
INVESTIGATION

"TELL HIM ALL, LIZZIE"

August 4, 1892

Assistant Marshal Fleet stood beside the little sofa in Lizzie's bedroom, pencil poised over his notebook. "Has your father or mother ever had trouble with anyone that you know of?" he repeated.

Lizzie, literal-minded sometimes to a fault, claimed that she did not know of anyone—perhaps meaning that she could not name anyone as a certain enemy. Alice Russell disagreed. "Tell him all, Lizzie," she urged. "Tell him about the man that you was telling me about."

The very night before, Lizzie had knocked on Alice Russell's door. For two hours Alice had sat listening in amazement as a fretful Lizzie described a series of unsettling events: the daylight break-ins, the ill-mannered man she'd heard her father order out of the house after an argument over renting some property, the figure she'd seen skulking around the back of the house when she came home one night, and finally, the sickness that had struck her parents so much more severely than herself.

"I think sometimes—I am afraid sometimes that somebody will do something to him; he is so discourteous to people," Alice remembered Lizzie saying of her father. Mr. Borden had even been rude to Dr. Bowen that same morning when Bowen stopped in to check on the family, Lizzie admitted. Both Lizzie and Mrs. Borden had been ashamed of the way he'd dismissed the doctor's friendly concern—"mortified," Lizzie had said. "I feel as if I wanted to sleep with my eyes half open—with one eye open half the time—for fear they will burn the house down over us."

At Alice's urging, Lizzie told the assistant marshal a fraction of what she'd told her friend the night before: Two weeks ago she heard the front bell ring, and her father had let a man into

the house. "I did not hear anything for some time, except just the voices; then I heard the man say, 'I would like to have that place, I would like to have that store.' Father said, 'I am not willing to let your business go in there.' And the man said, 'I thought with your reputation for liking money, you would let your store for anything.' Father said, 'You are mistaken.' Then they talked a while, and then their voices were louder, and I heard Father order him out." She did not know who he was, had not seen him, and could not tell all that he said—only that he sounded angry.

That was all the information she offered.

"HER ACTIONS WERE RATHER PECULIAR FOR A LADY"

Outside of the Borden home, news of the murder was flashing through the streets.

In the first scramble for a doctor, the sight of Mrs. Churchill as she sped across the street had caught the eye of John Cunningham, a reporter for the *Fall River Globe*, out collecting the weekly payments from subscribers. "Her actions," he noticed, "were rather peculiar for a lady." Smelling a scoop, he circled back down the block, where a group of men had gathered around Mrs. Churchill as she stood relaying the initial fragments of information. Learning there was trouble at the Borden house, Cunningham headed straight for the nearest telephone—at Gorman's paint shop about half a block farther north—to notify the city marshal. Before he left Gorman's he also phoned his editor at the *Globe*, as well as the *Fall River Daily Evening News*.

At about the same time, Charles Gardner, a stable keeper driving a customer down Second Street to change a hundred-dollar bill at the bank, became one of the first to hear a garbled sliver of

the news: “[A] young lad told me that there had been a fight.” His customer remembered, “Some one said there was a man stabbed another one.”

By the time the pair had made their transaction and headed toward the train depot, Mr. Gardner spotted John Manning, a reporter for the *Herald*, “on the run going up Second Street.” When the first volley of police officers arrived, Manning was already sitting on the Bordens’ doorstep, hopeful that he would be able to pass inside along with them. He did. In the ten minutes he was in the house, Manning saw it all—Lizzie sitting in the kitchen surrounded by her neighbors, Dr. Bowen displaying Mr. Borden’s wounds for Deputy Sheriff Wixon, and Inspector Doherty examining the position of Mrs. Borden’s body on the floor upstairs. On his way out he spoke with Bridget Sullivan, who was sitting on the attic steps.

Outside, two other reporters were already searching the yard: John Cunningham of the *Globe* and Walter Stevens of the *Evening News*. Together Manning and Stevens inched along the fence line looking for footprints, peered into the old well, and tried the outer cellar door but found it fastened. Then they parted, Stevens heading for the house, while Manning had a look into the barn before returning to his office.

The first newspaper report would be on the street in two hours, sold out within minutes.

“THE [MOST] GHASTLY THING I HAVE EVER SEEN”

In a thoroughly improbable coincidence, Dr. William Dolan, the county medical examiner, happened to be passing down Second Street at 11:45 the morning of the murders. Noticing the

commotion, he made his way inside and into the very center of the action—viewing the bodies, arranging for the crime scenes to be photographed, collecting hair samples, and sealing up milk specimens in jars bound for Harvard, where a chemist would verify whether any attempt at poisoning had been made. Upon his arrival, Dolan had taken only a cursory look at the victims; now it was time to examine them thoroughly.

Dr. Dolan's was by far the most professional examination of the bodies thus far, but even he was startled by the ferocity of the wounds. Mr. Borden's face, he said, was "the [most] ghastly thing I have ever seen." Although there were ten distinct cuts in all, at that time Dr. Dolan could not differentiate each of them. One blow sliced straight through the nose, lips, and chin. Another dented the forehead, split the left eyeball in two, and carved the cheekbone in half. Whole slivers of bone were missing entirely; others were driven into Mr. Borden's brain. In all, the murderer had opened a gap two and a half by four inches in the left side of Andrew Borden's skull.

Abby Borden's wounds, though slightly less gruesome to the eye, were even greater. Dolan counted eighteen blows to the back of the head—four to the left side, fourteen to the right. Only the blows on the right side had penetrated the skull. The cuts in this cluster were so near to one another they had effectively become crushing wounds, smashing shards of bone into Mrs. Borden's brain as though she'd been clubbed by a blunt instrument. The bleeding was so profuse she was soaked halfway to the waist, clear through to her underclothes. Even the canvas backing of the carpet on which she lay was saturated with blood.

“IT IS NO USE IN SEARCHING THIS ROOM”

Down cellar, police were unearthing a slew of weapons capable of inflicting exactly those injuries. They hardly had to look for them. Mr. Borden was particular about keeping his tools all in one place, and Bridget led them straight to a box on a shelf in the wood room alongside the chimney. She reached up and fished out two hatchets, which she handed down to Officer Mullaly. The larger of the two, a claw hatchet, had a rust stain on its head and a smudge of something red along the handle that looked as though it had been washed or wiped. Two axes, their handles coated with ashes, were also retrieved from the south wall of the cellar. Mullaly gathered them all up and laid them on the brick floor of the washroom, standing guard until Assistant Marshal Fleet arrived.

The big claw hatchet with its peculiar stains interested Fleet most. He took it aside and set it behind some boxes in the adjoining room under the stairs, where Mr. Borden kept shingles and vinegar barrels. Then Fleet searched the rest of the cellar, checked the outer cellar door, and looked into the barn long enough to satisfy himself that no one was there. The time had come, Fleet decided, to search Lizzie Borden's room.

Fleet summoned two officers to accompany him and went upstairs to Lizzie's bedroom door. It was locked. Fleet rapped. The bolt turned and Dr. Bowen appeared, opening the door just wide enough for the assistant marshal to see his face. His fearful expression, and the way he held the door, made Fleet think something was the matter inside. Fleet told the doctor that they had come to search the room.

“Just wait a moment,” Dr. Bowen said without explanation, and closed the door.

Fleet waited, his suspicion mounting.

When the door opened, it was Bowen again. “Is it absolutely

necessary that you should search this room, Lizzie wants to know?"

"Yes," Fleet said, "I have got to do my duty as an officer, and I cannot leave the premises until I have searched the whole of this house."

Once more the door shut in Fleet's face before he was allowed inside.

Lizzie Borden lay on the sofa beside the windows, her eyes scarcely open. "It is no use in searching this room," she said. "Nobody can get in here, or put anything in. I always lock my door when I leave it. How long will it take you?" she asked as the officers began searching her bureau drawers, her bed, her shelves, the little curtained alcove she used as a toilet room, and anything else they could get at in both her room and Emma's.

"It won't take me long," Fleet said. "I have got to search it, though."

"I do hope you will get through soon," Lizzie replied, ruffling the assistant marshal yet again with her blunt manner. "It will make me sick."

"I wish to ask you some questions," Fleet said.

"Please be brief," Lizzie answered, "for I am very weary. I have answered a great many questions."

"You said this morning that you was up in the barn for half an hour," Fleet said. "Do you say that now?"

"I don't say a half an hour, I say twenty minutes to half an hour."

"Well, we will call it twenty minutes, then."

"I say from twenty minutes to half an hour, sir," she informed him with the same sharpness she'd used when he referred to Mrs. Borden as her mother. If Fleet had had any sympathy for Lizzie Borden prior to that moment, it all but vanished.

“I DON'T LIKE THAT GIRL”

Out in the barn, the city marshal himself, Rufus Hilliard, was overseeing the search. The police hoped to find one of two things: confirmation of Lizzie's alibi—her claim that she'd been up in the loft when her father was killed—or evidence of the murderer. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon and his men were “stifling hot” in their blue woolen uniforms as they rifled through the dusty workbenches and piles of hay. Officer Philip Harrington was among them.

It had been more than two hours since Harrington had spoken with Lizzie, and still suspicion nagged at him. “I don't like that girl,” he told Hilliard.

“What is that?” the marshal asked.

“I don't like that girl,” Harrington said again. “Under the circumstances she does not act in a manner to suit me; it is strange, to say the least.”

He did not elaborate for the marshal just then, not about the surprising calm she'd displayed under questioning, or about how she'd dismissed Harrington when he tried to caution her about the firmness of her answers. It would be well, he'd advised, for her to be careful what she said, owing to the excitement. Perhaps on the morrow, she would be in a better frame of mind to give a clearer statement of the facts as she knew them. Lizzie had curt-sied, saying, “No, I can tell you all I know now just as well as at any other time.”

Harrington silently followed the marshal to the loft, where three more officers were already searching. “I want you men to go give this place [a] complete going over,” Hilliard ordered. “Every nook and corner must be looked into, and this hay turned over.”

“If any girl can show you or me, or anybody else what could

interest her up here for twenty minutes, I would like to have her do it," Officer Harrington remarked.

Marshal Hilliard shook his head. "Incredible," he agreed.

"AS IF SHE HAD RUN AROUND THE BED AS FAR AS SHE COULD"

Up in the guest room, photographer James Walsh was preparing his camera equipment for what would become the most famous images he would ever capture. Famous, but imperfect. Ideally, a crime scene photo ought to depict an untouched room, exactly as it appeared at the moment of discovery. Photographer Walsh was already too late for that.

When she was first found, Abby Borden lay with nearly a foot of her body wedged under the bed. A yardstick was beside her. Possibly she had been using it to get the bedspread perfectly smooth when the murderer came upon her. To Charles Sawyer, the position of her body made him think she had been trying to get "away from the door, as if she had run around the bed as far as she could."

One wound, a slice of skin two to three inches long, was flapped back over her left ear like a hinge, suggesting that she'd taken one blow—the first?—while facing her killer. Whether she was attacked before or after cornering herself no one would know for certain, but bruises on the bridge of her nose and above each eye marked where her face had struck the floor. Nose to the carpet, arms up around her face, she had evidently flailed and kicked until one of the eighteen blows to the head rendered her senseless.

None of this apparent struggle shows in the iconic crime scene photos snapped that afternoon, however. By the time Mr. Walsh arrived, the bed had been moved, and so had Abby Borden.

Walsh's photos depict her lying neatly centered in the space between the bed and the bureau, as though she keeled straight over like a tree trunk, pinning her arms beneath her. Her skirts are straightened demurely to her ankles, her face completely hidden by the shadow of her shoulder and a mass of blood-blackened hair. The yardstick is nowhere to be seen. The bed had not only been moved, but stripped, searched, and remade—and rather sloppily, too—before the photographer's arrival.

Andrew Borden's body—or more precisely, the sofa on which it lay—had been moved as well. Mr. Borden's splintered face distracts so thoroughly from the rest of the photo, it's not hard to overlook how drastically off-center the sofa is compared with the picture frame hanging above it, or the way its arm juts into the dining room doorway. If Abby Borden was indeed the kind of housekeeper who smoothed her bedspreads with a yardstick, it's difficult to imagine her abiding such an off-kilter arrangement of furniture. A closer look reveals the culprit: small casters on the sofa's feet. For whatever reason, the sofa was scooted sideways on its wheels, the movement hinted at by Mr. Borden's tipped knees and feet. Whether these shifts obscured any vital evidence is anybody's guess.

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY FORENSICS

Glaring blunders, like repositioning the bodies and failing to secure the crime scene, insured that the Fall River Police Department's investigation was less than ideal even by nineteenth-century standards. Yet if the police had done everything right; they still would have neglected a great deal of what is considered fundamental evidence in the twenty-first century.

In 1892, forensic methods common today were only beginning to germinate in countries such as England, Scotland, and India. The very idea of identifying a criminal from hair, clothing fibers, or fingernail scrapings was unheard of. Even fingerprint evidence, which had been suggested as a unique identifier as early as 1880, was not in widespread use and would not be admissible in court in the United States until 1911.

So while the police almost certainly destroyed or overlooked the minute bits of evidence that might easily crack the case today, that same evidence would have been virtually useless to investigators in 1892.

Photographer Walsh took one view of Mr. Borden and two of Mrs. Borden—the first from behind, and another with the bed moved completely out of the frame to show the full length of her body. That done, Dr. Dolan continued his grisly work.

One at a time, Dolan stripped the bodies and placed them on lightweight folding examination tables called undertaker's boards: Mr. Borden in the sitting room and Mrs. Borden in the dining room. He sliced open their abdomens and removed their stomachs, carefully tying them off at each end to keep whatever remained of their breakfasts inside. Each organ was put into its own airtight jar, sealed with wax, and shipped by express to Harvard along with the milk specimens he'd gathered that morning. Partway through the process, Mr. Walsh took two more photos—close-ups of the Bordens' injuries as their bodies lay half opened on the undertaker's boards. The image of Mr. Borden is easily the most disturbing, showing wounds so profound it is difficult to discern his features, while Mrs. Borden's are obscured by the clogged mess of her hair. Their blood-soaked clothes were bundled up

and sent down to the wash cellar, the naked victims themselves stitched back up before being covered and sequestered in the dining room for the night.

By the time Emma Borden arrived on the 3:40 train from New Bedford, the interior of 92 Second Street was returning to some semblance of order. Dr. Bowen had worded his telegram perhaps too softly, for Emma “had no thought of a greater calamity than that her father was sick.” At what moment did she begin to realize her life had forever changed—at the sight of the crowds in Second Street, or the policeman standing guard at her front door? How did she react? What did she say? There is hardly any record of it—only that she was “overcome” by the recital of the details of the murder.

However awful the shock, she did not give way for long. True to form, Emma immediately began to shoulder responsibility of the household. She summoned her father’s lawyer, Mr. Andrew Jennings, and asked Bridget two questions: whether the maid would stay on with them, and whether she had seen a boy come with a note for Mrs. Borden.

And what did she say to her sister, her beloved baby Lizzie? Were there tears between them, tenderness and grief? Again, no one seems to know. At the inquest less than a week later, Emma herself claimed not to remember what Lizzie had said to her about the murders. “[T]here was so much going on,” Emma explained.

Indeed there was.

“RATHER A SINGULAR COINCIDENCE”

Word was out. All of Fall River was talking about the Borden slaying. To Eli Bence, a clerk in D. R. Smith's, a drugstore barely three blocks from the scene of the crime, it seemed that his customers had spoken of nothing else all afternoon. “Why, I understand they are suspecting Miss Borden, the daughter,” one lady remarked.

“Is that so?” Bence asked.

“That,” as Frank Kilroy put it when he arrived a few minutes later, “was rather a singular coincidence.”

Both men had been in the store the previous morning, Wednesday, August 3, when a woman Bence knew only as a Miss Borden came in requesting ten cents' worth of prussic acid. She wanted it, she said, to put on the edges of a sealskin cape, presumably to discourage moths or vermin from nibbling the expensive fur. When Bence informed her that it was not sold except on a physician's orders, the woman protested that she had bought it several times.

“Well my good lady,” Bence replied, “it is something we don't sell unless by a prescription from the doctor, as it is a very dangerous thing to handle.” (In fact, it is one of the more deadly poisons, also known as hydrogen cyanide. Diluted to a strength of just two percent, more than four drops might be fatal.)

With that, she turned and went out.

“That is Andrew J. Borden's daughter,” Frank Kilroy told Bence as she made her way to the door.

By itself the incident had been unusual enough to stick in his memory. Bence had never been asked for prussic acid over the counter. Now it was stranger still.



At the Borden place, the hubbub had died down somewhat. Three policemen ringed the property, standing guard. Between eight and nine o'clock, Officer Harrington arrived at the back door. With him was Eli Bence. But Bence did not follow Harrington all the way in. He hung back in the doorway to the hall, listening as Harrington spoke to Lizzie in the kitchen. Bence stood within Lizzie's view, but whether Lizzie noticed him or was made aware of his presence is unclear. For Harrington's purposes, it did not matter. Bence was there not to talk but to listen. Exactly what Harrington and Lizzie said is also not known—the particulars of the conversation were not important. Officer Harrington simply needed to get Lizzie talking within Bence's earshot. Bence himself never said a word to Lizzie. He did not need to speak to her to make up his mind. That voice, the druggist thought—low, and a little tremulous—matched the voice of the woman who had asked him to sell her a deadly poison only the day before. He was sure of it.

THE DRUGSTORE CRUSADERS

Could Eli Bence have been mistaken?

According to the local papers, the wife of state police inspector McCaffrey had been operating a sting in Fall River at the beginning of August, testing whether clerks would illegally furnish poison to a customer without a prescription. Just three days before the Borden murder, she and another woman inquired at a nearby drugstore for both arsenic and prussic acid. Their requests were refused. According to the *Fall River Herald*, one of the women was said to resemble

Lizzie Borden. Lizzie's friends pounced on the story, eager to prove Eli Bence was wrong.

That, countered the *Fall River Globe*, was absurd. As far as the *Globe* was concerned, Lizzie Borden resembled the drugstore crusaders as much as she resembled heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan.

"WHAT SHE DID I DON'T KNOW"

There was nothing left to do in the Borden house but go to bed. Alice Russell stepped outside to tell the nearest guard, Officer Joseph Hyde, that they were going to retire for the night and were locking the door. If the policemen needed anything, they could knock.

Wearily, Emma and Lizzie Borden climbed the front stairs to their own bedrooms. Bridget Sullivan had retreated across the street to the home of Dr. Bowen's in-laws, bunking with their servant girl, while Alice, in a stalwart act of friendship, took the murdered couple's bedroom for the night. Uncle Morse, some would later whisper, slept in the very room where Mrs. Borden had been killed. This proved to be no more than a macabre rumor; Morse actually slept in the third-floor bedroom he had been known to occupy on previous visits. Body or no body, the guest chamber was still very much a crime scene. Drops of Abby Borden's blood stained the marble top of the bureau and its wooden drawers, the molding, wallpaper, bed rail, and linens. The blood-blackened carpet on which she'd lain, at least, was gone—pulled up and put in the cellar with the victims' clothing.

Sometime that day, the door between Lizzie's room and her parents' had been unhooked, connecting her now to Alice as well as Emma. Before the three women began undressing for the

night, Lizzie took up the slop pail and began to collect the afternoon's wash water from their basins.

"I will go down with that," Alice offered.

"I will go," Lizzie said, "if you will go and hold the lamp."

Down the stairs and through the dark house they went, Alice in front with a kerosene lamp and Lizzie just behind with the pail. They could no longer avoid the sitting room with its blood-spattered doors and wall—it was either that or go through the dining room, where Mr. and Mrs. Borden's corpses lay.

Alice stepped aside at the foot of the cellar steps. Lizzie passed by her, continuing across a little walkway to the water closet, where she dumped the soapy water down the toilet. Then Lizzie went to the washroom sink at the southeast corner of the cellar to rinse the pail.

The light wavered a little. Alice was nervous now. The wash-tub filled with Andrew and Abby Borden's bloodied clothes stood just a few feet away; nearer still, the trio of hatchets and axes lay on the brick floor where the police had left them.

Lizzie ran some clean water into the slop pail, and the two women went back the way they'd come.

From his post at the end of the house, Officer Hyde had observed it all through the big back windows—the light gliding toward him through the dark sitting room and kitchen before disappearing and reappearing in the cellar, the sound of water running in the washroom sink. At that moment, he thought little of it. The women had done nothing unusual, nor made any attempts to conceal their business. The light Alice carried burned brightly the whole time, bright enough that he could see them plainly.

Ten, perhaps fifteen minutes later, the light reappeared. This time it was Lizzie Borden—alone. Hyde watched through the cellar windows as Lizzie emerged into the wash cellar, set the lamp on a small stand just inside the door, and stooped down in front

of the sink. What she did there, Hyde did not know. Whatever it was took less than a minute. She did not open the cabinet under the sink, did not run any more water, did not touch the washtub full of her parents' clothing. Hyde knew the small pail of blood-stained cloths he'd seen soaking by the sink earlier that day must be right next to her, below his line of vision. Any married man would understand what that pail was meant for—Hyde's own wife likely kept just such a pail in their own cellar. But if that was all Lizzie was attending to, why hadn't she done so while Alice was there to hold the light for her?

Upstairs, Alice knew nothing of Lizzie's return to the cellar. She had closed the connecting door to do her bathing, then read an account of the murder in the *Evening News*. Finally, she climbed into Mr. and Mrs. Borden's bed, where she lay awake all that long night, listening to the policemen whispering below her open windows.

"LYNCH HIM!"

After the tumult of Thursday, 92 Second Street was strangely quiet on Friday. A Fall River Police sergeant came to collect the axes and hatchets from the cellar, and a detective from the Massachusetts District Police also searched the barn and cellar. That was all.

Undertaker Winward arrived that evening. The bodies were still on the boards in the dining room. No preparations had been made for their funeral, which was to be held the following morning. Winward had his work cut out for him. Not only did he have to dress the Bordens and put them into their caskets, he had the daunting task of making them look somewhat presentable. As was customary, the caskets were to be left open at least long enough for the immediate family to view the departed one last time.



Lizzie, so the papers said, did not leave her room all day. Twice Dr. Bowen had been summoned to attend to her; at midnight he would come for a third time. Bromo caffeine was no longer relieving Lizzie's distress. Dr. Bowen prescribed morphine. The dosage was a relatively mild $\frac{1}{8}$ grain—about 8 milligrams by modern standards.

No one seems to have mentioned how Emma was bearing up. Because she took the strain better? Because she had not been the one to discover her father's body—perhaps had not seen it yet at all—and therefore played a minor role in the unfolding drama? Or because she was not the one suspected of murder?

Nothing but an arrest would soothe the nerves of the city itself. Everyone in Fall River was on edge. The papers fairly seethed with stories about the killing, most of them rife with misinformation. All anyone knew for certain was that a murderer roamed among them, and likely a thoroughly demented one, judging by the descriptions of the corpses. *Horrible Butchery*, the headlines said. *Hacked To Pieces At Their Home. Mutilated Beyond Recognition.*

All day long a building crowd milled restlessly in Second Street, hungry for news. "At almost any moment startling developments may be given to the public," the front page of the *New Bedford Evening Standard* promised. There would probably be no arrests until after the funeral, the paper said, hinting that the family was suspected. Other headlines were far more blunt:

**Suspecting The Daughter Lizzie
Members of the Family Are Shadowed
The Suspected Man; John V. Morse**

The newspapers' fevered tone had thoroughly pervaded the streets by the time Uncle Morse stepped out of the house at seven

o'clock that evening, apparently oblivious to the 600 to 1,500 people loitering in the street. A detective writer would hardly dare invent a more suspicious character than Lizzie's horse-trading uncle, John Vinnicum Morse, with his dark collar-length beard and eyes that seemed to want to bulge from their sockets. The afternoon before the killing he had turned up unexpectedly without so much as a toothbrush—in spite of the fact that he planned to visit for a number of days—and stayed the night in the very room where Mrs. Borden was found with the back of her skull cracked open. His original vocation? Butcher.

As he headed down Second Street for the post office, the throng followed, gaining size. Then someone said his name. At the sound, the crowd's curiosity turned venomous. "That's the murderer!" they cried. "Lynch him!" Lucky for Morse, two plain-clothes policemen were also following him. With clubs drawn, they escorted Morse to the post office and back.

There was no escaping the public eye now, and not just in Fall River. As far as Boston and New York City, the Friday evening papers would carry this notice:

\$5000 REWARD:

The above reward will be paid to anyone who may secure the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who occasioned the death of Andrew J. Borden and his wife.

Emma J. Borden

Lizzie A. Borden

With that, the Borden sisters had elevated every citizen to detective, judge, and jury.

“HER NERVES WERE COMPLETELY UNSTRUNG”

Lizzie came downstairs Saturday morning in a black silk dress with beaded trim, her dark bonnet adorned with small flowers. No other mourners had arrived. Mrs. Holmes led her into the sitting room and up to the identical caskets—cedar, with three silver handles on each side. There, beside her father’s casket, Lizzie Borden cried. Not only cried, but leaned over and kissed Mr. Borden’s face. What could Undertaker Winward possibly have done to make such a thing possible? It was a perfectly simple solution: he turned Mr. Borden’s head so that only the uninjured side showed.

MOURNING DRESS

Newspapers took special note of Lizzie Borden’s funeral attire, remarking that she “was not in mourning”—meaning that despite her obvious grief, her clothing did not follow the conventions of the day.

In 1892, dressing for the funeral of an immediate family member was far more complicated than pulling a black dress from the closet. Very specific types of fabric, trimming, and jewelry were used as public emblems of grief, making the bereaved immediately recognizable. An orphan was expected to wear “deep mourning”—black wool trimmed with crepe—for a full year. Only then would silk with crepe trimmings become acceptable.

So although Lizzie did wear black, it seems her dress was neither wool nor trimmed with the traditional crepe—a somber, lusterless fabric that, as the author of Lizzie Borden’s own 1884 etiquette manual,

Manners and Social Usages, explains, “is alone considered respectful to the dead.” Lizzie and Emma also did not wear veils, mainstays of bereaved women. Either of these two omissions would have been enough to raise eyebrows.

The service was small and private—only a few friends and relatives, among them Dr. and Mrs. Bowen; Mrs. Churchill; Abby Borden’s stepmother, the widow Gray, sister Priscilla, and dear half sister Bertie; Andrew Borden’s sister, Luana, and cantankerous brother-in-law, Hiram Harrington; and of course, Uncle John Morse. Reverend Buck and Reverend Dr. Adams read scriptures and prayers. There were no songs, no eulogies.

Outside, onlookers crammed the entire block. Nearly a dozen officers, overseen by Marshal Hilliard and Assistant Marshal Fleet, worked to hold back a crowd estimated at anywhere from two to four thousand people as the front door of Number 92 opened and the pair of caskets appeared, borne by twelve of the town’s most prominent businessmen. The caskets were draped in black broadcloth now. A plain wreath of green ivy was the only decoration for Andrew Borden; upon Abby Borden’s lay a circlet of white roses, sweet pea, and fern, tied up with a white satin ribbon.

VICTORIAN FLOWER LANGUAGE

Whether for courtship, weddings, or funerals, flowers were not simply something pretty to look at. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Victorians had developed an extensive language of floral symbolism. Some of these associations are familiar to this day,

such as red roses for romantic love or lilies for purity, but the Victorians went much further, combining multiple varieties and colors into bouquets capable of conveying complex messages.

What, then, did the flowers atop the Bordens' caskets represent?

Mr. Borden's plain and simple ivy wreath stood for fidelity. The blossoms chosen for Mrs. Borden are more enigmatic. Sweet pea represented simple pleasures, or sometimes departure. In the context of a funeral, ferns likely stood for sincerity, but they could also convey fascination. White roses often expressed the sentiment *I am worthy of you*; they might also signify sadness, innocence, purity, or, most intriguing, silence.

And then, perhaps, the most coveted sight of all: Miss Lizzie Borden herself, leaning on the arm of Undertaker Winward. "Her nerves," the *New York Times* reported, "were completely unstrung, as was shown by the trembling of her body and the manner in which she bore down on her supporter." Behind her came Emma. Noticeably calmer than her sister, she walked quickly to her carriage, hardly acknowledging the jostling spectators.

All along the procession's route, one black hat after another silently rose and was lowered—associates of Andrew Borden, paying their final respects as slowly the long string of carriages containing the mourners, pallbearers, and clergy swung west and then north, making their way past the big Andrew J. Borden building at the corner of Anawan and South Main.

Hundreds more onlookers awaited the cortege beyond the granite archway of Oak Grove Cemetery. Lizzie and Emma did not leave their carriages as the caskets were carried from the

hearse to the Borden family lot, nor were they expected to. Standing before a wide-open grave was considered too much to ask of grieving Victorian ladies. Fir boughs covered the tops of the freshly cut graves, and dark fabric screened their sides from view. Only John Morse and the clergymen emerged for the reading of prayers. Within two minutes, all was said and done.

The somber carriages pulled away, but no one stepped forward to lower the caskets into the graves. Unbeknownst to Lizzie and Emma Borden, a message from Medical Examiner Dolan had arrived for Undertaker Winward at 92 Second Street before the funeral service. His orders? Do not inter the Bordens' bodies. Instead, they were taken to the receiving vault.

This large stone tomb, built into the side of a hill near the cemetery's entrance, was most often used to hold coffins through the winter months until the ground thawed sufficiently for burial. Andrew and Abby Borden's remains entered the receiving vault on August 6. They would not leave for nearly two weeks.

"AS THOROUGH AN EXAMINATION AS POSSIBLE"

The moment the funeral cortege left Second Street, Marshal Hilliard and a few of his men entered the Borden house. They had a search to make, a search that Alice Russell had instigated and that Emma and Lizzie Borden almost certainly knew nothing about.

Something in Mr. and Mrs. Borden's bedroom had frightened Alice nearly to pieces that morning. As she turned, fastening her waist, an object on the floor just under the head of the bed caught her eye. Alice was horrified at the sight. Immediately, she fetched both Mrs. Holmes and Officer Hyde. "I slept here last night," she told Hyde as he examined the thing. "If that was there last night, I don't see how I missed seeing it."

It was a wooden club, twenty inches long—not the least bit sharp, but plenty big enough to bash a person's head in. "I was terribly alarmed, because I felt as if in some way it implicated me," Alice said, begging Hyde to tell no one but the city marshal about it.

Now, with no one remaining in the house but Alice and Mrs. Holmes, Marshal Hilliard targeted Lizzie's bedroom, then Emma's, and the guest chamber. Every bit of linen was stripped from the beds and the beds themselves lifted to see whether anything might be hidden inside or underneath. Nothing. The men were gone before the mourners returned.

At three o'clock, Hilliard was back. This time he brought Assistant Marshal Fleet, Captain Desmond, and Detective George Seaver of the state police. Medical Examiner Dolan and the Borden family lawyer, Andrew Jennings, met them there. Small and prone to scowling, Lawyer Jennings had "a body that might rightly be designated as a bundle of nerves." Only two years older than Emma, he had been acquainted with the entire Borden family from boyhood; now in his early forties, he was "considered one of the ablest corporation lawyers in the state."

The authorities intended to search the place literally from top to bottom, beginning with the attic. The Borden sisters had just buried their parents—at least as far as they knew—but they made no objection to this unexpected intrusion. Emma told the men that she wanted "as thorough an examination as possible" of every part of the house. Any door or box they could not open, any lock that baffled them, they needed only ask and the keys would be given.

In the attics, the search party "handled most everything that was moveable." They found nothing of interest in Bridget's room, nothing in the old wooden water tank in the clothes press. Also nothing in the narrow bedroom Morse had been sleeping

in. Nothing in the two storage rooms at the front of the house, though two obstinate trunks briefly aroused suspicion. None of the keys they had been given fit the first of them. The other, once unlocked, simply would not open. All the men puzzled over it until they were confounded to the verge of breaking the thing open. Finally, they sent downstairs for help. Both Emma and Lizzie went up to show them the trick of it—a sly little spring release of a sort none of them had encountered before. The key to the first trunk, one of the sisters pointed out, was tied to the side of the trunk itself.

Not one thing in any way connected to the murder was up there, except, perhaps the sealskin capes hanging in one of the two front rooms—just the sort of garment the woman who had asked Eli Bence for prussic acid had described. Assistant Marshal Fleet even went out on the roof, clear up to the ridgepole, and found nothing.

Down they went to the second floor, where Fleet and Detective Seaver personally examined the dresses in the clothes press on the landing directly opposite Lizzie's room. Eighteen or nineteen dresses hung in this large closet, all but one belonging to Lizzie and Emma.

One at a time Detective Seaver took each dress down from its hook and passed it to the assistant marshal to examine before the big front window. The Bordens' murderer must have been spattered with blood, and if that murderer was Lizzie Borden, one of her dresses must be stained.

Fleet and Seaver noticed no stains of any kind. One or two heavy silk dresses they left untouched. If a lady were to go on an axe-wielding killing spree, it stood to reason that she would not put on her best silk to do so.

Stains or no stains, there was one dress Marshal Hilliard de-

cided he must have as evidence—the one Lizzie Borden had been wearing the day of the murders. Lawyer Jennings relayed the marshal's request to Lizzie, and within a few moments she retrieved three garments from the clothes press: a dark blue blouse and skirt of patterned or "figured" fabric, as it was called at the time, and a white underskirt.

Room by room, the search party slowly spiraled its way down to the cellar, where the intensity of the inspection fizzled. The men had been at it for three hours. They could not have been more thorough, Medical Examiner Dolan told Emma, "unless the paper was torn from the walls and the carpets taken from the floor."

So when they finally came to the cellar, Marshal Hilliard did not order his men to dismantle the wood and coal piles or sift through the bushel baskets of ashes. He let it go at looking into each room and examining the foundation and chimney to be sure no bricks or stones had been removed. But he would send a mason to dismantle the base of the chimney first thing Monday morning, he told Lawyer Jennings as they climbed the cellar steps to the kitchen, in case anything had been thrown down it.

"IS THERE ANYBODY IN THIS HOUSE SUSPECTED?"

At quarter to eight that same evening, a knock came at the back door of 92 Second Street. It had already been an exhausting day. The funeral, the searches. And now what?

Once again, it was Marshal Hilliard. Beside him stood the mayor of Fall River, Dr. John Coughlin, a sweet-faced man with a full beard and turned-up mustache.

"I have a request to make of the family," Mayor Coughlin said

once the Bordens had assembled in the front parlor, "and that is that you remain in the house for a few days, as I believe it would be better for all concerned."

"Why, is there anybody in this house suspected?" Lizzie asked.

The mayor hedged. "Well, perhaps Mr. Morse can answer that question better than I, as his experience last night, perhaps, would justify him in the inference that somebody in this house was suspected."

Such a roundabout reply did not satisfy Lizzie Borden. "I want to know the truth," she said.

Mayor Coughlin hesitated.

"I want to know the truth," Lizzie said again.

"Well, Miss Borden," Coughlin said, "I regret to answer, but I must answer yes, you are suspected."

"We have tried to keep it from her as long as we could," Emma said.

"Well," Lizzie answered without hesitation, "I am ready to go any time."

Whether Lizzie's surprising reply betrayed her guilt or demonstrated complete confidence in her innocence is debatable. Either way, it created a terribly awkward situation. She was, after all, a woman of impeccable reputation, and there they sat in her formal parlor, practically accusing her of double homicide. Hilliard and Coughlin did not even have a warrant, and Lizzie Borden had all but volunteered for arrest.

If the curiosity seekers outside the house bothered them in any way, the mayor told the family, they should inform him or the marshal. "I shall see that you receive all the protection that the police department can afford from the annoyance and the disturbance of the people congregating about the streets," he promised.

As he rose to leave, the ever-accommodating Emma responded

with equal good faith. "We want to do everything we can in this matter," she said.

It all sounded so courteous, but in fact the entire Borden household was now under house arrest.

"I WOULDN'T LET ANYBODY SEE ME DO THAT, LIZZIE"

When Alice Russell came downstairs Sunday morning, Lizzie stood at the foot of the stove near the dining room door, a skirt hanging over her arm.

Emma turned from the sink, where she was washing up the breakfast dishes. "What are you going to do?"

"I am going to burn this old thing up," Lizzie declared, "it is covered with paint." She held up the edge of the skirt, displaying a hem soiled with drab green house paint.

Emma could not recall her exact answer later—something like *You might as well*, or *Why don't you*. At any rate, she agreed, and turned back to the dirty dishes without another word about it.

Alice left the room.

When she returned, Lizzie had moved to the opposite side of the stove, into the corner beside the window. The door to the wood closet hung open, a bit of blue material visible on an upper shelf—an odd sight among the fuel and flatirons and other kitchen utensils Alice was used to seeing there. A small piece of fabric was in Lizzie's hand. Alice could not tell if Lizzie was ripping up the skirt or tearing something down from the shelf.

Whatever she was doing, Alice did not like the looks of it. "I wouldn't let anybody see me do that, Lizzie," she said, and left the kitchen again.

Lizzie took a single step back toward the closet. There was

almost nothing she could do to conceal herself. The three big kitchen windows stood wide open, with their blinds open. Any of the policemen in the yard could look inside without so much as standing on tiptoe. If Lizzie Borden had something to hide, she could hardly have picked a worse time or place to do it.

“WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?”

Monday morning, August 8, the Borden property rattled and shook with the sounds of yet another search. Down cellar, a mason chiseled bricks from the base of the chimney. Four police officers under the command of Captain Desmond pulled barrels, boxes, and shingles from under the steps. They dismantled the woodpiles, shoveled through boxes of ash and cinder, and emptied out the coal bins.

They also searched the barn, its privy, and the vault beneath it. They tore a foot of boards from the top of the lumber pile against the back fence and peered down through its center to the ground. They searched the old well behind the barn and examined the yard for any sign of the sod having been turned. Again, nothing.

But in the cellar, in the same room—the very same box—where Bridget had retrieved a pair of hatchets for the police on Thursday, Officer William Medley made a most interesting find. In his excitement Medley “sung out” to Captain Desmond, who stopped what he was doing to come and see.

It was a small hatchet, its handle broken off near the head. That break was curiously fresh—what the authorities termed a “bright” break due to its light color—while the head was coated front and back in an ashlike substance that did not seem to match the texture of the dust on the rest of the tools in the box. Medley

rubbed at one of the dark spots on the blade, but whether it was stained with rust or blood he could not tell. Then, handling it carefully to avoid rubbing off any more dust than had already been disturbed, they wrapped it up in a sheet of paper from the water closet. Medley put the bundle into his pocket and took it straight to Marshal Hilliard's office.

Upstairs in the parlor, a private detective from the famous Pinkerton Detective Agency was interviewing Alice Russell. Detective Hanscom had been hired on the advice of Lawyer Jennings, in hopes that the Pinkerton man could help unravel the crime. Both Lizzie and Emma had taken their turn with him and waited in the dining room.

When Alice emerged from the parlor, that hope dissolved in a single sentence. Alice's conscience was in turmoil. She had lied, "told Mr. Hanscom a falsehood."

"What," Emma wanted to know, "was there to tell a falsehood about?"

The detective had asked whether all the dresses that were there the day of the tragedy were still in the house. Out of loyalty to her friend, Alice had answered yes.

Emma was so frightened she hardly heard the rest of the conversation. To bring a private detective into their home only to have him lied to? It was a disaster.

"I am afraid, Lizzie, the worst thing you could have done was to burn that dress," Alice said.

"Oh, what made you let me do it?" Lizzie said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Alice must confess her lie to Detective Hanscom, the women decided. Not only confess, but tell the detective she was doing so at Emma and Lizzie's insistence. Alice did.

It made no difference. At noon, a warrant was sworn for the arrest of Lizzie Andrew Borden.

“LET US OURSELVES CURB OUR TONGUES”

From the outside, it appeared the police were at a standstill. Forty-eight hours had passed since the funeral, and the hinted-at arrest had not been made. Marshal Hilliard had not breathed a word of the warrant. “At this moment I can say there is nothing to connect any members of the family with the murder,” he said, stalling.

It seemed everyone but the police wanted to talk about the murders. “[M]en walked slowly with papers before their faces, absorbing the news,” the *New Bedford Evening Standard* reported, “drivers of delivery wagons allowed their horses to pick their own way and went over ‘the latest, all about the murder,’ and on every corner and in almost every doorway were groups of three, four and half a dozen, explaining and arguing, and driving home their own private convictions with their forefingers.”

Unlike the police, the newspapers did not have the choice to remain silent on the matter. The public was in such a frenzy for news that even the sight of Emma Borden bringing in the morning milk made the papers.

FALL RIVER'S NEWSPAPERS

Fall River had three newspapers in 1892: the *Daily Evening News*, the *Daily Herald*, and the *Daily Globe*.

People like the Bordens read the *Evening News*—a respectable, conservative paper favored by mill owners and other well-to-do businessmen.

In between came the *Herald*, another reliable, Republican-leaning newspaper that appealed to the middle class.

The *Globe* was the workingman's paper, Democratic, sensationalistic, and somewhat more reliable than a modern-day tabloid.

Competition between the three kept fresh news available constantly. Some papers published in the morning, others late in the day. The most sensational news—news like the Borden murders—produced special, or extra, editions that hit the streets at all hours, as quickly as the type could be set and the paper inked. Some were no more than a single one-sided sheet.

Finding accurate, unbiased news, especially on the Borden case, posed more of a challenge. John C. Milne, editor of the *Evening News*, was a friend of Andrew Borden and believed firmly in Lizzie's innocence. The *Globe*, almost from the moment of the murders, sided with the police and used a mixture of inside tips (probably from Officer Harrington) and outright hogwash to send its circulation rocketing. Though the *Evening News* had more integrity, both papers were guilty of emphasizing the evidence that favored their verdict on the case. "Two interpretations are not placed side by side so that readers can make their own choice," the *Herald* complained. The *Herald* may have been the least biased paper in town, but it was not above using the Borden case to boost its own numbers. Not at all. "34 Columns of reading matter," its weekly edition advertised in big bold print, "comprising the latest developments in the Borden affair."

From his pulpit on Sunday morning Reverend Jubb of the Central Congregational Church begged, "Let us ourselves curb our tongues and preserve a blameless life from undeserved suspicions." The Bordens' pastor had every reason to be concerned. In spite of her friends' attempts to defend Lizzie's character, juicier stories were making the rounds. An indelible image of Lizzie Borden was emerging, one her nearest and dearest could barely recognize—a cold, conniving Lizzie Borden obsessed with wealth and privilege.

Lizzie, so a pair of local hatmakers heard, had been practicing in a gymnasium, boasting of building her strength. Mrs. Churchill, said a clerk at Troy Mill, had seen something in the Borden house the day of the murders that she would never repeat, even if they tore her tongue out. And everyone in town seemed to know that Lizzie had tried to coax Bridget out of the house just before Mr. Borden's murder by offering her money to buy one of the dress patterns on sale at Sargent's dry goods shop.

These second- and third-hand tales might have been dismissed as absurdities if not for unsettling remarks coming from those who were indeed acquainted with Lizzie Borden. Mrs. Borden's brother-in-law told police he believed Lizzie and her uncle John Morse had "concocted the deed, and hired someone to do it." Worse yet, the *New York Herald* quoted Uncle Morse himself admitting "that there had been ill-feeling between Mrs. Borden and her step-daughters."

One of the most scathing interviews came from another of Lizzie's uncles, Hiram Harrington, who claimed to have spoken with her at length on Friday evening. Whether the visit actually took place is hard to say. Harrington's story is a maddening mixture of the kind of intimate details only a family member might be expected to know and flagrant exaggerations—if not outright lies. He appears to be the first to verify the daylight robbery, for

example, but he embellished the story with the claim that diamonds had been among the items stolen. Harrington also tried to convince the *Herald* that Lizzie had refused to see anyone but him since the murder—a claim at least half a dozen friends and neighbors could disprove.

In a manner clearly evoking suspicion, Harrington described the uncharacteristic tenderness with which Lizzie helped Mr. Borden take off his coat and lie down for his nap Thursday morning: “She told me she helped him to get a comfortable reclining position on the lounge, and asked him if he did not wish the blinds closed to keep out the sun, so he could have a nice nap,” he said. “All these things showed a solicitude and a thoughtfulness that I never had heard was a part of her nature or custom before,” Harrington added, almost, but not quite, suggesting that she’d deliberately positioned her father for his murder.

When asked what motive for the crime, Harrington replied, “Money, unquestionably money. If Mr. Borden died he would have left something over \$500,000, and all I will say is that, in my opinion, that furnishes the only motive, and a sufficient one, for the double murder.” He had managed to say, without actually using the words, that Lizzie Borden slaughtered her own parents for her inheritance.

If a member of her own family suspected her, the public wondered, why couldn’t the police arrest Lizzie Borden? The officers had followed every outside lead—even those given by gossips, drunkards, and children—and come up with nothing. They’d hauled in the usual suspects—peddlers, Portuguese, Russian Jews—and been forced by lack of evidence to set them all free. They’d searched for a man seen with a monstrous cleaver and questioned Mr. Borden’s troublesome tenants. Nothing.

Every dead end forced the police to turn right back toward Miss Lizzie Borden of Number 92 Second Street. Everyone knew

Lizzie had refused to let the officers search her room—the *New York Herald* had said so. What more did the authorities need?

In his private office at the central police station, Marshal Hilliard sat considering the evidence. The press was watching, criticizing his every move. "The Fall River police are making a dreadfully bungling mess," a Rhode Island editor said, mocking the officers as "country bumpkins." Even the residents of Fall River had begun grumbling that if Lizzie Borden were a poor man's daughter, she'd have been locked up days ago.

The warrant alone was not enough. It would do no good to arrest anyone if he did not also have enough proof to hold them, and what Marshal Hilliard had told the press was true. He did not have one atom of direct evidence linking Lizzie Borden to the crime.