

VICTIM/SAVIOR

Written by

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The front of the property is expansive, no other houses in sight. Patches of grass dot the dry dirt.

From afar, the house seems quaint and cozy, but upon further inspection, Candace notices the chipping paint and sagging floor boards of the porch.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

A BOY (White, 11), small-framed and grimy from head to toe. He's shooting a flat basketball at a plastic milk carton nailed to a tree.

He throws the ball up, missing. The basketball gives three weak bounces on its way down. THUMP THUMP THUMP.

HAZEL (O.S.)

Kory! Come say hi to Dr. Kenneth!

Beckoned by the sound of his mother's voice, the boy swivels and spots Candace. He hesitates, then runs to his mother's side on the...

PORCH

HAZEL (White, 30s) stands, holding the screen door ajar. Her strawberry blonde hair frizzes around her ponytail. She rests her hands on Kory's shoulders.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, we have enough lasagna to eat ourselves dead.

KENNETH

No lasagna today.

HAZEL

Thank goodness for that.

KENNETH

Hazel, I'd like you to meet Candace Gutierrez.

Candace holds out her hand. Hazel eyes it skeptically before accepting the gesture.

HAZEL

That's quite the last name. You the shrink?

CANDACE

My partner's the psychiatrist. I'm a licensed counselor.

HAZEL
What's the difference?

CANDACE
Honestly? The drugs.

HAZEL
What good are you, then?

Hazel chuckles. Candace politely follows suit.

KENNETH
Can we see her?

Hazel leans down by Kory's ear.

HAZEL
Baby, why don't you go on inside?

Hazel guides him in, watching him disappear into the house. She lets the door SLAM in place.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
She's not having a great day.

KENNETH
This could be good for her.

HAZEL
It's all just been a little much.

KENNETH
Candace is a professional. She knows what she's doing.

HAZEL
And what exactly is it that she'll be doing? I don't want any funny business around my daughter.

CANDACE
With all due respect, Mrs. Peddington, but I don't think you've avoided that thus far.

Hazel glowers.

HAZEL
You got spunk in you.

SCREECH. Hazel opens the screen door.

HAZEL (CONT'D)
Maybe she will like you.

Hazel moves aside. Kenneth and Candace enter cautiously.

INT. PEDDINGTON HOUSE - DAY

From the foyer, Candace peeks around the house. The surfaces are clean, for the most part, giving the space the aura of tidiness. The corners, however, are stacked with grungy clutter.

Hazel marches in front of Candace.

HAZEL

This way.

The trio slowly ascends the dusty staircase.

UPSTAIRS

KNOCK KNOCK. Hazel gently taps on the heavy, oak door.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

Oakley? You've got some visitors.

No response. Hazel tries again.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

It's Dr. Ken. He's brought someone for you to meet.

Still nothing. Candace hears a few stifled CLICKS and CLANKS inside.

CANDACE

I'd like to try just her and I.
With your permission, of course.

She moves toward the door, edging Hazel away.

KENNETH

We'll be right downstairs.

Hazel concedes, apprehensively. She and Kenneth climb back down the stairs.

Candace squares off to the door.

MOIRA (V.O.)

When you meet her, establish rules that are mutually beneficial. This should establish an open environment, make her feel safe.

KNOCK KNOCK.

CANDACE
Oakley? My name is Candace.

No response.

CANDACE (CONT'D)
It's really important that I talk
to you, so... I'm going to come in,
if that's okay.

Again, nothing.

CANDACE (CONT'D)
Is that okay?

With a third no answer, Candace turns the doorknob. She opens
the door to find...

THE BARREL OF A RIFLE, pointed directly at her.

CANDACE (CONT'D)
My god.

Candace hits the floor.

OAKLEY
Calm down. I ain't gonna shoot ya.

Candace looks up from her ducked position. OAKLEY sits at a
small craft table in middle of the room, assorted gun parts
organized in front of her.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)
I'm just cleanin' it.

Her faded jeans sport an impressive hole; her oversized
flannel shirt would cover it if it weren't for the prominent
baby bump.

Candace slowly picks herself off the ground. Wary, she
crosses the threshold of...

OAKLEY'S BEDROOM

Candace walks towards her, hard at work. She waits for Oakley
to acknowledge her. She doesn't.

CANDACE
Oakley.

Oakley wipes down each individual part spread on the table.

OAKLEY
Yes. Candace, is it?

CANDACE

That's right. I'm visiting from Portland... and there, my job is to talk to people. I'm a--

OAKLEY

I know what you are. And I know why you're here.

Oakley puts the rag down and starts to reassemble the pieces.

CANDACE

What is it that you think I'm here to do?

OAKLEY

I'm twelve. You can talk to me like I am.

Candace begins to pace the room. A worn but tended to fishing pole sits in the corner. Various animal skins cover the walls, along with crude drawings of deep imaginative worlds.

CANDACE

Okay. That can be our first rule.

OAKLEY

Rule?

CANDACE

Yes. We'll have three of them. And the first one is: we will not patronize each other.

She spots a set of picture frames on Oakley's dresser. She notices that almost all of them depict someone that Candace doesn't recognize.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

Who's this in all your pictures? He has a nice smile.

OAKLEY

Rule number two: no snoopin'.

Candace glances at her; the rifle is halfway put together.

CANDACE

How about... Respecting boundaries? I won't go poking around where I don't belong.

OAKLEY

Sounds the same as snoopin' to me.
What's rule number three?

Candace circles back around to the table.

CANDACE

It's the most important: honesty.

Oakley stops. She looks directly at Candace for the first time.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

I'll tell you the truth, you tell
me the truth. No lying, no
deceiving, no--

OAKLEY

--No sneaky cheatin'.

CANDACE

No sneaky cheatin'.

Oakley returns to her gun. Candace bends down to her level.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

And... if I'm being honest right
now... can I just say, I think you
are truly the bravest little girl
I've ever known.

Gun ready, Oakley SNAPS the bolt into place.

OAKLEY

I'd like you to leave.

Surprised, Candace stammers.

CANDACE

But...

OAKLEY

Rule number two. Respectin'
boundaries. Get out.

CANDACE

I would still like to talk--

Oakley slams her gun down, standing up with insistence.

OAKLEY

GET OUT!

Candace scurries out the door, shutting it quickly.

Breathing heavily, she rests her head back.

CANDACE
(to herself)
Shit.

INT/EXT. KENNETH'S CAR - DUSK

SLAM. Candace and Kenneth sit for a moment in silence.

KENNETH
How'd those floaties work out?

CANDACE
Just drive the damn car.

Kenneth smirks, finally puts the keys into the ignition.

EXT. PEDDINGTON FRONT YARD - DUSK

Puffing on the stub of a cigarette, Hazel watches them depart from the front porch. The end of the cigarette glows red in the impending darkness.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Candace sits, a lonely island amid a spread of papers. She's crouched over her journal, making notes to herself.

INSERT PAGE:

- 29 weeks
- Mother: relationship undetermined
- Father: deceased
- Extreme gun enthusiast...

BACK TO SCENE

Candace flips the page back to her list of allies. She hovers over it with her pen, then begins to cross something out.

INSERT PAGE:

She etches over the question mark beside Kenneth's name.

BACK TO SCENE

Candace throws the pen down in the center of the journal and falls back on the headboard.

The clock reads 1:45.

Candace stares up at the ceiling. She shuts her heavy eyes.

INT. CANDACE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Candace pops a bottle of champagne.

CANDACE

AH! God that's terrifying.

The bottle starts to overflow, and, underprepared, Candace rushes to the sink.

MOIRA

What exactly are we celebrating?

Candace puts the bottle in the sink and slides a crisply-folded letter across the counter.

CANDACE

I'm going to be a counselor.

Candace pours two glasses of bubbly.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

You can say something... Why aren't you saying anything?

MOIRA

I'm just surprised is all.

CANDACE

Well, you inspired me.

MOIRA

Me?

Candace hands her a flute.

CANDACE

Through everything that happened with Fletcher, you were strongest at my weakest. I want to do that for other people. Change lives.

Moira lifts her glass.

MOIRA

To changing lives.

Candace joins her. They toast.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. PEDDINGTON BACK YARD - DAY

BANG! TINK! Oakley raises her eye from the scope of her gun. She beautifully hit her target: a can on a slab of boards 150 yards away. Several others are still upright.

Oakley kneels from her awkward recumbent position and goes to reload her rifle. The baby has made the task cumbersome.

Candace stands behind her. She's holding a cardboard carrier, two milkshakes placed firmly inside. In the other hand hangs a white bag, grease smudged on its sides.

CANDACE

You're quite the shot. I can barely see those things out there.

Oakley ignores her, sliding ammo into her magazine.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

How long have you been shooting?

OAKLEY

Daddy handed me a gun when I was five.

CANDACE

I bet you were a natural.

OAKLEY

Nobody's a natural with a gun. To think so makes you irresponsible with one.

Candace sits in the grass and takes out one of the shakes.

CANDACE

God, I love a good milkshake.

She picks up its companion and holds it up to Oakley. Oakley loads her magazine and returns to her former position.

She takes aim through her scope... Can in the crosshairs.

CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH.

Oakley's eyes open wide, broken from concentration. She turns to Candace.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

Fries?

Oakley scowls.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

I used to dip my fries in my shake.
My friend Moira taught me that.

She opens the lid of her shake, dips a fry in, and pops it into her mouth.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

Seriously, you have to try this.

Oakley sneers and returns to her task. She takes aim...

SLLLLUUUUURRRRPPPPP.

Oakley slowly raises her gaze once again.

SLURP. SLURP. SLLLLUUURRRRP.

Oakley spins to face Candace.

CANDACE (CONT'D)

Hmm.... Must have a hole in this straw somewhere.

OAKLEY

Are you trying to peeve me?

CANDACE

I thought you could use a break.
Don't you want anything?

Oakley stands, leaving the gun at her feet.

OAKLEY

No. I do not want anything from you.

She balefully marches toward Candace.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

I know how it works, and you can't bribe me, you can't get all buddy-buddy with me. You know why? 'Cause you don't really care about me. You care about yourself, how you can make yourself feel good about poor, helpless little Oakley.

Oakley looms directly over Candace.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

I'm not some sad little girl that you say is brave. I take care of myself. Have every day I've been on this Earth. So take your little games and bother someone else before I turn that rifle around on you and make my daddy turn in his grave.

Candace gathers the bag and the drinks.

CANDACE

I can see this is a bad time, then.

Candace heads toward the front of the house. Oakley, gun in hand, calls out to her.

OAKLEY

Oh, and I *hate* chocolate shakes.

Oakley lies back down.

Candace turns to leave, gunshots echoing behind her.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Candace holds a large permanent marker in her hand. She crosses "ICE CREAM EQUIVALENT" off a large poster.

The phone is pressed against her ear.

CANDACE

She's a spawn of a she-devil, I'm telling you.

Only one other idea is listed-- "FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS."

The poster is just one of many things now taped on the wall: the room looks inappropriately like an FBI investigation.

MOIRA (V.O.)

She won't talk to people she knows, much less someone that she just met. You haven't earned her trust.

Candace takes hold of the phone held precariously between her ear and shoulder.

CANDACE

I'd like to tie her to a chair and whip her with some bike chains right now. Can I just do that?

MOIRA (V.O.)
Helpful.

CANDACE
It's a the best idea I've got.

MOIRA (V.O.)
Keep brainstorming. You just need
to find another way.

INT. MOIRA'S OFFICE - DAY

Moira sits behind her desk. Suddenly, a figure appears at her office door: it's Valerie.

MOIRA
I gotta go. Good luck out there.

Moira hangs up and hurries to welcome Valerie.

MOIRA (CONT'D)
Hi. Come on in. Have a seat.

Valerie sheepishly enters, looking around tentatively.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Candace throws her phone on the bed. She inspects the short list of ideas, quickly deciding to viciously scribble out the other option.

INT. DR. KEN'S EXAM ROOM - DAY

The blood pressure gauge releases around Oakley's arm. Kenneth un-velcros the apparatus.

KENNETH
130 over 80.

OAKLEY
Is that good?

KENNETH
It's a little higher than I'd like,
but we'll keep monitoring it.

Kenneth writes on Oakley's chart as she sits on the exam chair, legs swinging. Her belly is less hidden in the gown.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
So... what do you think of Candace?

Oakley scoffs.

OAKLEY
She tries too hard.

KENNETH
I'm sure you're not making things
easy.

Kenneth approaches her once again.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
Node check. Let me know if you're
uncomfortable.

He begins to check her neck. Oakley flinches, and Kenneth
raises his hands in response.

OAKLEY
Sorry.

KENNETH
Don't apologize.

He touches her neck again. Oakley closes her eyes, trying not
to wince.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
She's really nice, I bet. Once you
get to know her.

OAKLEY
So, you don't like her, either?

He removes his hands and writes more in his chart.

KENNETH
All good.

OAKLEY
Anything else?

KENNETH
You know what I'm gonna say.

Oakley hops down from the chair.

KENNETH (CONT'D)
I think it's important you do an
ultrasound, Oakley. At your age,
it's better to be safe than--

OAKLEY

Can I get changed, Doc? If you're done.

Kenneth, disappointed, nods.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Kenneth stuts into the waiting room, where Hazel waits for updates.

HAZEL

How is she?

KENNETH

Vitals are good. She's not complaining of too much pain. No signs of infection.

HAZEL

That's good.

KENNETH

I am a little concerned...

HAZEL

With?

Kenneth talks softly, pulling her in closer.

KENNETH

She's still refusing the ultrasound. She won't talk about the baby beyond mild discomforts...

HAZEL

Is an ultrasound necessary?

KENNETH

In a strict, technical sense... no. But I highly recommend--

HAZEL

I support my daughter. This is her decision.

KENNETH

Hazel, I beg that you reconsider--

HAZEL

Past medical necessities, this is a family issue. I appreciate you keeping it that way, Dr. Bellmer.