

# Redemption on the Installment Plan - III

*by Amita*

May the spirits of heaven and earth light the path for the warrior who seeks his way.

## *Chapter 1 of 1*

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"Do you do love potions?"

"No one respectable does them. Why? Aren't your considerable charms enough to keep your fiancé interested?"

"Weren't your considerable charms enough to keep Miss Patil interested?"

There was a pause.

"First, let me apologize," he said. "Your request shocked and surprised me, and I spoke inappropriately." He took a breath. "The fling with Parvati was destined to be temporary. You can heap scorn on me if you wish because I don't even know if I did a good thing or a bad thing."

She managed to stop glowering and say, "I need to take it myself."

He said, "Perhaps if you talked to someone." He did not say that everyone had seen this coming.

They ran through the possibilities. Her fiancé's mother was out, and so was his sister. She hadn't formed a close association with any other witch her own age. Talking to her old head of house would make her feel like an immature student again. He mentioned that he knew someone who might help and he would approach her.

Three days later, the door chime rang and a lovely lady entered.

"Wotcher, Severus."

"What cheer, indeed, Mrs. Tonks."

"How formal. Is this to fight off great pain?" she asked.

"No greater than usual. And you?"

She admitted that the coming holidays would be hard. He replied that the losses were still fresh for everyone. She said that her sister had nodded to her in the street the other day but had hurried on. He remembered that another lady was looking for a quiet place to spend the holiday, an educated and responsible lady who needed some time to reflect and who would gladly pay room and board. She thought company would be marvelous and inquired who. She was puzzled that such a famous and competent witch needed a retreat but added that everyone deserved some time of their own.

"I would never have guessed you were a go-between," she said as she made her purchases.

"I'm a person of many talents, Andy."

"I'm eager to see them, Sevvv, especially the hidden ones."

When his voice of conscience appeared for her weekly cleaning supplies, he had good news about a holiday haven, and "I have the perfect guest gift," he said. He presented an item that was to be introduced to the public on Guy Fawkes Day.

She looked at the label.

### **Lord Dark-Chocolate Truffles**

*Join the Deathly Delicious Eaters*

*and*

*Feel the Power of the Dark Side*

"What?"

"Open it," he suggested.

When she lifted the lid, it played the intro to a military march.

"What?"

"It's the 'Dark Valor Theme' from *Star Battles*," he said. "A non-wizard flick."

She read the label on the lid again. "That's not even grammatical." She looked at the embossed design on the individual chocolates. "Is that the Elder Wand? Isn't this all in rather poor taste?" She gave him a hard look. "Did Astoria put you up to this?"

"She's a marketing genius," said Severus. "Try one."

Hermione delicately picked what she thought was the smallest truffle and surreptitiously popped it into her mouth. She tried to hold her glare and not smile as the power of the dark seeped into her being.

Severus decided to keep quiet about his chocolate enhancers.

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The door to the dungeon slammed shut behind them as Severus and Astoria ran up the stairs into normality. By the time they reached the main floor, the manor was glowing. The house-elves bowed before Astoria Malfoy.

Astoria was in the tub with a sherry. It was like after a thorough examination by a medi-wizard: a dehumanizing experience that reminded her she was human. She had set the house-elves to cleaning and repairing her wedding dress and the ancestral lingerie, certain there was more to come for them. She wondered about Severus's usual evening. She assumed he would screw Parvati's brains out, not that that took much doing, and she would feed him curry on rice. How poetic: white on spicy Indian followed by spicy Indian on white.

When the elves returned her restored wedding dress and ancestral lingerie and she was dressed, she found Severus in the library wearing only a cloak after his bath.

"We should begin at the front gate and walk to the manor," she said. "It creates the necessary anticipation."

When they reached the front gate, Severus gently embraced Astoria and, even more gently, kissed her. Astoria mentally agreed that was appropriate. She was surprised at how much she liked it. And how much she liked that he was holding her hand as they strolled along the path.

She heard him say that she was an admirable lady, and she knew she was blushing as she shook her head no. She wondered why she was blushing. After a few more steps, he was talking about her bright intelligent eyes and he wanted to see them smoky with passion. It took a few more steps for her to realize she didn't mind him saying that. He admired her carriage. She smiled at him. She had the strangest wish that he would say more. She was beginning to feel disappointment at his silence when he finally complemented her figure. A thrill moved along her spine as his eyes savored her graciousness. She had no objections to his surmise that beneath her elegance, a fierce passion raged intensity driven by her passion for elegance. She felt herself relaxing. A small inner voice was telling her that she had never let her guard down before, never ever. But she was enjoying it. It was a heady experience.

As they approached the threshold, she was convinced it should be in the foyer: it was a matter of entries and passages and entrances. Yes, as they entered, his hand went around her waist, and she backed against the wall as his other hand traced the outline of her temple, her cheek, her neck, her shoulder.

Astoria had always believed that the ultimate experience would be the product of wild, animal coupling, but Severus was softly caressing her and whispering that she was lovely and strong and all the things a wizard could want. She was welcoming it as she never imagined she would welcome anything. It was soothing and relaxing, and she wanted more. She wanted to be closer to him. The dress was in the way. He nourished her with flowing hands and wonderful words. The dress was no longer in the way. Her breasts in the ancestral lace ached, and he comforted them comforting them and her noble ancestry paying homage to them and her. She wanted him to want more, to pay homage to her, to everything in the noble lace. Her hands found what she wanted, and she guided him to where the noble lace parted as easily as her noble self. Now she was looking into his eyes, happy to see the fire and smoke as he entered her. Now her fingers were tracing his face, showing her joy at what he was doing for her, expressing all her desire for his fire wondering that he was moving lovingly and she was floating on wave after wave. She was adrift and lost. It could go on forever. It couldn't go on any longer. The wave crashed, and she floated on a sea of foam. But she still caressed his face and looked into his eyes until they said that he had crashed for her and foamed inside her and she was content.

"Stay," she said. "Hold me through the night."

"Yes," he said.

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Severus had decided to be amused at how Parvati had flown from his arms into the arms of her fiancé and to be impressed by how Astoria took her returning husband under her wing. The reunifications had occurred in the nick of time. He was becoming absorbed in their lives and consumed by their passion. Perhaps the bushy-haired one was correct. Perhaps he was overdoing the tolerance bit. Did an enthusiastic appreciation of both a creamy complexion and a tawny complexion constitute depravity?

An entirely different thought was would the bushy-haired one pay any attention to him if he were in no danger of backsliding. Amusing. He would walk the straight and narrow if he knew what it was.

His reminiscing was interrupted by Andromeda Tonks entering the shop in a great bustle and looking around to make certain they were alone.

"Is something amiss?" he asked.

"I'm terribly sorry, Severus, but I shouldn't have people stay at my house. I know I said I would, and I was looking forward to it, but right now, I just can't. Will you tell Hermione how sorry I am that I can't have visitors? I was really looking forward to it."

He waited.

"I've been getting strange letters. I didn't pay any attention at first, but they've started to sound threatening, and I think someone's been following me and snooping around the house."

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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.