

SHIREEN DAY*UNEXPECTED STRANGERS*

The call came at 4:30 a.m. I had gone to sleep excited that my twenty-year-old daughter was coming home for Thanksgiving. But when the phone rang, my heart caught in my throat. I bolted out of bed to grab my cell phone from the charger on the other side of the room.

Ellie's voice sounded strong and clear as she said, "Mom, I've been in an accident, but I'm fine. I just wanted you to know I'm going to miss my flight."

Nothing in her tone suggested she was bleeding and trapped inside her car on the side of a highway with fragments of glass embedded in her face. All I knew for sure was that it was 6:30 a.m., in western Massachusetts and she was driving herself to the airport in her 1995 Buick Le Sabre.

A chill swept through me. I felt like an undertow was dragging me away. "What happened?"

"I think I hit black ice. Then I saw a black truck coming toward me. I don't know what happened next."

Black ice. Black truck. Black out.

She paused before saying, "Someone is coming. I need to go."

And then she just hung up.

I stood in my bedroom. Silent. Shaking. My daughter was 2000 miles away, alone in a disabled car on the side of the highway. It was dark. She had been hit by a truck.

Someone was coming.

X X X

Someone.

A million stories of young women disappearing begin inside a car on the side of the road. I had taught her to lock her doors. I had taught her to