

WOVEN: (The Other) Secret Diary of a Call Girl

written by Guest Contributor | July 28, 2021



WOVEN is an Entropy series and dedicated safe space for essays by persons who engage with #MeToo, sexual assault and harassment, and #DomesticViolence, as well as their intersections with mental illness, substance addiction, and legal failures and remedies. We believe you. If selected for the series, we want to provide the editorial and human support such that our conversation continues long after the stories and names have changed. You can view submission guidelines for WOVEN [here](#).

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I did not enter prostitution in order to write a memoir. I was an addict, twenty years old, broke and dissatisfied with my usual self-harm methods. I had been nursing my sickness like a child for some time by then, holed up to lick my wounds until the floor gave out and I fell into motion, as if against my will, running straight into a dead-end brothel before I could have understood what I was doing. I entered prostitution because, in one way or another, rape had bound me to it, and desperation propelled me, and I did not see any other answers but submission to this stripped fate. This was not a political act. It was the turning of the current of the underbelly, the darkest waters, the Real World in which sometimes things do not get better. It was just my life; I was just there.

And then I wasn't. I was in psychiatric hold, I was in rehabilitation, I was in shock. But one thing I was not was alone. Don't misunderstand: my friends fled, or else could not wrap their heads around the person I had become, and so did not try to. But I knew it in my heart that I was not alone, for, though betrayed by them as I was, I knew the women who had hooked beside me were suffering just as I was.

Because the average woman in the average brothel is not practicing an exercise in sexual liberation, or an exotic acquisition of pocket money, as pop-culture feminist rumor would have it. In my experience, the average hookers are mothers, drug addicts, and trauma victims. If they're lucky, they're all three. If you are not any of these three, I would hazard a guess that you'll become at least one in the process.

Because nobody thinks to tell you when you enter prostitution that you are going to get raped. What I mean to say is, it happens so frequently that maybe the other women don't remember it is wrong. Sure, there were whispers: watch him with the condom, he picks new girls for a reason. But there is what I suspect to be a subconsciously intentional omission of the truth—it does not matter how carefully you watch, there are men who hate you and will take what they want. I have been strangled within an inch of my life as I was raped more than once. To the credit of the other women, I can understand that it becomes normal, too normal to mention, especially when you find yourself the one cleaning up the blood.

There is a reason that, of all industries, of all places you could end up, prostitution is the place where this is so likely, because your clients—whether they enact it gently or cruelly—are all operating under the same assumption: a hooker is a thing to be purchased. The body, behavior, sexuality of the woman is no longer that of the woman, but of the hooker, a separate entity unto itself. You hear this rhetoric in the defenders of the sex industry: without hookers, these men would rape or abuse the women and children in their lives. Immediately, this posits the prostitute as something other than woman (or, in many cases, child). This is a profound form of dehumanization, a rhetoric that goes far beyond rhetoric and dictates the material conditions of the woman selling sex. These are the conditions in which my molested body was capitalized on, was touched by the cruelest men, fucked like a diagnosis.

I am not theorizing about the ways in which other women in the sex industry conceptualize their own experiences. I am not asking whether buyers of sex should hold these assumptions. Of course they shouldn't; of course they're wrong. Of course this is not what I signed up for. But it is, nonetheless, the reality that I was confronted with, and to lie about that is a psychic death I am not prepared to submit to anymore.

I have been asked many times if there was security who could have helped me, or a button I could have pressed—what I feel that I am really being asked is precisely this: surely that doesn't *really* happen? Surely it's not *that* bad? Well, what I have to say to that is this: there's a reason most of us use drugs. There is a reason so many exited women kill themselves, or else end up right back where they started. There is a reason boots are so common in brothels, junk babies hiding pin prick tracks from men with glass pipes. To put it simply, it is that bad for many of us, and no sex-positive think-piece can erase this reality.

And so I find myself listening with my ear to the wall to the dominant conversations being had about the sex industry; I find myself ignored when I try to answer back. From the ground, I hear the suppressed, dissenting voices

naming what has been done to them. It often feels as though I am the only one that hears it, is strong enough to hear it. Sometimes I want to start shrieking, bleeding, pleading.

But even I will admit, there is some truth to the narrative that sex work (as it were) can act as a medium for sexual exploration, a play at empowerment for the eternal victim. However, the ramifications of doing this in a brothel are not as slight as they are portrayed. They were not this way for me. So I will tell you the truth, as I have come to understand it: indulging one's most primitive, most shameful masochism is its own thrill, one that enables us to disregard the consequential permanent scarring, at least for a little while. It is this masochism that is precisely the appeal of prostitution. It is a particular kind of sadism that is precisely the appeal of buying sex.

What I am left with now at almost-twenty three years old is the bone deep understanding that there is no immunity in the world from your worst fears, or from your saddest pleasures. I have learned that my story is pathetically common, and that it will go on being common as long as we let it. My body is scarred forever. I sold well, because, if you are brave enough to be honest with yourself, you know that sex is not the selling point—the dehumanization of women is. And there I was, non-human, naked, a girlfriend machine. Sometimes I still forget I have a face.

Madilyn Newbery is a writer from Sydney, Australia. She has studied creative writing at Western Sydney University. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Fever Dreams*.