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# EPILOGUE

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For over a century, the public saw her only through a haze of headlines and rumors. But who was the woman behind the stories? How did she view herself? A photograph commissioned by Lizzie Borden herself and known only to her closest friends provides a bounty of clues.

Framed by the spindles and stonework of Maplecroft's back porch, a plump and graying Lizzie sits in a wicker rocking chair. Her lacy white summer gown just brushes the top of her shoe. A half smile plays about her lips, while her eyes, formerly so direct and penetrating, gaze down at the Boston bull terrier perched in her lap. One dainty hand curves around his fat rump.

She looks nothing like most people imagine, yet this is the image she wanted to project. Indeed, this is how her friends and neighbors remember her.

They remember a yard full of birdhouses, and squirrels so tame they climbed her shoulders. For young Russell Lake, who lived across the street, that yard was a haven, a place to escape from the neighborhood bully. Other children were frightened to walk by the place, but Russell knew he had nothing to fear—Miss Borden was always the best customer at his lemonade stand.

To her chauffeur's son and daughter she was "Auntie Borden," the lady who picnicked with them, sent them postcards and birthday wishes by special delivery, and took them on drives to nearby Tiverton, Rhode Island, for ice cream, in the fancy car with a little window seat made specially for her dog. Other youngsters cherished memories of reading or sharing games of cribbage with Auntie Borden beneath the shade of her maple trees. Lizzie's attentions made a profound impression on her surrogate nieces and nephews—one of them never failed to exclaim to her own grandchildren, "Now you remember . . . Lizzie had nothing to do with it," each time they drove past Maplecroft.

Her thoughtfulness extended beyond the city's children. She

sent weekly deliveries of groceries to pensioners and lent her automobile to invalids and shut-ins. Over the years, Laughlin McFarland, owner of a local bookstore, watched her buy hundreds of books for the city's poor. He thought so highly of her that he refused to stock a popular early study of the Borden case. When she died, she left \$30,000 of her fortune to Fall River's Animal Rescue League.

Unlike her father, she used her money to bring ease and comfort to herself and others. But money could not buy the one thing Miss Lizbeth wanted most. "I would give every cent I have in the world and beg in the streets," she once told a friend, "if it could only be proved while I live that I did not kill my father and my stepmother."

No one has ever proved or disproved it. Over one hundred years after the crime, the murders of Andrew and Abby Borden remain unsolved. Lizzie Borden had her own suspicions but refused to divulge them. "When I know how easy it is to be accused," she explained, "it ill befits me to accuse in my turn, since I don't know."

*Lizzie Borden took an axe,  
Gave her mother forty whacks.  
When she saw what she had done,  
She gave her father forty-one.*

Lizzie Borden, like the murders she was accused of, is an enigma—a symbol of either tortured innocence or insensible evil. The simplest solution to the mystery is also the most difficult to stomach, and so with each telling, the morning becomes hotter, the mutton older, the house on Second Street smaller and more cramped. Mr. Borden grows stingier, Mrs. Borden greedier. Lizzie Borden has become something so inhuman, her eyes glow red with hatred.

Despite the grip that legend continues to hold on the popular imagination, almost anyone who studies the Borden trial has no choice but to admit that the jury returned the proper verdict: not guilty. The evidence presented to those twelve men simply was not enough to put her to death.

But was Lizzie Borden truly innocent? We may never know.