

Redemption on the Installment Plan – XI

by Amita

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

Chapter 1 of 1

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"Have a chair, Miss. We assume you're here for the part-time position in Magic Arts."

The lady nodded yes.

"We have a basic curriculum for the first two grades, but school isn't only reading, writing, and arithmetic. We've found several artists who are willing to visit the classrooms and demonstrate drawing and painting, but we were thinking about adding occasional tutorials in magic. Several people have applied. One claims he can ride the whirlwind and stop cyclones; another says he can vaporize bullets and hex the scales off dragons. Tell us. What do you do?"

The lady sat up straight. "I read peafowl."

Severus and Hermione looked at each other. "That's a start," they said.

The lady cleared her throat. "I read your advertisement yesterday morning, and when I stepped out the door to run errands, there was a flock of peahens in my lawn. They crossed the path in front of me, and then they crossed it again before running down the road to the village. I told everyone in the grocery store that I had received a good omen for a worthy venture. I told the same thing to everyone in the broom repair shop and repeated it to my knitting circle."

Severus and Hermione nodded.

The lady continued. "This morning the peahens were back. I told all my neighbors an exemplary project was starting and good fortune would befall the founders." She paused to catch her breath. "And I might be blessed to be part of it."

Severus and Hermione smiled at each other. "Yes, that's good," they said. "We may be able to use such a practical talent."

After the lady left, Hermione was looking pensive.

"I know what you're thinking," said Severus. "The seer's portents have inspired you, and you're wondering if we can conjure up a comet for the school's official opening."

"Well, Hermione, what's the Department Head think of your report?"

"She gave it to Henry Grudlowe to review."

"What. He's an idiot. What's he doing with it?"

"Originally, it was a bookkeeping error. He has the same initials, and the clerk assumed that since he's the Assistant Department Head, he must have written it, but now that he's involved, they decided to let him review it."

"He's the Assistant Department Head?"

"No one can find anything that he can do, and they have to stick him somewhere."

"Has it occurred to you that good old Grudlowe might try to show that he can do something and make you rewrite your report until he can understand it?"

"You two aren't wagging your tails enough."

"We're trying."

"Then I can't understand why you're alone ... unless the wizards are afraid of being crushed by Hermione's intellect and shamed by Andy's aristocratic refinement. That would explain it."

"I never knew wizards were such a cowardly lot," said Hermione.

"What happened to all the heroes? Wait, you went and married one of them," said Andy.

"It's not my fault you're alone," said Ginny Potter, but she could see she wasn't convincing them.

"You could tell us your secrets," said Andy.

"You must have done something," said Hermione. "When your husband was at Hogwarts, he kissed a girl exactly twice, never forgave his first girlfriend, and never made a pass at me. How did you soften that hard heart?"

"Or did you make the rest of him as hard as his heart?" asked Andy. "Perhaps we should take pointers from your lingerie."

"Or did he marry a family and become my mother's son-in-law?" asked Ginny.

They decided a general inspection of lingerie was in order. That would provide a firm foundation for a shopping expedition. Andy declared she had been too poor to afford anything decent while Hermione confessed hers was strictly utilitarian. That left Ginny with the means, motive, and opportunity.

"Do you think Severus would like this?" asked Hermione, holding up a garment.

"Severus?" queried Ginny.

"Would this get Cormac excited?" asked Andy.

"Cormac?" wondered Ginny. She mentally wrangled with cross-generation passion.

Ginny watched their initial enthusiasm dwindle. She decided they weren't after sex; they wanted romance. She asked Hermione if she was wearing white cotton. Hermione nodded yes. She asked Andy if she was wearing ivory silk. Andy nodded yes.

"That's who you are, and you're already perfect," said Ginny. "Cormac is a merchant of quality goods who appreciates a classy presentation, and Severus is an artisan who knows the best products come in the simplest package."

Ginny asked if anything was happening. Andy replied that every Friday evening, when she was about to collapse from a week of teaching young sprouts, Cormac appeared with a pizza and a bottle of wine. It was a life saver. Hermione admitted she had been going to Severus's shop every Saturday and Sunday afternoon with the intent of seeking his help on planning the grade-three curriculum, but all she did was chat while he supplied her with tea and biscuits. Hermione blushed and admitted she often fell asleep in his comfortable reclining chair.

Ginny was appalled. "They're already taking care of you, and you can't think of what to do? Don't you have any feminine wiles?"

Andy and Hermione looked hurt. "Do you think they like us?" they asked.

Ginny sighed.

"Do you think you can do any better?" asked Andy and Hermione.

"We are having a get together over the holidays. And we were thinking of going medieval before we suffocate in virtue."

"I'm not certain I should indulge."

"If you try to be too good, you'll crack, and you won't be of any use to anyone."

"I suppose that's an invitation, providing I can find a partner."

"An attractive partner, old bean. It's share and share alike," said Lucius. "Try to persuade Cormac to come with someone too. It doesn't get interesting until we have four couples."

"I'll tell him to choose a married lady of upstanding character. They enjoy it more," said Severus.

"Yes, tell him it's only worthwhile if the girls are enthusiastic and want to do it again," said Lucius.

"We wizards live to serve," agreed Severus.