

Experience: A woman bit off my eyebrow

Four years ago Linda Lovett, 52, went to a bar with a woman she barely knew. When she became uncomfortable and tried to leave early, the woman physically attacked her. She tells Reenat Sinay her story.

Lizzie was the kind of character who makes her presence known – bossy and mouthy – but she had always been alright with me. She was a big-boned woman in her forties who lived on my council estate in southeast London. We’d spoken a few times at the local pub over the years, but we weren’t friends. So I was surprised when she asked me to go to a nearby karaoke bar with her.

The whole evening was strange. She spent all night talking with this one man at the bar, and when it closed for the night, he asked to share our cab. So we drove to his house, which was about four miles from where we lived. When he invited us in for a coffee, I tried to refuse, but Lizzie snapped at me and jumped out of the car. I couldn’t get home without her because I’d paid for the cab up and I was skint now. I thought, ‘10 minutes can’t hurt.’

The man didn’t have a key to the house, so he banged on the door for what seemed like five minutes. A little old lady in a pink dressing gown and rollers in her hair answered the door – it was the middle of the night and we’d just woken his mum. I felt like we were intruding on this poor lady, and while we sat in her musty living room, I mouthed at Lizzie, ‘Let’s go’. But she was pulling faces at me, sneering. I was so uncomfortable that I stood up and said I would just walk the four miles home.

I passed the kitchen where the man was making our coffee and opened the front door. Just as I stepped outside my neck snapped backwards like whiplash and I felt the hair at the back of my head being torn out at the root.

Lizzie had grabbed me from behind. I spun around and tried to force her off me with my hands, but she chomped down on my right middle finger below the second joint. Her gold-plated teeth broke easily through the skin and I felt her on my bone. A sharp pain shot up through my arm and blood streamed down my hand toward my wrist. I knew if I didn't get my finger out of there she would bite it off.

I pushed her face off with my other hand and dragged my mangled finger out of her mouth, the skin peeling back a bit as I did. Then she shoved me to the ground outside. She was a tall, large lady and much stronger than me. I remember hitting the pavement, but I must have gone into shock at that point because I didn't feel her bite my eyebrow off. I don't remember screaming or even hearing anything.

The doctors later told me that she severed the nerves completely. There was a two or three centimetre chunk of flesh missing from my face, like she'd taken a bite out of an apple. There was no skin covering my left eye – the whole flap was gone. You could see my eyeball. I was told she could have blinded me if she'd gone any deeper.

Lizzie backed off when she saw a group of teenage girls was passing across the street. I scrambled to grab my coat and bag, and ran over to them. I asked if they would call me a cab because the credit on my phone had run out. The girls looked horrified and one of them said to me, 'You've got no eyebrow, you need to go to hospital.' I knew there was a lot of blood, but I hadn't realised how serious it was.

The cab arrived, but the driver refused to take me home. He drove me straight to the police station, marched me in and left me in reception. I just sat there cold and shaking while they put something over my eye, but I never felt pain. After the police interviewed me I was transferred to St Thomas's Hospital, where I waited for three days for plastic surgery.

The surgeon was sure a dog bit me when he first saw the wound. They had to do a skin graft from my forehead to replace the skin over my eye and reattach the nerves.

I later had my eyebrow tattooed back on because the hair never grew back. I also had two large bald patches at the back of my head from where she tore my hair out, and my finger had to have stitches all around it like a ring.

Lizzie was arrested on the night of the attack and later charged with causing grievous bodily harm at the trial a year later. I hadn't seen what my eye looked like that night until I saw the pictures in court. I nearly broke down crying on the stand because I didn't recognise myself. I felt so weak, and just kept wondering, 'Why did this happen to me?'

During the police investigation leading up to the trial, I learned that Lizzie had a violent past and a history of biting. She had bitten a girl's cheek off when she was in junior school, but wasn't charged because she was a child.

This time she was sentenced to 15 months in prison, but was released after just six months. For years I would wake up from the least little noise at night and had panic attacks when I would see her around the neighbourhood. She would try to intimidate me and sing 'You're gonna die, you're gonna die' when we'd bump into each other at the shops. I never moved away because I don't want her to think that she can scare me into leaving a place I've been comfortable in for so many years. But I sometimes wonder if she'll ever come after me again.

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Linda Lovett is my flatmate's mother. Her name has been changed to protect her identity as she still feels she is in danger.