



Zola's Story Identity



Identity

I am 24 years old, and my name is Zola. From a young age, I felt different. I preferred to play with my brothers outside and felt like a stranger when I wore a dress or tried to be like the other girls. My parents were very strict, and we grew up going to Sunday school and good schools in the city. For a long time, I felt like something was wrong inside of me, something that I could not control. In secondary school, when the girls talked about boys and dressed up for outings, I wore loose clothes, kept my hair short, and never bothered with lip gloss. When I found myself watching and thinking about girls much more than boys, I tried to change it but couldn't. The teachers would call my mother to complain about me and my troublesome boyish ways. At home, my father beat me, saying he would not stop until the demons left me and I became a normal girl.

My mom's sister, Martha, wasn't like the rest of my family. Sometimes she would even take me shopping for clothes and let me get what made me feel good. She was the first person who talked to me about sexuality. She is the one I told when I realized that I was a lesbian.

This knowledge was the dawn of a new and often difficult chapter in my life. The only time people like me are mentioned is when they call us sinners in religious services. Everyone I know, even at college, thinks we are dangerous and evil, and since my own family has turned against me, I too have started to question myself...

Go to Violence Strikes and take Card 1.

A black silhouette of a person with dreadlocks is positioned on the left side of the slide, facing right. The background behind the silhouette features a repeating pattern of stylized, concentric circles with radiating lines, set against a light blue background. The right side of the slide is a solid light blue color.

Zola's Story

Violence Strikes 1



Violence Strikes 1

You hate the constant ridiculing from your family. Even though they don't speak about it directly, everyone knows that you are different. Your parents continue to make your life a nightmare, especially since you came back home after university to apply for jobs. Your father begins to invite some of the sons of his friends over to dinner parties and tells you to dress up. When that doesn't help matters, he starts lending his car to some fresh male graduates to take you out. You go but are mostly silent and wonder what happened to make you feel so blank inside.

Your mother spends less and less time with you and keeps shaking her head, asking God what she did wrong and how she can fix it. The final straw comes one night when you are driving home with one of your suitors. Just before you reach your house, he pulls the car over and tries to kiss you, holds you down tight, and begins to unbutton his trousers. You scream and manage to kick him in the groin. He shouts and asks if you are insane. He tells you there is something very wrong with you and leaves you on the side of the road to walk the rest of the way home. You decide that you cannot continue to live like this.

You think of your good friend Lakeri from university who offered you a place to stay and consider moving in with her. You can also go to your Aunt Martha. In the past, she tried to calm your parents down, saying that your behavior was a normal part of growing up, but your parents now distrust her.

If you decide to move in with your friend, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.

If you decide to go to your Aunt Martha's house, go to Family and take card 1.



Zola's Story

Friends & Neighbors 1



Friends & Neighbors 1

Your friend, Lakeri, picks up her phone after the second ring. She is delighted to hear from you and invites you to come stay at her house. Even though she is out, she says that you can go home and speak to the housekeeper, who will take care of you until she arrives. Your friend, who is actually married but whose husband is away studying for a PhD, has no children and a well-paying job.

When you arrive, you are led into a lush compound. You take in the breathtaking view from the upstairs balcony while sipping fresh orange juice. For now, you are glad to be away from all the forced dates, the whispering, and the ostracism that come with living at home.

When your friend returns in the evening, you are taken aback at how stunning she looks in her short business suit. She gives you a big hug and you feel butterflies in your stomach. She is very sympathetic when you share with her the trauma of your time at home. During dinner, she explains how she went through a similar trauma but that hers was much worse because her parents arranged for her marriage to her current husband, whom she has never loved. You enjoy the next few days with your friend. You play cards, watch TV together, and feel so comfortable that you do not start applying for jobs. Your feelings for her grow strong and you don't know what to do.

If you want to talk to your Aunt Martha, go to Family and take card 1.

If you want to look for community online, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.



Zola's Story

Family 1



Family 1

Aunt Martha is pleased to see you since most of your family practically disowned her, saying that she was teaching you foreign values. Her husband died before they had any children, and while she dates occasionally, she has never married again. She speaks slang, uses the internet, reads lots of novels, and doesn't seem to care what anyone else thinks.

You confide in her, "Auntie, I can't take it anymore. Daddy has been bringing in different men to date me, and one of them tried to force himself on me. I am always being compared to my sister. No one at home seems to understand that I did not ask to be this way; it just happened," you sob, overwhelmed. Your aunt soothes you with a hug saying, "I am so sorry, Zola, but you must know that your parents love you. I have tried to tell them to accept you as you are and treat you well, but they have stopped listening to me. Let us be strong. For now, stay here with me while you apply for a job so you can earn your own money. Now we shall go to church and pray together for you."

If you agree to go to church, go to Religion and take card 1.

If you decide to seek online community and support, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.



Zola's Story

Religion 1



Religion 1

Your aunt does not go to the same church as your family, otherwise you would never have agreed to go with her. When you walk into church you feel as though everyone is staring at you and whispering, but it is probably your imagination. The usher greets and hugs your aunt with a huge smile and shakes your hand. “We love you and are praying for you,” she says to you.

Sitting down, you look at the choir girls all made up with their hair and makeup. There is a Bible study after the service, and as fate would have it, the topic of the day is sin. The pastor goes on to talk about how modernity has clouded our better judgment, introducing practices which are sins before God. He mentions adultery and then he goes on to homosexuality, warning that this sin of the body can destroy a whole nation, the way God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. He adds, “The Bible says that it is immoral for man to sleep with man and woman with woman. This is unnatural and an abomination! Homosexuals must confess their sins, after which God will forgive them. He loves the sinners but hates the sin.”

Your cheeks burn and you feel the fire of shame as well as anger in your chest. You can hardly contain yourself for the rest of the sermon. You burst into tears as your aunt drives you home.

To seek online community, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.



Zola's Story

Friends & Neighbors 2



Friends & Neighbors 2

There is an internet cafe near your aunt's house, and you've heard that it is possible to find like-minded people through the internet these days. As you search the web, you are amazed to find the site of a women's network that supports people like you in your country. They call themselves Friends of Friends. You apply to become a member of the online community, and day by day this place becomes your new home. Online, you meet many new people who share their troubles, crack jokes, and encourage one another to work to end discrimination. Sometimes they meet at a joint near your aunt's house.

You finally feel like you belong somewhere, like you are part of something bigger. Nobody calls you out for who you are, and in a strange way you begin to call them your sisters. You begin dropping in at the joint and are delighted to meet your online friends face-to-face. Your friends tell you that while they support each other, it is still difficult for them to be accepted in society where they need to survive and earn money.

You are starting to feel better having this new group of friends and a place to socialize. You are even considering moving into your own place, but you cannot know what the future holds...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.

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Zola's Story

Violence Strikes 2



Violence Strikes 2

You have just spent your evening chatting away with your friends at the local joint. You decide to walk the short distance to your friend Lakeri's house and are excited to invite her on a trip that your friends are planning. You are thinking about how nice it will be to spend a few days out of town when two men cross the street and begin walking quickly toward you. Your heart begins racing. You look around, but no one else is in sight and it is too late to run or hide.

"Hey baby," one of the men taunts as they catch up with you. "Can we walk you home?" the other slides his hand around your waist and turns you to face him with enough force to leave a bruise. You try to resist and raise your arms in front of you to block the men. But they are much bigger than you and while one pins you to the wall, the other teases you, "You want me? You want me lady? All you need is a taste of a real man."

"No! Help!!" you shout, hoping someone can hear you. "You think we don't know about people like you? You and your little friends just showing up at the joint whenever you please... You think we don't know about your kind? We're going to fix you for good." After that there are only their grunts and your whimpers as they take turns raping you. They finish and give you one last, disgusted look before sprinting away.

When they are out of sight, you begin to walk, but you don't know where you are going.

If you want to report the rape to the police, go to Police and take card 1.

If you decide to go to the hospital, go to Medical Care and take card 1.

A black silhouette of a person with dreadlocks is positioned on the left side of the page. Behind the silhouette is a decorative pattern of overlapping circles, each containing a sun-like design with rays. The background is a solid orange color.

Zola's Story

Medical Care 1



Medical Care 1

You don't feel like you can report the crime to the police. Everyone would know your secret, and you fear exposing your friends and the joint by giving too many details.

You call Lakeri and leave a message explaining where you are. After waiting for a few hours, you are checked by a doctor. He is in a hurry and handles you roughly as he asks what happened. You flinch as he presses on your bruises and tell him a very brief version of the story, admitting only that you were raped by thieves in the street. He scolds you for walking alone at night and tells you that if you were more careful, things like this would not happen. He examines you and says that other than some bad bruises, there is no severe damage. You are then left to wait for more test results.

A few minutes later, Lakeri rushes through the door and runs over to you. She is scared and angry, asking you what happened. When you tell her about the rape, she takes you in her arms and begins to cry as well. She says she is so sorry for what happened and begins to rub your back. When you pull away a few moments later, you notice the doctor standing in the doorway, watching. He comes over to you and demands that you both leave immediately, claiming that you are a liar. He informs you that the hospital does not treat people like you.

Lakeri tries to say she is your sister but the doctor continues to shout, attracting the attention of other patients. Lakeri covers her face and runs out of the hospital, leaving you behind. You have nowhere left to turn but your Aunt Martha.

Go to Family and take card 2.



Zola's Story

Police 1



Police 1

You are exhausted by the time you reach the police station. Since it is late there are not many people around, and thankfully you are able to speak with an officer quickly. “I was just raped by two men. I was walking home,” you explain. The officer makes a few notes before bombarding you with questions, “Where exactly did this encounter take place and what were you doing out so late? Why were you walking alone at night?” You are annoyed with his questions and tell him about the joint where you had met your friends. A strange look passes over his face and he eyes you carefully from head to toe. “I think I know that place,” he mutters. “You say you were meeting some friends there. Do you all go there often?” You are confused, so you just answer honestly. “I know your people,” he says as he beckons the other officer on duty over and fills him in.

“You’re lucky that those men found you,” the second officer laughs. “They were trying to do you a favor!” The first officer nods his head in agreement. “Now what should we do about this one?” he tilts his head toward you. “You know, we could lock her up after all for being one of them.” You begin shaking in fright. “Nah,” the second officer finally says, “too much paperwork.” “Listen lady, I hope you learned your lesson tonight. Now go home and get a boyfriend. You aren’t that ugly.” He tears up the report that the first officer had started writing and they move away, laughing together. You leave the police station and dissolve into tears.

If you want to go to your aunt, go to Family and take card 2.

If you would rather go home to Lakeri, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 3.



Zola's Story

Friends & Neighbors 3



Friends & Neighbors 3

Lakeri is asleep when you finally return home. You nudge her awake and when she takes in your tattered appearance and tear-stained face, she sits up in fright. “Darling, what happened?” she asks. You fall onto her shoulder and cry for awhile. When you feel empty of all emotion, you relate your story to her briefly. She is horrified and insists on taking you to the hospital. When you refuse, she asks if she can get you some food. You just want to bathe and feel clean again. After that you fall asleep beside her.

Over the next few weeks, you feel like a zombie. You are always exhausted even though you spend most of your time on the couch. You find yourself in tears for no apparent reason, and you don’t want to answer your phone or leave the house. The slightest sound makes you jump, and you feel like the world is a dangerous place to be.

Lakeri has been patient, but she is beginning to get annoyed with your moods. She tells you that you may feel better if you find something to keep you busy during the day and suggests that you look for a job. You get defensive, but then she softens, saying that maybe you should go to an NGO that helps victims of rape.

If you want to go to the NGO, go to NGO and take card 1.

If you want to look for a job, go to Work and take card 1.



Zola's Story

Family 2



Family 2

Your Aunt Martha lets you in the door with a worried frown. She asks what has brought you to her house at such a late hour. You can only cry quietly and shiver. She gives you tea and takes your hand as she asks you again to tell her what happened. You finally tell her everything.

She takes you to the bathroom and helps you clean up before you crawl into bed exhausted. The next morning she is waiting for you when you wake up. She tells you that you are welcome to stay with her as long as you like. She encourages you to call your mother. You call but your father answers and you hang up immediately. Aunt Martha advises that sitting around the house feeling sad will not help anything. She suggests that you visit with your friends or start looking for a job, but you do not feel like it.

The next few weeks are very difficult as you struggle with your feelings of fear and betrayal. You are afraid whenever you leave the house and feel like you are no longer safe anywhere. After a while, spending time with your aunt, writing in your journal, and talking to your friends online helps you to heal slowly, and soon you feel ready to apply for a job.

Go to Work and take card 1.



Zola's Story

Work 1



Work 1

After submitting many applications, you take the first job you are offered and start working as an administrator at a marketing firm. It is easy for you to adjust to your work schedule and you enjoy the distraction. Arriving by 7:30 every morning, you prepare your boss' coffee and respond to urgent e-mails. It is also your responsibility to schedule his meetings. He is single and many of the girls at the office spend lunchtime talking about his muscles and expensive shoes. You never take part in such gossip.

Your female co-workers keep on asking you why you always wear the same dark suits and never wear makeup or jewelry, but you explain it away by saying you have no interest in dressing up like a doll. Sometimes, your boss asks why you are single. One night, there is an important work dinner which you have to attend with him. It ends late and he gives you a lift home. While dropping you off, he makes a pass at you and grabs your breasts.

Instinctively you grab his wrist and twist it until he yells. You try to apologize and explain that he startled you and that you had no intention of hurting him. He tells you to get out of his car. It is awkward at work the next day. You only speak to him when it is absolutely necessary. The days and weeks after that are terrible. Your boss begins to spread rumors that you have no interest in men and soon the whole office starts gossiping about you.

When you arrive at your desk, you find rude words on your papers and get obscene emails. It is more than you can bear. But the worst is yet to come...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.

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Zola's Story

Violence Strikes 3



Violence Strikes 3

At the office, the harassment increases from petty to severe. Your co-worker leaves a note on one of the doors in the washroom with your name on it. Inside, you find a picture of a girl with no breasts wearing trousers with a sign that says, 'Men's Toilets.'

One night when you are working late, your boss tells you to undress in front of him so that he can see if you are really a woman or a man. He threatens to withhold your pay until he can see if you are an actual woman. He laughs when he sees how scared you are, but you refuse to take off your clothes. He continues to mock you, and when you tell him that you will scream if he doesn't let you out, he opens the door and warns you that you are making a big mistake and will be sorry.

The next day you arrive at work to find your things thrown into a trash bag and left at the reception. "You have been fired, Zola," the guard says, escorting you back out the door.

You feel like such a failure. Now that you've lost your job, you have nothing. You wish you could turn to your mother or sister but know that is not an option for you. At least your aunt and friends from the online network are very kind. If it were not for them, you would be completely isolated.

If you decide that the only way to survive is to change the way you behave and hide your sexuality completely, go to Return Home and take card 1.

If you decide to move to another town, go to Chance and take card 1.



Zola's Story

NGO 1



NGO 1

You are very hesitant to go to a women's organization. It is only when Lakeri offers to come with you that you agree. Lakeri accompanies you to the reception desk and sits next to you as you wait to see a counselor. She promises you that she will be waiting whenever you finish.

You feel a bit calmer when you walk into a warmly decorated room and meet the counselor. She invites you to share a little about yourself and asks if you could describe what happened the night you were raped. You go through the details even though it is painful, but the counselor stops you when you are in the middle of repeating the awful words the men spoke to you about your sexuality.

"I'm sorry, please wait," she interrupts, shaking her head. "I...I didn't realize that your case has special circumstances." She makes a note on her paper while you wonder what is happening. As she stands up she says, "I'm sorry, but we do not have services to help you." She motions for you to follow her out the door and you protest, trying to figure out what is happening. "Please, don't cause a scene. Please just go and take your girlfriend with you. I will pray for you," she adds. You rush into the reception and pull Lakeri out the door without explanation.

When you recount your experience in the parking lot, Lakeri says nothing and seems angry at you. She avoids you for the rest of the day, and later that night she shouts at you for your outburst at the NGO. She explains that an old classmate works there and that now her secret is out. She tells you to find somewhere else to stay.

If you decide to move in with your aunt and look for a job, go to Work and take card 1.

If you feel like all hope is lost and you can only leave town, go to Chance and take card 1.



Zola's Story

Chance 1



Chance 1

You are devastated by everything that has happened and decide that you have to get away. Your lesbian friends from the internet and the local joint help you do some research to find a new city where you can start again. Your Aunt Martha is saddened to hear about your decision, but she understands your pain and fear and gives you a small loan to help you get started.

You go to your parent's house before you leave with the hope of making one last try. Your sister lets you in but your mother barely acknowledges your presence. You are sitting at the kitchen table, your mother busily distracting herself with making dinner when you hear your father entering the house. Your mother suddenly pushes you out the back door saying that you have caused enough trouble and that you can't stay.

Your first few months in a new town are very lonely. You often wonder if you made a mistake, but there are too many things that you cannot face back at home. Even if you are all alone, at least you can make a fresh, anonymous start. You put out many job applications and wait anxiously to hear back.

Finally, you get a job working at a secondary school. The staff is kind and friendly, and you feel like you might even be able to make friends if they don't find out about you. You still feel lonely and continue to read the news from home and chat with your friends online. You wonder if you will ever be able to tell the truth about yourself and long for the day when you can live without fear and discrimination.

THE END

This is the end of this version of Zola's story. Take a few minutes to sit quietly and reflect on Zola's experience. When you are ready, ask the facilitator for another woman's story.



Zola's Story

Return Home 1



Return Home 1

There seems to be no other way of being safe in the community unless you keep your sexuality a secret. True, it will be like living a lie, but you know that many women and men are forced to live lies to protect themselves and their families.

You continue living with your aunt, spending most of your time alone in her house. As you grow more and more depressed, she encourages you to look for a new job, but you no longer feel like you can trust anyone.

You sometimes venture online but avoid going to the joint because it poses too much risk. You avoid getting close to anyone and don't even think of finding yourself a partner. It is difficult living a lie, so you keep to yourself and quietly surrender to a lonely life.

THE END

This is the end of this version of Zola's story. Take a few minutes to sit quietly and reflect on Zola's experience. When you are ready, ask the facilitator for another woman's story.