

Redemption on the Installment Plan – X

by Amita

Who can see ahead if his eyes are on the path?

Chapter 1 of 1

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Hermione knocked and entered. "Have you looked at my report?" she asked. She had turned it in three days ago.

Her supervisor shook her head no. "It's not due for another week, and I noticed you're still not working with others, but while you're here, how is the primary school project going?"

At Hermione's puzzled look, the supervisor said, "I have several nephews the right age. Their mothers are enthusiastic, but only if you are Mr. Snape are involved."

"I didn't know Severus, I mean, Mr. Snape was that popular," said Hermione.

"He's not," said the supervisor, "but everyone's convinced that if you and Mr. Snape are involved the instructors will be the best, or they'll be replaced."

Hermione wondered about her own popularity versus her reputation and said, "Nothing's been settled yet."

The supervisor sighed. "You can't let the project bog down with teamwork. It will only succeed if the right individuals make an extraordinary effort. People are counting on you."

"Mum says you're doing great work setting up the schools."

"She's too generous."

"Have you thought she might fancy you?"

"No. These days I'm content with a lack of active hatred."

"You're not being fair to yourself. You're resourceful enough to have fooled everyone for decades, and you held the school together during its most dangerous period."

"It's most dangerous period was the first two hundred years. The country was constantly being invaded and cultures destroyed."

"I've heard you talk about that before, and I think you're right. Salazar Slytherin was the true hero, not Godric Gryffindor. Godric just bashed heads. Salazar made the strategic plans and preserved our heritage. I bet you could keep a girl up all night talking about your ideas, and I know you'd be sympathetic and a good listener to her thoughts, too. You'd be a marvelous companion."

"You overestimate my charm."

"No, I don't. And there you go again. You're putting yourself down. Don't you know that puts down the people who admire you? Don't you ever think how much you hurt someone who wants to be your friend? Lots of girls would like to be with you. You're smart and handsome and clever, and deep down, you're loyal and loving. But you never give anyone a chance, and it's not fair."

Severus watched Pansy storm out of the shop. His attempt at friendly modesty to disguise his inappropriate urges had not worked out well.

"Is this legal?"

"There's no copyright treaty with the non-wizards."

"But isn't it a one way exchange? What use do they have for a spellbook?"

"*A Compendium of Spells* is a favorite among them."

"What?"

"That and *Biographies of the Dark Wizards*" said Cormac. "Haven't you heard of the urban-fantasy writers?"

"The who?" asked Andy.

He tried a brief explanation of the genre among the non-wizards. Cormac and Andy and Teddy were packing the first printing of the grade-one readers, or rather, Andy was packing them as Teddy sat on Cormac's knee while Cormac helped him read his copy. Cormac had given them a tour of the family printing shop and was now conducting what he called a beta test while thinking this was the way young wizards should be taught, except that lessons on a mother's knee might falter upon world history or the elements of geomancy. Whilst packing, Andy continued to ponder literary possibilities. She asked if it would be possible to produce a dual-novel, a novel including both worlds that would appear to be urban fantasy to the non-wizards and appear to be science fiction to the wizards. Cormac admired her imagination and wished he had been able to persuade her to join the family business, but she was determined to try teaching.

"You could make even more money by fashion modeling," he said.

She patted her hair. "That was sweet, Cormie."

Cormac held himself in check. The unexpected snog with Cissy had aroused strange feelings, and he told himself that his growing attraction to Andy was unseemly. He smiled at her as wild images came unbidden to his mind.

"Do you think I'm letting everyone down?"

Severus sipped his tea. "What's this about?"

Hermione braced herself for her confession. "I mean I haven't been doing enough. I'm letting other people do all the work."

She's cute when she's contrite, he thought. *Omigod, first Pansy, and now Hermione. I've got to stop lusting after young women.*

"You're letting other people participate," said Severus. "There was general consensus on the contents of the grade-one books, and Andy put together a coherent version." *Is Pansy full of spirit while Hermione is full of determination? And I've got to stop comparing their breasts. Besides, I can't really compare until I get their bras off, and I bet their faces are lovely when someone they want is stroking their hair and telling them they're marvelous, and I've got to get a grip on myself.*

She took his hand. "Are you being honest with me? I need to know."

"It's best to let others contribute. Of course, no one wants you to drop out," he said. *No one wants you to let go of their hand, either. No, no, no, I can't think like this. Your lonely nights are over, sweetheart. By the gods, why can't I be normal and chase married women my own age? Blimey, look at those intelligent eyes. This is torture.*

Her fingers wrapped around his. "Everyone wants you on the project, too. You will keep working with us, won't you?"

He decided to reassure her that the project was growing in popularity. "Pansy Parkinson and her mother are both keen on the school," said Severus.

Hermione's nostrils flared.