career choice,' muttered Severus sotto voce as he replaced his students' scripts in his bag and looked up at his companion.

'Not stimulating enough, I'm afraid.' The arithmancer rewarded him with a grin as she tossed the newspaper in her capacious book bag.

He responded by drinking deeply from his coffee cup. 'That's over, thank goodness.'

'While all seems to have ended well, I am disturbed that no one suggested Potter had colluded with Ginny and Ron to keep the murder under wraps,' Hermione ventured, pinching her nose to stifle a sneeze. 'A part of me suspects that he did know the published report on Dumbledore's death was not all it seemed. Yet despite suspecting so, he endorsed the slipshod account. Was he trying to protect Ginny or was he trying to protect Ron?'

'Very likely both,' he said evenly, rising and straightening the scarf around his neck. 'Very likely, he suspected one of them but did not want to know which. That he had already suspected foul play, I do not doubt. I rather like to think he chose to be a mystery even to himself.'

'You're being cryptic again,' Hermione chided him on taking his arm.

'I am always cryptic. It comes from playing *Go* all the time with a person favouring the new *joseki*,' he purred with a smirk. 'Shall we go to Carrefour then? There's a sale on Portobello mushrooms and I have a sudden craving for your cream of mushroom soup.'

The only reply nearby pedestrians would have heard was his rich laughter in the air and the sounds of Hermione's smart smacks on his arm.

~Finis~

FOOTNOTES:

Everything here on wizarding politics is entirely made up. It may be disturbing but I just write what I know.

Readers may object to the 'Secret Department of Unspeakable Unspeakables'. I call it thus, as I explained in the first story *Christmas Presents Undisguised*, because the agents there are more unspeakable than normal unspeakables. They are so unspeakable that they are secret.

Views on Burma stem from my own research and are culled from a paper I am currently co-writing with someone.

Hiraki - For explanation, please c/f footnotes in Ch 2.

Joseki- For explanation, please c/f footnotes in Ch 2.

Moku- For explanation, please c/f footnotes in Ch 2.

Assas refers to *L'université Panthéon-Assas Paris II*. It is also known as *Paris deux*. I call it *Assas* after its other name because it is headquartered at the rue d'Assas. It is one of the 13 universities descended from the University of Paris. I have arranged for Hermione to lecture there because *Assas* students mainly study law, business administration, economics, social and political sciences all fairly quantitative fields like I picture arithmancy to be.

Paris-Sorbonne University, or *Paris IV* as a friend there likes to call it, is one of the 13 universities descended from the University of Paris. I have arranged for Severus to lecture there because the school is traditionally for the faculties of Arts and Human Sciences, where I think alchemy belongs.

Carrefour means 'junction' in French and is a chain of very large supermarkets my favourite supermarket to be exact.

~~~~~

#### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my beta (the lovely Su) and preliminary readers (Lawrence and Pius) for taking the time to go through this story.

Sincere gratitude is also extended to my esteemed patroness, JuneW, who is in every sense of the word - a lady.

And thank you, dear readers, for welcoming me back after the long hiatus from the fandom, and sticking with this very short murder mystery.

best,

Lady Strange

3rd January 2008