NINA MOINI: Time for our series, Thank You, Stranger, where we hear about the acts of kindness, big or small, that brighten our lives. Today, we'll hear from a woman having a classic bad day, the kind that any of us could have. But the kindness she encountered in the aftermath only comes along once in a while. Here's her story.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KYRRA: Hi, my name is Kyrra, and I live in South Minneapolis.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I guess I would start by just saying it was a morning like any other. I drove my kids to school. I was running a little bit late. I was going to get my mammogram, which I do really regularly. So I'm running late, but I need to get to this appointment. And I parked in this parking lot across the street from the Piper Breast Center, which is in South Minneapolis. It's right there. It's very convenient. There's a lot of construction in the area.

I ran in, had a lovely experience. I came out. And I have parked there many times. I come out. My car is not there. And I know, immediately, someone else might think it was stolen. But I didn't. I had this sinking feeling. I'm clicking my thing, walking back and forth. Thank God I brought my phone-- like, the bare necessities.

But I left my work bag in the car. I left my computer in the car. As I'm having that realization-- this was all happening quickly-- one of the construction bobcat-ty cars kind of pulls behind me. And a man leans out and says, excuse me, Miss, are you looking for your car?

I was like, yeah. And he's like, was it kind of greenish colored? I'm like, yeah. And he says, I'm so sorry. They just towed it. OK, that's what I thought. He says, the phone number's over here, just so you know-- on the gigantic sign right behind me. And I thought that was very kind. And I just took a deep breath and sat on the curb, called them.

I get all these details. My brain is kind of scrambled. They told me it would be $309. Then a man walks up to me. And it's the same person but not in the construction car. He says, I saw you. You're still here. Did you talk to them? Did you get a chance to call them?

He said, did you find out what it cost? And I said, yeah, it's $309. And if I can't get it out by XYZ time, it's, like, $50 a day or something. And he said, I'm so sorry. I know, that happens. This can happen here. And I said to him, you know what? It's kind of probably my own karma. I have done this too many times. And it's really my own fault.

And he kind of reached his hand out towards me. And in his hand was just a little wad of bills. I think he said something like me and the guys just wanted to buy you a cup of coffee just to make up for the day-- the morning or something. And so I was like, oh, my gosh, I'll be OK. I don't need your money. It's OK.

And he leans in a little bit and looks me in the eye and just had the kindest eyes. And he's said, no, please take this. And I said, I don't even drink that much coffee. And he's like, please, you have to take this. He actually kind of put a different emphasis. You have to take this.

I said, thank you. And as he's backing away from me, back across the street to the hospital, he looks me straight in the eye. And he's smiling. He's, like, gleeful. And he says, just pay it forward. Just pay it forward and nodding at me. And I looked at him. I said, I work in homelessness prevention and housing stability. I promise you I will figure out a way to pay this forward.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

My husband's like, just take an Uber. And I'm like, I don't really feel like I deserve an Uber right now, so I'm just going to walk. And it's not a super far walk. I think it's about a mile. And so, anyway, I'm still chatting with my husband and narrating my walk. And I go to put the money in my wallet, in my pocket.

So I started to unwrap it. And it's four dollar bills, four 1s, and then a 5, and then three crisp, brand new $100 bills.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I felt like I was suddenly on one of those beautiful*Punked* reality TV shows. I was like, is there a camera somewhere? Obviously, he already knew it was $309. He knew exactly how much it cost. It wasn't like he saw me and then ran back and was like, you guys, there's someone out there who I bet-- I think this is going to be a hard time, and they all threw it in the hand. It wasn't like 20s and 10s and 5s and 1s, like normal people have. Most people don't have three crisp $100 bills they had prepared.

And that is the other part that just takes me out whenever I think about it. The layers of this for me were just so much as I was walking through a neighborhood and a community that has endured so much and has been really maligned. And I just really think, if you know the people in the community and you're rooted there, you would not be surprised that this happened.

I asked him his name before he left. Levi and his colleagues, from their vantage point in the world, see, what is for some people, one of the worst days of their life. A tiny thing, mistake, whatever, tiny decision, it can, for so many people, tip out down a set of dominoes. For some people, a car is a home. It's an office. It's, like, their literal job, like, if you're a Lyft driver.

They saw what they could do from where they were. And they said, this is what I can do here. We can all look around us. And it doesn't have to be our expertise. We don't have to get permission or kudos or attention. He didn't put it on social media. You can do good for people right where you are.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Levi, I'm trying to pay it forward to you by asking everyone else to do their version of what you just did. Hopefully, you feel it.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NINA MOINI: That was Kyrra Rankine telling her story for our series, Thank You, Stranger. If you have a story to share about an act of kindness from a stranger, email us at MinnesotaNow@NPR.org.