

Redemption on the Installment Plan – IX

by Amita

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Average? My performance appraisal is 'Average'?"

The supervisor nodded.

"I did twice as much work as anybody else in the division."

"A key element is teamwork, dear."

"But I tried to join the teams. They didn't respond. I brought them samples of what I could do for them. They ignored me."

The supervisor stared blankly ahead.

It struck Hermione that all the supervisor could do was follow the guidelines. The supervisor's hands were tied. If she pressed, the supervisor would reply that the average rating was a gift considering her lack of teamwork.

Walking past the supervisor's door an hour later, Hermione heard part of a conversation. "We all tried really hard to work with Hermione, but she's just too stuck-up. She won't try to cooperate at all."

"Oh, Hermione, you brought a mountain of stuff to look at. I'm due at a tea this afternoon at the Parkinson's, and tomorrow, I must be fitted for a new dress for the Saturday ball."

"It sounds demanding," said Hermione.

"You have no idea, my child," said Cissy. "It would run someone half my age off their feet. But it's for a good cause, isn't it?"

Mrs. Malfoy was gathering support for the primary school among a group that styled itself 'The Wizard Preservation Society.' It made sense. Great events could be taught to students as part of festive occasions; study needn't be all boring; and the wealthier members of society would contribute to the schools in the spirit of keeping alive the traditions that held wizard society together.

"I can try," said Andy, "but I just got back from an exhausting tea. You have no idea, my child, how much a bunch of matrons can squabble over what should be festive

occasions. And I promised my sister that I would attend the ball with her."

Hermione nodded. Andy at Cissy's side was essential. The Ministry was already suspicious of the Malfoy involvement.

"How's it going?" asked Hermione.

Molly shook her head. "Thank goodness for magic. I can convert two rooms at my house into classrooms, but we need to find some space more centrally located. And I'm still working on transportation."

"Thank goodness we have someone with your skill with large groups," said Hermione, not bothering to show Molly the material she had gathered.

"Hey, sleepyhead."

She looked up to see a familiar face.

"Very few people come to a pub for a tea and a nap," said Cormac.

"I was hoping a change of scenery would do me good. All I do at my flat is stare at the walls."

"Burnout," said Cormac. "You're performing brilliantly at the Ministry, and you're building the foundations for a wizard primary school."

"What?" asked Hermione.

"Don't look surprised. People talk, and my family is connected. But you've got to take a break."

"Someone has to go through these documents," said Hermione.

"I can review them, and you can trust me. My family has a vested interest in the success of the project. School supplies will be a small, but steady source of revenue."

"That's a lot of extra work for you," said Hermione.

"I get a bonus for hard work."

"Don't you have to work with a team?" asked Hermione.

"Why drag more people in? They're already busy."

"You're rewarded for individual hard work?" she asked.

"Wow, you are burned out. What else makes sense?" he said. "In the meantime, you've got to get more sleep."

"I can't; I'm too tense."

"Find someone to massage your shoulders," he suggested.

She looked at him hopefully.

As his fingers kneaded taut muscles, he ignored the snickers of the other patrons. Helping this lady relax and keeping her in good health was a good investment. *A good investment*, he told himself, his hands on an admirable lady, *It's a good investment*.

Perhaps I over invested, he thought as, a half-hour later, he carried a limp Hermione to her flat.

He took her stack of documents to his rooms, brewed a tea, and began to read them.

When the pair had entered the shop, he had ducked into the back room and retrieved his war medal from a drawer.

"We wonder if you could help us on some Ministry business?" said the older of the pair.

"The Ministry has no greater friend," said Severus, fingering the medal now pinned to his cloak.

"We heard you were at the buffet organized by the cabal for public schools," continued the older.

"Mutual acquaintances invited me, and it would have been rude not to volunteer information on academic organization," said Severus.

"Then you agree with aims and objectives of that lot," said the younger of the pair.

"I have no interest in the matter," said Severus. "And you're certainly aware that my past experiences leave me with no desire to become involved with any such thing."

"But you attended," pressed the older.

"I steeled myself; I persevered; and my moral fibre held out," said Severus.

"You are aware that there was some outrageous behavior at the affair," said the younger.

I told Cormac to go with brass buckles instead of silver, thought Severus.

"The tea was inferior, and the biscuits second rate," said Severus. "I expected better of the organizers."

"Then you admit you admire this type of people," said the older.

"Not after sampling their tea and biscuits," said Severus.

The two Ministry officials looked at each other. Was the brand of tea and biscuits important at these occasions? This sounded like pureblood tendencies. It was worth including in the report.

Severus was thinking that it had been three weeks since the buffet. It had taken that long for the Ministry to realize that that the Ministry Intelligence Agents and the Ministry Education Spies had fingered each other.

"May I interest you gents in some antique scales," asked Severus, "or some enchanted feathers? A new shipment just arrived."

"Do you have some wide-brimmed hats that match the feathers?" asked the younger of the pair.

"That does attract the eye of a witch," winked Severus.

"Maybe some other time," said the older, dragging the younger out of the shop.