LAST ONE TO DIE

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For my parents,
who raised me;
and
for Luke,
who saved me.

London Borough Police

Interview Transcript

Case number:	36926
Date:	28th June
Interviewing Officer:	Detective Moran
Transcript prepared by:	PC Bowers
Incident type:	GBH
Address of occurrence:	[redacted]
Victim name:	[redacted]
D.O.B:	[redacted]

DET. MORAN: (Rustling noises) OK, Miss Stevens. For the purposes of this tape, can you describe the events that took place on the evening of June twenty-seventh?

MARY STEVENS: I . . . well, yeah, sort of. It was dark (audible sobs) and . . . and. . . (audible sobbing).

DM: Take your time.

MS: (Audible sobbing.)

DM: Let's start from the beginning, shall we? You stated that you had just left a party, is that correct?

MS: Yes.

DM: Were you alone? No? Please note for the tape that Miss Stevens is shaking her head in a negative gesture.

MS: No, not at first. But, (audible sigh) my boyfriend and I had a fight—

DM: A physical altercation?

MS: What?

DM: A physical fight.

MS: Oh, right. No, just an argument. But he walked off.

DM: He left you alone? At (papers rustling) two-thirty a.m.?

MS: (Barely audible) Yes.

DM: Can you recall where?

MS: Yeah, it was near the Tate, you know, near Millennium Bridge? Where you can see St. Paul's? I was upset. He knows how creepy I think it is around there, especially at night.

DM: And is this where the altercation happened? Yes? Please note for the tape that Miss Stevens is nodding.

MS: (Barely audible) Yes.

DM: Can you tell me what you saw?

MS: Not really. Like I said, it was dark. Sorry. (Pause) I suppose I heard him first.

DM: Him?

MS: I think so.

DM: But you aren't certain.

MS: No, but why would a woman. . . (audible sobbing).

DM: We just have to be sure. Speculation can be harmful in a case like . . . this.

MS: Right. A case like this. (Pause.) Well, I heard *them,* the person. They crept up on me, but I heard clicking, right before. . . (audible sobbing).

DM: Before?

MS: Before they did this to me.

DM: Please note for the tape that Miss Stevens is indicating lacerations from her collar bone across to her right shoulder.

MS: It didn't hurt at first. It just felt hot, then wet. Then I realized it was blood. So much blood. . .

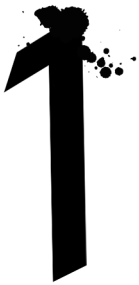
DM: I'm sorry (audible rustling). The initial report states that you were injured with a knife-like object?

MS: Not a knife. (Barely audible) It was his – the person's – nails. He ripped my necklace off with them.

DM: Miss Stevens, I'm not sure I understand what you're trying to tell me.

MS: Their nails. They were made from metal.

(End of Interview)



This is it. My new life. A fresh start, no boy worries, just me, the big city and my future.

At least that's what I thought until two minutes ago.

"I'm sorry, miss. There ain't no Neve listed here."

I try really hard not to bite this guy's head off and force my lips into a smile instead.

"It's Gaelic," I explain, for the seventeenth time since I got off the boat. "It's spelled N-I-A-M-H."

"Oh." The little man behind the desk of my new halls of residence narrows his eyes and scans his list again. I notice the name on his polished steel badge says *Derek*. "Oh, yeah, here you are. Weird spelling, innit."

A series of almighty thumps interrupt him, and I turn to see a tall, pretty brunette. She's busy dragging a huge suitcase down the steps into the foyer, panting from the effort.

"Excuse me," she starts, before focusing big brown eyes on me. "Oh, sorry. I'll wait."

"No, it's fine." I gesture towards the desk. "Go ahead." I'm getting nowhere with Oliver Twist here. It must be important if she dragged that massive bag all the way down here again. A cursory glance around had shown that there wasn't a lift in the place.

"Oh, thank you so much!" She drops the case at the foot of the stairs and approaches the desk. A small diamond twinkles in her nose and I can't take my eyes off it, it's so cool. No one at home has their nose pierced, well unless you count Carrie Duncan from up the road, who got drunk and stuck her mammy's hoop earring through her nostril, which I do not.

"Yeah?" Derek's face is impassive as the girl twirls a loose curl around one finger. She has that effortless look of someone with money. Her dark hair is glossy, shot through with streaks of gold, and a loose silk camisole hangs delicately from one shoulder. I'll bet anything it's vintage.

"It's my room, it's too high up," she begins. "I need to change."

Derek holds up a raised palm. "No more rooms," he barks. "Irish here got the last one."

Nice.

"But I haven't even checked in yet," I protest.

The girl whirls on me, grabbing my arm. "You haven't?"

"Er, no, I've just arrived." I look down at her hand on my arm. She's not letting go.

Awkward.

"What floor is she on?" The girl turns those brown, melting eyes on the self-proclaimed guardian of the rooms and he checks his ledger.

"Second."

She turns to me again. "That's perfect! How are you with heights?"

"Er. . ." I don't know, is the honest answer. Most of the houses in the little town I'm from are bungalows and there isn't a high rise between my house and Dublin, not that I've ever seen, anyway. I quite liked standing on the top deck of the boat coming over, though. "Fine, I guess."

"Oh my God, I love your accent!" She squeals, pumping my arm so enthusiastically I can't help but laugh. "Would you swap? Pretty please? I'm on the tenth floor and I am just terrified of heights. Terrified. I can't even stand on a chair."

She's so . . . eloquent, I think is the right word. I've never met anyone this posh or charming in real life before. Her voice seems to drip honey and diamonds compared to my country twang.

"Yeah, sure, that's grand with me," I turn to the man. "Is that all right with you, Derek?"

"Doesn't bother me," he shrugs. "Give Irish your keys, then."

"It's Niamh," I repeat through gritted teeth.

The girl holds out a small, worn plastic keyring, its corners chipped and scratched, two small silver keys dangling from it. Room 1012. Mine for the next six weeks. "Like Neve Campbell? That's so retro!"

"Er, sure," I reply, taking the keys from her and smiling. Mental note – find out who Neve Campbell is.

"Here." Derek thumps another set of keys and a thick packet of paperwork on his desk. 215, the room I should have been in. "Sign your name there, Missy, and fill the rest of this lot out for tomorrow." He hands me a chewed blue biro that I take gingerly, with great care not to touch the end. I practise my signature (any excuse) and hand it back. He doesn't bother to change our room numbers on the paperwork, I notice. I guess it doesn't really matter.

"Thank you so much!" The girl scoops up her new keys and dances back over to her luggage before turning back to me. "Where are my manners! I'm Sara." She smiles. "I'll take this upstairs and then come and help with your bags, if you like?"

"No need." I grab the folder before swinging my rucksack on to my back. "I travel light."

I almost laugh at the look of shock on her face.

"That's all you have? Seriously?"

I nod, feeling my cheeks warm up. I hadn't had much to pack, not that I wanted to bring to London, anyway. I don't think my farming wellies would go down too well here.

"Good for you, like a capsule wardrobe," she huffs, lugging her case up each step with a loud thump and a sigh. Derek pointedly ignores her and opens his newspaper, so I run to grab the other end of it. "Thanks. Didn't realize how much I'd packed until I had to drag it up and down here."

Sweat breaks out on the skin beneath my backpack immediately. "Is there really no lift?"

"Oh, yeah," she replies, though it sounds more like "*Yah*". "There is, but only where the rooms are. Once we're up this flight we can take the easy route."

"Thank God." I choke the words out, trying to hide my rattling breath as we navigate the narrow stairwell. We heft the case up to the next landing and I think we're home free, but suddenly I lurch forwards. The paper wallet in my hands goes flying over the top of the suitcase. One of its wheels is caught in a piece of upturned carpet.

"Oh, no!" Sara drops to her knees, gathering up my course documents while I wrestle the case back on to the landing. I finally manage to tear it free, my hairline prickling with sweat, as Sara hands a haphazard pile of papers out to me. "Here," she smiles. "Think I got it all."

"Thanks." Sara still manages to look impeccable as she wheels her case along the drab corridor, not a hair out of place. I spot manicured toenails peeking out of Havianas, their rose gold straps highlighting her lightly tanned skin. The pale green paint is chipped at shoulder and hip height, as though many bodies have rubbed along the walls. Layers of white and yellow show beneath, a pattern of the building's past.

At the end of the corridor is the lift. Sara presses a button and the lift dings. The doors groan open, beckoning us in.

"Don't judge," says Sara as we step inside. "I know it's only one more floor, but I cannot face carrying this up another step."

"Same," I laugh, dropping the weight from my shoulders and dragging myself into the lift after her. The doors don't close immediately, so I perch precariously on my bag and try to shove my papers into some sort of order while Sara presses the buttons. A beautiful diamond cluster ring sparkles on her forefinger. God, she's effortlessly cool, that perfect mix of polished and casual chic. I wonder if I should put a couple of strategic rips into my jeans, too.

"So," she says. "Which summer course are you going on?"

"Drama." I don't even try to keep the excitement out of my voice. I've worked my behind off all year saving for these six weeks and I can't believe I'm finally here.

"Hey, me too!" The doors shudder closed, and the

lift begins its jerky ascent. Before we can carry on the conversation it wobbles to a stop and they open again on the second floor. Sara turns to me. "I guess this is me. Thanks again for swapping, I owe you. I would have died if I had to live on the tenth floor, seriously."

"No problem," I reply, embarrassed. "I'm just glad I'm here."

"Me too." She hesitates for a second, leaning on the doors so they don't close. "Hey, do you want to go in together in the morning? I don't know anyone else yet."

"I'd love to." Then I blurt out, "I don't know a soul here either."

"Great!" She smiles, letting go of the doors. "Do you want to knock for me around 8:30? We can grab a coffee before we walk to the welcome event."

"Sure." I wave through the closing gap. I wonder if I can train myself to like coffee overnight. "See you in the morning."

I smile at my blurred reflection as the lift lumbers up to my temporary new home. See, Niamh, you've already made a friend. You'll be grand here.

The doors creak open and I'm faced with a corridor that is a carbon copy of the one downstairs: faded, with a subtle air of neglect. I grab the top handle of my bag, not able to pick it up again. I follow the numbers along until I arrive at room 1012. The key slots in easily.

I turn the handle, but the door is heavy, and I have to

lean my weight against it before it opens. I enter a small, sparse room with nothing but a naked single bed, a desk and a wardrobe that's seen better days.

Oh, and there's a window. Bonus.

I ditch my bag and let the door close softly as I run to press my face up against the glass, like an excited kid. The city glitters before me and I can pick out huge, up-lit buildings, though I'm not sure what they are. I scan the horizon with excitement – how big *is* this place? I spot the Thames snaking along beneath my window and my arms explode into goosebumps. *You did it, girl,* I think. All that hard work, all the mucking out horses and dirty farm jobs were totally worth it. You're here, you're finally here.

Despite my excitement, I'm absolutely shattered. It's been a long day of travelling and I want to be fresh for the morning. I open my bag and upend it on the desk, where a mini survival kit of Irish teabags, Tayto crisps and Tiffin chocolate bars topples out. God bless my sister. The rest of my meagre belongings spill everywhere but I don't care, I'm too tired and I have no Mammy to tell me off for it.

Ohhh, no. Mammy. I dig around for my phone, retrieving it from the rucksack pocket I stashed it in earlier, and hunt for the charger. I plug it in and stare at the cracked screen, willing it to light up. Mammy will kill me if I don't get in touch tonight.

To my relief, the screen blinks into life and I grab it, firing off a text to let her know I'm here safe, before

switching it on to silent. A few seconds later my phone bounces on the scarred wooden desk, but I ignore it. I can't deal with Mammy tonight; I'll get up a little earlier tomorrow and ring her then, instead. Right now, I need to sleep. Grabbing pyjamas and a bobble, I eye the bare pillows and duvet, wondering how many bodies have slept in them before me. Am I too tired to care?

Yep, I think I am.

I change quickly, grab the pile of papers and sit back on the bed, pressing my back to the cool, bare wall. I spread them out, digging around for tomorrow's schedule, when I realize I have two of everything. Sara must have mixed her pack up with mine.

I look down at my fleecy pjs, tiny, fluffy sheep jumping lazily over fences decorating my legs.

I can't go downstairs in these.

I start to sort through the papers, making two piles, one for me and one for Sara. I can't believe the amount of stuff there is to fill in – medical forms, housing stuff. . . Guilt gnaws at me. I should really take them back down to Sara, so she can get started on them. I stare at the jolly little sheep and sigh.

Sometimes I really am too nice.

I press the button for the lift, scuffing my sliders along the tattered green carpet. The doors creak open and I get in.

The lift grinds to a halt on the second floor and a

little bubble erupts in my stomach. What if Sara's asleep already? Have I totally misjudged this? I tug at the hem of my button down top and slowly approach my could-have-been room. I hesitate for a second and knock.

No answer.

"Hey." A male voice makes me jump. "I don't think anyone's in there."

"Oh." I turn, but the figure is disappearing round the corner. I hesitate, then I knock again, just in case. "Sara?"

Nothing.

Something makes me try the handle. To my surprise, the door opens easily in my hand.

"Sara?" I call, into the room. Silence.

She must be out then. I'll just leave the pack on her desk and come straight out, no harm done.

It's dark in Sara's room, the curtains pulled tightly shut. I guess she really is scared of heights, even on the second floor.

The smell hits me suddenly, something raw and primal that turns my stomach. I inch further into the room on autopilot, even though my brain is screaming at me to get out. Something is not right. My eyes adjust to the darkness. In the gloom I can just about decipher the bed, and a huddled figure lying on it, one arm hanging limply over the edge.

The door is ajar and as I step forward, a slice of light from the corridor lands on the bed. Eyes wide and staring.

Clumps of hair scattered across the pillow, ripped from the roots. A long, slim hand trailing towards the carpet, a beautiful diamond cluster ring on its forefinger.

A forefinger that is steadily dripping with blood, forming a dark pool on the floor.