

# Redemption on the Installment Plan - XVIII

*by Amita*

How strange the path is.

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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He greeted her at the door and escorted her into a parlor-study. She wasn't certain what the room was, but she admired its combination of bright sunniness and quiet studiousness. He asked if she had taken in the rugged shore line on her way to his home. Padma Patil was thinking that Lucius Malfoy didn't seem all that shattered.

"Miss Patil, I assume," said a house-elf, entering with a tea tray. "I hope you like our tea. It's a rather stringent brew. And Mr. Malfoy doesn't care for biscuits that are too sweet."

"K'tak and I can offer you other choices if this is not to your liking," said Lucius.

Padma sipped the tea and nodded her approval. It was bracing. Sugar or cream would ruin it. Observing the tea was acceptable, K'tak left the room.

"K'tak?" asked Padma.

"It's as close as I can come to pronouncing her elven name," said Lucius. "She and her uncle insisted on accompanying me."

Padma asked about her uncle's name, but Lucius replied that he was of the old school and went by the Anglicized Harold. Harold spent most of the day sunning his old bones and sipping vintage Chardonnay to ease his aches and pains. Nevertheless, he was a demon at maintaining china and cutlery and eliminating dust bunnies. Padma wondered if the rest of the chores weren't a heavy burden for K'tak. Lucius assured Padma that it was easy for K'tak if one allowed her to use the full range of elf magic. Padma was pondering exactly what 'shattered' meant.

"But you came to me about applying Arithmancy to Potions," said Lucius. "Quite apt since of all the disciplines those two appear the least magical, but that may be a misconception since among the non-magical, the high practitioners of the corresponding Mathematics and Chemistry are often regarded as wizards."

Padma informed Lucius that the idea of combining the two had come to her and it wouldn't let go even though she had no idea how to begin. He suggested variations of simple concoctions. He vaguely recalled that there were a number of preparations where a slight change produced a different result. She added that she, too, had noticed that, but the specifics escaped her whereupon the two spent some time lamenting the abysmal organization of the standard Potions course. Now that they thought about it, they didn't even know what the operative ingredient was in crushed beetle shells, or perhaps, there were several operatives that became active under different circumstances.

Noticing Padma's despair at the task ahead of them, Lucius poured her another cup and said, "Come, come, my lady, 'tis a grand undertaking."

Padma couldn't disagree with that, or under the circumstances, could she decline a walk by the cliff wall where the pounding sea would lift their spirits. On their way, they passed Harold sunning himself in his lawn chair. They gave him a formal wave. Harold, being of the old school and not certain humans should acknowledge him as an actual being, returned their salute, wine glass in hand, with embarrassment.

"It's an adventure," said Lucius as they admired the relentless sea.

*Yes, the journey, thought Padma. Even if it ends in epic fail, it's the journey.*

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The nemesis-witch was talking at him.

Cormac was playing hooky. He had left the clatter of the office where clerks and secretaries had been at him all morning with minor problems. His excuse, he told himself, was that all the problems were minor and they could solve them themselves if they didn't feel as if they had to get his approval, which they couldn't do if he was not in the office, which left them free to take care of routine business with their usual efficiency.

Now, he was discovering, Arthur Weasley had spilled the beans and had pointed out to Miss Granger what a fix she had been in in her previous department and how much she owed Cormac and his family. He was thinking that the world would run smoother with less honesty and integrity, but good old Arthur was probably beyond reforming, which had led to the witch of his nightmares plunking herself down at the table where he was trying to have a well-deserved café au lait.

"Let me order you one," he said, thinking his family would never forgive him if he alienated the witch they had gone to so much trouble to get on their side.

"I should buy you one. I owe you," said Hermione.

"Not really," he said. "Someone once observed problems arose because things weren't the right fit."

"But I'm spending my time collecting stories for primary school readers," she said. She paused. "Wait, that's being proactive. It will be more difficult to file a complaint against a reader that the Ministry helped produce."

"And my family is investing in primary textbooks, which are becoming generally popular. We believe we've found the right person for the job."

It had been a long time since anyone had said something nice to her, and he had deftly removed the nagging feeling that she owed him for a favor. When her café au lait arrived, Hermione took the opportunity to smile and take Cormac's hand as she thanked him. A few moments later, she realized she was still holding his hand. As smoothly as she could, she moved it to her coffee cup. She relaxed, enjoyed the sunshine and the cool breeze, and took a closer look at Cormac.

Cormac was thinking he should make his excuses and rush back to the office, but he didn't want to leave. This was stupid. This girl had described him as vile, and that was when he was an innocent schoolboy. He recalled her obvious defects: frizzy hair, thick spectacles, frumpy clothes, but he had seen beyond those when he was younger. Overbearing. Overbearing was the ticket. She might be acting demure at the moment, but he would not let himself be fooled. Life around this woman would be misery; life with her would be hell on earth.

"What are you doing for lunch next Friday?" she was asking. "I know you're busy, and I'm not exciting company, but if nothing else is happening, we could meet and talk some more. It's not a date or anything like that. We'll buy our own lunches."

Why was he saying yes?

"Oh, that's marvelous," said Hermione, putting her hand on his shoulder. "I'll come by your office so that you don't have to go out of your way. I'm really looking forward to it."

She might have been talking about fairy tales, but her knee was pressed against his leg, and Cormac was lost in his.

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Lavender casually looked over the potions on the shelves until the other customers left, but she decided she had not been as discreet as she had thought because when she approached the counter, Severus put on his most sincere face and said, "We don't do love potions, Miss Brown."

"It's not Miss," she said, showing him the ring, "and you can call me Lavender and it's not something as crass as a love potion."

Before he could apologize, she informed him that she needed something to increase libido. He recommended a product called 'The Witches Bedtime Friend,' but she shook her head and said she needed something for a wizard. When he looked puzzled, she explained that she had only been married two weeks, but immediately after the ceremony, her husband's interest in her had plummeted. Not that she minded all that much, but she was getting desperate for something, and now that she thought about it, if his interest increased, she might need the 'Witches Friend' after all.

She sighed. "Do you think there's something wrong with me? Am I ugly? Am I abnormal? Isn't there anything that someone can do?"

"You look healthy, and you're certainly attractive," said Severus. "There is a remedy for married women, but it's an ancient ritual, and it doesn't follow current morality."

She experienced a ray of hope, but she had reservations. "Does it hurt? Why aren't other witches doing it?"

"Another witch is planning to participate, and the ritual is not performed unless everyone is enthusiastic, but it does require the women be compatible with the wizards involved," said Severus.

Lavender was wondering if that meant what she hoped it meant. When she learned the wizards were Severus and Lucius and they would be bad boys, she almost agreed immediately, but a reservoir of cunning requested some demonstration of compatibility and wasn't it time to close the shop for a short tea break.

"How bad will you be?" asked Lavender after the door had closed behind them.

"We will be guided by temptation," said Severus, "and your charms are as great as your heart."

"What?" asked Lavender.

"Did anyone ever love so much?" he said, taking her hand. "Did anyone ever lose so much?" he said, letting his fingers intertwine with hers. "And did you not return to fight for what was right beside your ex-lover?" he said, giving her a look that warmed her core.

"I think I was childish," said Lavender.

"We should all be so childish, and perhaps some part of us should remain so, resisting the calluses that grow over our better nature," he said, one hand moving to her waist and the other stroking her temples as it brushed her locks behind her ears.

She had one hand on his arm and the other on his waist. Just his presence was comforting.

"I thought you were going to tell me I had a nice rack," she said.

"That would be safer," he admitted.

She was thinking that his hands massaging her temples couldn't make her breasts feel perky, could it? His kissing her on the forehead couldn't make her ache, could it? His whispering in her ear that he and Lucius needed her couldn't make her knees buckle, could it?

Her arms wrapped around his neck as her weakened knees gave way and perky breasts pressed against him. He was hard all over. Lavender moaned. "Do you think I'm being a naughty girl?"

"It's not your fault if your beauty drives me wild and I take advantage of a neglected lady," said Severus.

"You'll be gentle won't you?" asked Lavender.

"No, you're going to scream my name." Severus grabbed her hair. His lips were on hers. His tongue was in her mouth. His other hand moved to her hips then under her skirt to slide back up her leg to grip and roam over the cotton-covered promise of a married woman.

When they came up for air, Lavender was tearing at the buttons to her blouse. "Oh, don't tell anyone. Oh, don't tell anyone."

Severus waltzed her to the sofa, a clumsy waltz since her knickers were on the way to the floor. On the sofa, she opened her legs wide, thinking he would plunge in, but instead, he was nibbling his way up the inside of her thighs. It was lovely. It was agony. She was groaning it was enough, it was enough, and she couldn't take it any longer and his lips couldn't go any higher, could they, and then ...

Lavender yelled.

In the midst of worrying that people could hear her for blocks and not really caring, she realized that he was not using any finesse whatsoever. It was just his tongue and waves of pleasure and her clutching his hair and everything becoming unbearable and it going on and on and her incoherent ululating until ecstasy pierced her heart and stopped the world.

He wouldn't stop now, would he? No, he was unfastening his trousers. He was going to make her be completely unfaithful. As she guided him in, she was surprised that she liked being mounted by him, but this time she would be a good girl. She couldn't stop him, but she didn't have to have an orgasm. She dared anyone to resist that tongue, but now, she would just let him enjoy himself. She placed her hands beside her head in invitation. She would let him hold her down and ride her like a randy male as she behaved like a decorous lady. It was going well. He was holding her gently and riding her gently and telling her she was lovely. It felt so good that she knew he was sincere. He was holding her and riding her and telling her that she was the one he wanted. She believed him. He was holding her possessively and riding her urgently and telling her he wanted to have her. It was going too well. Her determination to be a good girl dissolved in her hot, wet self. He was holding her lovingly and holding back and telling her to make love to him, and her legs were wrapped around him and pulling him into her growing need and her body was arching to give him what he wanted and she was begging him, "Fuck me. Fuck me," and she thought she would never say that. He was holding her and riding her and savoring her rictus smile and telling her to give herself to him. Severus was holding Lavender and experiencing her rapture and releasing himself into another wizard' wife.

Some time later, they dressed and made themselves presentable to polite society, but during tea, she had an attack of conscience. What had she let him do to her? She was a violated woman, and it was obviously his fault. "Did you have fun?" she accused him.

"I had you," said Severus.

She had to agree.