

Redemption on the Installment Plan – VIII

by Amita

Where will the way lead us?

Chapter 1 of 1

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The buffet to generate interest and goodwill for wizard primary schools was in full swing.

“Why are we interested in that peacock?”

“His family is influential.”

Andy, hearing the exchange, glided over to the two wizards and gave them a warm welcome – the very model of class and unobtainable delights. They were soon insisting she remember their names and the fact they were important Intelligence agents entrusted with uncovering subversive activities. She noticed that, across the room, Cissy was vamping a pair that Severus had identified as being from the Board of Education and who were, no doubt, out to prevent young minds from being turned against the Ministry.

Andy watched Cissy’s skirt creep up and her knees point at the Education spies. Once Cissy had their attention she pointed out the Intelligence agents as suspicious characters. Not to be outdone by the other hussy, Andy flashed some leg and pointed out the Education officials as people to be watched. They were certainly paying too much attention to a married woman. And yes, Andy might be able to get their names. It was the least she could do for two handsome guardians of society. The two sisters sashayed across the room on their missions, meeting at the buffet table.

Meanwhile, back at their table, Severus and Hermione were the center of a crowd discussing the goals for grade one students when Severus noticed the two sisters at the punch bowl. He offered to get Hermione more tea and strode to the buffet table where he placed himself between the two in order to intercept the glared daggers.

“The evening is going well, but we’ll have to talk later,” he said. “We can’t let anyone suspect we’re operating as a team.”

Cormac, the peacock of no substance who was making certain the punch consumed by the Intelligence and Education pairs was especially potent, heaved a sigh of relief as the two sisters smiled at Severus and retracted their claws. Hermione, the frumpy bookworm who was outlining the first-year curriculum to concerned mothers, saw the two sisters smile at Severus and fought down the urge to claw some eyes out.

After Cissy and Andy returned to confounding the Ministry agents, the beast within Severus snarled. Were those polite smiles of social graciousness, or were they invitations to which he was not responding? Which was worse: seeing signals where there were none or continuing his clamped-down personality of the last several decades and not growing as a person? All tonight would yield would be his envy of the bushy-haired one who was consistently confident.

As he walked back to the table where he had left the self-contained one, he heard snatches of conversation: “I don’t want to send my daughter to a bunch of glorified baby sitters.” “Learning to read and count is fine, but what about the magic part?” He relaxed as he joined the well-prepared lady who was free of petty jealousies.

Meanwhile, Cormac saw Cissy follow the Education agents into the hallway. He groaned. She would give away the game if she overdid it. He strode after her, and when he caught up, he whispered, “They might get suspicious if they see you following them.”

They heard the Education agents returning.

"We need to hide," he said.

"That's easy," she replied, pulling him into a side hall and holding him close.

Cormac had not let himself know how much he had admired Cissy Malfoy from a distance, and now, there was no distance – just glossy hair coming undone, a noble face turning soft, and lips inviting him to possess what he wanted. He nuzzled her as she moaned and slithered. As his toes curled below his silver buckles, Cormac waved his wand to change her emerald cloak into the subtle international-orange, an admirable hue he had not worked into his own ensemble, and this fashion savoir faire did so overcome the vision of any potential snoopers that their eyes were unable to identify the couple.

Well, almost all, for is it not the nature of the world that for every endeavor there are those who lack the requisite sensitivity?

Wrong sister, Cormac, thought Severus. You're supposed to be reducing the local tension, not making things more complicated.

Severus, reigning in his snarling beast, returned to bring more tea to the parched throat of Hermione. They watched the Ministry agents leave, each pair eyeing the other.

"I'm not helping fend off the opponents," said Hermione.

"You're doing the important work," said Severus. He took her hand. "If several hundred mothers want a school, the Ministry is not going to stop them."

She held his hand. "Thanks. That was kind of you."

It burst out of her. "Do you think you could live with a cat?"

Through her embarrassment, she could see the puzzled look on his face. "I was just asking," she said. "I mean, I've never seen you with an animal, but you're so good with their healing potions, and it might be some company for you because you must be lonely, and, I mean, I was just asking."

What she asked caused his heart to skip. He could have been knocked over with a feather. "I haven't thought about it," he said.

It was the dream again.

A long queue that moved slowly down a corridor lit by flickering torches. At the end, the scales, always the scales. His heart and a feather. The scales tipped. The head bared its fangs. The bite. The bite, the pain, the tumbling back.

"I am created Anubis, Lord of the Dead."

Severus sat bolt upright in bed, wondering who had said that.

His antique potion scales cast deep shadows in the moonlight.