

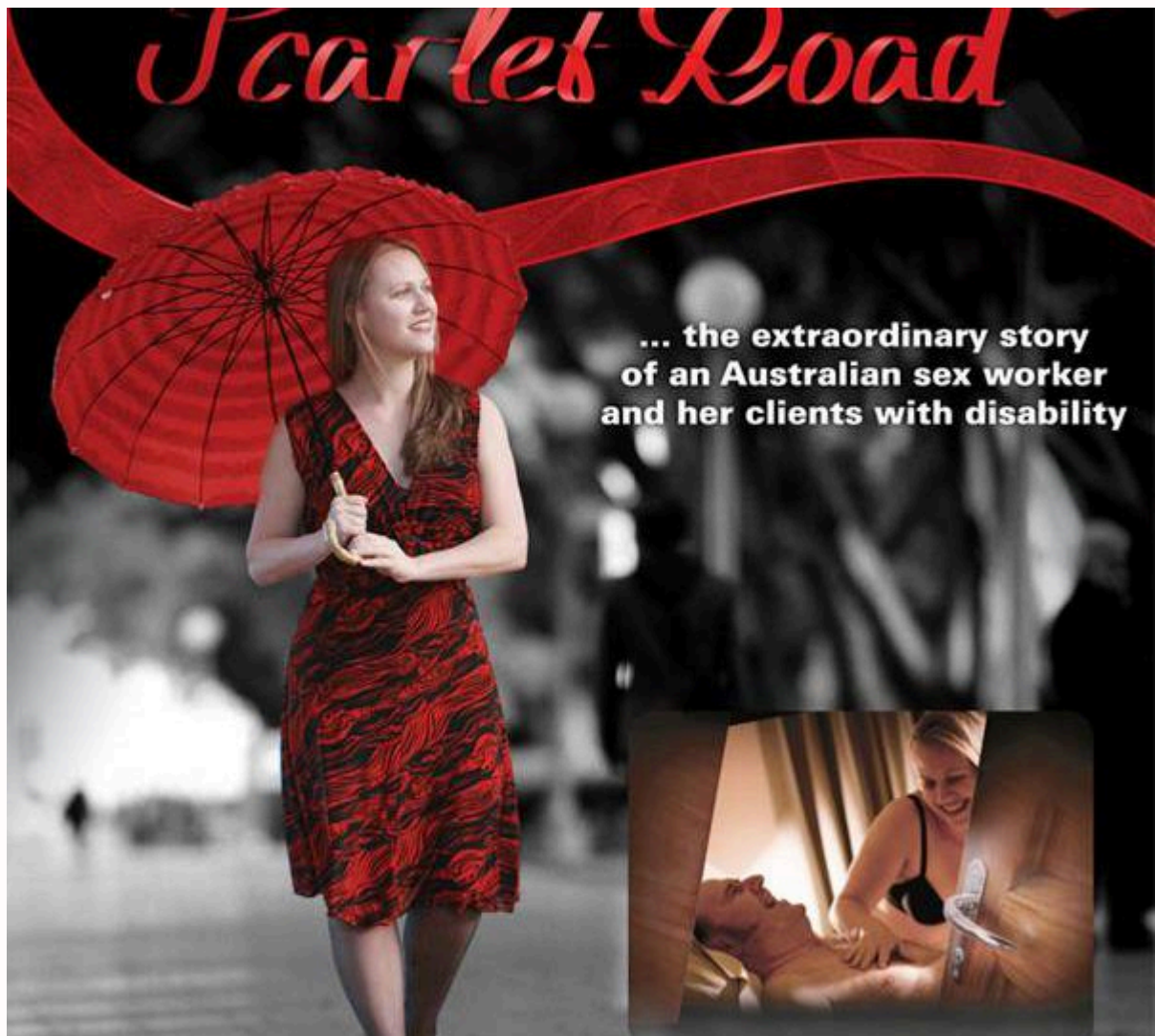


# In Plainspeak

*A digital magazine on sexuality, based in the Global South: We are working towards cultivating safe, inclusive, and self-affirming spaces in which all individuals can express themselves without fear, judgement or shame*



## Review: Scarlet Road



By Zulfiya Hamzaki

Categories | Reel Review | Review | Sexuality and Disability



August 1, 2014



## Scarlet Road: Of Sex Work and Disability

Sex workers and people with disabilities. Two communities who are marginalized, disapproved of, and unsupported by a large section of society, come together in this film with an enchanting name – Scarlet Road. My first viewing of the film was quite a unique experience. I had watched it at a friend's place, who had organized a screening of the film for all her friends. What made it special was that she and her friends were all visually challenged. Yet that was no barrier for this group of spirited people who were keen to watch the film. The sighted persons in the group took turns explaining the visuals, while they listened, experiencing the film, clarifying doubts as we steadily progressed. That was one of the most remarkable and insightful experiences for me – of film viewing, and that with a fun and unique bunch of film enthusiasts.

*'I will be as sex worker, I will be an out and proud sex worker, and I will be Doctor Rachel Wotton, sex worker.'* - Rachel Wotton

Directed by Catherine Scott, the film follows the work of Rachel Wotton, a sex worker based in Australia, who specializes in clients with disabilities. Rachel lives and works in Australia. She is a stunning personality – fearless, strong, confident, beautiful, sensitive and an advocate of the freedom of sexual expression. She is unlike any sex worker you have met. With a Diploma in Sexual Health and an ambition to do her PhD, Rachel will blow you away.

In the film, we meet two of her clients with special needs – John Blades, a 51 year old who has been living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for 29 years. On a wheelchair, John has no movement below the neck. We then meet Mark Manitta, a 49 year old, who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy when he was ten. Through the course of the film, we see the relationships that develop between Rachel and them, and the impact she has in their lives.

For John, his sessions with Rachel have helped him regain body movement, not to mention his self-confidence and self esteem. Mark always dreamt of falling asleep with a woman, and waking up beside her the next morning. Rachel doesn't just give him that, but lends him a ear and spends time getting to know him. For her clients, Rachel is more than a sex worker, she is someone who they can talk to, share their feelings with and express themselves sexually. Like Mark says in the film *'People do not*

*understand the difference sex makes. Part of having cerebral palsy, is spasticity and muscle spasms. I need sex to make my muscles relax...and I like sex.'*



Sex work is decriminalized in New South Wales, Australia. For Rachel, sex work isn't just a source of living, but a cause that she has taken up. It's both a personal and professional struggle as she tries to cope with various laws on sex work, travelling, learning, and lending a voice to her thoughts. She represents the sex worker community with a certain élan, attending conferences and making her presence felt, moving audiences with her advocacy. She actively campaigns on international forums for the rights of sex workers to end the discrimination against them.

Rachel has helped set up **Touching Base**, a charitable organization based in Sydney that strives to connect sex workers and persons with disabilities. She also served as international spokesperson for **Scarlet Alliance**, the Australian Sex Workers Association. With all these strengths driving her, she comes as a breath of fresh air in the film – a level headed young woman who loves her job, and would do anything to be good at it. What makes her different is her ability to connect with people like John and Mark, and give them what everyone deserves – a human touch.

For me, the film did wonders. It not only made me more sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities, but helped me understand how both the communities are in the movement together, fighting for their rights, against social stigma and for the freedom of sexual expression. With their joint efforts, their voices are clear, prominent and outright. The private act of sex, generally confined behind closed doors, is now in the open – to be taken notice of and be granted a fair chance to all sections of the community. As Rachel mentions in an **interview**, Scarlet Road was created to show the diverse nature of the sex industry, and the diverse nature of those who participate in it.

I feel lucky to have watched the film with a special set of friends, who made me realize that there is no stopping you to experience what you want and embrace life wholeheartedly. I'd like to end with Rachel's words in the film, that encapsulates the spirit of the film and states simply what her job means to her.

*'I like that my job always entails pleasure, making someone feel better about themselves, that they are the center of someone's attention, and they deserve to smile.'* - Rachel Wotton

[Disability](#)[Film](#)[Sex Work](#)[Sexuality](#)



## Zulfiya Hamzaki / ABOUT AUTHOR

Zulfiya is a documentary filmmaker with an MFA in documentary film and video from Stanford University, USA. Her films have explored women in sport, immigration, Native American issues, Silicon Valley's dating culture and refugee resettlement in California's Bay area. Her previous work includes media and video projects in the areas of gender, sexuality, rural journalism, disability, education and environment. You can check out some of her work at [www.zulfiyahamzaki.com](http://www.zulfiyahamzaki.com)

> [More posts by Zulfiya Hamzaki](#)



## Disclaimer ▾

We curate content from other portals to amplify discussion around sexuality and rights. All rights remain with the original sources. **Corners** and **Videos** are embedded links and **Brushstrokes** and **Blogrolls** are republished from open sources with a link back to the original source. Older links may no longer be available.

We mostly use images with a Creative Commons license. If you are the owner of an image and find that the image has not been credited properly, please let us know at [inplainspeak@tarshi.net](mailto:inplainspeak@tarshi.net).

## Featured Video ▾





## Meet The Woman Helping Bollywood Have Better Sex

### Themes ▾

*In Plainspeak* publishes one issue every month, with a single theme running across two months. Our aim is to expand safe, inclusive self-affirming spaces.

### CURRENT ISSUE:

#### March 2024: Entertainment and Sexuality



While the primary purpose of entertainment might be to interest and amuse people, entertainment goes beyond merely being a mode of recreation. It influences social mores and norms just as much as it is influenced by them, factoring in play, pleasure, desire and fantasy. Through various mediums, entertainment can both subvert and reinforce stereotypes about certain individuals and communities. Popular or mainstream entertainment, by virtue of being made for mass appeal, can erase nuance, but it can also be a great sensitisation tool. Additionally, audience members also get a chance to participate in the process of meaning-making whether it be through fandom discussions or creating fan fiction. Alternatively, sexuality itself can be a form

of entertainment, for example, drag, burlesque, peep shows, etc. What are acceptable modes of entertainment? How are they gendered and validated based on an individual's social location? How has technology and the internet changed the ways in which we create and consume entertainment? Beyond token representation, how can we queer the idea and forms of entertainment? How can entertainment be used to disseminate rights-based and pleasure-affirming content on sexuality and SRHR, particularly Comprehensive Sexuality Education? In this issue of *In Plainspeak*, we examine how entertainment and sexuality are connected.



## UPCOMING ISSUES:

### April 2024: The Pandemic and Sexuality



Would you like to contribute? Click [here](#) for more details and send an email to [inplainspeak@tarshi.net](mailto:inplainspeak@tarshi.net) with your ideas and drafts. Do take a look at our [submission guidelines](#)!



For future issue themes, click [here](#).



## IN PLAINSPEAK is published by

About

Submission Guidelines

Donate

Contact

Content Syndication Policy

### Follow TARSHI

 TWITTER

 FACEBOOK

 INSTAGRAM

 LINKEDIN

 YOUTUBE

### GET EACH ISSUE IN YOUR INBOX

First Name

Last Name

Email Address

Submit



