

GOOD
HALF
GONE

TARRYN
FISHER

THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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"911, WHAT IS your emergency?"

*"Hello? Help me, please! They took my sister! Please hurry, I don't know where they are. I can't find them." *rustling noise* *yells something* "Oh my god—oh my god. Piper!"*

"Ma'am, I need you to calm down so that I can understand you."

*"Okay..." *crying**

"Who took your sister?"

"I don't know! I don't know them. Two guys. Dupont knows them, I—"

"Miss, what is the address? Where are you?"

*"The theater on Pike, the Five Dollar..." *crying* "They took my phone, I'm calling from inside the theater."*

"Wait right where you are, someone is going to be there to help shortly. Can you tell me what your name is?"

crying

"What is your name? Hello...?"

crying, indecipherable noises

"Can you tell me your name?"

"Iris..."

"What is your sister's name, Iris? And how old is she?"

“Piper. She’s fifteen.”

“Is she your older sister or younger sister... Iris, can you hear me?”

“We’re twins. They just put her in a car and drove away. Please hurry.”

“Can you tell me what kind of vehicle they were driving?”

“I don’t know...”

“—a van, or a sedan—?”

“It was blue and long. I can’t remember.”

“Did it have four doors or two... Iris?”

“Four.”

“And how many men were there?”

“Three.”

“I’m going to stay on the line with you until the officers get there.”

He leans forward, rouses the mouse, and turns off the audio on his computer. *Click click clack*. I was referred to Dr. Stanford a year ago when my long-term therapist retired. I had the option of finding a new therapist on my own or being assigned someone in the practice. Of course I considered breaking up with therapy all together, but after eight years it felt unnatural not to go. But I was a drinker of therapy sauce: a true believer in the art of feelings. I imagined people felt that way about church. At the end of the day, I told myself that a weird therapist was better than no therapist.

I disliked Allen Stanford on sight. Grubby. He is the grown-up version of the kindergarten booger eater. A mouth breather with a slow, stiff smile. I was hoping he’d grow on me.

Dr. Stanford clears his throat.

“That’s hard to listen to for me, so I can only imagine how you must feel.”

Every year, on the anniversary of Piper’s kidnapping, I listen to the recording of the 911 call I made from the lobby of the Five Dollar. When I close my eyes, I can still see the blue diamond carpet and the blinking neon popcorn sign.

“Do you want to take a break?”

“A break from what?”

“It must be hard for you to hear that even now...”

That is true, reliving the worst day of my life never gets easier. The smell of popcorn is attached to the memory, and I feel nauseated. A cold chill sweeps over me. Swallowing the lump in my throat, I nod once.

“What happened after you hung up the phone?”

“I waited...what else could I do? I was afraid they were outside waiting to take me too. My brain hadn’t fully caught up to what was happening. I felt like I was dreaming.”

My voice is weighed down with shame; in the moments after my twin was taken, I was thinking of my own safety, worried that her kidnappers would come back. Why hadn’t I chased the car down the street, or at least paid attention to the license plate so I could give it to the cops? Hindsight was a sore throat.

“I wanted to call Gran.” I shake my head. “I thought I was crazy because I’d dialed her number hundreds of times and I just... I forgot. I had to wait for the cops.”

My lungs feel like they’re compressing. I force a deep breath.

“I guess it took five minutes for the cops to get there, but if you asked me that day, I would have said it took an hour.”

When I close my eyes, I can still see the city block in detail—smell the fry oil drifting across the street from the McDonald’s.

“The cops parked their cruiser on the street in front of the theater,” I continue. “I was afraid of them. My mother was an addict—she hated cops. To certain people, cops only show up to take things away, you know?”

He nods like he knows, and maybe he does, maybe he had a mom like mine, but for the last twenty years, he’s been going to Disney World—according to the photos on his desk—and that somehow disqualifies him in my mind as a person who’s had things taken away from him.

I take another sip of water, the memories rushing back. I

close my eyes, wanting to remember, but not wanting to feel—a fine line.

I was shaking when I stumbled out of the theater and ran toward the cop car, drunk with shock, the syrupy soda pooling in my belly. My toe hit a crack in the asphalt and I rolled my ankle, scraping it along the side of the curb. I made it to them, staggering and crying, scared out of my mind—and that’s when things had gone from bad to worse.

“Tell me about your exchange with the police,” he prompts. “What, if anything, did they do to help you in that moment?”

The antiquated anger begins festering now, my hands fisting into rocks. “Nothing. They arrived already not believing me. The first thing they asked was if I had taken any drugs. Then they wanted to know if Piper did drugs.”

The one with the watery eyes—I remember him having a lot of hair. It poked out the top of his shirt, tufted out of his ears. The guy whose glasses I could see my face in—he had no hair. But what they had both worn that day was the same bored, cynical expression. I sigh. “To them, teenagers who looked like me did drugs. They saw a tweaker, not a panicked, traumatized, teenage girl.”

“What was your response?”

“I denied it—said no way. For the last six months, my sister had been hanging with a church crowd. She spent weekends going to youth group and Bible study. If anyone was going to do drugs at that point, it would have been me.”

He writes something down on his notepad. Later I’ll try to imagine what it was, but for now I am focused.

“They thought I was lying—I don’t even know about what, just lying. The manager of the theater came outside to see what was going on, and he brought one of his employees out to confirm to the police that I had indeed come in with a girl who looked just like me, and three men. I asked if I could call my gran, who had custody of us.”

“Did they let you?”

“Not at first. They ignored me and just kept asking questions. The bald one asked if I lived with her, but before I could answer his question, the other one was asking me which way the car went. It was like being shot at from two different directions.” I lean forward in my seat to stretch my back. I’m so emotionally spiked, both of my legs are bouncing. I can’t make eye contact with him; I’m trapped in my own story—helpless and fifteen.

“The men who took my sister—they took my phone. The cops wanted to know how I called 911. I told them the manager let me use the phone inside the theater. They were stuck on the phone thing. They wanted to know why the men would take my phone. I screamed, ‘I have no idea. Why would they take my sister?’”

“They weren’t hearing you,” he interjects.

I stare at him. I want to say *No shit, Sherlock*, but I don’t. Shrinkers are here to edit your emotions with adjectives in order to create a *TV Guide* synopsis of your issues. *Today on an episode of Iris in Therapy, we discover she has never felt heard!*

“I was hysterical by the time they put me in the cruiser to take me to the station. Being in the back of that car after just seeing Piper get kidnapped—it was like I could feel her panic. Her need to get away. They drove me to the station...” I pause to remember the order of how things happened.

“They let me call my grandmother, and then they put me in a room alone to wait. It was horrible—all the waiting. Every minute of that day felt like ten hours.”

“Trauma often feels that way.”

“It certainly does,” I say. “Have you ever been in a situation that makes you feel that way—like every minute is an hour?” I lean forward, wanting a real answer. Seconds tick by as he considers me from behind his desk. Therapists don’t like to answer questions. I find it hypocritical. I try to ask as many as I can just to make it fair.

He leans his chin on a hairy fist and assures me again that most people feel similar in situations such as mine.

I yawn and check the time on my phone.

I was still in a state of shock when the detectives came in to take my statement that day. The man introduced himself as Detective Audrain without looking at me. The woman—in her early twenties and named Poley—was the object of his attention. I'd caught them on the end of a story or joke they were still recovering from before they walked in the room. They spent the first ten minutes of the interview half laughing, half listening. I hadn't understood the dynamic when I was a fifteen-year-old girl. The story of their affair only came out three years later; the scandal forced Audrain into early retirement.

My ankle looked like rotted fruit—bloated purple and oozing blood beneath the cuff of my jeans. I was surprised that it didn't hurt—it didn't feel like anything. The hurt was in my chest, crushing my lungs.

“They didn't believe me. Kind of blew me off and insinuated Piper went with those guys of her own volition. Just like the other two cops.”

A knot forms behind my breastbone and floats up to my throat, lodging. I swallow but can't get it down. There were so many things that went wrong that day.

Audrain would give Poley a look like, *You're up!* and she'd smile at him and bat me another question. If she asked me a question he was impressed by, he'd nod in appreciation.

“I told them over and over that she didn't get into the car; she was forced into the car. They'd wanted to know how we knew the men. What they looked like. What Piper was wearing. I was trying to answer their questions, but I felt weird, like my thoughts were thick. Eventually they came to the unanimous decision that I was in shock.”

I remember Poley leaving the room and coming back with a doughnut, four chocolate Kisses, and a bottle of Dr. Pepper.

She lined them up in front of me one after the other—*plunk, plunk, plunk*. I wanted to throw up when I saw the scrounged picnic, but my hand mindlessly began unwrapping the Kisses.

Poley eyed my green face and said to Audrain, “Hey, screw off that cap for her, won’t you?”

I’d taken a sip of soda to wash away the chocolate sticking to the roof of my mouth, and that’s when I remembered. “It was the soda!” I’d cried out.

And then Gran walked in and I’d dissolved against her, crying so hard my words wouldn’t come out. She cradled me in her arms, and I folded up in shame against her pink sweater. I’d lost my sister. Gran told me to take care of her, and now she was gone.

He’s listening hard. I have his attention. The novelty of being an adult is that you can pay for what you didn’t get as a child. I get high on therapy, the nurture drug.

“Time’s up.”

He startles. “What?”

I point to the clock—his clock. “Our session is over.”

He looks momentarily lost, and then he sits up straighter in his chair. I’m a pretty good storyteller after all these years.

Setting down his pen, he frowns. “It’s my job to say when time is up.”

I nod. *Of course, of course*. Men like to feel that they are in control. I wonder who has more issues: me or him.