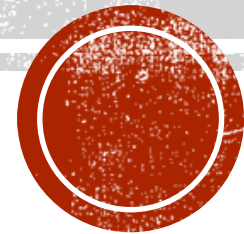


SARAH WILSON

In Their Shoes



BEFORE YOU START

How the activity works:

You are about to step into the story of Sarah Wilson. Each slide represents a point in her story.

You will need to read through each part, and then make a decision on what to do next.

The decision options will be located in red boxes. Once you have decided, click on the red box that corresponds with your decision.

You need:

Coin

- You will need a coin with opposite faces (heads, tails)
- Throughout points in the story your decisions will be left to the fate of the coin flip.



INTRODUCTION

My name is Sarah Wilson. Soon it will be your name. What a relief to have someone else walking in my shoes for a while because...well...I think I'd trade places with just about anyone at this point.

Let me tell you a little about your new life. After you understand about it first hand, maybe you can tell me what you would do differently if you were me.

[**Click here to learn facts about your new life**](#)



FACTS ABOUT YOUR NEW LIFE

- You met your husband Doug almost 20 years ago when he and his buddies came in to a party at the bar you worked at. He was so full of life and so handsome. Talk about electricity! The sparks flew between you that night. He asked you to marry him 6 months later and you leapt at the chance.
- Doug inherited his beautiful family farm waaayyyy out in the country- it was completely idyllic.
- Over the years, you have three children. Brian is 16, Stephanie is 12, then Craig who is 8. Craig is the sweetest little boy, but because he was born so early he has always had a lot of health problems. You and Doug never talk about that day anymore, you put it behind you. You know it wasn't your fault, but sometimes you cant help but feel you are being punished for something.

[**Click here to find out what happens next**](#)



Things have been tough. Doug had to give up farming because the big farms drove him out. He made ends meet by piecing work together. But recently he got a steady job at the grocery store in town. You couldn't expect that store to offer paid health benefits, but they at least give their employees the option to pay for health insurance themselves. The premium takes a healthy chunk out of his pay, but at least the kids are covered. Craig is always at the clinic and takes a lot of medicines.

You do, too. Dr. Brown writes you scripts for tranquilizers whenever you ask. They make living with Doug bearable, especially when you can't get something to drink. It must be embarrassing for a man when he has to struggle so hard to provide for his family. You offer to work, but he doesn't want you out in public where other men will look at you. He's always been jealous. When you first dated, you were amused and flattered by his attentions – not anymore.

When Doug enters the bedroom, you try to avoid him. But you know it's useless to say no or resist. You just lie there, close your eyes and pretend that you are somewhere else. After Doug has finished and has fallen asleep, you go to the kitchen and open a bottle of gin to take the edge off. You channel surf and land on the local access station with community announcements. Harvest Day Festival, kindergarten registration, support group for dealing with physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse? Abuse? The alcohol has dulled you but you aren't that dull.

**Do you want to call about support
the group?**

**Do you want to go to sleep and forget
about it?**



You call the number you saw on the screen and get the local domestic violence agency. You feel awkward because it's not like you're abused. With the exception of that one terrible day eight years ago, he has never hit you. He promised he would never do it again, and he has kept his word. He is a good man. He never calls you names, he compliments your cooking and the way you look. But sometimes you feel like you can't take it anymore.

“What can't you take anymore?” the advocate asks. You're too embarrassed to answer. “I can tell this is really hard for you. Would you like to meet in person?” “I...I...have to go.” You hang up the phone. It's hard enough to talk on the phone – but meeting in person? You'd have to sneak around to get there, cram in an appointment between other errands. And depending on where their office is, that could be a problem. Every so often, Doug checks the mileage when you get back from town to make sure you only went on errands that he approves.

The phone rings, and you nearly jump out of your skin. Did Doug figure out you called someone? If he got a busy signal he'd expect you to tell him who you were talking to. But instead it's your son Craig's school asking you to come in to discuss the plan the school is working on to meet his special needs. The teacher, school counselor, and the principle will be there.

Go to the school



Doug was really sweet to you this morning. He told you about a dream he had about being on a beautiful beach with you, how sunny and warm it was. Then you both went swimming and turned into fish. He even thinks the dream was in color. He then gets kind of quiet and says how much he wishes he could really take you to that beach. Maybe someday, when things straighten out and he'll have the money to treat you to all the things he wishes for you. Maybe you could work this out with him, after all, you did promise "through good times and bad."

But really, you shake your head, this is the same fleeting thought it has been for twenty years. You know it in your heart that things will not magically change. You keep touching the scrap paper where you wrote down the number for the women's support group. You find your hands sweating as you dial the number. You don't want to drink, though, so you pop a pill. Doug doesn't seem to notice them as long as they help you function.

Go to the Domestic Violence Program



You get in the truck and drive down your long dirt drive to the main road. Only when the gate comes into view does your heart sink. Every now and then, Doug locks it. He usually only does this after you've had some kind of disagreement, but you haven't recently. So you are surprised, then angry, then incredibly disappointed that he locked you in today. You drive home and call the school. You lie and say your car won't start. Can you reschedule for the next day? But they tell you not to worry. Doug is there. He gets on and says he'll fill you in when he gets home. You really wanted to be part of this.

Another drink takes the edge off. Sweet relief. When Doug and the kids come home, you rise to greet them. You are tipsier than you realized, but you try to cover up. You ask him how the meeting went. "If you weren't sitting around all day drinking, you'd know" he snaps. You feel terrible. The next day you feel the full impact of it all – the locked gate, the unfairness, and the loneliness. Your head aches and you can't concentrate. Your hands shake. At least that you know how to fix. You down a shot of vodka. Now, you feel well enough to want to talk to somebody, but who?

You think about calling your sister. But how could you explain? She wouldn't understand being locked in. You don't understand it yourself. You decide to call the women's advocate instead.

Go to the Domestic Violence Program



You call the domestic violence program again and a different advocate answers. You ask to speak to the person you talked to before, and fortunately she is there. She says she hoped you'd call back. Because she seems so real and honest to you, you tell her the truth- for the first time in your life- that your husband has been forcing sex on you for 20 years. No, you won't call it rape. He's no stranger and you could have left him anytime you wanted to.

“Is that true?” the advocate asks about leaving him anytime. *Is that true?* You wonder to yourself. You feel overwhelmed again. The advocate can tell you've reached your limit, and she reassures you that although it *feels* overwhelming, lots and lots of people have been able to overcome all kinds of obstacles. One day at a time, step by step. She sounds so confident. “Please, keep calling. I think we can help.”

Several days go by, and you just keep thinking about whether it is true that you could leave. Even entertaining the idea of leaving makes you nostalgic for all the good times, for your wonderful kinds growing up in this beautiful place, for how handsome and strong Doug was and still is. It makes you so sad. You drown your deep sorrow with a drink. And you call your oldest friend, your sister.

Go to friends and family



It's been way too long since you talked to your sister, Kayla. It's her birthday, so you can justify the phone call to Doug. You tell her about your marriage – well, about most of it. Not about what happens at night. You talk about Doug's jealousy. About the loneliness. About the huge sky and fields that go on forever. About how sometimes you drown in all that space. You don't mention the booze, the pills, or the blackouts.

“Oh Sarah, honey, I love you so much. You don't need me to tell you that no marriage is perfect. You've been together for 20 years. Now isn't that something? Dog has always provided for his family, and you know that *hasn't* been easy.” It feels so good just to hear her voice. “Sarah,” she continues, “it shows strength of character to hang in there like Doug does. And don't even tell me you're thinking of leaving. Even with three healthy kids, how could you do it on your own? You need to think about Craig. Honey, have you held down a job since we scooped ice cream together in high school?” “You're right. It's just sometimes, it's so...hard.”

“Of course it's hard. Maybe you should see a counselor. There's no shame in admitting you need some help.” You know she's right, but there's no way you could afford to go see a shrink when you can barely put food on the table. You tell Kayla you'll check in with her again soon. It's been too long. You miss her so much it hurts.

[Click here to see what happens next](#)



You resolve to make the best of things. But later that night when Doug leans over in bed, you tell him, “Please, no.” You haven’t prayed in years, but you ask God to make it stop. Afterwards, you drink and pass out on the couch. When you wake, Doug and the kids have already left for the day. Your tongue feels like cotton. Your eyes hurt and you stink. You lie there, thinking ever so briefly about ending it all. You know that you just want the pain to stop. You are so ashamed of yourself. You have to pull yourself together. For the kids and for yourself.

The other day Stephanie poured cold water on you to get you up before daddy came home. You slapped her when you came to, because you were startled and because she ruined the couch. But you hate yourself! You know you are a bad mother and the drinking and pills will kill you. You have to find someone to talk to about your drinking.

But what can you do? You don’t have a penny to your name. Doug gives you money for errands and then checks the receipts and the change to make sure he can account for every cent. You’ve never held the checkbook, and you aren’t sure about how to write a check or get money out of ATMs. Wait, stop this! You can figure this out. You see women doing all kinds of things in town and on TV. You find the checkbook. You flip to the top part. Does this mean there is \$849 in the account? You are determined to sneak to the bank to see how much money you *could* get.

Go to the bank



You walk into the bank. Sure, you've been here before with Doug. But he always goes up to the teller's window by himself. You take a deep breath and walk up to the teller, Kim Dobbs, who you know because her son is in Stephanie's class. "Hello, Sarah. How's Stephanie doing?" You reply, "Fine...thanks. Um...things have been so chaotic lately that I can't figure out how much money is in our account." You slide the checkbook to her. She taps on her computer and writes \$659.42 on a slip of paper and slides it across to you. "Great, that's better than I thought." You both laugh. "Um...could I withdraw \$10?" Kim scrolls the screen, "You know, Sarah, you aren't actually a signer on this account. You have rights of survivorship, but without your name on the account, I can't do a withdrawal. I probably shouldn't have even told you the balance. But it looks like you have the register anyway."

You are temporarily dumb struck. She continues, "Doug will probably be in later this week to cash his paycheck, so I hope that's soon enough for you." You realize you can't have her telling Doug you were here, so you ask her to please not mention it. You tell her he would be so mad if he had any idea how badly you'd messed up the bookkeeping. "Your secret is safe with me," she says. Back in the truck, a quick swig from the 'medicine' in your purse composes you again. Going to the bank and actually doing *something, anything*, has given you the courage to keep going. Just like that advocate said – one thing at a time.

[Click here to see what happens next](#)



On the drive home, you have a 50/50 chance of getting pulled over for driving under the influence of alcohol.

Flip a coin to determine the outcome.

Heads

you are charged with a DUI, go to jail. [Click here](#)

Tails

you dent the fender but don't get pulled over. [Click here to go home and call the advocate](#)



The cops pull you over. You think, “Doug will be furious. This is going to cost money. Or maybe he’ll be glad. If they take my license away, I won’t be going *anywhere*, ever. Thank God the kids weren’t in the car. Is this is going to be in the newspaper? Doug will never let me live this down. Oh God, I’m going to be arrested. Doug will have to come and get me.”

Doug bails you out. You have a court date scheduled and need a lawyer. Doug says you can use a public defender as he’s not paying your legal fees. The police give you a referral to a toll-free Alcohol/Drug Help Line. On the way out of the police station, Doug asks one of the cops, “Are you married? Man, how do you handle it when she gets out of line?” The police officer makes a crude gesture and he and Doug both laugh.

When you get home, Doug slaps you, hard, for embarrassing him. He slaps you again for sneaking around. He slaps you for costing him money and he slaps you, hard three more times, for being a bad mother. He tells you nobody else would put up with you. And if you ever leave him, you’ll never see the kids again- because you are a lousy alcoholic.

Flip a coin

Heads

Click to go to the Domestic Violence program.

Tails

**You overdose and die.
Chick here.**



You don't tell the advocate about the drinking. You do tell her more about what has been going on between you and Doug. "Do you want to come to the shelter?" she asks, sounding concerned. As bad as it is, you wait a little longer. You need money if you want to do anything. You take nickels and dimes from Doug's pockets – coins you hope he won't miss. You safeguard your liquor supply by pouring vodka into cough medicine and mouthwash bottles and hiding them. Then you add water to the liquor bottle so Doug won't suspect anything.

"How can I get money?" you ask the advocate the next time you call. "Is there anyone in your family that you can ask?" she replies. "Well there's my sister. But she doesn't know everything." The advocate takes a moment to reflect and say, "What would you do if your sister called you and asked for help? Would you loan her money if you could?"

You realize that of course you would, that your sister loves you and will help. "OK, I'll call her." You also decide to sell two old pieces of family jewelry you haven't worn in years. Doug will never know they're gone. "Sarah, these are great ideas. You can also go to the welfare office and ask for help there." Your head is abuzz with plans. You hope you'll have the energy to follow through. You will talk with your sister and go to the welfare office.

Which do you want to do first? Your choice.

Talk to your sister

Go to the welfare office



FUNERAL HOME

Sadly, Sarah lost her life to addiction. What do you think could be some ways to support survivors who are struggling with Substance Use Disorders?

[This is the end of Sarah's story, click here to end](#)



Kayla answers the phone right away. “Sarah, honey, what’s wrong?” You are brutally honest about your marriage. You come clean about Craig’s premature birth. “That time, I stood up for myself and refused him. He just started beating on me. Then he shoved me and I tripped and fell down the stairs. I went into labor later that night.” You also tell her about the drinking. Your sister is stunned. “I feel terrible that I didn’t figure it out to help you. What can I do now?”

“Kayla, I want to leave, but I’m totally broke.” She says, “I can manage \$300 today. I wish it were more.” You have her mail it to the women’s shelter program in your name. Coming clean with your sister is a huge relief. Your anxiety about actually leaving mounts. You lean more and more on alcohol to calm you and give you courage. Only once do you have major regrets when you use your hard saved cash to buy a cheap bottle of wine. You hide it and drink it down fast and early, right after Doug leaves for his long day at work and the kids get on the bus for school. You are stone cold sober when everyone arrives back home that evening, but tense and shaky. You remember calling the shelter, but you can’t remember who you talked to and exactly what your plan was.

[**Click here if you haven’t gone to welfare office yet**](#)

[**Click here if you have your plans settled with your sister and welfare**](#)



This is tough. Your family has never asked anyone for a handout. Is this safe? What if someone sees you and tells Doug? You have to be careful. You'll park a block away and duck into the store next door if you see anyone you know. You'll go quick to get in and out while Doug thinks you're shopping and picking up the kids.

You are in luck, there's no one at the window. You tell the receptionist that you need help. She hands you a thick packet of forms to fill out. You eye the clock and your lip trembles. "I just need some emergency money for me and my kids. Just until we can get on our feet." The receptionist touches your hand and goes to get another worker who escorts you to her cubicle. "I'm a social worker," the woman tells you, "and I just need to get a little information about what's going on." You talk for a while, starting off you say, "I've been talking with the women's shelter and I've been thinking about..." you look right at her, "about leaving my husband."

"So you've still live with him?" she asks. "Yes, I've been saving up to leave." She informs you that they consider every adult's income to figure out if the family qualifies, but they have special funds to help people like you. The social worker says, "you have to leave first. If you take the leap, we'll be here to catch you."

**If you haven't spoken to your sister yet,
click here to do so now**

**If you already talked with her, carry
on with your plan and look for a job**



Boy, being out of the paid work force for 20 plus years is going to be a major problem. Living in this little town is not going to help either. But you persist. Reading the ads for help wanted every day, you finally see a job for the local janitorial service, cleaners needed for residential and business offices. Well, if there is one thing that you know how to do, it's clean. You call them up. The manager isn't all that excited about interviewing you, given that you have not had a job for so long. But he is also fed up with hiring youngsters who just get the hang of the job, then up and quit. You tell him you are an adult woman with three children to support. You are serious about working. He senses a winner here and asks you to come in for an interview.

Okay, maybe you can get a job, but the other big thing you needed is a place to live. You are counting on being able to stay at the shelter for their six-week maximum. Six weeks of free roof over your head will give you enough time to find something more permanent. Won't it? Now that you think about it, there aren't a lot of housing possibilities in this little town. You don't want to uproot the kids, so you need to stay here. Maybe you should go see what you might find to live in before you get too hopeful.

Go to housing



Well this is depressing. This is exactly how bad you thought it was going to be. The shelter program helps lots of people look for permanent housing and they tell you its not easy. After a week, they call to let you know there is a small trailer in a mobile home park on the edge of town that's going to be available in a month or so. It needs some repairs, but the owner is working on it. Its not pretty, but its waterproof and cheap. And the owner of the park is willing to do a month-no-month rental rather than require a lease. He's also aware that a lot of the women and kids he rents to are in your situation, so he keeps an eye out.

“How cheap is cheap?” you ask, and you are given ballpark figure. Okay, you do a little math in your head. It might work.

Go to the job interview



The day of the interview, you need to make sure Doug doesn't lock the gate. You tell him you have to meet with Craig's teacher. You go to the interview and get the job! Even though its minimum wage for 20 hours a week with no benefits, you're thrilled. You start in a week. You know you need to taper off the booze. You've abstained for days at a time when Doug has been on you about it. You know you need your wits about you. Things are falling into place.

When you arrive home, you find Doug standing in front of the house with his arms crossed. "Who have you been seeing?" he demands. "I called Craig's school. Funny, they didn't see you today. Who is it? Tell me!" Crying, you tell him about the interview. "You work so hard and I just wanted to help out." He hugs you hard. "You know I don't want you where other men can take advantage of you. Just call the cleaning service and tell him you don't need the job. I'm looking for a better job, and hey, maybe the farm will come back together soon."

You go into the house, while Doug watches you, you look up the phone number of a gas station out on Route 18. Heart racing, you go through the motions. You dial and say, "Hi, is this Trudy? Yes, this is Sarah...fine, thank you. I'm calling just to let you know, I wont take the job...no, but thanks...okay. Bye." The gas station clerk calls you crazy and hangs up, but Doug seems satisfied.

Go to the domestic violence program



Your confidence grows with every dollar you save. The money from your sister arrived at the shelter. You tell the advocate that you are finally ready to go to the shelter with your kids. “Great! I know you said you have three kids. How old are they?” You tell her Brian is 16, Stephanie is 12, and Craig is 8. The advocate pauses. “Oh, Sarah. I’m so sorry. I should have asked you this before. We can’t take boys over 15. Its our policy. Is there someone else Brian can stay with? You can’t believe she is even asking you that. “No. Of course not.”

“I feel terrible. We can give you a motel vouchers for up to 7 days, or get you into one of the homeless shelters in another town that does take teen boys.” You were really counting on having the entire 45 days, their maximum shelter stay, to get your life in order. Even in the cheapest motel, and with one week paid with vouchers, the cash you saved won’t last long. You have to get off the phone and calculate what you’ll earn at your part-time job.

What a disappointment. Done drink slows your racing thoughts. Several more calm the panic to a manageable level. You know you’ll have a headache later, and the anxiety will get worse.

If you wait and adjust your plans for leaving click here

If you just cant wait any longer and are ready to leave click here



Despite your best efforts, Doug has been getting suspicious. He still thinks you're seeing another man. He notices you've been sober and offers to mix you a drink. Last week he complained about the booze, now he wants you to drink. Tonight, he's in a deep funk. He begs you to tell him what's going on. "Nothing is going on, Doug." "Sarah, I couldn't bear to see you with another man. You're my whole life. I'd be lost without you." He's crying. You've only seen him cry once before. You are gripped with guilt. He really would be lost. You don't want to hurt him. For the first time in years you see the handsome, sensitive, and vulnerable man you first met. That night, he is tender and attentive with you, and not just himself.

The next day, he thanks you for being so understanding. He's whistling as he goes out to his truck to bring in a box of something in it he bought yesterday. It's a new phone. He signed you up for caller ID. "When the phone rings, you can see if it's a phone solicitor. It's your new toy, honey." After Doug drives away, you scream out loud, "you spent what little money we have on something to keep track of who I'm calling and who's calling me. That's it! I've had enough!"

Go to housing



Moving day! Even if its just to a motel room. It's Doug's long day at the store. You count on several check-in calls from him. You'll pretend everything's normal each time he calls. But after his 2:30pm call you'll have the truck all packed and pick the kids up, drive to the welfare office to drop off your application, and then go to the motel instead of back home. All day you throw clothes in your one suitcase, then grocery bags, then garbage bags. You load up food, all of Craig's medicines and medical supplies, sheets, towels, pots, and pans. The cat? The cat can't come. You burst into tears, but keep hauling stuff out to the truck.

Doug calls, you hold it together while he tells you what he wants for dinner. You try to sound cheerful and say the obligatory, "I love you" before you hang up. You must get down to the gate long before the bus arrives. You plan to run the gate over with your truck and hope for the best. When you stop to study the gate, you realize it's really very flimsy. You sigh deeply, thinking about how long it has penned you in. You just nudge the truck up to it, get out to make sure the gate wont' take out a headlight, hop back in, and slowly let the clutch out. The gate falls and you drive over it. You are out. The kids arrive and the bus pulls away. Your three beautiful children stand in a semi-circle looking from you to the gate that's lying on the ground. You tell them to get into the car, you're going to run one errand, then go get them ice cream and talk.

Go to Welfare



You can't believe it. You left Doug. You rush to the welfare office to request the money the social worker told you about. It's Friday afternoon, better hurry... You give the receptionist the completed forms. When your name is called, you tell Brian to watch the younger kids. The social worker's desk is empty. A new woman asks for your address. You don't know the address of the motel. The case manager looks puzzled. You tell her what the social worker told you about being able to get emergency money, if you left your husband and came straight here. "Are you in immediate danger? Has he threatened to kill you? Do you have a protective order? Are you homeless?" you look down and answer "no" to all the questions. She enters this information into a computer, her back to you. You can't imagine saying, "Excuse me, but my husband forced sex on me every other night for the last twenty years. Does that qualify?"

She turn back to you and says, "Social workers don't always know all the eligibility rules because the rules are so complicated. If you aren't in immediate danger, you don't qualify for special funds. You have to follow the regular rules. Bring in proof of residency, receipts from our landlord. You're disappointed. "I have a trailer I'm going to move into in a couple of weeks." "After you move in, come back. Maybe we can help you then." All your plans are falling apart. Is God punishing you for resisting the will of your husband and not protecting Craig? Thank God you can at least get help from the one friend who never lets you down. You reach in your purse for the mouthwash bottle.

If you want to rush home before Doug gets home click here

If you can't imagine going back now, go to housing



You rush home, get the kids to help you put everything away, and try to fix the gate, which proves to be hopeless. You throw dinner together and wait. Doug gets home and looks around. “What’s going on here? Brian, Steph?” Your kids shrug and shuffle off. “What happened to the gate?” You tell him the UPS guy hit it when he pulled in off the highway. He goes down to look and comes back and says there aren’t any tracks. You just say, if he doesn’t believe you, that’s fine, but that’s what happened.

Life goes on. The nights are still the worst. But the days have been hell as well. Doug monitors the caller ID every day. He won’t let you talk to your sister anymore, he can see when she calls and yammers at you so much you just tell her to stop. She offers to try to sneak you a cell phone to use. You laugh. You’ve heard people talk. Cell phones don’t work out here. The hardest part is that you don’t even try to hide your drinking anymore. Doug doesn’t care. Drinking keeps you quiet, it keeps you home. You won’t be going anywhere with anyone else.

This part of Sarah’s story ends here.

[Click here to exit story](#)



You grab your kids in the waiting room, and chirp, “All set, let’s go!” You don’t want to portray your panic. In the truck you tell the kids they can have whatever they want at the burger stand. You keep looking in the rear-view mirror. You get the food to go and eat as you drive to the motel. It’s a couple of towns away. Brian is sullen and the younger ones look dazed. You want to sound confident when you tell them you and daddy are going to separate for a while. You tell them that of course they can still see him. In a couple of days, after you get settled in. No, school routines aren’t changing. It’s Friday and you tell them they can play at the park all day Saturday. But come Sunday afternoon, it’s homework time as usual. And, moms going to work. “You got a job?” they all say in unison. “Yes, of course I did.”

You are all in one room at the motel. The two younger kids fall asleep early. You and Brian stay up and talk. He just wants things the way they were. “I don’t want to move. Dad is never mean to you when you aren’t drinking. Why do you drink? Why are you being so mean to him?” you tell him that this has nothing to do with him, Steph, or Craig. You spend the weekend together, and Brian calms down. You promise him you won’t tell a soul what is going on so he can pretend everything is normal. And you promise you won’t drink. How many promises can you really keep? You hate yourself. Monday morning, you drop the kids off at school and go to work.

Time to go to work



You've got yourself a real job. You go to work that first day, and the next and the next. The kids are holding it together. You called Doug four days after you left, to speak briefly with him and tell him the kids are okay. You forget that the phone he bought would tell him where you were calling from. So he calls back immediately. This terrifies you. You're just glad you didn't call him the day you left because he would have come after you. You assume he searched for you, but you went far enough away to give him time to calm down. He sounds furious in a controlled way now. You tell him again that you have left him. He calls again and again over the next several days, you decide to unplug the phone.

You've been working for the cleaning service for 2 weeks and earn just enough money to pay for the motel. You get a letter from welfare, but it didn't make sense and you haven't had time to go back there. You've been so busy with work, driving the kids around, waiting at the food bank, looking for a full-time job, trying to rent the trailer, and meeting with your advocate.

That night in the hotel Craig has a severe asthma attack.

Go to the hospital



At the emergency room, the doctors see Craig right away and give him a breathing treatment to stabilize him. Hours later, as you are about to leave, you find out that the hospital couldn't get insurance authorization because Craig's policy has been cancelled. They ask you if you know anything about that? You are so mad at Doug you could scream. You understand that he is mad at you, but you can't believe that he would take the kids off his insurance. Because Craig is in immediate danger, the hospital treats him as charity care, but they won't cover the prescription. Whoa - \$167! That will cut your reserves, if you can call them that, to...let's see...\$56.

You call Doug when you get back from the motel, but he doesn't let you talk. He tells you that he is filing for divorce and custody. You can't believe that someone who would cancel his sick child's medical insurance could get custody. But he tells you he has mortgaged the farm in order to get money to hire a lawyer. He tells you that you better get a lawyer, too. But you know you can't afford a lawyer. You call your advocate who gives you the number of free legal services, but the few opportunities you get to call, the line is busy. Time runs out. You don't have any choice, you have to go to court to represent yourself. They don't have public defenders for divorce actions and custody disputes

Go to the courthouse



Doug's lawyer sure looks sharp and seems to know everyone. Doug is stiff and formal. You are alone. When your case is called, you don't get to say anything. The judge issues a Temporary Mutual Restraining order. What does that mean? The judge sets another hearing in 2 weeks. Dazed, you head back to work. Your boss is pissed that you took off time to go to court. You wait a few days then request time off to go to the next hearing. Your boss tells you that he can't keep giving you all this time off.

You don't understand what happens at this next hearing either. You ask the judge a question. "With all due respect, you really need to get yourself a lawyer," he says. He then postpones the hearing again so you can get an attorney. You tell your boss you have another hearing in two weeks. He says, "I can't give you anymore time off."

"But I can work late, I can make up the hours. The hearing is about the custody of my kids. I have to go." He sighs, "I'd love to give you a break, but I'm running a business here. I can't tell the clients that we can't do the job because the cleaning lady has legal problems." You plead with him, but he says he'll only keep you on until he can find someone else to replace you. You can't go back to Doug. Working, even for this short time, has given you confidence that you can find something else. And your boss said he'd give you a good recommendation if you find a job that is more flexible so you can deal with all the court stuff.

[**Click here to find out what happens
next**](#)



Time is money and you are running out of both. You apply for a few jobs, but only hear back from one. After you get the kids to school, your brain races around in the same worry circles over and over and over again. The phone rings at the school. Craig had another asthma attack and you need to come get him. You rush to your car and drive to the school. As you have worked and as much as you have wished for it, you cannot make it on your own. You're broke. Craig's last hospital visit broke the bank.

You see Doug in the hospital parking lot and he motions you to get into his truck with him. You ask him to help with Craig's medical bills. He tells you that his attorney has let him know that between you being practically homeless and not having any prospect for a job, your chances of maintaining custody of the kids are zero. You crumble. In the same measured tone, he says he does not want this divorce. You can come home with him right now. He says he'll take care of you and the kids, like he promised. He just wants you to hold up your end of the bargain. You think, "What do I do? What do I do?"

This part of Sarah's story ends here.

[Click here to exit story](#)



THE END DISCUSSION

- Think about everyone who Sarah went to for help. Could anyone have done anything different to make her outcome better?
- What were barriers you noticed impacting Sarah?
- Can you identify tactics of abuse that Sarah experienced?

