

# TOOLS OF VENGEANCE



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# **TOOLS OF VENGEANCE**

**by**

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The petite teen tentatively opened the door and stepped into the gallery. The receptionist/sales woman peered at the child over her jeweled harlequin glasses. She was about to say that the gallery was closed but thought better of it since this youngster was surely not a potential buyer. It was an effort not to smile at the charming awkwardness of this child. A dark green hounds tooth checked man tailored shirt was a perfect complement due to the obviously natural claret colored hair, so silky and soft and totally devoid of spray or lacquer. The color and texture of that hair was such that most women would envy especially with the short, sophisticated style marked by side swept bangs. The earth tone slacks which went so well with the rest of the outfit showed that the youngster had a remarkable color sense for one so young or that she followed the suggestions of whoever took care of her. Well polished penny loafers suggested a degree of pride in appearance that was unusual in any teen let alone one that young. Astonishingly long, graceful fingers and lithe wrists sported very little jewelry; a birthstone ring in an antique copy Tiffany setting and a small gold watch on black suede band. Buttons deliberately left undone revealed both the Star of David and a smooth unblemished chest set off by a glimpse of glossy undergarment. The whiteness of the cami or under vest was made more intense by its contrast to a golden tan. A leather envelope, perhaps a portfolio or some sort of pocketbook, was clutched to the kid's side. Before Sara could think of a diplomatic way to offer to help, the clearly misplaced adolescent spoke.

“Excuse me; I don't mean to disturb you but I would like very much to look around the gallery. Maybe take some notes, too. I mean if it's okay.”

Despite her efforts to remain aloof from this disturbingly appealing teen, a teen much too young to be flirted with, a smile broke over Sara's classic features.

“Of course you may. I must tell you, miss, that I thought you were lost and wandered in here for directions. I will ask you what brings you to this out of the way spot on a nice spring day... You needn't tell me if you don't feel comfortable doing so.”

“Oh, no. Not all. I'm really quite glad whenever

anyone shows any interest in me..." An embarrassed hesitation, as if this might be the beginning of a perhaps inappropriate self-revelation. "Anyhow, it's for an honors paper for school. I want to compare and contrast historical artists as social critics to the work shown in small contemporary galleries like this one. I only hesitated because I was trying to think of a nice way to tell you that I really shouldn't be called miss."

"Don't tell me you're married. You're much too young to even have a steady beau."

"Well, no... but there are other reasons why someone shouldn't be called miss." For the first time, this very self-possessed youngster seemed awkward. "It's just that with me there's one really, really good reason not to..."

"Can you tell me what that really, really good reason might be?"

Jude was knew he had said too much, had gone too far in piquing this cordial woman's curiosity. There was no way to avoid correcting her misimpression of him without being rude.

"I thought I might not have to but you're really so nice that I can't let you go on thinking I'm something I'm not..."

Sara saw the remark as teenage conceit. What about any of her perceptions of this girl could possibly matter since it was all but certain they would never meet again? Whatever it might be was enough to make this oddly appealing teenager look away from Sara. The girl rolled her shoulders back, took a deep breath, and looked directly into Sara's eyes in a way that begged Sara to listen to something that was of great concern to the teen while daring Sara to refuse.

"You see, I'm a boy."

Sara did something she hadn't done since childhood. She began to blush! Should I say to her she's got to be kidding? No. I can't risk losing her, not now. This kid might be what I've been after ever since.. .He.. .She could be the perfect subject Just what I've been looking for ever since.. I can't even think about what happened or I'll just fall apart.

Again, the pubescent enigma spoke before Sara could organize her thoughts.

"You're not sure what to make of me, are you? I mean I can show you my driver's license; well, learner's permit any-

how.”

Sara sat back down to catch her breath. This was really too, too much. This adorable teen with looks most girls, most women would die to have just one his many charms was a boy! As astonishing as being told this beauty was a boy was being told she was old enough to drive! This eighteen year old boy could, with some guidance, be a convincing fourteen year old girl or, for that matter, with the right clothes and makeup, a very attractive college coed.

“I’m ever so sorry I upset you. I guess I should have just let you go on thinking I’m a girl. Happens all the time. I’m used to it; matter of fact...”

“You were about to say something.”

“Nothing really. I mean...”

“I think you were about to say that you’re really not that uncomfortable with that.”

Sara thought to herself that this girl was telling the truth. Girl indeed! I still can’t bring myself to think of this gorgeous doll as a boy. Of course, he must like it. Just look at how much he affects the casual girl look.

“By the way my name is Sara Ross. What can I call you?”

“Jude which is what’s on my birth certificate but it’s short for Judah. I was named for an ancient Jewish warrior. Turned out to be a joke; a really bad joke.”

“Yes, I know the name; Judah Maccabee, correct? But why do you say it’s a joke?”

“Right but in my case it’s so wrong. Everyone calls me Jude. Sometimes I get teased and they call me Judy.”

“You seem to handle it quite well.”

“I’m pretty used to it. I guess I even like it when it comes from certain people. I don’t know why I’m telling you this but it seems like you care about people who might be weird, out of the ordinary. Empathy is probably the right word for what you seem to radiate.”

“My goodness. You have a terrific vocabulary. You must read a lot.”

“Thanks. Yes, I love to read. Makes me even more of a freak than the way I look.”

“Jude, honey, I’m surprised at you. You’re a lovely person.”

“I don’t mean to be ungracious but isn’t kind of weird that you said I’m lovely. I mean where I live a lovely boy is just the worst kind of drip. And I don’t mean just my neighborhood, my family, too.”

“I’m so sorry. I don’t know why I’m telling you all this, burdening you really. It’s just so hard sometimes, so lonely.”

“Jude, sweetie...”

Sara reached for a tissue in the desk drawer and dabbed away the tears that were trickling down Jude’s smooth cheeks.

“Take a deep breath. Now let it out slowly.” Sara tilted Jude’s face toward her and smiled. “There now.” She walked quickly to the door of the gallery and locked it.

Jude was impressed by Sara’s classic beauty, her superb figure and carriage. Sara’s dark gray knit dress with its loosely fitted skirt was made less somber by the silver necklace and matching cuff bracelet she wore. The woman’s firm, well-formed legs were highlighted by barely tinted hose and gray suede opera pumps.

“This will give us some privacy.”

“Uh huh, but aren’t you going to get in trouble with your boss if you close when the place is supposed to be open?”

“Don’t you fret. These aren’t our regular business hours and besides that, I’ve already given notice.”

“Notice?”

“That means I’ve let them know I’m leaving, going elsewhere. Now, come into my office and you can tell me why you’re so upset.”

“Don’t you know?”

“I think I do but perhaps we can understand why it spilled out at right here and now.”

Sara lowered the gallery lights and led Jude to her

office. The small room, little more than a cubby hole, was in a state of apparent disarray confirming that Sara was, indeed, leaving. Jude saw that, despite the impression of turmoil, there was an organized quality to it. A few large cardboard file boxes were filled or partially filled with folders, papers and notebooks. Piles of papers and personal items covered the desk and cabinet.

“Do sit down.” Sara pointed to the one empty chair in the tiny room. Her tone, although soft and calm, said this was neither a request nor an invitation. The woman seated herself on the edge of her desk and crossed her legs. Jude smiled through tears realizing that Sara made no effort to adjust her skirt. Despite Sara revealing more leg than was proper back in the fifties, Jude sensed the woman wasn’t being flirtatious; Sara was as unperturbed and as unaffected around Jude as she might with a real girl, a real girl who was close to her. It was, to the diffident Jude, a sense of being accepted as he was or at least felt he should be.

“When I was little I didn’t know how different I was. It was kind of okay, but just kind of. At first my folks thought it was cute but then they started to yell at me for nothing. They wanted me to be rough and tumble like all the other little boys but I still wanted to play house with the girls.” Here Jude paused and looked down at her hands. A sad smile and a sigh before she continued in a softer voice. “The bigger girls would be the mommies and I’d be their little girl. And then when most boys were starting to grow fuzzy little moustaches, I started getting tiny bumps, sort of like breasts. My mom and her folks thought I was possessed or something....”

Jude paused to wipe away the tears with the back of his wrist, tears that slowly trickled down his hairless cheeks. It was all Sara could do to keep from smiling at the little girl mannerisms that were so natural to this strange teen.

“The only one who stayed friends with me was a girl but she got leukemia and died. Some people, people who thought they were so adult said that God punished her for having stayed friends with the demon child. Rotten shits... The kids around my age, they used to jump me and beat me up or push me in the bushes. Once we were in high school they pretty much ignored me or else they would bump into me on the stairs in school and see if they could make me fall down. It

would have been even be worse but there's this one guy who was a year ahead of me and just didn't like to see anyone bullied. He really smacked anyone who tried to hurt me. Pretty much got them out of the habit of picking on me. I really liked him, liked him the way boys are supposed to like girls. I used to cry myself to sleep, I was so miserable...Oh, I'm so sorry for sounding like a jerk but I've been holding it in for so long. That's kind of why I'm so upset. For a long time now I've wanted to be able to talk to someone about my feelings and now that I have someone to listen all I can do is cry... And now everyone in my own stupid family tells me I've got to start being a man or get out. A man! Can you ever imagine me as a man? Certainly not what they think a man should be. I'd rather die, kill myself before I turn into their idea of a man. Not that I want to stay with them but I have no other place to go; at least not yet.. I want to go to City College because that's free but I need a place to live and a way to earn my living expenses, otherwise I'll have to start really pretending to be something I'm not and I don't even think I can do it." Jude paused to catch his breath and looked up at Sara with his eyes bright with hope. "I think I know why I told you I like being what I am and why I just told you more than I should've. It's just so neat that you didn't laugh at me or make fun or send me on my way... It's just so hard being so freaky."

"Jude, darling, you're a lot less freaky than you can ever imagine. Being different can be a great asset in the right circles. Come on. You look like you need a hug."

Sara took Jude by the wrist and gently pulled him to his feet. Jude, at first tense and rigid, slowly relaxed in the tender, caring embrace of the compassionate young woman.

"Goodness gracious, you are sweaty. Here, let me fold up your sleeves."

Sara managed to keep from wincing as she noticed the scars on the inside of Jude's wrists, scars which movingly underscored how unhappy this wraithlike being had been made to feel. As if from habit, Jude turned his wrists to conceal the pale scars, so harshly white and ghastly against the golden tan of the child's otherwise flawless skin. Again, silent tears trickled Jude's smooth cheeks.

Sara leaned back across the desk and reached behind it to open a drawer from which she extracted a box of tissues.

Jude was transfixed by the unfettered view of Sara's legs. She effortlessly raised herself to a sitting position but made no effort to readjust her skirt. Her warm smile caused Jude some momentary discomfort.

"What is that you like about what you see? Oh, don't feel so self-conscious about seeing my legs. When a girl trusts another girl, she's less inhibited, less stuck on false modesty. It's okay if you like the way I'm made and it's okay to wonder about what a girl or a woman is wearing under her clothing. It's even okay if you wonder what it feels like and want to... I'd better stop before I make you uncomfortable."

"No, no. It's okay. It's really swank that you want to listen to me and that you know what I'm like.

"Can I tell you what's scaring me?"

"Of course you can, and I promise not to tease you about it, not ever."

"Now that I've had someone listen to me and show me they care I might not ever be able to close myself off again. It's so awful for me at home. I just can't go on..."

Sara paused and took a deep breath. She studied Jude who seemed in a state of shock.

"Jude, sweetie. If I promise you that I'll help you change your life will you promise me that you'll put up with what you have now for another few weeks... at the most?"

Jude nodded and gently bit her lower lip.

"You're eighteen and there's no way your family can force you to stay with them. Your high school graduation can't be more than six weeks off. It'd be best if you stay with them until then.

"Before you make any commitment to staying with me, I want you to see where I live and what your accommodations will be like. It's also likely that I'll be relocating, relocating to an area far away from here. If this works out, you'll be more than welcome to come along with me and I promise you the accommodations will be a lot better than what I have to offer you right now. There's also a junior college nearby that I'm sure you could go to. Now don't worry about the expenses. It'll all be explained over time. Are you understanding what this entails?"

“Gee, this is just so swell of you. I know it’ll work out. I just know it.”

“Good girl...” An embarrassed silence as Sara realized her faux pas. Jude. Although potentially a girl and quiet a girl at that, was still living as a boy. Would she scare Jude off before she had a chance to help him fulfill what Sara intuited to be his destiny? Jude broke the tension even before Sara could recover.

“Sara, that’s probably the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

They both started to giggle until Jude managed to blurt out, “Don’t laugh, I’m perfectly serious.”

The young woman’s eyes followed Jude as he walked to the door of the gallery and waited for Sara to come unlock the door. Sara smiled warmly at the overwhelmed boy. She felt a surge of affection as she reflected on how awkwardly he moved while acknowledging there was an underlying grace that needed only to be cultivated in order to spring free. There was an eerie, anxiety producing quality to this affection. It was so like something Sara had experienced before, a situation, a relationship that had caused her pain which she had fought so hard to bury by atoning through good deeds even though there was nothing she had done which warranted atonement.

Jude’s awkwardness, Sara was certain, was an effect of the horrible inhibition of the true femininity of this unformed yet already divine being. She hugged herself and hoped that Cybele, Hecate and all the ancient goddesses she had studied and adored would grant her the power to save Jude by empowering the still buried femme anger to rise to the fore.

Sara then strode to her office picked up the phone and, with practiced, speed dialed. Her face betrayed her tension as she waited for someone to pick up. She relaxed visibly as someone picked up.

“Maud, thank goodness you’re there. I take it she’s out. I think I’ve found the person we need. No, not think; I’m certain that we’ve found the right one....Oh, sweetie, I know I said this last time but this time I just know it’s going to work out. Right now I need you to let her into my place and show her around... Jude...I’ll be home soon so there’s no need for you to dress.... Thanks, Maud, for being so sweet.”