

# Dr. Angela®

## Short Case Stories #IPV-50

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### After the Fact Story

*G.L. is finally feeling strong again. She and her children have now gotten past the grueling divorce, the move to a different house, the selling of the house they had lived in before the divorce, the marriage of F.B. (the children's father) to S., the acquiring of a stepbrother.*

*Although money is tight, and the house G.L. and the children now live in is small, things run pretty well. G.L. and her children are close and they share a sense that they have survived something very painful together.*

*The only really difficult things that remain are the weekend visits the children have with their father. Every time they have to get ready for his picking them up to spend a weekend with him, they complain and cry and resist.*

*G.L. doesn't really want to force them to go, but she says, "You need to spend some time with your father." When this does not sway them (and it never does), G.L. resorts to restating the fact that the court has decreed that the children must visit their father on an agreed upon schedule.*

*When the father arrives, the children are usually crying, angry, and not yet packed. The father rings the bell. G.L. opens the door because the children will not.*

*"Are they ready?" the father asks coldly.*

*G.L. says, "No. I'm sorry, I can't seem to get them to want to go. It's like this every time."*

*He replies in a low but angry voice, "This is your fault. You've turned them against me, alienated them. I know it's you."*

*"No, no it's not. I tell you this every time. Now, I'll wait out front, you come in and you make 'em get ready and go. I can't deal with it anymore. It's your turn," G.L. insists.*

*F.B. marches right by G.L. and up to the kids' rooms. G.L. sits down outside on the steps, her face in her hands. There is shouting up there. Eventually F.B. and the kids come down packed. F.B. stands at the door. The kids tearfully kiss their mother good bye. They leave.*

*Then G.L. cries alone.*

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*Now, every time the children return, they are unwilling to discuss the behavior they exhibited at*

*the time of their departure. After a while, G.L. stops trying to discuss this with them. And they won't talk about their weekend activities much.*

*"What did you do with Dad and S?...Did you play with little G.?" G. is new stepmother S.'s son by a previous marriage. When the kids avoid answering, G.L. shrugs. She enjoys the peace and loving closeness she has with her children.*

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*Life goes on. Things continue calmly and happily in G.L.'s home. Or so G.L. thinks. Eventually, reports come in from teachers and other parents: the children are hitting each other and others at school.*

*Then, one day, a day that changes everything all over again, a letter arrives. It falls out of the pile of mail and G.L. feels uncomfortable as soon as she sees the envelope. She picks it up and takes it into the kitchen in order to read it alone: F.B. is suing for full custody of the children!!!*

*The nightmare begins. The divorce is relived, but now G.L.'s fitness as a mother is fiercely challenged. The files of her therapist are subpoenaed as her children had participated in some sessions. Witnesses speak against her. The relative quality of the homes and schools and toys and computers the two parents can provide is compared. F.B. has more money, a larger house, a family life which appears to be "whole" (mommy, daddy, pets, and kids). S. is at home with the younger G., so G.L.'s children would not be latchkey kids, coming home to what is described in court as a cold and empty house while the single mother G.L. is still at work. Moreover, F.B. and S. go to church and appear to offer some spiritual structure to the children's lives.*

*Based upon a long in the past drinking and pill problem, an old suicide attempt, her long working hours, the relative economic hardships her children experience while living with G.L., the crime rate in G.L.'s lower middle class neighborhood, and the subpoenaed testimony of her therapist, G.L. is found an unfit mother. She loses custody and becomes the parent with supervised visitation rights every other weekend.*

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*G.L. is alone. She has lost primary custody of her children. She is shattered, lost. Hopelessness sets in.*

*Her children are angry at her because they feel that she let F.B. win custody. They are too young to understand this is not the case.*

*Spending hours, days and nights alone at home with the windows closed, the phone unplugged, and no one to talk to, G.L. catches herself drinking again. She mumbles to herself that, "Maybe they're right about me."*

*The desperation grows. G.L. begins to sink to depths she has never known.*

*One morning, G.L.'s boss and old friend, C., comes to see her. C. knocks on the door again and*

again. When there is no answer, C. opens a side window and crawls in. She finds G.L. lying on the couch half asleep. G.L. has a hangover. “G.L., I’m going to have to fire you pretty soon. But I don’t want to do this . . . You have a choice to make and NOW!”

At some point during this discussion, G.L. comes to feel that this may be her last chance to pull out of this mess and her last friend. She digs deep inside, decides to pull herself together, and to go back to work that very day, putting aside all sense that she would need to look perfect to go to work, as she once felt she was able to do. Passable would be alright for now. But first, before stepping back in to life, she throws out all the alcohol in the house, along with her wedding ring. Somehow, she relates alcohol, the drug, to F.B., the drug. She decides to be free of both. She knows she will need help and treatment. . . .

When she gets home that afternoon, she checks to be sure she has thrown out all the bottles of alcohol. She opens the windows. She plugs in the phone. She dials a number.

“I know it’s late,” she says, “but I hear you once lost custody of your children and that you have a lawyer who helped you get shared custody.... Yes, I’m that G.L.. . . . Yes, I lost. Totally. A few months clean and sober, well, that’s not really true. I lied.... Yeah, but I’m ready to try to fix this now... Yes, I have a pencil.”

G.L. trembles as she writes down the telephone number of the suggested attorney. This is the beginning of G.L.’s transition to a stronger state of mind and a greater self esteem: she is taking action on her own behalf. She begins to put things back together, to stand up for herself. It will be a long and difficult road, but she intends to come back stronger than ever. And the first step has to be to get herself well.

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