

Dazed Detachment

by Southern_Witch_69

Spared a horrible fate, Hermione is spirited off to a safehouse, but is everything as it seems? Sometimes the mind can be one's worst enemy... or savior.

Use Your Illusion 1

Chapter 1 of 4

Spared a horrible fate, Hermione is spirited off to a safehouse, but is everything as it seems? Sometimes the mind can be one's worst enemy... or savior.

Disclaimer: These aren't my characters. I'm just snatching them for a spot of entertainment.

Thanks go to RobisonRocket for beta reading this for me.

I've written this for NotSoSaintly as a birthday gift (in 2008).

About this story, I could have marked warnings...such as suicide attempt, death, abuse, or something like that, but I fear that would be misleading. None of this happens to Hermione. It's only mentioned in passing. Therefore, I did not put those warnings here, afraid it might turn away some tenderhearted readers when there really isn't cause. Or is there? Bwahahaha...

"A waste is a terrible thing to mind..."

-C. Collins, Senior Trip 1993 (after many Budweiser beers)

The thin line of Hermione's lips curved down into a frown as she neared the edge of the cliff, the strong wind whipping about her and nearly knocking her over, the moon shining down on her through the thick, smoky clouds as if making her visible purposely so that her pursuer could easily find her. "Take me if you want," she muttered at the invisible breeze and glaring moon. "I don't care any longer. Light my path and push me over the edge!" Tears began streaming down her cheeks once again, but she no longer noticed them. She'd always come to this place to think when needing time alone. She'd never once thought in all her months here that it would be her final destination. It held a magnificent view at any time of day, reminding her of the grounds at Hogwarts, of when days were good.

Hogwarts. That had been so long ago, hadn't it? The war had long since been over with Voldemort the victor. She'd watched, bound and gagged, as Ron had been killed brutally twenty feet away, listening to the Death Eaters taunting her with calls that she'd be next and for her to watch what was coming. They'd told her that Voldemort had hexed Harry so strongly that he'd simply disappeared from existence, leaving no trace behind. She'd never heard of anything that would truly allow for that, but then again, she hadn't the knowledge or experience that Voldemort had. Truth be known, he'd invented it himself.

God, the screaming had finally stopped! She could only fear that he was gone...dead. As Rabastan Lestrangle lowered his trousers and roughly pushed into Ron's limp arse, laughing along with the others as he did so, something odd happened. The tight bindings on her hands had melted away, leaving her flesh sore but free. A voice whispered into her ear softly, "You will have to go while you still can. I'll come to you soon."

"Harry?" she tried to whisper, her gag not letting anything come out. It had to be Harry! He'd had the Invisibility Cloak, so it was possible that he truly hadn't been obliterated

as the Death Eaters thought!

"Shhh. I'm going to take this gag off of you and put a Portkey into your hand. There's a warded, Secret-Kept home for you to stay in until I can join you." Something was pushed into her hand, and the foul-tasting flannel that had been shoved into her mouth vanished. Before she could form any words, a tug from behind her navel pulled her away from the dirty floor of the cave she'd been brought to.

When Hermione had appeared in the quaint cottage, she'd felt as if things couldn't possibly get any worse. She'd immediately wept for the losses she'd seen...the suffering, the horrors...yet she'd still firmly believed that Harry would make things work. After all, he hadn't been destroyed! He'd just freed her. He'd made arrangements for a safe house in case all else failed. He'd used his glasses as a Portkey to get her away!

The home was comfortable and well stocked, but hours stretched into days and then into weeks with no sign of Harry or anyone else. She couldn't Disapparate, she had no wand, and she couldn't leave the small wooded area surrounding the cottage. It was as if she were a prisoner again...only this time, it was Harry who was her captor.

Just as she'd been certain that she'd go mad if she spent one more day alone with nothing but death and dismay as her company, Harry appeared. He'd been injured badly and had been unable to follow her directly as he'd planned.

"Oh, Harry, thank God!" she cried, jumping up from her chair, running to him, and throwing her arms around him. "I thought you'd never come! What's happened? Where are the others? Have we won?"

He shook his head but smiled softly. "Let me sit." He began to limp towards the couch, and she put an arm around him to guide him.

"You're hurt," she said once he'd seated himself. Tears welled in her eyes. "Is everyone lost?"

"Nearly."

"Tell me."

And he had. He'd told her details of the deaths, plans made by the few left, reasons to keep her hidden away, and why he'd have to leave at times without taking her with him. She hadn't cared. Not really. So long as he returned to her and kept her abreast of everything going on, she'd been quite happy to keep their home tidy, help him plot out strategies, and research things for him in the books he brought her. Eventually, however, she'd found out that the Harry that had returned to her was not...nor had ever been...the Harry she'd known.

Shaken from her thoughts by a shout in the distance, Hermione looked down and gazed over the edge of the cliff. She was very high up. Surely the fall would kill her...no chance of only being maimed or paralyzed. "Dead is better. Dead is better," she muttered, finally voicing the mantra that had been flitting through her mind for the past few days. She took a deep breath, intending it to be her last before she stepped off the cliff to her destiny, but a gust of wind hit her and knocked her back on her arse.

"No, no, don't," she said tearfully. "Why does something always keep me here when I know I should go?" Was it a sign? Was she making a mistake? Was she truly mad, just as Harry...no, Snape!...had implied. Why did it feel as though she'd done this before?

"Hermione?" Harry asked from her doorway.

She sat up, rubbed the sleep away from her eyes, and squinted as she tried to adjust to the darkness. "What is it?"

"I heard you moaning." He was closer, though still not visible to her, even with the small sliver of moonlight filtering in through the window.

"Was I?"

"Had a nightmare?" His voice was just to her left, and she startled slightly.

"N-no. Harry? I can't see you."

Her bed dipped slightly as he sat down beside her, right near her knees. "I'm right here."

His voice sounded deeper, almost silky. She was certain sleep had left it that way and paid no attention. "I don't remember having a nightmare. I don't even feel uneasy."

"A good dream them?"

"If it were a good dream, why would I be moa..." Her words died on her lips as she realized his hand was on her bare thigh, rubbing her gently. "Good dream. Swallowing, she said, "I can't remember any dream, only sleeping."

"It's hard for me to hear you making sounds like that... me in the next room, wanting to come in and comfort you."

"Really, it wasn't anything bad that I know of." Hermione sucked in a sharp breath as his hand moved up beneath her loose nightshirt and traced the crotch of her knickers. "Harry?"

Before she realized what was happening, his lips were against hers, one hand behind her head cradling her neck, the other rubbing more firmly against her center. Losing herself in his minty kiss, her hands moved up to circle his neck and draw him closer. Oh, how she wanted him! For the last few months, he'd been invading her mind at night and even during the daytime. All of her fantasies were the same...him coming into her bedroom during the night and taking her, just as he was about to.

Lowering her down and moving between her parted legs, he gruffly said, "Do you know how much I want to fuck you, Hermione? How I've wanted to for so long now?" He gyrated his hips firmly against hers, proving his words true by shoving his thick, hard erection against her. "Can we?"

"Yes... yes... take me."

Wasting no time, they anxiously pulled away their clothing and hurriedly coupled, him pushing into her possessively with long, steady strokes while she eagerly met him each time in search of fulfillment. At some point thunder began rumbling in the distance, and rain soon followed, pelting against their roof. Her orgasm hit her with sudden fierceness, causing her to close her eyes and let go of reality...for many moments, she knew nothing but pleasure, nothing but Harry, nothing but feeling needed and sated and wanted.

"Unh... Fuck... yeah..." grunted Harry, bucking erratically as he met his culmination.

She opened her eyes just as thunder clapped and lightning struck, causing the room to light up nearly as brilliantly as if it had been early morning. And it wasn't Harry whose head was tossed back, eyes shut tightly, mouth slack, in ecstasy.

It was Severus Snape.

Murderer.

Death Eater.

"Oh my God!" she yelled, trying to scoot out from under him. "NO!"

Crawling back towards the ledge, she heard his voice again. "Hermione, what are you doing? You'll be killed! Get away from that ledge!"

"Leave me alone, Snape!"

"Stop calling me Snape!" he said, closing the distance, wand pointing at her.

"I know who you truly are! I saw you!"

"Hermione, please," he begged, "it's mental! You know me. Come back from that ledge, baby. Listen to me."

"Baby? *Baby?*" she cried shrilly, scooting closer to the edge. "Don't you dare call me that!"

"I've lost everyone, Hermione. I can't lose you, too. Stay with me." He fell to his knees in the grass only a few feet away from her, wand lowered, eyes beseeching. "I don't know what you think you saw, but we can fix this."

"You've been keeping me drugged! It's all clear to me now! I didn't drink your potions for the last three days, only pretending to believe that I didn't know who you were and that I'd had a terrible vision, but my mind is sharpening, coming back to me!"

"We've been over this. It was just the shadows cast by the curtain that made my hair look longer and nose look a little hooked. Please..."

"How could you act like him? How could you have sex with me knowing I thought you were Harry?" She shook her head. "Dead is better. It's where Ron is... where the real Harry is... where they all are!"

"I *am* Harry. If you'd take your potion, you'd be able to deal with your grief and anxiety better. Remember when you asked me to start giving it to you? I don't know why you suddenly suspect me or think I'm Snape."

"Because I saw you, Snape! While we were shagging! The lightning hit, and you were having an orgasm. Couldn't keep up your invisibility charm or glamour while that was on your mind, eh?" she accused.

He inched forward slightly, extending a hand. "You must have been dreaming, or... I don't know what exactly, but you've got to trust me. I'm all you have. All you need."

"Stay away!"

She pulled at her hair and screamed. Everything was muddled and yet it wasn't. What was real? What wasn't? She could hear Ron's voice inside her head, saying, 'Dead is better.' He was right. Poor, sweet Ron. They'd done such horrible things to him, and they would have done it to her if Harry... no, Snape... hadn't freed her.

"Why did you free me?" she asked almost inaudibly. "Was this some plan to torture me? To drive me mad? To have a free fuck when you needed it?"

"Hermione, please."

His words were followed by a piercing scream, as she chose that moment to lean back and let herself fall from the cliff. Her stomach was tingling madly, clenching and unclenching. The wind was blowing her clothes and hair about wildly and whistling as it beat against the mountainside. She could feel herself falling... falling...

Southern's Notes: Ever felt like you were going crazy? Like up was down, left was right? Uh-huh. Me too. Hermione's not certain what the hell is going on. Is that Snape or is it truly Harry? Any ideas as to wtf is going on? Teehee.

Use Your Illusion 2

Chapter 2 of 4

Some things are explained, but Hermione still feels something is off, but is it?

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Thanks go to CocoaChristy for beta reading this for me.

Hermione blinked rapidly upon opening her eyes in attempt to lessen the bright glare. Her head felt extremely heavy, her throat painfully dry, and she couldn't shake the feeling that she was floating on a raft in choppy water. It was as if her entire body was swaying to a dizzying beat.

"Are you with me?" asked a soft, silky voice.

Snape. Her eyes popped open fully and focused on the dark shape sitting next to her. Everything came into focus...the room, the bed, the scent, him. It was the same cottage she'd been staying in. "Wh..."

"Don't try to speak until you've had some water," he said soothingly, taking a glass with a straw from the small table next to her bed and extending it towards her in an attempt to give her a sip.

She shook her head slightly. "N-no..." It could be poison...something to keep her from escaping. But what was she doing back in this bed? Hadn't she jumped from a cliff? Why wasn't he acting like Harry again?

"I assure you it's only water, Hermione, and if you intend to ask any number of the questions lingering in your mind, you'll need this... for your throat. I'm certain your

medicine has left you dry-mouthed at the least." Again he moved to place the straw against her lips.

Needing the water, she warily accepted his offering, her throat rejoicing as the cool substance slid down and moistened it. She couldn't detect any foreign taste, but then, why should she think that she could? He was a master of potions, was he not? He could easily lace a poison into anything, and it wouldn't be easy to detect.

Moving her head to the side to indicate she wanted no more, he placed the glass back on the table and then looked back at her, brow creased slightly in... worry. This was something new. Last she'd seen of him, he'd been sneering at her and casting a Stunner in her direction.

"Professor! Stop!" Hermione yelled, wand pointing at him shakily. "We just want to talk to you." The dark lighting of the room made him nearly impossible to discern amongst the blackness. His sallow, sneering face, though, seemed to glow.

"Forget talking!" Harry said coldly. "You've a lot to account for, Snape! Who cares if you've been sending those notes under the pretense of helping us!"

"Yeah," Ron added. "And you can start by...umph!"

At that moment, a Death Eater hit Ron in the head with a heavy vase, shattering it all over the room. A shard cut through a gloved hand and caused a shriek from his attacker. It was a woman from the sound of it...one who had no wand and was now dodging Harry's hexes. Not paying attention to Snape was a mistake she shouldn't have made, but she'd turned her head for an instant and was promptly disarmed and tossed back against the wall magically. A jet of red light headed for her, and she only managed to move aside at the last second, causing it to hit the wall and bounce off towards the ceiling.

This had drawn Harry's attention, and he was concentrating on trying to outwit Snape. In the end, Snape was able to Disapparate, taking the Death Eater with him and leaving a wounded Harry, a knocked out Ron, and a winded Hermione in his wake.

"We were only going to talk to him," she said, crawling towards Harry, wishing the professor hadn't taken her wand.

"Can you speak now?" Snape asked.

"Wh-why did you stop me from hitting ground?"

He sat back and stared at her for a long moment. "Hit ground?"

"From the cliff... I jumped off."

"Hermione, you've not left this bed for several days now," he said quietly before rising and beginning to pace in front of the bed.

"But, no, I escaped you! I found out you weren't really Harry," she said in confusion, voice finally sounding like her own.

This made him pause and turn to look at her with a surprised expression. "I wondered what was going on, what with all that mumbling you were doing," he said quietly, finally moving back to sit next to her. "Tell me everything you remember."

"No," she said firmly. "I won't tell you anything. Where's Harry? Why do you have me here?" He reached for her hand, only to have her snatch hers out of reach. "Don't you touch me!" It then hit her full force. They'd had sex...him disguised as Harry. He'd lied to her, used her, and toyed with her... but why? Tears welled in her eyes as the shame and disgust washed over her, warring with each other and attempting to make her even more miserable than she felt. "How could you?" she asked brokenly, sobbing slightly.

"How could I what?" he asked seemingly distraught.

"How could you take advantage of me like that? Have sex with me under false pre..."

Snape sat back in his chair as if he'd been slapped. "Are you saying you remember nothing from before?"

"I remember you living here with me and pretending you were Harry, giving me hope, making me think we still had a chance to win this war!"

This time he leaned forward and took her hand in his forcefully. "Hermione, no, I never did any such thing. We've been living here together in hiding for well over a year after the Dark Lord won, and when we became lovers, it was you who approached me first. In fact..."

"What?" she asked shrilly. Nothing made sense. She felt hot, cold, dizzy... "I thought I was making love to Harry, and your glamour dropped! I... Oh, my God."

Hermione could see the blatant hurt in his eyes as his hands slipped away from hers. A sudden vision filled her mind.

"Severus?"

"Yes?" he asked, looking up from his book and pushing over so that she could sit next to him on the couch.

"I'm tired of sleeping alone."

"Are you saying that you want me to sleep in your room with you?"

"I want you to make love to me," she said softly, leaning closer and pressing her lips against his uncertainly. There was a thud as his book hit the floor, forgotten.

"There was something... We did... I'm so confused." Her tears began anew, this time from frustration.

"How could you confuse me with Potter?" he asked, lower lip curled in disgust.

"I don't know. Something's just so wrong. What's wrong with me?"

Visibly swallowing and taking a deep breath before speaking, he said, "So much has happened. Things with the war. You couldn't cope with all that had happened to your friends... to you. We discussed it, and in light of your depression, mood swings, and inability to deal with what you witnessed, experienced, and partook in, you wanted to turn to medicinal potions to help you. You were taking two each day."

"But... no, that doesn't make sense. They wouldn't keep me dazed like this and make me lose my memories."

"It seems that you thought you were better and opted to stop taking them, without telling me, and I must admit that I wasn't the wiser, aside from a couple of small rows, as you seemed fine. However, you began reading in my journal, and I'm afraid you became upset...dramatically so. You revealed you'd stopped taking your potions, and I knew immediately that you were having withdrawals from their absence and your old symptoms were crashing down on you." He looked away.

"And?"

"And I tried to force you to take them, causing you to run out...where you slipped and hit your head. You've been unconscious off and on since."

"You've started giving me the potions again?"

"Yes."

"But it seemed so real...my life here..." Her hand flew to her mouth. "Oh, no, is Harry dead?"

Snape shrugged. "We do not know. He simply vanished. Some think he made a Horcrux in the event that he failed, but he's yet to resurface."

"He never made one," she said softly, feeling as if she'd lost her friend all over again. What troubled her was that his explanation seemed too good to be true. Why could she not remember more? She closed her eyes and tried to draw any memory.

"I think your memories will return in time," he said as if guessing what she was attempting. "I can only say that you've tried to blot out everything that's been hurting you. Will you tell me of all you remember? What you dreamed of?"

She spent the next thirty minutes describing everything she could remember and listened as he told her what he thought. The more he spoke, the more things made sense.

"So... you think that I imagined living here with Harry because it was the safest thing for my mind to imagine?"

"Yes. So long as you remained safely tucked away with him here," at this he frowned, "you didn't have to face the fact that all of your friends are gone, that the Dark Lord now rules our world with a vengeance, and you didn't have to cope with all that you've seen and done. It makes sense...a self preservation if you will, self-imposed detachment."

"If I love you...er, do I love you?" she asked suddenly, cheeks reddening. Shouldn't she be able to feel it still?

He smiled tightly. "I'd like to think so."

"Do you love me?"

"I've come to, yes," he said immediately, nodding firmly.

Part of her felt suddenly at ease. He would take care of her. He would help her sort this mess out. Snape. No, Severus... Another part of her wanted her to ask questions about Dumbledore's murder, about the help he'd secretly given them, about their life together... Was it wise?

"How did we end up here together?" she asked finally.

"Think about it. Try to remember." He moved to lie next to her in the bed, and she felt only a little unease with it. There was something familiar about his body lying next to her, the touch of his hand on her face, cupping her cheek gently and gazing into her eyes intently.

Ron was screaming loudly as a Death Eater cast a Cruciatius at him, and Hermione turned her head, not wanting to watch his writhing body as it flailed about. It was then that she noticed a man moving along the shadows of the cave. It was Snape. He drew near and put his finger to his lips as a command for her to remain still. It wasn't as though she could speak through her gag anyway, but all the same, she nodded minutely, pretending not to hear the laughter and taunting...Ron's torture.

Snape lifted his hand and opened it to reveal Harry's glasses. So it was true. Harry was gone then. Why was Snape not joining his comrades in their fun then? Why did his eyes look haunted? She'd long since thought he was only in Voldemort's camp to carry on Dumbledore's work, even after all that had happened, had always imagined there was some explanation for his treachery.

"Leave this place with me," he whispered. "There's nothing more we can do for him...or anyone else."

She said nothing, eyes wide.

"I'll only ask once."

Feeling only a minute amount of guilt, she nodded vigorously, wanting to leave the place before the others made good on their threats. There was nothing she could do for Ron but to escape and find a way to make things right. If Snape was the only way out, she'd have to take it. She would mourn him later... avenge his death later... avenge Harry's as well.

Severus lowered his head slowly; closer and closer to her mouth, he moved. She licked her lips and prepared herself for his kiss, but turned away at the last minute. Something still wasn't right. Thoughts of Harry flashed through her mind. How could that seem so real and what had supposedly truly happened seemed so staged?

"Hermione?"

"I just have a lot to be taking in right now," she said quietly, not meeting his eyes. "I can barely think straight. It seems like only yesterday that I wanted to die, that being dead was better."

"We'll start over again. Our life together will come back to you. I swear it."

At the catch in his voice, she turned to meet his intense gaze. She unexpectedly remembered kissing him heatedly, hungrily tearing at his clothes, riding him until they were both sated... his eyes closed in ecstasy and his head arched back as he murmured her name as he filled her.

"Severus," she said softly and met his lips in a soft kiss, losing herself in him, his taste, his scent, and the feel of his body against hers.

Yes, he would help her, he would help her reclaim their life piece by piece, and all would be well.

Minutes later, he reluctantly pulled away. "It's nearly time for your second potion. Would you like to take it before or after a light meal?"

"I'd really like some toast," she said, smiling for the first time.

He nodded. "I'll be back shortly."

Watching as he left, she willed any lingering uneasiness to disappear. He was right, and what he'd said had made sense. She'd take her potion and continue to get better. It was no wonder Severus had replaced Harry in her "dream." It was simply her mind finally pointing out that her reality was wrong, that another one awaited her.

Although she was somewhat dazed and confused with all that had happened, she stretched languorously and slid down beneath the soft duvet, waiting for the return of her prince and her meal... and then the medicine that would help clarify things, help heal her mind.

Southern's Notes: And so, the second chapter has been appended. Any comments? Bwahahaha. I wonder if things truly are this easily explained and brushed aside?

Use Your Illusion 3

Chapter 3 of 4

Hermione tries to cope without her potions, and things start falling into place... or do they?

Disclaimer: Not my characters...just toying with them!

Thanks go to CocoaChristy for beta reading this.

"I love walking along this path," Hermione said softly as she gazed out towards the horizon.

"Don't get too near the edge, my dear," Severus said, tugging on their entwined hands and pulling her closer to him.

"This might sound ridiculous, but sometimes it feels as if I've come here and just jumped off this cliff."

"Well, you did dream that you jumped off once," he said quietly. "Don't you remember?"

"Did I?" she asked curiously. "No, I don't remember. Oh, well, maybe vaguely now that you mention it." She giggled and brought her free hand up to cover her lips. "Perhaps I should finish my Animagus training, eh? I'll bet that I'm some sort of bird...something lovely with long colorful feathers."

"Yes, likely one of those talking types," Severus quipped, giving her a small grin. "You never cease your chatter."

Hermione enjoyed their walks and the times they spent together when he seemed so carefree. Sometimes, though, she'd find him in his private study, which he didn't allow her to enter alone, scribbling away madly in an old worn book. He told her that it was best she didn't ever look at it, as she wasn't good with Occlumency, and if they were ever found, she might be forced to reveal what she knew.

And she hated being kept in the dark about things...especially important things!

He and a few others were working privately to form a resistance against the Dark Lord's forces, which were diminishing a little at a time, but she was certain that he kept things from her. Hopefully, he didn't think her too weak.

No, Hermione, he doesn't, or else he wouldn't allow you to work with him on those potions the Order needs.

He'd told her a few weeks before when she began to get restless that there had been small signs that Harry was still alive! She only wished there would be positive confirmation of that, and oh, how she longed to see him. The last thing she remembered about Ron came to mind, and she could hear his screaming, causing her to sway.

"All right?" Severus asked, voice etched with concern.

"I was thinking about Ron... what they did to him," she said quietly.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"No," she admitted, shaking her head. "I feel so guilty, so helpless. He'd never forgive me for just leaving."

"For all of Weasley's faults, I'm certain he would have preferred you to escape than to be subjected to anything else."

"I should have taken my potion this morning," she blurted, wanting to kick herself for slipping up and telling him.

He turned her to face him roughly. "You've missed your dose?"

"Yes, I wanted to hurry and fix your breakfast to serve you in bed. I forgot to take it after," she lied.

"Well, that's not so bad then," he said softly, lifting a hand to cup her face. "I'll just give you a little more this evening to make up for it."

She smiled and allowed him to kiss her, enjoying the security he provided. Normally, she felt comfortable in his arms, but for some reason, lately, she would get an odd sensation, as if something was off. Crazy thoughts would come to mind on those occasions. Was he seeing another woman? Why was he really hiding things from her? Why shouldn't she be able to learn Occlumency so that she could be kept informed of everything? She'd never heard of any potion that interfered with Occlumency training before. Hell, an Occlumens could even slide by Veritaserum being administered to them.

As they walked back to their cottage, she remembered a session of the previous week's lovemaking, one that kept flashing through her mind.

Hermione slowly slid down Severus' stiff erection, enjoying the feel of him filling her, the intense pressure of becoming one, and coupled with the sensations of his hands at her breasts, she was certain she'd never felt such pleasure before.

"Oh, Ha..." She gasped slightly.

His eyes snapped open, and he gazed at her intently. "Sorry, didn't catch that."

"Oh, have you ever felt something so good in your life?" she said immediately, smiling down at him wantonly.

"Only with you, my Hermione," he replied, still gazing at her suspiciously.

She hadn't been able to orgasm that night, but she'd been able to fake it without him being the wiser. It wasn't that their shared strokes and thrusts and fondling hadn't aroused her. It was the lie she'd told him. She'd nearly called him Harry.

Why? Where had that come from? She'd never made love to Harry. Nor had she ever fantasized about doing so. Well, maybe she'd wondered what it would be like, but who hadn't wondered about what it would be like to shag the Boy Who Lived? However, she'd been satisfied with Ron.

Since then, she'd not been taking her potions as directed. What did it matter if she missed one or both, pretending to have taken them? It wasn't that she enjoyed lying to

Severus, but her damn medicine kept her feeling a little foggy sometimes. Yes, she enjoyed not being brought down by depression or stressful memories, but it seemed like her mind was much clearer without them. Perhaps it was her body's way of showing her that she should face her past. Besides, if she could get better on her own, Severus could teach her Occlumency and not have to keep important information from her without worrying her skills would be affected by the potions.

"Come. Let's go back. The weather looks to be getting bad."

A few hours later, Severus was sitting near the fire, reading from a large tome, and he suddenly yelped, dropping the book down soundly, causing Hermione to startle. "Damn it!"

"What's wrong?" she asked, alarmed.

"I'm being... called to an emergency meeting," he said quickly.

"How?"

"My timepiece... There's a Protean Charm on it and heats it up so much, so quickly." He smiled apologetically. "I may be gone a while. Don't wait up for me."

He gave her a small kiss on the head and fled hurriedly. She crossed her arms in annoyance and frowned. Why could they never have meetings here? She'd love to see a few of the old crowd. Sulking, she made her way to their bedroom, only to stop when she realized that he'd left without warding his study. Biting her lip in indecision, she wondered what she should do: go in or respect his request. It was too tempting, and as she backtracked to the doorway, she could see his book...the one he kept the war information in...on his desk where he'd left it earlier once she'd called him to dinner.

Tiptoeing into the room and taking a seat in his chair, she lifted the book and opened it to a random page, smiling when she wasn't hexed. "How foolish of you not to ward this, Severus," she said in amusement, eagerly wanting to devour the new knowledge.

I suppose I could always resort to a complete Obliviate if I have to. What a pity it would be to lose such a brilliant mind, though, and never be able to unlock or use everything it holds dear. I am prepared to try most anything else...potions, partial Obliviates, new memory implants. Whatever it takes. Interestingly enough...

"Good Lord." Who was he talking about? Why were there no dates in this book? Were they using someone to spy for them and having to coerce or force them into it? Perhaps she should turn back and find out exactly what was going on. Turning a few pages back, she began reading again.

Using the bloody Polyjuice for so long resulted in having annoying side effects. I am quite pleased that the others have helped me to devise a glamour that works well enough to keep it in place. One needs only to maintain a small amount of concentration and take a single dose of the enhanced Polyjuice for it to work at will. So much easier indeed. With these modifications and new charm, I could likely put this on the black market and make a great deal of money. The Ministry would never approve of something so devious, would they?

"The Ministry? I thought Voldemort controlled that now." She shrugged. "Oh, right. Well, he would realize that it was Severus perhaps, so I could see the need to black market it." Poor Severus. Was money tight for them? She'd never even questioned how they were able to afford food and necessities. A part of her always assumed he'd just took what he needed from the land or even from others, not that she approved of thievery, but when on the run from the Dark Lord and his Death Eaters, one couldn't openly hold a job or make too many public appearances...even with a new identity. She flipped a few more pages.

The potion Hermione helped me make isn't exactly working out the way I'd planned. I did test it, but the results left much to be desired. When I utter the password to trigger the consumed potion, it takes a long while for my request to be acquiesced without further coercing on my part. However, perhaps I am too impatient and should wait longer before making any demands.

Trying to remember the potion he was talking about, Hermione leaned against the back of the chair, brow furrowed. He asked for her help many times and usually explained what they were making, but this didn't sound familiar at all. "Hang on," she said. "Maybe it does." Yes, something about a potion that worked like the Imperius. It was a bit hazy though. She wished she could ask him, but then he'd know she'd been in his personal journal.

Deciding to read more recent entries, knowing she could at least discern some of those dates, she flipped forward many pages.

I find it interesting that a leap from the cliff has been the climax of each breaking point. It's as though life's termination via a fall into oblivion is the best choice.

"Oh, God... oh, no..." Leaping from a cliff? The feeling of spiraling downward swiftly passed through her body so violently that chills crawled over her flesh. She knew what it was like to fall firsthand. She'd done it. The memory came back to her then... more than one in fact. How many times had she leapt from the cliff she loved so much? Why? If she'd done so, surely she would have died. Dreams. Severus had said she'd dreamed about it already. He'd told her more than once that her nighttime medicine included something that would help her sleep without nightmares.

"He's been drugging me, mucking with my memories!"

Things began to make sense to her then. The different entries she'd read hadn't been about just anyone.... No, they'd been about her...all of them, as if she were a fucking test subject!

Panic and confusion welled up inside of her so violently that she could swear her throat constricted and was only allowing a minute amount of air safe passage to her lungs. Feeling her chest tighten, she tried to tell herself to remain calm. So many things passed through her mind.

You shouldn't have stopped taking your potion! Don't you remember? You hallucinate!

"No! I'm being drugged! It's not me!"

Severus loves you, takes care of you, makes you feel safe... you should never have betrayed him by reading his private journal.

"But it was supposed to be information about the war, stuff that was too dangerous for anyone to know in case of capture...even me."

That's just what he told you, Hermione. Don't be daft. You're so much smarter than that! YOU are the information he needs about the war. You're an experimental subject only...nothing more. His words of love, his passion, his information... all lies!

Sobbing freely now as her mind continued to yell things silently, she felt as though a dam had broken within in and a river of emotions began pouring out. She loved Severus so much. How could she handle living and knowing he'd been using her, deceiving her, or that he didn't truly love her? Was there even a small reformed Order with a few members who'd survived? Had there truly been signs that Harry might still be out there? Good God. Was Severus still a Death Eater?

"Sweet Lord, no... There was no Protean Charm on his timepiece! He was being summoned by Voldemort...his mark was burning his arm!"

She jumped up and slammed everything off of his desk in anger, yelling obscenities and words of woe as she did so, not noticing the book had turned to a page that read: *can honestly say that I've never cared about anyone the way I care about Hermione.*

"Ron was right: Dead is better."

Suddenly, everything became very clear for her. Staying with Severus was not an option. However, she hadn't a wand, was disallowed to use Apparition, and the premises

were warded so that nobody could enter or leave without Severus. Only someone with a ward and expertise of dark magic could dismantle them.

The cliff!

Yes!

"I must escape. I have to go. Dead is better."

Hermione quickly left the cottage and made her way through the slick grass and wet slope towards the place that had been her haven on some days and evenings. It beckoned to her always...even now. She'd only ascended halfway when she heard a shout not far behind her.

"What are you doing? Hermione!"

Severus. She looked back over her shoulder to see her frantic lover racing after her. No! She'd not be swayed. He would not be allowed to catch her. She had to be free, wanted to fly away from him, wanted to leave this place...didn't want to know what she now knew. Oh, why, oh, why did she have to read his journal? *Ignorance is bliss!*

"I read what you wrote about me! You won't use me ever again!"

"No, you are mistaking what you read. I can explain everything. Stop!"

"Stay away!"

"I swear, Hermione, that I only used Narcissa to get information."

She didn't stop, didn't want to hear his lies, and moved faster than ever. Finally reaching the ledge of the place she'd always loved, she spun around to see how far away he was, heart racing, blood pumping so quickly she could hear it pounding in her ears, nearly making her dizzy. Severus was gone. Had she imagined him chasing her? Why were things clear one second and added the next? Was she mad? What was wrong?

She gazed up at the sky, wishing that more of the moon would be showing. There was only a small sliver out, and the clouds in the sky, which were leftover from the storm they'd had earlier, covered part of it. "What should I do?" she asked, almost wishing it would answer her.

Something snapping from behind surprised her and caused her to fall forward and slide through the wet, muddy ground towards the edge. There was nothing solid with which she could seek purchase, so she couldn't stop her inevitable slipping over the edge of the cliff. Just as she went over, a pair of hands grabbed hers, keeping her from falling. She looked up, expecting to see Severus, and instead saw Harry.

"Hold on, Hermione!"

"Harry! Is it really you? Where's Severus?"

"Don't worry about that right now. Come on. Come back to me. Things will be all right."

Was this Harry? *No! Remember what you read! Polyjuice! Glamours!* "I wish I could believe you. I really do, but you're not Harry. You're him... trying to trick me. Well, I won't be your test subject! Dead is better!"

"Don't! Please... Why would you say that?" he asked, obviously heartbroken.

"It's what Ron said before he..."

"That idiot. Pay no attention to anything he says."

She sniffed and felt her fingers losing their grip on his wrists. "He was right, Harry."

"No, he wasn't! Don't let go, Hermione! Come back to me," he pleaded. "Please... try harder."

Knowing what she had to do, she released her hold on him completely and watched silently as he struggled to pull her up. The moment his hold slipped, she began her descent down to the bottom, the sensation of freefalling washing over her. She could see his contorted face shrinking away above her in the distance the more she fell. Falling... falling away... It would soon be over.

Southern's Notes: So, what do you believe? Still confused? This was only supposed to be three chapters, but something happened while I was writing, and there will now be a fourth, as I feel inclined to add an epilogue. I sort of like it this way because it allows us to believe what we'd like, but then, that's because I know what's going on, I guess. LOL I would truly love to hear any interpretations that you might have! Some have nearly hit the nail on the head already... almost.

Lucidity

Chapter 4 of 4

Things finally become clear.

Disclaimer: Not mine. Damn. But having fun at least.

Thanks go to CocoaChristy for looking this over for me...I made the poor dear read it in our messenger windows! Hahaha!

Harry walked into the darkened room and pulled back the heavy curtains on the windows, wanting Hermione to get a little sunshine on her pale flesh. It was still a bit too cool out to open the window, but he felt that the light would do her well enough. With a sigh, he sat down next to her bed and propped up his feet on the windowsill, leaning back into his chair and staring at her slackened face.

"Today was a bit boring," he began. "I just don't enjoy going over to the Burrow as much as I used to, not since everything went wrong." He dropped his feet quickly and

reached for her hand to give it a squeeze. "I wish you were here, Hermione." A small snort sounded. "I mean, yeah, you're here, but not really, eh?"

He frowned slightly as he saw the bruise on her forearm. "Oi, what's this? Thrashed about, did you?"

"Harry? Are you here?" called a feminine voice from the stairway.

"I'm in the room, Madam Pomfrey," he said, rising to meet her at the doorway.

"Any change with her today?" she asked hopefully.

"No, but there's a new bruise. Must have moved about while I was gone."

"Gone?"

"Only for a half hour at the most," he said abashedly. "I didn't want to leave, but Ron swore that if I didn't, his mum would bring the whole lot here to have dinner."

"Well, I suppose some time without you is better than too much time with a houseful of people who are accidentally inconsiderate to her condition," she said with disapproval.

"Ron didn't know any better," Harry pointed out.

"He was there when Healer Goodwin explained the nature of this condition. Everything we say or do around her can possibly influence the outcome of her treatments. Each time we start her treatments, it seems something always happens to put things behind." She looked over at Hermione and smiled softly. "I can only hope this session will be the best yet. She does seem stronger, doesn't she? And she has more lucid periods than ever before."

Harry's face reddened, remembering her moaning erotically the day before. "Lucid...I wouldn't call it that exactly."

"Well," she said with a huff, "you know what I mean. Ah, let me just check her vitals and give her tonight's dose before I check on my other patient."

Making a noncommittal grunt, Harry moved over to the window again, not wanting to watch, not daring to hope. Since he'd defeated Voldemort and had lost Ginny in the final battle, things had changed for him. He'd stopped going out in public, as many people didn't find it rude to pester him for a chat or an autograph at every turn. The worst part of it all was that Hermione had been hexed with something that had them struggling to cure her.

He smirked at the irony that this situation would be the first time he truly wished he could ask Snape for help. Snape's expertise in Dark magic and potions could move things along more quickly, he was certain. The only problem was that Snape, too, had been struck by the same hex, having been with Hermione at the time Bellatrix Lestrange came across her. The haughty bitch had refused to confess exactly what she'd done to them, even until her last breath. Her husband, however, had given them what information he knew in exchange for a lesser sentence. It hadn't been much, but it had given them something to start with, and despite all the setbacks, they were truly finally making progress. Mostly.

"She's all right. Her heart rate's accelerated, but her eyes are quite clear. See her pupils, eh?" Pomfrey grinned. "And how's Severus?"

Harry shrugged. "Don't know. Didn't look in on him."

"Harry Potter! What have I told you? He needs the same amount of care as Hermione. You should talk to him as well."

"Oh, I do talk to him," Harry said softly, feeling slightly guilty and refusing to confess he'd not been as kind to Snape.

"Hmph." She quickly turned and went to the other side of the room where she pulled back a curtain that kept Snape's bed closed off from Hermione's part of the room. "And not a spot of sunlight coming in!" She flicked her wand to blast the thick curtains away from the windows and turned to glare at Harry before going about checking him over.

After checking his vitals and giving him his dose of potion, she held his hand and softly said, "You're looking better all the time, lad. Let the potion do its work and come back to us." Once she'd fretted over his pillows and cover, she made her way towards the door and brusquely said, "A word," before walking out.

Following quickly, Harry went to her, eager to hear what she thought about Hermione's progress and knowing they shouldn't speak of it in front of the patients. "Well?"

"If I come here one more time and find Severus neglected, I will make certain *neither* of them remain here."

"I don't purposely..."

"Yes, you do. I know how you still feel about him, but the fact of the matter is that they both seem to not thrive well apart, so if you want her here, you'll have to deal with his presence and treat him fairly."

"That was never even proven!" he said heatedly.

"You saw it for yourself when we first separated them!" she retorted just as hotly. "Both of them did worse, wouldn't respond to any of their doses.... Why, if Minerva hadn't thought of testing the theory that them being hexed together had given them a further bond, we might have lost them both by now." She pursed her lips. "It would do well for you to show him more respect, albeit grudgingly."

"All right," he said, holding his hands up in surrender. "So, what do you think then?"

"I think things aren't as well as they could be," she said honestly. "It's taking so long. Are you careful in whom you allow in?" He nodded. "In what you say to her?" He nodded, though blushed. "What's that about? Haven't been filling their heads with war tales, have you?"

"No, I haven't!" he denied. "I just talk to her. Not everything's about the weather, you know, but I don't think it's anything comparable to what Ron said."

"Yes, graphically describing things he saw and speculated on did set her back." She shook her head. "I still remember coming in to find her shaking and eyes open in ho..." Her voice cracked. "In horror."

Harry snickered slightly. "He deserved to be hexed for that, good show, but I can say he didn't do it on purpose. He was just trying to find something to talk about, and the recent battles being fresh on his mind, that's what came out."

"Never did pay much mind to rules or details, that one," she groused, gazing at Harry. "Nor did you. Be certain that you heed my warnings, else she may continue to have setbacks, fighting the potion's effects and not being able to find her way back to us."

Nodding, he asked, "Will you be round in the morning?"

"No, I've things to do, but Minerva will come in my stead."

"Okay."

"Floo me if you need anything or if something changes."

"Thank you."

She patted his shoulder affectionately and left. After he was certain she was gone, Harry went back to sit by Hermione's bed without sparing Snape a glance. He supposed he'd go talk to the git later. For now, he felt the need to talk to Hermione.

"Well, looks like all will be well soon. Pomfrey says you're getting better," he said, adding, "Snape too," as an afterthought. "Ginny wanted to be a Healer. She'd have been good...caring and thorough. Bet she'd be helping out right now." He sighed. "I miss her so much these days. I'd always had a fear that I'd be the one to die, never thinking she would."

Voice turning bitter, he said, "She wasn't even supposed to be there! Never listened, that one." Kicking his trainers off, he got comfortable and brought his feet up onto his chair. "I'll never forget the last time we made love...the only time. Will I ever feel anything like that again, you think? You're probably tired of hearing about this, but... So warm and hot, like she was made for me." He smiled and stared at the ceiling. "Each time I moved against her, her breasts would jiggle and bounce." He laughed out loud. "You know she even had freckles on them, right?"

His smile faded. "What did you see in Snape, Hermione? What made you turn to him and leave off with Ron? I just don't understand that. Well, I only found out right before, but I just don't get it. How did you know that you could trust him implicitly even after all he'd done?" He snorted. "Hell, I still wonder about where his loyalties truly lie, sometimes thinking he's on his own side." Shrugging, he added, "He did help us win though."

Darkly, he gazed over at Snape. "Hear that, do you, Snape? That's right. I just admitted you helped us win." Looking back at Hermione, he reached for her hand. "I remember when Draco came round with his injured mother. You were so upset when she'd revealed that she had been the one to give Snape information, implying they'd done some shagging or snogging. I never fully realized why you were so hurt, and when Snape ran after you when you took off like that, I was still too thick to add it together. Ron's the one who figured it out, you know." He squeezed her hand. "I wish you hadn't taken off like that, wish you would have confided in me." Sighing, he murmured, "Guess I wouldn't have responded too happily, huh? I'm sorry... so sorry."

He felt a twitch in her hand. "Hermione? Can you hear me?"

When her eyes opened, he nearly jumped for joy, but then he noticed that although she was looking at him, she wasn't truly seeing him, as was the case most of the time. Disappointment flooded him. Why wouldn't the bloody potion work? Why wouldn't she come back to him?

"Stay back," she said, voice thick and nearly inaudible.

"It's me. It's Harry, love. Hold on, okay? Come back to me."

"Dead is better."

Harry flinched. "No, don't say that. Anything is better than that. Why are you saying that?"

"Ron... he said dead is better." She frowned, and a couple of tears leaked from her eyes. "The things they did... so horrible."

Harry silently vowed that Pomfrey was right and that he'd kick Ron's arse for putting that shite into her head. He'd make the hex she'd put on him seem like a first year's curse. "Ron's a git. You shouldn't pay attention to what he says. You know how he is when he's rambling." Harry had nearly hexed Ron when he'd loudly proclaimed that "maybe death would be better" because seeing her in such a state was too hard. It seemed she'd latched onto that and wouldn't let it go.

"Slipping... want to fall..."

"No! Don't fall back into it, baby. Fight it. Come back to me. I need you here, Hermione. Please!" He pulled her other hand into his, gripping and squeezing it as well, trying to make her feel him, but he felt her grip fade and knew...from many past experiences...that she was falling back into her unconscious state.

When her eyes closed and her hands went limp, he nearly wanted to cry. Was it he who was harming her? Was he talking about the wrong things? Should he read something to her instead?

"Shite," he muttered disappointedly. "I swear, I'll do better. Hey, I'll read *Hogwarts: A History* to you. You'd like that, eh?"

"Po-Potter."

Eyes wide, he looked up and over towards Snape's bed. The man was sitting up and gazing at him in confusion. "Snape!"

At first he'd thought it was just another outburst, but from the way the man was looking at him...truly seeing him...he could tell that he was awake. Hurrying over to his side, he couldn't help grinning.

"Awake then?"

"Wa-water."

He summoned a glass of water and helped Snape take a small sip. "All right?"

"Hermione...?"

"Still out," he said sadly. "But that's going to change. If the potion worked for you, it can work for her, too."

Harry truly believed those words, and he'd never been happier to see Snape, knowing it meant that his Hermione was on the road to recovery as well. Perhaps if they joined forces, she'd be all right sooner.

"Potter, what's happened?"

Harry sat down in the chair next to Snape's bed and said, "It's a long story, but seeing as you and I have all the time in the world, I'll tell it to you." Snape nodded and looked towards Hermione's bed. "She's resting just now." To make certain she didn't hear anything he was about to say, he cast a charm to keep their words private, smiling genuinely as he turned back to Snape, feeling hope building within once again.

Southern's Notes: I hope that this chapter has cleared some things up for everyone. I know I didn't answer each question, but I've added enough here so that everyone can draw his or her own conclusions. Hats off to Selened who figured out exactly what Hermione was going through in previous chapters.