

Redemption on the Installment Plan – XII

by Amita

Path, what path?

Chapter 1 of 1

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"Who's responsible for this ridiculous accusation? Is it you?"

The bureaucrat looked at the document the lady had slammed on his desk. "It didn't originate here," he said. "It's about adopting non-wizard textbooks, but we have no copyright treaty with the non-wizards." He scanned the parchment. "It says the misuse of a muggle artifact is that the textbooks present non-wizards as benign."

"So, the charge is that we're not teaching fear and hate."

The bureaucrat nodded agreement.

"Don't you think some things are best left to the parents?" asked Mrs. Malfoy.

It took a while for that to percolate through Mr. Weasley's skull. Finally, he said, "Properly phrased, that might be a viable defense."

They talked strategy. It was true that the smaller community of wizards hadn't turned out the volume of literature the non-wizard community had, and it was ironic that upgrading the education of young wizards had created a demand for stories that could only be met by pilfering the riches of a possibly hostile society.

"I helped my sister select the stories, and most of them feature dogs," said Mrs. Malfoy, "but there's an occasional one about a cat, owl, or toad."

"That's the solution," said Mr. Weasley, "more toads."

Keeping a straight face, Mrs. Malfoy declared that, at last, Mr. Weasley was taking this in the right spirit and they couldn't interrupt their discussion just because it was the lunch hour. Doubtless, this was official business and it could go on an expense account and she knew the very place where an understanding bureaucrat could have the meal he deserved.

"You're out of scouring powder for porcelain."

The two looked up from where they were having tea while she held her breath thinking it had taken a lot of nerve to address her ex-professor in such a manner and it had taken more than she thought she had to confront both of them and she wished the other wizard weren't there but she knew she would never work up the courage again and it was now or never and she would run out of the shop but for the shame of it and why didn't they say something before she embarrassed herself right then and there and she had told herself this was a bad idea and she wished she had never resolved to show those other two girls how to wag their tails and now her own tail was caught in the grinder.

"An oversight," said Severus. "I can prepare some this evening or right now if you are in a rush."

"Would you care for a tea, Mrs. Potter," asked Lucius, "or must you hurry off?"

"I would love a tea, and I can help you prepare the powder," said Ginny before she could stop the words from coming out of her mouth. This was going too well. This was scary.

The two wizards made a production out of seating her and furnishing her with cup, saucer, napkins, and biscuits. It ended with Lucius leaning forward and asking, "One lump or two, love?" Ginny relaxed at the display of good humor. She had a story ready about discovering the family porcelain in poor shape, but she was soon caught up in their discussion of the ridiculous charge against the textbooks. She was surprised the Ministry wasn't acting in a manner more befitting their kind: hiring a troll to break in at night and piss in the classrooms. She had worn a short skirt, and they laughed at the troll and glanced at her knees and glimpse of thigh. She smiled encouragingly and hoped their thoughts were moving on to higher things and, she hoped, the image of her husband wedged between what they could only imagine. A husband who would again spend the holiday season on assignment, sacrificing the warmth of his mother-in-law's family for the cold comfort of duty.

Ginny Potter let Severus instruct her in the preparation of the powder, and she paid close attention to the business at hand. It would not do to have him think of her as a flighty girl. Besides, just his hand guiding hers and the thought of his smelling her hair was more than distracting. But his pleased look at her success told her she had done the right thing. He mentioned his stocks were low in several items, and she said she wouldn't mind learning their preparation either.

"Just grind it down to that level but no finer."

"You already said that," said Ginny.

His nod of approval sent her spirit soaring. She was something besides the baby of the family.

Several hours later, they returned to where Lucius had been minding the store where, once again in good humor, they insisted on a tea to celebrate her good efforts.

Lucius offered one lump or two and suggested that Ginny help in the shop more often while giving Severus a huge, obvious wink. *What a pair*, thought Ginny, letting her skirt ride higher. Severus challenged Lucius to invite Ginny to a social event at the Manor. Lucius replied that it was an attractive idea, but the upcoming event, the Winter Solstice, might be too pagan for a refined lady. Ginny's heart sank and her skirt rode lower – all this effort for nothing. Severus said it might be acceptable. Ginny's hopes and skirt rose – she was ready for some pagan. Severus added it might be acceptable if the festivities were toned down. Ginny's heart and skirt sank – godawful, bloody gentlemen. Lucius commented that toning it down was possible, but perhaps not necessary since Ginny seemed to be of strong moral fibre. Ginny's hopes rose to shine in her face as her skirt responded to an appreciative audience – oh, bad boys.