

Redemption on the Installment Plan – XIV

by Amita

If all are on the one true path, how will any paths cross?

Chapter 1 of 1

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"You've got to help me shop for a new outfit."

"Me?"

Andy dragged Cormac and Teddy through several dress shops until she found something that produced the right look on Cormie's face: a balanced mix of admiration and lust.

They walked hand-in-hand back to her house where Teddy, worn out by the rigors of shopping, actually asked to take a nap. Andy became afraid that her dear Cormie was about to do the same, but she had an answer to that. She guided him to a pile of rugs and quilts before the fireplace where he relaxed while the one more conditioned to the rigors of shopping fetched tea and biscuits. And sherry. For had he not accomplished a noble venture worthy of celebration? And it might have been the sherry although she preferred to think it was her figure, still svelte but complimented with mature roundness, that kept him alert and his lips glued to hers as his hands roamed over a woman who hoped she was pleasing. And so alert and interested did he become that it was Andy who succumbed to the wellbeing produced by his attentions and slipped into a blissful state where all was right with the world and she was asleep in her Cormie's arms.

"My family maintains this forest, and it's not that wild, but it's still fun for a leisurely, Sunday ride," she said.

"Nothing too strenuous before elevenses has always been a good rule," he replied.

"I was hoping for more snark," said Pansy, "at least a subtle sneer about missing the thrills of something dangerous."

"Perhaps after an invigorating tea, we can search for the heart of the Forbidden Forest," suggested Severus.

Bugger, she thought. *He's going to be smooth and impenetrable.*

"There are lots of hearts," said Pansy, not giving up as she mounted her broom, "and they all have forbidden forests."

She pointed out the different woods for different wands and the shade-loving plants that were equally profitable, and in the shade of her heart, the wild vines twisted and sprawled as they clawed the harsh ground, desperate for fertile soil.

Upon their return to civilization, Severus escorted Pansy to an outdoor table and went to fetch tea for elevenses. And scones, "To fortify ourselves for the rigorous journeys ahead."

After Severus has suggested disguising her as an older woman, Pansy had spent the intervening days perusing photo albums, looking for subtle sirens. Now, she sat demurely at the table as befitted the disguise he had chosen for her. She heard steps behind her.

"Why, Pansy, it's you."

"We didn't recognize you."

Parvati and Lavender helped themselves to chairs at the table.

"We love your new look."

"Floral brings out the inner you."

"And pink is just too too."

I always thought eye gouging was too too, thought Pansy.

"But we don't understand why you're wearing that wide-brimmed hat."

"It hides your face."

"Don't you want to be recognized?"

"Is this a clandestine meeting?"

"Perhaps she finally found a boyfriend."

At this, Parvati and Lavender flashed their engagement rings.

"I admit that outfit is every boyfriend's dream."

"You don't object to his mentally undressing you, you hope he will."

Gotta give Severus credit for that one, thought Pansy.

"If you don't mind a small bit of advice, that feather in your hat doesn't fit."

"Yes, the feather is dignified."

There will be a weighing of souls, thought Pansy.

Pansy watched Parvati and Lavender take their leave with the two of them radiating smugness at a job well done. Someone was going to pay for this.

"Me? I'm supposed to do it?"

"Yes, this is part of the family business entrusted to you."

That was last week. Today, Cormac McGlagger talked to Minister Shacklebolt about transferring Miss Granger to the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office. Who else in the wizard world had the depth of knowledge in non-wizard literature to examine the charge of textbook malfeasance? Any accusations of conflict of interest would imply that Ministry employees were unable to perform their jobs without bias. The Minister had to agree, and even acknowledged that Miss Granger's last report, which appeared to be stuck in her current department, was best passed to the next level to expedite Miss Granger's total attention to her new assignment. It was clearly the best option for the Ministry and, hence, the best option for the wizard world.

"You're low on these potions," she said, showing him a list.

She waited for him to tell her to mind her own business, for him to become angry, but she couldn't forget last Saturday when she had complained about the shop being out of porcelain powder and he had guided her through preparing several compounds. And were Severus and Lucius only teasing about inviting her to a solstice ritual?

He looked at the list of three items. "There's not much demand for them and their preparation is tricky." He was wondering if she was trying to be social.

"I can help," said Ginny.

He concluded she was either trying to be social, although a 'hello' and an invitation to tea would have sufficed, or she enjoyed making potions, or wildest of thoughts, she wanted to be alone with him.

"You do excellent work," he said, "and I can close for an hour since it's the slowest part of the day."

Ginny Potter beamed.

Back in the lab, she was thinking so much about the wizard next to her that she mixed up the ingredients for her first effort. She waited for the explosion. Instead she felt reassuring hands on her shoulders and a comforting voice telling her that this potion was indeed tricky. Catching her breath, she managed to reply, in a voice grown hoarse, that if he kept his calming hands on her, she could probably follow the exacting procedure.

Calming, bloody hell, her insides were rearranging themselves.

Putting forth more of a mental effort than she knew she possessed, she successfully mixed the concoction.

"Well done," he said.

She reached up to hold his right hand with hers as his left hand stroked her hair. She stepped back into him. She nearly swooned when he gave her a gentle hug. The spot between her legs felt sticky. She stammered out something about solstice.

"Are you still interested?" he asked. "We need to find a partner for Lucius."

Her brain, already racing with racy thoughts, tried to compile a list of possible candidates while Severus informed her there were several possible rites and the one they chose depended on the portents and the desires of the witches. She thought about the possibility of no other witch coming forth and facing the task of pleasing both Severus and Lucius.

Oh my oh my.

Hermione stopped outside Arthur's office. There was someone in there. She told herself she shouldn't listen, but she did.

There was the creak of a chair as Cissy placed herself in Arthur's lap.

"Do you mind my fat bum?" asked Cissy.

"Don't you mean, aren't I admiring your lovely shape?"

"Are you?" asked Cissy

"Don't you want to ask if I'm getting excited by what an elegant lady you are?" asked Arthur.

"It would be safer for both of us if you lusted after my available charms," said Cissy.

"That's true," said Arthur.

"Well, which is it, elegance or charms?" asked Cissy.

"They go together, and they make me want to give you your daily dose of warm fuzzies."

If one listened closely, which, of course, Hermione didn't do, one might hear the rustling of clothes and the passionate sighs of a woman as Cissy snogged the living daylight out of Arthur. As she turned on her heels and left, Hermione was thinking that no one was offering her any warm fuzzies.

Then came owl only wasted love. Deep in the mechanics of her mind, she had flawlessly reasoned her way to the end of all things: their ultimate incompatibility. Her current passion, her inability to stop thinking about him, all the things he would have died to have heard from her, became the reasons that she must give him up. She had concluded that his was a temporary infatuation with an older woman while her affection that reached to her center would only grow and consume her and cause such pain when he left, as she knew he inevitably must, that at this future departure date she would be utterly destroyed. How much better to endure the unendurable pain of giving him up now. And on his part, he remembered his past as a prat and decided not to act on the impulse to run to her and assure her that she was all he ever wanted, but acting more wisely, he sought advice from others who told him that nothing could be forced upon a woman. She must decide in her own mind to take the leap. Any protest on his part would only stiffen her resolve. Any protestation of affection would only remind her of how much greater her future agony would be. Thus, Cormac burned the letter from Andromeda delivered by owl only wasted love.