

If you intend to write a story about a woman, know that you will fail. To capture the nuanced experience of women in America at this current moment, you are going to try to make it about sexual assault and reproductive rights. This is clever, but remember: ideas don't make stories. Good ones, anyway.

When you write about rape, make sure to depict the woman as very emotional, because you know, she's a woman. Also, be sure to write descriptively, be almost too graphic, lewd and terrible. Readers are expecting porn. As I always say, voyeurism is sexy.

You start with something like: in a moment of lustful abandon, she let him enter her. His persistence and drunken stupor quieted her protest. With each thrust the divine spark in her dimmed as he took his penis and extinguished her light.

In flashes she'd remember, triggered by a seemingly innocuous comment. In sudden moments of emotional outburst, she'd cry hysterically, over a song.

Then you mention her friends and how they would describe her as charismatic, bubbly and sweet, that lovely Leah. Depressed people often bring others happiness. It's just one of those inexplicable magic tricks.

Make sure to give some backstory:

Before her light was dimmed she was a horny hormonal teenager, yet after, she became an insatiable carnal beast. Her friends encouraged her lioness approach to getting some but predators aren't supposed to be preyed on. It wasn't supposed to be like this.

*Alas, this is how it was. Leah jumped rope with the blurred lines of consent, drinking and drugging and laughing the while. Switching forms of birth control, the pill, the patch, the NuvaRing, the IUD, sometimes not even taking the necessary precaution, risking everything with a smile. She hadn't used a condom since she had a flip phone yet the boys would always come inside her. They wouldn't atone for the bloody mess. *She let them, I guess.**

*Maybe include something about how her years of ravenous hooking up were due to her years of unrequited love. She spent her high school years falling in love with her best friends, sucking dick, and ignoring the fact that her sex partners were the only ones who had orgasms. *It is important to allude to the fact that the female orgasm doesn't matter.**

Desperately wanting to be one of the guys, Leah distinguished herself from other girls, a ruby among the diamonds, a girl so complicit in her own degradation she would argue why female

comedians aren't funny and high five all the guys with prowess. It was her fault. She grew up playing baseball not softball and spent her childhood with videogames and barbies, wholly inept at differentiating between what was meant for her as a girl.

She was one of the guys. For years she was the boys' mother, maiden and crone all in one, rescuing them from the insecurities of high school with a reassuring love cocooning them from being called pussies and faggots. The boys would grow into men and she remained a girl, dancing along to the five hour jam sessions as the boys banged their drums, strung their guitars.

Now is when you seamlessly weave in the rape:

She became a woman when she found the courage to tell her story and call it rape. *Switch to second person so the audience knows you're trying to say something about the general female experience.* When you're in that moment, the one right before you hate and blame yourself, you become all bark and no bite, and eventually you stop barking all together. The silence shields you from feeling the truth. You become an object left behind to pick up the pieces of your shattered self worth. *To the women who gather those pieces and storm police precincts and college campus offices to tell men that eerily look like their perpetrators the violations they were subject to, I say go you. To the women who never tell their story, I understand.*

On a related note, it is important to teach the readers that female solidarity is essential for the revolution, so here is a great moment to talk about her girl friends. But make it happen in college, because college changes lives.

College was when she befriended women. Being one the of girls was different. They'd look forward to going to parties as a crew, but the real party was the pre-game. Leah dressed up for the ritual.. She painted her lips, covering her face in shadows, concealers, and liners. They all did. *Make some cultural references by mentioning artists like Beyonce and Lizzo, readers love recognizing references to their culture.* They'd Countdown to the witching hour and feel Good as Hell.

It was a bonding activity for the girls, the get up, the time to lather each other with complements, forging alliances, strengthening the pack. For a moment in front of the mirror they became wolves, howling at the moon, these witchy women made sound sigils with the clicks of their heels, conjuring the canine they bark along to the songs, baring their teeth, they rawr.

Take the story in a different direction now, talk about abortion because when you talk about rape you invite all of women's issues to the table, right?

The day Leah peed on a stick in the Rite Aid employee bathroom down the street from her dorm room, she let out a sigh and a “fuck.” It had happened. Checking the box to make sure she followed all the steps and the product was functioning properly, she continued to stare at the screen on the stick, waiting for a different answer.

There was no conflict in her mind. There was no doubt of what to do next, only how to get it done. He was no one special to her, just some friday night fling. She thought about telling him then didn't. It annoyed her that the guy couldn't take this burden on, it had to be her. Fucking seahorses.

Remember that there hasn't been much dialogue so it might be a nice time to include some.

At brunch with her girlfriends, the dark humor ran rampant:

“Let's drown this sucker” chugging a mimosa.

“How about we have an abortion shower?”

“Oh my god, yes, and you can register at a sex shop.”

“Name the baby mission, so you can abort mission! HA!”

Leah never considered it a baby. Not for a second. It was a foreign thing her body was responding to like a parasite, a malfunction of her birth control. It made her sick, not just in the morning, all day, everything nauseated her. Lemon helped, but if some asshole brought something fishy to class, it was over.

When she called her doctor's office to set up an appointment, the woman on the phone started to say congratulations but was interrupted by an emphatic “NO, I'm getting an abortion.”

For this next section, add a flare of experimental fiction! Lead us through the actual abortion process but try to also include how getting an abortion is part of the whole being-a-woman deal.

Getting an Abortion Job Description

Requirements:

- Must have an escort to safely return your loopy amnesia ass home
- Familiarity with waiting in the designated waiting room for forty five minutes while facing a non-stop streaming of CNN, watching the latest natural disaster, and subjecting yourself to that face that mocks you with his presence and threatens your agency with every appointment
- Proven pregnancy at least four weeks in and no more than twenty weeks

- Basic identification documents
- Must have health insurance, preferably Medicaid so you don't have to pay for any of your care because otherwise, you can be sure, the whole ordeal will eat up at least two paychecks.
- Hands-on experience signing documents without reading them to speed along the process
- Be willing to be called "Nebraska" for the sake of anonymity
- Must be able to follow simple instructions and follow procedure, returning to the front desk multiple times before being seen by a doctor
- Proficiency in being able to respond to the name "Nebraska" and deal with the strangeness of not being allowed to be known

Responsibilities:

- Comply with medical staff to ensure a safe experience and follow a nurse through a security locked door that opens to yet another waiting room
- Actively seek out the locker room and put on the gown, booties, hair net, and blanket, provided by the nurse.
- Assess other women in the waiting room with you in matching gown, booties, hair nets, wrapped in blankets, and notice how there are more black and brown bodies than white bodies.
- Follow the other women who get their blood drawn, pee in a cup, and return to their waiting seat, with glazed over eyes.
- Comply with getting yet another sonogram and endure the sterile dildo with a condom on it being stuck inside you for way to long as the nurse moves it around to get the pictures she needs.
- Deal with the nurse's humor as she says "Well you're definitely pregnant"
- Report to the pre-op area where you will be visited by an anesthesiologist who will give you an IV and ask some questions.
- Prepare to wait
- Listen to the doctor as he explains exactly what will happen from the second you are asked to leave your pre-op chair to the date of your follow up appointment.
- Arrive at the moment before the procedure happens and stroll around the operating room before being told you'll feel a slight burning sensation, then you'll be out.
- Wakes up in a post-op bed, lethargic, dizzy, and disoriented, with dried vomit on your gown
- Insist on tea instead of apple juice when the nurse asks for your preference
- Let the nurse assist you out of the bed and use the toilet.
- Follow the nurse to another chair with a wee wee pad on it, the dog training pads.
- Notice a woman in the chair next to you and listen to her ask if you are cramping

- Lie and tell her no then mull over whether the woman playfully said fuck you or really meant it

Now, don't forget to bring back some exposition to explain the pain and loss that comes with losing out on motherhood, since everyone woman is destined to be a mother.

Far from mourning a loss, the recovery was not nearly as traumatic as it was supposed to be. These things are supposed to be painful. You are supposed to feel shame for getting knocked up, shame for not doing all you could to protect yourself. You are supposed to feel guilt for the way your body did what your body is designed to do. The shame and guilt are supposed to paralyze you into silence and the silence will eat away at your self worth until you're a shell of a person, pretty and collectible, but lifeless.

For Leah, this was not the way of it; recovery felt like coming back to life. She had a rush of energy like when you can finally breathe deeply after weeks of sinus congestion.

For the conclusion you want to end with a call to action, but make it subtle because at least something in this story should be.

When she started to call people, close friends and family, to let them know that she was terminating the pregnancy, a strange phenomena occurred: the more women she told, the more stories she heard. Other abortion stories, other pregnancy scares. Her sister, her aunt, her mother, her great grandmothers, her friends, they all had their own abortion stories. There was one story someone told Leah about having to push through a crowd of picketers, preaching pro-life nonsense. That must have felt awful and confusing. Leah never understood the political polarity; she considered abortion pro-life, women's lives.

A similar phenomenon happened when she shared her assault story. The more women she told, the more stories she'd collect.

Before you end, remind your audience this is a personal struggle and since the personal is political, this is a human struggle, and to confront your own humanity is to show others their own.

Sometimes living with these secrets feels like too much of a burden, weighs heavy on our hearts, and there isn't always a room of our own to retreat to. We think back to the time when our foremothers would break the law by using contraceptives. Married and unmarried women, poor

and rich, black and white alike navigated legal blockades that created a landscape of botched abortions and forced motherhood.

Learning that sex can lead you down an inevitable, tragic march towards a destiny of servitude, means your relationship with sex and your own sexuality are forever complicated in a uniquely female way.

So it's ok for it to hurt. It's ok, we remind ourselves. *And this is how you end a story about a woman. Make it a story about all women. Try to be inclusive, knowing you'll fail.*

It's not fair, it's not complete.