

Things Every Good Woman Should Know *Volume 1*



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Jae Henderson

**Things Every Good Woman
Should Know**

Volume 1

By Jae Henderson

THINGS EVERY GOOD WOMAN SHOULD KNOW VOLUME 1

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Success Is the Best Revenge

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge: I will repay," says the Lord.—Romans 12:19

Janice clutched the letter in her pocket tightly. Her palms were so sweaty that the blue ink on the paper began to smear. It only contained a few nondescriptive lines, but it was what the letter didn't say that made it so intriguing.

She was in the living room helping her favorite aunt mend her uncle's work clothes when the postman came to deliver the certified letter. Janice wondered how the writer found her. She didn't tell anyone where she was going. After the scandal, as she referred to it, and her separation from her husband, John, she disappeared. She knew that no one would think to look for her on her aunt and uncle's small farm in Oklahoma. Not even her husband, since he always thought he was too good to come visit her family "in the country" when they were together. Her mother was the only person who knew of her whereabouts, and Janice knew that she would never rat her out.

She was curious to know who wrote the letter and what it meant. The words scrawled in tiny neat script read, *How would you like your old life back? You once extended me your friendship when I needed it*

most. Please allow me to return the favor. Meet me tomorrow for dinner.

It was followed by the name and address of one of the most popular diners in the town, Lucille's.

Janice arrived 15 minutes early because she wanted to beat the crowd and get a good view of the man or woman who thought they could restore her life as soon as he or she entered. She opened the door to the eatery to find Lucille herself serving as hostess. This was rare since the old woman retired about 3 years ago and left the daily operation to her only son, Clive. She joined a senior's travel group and was always on some cruise or exploring what she called "new territory." But every now and then when she began to miss the hustle and bustle of her busy diner and her favorite customers, Lucille came to her namesake place and behaved as if she'd never left. Lucille was fond of Janice. As a child, she spent her summers in Oklahoma and her uncle and aunt would bring her to the restaurant once a week for some homemade vanilla ice cream and a slice of apple pie. Lucille would always make sure she got a nice portion of crust just the way Janice liked it.

"Hey, Sugar Dumpling! Gon'head and find you a seat and I'll send somebody over to take your order," Lucille called out.

"Take your time, Ms. Lou. I'm expecting a guest and he hasn't arrived yet."

"He?" Lucille asked while peering over her brown horn-rimmed spectacles with a raised eyebrow. "It better not be that no-count husband of yours, or I'm gone do like Savannah did in *Waiting to Exhale* and pour water all in his lap."

Word got around the town pretty quickly that she was on her way to divorce court. Most people in the town only knew bits and pieces of what happened, but to them, Janice was like family. They watched her grow up. She played with their children, spent the night during sleepovers, ate dinner at their tables, and worshipped with them on Sundays. The worst thing you can do is mess with family. John was on the hit list of several people he never met and didn't know existed.

"No worries, Ms. Lou. To tell you the truth it might be a she. You can save the water for your customers," she smiled.

Janice sat down, picked up a menu, and looked at it as if she didn't already know everything that was on it. She held out her hands and examined her semi-dirty unmanicured nails.

It was mind-boggling how her life had changed in a matter of weeks. One of the highlights of her week used to be her trips to the spa. She could no longer afford her massage, facial, manicure, and pedicure appointments. Even if she could, it wouldn't be practical when you live and work on a farm. Getting your hands dirty was part of the job requirements. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, helping her uncle with the animals and preparing the fields for planting were all in a day's work. Each evening before dinner she scrubbed the thick rich dark earth from beneath her fingernails. Sometimes she had to wash them at least three times to get it all out. Her manicure and polish wouldn't last 2 days under those conditions.

Janice laughed, but it wasn't a laugh of joy. It was the laugh someone gives when they are walking

that thin line between sanity and insanity. Everything she held dear was ripped away from her simply because she did what she had to do to give her conscience peace. It tormented her day and night as she fought to convince herself that it was okay not to turn the information she knew over to the proper authorities. She talked it over with her husband, and he told her that if she did that, she would not only ruin their lives but hundreds of others as well.

“Some things are better left unsaid,” he stated. But she couldn’t. As an environmental specialist she knew that the toxins her company was allowing to seep into the water table and the soil were hazardous and could lead to severe illness and possibly even the deaths of the people in the small neighboring town. She and most of the people who worked at the plant didn’t live there. The town was small and poor, and plant employees, most of who made an above-average salary, could afford to live in more affluent areas. So they did. Some drove an hour or more to and from work.

Janice enjoyed her job at Valcrex, and she was good at it. When she noticed the company was growing lax in their hazardous waste disposal standards, she tried to alert her bosses to the problem. She soon learned that they were “trying something new” to save money and told her that she needn’t worry herself about it. She begged them to do the right thing and upgrade their equipment to properly dispose of the hazardous manufacturing by-products they made during production each day. Upper management told her that they would look into it, but the new equipment would cost millions, and it would take time to get it. They

tried to pacify her with a month's paid vacation and a bonus. She was told when she got back everything would be up to code. Janice wanted to stay and supervise the changes, but they told her that wasn't necessary. She reluctantly took her month's leave and spent the time relaxing and bonding with her children. She even when to the Virgin Islands for a week.

When she returned to work, she realized that the toxins being released into the environment were worse than ever. Nothing had changed. Janice refused to eat at the local restaurants for fear that they were cooking the food from water found in the nearby reservoir. Each day she brought lunch for her and her husband, who also worked for the company. She encouraged her coworkers to do the same. She tried to appeal to her bosses again, but she was told that if she wanted to keep her job she better keep quiet. That silenced her for a little while. She had grown accustomed to her life of luxury and had no desire to give it up. But at what cost?

The guilt Janice felt became unbearable. She was in constant inner-turmoil because of the dirty secret she was being forced to carry. She couldn't eat. She couldn't sleep. She tried to keep busy so she wouldn't think about the toxins poisoning those in the town, but there wasn't enough work to be done to make her forget Valcrex's dastardly deed. Then one day she couldn't continue to stand under the weight of her guilt any longer and called the Environmental Protection Agency. She even sent them documentation to corroborate her claims. She felt better but wondered what would happen next. She didn't have to wonder

long because within a week, the place was swarming with investigators.

The EPA closed the plant, and it stayed closed for over a month. During that time, the board of directors disavowed any wrongdoing and fired all the heads of the company, making it seem as if they were operating independently. They even fired the founder's son, Mitchell Valcrex, Jr. They brought in new people and began a neighborhood cleanup campaign. Fines were levied and paid. A reopen date was set. Although, Janice and her husband were not among those employees asked to return. Their positions were given to others.

The company looked like it was going to recover until the residents of the town filed a multi-million dollar lawsuit. Valcrex was being accused of being responsible for the scores of people diagnosed with cancer. There were multiple miscarriages among the women and three deaths. The two sides couldn't reach an amicable settlement so the case went to trial. After listening to scientific testimony that clearly concluded that the toxins released by Valcrex were responsible for the town's ill population, the judge decided to make an example out of them and awarded the town and its people \$500 million. The company had no choice but to file bankruptcy and close its doors forever.

Valcrex wasn't the only thing in shambles. So was Janice's life. Janice was labeled a whistle-blower and blackballed within the manufacturing industry. Everyone released by the company hated her because in their eyes, her honesty had stripped them of their

lucrative salaries and the posh lifestyles that came with them. They were all simultaneously thrust into unemployment.

John was resentful as well. He didn't see why she couldn't just keep her mouth shut and continue to pack their lunches every day. At least until the two of them had devised a plan to leave the company with their careers and bank accounts still intact. Living 8 months without any income ravaged their bank accounts and 401k. They had a hefty mortgage, 2 luxury vehicles, and their 3 children were enrolled in private school. John said he felt like she betrayed him. She shouldn't have made that phone call without consulting him, and the fact that she did showed that she didn't care enough to put their family first. He said she jeopardized their lives and their livelihood. In a way, he was right. In addition to losing their lucrative jobs, they received hate mail and phone calls at home and on their cell phones for months from angry former coworkers who thought she should have kept her mouth shut, too. It amazed Janice how they had no compassion for the men, women, and children they were poisoning each day.

John was able to find a job in Chicago. After he made that announcement, he stated that he wanted a divorce. Janice wasn't surprised. All they did was fight, and they hadn't touched each other in months. Twenty years of marriage had dwindled to this. They gave their children the option to choose which parent they wanted to live with. Janice believed that her husband's parenting skills were every bit as good as her own. The eldest, Joseph, followed the money. He was a spoiled,

selfish 14-year-old who was used to the best of everything. He did not enjoy the lean months the family experienced and was elated about the opportunity to be rid of them. His 7-year-old little brother, Westin, who mimicked everything Joseph did, followed suit. He said he couldn't see life without him.

However, their sweet 12-year-old daughter, Adaline, stayed loyal to her mother and remained under her charge. She followed her to Oklahoma without a single complaint. It was obvious that she missed her suburban lifestyle with destination play dates and spa parties at shops that specifically catered to kids, but she took it in stride and adapted to farm life.

Janice was grateful for the kindness of family. Her uncle and aunt welcomed her with open arms and told her that she could stay as long as she needed. Janice was flat broke except for the money she received from pawning her wedding ring and other expensive jewelry. Her degrees did little for her in her new surroundings.

As she sat there waiting, she questioned her decision. She used to think making that phone call was the right thing to do, but sitting there in jeans, a flannel shirt, with hair that desperately needed a few hours at a good salon, and unmanicured hands with broken nails made her begin to think otherwise.

"Hello, Janice," a soft voice that she instantly recognized said from behind her.

She swung around to face Mr. Willie Arnold. He served as the CFO of Valcrex for over 20 years until they fired him. He was a sweet soul who believed in investing in the lives of others. When the company was

booming, he presented a proposal to the board to increase the benefits of the employees that included more insurance and 401k contributions from the company. He wanted to put a day care onsite and start a job training program to allow more people from the town to qualify for the more technical positions within the company. He also wanted to implement tuition reimbursement and a bunch of other programs that companies that appear on the “Best Places to Work” lists each year do for their employees.

Willie was soon released from his position. The leadership at Valcrex was about making money, not spending money. His business savvy helped make that company profitable, and they fired him because he wanted to give back to the men and women who helped Valcrex to excel. It was sad. Willie looked so dejected when they gave him his walking papers. Janice saw him being escorted out of the building by security as if he stole something. As he stood by his car fumbling with his keys, she asked him to join her for a cup of coffee. He accepted. They went to one of the town restaurants and talked about everything but work. She even got him to smile and laugh a couple of times before they said good-bye.

Janice recalled that her last words to him were, “This job doesn’t determine your outcome. You do.”

Willie smiled, gave her a hug and a peck on the cheek, and said, “Thank you, dear.” He then got in his BMW and drove away. Janice never heard or saw Willie again, until now.

She stood, and he gave her a tight embrace. He looked like he was doing well. Of course, he had aged a

little over the years, but so had Janice. He was smartly dressed in a blue tailored suit, but there was something else different about him. Willie had a sparkle in his eye that hadn't been there before. It was the look of a man who found his purpose in life and was happy.

"Sit, sit, sit," he said. Willie took off his hat and suit coat and had a seat. "You were not an easy lady to find. I had to hire a private investigator. My investigator couldn't get a thing out of your mother. Your ex-husband doesn't even know where you are."

Janice laughed. "I know. I was afraid he would try to ask me for child support so I won't give him an address, but I do call and talk to my sons at least twice a week. I was hoping to go visit them in a month or two. My mother said someone came to see her, but she couldn't remember who it was. She's pretty good at keeping a secret."

Willie nodded. "That she is. Don't worry, I won't tell John where you are. You've been through a lot. It isn't easy picking up the pieces of your life, is it?"

"What life?" said Janice. "I feed chickens, slop hogs, till soil, and milk cows all day."

"Yet, you're alive to do it, and that's what matters. Every day you are aboveground is a gift. Don't you go getting all bitter and angry. It achieves nothing. Believe me, I know. Besides, I've come to save you."

Janice was glad that he got straight to the point. "Save me? How?"

"Didn't I say it in my note? I'm here to give you your life back, or at least the quality of life you once had. I've been very busy since I left Valcrex. I am now

the president of a small but expensive private college in upstate New York. I've been looking at ways to enhance our business program. It's successful in its own right, but I know we can make it better. What I've come up with is a curriculum focused not only on the fundamental principles of business but ethics.

“America has become too selfish. Too many businesses are more concerned about their bottom line than they are the people who work for them. Charity is done to get tax breaks, not because they really want to help people. This mentality has created men and women with no loyalty to the companies they serve. That's why turnover is so high. Employees stay long enough to acquire new skills, and then they take them to the competition. For an employer, that can be nerve-racking because as soon as you have a solid worker who knows his or her position and how to excel at it, you lose them. Then you have to bring someone new in and train them all over again. You could bring in someone who already has the skills, but that can become expensive. Top-notch talent commands high salaries. But there is more to it than that.” He furrowed his brow before he continued.

“I watch these kids we graduate with honors every year, and they are ruthless. They'd rather work hard at trying to throw their coworkers under the bus than they would at excelling at their own jobs. It's every person for himself. We have some of the most brilliant minds at our university, but their morals concern me. We need more men and women with good ethics in business, and that is why I've been combing the earth looking for you, my dear Janice.”

Janice wasn't sure how she fit into all of this. He needed to make his intentions plainer. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

"I want you to head the department," Willie said matter-of-factly.

"But I don't know the first thing about business. I'm a biologist."

"I know that, but you can learn. Do you still have that recipe for those delicious cookies you used to bring to the office?"

Janice wished he would stick to the subject. She wanted to talk about her future, not cookies. "My Grandma Addie's butter pecan cookies?" she asked.

"Yes. Those were delicious," the old man licked his lips as if he were tasting one at that very moment.

"Of course, I do. My kids love them."

"As they should. They were the most delectable treats I have ever eaten, and I've eaten a lot of food in my day." Willie rubbed his Santa Claus-like stomach.

"I always thought that if you ever marketed those they would be a hit. It's high time you did. I'm prepared to give you the seed money and the connections to launch your own cookie business. I'm not just talking any cookie business, either. I'm talking about along the lines of Mrs. Fields, Little Debbie, Hostess, Famous Amos. I can't present you as the best thing to ever happen to my school if you don't have the business credentials to back it up. You've got the right moral compass, but I need more."

Janice sat quietly letting it all sink in. During that time Meagan, Lucille's niece, came over and took their drink orders.

Several minutes after she left their table Janice said, “Why would you do this for me?”

“Number one, I hate to see a good person knocked down and dragged through the dirt. You did the right thing, Janice. Don’t you doubt your decision to alert the authorities to that sludge they were pumping in the water supply for one minute.”

“But that decision cost me everything—my marriage, my sons, my job, even my career. No one will hire me. I’ve applied everywhere. I’m blackballed. They’re all afraid I’m a snitch. How do you hold your head up high when you go from living in an expensive house in the land of the affluent and influential to a small-town farmhouse in a place most of the world doesn’t even know exists?”

“You hold your head up high because you are a child of God, and as such, you are royalty. God Himself said that you are the head, not the tail, and your enemies shall be your footstool. Would it make you feel any better if I told you that you would still have lost it if you kept your mouth closed?” Willie looked at her slyly as if he had a secret. Meagan returned with one hot tea and an orange soda. Janice waited until she left to respond.

“What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I said. Valcrex was getting ready to ruin your career by making it seem as if you were the one turning a blind eye to those environmental violations and falsifying documents. You were going to take the fall for those toxins seeping into the ground and water and you probably would have ended up in

jail. You foiled those plans by contacting the authorities first.”

“What?” Janice slammed her fist on the table shaking their beverages. “How do you know that?”

“I have my sources. You can’t work for a company as long as I did and not make a few friends. That 1-month vacation they gave you was so they could alter documents, falsify water and soil tests, and the like. They were going to run you over with a Mack truck, and then leave your carcass lying there so the vultures could pick what was left off your broken bones. It would have been the scandal of the century. And as for that husband of yours, he was in on the plan. They offered him a lot of money to keep them abreast of your every move. Why do you think he was so upset when you called the EPA without telling him first? He wanted to be rich beyond his wildest dreams more than he wanted his wife.”

Janice felt a wave of heat wash over her. Her face was flushed, and she was sweating bullets. Her flannel shirt instantly felt like a thick blanket against her skin. She reached for the soda in front of her and took several large gulps.

The old man chuckled. “I want you to get angry, Janice. Angry enough to do the hard work it takes for you to regain your rightful position in life. A good woman like you should be on top,” said Willie.

“I’m going to kill him,” growled Janice. “Here I was thinking I killed my marriage, and he was already doing so in order to line his pockets.” She stood to

leave. She needed to get to Chicago, slap her husband, and get her sons.

“Sit down, Janice,” Willie said calmly, and then took a sip of his tea. “Doing something rash will only make matters worse. Didn’t you say that you have a daughter to take care of? What will happen to her if you end up in the penitentiary?”

The mere thought of her sweet loyal Adaline made Janice settle back into her chair. She was named after the woman who helped raised Janice, her deceased grandmother Addie. Janice had to make sure that she was taken care of at all costs. As far as she was concerned, the child was all she had left.

“I am offering you a foolproof plan to enact the best kind of revenge there is . . . success. All your haters, as the kids say, will be green with envy. What do you think John and those moneygrubbing leeches you used to work for will say when they see you as the head of a multimillion-dollar company and the head of a successful business ethics program at a prestigious school?”

That brought a twisted smile to Janice’s face, but she was still skeptical. Was Willie secretly one of those heartless vultures she used to work for? Was she about to sell her soul to the devil?

“Why me? What do you get out of this?”

“I get to go down in history as one of the smartest college presidents who ever lived. Who better to head an ethics program than a whistle-blower? You risked everything to save a few hundred people in a measly little town no one seemed to care about. If this

program is successful, we'll be able to compete with all the ivy leagues—Harvard, Yale, Stanford.”

His eyes glistened as the names rolled off his tongue. Then his tone softened, and he looked down at the table.

“I also get the pleasure of thanking a woman who prevented an old man from going home and committing suicide many years ago. That company was everything to me. I gave Valcrex 20 years of my life. My best friend and I made that company great, but after he died, that dunce son of his took over and forgot everything his father stood for. Mitchell Valcrex was a brilliant man of integrity and valor. That plan I presented to the board was all the things Mitchell said he wanted to do for his employees once the company reached a certain level of financial success. I was hoping to continue his legacy but it wasn't to be. At least not at Valcrex. I felt like I had let Mitchell down when the board rejected my proposal. I was planning to revise it and give it another shot, but they fired me a week later. I have no wife and no kids. That job was everything to me. The people working there were my family, and they were stripped away from me over a difference in opinion.

“You know I had enough knowledge of dirty little secrets to ruin just about every man and woman on that board of directors and in the executive offices. You learn quite a bit when you keep quiet and observe. I knew who was sleeping with whom, who was using company credit cards for personal expenses, who was hiding company funds from the IRS.”

“Why didn’t you use that information for your benefit?” asked Janice. “I would have.”

“That would have made me no better than them. I’ve been around long enough to know that when you seek to put someone in their grave, make sure you dig a second one for yourself. Karma has a way of getting you too when evil is your motivation. I prefer to keep love in my heart and let God handle my enemies. Revenge is mine saith the Lord!

“I loved Valcrex, but the company was changing. Junior was systematically ruining the wonderful office culture his father managed with respect and concern for the well-being of his employees. Junior believed in fear, intimidation, and getting the most out of people for the least amount of money. Greed was his downfall.”

Willie looked a little teary eyed for a moment, but then he shook his head, smiled, and said, “So, are you in or out?”

Janice smiled. She had no idea Willie remembered their talk over coffee so fondly. She wondered if he really would have killed himself or was he exaggerating. He seemed sincere. What did she have to lose?

“I’m in,” she said. “The good thing about being at the bottom is the only place you can go is up.”

“No, that’s the wrong attitude. God needed to put you in a new position so that you could grow. You were a potted plant at Valcrex and your roots had reached the bottom of the vessel. Now, you’re in rich, deep soil, and your roots can grow in any direction and receive all the nutrients they need.”

Willie took a final sip of his tea, and then grabbed his coat and hat. “Now that we have come to an agreement, I must be going. A food chemist is going to be at your house tomorrow at 2 P.M. Show him your recipe so that he can figure out the best ingredients to keep your cookies fresh on the shelves without compromising their flavor. Then, you’ll meet your business coach, and she will show you how to launch and create a successful business.

“I truly can’t thank you enough for what you did that day. All these years you thought you just bought an old man a cup of coffee. You did much more than that. You lit a spark that turned into a raging fire. I took that fire to where it was needed. A college that was looking for someone who knew numbers and was up to the challenge of saving a fledgling institution from going bankrupt. I did that, and now I head the college and can hire anyone I want if they have the right credentials. And I want you. Remember, dear, that job doesn’t determine your outcome, you do. Forget that no-good husband of yours and let’s go make history.”

Janice stood and shook his hand. Willie took a step toward the door and stopped, “Oh, I almost forgot,” he said as he reached under his coat and pulled out a large bulky manila envelope and handed it to her.

She turned it over, but there was nothing written on it to indicate its contents.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“Thank-you letters from the townspeople you saved from years of severe health calamities. Every time you start to doubt that you did the right thing by calling the EPA, you pull out a letter and read it.

There's a real tearjerker in there from a mother of three named Pearl. She was able to use the money she got from Valcrex to pay for her husband's cancer treatments. He would have died without them.

“Get ready to be rich beyond your wildest dreams, dear. I trust you won't let it go to your head. I'll see you soon.”

He kissed her cheek and headed toward the door.

Epilogue

Willie kept his promise and made Janice rich beyond her wildest dreams. Her finances and her personal life were changed forever. Janice fell in love with the food chemist Willie sent to her house to help her with her cookie recipe. Together, with the help of the business coach and Willie's financial backing, they founded Victory Foods and introduced the world to Grandma Addie's Butter Pecan Cookies. They later launched an entire catalogue of cookies, cakes, pies, and candies. Victory Foods was named one of America's fastest-growing companies after it grossed over \$1 million in 2 years. Janice worked hard for every dime the company earned. The crash course in business she received was lucrative but tiring. Willie refused to help her run it, but he did offer advice whenever asked. The only way she was going to be qualified to head an entire department in his college was to succeed at being an entrepreneur and learn the lessons that came with it.

Willie also became like a father to Janice and a grandfather to Adaline, who affectionately referred to

him as Papa. Willie became richer than he had ever been before, too. The love of a family that he lacked for years was provided by simply helping a woman who did the same for him. His share of the profits from Janice's company didn't hurt either.

Janice gladly divorced John and remarried. After 2 years, her new husband, whose name was Luke, took over the daily operations of the company so Janice could return to school to obtain her Ph.D. Willie arranged for her to take an accelerated 1-year program. Upon graduation, she took over as chair of the business department of Oberlin Brown College. She worked hard to create a program built on a foundation of ethics as Willie asked. She also became a highly sought after public speaker and frequently attended company conferences and presented the topic of how to implement ethical practices into the workplace.

As for Janice's ex-husband, John married a cute little secretary in his office named Kristin but found out the hard way she was only with him for his money. When the recession hit and he lost his job, she ran off with a millionaire she met on Richgentlemen.com, but not before she cleaned out John's bank account and left him with the infant daughter they had together. He was now an unemployed, impoverished single father of three. His only saving grace was the child support Janice agreed to pay each month. It kept them afloat until he was able to find another job. Although it came too late for their eldest son, Joseph. After his father lost his job, Joseph and some friends robbed a liquor store and accidentally shot and killed the clerk that tried to stop them. When the police asked him why he did it, the 18-

year-old high school senior confessed that he was trying to score enough cash to get the new iPhone his father could no longer afford to buy him. He was sentenced to 15 years. His mother puts money on his books every month so he can get all the chips, cookies, and Jungle Juice he wants. His favorite snack is Grandma Addie's Butter Pecan Cookies.

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