

# VICTIM



a feminist  
manifesto  
from a fierce  
survivor

"She writes how we can  
find authentic hope."

— Robert Jensen author of  
*The End of Patriarchy:  
Radical Feminism for Men.*

Karen Moe

# VICTIM

a feminist manifesto from a fierce survivor

KAREN MOE

Copyright © 2022 Karen Moe

All rights reserved. No part of this publication in print or in electronic format may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property.

Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Author Photo Credit by Stasia Garraway  
Edited by Jay Christopher Gowen & Catherine Owen  
Cover Design by Bobbi Sue Smith

Distribution by Publish, Inc.  
Published by Vigilance Press

[www.vigilancemagazine.com](http://www.vigilancemagazine.com)  
[@vigilancemagazine](https://twitter.com/vigilancemagazine)



ISBN: 978-1-64704-470-1 (paperback)  
ISBN: ISBN: 978-1-64704-471-8 (eBook)

*For my Dad*



“Keep to Beauty. Have no fear. Learn to bear  
the unbearable. The raw of all things.”  
Nicole Brossard.



# PART ONE

I got into the vehicle. He had offered me a lift back to my motel. I knew it was wrong, but I got in anyway. Some of you might think that I was stupid and that I had it coming. It was all my fault. But does that mean I deserved what is going to happen next?



karen moe

December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Around 5  
p.m. Flagstaff, Arizona.

I have lost the mustard yellow suede jacket from that time. Maybe I gave it away and then asked for it back. Maybe I still have it packed in a box in storage. Maybe it's lost.

It had a Dino pin on the lapel. Platinum. About an inch and a half tall. I have always loved the Flintstones. Barney and Dino in particular.

The jacket was used. Vintage before vintage was vintage. I don't remember where I bought it. Did I buy it long before it happened? Just before? On the brink of during?

I remember that it barely covered my bum. It had slouching pockets from past hands. It was a bit tight across the chest and shoulders when I did the buttons up. Even when I was very slim, I was still well endowed, both a blessing and a curse. I used to wear it unbuttoned most of the time so as not to appear frumpy. It was ridiculous that I would even have considered that.

Has anyone seen my mustard yellow suede jacket?

I had checkered leggings. They were second-hand, too. Black and white. Some retro petroleum fabric that Gen-Xers like myself made Retro. I wore them so regularly that the knees were baggy, and there was a little hole on one knee with a small vertical run. I wore them almost all the time anyway.

I always wore very colourful socks. Maybe stitched with another Flintstones character or one from Peanuts. Probably Snoopy or Woodstock. I would tuck the checkered leggings into my very colourful socks and then pull on my electric blue Doc Martens. Yes, I think I wore my Docs then, but I have no pictures from that time to prove it.

Every part of my ensemble was light-hearted except for my shirt. I have always had challenges with shirts. The

## victim

boobs blessing/curse again. It was a plain black T-shirt. Not fitted. A crew neck that is always a no-no when you have breasts larger than a B-Cup. The shirt hung like a block.

Like the jacket, the T-shirt just covered my bum. I don't think it hung lower than the jacket. Although I remember wishing it did. I remember wishing a lot of things about that T-shirt as I fussed with it daily in front of the mirror. Sometimes it would take me quite a while to get outside and do the sightseeing I had come there to do and have the adventures that awaited my curious mind. I was chained to the mirror, scolding myself for not packing a skirt, pulling the T-shirt tight around my waist from behind, and wishing I had a clip to keep it there. Maybe the unsexy shirt was a way of concealing my sexuality, the always-violatable young womanhood. And yet, even though the T-shirt was far from fetching, I still felt exposed. Whatever the pathology, it didn't matter. I was in danger despite any inadvertent attempt to be invisible.

The motel was a very scary place. So much so that the memory of the motel cancels out the fact that I may have gone to some prehistoric cave houses along the way. Red cliffs. A bus tour. But I'm not sure. If I did, the experience is like a fading dream, a blur caught in mid-maybe. Lying on the well-used bed, looking up at the cracked ceiling, I could feel the thousands of sordid things that had happened there. The springs squeaked when I got up to prove it. My body knew there was danger twenty-four hours before it began. Flagstaff, Arizona. Route 66.

I was born in 1966, and I remember trying to console myself with this connection even though Route 66 kind of scared me too. "Get your kicks on Route 66." I always wondered what the kicks were. I knew they were supposed to be fun, but the whole idea seemed ominous to me. Like all

karen moe

the women Jim Morrison had had sex with or something. Or the first time I read Henry Miller. Or even *A Catcher in the Rye*. I hadn't read *On the Road* yet, but I bet Dean Moriarty got some of his kicks on Route 66 too.

Knowing what I know now, it was absolute madness that I was there alone. I was immersing myself in handgun central USA, in a hotbed of gender violence, in the birthplace of slasher B-movies. But I didn't know any of this. Despite this pang of awareness in the scary motel room, I was entirely oblivious. I prided myself in being an adventurer, living life to the fullest, learning, experiencing, writing, thinking, being a free spirit. Like men could. I had no idea that women are not allowed to do this. I was perfect prey.

Sometime in 1997. Late Afternoon.  
Ventura County, California.

As soon as I got off of the plane, they presented me with a teddy bear. "DA Bear," said the happy-go-lucky T-shirt Teddy wore. Pink, I think. With one of those cartoony fonts. When I was left alone in the hotel room, I immediately got rid of Teddy's T-shirt.

They took me for lunch. The District Attorney and the Chief of Police. I drank a beer. Maybe two. I don't think I ate much. We discussed what was going to happen in the morning, and they briefed me on what to expect.

"No problem," I replied, my voice intoned with the worldly nonchalance I had honed since my late teens.

"I got it all covered," I added, and my hand probably brushed away any concern. Even though I was there alone. Strangely, no one had offered to come with me. It was like everyone I knew wanted to forget, or maybe it was old

## victim

news now, or they couldn't handle it. Even though I was the one who was still living it and always would be.

I had been waiting for three years to go down there and do the deed. The trial kept being continued as the defense attorney was trying to dig up dirt on me. Of course. Discredit the key witness to put a rapist back out on the street. Standard procedure that too often works because everyone knows rape victims lie. There are so many women with nothing better to do than make up a rape.

When I first got back to Canada, I gave my testimony over the phone. I wish I had that tape. I called a few years ago to try and get it. It's lost. Apparently, evidence of abduction and rapes are no longer important after a certain amount of time. The artifacts of our experiences, the talismans of our stories, are neglected, fall behind filing cabinets to be destined for the landfill as victims of spring cleaning. Perhaps it will be found in the far-distant future when our descendants dig into the archeology sites of twentieth-century garbage dumps, and my voice will add to the anthropological study of our current cultural plight. But, even though formal documentation has been lost, we can keep telling our stories. Maintain our own memories. Our proof.

I wish I could hear that voice, though: its texture, tone, the exact words I said. I know I sounded a bit cocky. Overly confident. I am sure I laughed a lot. Made jokes about the whole thing. I know I was also shaking and that I felt like I was made of vapor. I had to go to the police station and identify the mug shot after. I did it in seconds. I knew his eyes so well. The terrible droopy mustache. An assault in itself.

And now I was finally there. Three years after. Armed with a teddy bear. Ready to do my duty as a superhero. Again. Yes, a victim can also be a hero.

karen moe

December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1994. Between 1:25  
a.m. and 4 a.m. Various Locations  
in the Arizona Desert.

He called me his Little Girl on a String. That's because I was literally on one. But not a string. More like a rope. Now that I think about it, it was the kind of rope they always use. The slim kind used on TV or in movies. The kind that's easy to tie.

He had it tied around my neck. Not too tight. And there was a long end, so he could hold onto it whenever I needed to go outside and pee. This was the reason for the rope: so that I couldn't roll away into the darkness of the ditch, scabble up a bank, or slide down a cliff on the side of the road, or run into the middle of the road and flag down a car. The expression on my face would have been terrifying. My naked white body emerging from the pitch-black would have definitely gotten drivers' attention. Arms waving wildly. Bruised. Desperate. Only the beginning. I would have made them stop even if they didn't want to. I would have jumped onto the hood. I would have lain on my stomach and gripped the edges of their car with my hands and feet. They would have had to pry me off. He must have read my mind the first time I asked if I could go pee.

When we were driving, he had me tied up and gagged in the back of the makeshift camper/van. He tied my ankles together and my arms behind my back and made me lie down, staring at the ceiling made of moldy insulation. He gagged me with silver duct tape. He seemed to like to talk to me when we were parked in one of our three locations, so he would take the duct tape off when it was safe to, when my yells for help would never be heard. I don't recall him being rough when he pulled off the tape. He was actually a bit tender. I don't recall having any abrasions

## victim

around my mouth from the on and off of the sticky tape, each time a fresh piece. He said to me once,

“Sorry, I have to do this. We just can’t have anyone hearing you when there are people around. I am sure you understand.” Yes, I understood his abductor’s logic, and now, in retrospect, I am struck by the fact that there is always a human in every monster, and there is always the potential for a monster in every man.<sup>1</sup> I am not going to apologize for such an essentializing statement because very few women behave this way. Karla Homolka was a sadistic accomplice to her husband’s crimes, but this is a rare case.

I researched ‘Women Murderers and Rapists.’ The lists aren’t very long. One digs back to Elisabeth Bathory from the sixteenth century (sensationally known as ‘the Blood Countess’), who was accused of all sorts of acts of torture like chaining her servants so tight that their hands spurted blood, using her teeth to lacerate their genitals and one incident even broaching the freaky realm of hocus-pocus where she was caught “casting a magic spell to summon a cloud filled with ninety cats to torment her enemies.” It has, ironically, been argued that the Blood Countess was innocent and that all of the legendary accusations of slaughter were a result of political slander and, very possibly, a bit of backlash against a powerful, take-no-shit kind of woman.<sup>2</sup>

Homolka is the only woman connected to rape when she gave her little sister to her boyfriend as a gift. Very grisly stuff! Her actions can definitely be cited as an extreme instance of a woman being conditioned to please her man, that’s for sure. To the point of sacrificing her own sister.

One of the most notorious female serial killers is Aileen Wuornos, the hitch-hiking prostitute who shot seven men

karen moe

in one year. She was certainly enacting her own version of the 1978 cult female revenge film *I Spit on your Grave*. In this film, as in the life of Wuornos, what started the revenge and murder is rape. For Wuornos, a lifetime of it, for the fictional character Jennifer Hills, a gang rape in a scene that lasts thirty minutes—quite a realistic duration when four men have their turn sexually assaulting and beating one woman. When you think about it, thirty minutes could very well be a conservative estimate.

The 2010 Hollywood blockbuster, *Monster*, tells the story of the life of Aileen Wuornos and her eventual execution. I don't know if I can speak for all of us but, as a rape victim and a survivor, I empathize with these revenge-getting victims (*all* of the revenge killings of the fictional Jennifer Hills and especially Wuornos' first killing of the man who had her tied up, repeatedly beat her, raped her himself and then with a metal pipe, until she got her hands free, got the gun and killed him). Either in the real-life version of Wuornos or the fantasy represented by Jennifer Hills, even though it's an of-course-no-one-should-ever-murder-anyone, for me, this is not 'just' anger, self-defence, and revenge: there is justice to these acts—a justifiable revenge.

How does a misogynist culture frame these women? Are they participating in the same male violence when it is men who pushed them to kill in the first place? Can such cases be used as evidence to prove that women are just as violent as men (even though neither of the women—one non-fiction, the other fiction—rape)? Certainly not. In *Monster*, Wuornos expresses the foundation of rape culture and how she, as a life-long victim, is onto it:

“You don't know what's goin' on. I do. So if you wanna' keep your eyes shut to the whole world, then at least hear me out.” Up to her death, eyes remained firmly shut.<sup>3</sup> No

## victim

one heard her out. Society called her crazy. No wonder she went too far.

Yes, in the end, with her final murder of a good man who was trying to help her, Wuornos crossed a line.<sup>4</sup> Real life is always far more complex than the straight-ahead revenge of the fantasy film, not to mention less just. And yet, after confessing to all, when sentenced to death, Wuornos again nails it when she says to the judge: “Thanks, judge. May you rot in hell for sentencing a raped woman to death.” And, again in an interview the day before her execution, she stated, “Thanks a lot society for railroading my ass.”

It is a society based in power abuse that psychologically killed Wuornos and drove her to kill; the acts that had led her to murder were never taken seriously or even addressed. The white male judge, the traditional symbol and dispenser of justice in Western patriarchy, had no interest in considering the context of the murders, the justifiable whys they were committed in the first place. The system that rapes and (rarely) pushes a female victim to the point of re-enacting the violence that was inflicted upon her must definitely be denied; the unruly woman must always be disciplined for masculine supremacy to be maintained.

Go-to movie critic Roger Ebert condemned *I Spit on Your Grave* as a ‘vile piece of garbage,’ and *Monster* was celebrated with numerous awards. Regardless of the discrepancy in budget, could this have anything to do with the fact that in the former, pure revenge is achieved, and in the latter, the real-life Wuornos is sentenced to death, silenced, and proclaimed insane? Wuornos, a woman who endured a lifetime of sexual abuse, assaults, and poverty, had no choice but to be a part of what Robert Jensen calls “the sexual exploitation industry.”<sup>5</sup> At the end of *Monster*, as at the end of the subject’s life, an exploited woman is



karen moe

disciplined, discredited, and erased. Everything is back as it should be. In the final scene of *I Spit on Your Grave*, though, after having wreaked revenge on the rapists, the rape-victim-cum-revenge-killer is smiling. Unfortunately, justice is usually only achieved in fantasy.

People often point to Karla Homolka and Aileen Wuornos (and even to the Blood Countess) as proof that women abduct, rape, and murder, that we are just like men, that we have the same capacity for violence, and that, somehow, this makes male violence okay. These few women killers are held up as evidence that we are all like that, so violence is but a part of being human. A levelling. An equalization. An excuse. It's very dangerous when people claim that a smattering of examples is proof that undermines the validity of the majority. Yes, there are no absolutes, but generalizations exist for a reason. They speak of the general, of the majority, of truths that so often happen.

In 1405, French feminist Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Christine was a member of the upper class and, as such, was as highly educated as women were allowed to be in those days. Idle in her privileged status, she had plenty of time to read, and she read every book in her father's library. In the introduction to her book, she relates how most of the women in mythology are represented as evil. She finds this very curious because none of the women she knows are like that. In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine built a city inhabited by the women she knew. With a revolutionary snub at patriarchy, she just left all the misogynist female stereotypes out.

In unison with Christine six centuries later, I ask, once again:

## victim

Are you like that? I know I am not. I know all of my women friends are not. I know my mother and sister are not. Would you abduct and rape someone? Would you take away a fellow creature's power for the satisfaction of your ego and alleviation of your fear? Would this turn you on sexually? I doubt it. Especially if you are a woman.<sup>6</sup>



While I was gagged and tied up in the back of the camper/van, I didn't last long on my back; I spent most of the time on my side, feeling the crack of the back door with my fingertips. I had to shift incrementally onto my side so that he wouldn't notice; he was always watching me through the rear-view mirror. His eyes were those of a frightened animal, darting sporadically from left to right but never straying from this moment of my taking. It was as though time had stopped. Perhaps for both of us. I know those eyes better than any part of him.

I kept my gaze locked onto his as I shifted my body into this futile attempt at escape. I worked to pry the door open. If I could get the door to release, a crack even, I could use the weight of my body and roll out—a fantasy that added to my tweaked adrenalin. I caressed the separation between the bottom of the door and the floor like an inefable lover: searching, obsessed, ridiculous. The guarantee of severe injury and possible death when one rolls out of a moving vehicle onto a highway didn't matter to me. As far as I was concerned, I was already dead. And, even though I didn't know it then, thinking I was dead was starting to give me power—I had nothing to lose.

