

Redemption on the Installment Plan - II

by Amita

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The door chime rang, and a lady entered the shop.

"Lo, how the mighty have fallen."

"I suppose you're implying that I'm no longer a beleaguered professor worrying about imbeciles killing me with badly prepared potions but an independent shopkeeper free to indulge in my craft in return for substantial remuneration."

"That's what I was implying, yes," said Astoria Malfoy.

"Did you have something specific in mind, or would you like to tour the shop and examine the catalog of spells?" asked Severus Snape.

"Spells?" she asked. "Oh, I remember. You're also an expert in the Dark Arts."

"We are constantly fending off the dark forces," he said, "even in things as commonplace as vermin."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"How do I know? I don't know," he replied.

She sighed. "It's the manor. It looks new and shiny on the outside, but it's built on an old fortress full of creepy stuff." She shuddered.

He was tempted to quip that the manor was like the family, but his new persona intervened, and he said, "I suppose the solution is being left to you."

She bristled. "I don't care for your criticism of the family." She relented. "But you're right. Narcissa is content if her wardrobe and peacocks aren't disturbed, and Draco and Lucius are content if the wine cellar isn't disturbed." Her hand flew to her mouth as she realized what she had said.

"I was only saying that the family is relying on you and you are free to act," said Severus.

Astoria's lips tightened. "The rest of the family is touring France." She was determined to add no comment.

He informed her that there were general remedies but the better ones were specific and the ancient fortress might present special challenges. Astoria spent some time looking through his book on counter spells before announcing she would return the next day. She spent the next morning examining and reexamining the catalogue. He interrupted her intense search with an invitation to lunch if she could associate with a former opponent.

"I hated you at first," she said, "but ... ,"

He waited.

"But you went alone into danger," she finished. "Both sides tried to kill you, and you survived. I may need that. Oh, I think I've said too much."

During lunch, he talked about the life of a craftsperson-retailer. She related the pranks she and her friends had pulled on fellow students. He regaled her with one of his wartime escapades. After lunch, she hesitantly confessed she thought something was amiss with the manor. He agreed to investigate.

Parvati was delighted. He could soak the wealthy traitors. It would be justice. "As long as you're not attracted to that rich bitch." Severus made a face. Parvati thought he should use the money to buy her more lingerie since she would think about him while showing jewelry to customers and have to dash home at noon for dry knickers. She frowned. "But I don't want you to get any slinky ideas from her." He told her not to be silly as he backed her to the bed and enjoyed her eyes turning shiny as his hands roamed over her and then smoky when he slid her damp garment off and opened her legs

He arrived at the manor the next morning. Astoria was guiding him to the lower levels when the structure itself appeared to moan.

"I feel like it's calling to me," she said and ran back to her rooms.

The strange sounds ceased. He inspected the ancient part of the building, baffled by what he saw. When he emerged, Astoria offered him a tea, possibly a sherry. Severus declined, citing customers waiting at the shop, but the real reason was that he had to get away to some place wholesome.

"There you are," he heard as he was sipping tea at an outdoor café. "You weren't at the shop."

"Please tell me your cat doesn't have another rash," he said. "No animal should suffer so."

"No, no, I came for some room fragrance," she said. "And I'm glad you care about my pet."

Hermione Granger looked at him, paused, and said, "What happened?"

He was thinking he shouldn't talk about a client, but the forces lurking in the old fortress had taken their toll, and he responded to a concerned voice.

Part way through the description, she interrupted. "You shouldn't take this job. I don't care how much it pays. I don't care how much of a challenge it is. Stay away from it."

"It's just another routine cleansing," he said.

"No, it's not," she retorted. "The Malfoys have a way of pulling people into evil."

"I can take care of myself if you recall," he said.

"You're not the same person. You're trying to be kind. You're in the middle of changing, and you're vulnerable."

"Are you trying to mother me?" he asked.

"We haven't been friends," she said, "but we were on the same side. The old stuff is past."

He tried for reconciliation. "I suppose it's your caring nature, like with Crookshanks."

She stood up. Her fist hit the table. "You don't understand. You don't understand at all." She stormed off.

It hadn't been the relaxing tea break that Severus had hoped it would be.

On the other hand, the encounter with Miss Overbearing had derailed his preconceptions. He spent the evening perusing grimoires on ancient bloodlines and their ancestral homes. A terrible pattern was emerging.

He returned to the manor the next day, and he and Astoria examined the volumes in the library normally kept under lock and key. She found a description of the ritual. She announced she couldn't face it alone. Neither mentioned her husband had left her to do just that.

At the next full moon, Astoria retrieved her wedding dress and the ancient, lace lingerie she had worn under it. She dressed, and as they descended into the lower levels, the old structure seemed to shift and sigh.

They stood before a massive door. He took her hand and said, "You're not going alone into danger."

The door swung open. As they entered, Astoria gave a sharp cry. Roots had dropped from the doorframe onto her neck, and drops of blood appeared on several small punctures. She declared herself okay, but her skin was becoming flushed.

Severus looked around the room. When he turned his attention back to Astoria, she was leaning against a wall and breathing deeply. Her wedding dress rippled as if something were moving over it. Her lips parted, and she made a low moan. She reached behind with her wand to unbutton the top of her dress. It fell to her waist.

Severus had known in the abstract that Astoria had a decent figure svelte but still well rounded and he had been surprised that Draco had such a good eye. Nevertheless, he was not prepared for breasts that were firm enough that the lace bra merely embellished them, except that it was not merely embellishing them, it was caressing them and they were responding. Severus reminded himself that he was here as an escort.

Astoria began pulling her dress up to reveal nicely turned ankles and shapely calves. When the hem of her dress reached her knees, she paused, but the lace moved across her nipples and she moaned and began pulling the dress higher. As the dress rose higher, something seemed to sensuously follow it up her thighs. The dress stayed at her waist as she raised her hands over her head and began to weave, weave in time with whatever was flowing over her. Severus fought for control.

She weaved and weaved. Something was nudging her legs apart. It was fumbling with the lace knickers. Astoria spread her thighs in invitation. Her body jerked and she tilted her head back and gasped as the room groaned. Her body jerked and she gasped again as the room groaned again. And once again. Severus recognized the ethereal look. The entity was in her. He watched as it had its way with Draco's wife.

She swayed in time with the groans of the room, in time with the wet slurps between her legs. Her skin was sweaty, and her hair was sticking to her face. The swaying became more intense. She smiled. She was making primitive noises. Her face contorted. Her thighs quivered. Her moves became incoherent. The room convulsed. The lady cried out, and spasms wracked her body. She went limp and began sliding down the wall to the floor.

Severus leaped forward, hurling hexes to free the lady. He grabbed her and fled the room. The door to the room slammed shut behind them as he pulled her up the stairs into normality.

By the time they reached the main floor, the manor was glowing. The house-elves bowed before Astoria Malfoy.

Two days later, his constant critic entered the shop. "I suppose you ignored my advice and got involved with those Malfoys," she said.

"Nothing an ancient fertility rite and two sticks of dynamite couldn't handle," he replied.

"What?"

Then she recovered and glared at him. This was no time for levity and clever quips.

Prompt from LynF in chat: Severus discovers to his surprise that he wants to know a witch better.

Author's Note: Severus's healing journey, which he must undertake alone, has taken on a life of its own.