

THE
**BORDEN
MURDERS**

LIZZIE BORDEN
& THE TRIAL OF THE
CENTURY

SARAH
MILLER

**LIZZIE BORDEN TOOK AN AXE,
GAVE HER MOTHER FORTY WHACKS.
WHEN SHE SAW WHAT SHE HAD DONE,
SHE GAVE HER FATHER FORTY-ONE.**

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A YEARLING BOOK

WHO'S WHO

THE BORDEN FAMILY

Abby Borden: Andrew's second wife

Andrew Borden: Lizzie and Emma's father

Emma Borden: eldest daughter of Andrew and Sarah Morse Borden

Lizzie Borden: youngest daughter of Andrew and Sarah Morse Borden

Hiram Harrington: Lizzie and Emma's uncle (by marriage) on their father's side

John Morse: Lizzie and Emma's uncle on their mother's side

FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Dr. Seabury Bowen: the Borden family physician; first doctor on the scene

Mary Ella Brigham: Lizzie's childhood friend

Reverend Edwin Buck: missionary at the Fall River Central Congregational Church

Adelaide Churchill: the Borden's next-door neighbor; first witness on the scene

Marianna Holmes: a Borden family acquaintance; mother of Lizzie's schoolmate

Alice Russell: friend and former next-door neighbor of the Borden sisters

Bridget Sullivan: the Borden's maid, called Maggie by the Borden sisters

POLICE AND CITY AUTHORITIES

George Allen: first policeman on the scene

Dr. John Coughlin: mayor of Fall River

Dennis Desmond: headed the search of the Borden cellar on August 8

Dr. William Dolan: Bristol County medical examiner

John Fleet: assistant marshal

Philip Harrington: questioned Lizzie on August 4

Rufus Hilliard: city marshal of Fall River

Joseph Hyde: guarded the back of the Borden property on the evening of August 4

William Medley: questioned Lizzie Borden and searched the barn on August 4

Michael Mullaly: discovered the handleless hatchet on August 8

Hannah Reagan: matron at Fall River's Central Police Station

George Seaver: searched the clothes press on August 6

Deputy Sheriff Francis "Frank" Wixon: searched the Borden yard on August 4

LAWYERS AND JUDGES

Colonel Melvin Ohio Adams: associate counsel for the defense

Josiah Blaisdell: justice of Bristol County District Court; presided over the Borden inquest and hearing

Caleb Blodgett: associate justice of Massachusetts Superior Court; presided over the Borden trial

Justin Dewey: associate justice of Massachusetts Superior Court; presided over the Borden trial

Andrew J. Jennings: associate counsel for the defense

Hosea M. Knowlton: district attorney of the Southern District of Massachusetts

Albert Mason: chief justice of Massachusetts Superior Court; presided over Borden trial

William Henry Moody: associate counsel for the prosecution

George Dexter Robinson: former governor of Massachusetts; head of Lizzie Borden's defense team

KEY WITNESSES

Thomas Barlow and Everett Brown: passersby on Second Street

Eli Bence: clerk at D. R. Smith's drugstore

Hannah Gifford: cloakmaker

Hymon Lubinsky: ice cream peddler

Edward Wood: professor and chemist at Harvard University

LIZZIE BORDEN TOOK AN AXE . . .

It happened every spring in Fall River, Massachusetts. Behind the curtained windows of the stately house she shared with her sister on French Street, Miss Lizbeth Borden heard the children skipping rope on the sidewalk, chanting a rhyme to the once-popular tune of "Ta-Ra-Ra Boom-De-Ay":

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

Year after year, she listened to them butcher her family's tragic past. A new century had dawned since the brutal hatchet murders of Miss Lizbeth's father and stepmother captured the nation's attention. She had altered her name from Lizzie to Lizbeth and left the family home on Second Street, where the terrible deed was done, and still the ditty followed her.

Most of Miss Lizbeth's well-bred neighbors up on Fall River's posh "Hill" refused to speak about the Borden slayings, let alone the fact that the Bordens' own daughter, Miss Lizbeth herself, had been accused of them. And yet their children never failed to learn the rhyme. The youngsters singing it now had not even been alive on August 4, 1892, but that didn't stop them from contributing new verses:

*Andrew Borden now is dead.
Lizzie hit him on the head.
Up in heaven he will sing,
On the gallows she will swing.*

Miss Lizbeth's sensational murder trial, the jury's momentous decision, the time she spent behind bars, none of that mattered. In the decades that followed, the citizens of Fall River—young and old—enacted their own sentence upon her.

The members of the Central Congregational Church, where Miss Lizbeth had been a member of the Christian Endeavor Society and taught immigrants at the Central Mission Sunday School, publicly shunned her. Friends, even those who had testified to her innocence, quietly broke away.

Over the years mischievous children trampled her lawn and lobbed rotting eggs at the clapboards of her home. Handfuls of sand and gravel rained upon her windowpanes. They tied her doorknobs and stuck pins in her doorbell to make it ring non-stop. At least they did not chant their jump-rope rhyme to her face when she answered the bell. Instead, they called her vile names before dashing from the porch.

Gawkers in Oak Grove Cemetery—adults, no less—rubbernecked at the sight of Miss Lizbeth Borden, come to tend the graves of her supposed victims. "Miss Borden, don't pay any attention to them," Terrance Lomax, the grounds foreman, often told her as he accompanied her to the plot where her parents lay alongside the baby sister she had never known. Certainly Miss Lizbeth was grateful for Terrance and the discreet handful of others who were kind and respectful to her in spite of her past. Everyone had heard the rumors about her beheading troublesome kittens and baby birds, but only a few knew of the tender notes and thoughtful gifts she dispensed—people like the coal delivery man who always found a slice of chocolate cake waiting inside Miss Lizbeth's basement, or the sick little girl who received a pretty painted bowl full of gumdrops with a five-dollar bill hidden at the bottom from "Auntie Borden." There was little that Miss Lizbeth treasured above loyalty, and contrary to her public

image, she delighted in doting upon those, like Terrance, who graced her later years with their companionship.

But did Miss Lizbeth realize that even Terrance, the sympathetic groundskeeper who made sure the paths to the Borden family plot were cleared in winter and was too polite to accept her persistent attempts to tip him, had gone to witness the spectacle of her trial as a young man?

In the same way the children chanting outside her windows marked the arrival of spring for Miss Lizbeth, the newspaper headlines heralded summer's peak. Every August, the *Fall River Daily Globe* observed the anniversary of Andrew and Abby Borden's deaths by printing another front-page tirade against the "incarnate fiend in human form [who] rained cruel, vengeful, bloody blow after blow upon Andrew J. Borden's venerable head." Always, the *Globe* was at pains to remind the citizenry that the man—or woman—who had committed the crime still wandered among them. There was no need to print a name. Every man, woman, and child in Fall River knew perfectly well who the *Globe's* pointing finger accused.

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

Today, everything most people know of Lizzie Andrew Borden is contained in those four singsong lines of doggerel. And nearly everything in those four lines is wrong.

MURDER!

"SOMEBODY HAS KILLED FATHER"

Thursday, August 4, 1892

Lizzie could hardly look past the blood, there was so much of it. Blood soaked Mr. Borden's neatly folded Prince Albert coat. It dripped from the slick horsehair cushions to the flowered carpet below. It arced in a fine spatter across the wall and picture frame above. In the midst of it all, her father lay stretched out on the couch with his face so carved and bloodied that she did not know whether he was alive or dead. "I did not notice anything else, I was so frightened and horrified. I ran to the foot of the stairs and called Maggie."

Bridget Sullivan—nicknamed Maggie by Lizzie and her sister—had barely managed to drift to sleep when the shouting woke her. Bridget did not dally an instant. A housemaid had no business stealing a few winks at eleven in the morning, and besides, that scream was too loud, too strident for any ordinary reprimand.

"What is the matter?" Bridget shouted back.

"Come down quick!"

Down three flights of stairs Bridget came pounding to find Miss Lizzie Borden in a state such as she'd never seen before—backed up against the screen door as though she were about to flee the house entirely.

"Go for Dr. Bowen as soon as you can," Lizzie commanded. "I think Father is hurt."

Instinctively Bridget moved toward the sitting room to see what was the matter with her employer, Mr. Andrew Borden. "Oh, Maggie, don't go in," Lizzie cried. "I have got to have a doctor quick. Go over. I have got to have the doctor," she insisted.

Bridget dashed across Second Street and "rang violently" at Dr. Bowen's door, only to have Mrs. Bowen inform her that the

doctor was out making house calls. Back Bridget hurried with the bad news. Lizzie had not budged from the doorway.

"Miss Lizzie, where was you?" Bridget ventured to ask. "Didn't I leave the screen door hooked?"

"I was out in the backyard and heard a groan, and came in and the screen door was wide open."

But Lizzie Borden did not want to answer questions. She wanted help. If she could not have the doctor, she wanted her friend, Miss Alice Russell. "Go and get her," she begged. "I can't be alone in the house."

Bridget yanked her hat and shawl from their hook and took off toward Borden Street.

Lizzie Borden waited, alone—as far as anyone knew. There were three locks on the front door. No one intent on harming her father could have gotten in that way. And anyone who might still be lurking inside could not possibly escape without her notice now.

"Lizzie, what is the matter?" said a voice from behind her. But it was only Mrs. Adelaide Churchill, the young widow next door. On her way home from her marketing she'd noticed Bridget crossing the street from Dr. Bowen's house, "running, and she looked as if she was scared." Mrs. Churchill went straight home and laid her groceries on a bench in the kitchen. Through her kitchen window she caught a glimpse of Miss Lizzie leaning against the doorway of the back screen, rubbing her face "as if she was in great distress." The young woman looked so much out of sorts, Mrs. Churchill had opened her window and called across the fence.

"O, Mrs. Churchill," Lizzie answered, "do come over, somebody has killed Father."

By the time Mrs. Churchill hurried across the yard, Lizzie had sunk down onto the second step, "pale and frightened."

“O Lizzie, where is your father?” she asked, laying a hand on Lizzie’s arm.

“In the sitting room.”

Mrs. Churchill did not go in. Instead, she asked, “Where was you when it happened?”

“I went to the barn to get a piece of iron.”

“Where is your mother?”

“I don’t know,” Lizzie said, her words spilling out now, “she had a note to go and see someone that was sick this morning, but I don’t know but they have killed her too. Father must have had an enemy, for we have all been sick, and we think the milk has been poisoned. Dr. Bowen is not at home, but I must have a doctor.”

“Shall I go, Lizzie, and try to find someone to go and get a doctor?” Mrs. Churchill asked.

She answered yes, and Mrs. Churchill ran across the street to L. L. Hall’s Stable for help.

Lizzie Borden did not want to be alone in that house. She had told Bridget so, and still Bridget had brought her neither the doctor nor Miss Russell. Where could that girl be?

“I DON’T KNOW BUT WHAT MR. BORDEN IS DEAD”

It was no more than quarter past eleven when Alice Russell saw the Borden’s maid hurrying up her front steps. Right then Alice knew there was trouble. Only last evening her friend Lizzie had come calling with worrisome news. She and her father and step-mother, Lizzie said, had all been taken sick Tuesday night—very sick indeed.

Alice laid aside her work at once and met Bridget at the door.

“What is it, Bridget? Are they worse?” Alice asked.

Bridget did not take time to explain. She hardly knew herself

just what had happened. "Yes," the young Irishwoman said. "I don't know but what Mr. Borden is dead." She paused only long enough to hear Alice say she would come before taking off again. To Bridget's relief, Dr. Bowen was just stepping from his carriage as she ran back up Second Street.

"What is the matter, Lizzie?" Dr. Bowen asked as he entered the house.

Under any other circumstances, the sight of his familiar face with its graying mustache and side-whiskers might have calmed Lizzie. After all, he had lived across the street from the Bordens for twenty years; she had known him since she was a girl of twelve.

Lizzie answered that she was afraid her father had been stabbed or hurt.

That one word—*stabbed*—took him aback. He expected sickness, possibly bad, judging from the way his wife had called out *They want you quick over to Mr. Borden's!* before he stepped from his carriage. Even poisoning would not have completely surprised him. The previous day, Mrs. Borden had arrived at his office before eight o'clock in the morning, nearly hysterical with fear that her family's bread had been tainted. But stabbing?

"Has there been anybody here?" Dr. Bowen asked.

Not as she knew of, Lizzie answered.

"Where is he?" the doctor asked.

Lizzie led him through the dining room and motioned toward the sitting room door. Not a sound came from the other side.

Steeled for the worst, Dr. Bowen went in.

Nothing in all his twenty-five years as a medical man had prepared Dr. Bowen for the sight that assaulted him as he stepped into the Bordens' sitting room. Before him on the sofa, Lizzie's father lay keeled sideways, the left side of his face so smashed that Dr. Bowen did not, could not, recognize him. The elderly gentle-

man's features were a pulp of chipped bone and razored flesh, his left eye cleaved in two.

The wounds were so violent, so obviously criminal, that they completely derailed Bowen's instincts as a doctor. Instead, his first thought was that of a policeman. Something in that room—something besides the obvious horror on the sofa—felt wrong. "Like a flash," it struck him to check the room to see if anything else was disturbed. Nothing. Not one thing was out of place, not even a speck of blood on the side table. It was not a particularly reassuring observation.

Only then did the doctor do what he had been called upon to do, and lifted one of Mr. Borden's hands from his lap to feel for a pulse. Still warm, but that was all.

"WILL SOMEBODY FIND MRS. BORDEN?"

Alice Russell had taken just enough time to change her dress before hurrying over the three blocks that separated her home from the Bordens'. There, she found Bridget, Mrs. Churchill, and a "dazed" Lizzie. "Sit right down here Lizzie in the kitchen," Alice told her friend, and led her to a rocking chair.

While Mrs. Churchill fanned Lizzie, Alice rubbed Lizzie's hands and bathed her forehead with wet cloths. No one informed Alice what was wrong with Mr. Borden, but seeing her friend in such a state must have told her that it was something dreadful. The Lizzie she knew was simply not the sort of person who came easily unhinged.

At this moment, however, Lizzie Borden was not herself at all. She seemed so much in need of comfort that Alice could not content herself with holding Lizzie's hand. Within minutes of her

arrival, Alice Russell climbed into the chair beside Lizzie as though she were a child, and Lizzie laid her head on Alice's shoulder.

Then Lizzie's voice, drifting up from beneath the waving newspapers and cool compresses, stopped them all with one simple question:

"Will somebody find Mrs. Borden?"

Amidst all the frantic coming and going, the women realized, not one of them had seen Abby Borden.

Lizzie was insistent that her stepmother had received a note that morning. Somebody was sick, Mrs. Borden had told her, and she intended to call on the invalid when she went out to pick up the meat for that afternoon's dinner.

"Oh, Lizzie," Bridget said, "if I knew where [Mrs. Borden's sister] was I would go and see if Mrs. Borden was there and tell her that Mr. Borden was very sick."

"No," Lizzie replied, "I think I heard her come in."

But if Mrs. Borden had already returned from her errand, why didn't she come running herself when Lizzie screamed for Bridget? Mrs. Borden's second-floor bedroom was directly below Bridget's—the maid had rushed right by it on her way down. Wouldn't the repeated slamming of the screen door or the drumming of excited footsteps have attracted Mrs. Borden's attention as the neighbors arrived on the scene?

As the pitch of excitement rose, Lizzie's conviction wavered. "I don't know where Mrs. Borden is," she said to Mrs. Churchill. "I think she is out, but I wish you would look."

Someone must search the house for Mrs. Borden, the women decided, and it would not be Lizzie. She was plainly in no condition to do any such thing.

At that moment, Dr. Bowen came out of the sitting room, shaking his head as though he hoped to dislodge the image of what he had just seen from his mind. "That is awful," he said.

"O, I can't go through that room," Bridget said. From where they stood, there was no way into the front of the house but through the sitting room, where Mr. Borden's murdered body lay with the blood still oozing onto the haircloth sofa.

LAYOUT OF THE BORDEN HOUSE

When Andrew Borden bought Number 92 Second Street in 1872, it was not a single-family home. At that time the building was fitted out as upper and lower flats with identical floor plans: a front parlor, central dining room, rear kitchen, and two small side bedrooms. This compact arrangement accounts for both the lack of hallways and the peculiar interconnecting layout of the upstairs bedrooms during the Bordens' time—Lizzie's room had once been the upstairs family's dining room, with doors opening to the entry, parlor, kitchen, and one of the bedrooms.

Andrew Borden made two substantial changes to the house. He tore out the upstairs kitchen and converted the space into a master bedroom, and he joined the two downstairs bedrooms to create a large dining room. What had been the downstairs family's dining room then became the Bordens' notorious sitting room.

The most significant alteration, however—at least in terms of the murder—was not structural. It was the mutually locked door between Lizzie's room and the master bedroom. That door, with its bolt on one side and hook on the other, essentially became a wall dividing the second floor into two completely separate

compartments. As long as both sides of that door were locked, no one in the front half of the upstairs could access the master bedroom, back stairs, back door, cellar, or attic without going down the front stairs and passing through both the sitting room and the kitchen.

"Get me a sheet, and I will cover Mr. Borden over," Dr. Bowen offered.

But the linens were stored upstairs in the small dressing room off Mr. and Mrs. Borden's locked bedroom. And the key to that bedroom lay on the mantel in the sitting room—just steps from Mr. Borden.

Again Dr. Bowen spared the ladies by going back into the sitting room to retrieve the key, and a reluctant Bridget, accompanied by Mrs. Churchill, set off up the back stairs.

"GO AND GET THE POLICE AS FAST AS YOU CAN"

"Doctor, will you send a telegram to Emma, my sister, for me?" Lizzie asked after he had draped Mr. Borden's body.

"I will do anything for you," Bowen gallantly replied. As a doctor, there was nothing left for him to do. He acted now as a friend.

Her mind suddenly astir with practicalities, Lizzie asked him to word the telegram as gently as possible, not just for her sister's sake, but because "the old lady where Emma was visiting was feeble, she had better not have the shock."

As Dr. Bowen headed out the back door, two men met him at the screen—one was Charles Sawyer, a neighbor from just a few doors down Second Street. Bowen balked at letting them in until Sawyer identified his companion, a burly, pork-faced fellow

dressed in an ordinary suit of clothes, as Officer George Allen of the Fall River Police Department.

"All right, come right in," Bowen said.

Before he went any farther, Officer Allen deputized Mr. Sawyer and stationed him at the screen door with instructions that he must not allow anyone to come in, only police officers. Then Allen followed Dr. Bowen into the sitting room, where the doctor pulled the sheet from Mr. Borden's face. "You go down, and tell the Marshal all about it," Bowen instructed the policeman. "Go and get the police as fast as you can."

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Lizzie's moments of clearheadedness were fading in and out.

Again Lizzie said, "I wish someone would go and try to find Mrs. Borden."

They could avoid it no longer. Once more Bridget and Mrs. Churchill screwed up their courage to creep through the house. There was no one else for the job.

Together, the two women went through the dining room to the sitting room door. From there they scurried kitty-corner toward the foyer, trying not to see the end of the sofa a few inches to their left, where Mr. Borden's head lay. Bridget was just ahead of Mrs. Churchill, leading the way. Down the hall and then up the open staircase they crept, uncertain whether a murderer still lurked within the house.

As the floor of the landing and then the open door to the guest room came into view, Mrs. Churchill turned her head, peering beneath the railing. Her nose was not quite level with the second floor. Through the spindles she could see across the landing and straight under the guest-room bed. Lying on the floor on the other side of the bed was something she did not want to recognize, but

even in the dim light she could not pretend it was anything but the form of a person.

Mrs. Churchill went not one step farther.

Bridget, suddenly bold, continued. Drawn by the glimpse of a woman's dress on the floor, she ran as far as the foot of the spare bed before the dreadful sight stopped her: Mrs. Borden, splayed facedown on the red Brussels carpet between the bed and the bureau in a thick black pool of drying blood.

Mrs. Churchill did not wait for Bridget to react. She rushed downstairs into the dining room, so frightened she doubled herself up, and cried out, "O, Mrs. Borden!"

"Is there another?" Alice Russell asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Churchill gasped, "they killed her too."

"FOR GOD'S SAKE, HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?"

First her father, now her stepmother. Lizzie reeled at this second blow, appearing so "very much overcome" that Alice Russell was compelled to shepherd her friend out of the hot kitchen and into the dining room. There Lizzie "threw herself" down on the green-striped lounge at the end of the room.

Alice bustled and fussed over Lizzie, anxious to keep her cool and calm. Thinking she was faint, she started to loosen Lizzie's dress. But Lizzie suddenly rallied, refusing to succumb completely to Alice's ministrations.

"I am not faint," Lizzie declared.

Nevertheless, Alice and Mrs. Churchill strove to maintain an atmosphere of calm for Lizzie's sake, even as a rapid succession of policemen bombarded the Borden property.

ROCKY POINT

Not every member of the Fall River police force was at the Borden house on August 4. Far from it. It just so happened that the homicide at 92 Second Street coincided with the annual policemen's excursion to a popular amusement park. At 8:00 that morning, a number of officers and their families had boarded the steamer *Mt. Hope*, bound for Rocky Point in Warwick, Rhode Island. There, on the shores of Narragansett Bay, they could partake of theater, vaudeville shows, music, dancing, a Ferris wheel, a toboggan run, and various outdoor sports. The ferry would not return for them until 4:15 that afternoon.

Just how many policemen were absent that day? Accounts vary. The *Boston Advertiser* estimated only half the force was away, while in the *Fall River Globe's* report the figure swelled to 80 percent. The more conservative *Fall River Daily Herald* settled on a non-specific "majority." Author Edward Radin, who busted many a Borden myth in the 1960s, was most conservative of all, saying the picnic was limited to off-duty patrolmen. Whatever the actual number, the on-duty policemen were at a distinct disadvantage.

First came Inspector Patrick Doherty and Deputy Sheriff Francis Wixon. Then Officer Allen returned to the scene with Officers Michael Mullaly and John Devine.

They swarmed everywhere—searching the barn, the yard, the cellar and attics. Virtually all of them angled for a glimpse of

Mr. and Mrs. Borden, and all of them wanted information from Lizzie.

Did you see anyone around here?

Is there any Portuguese working on the farm over the river for your father?

PORTUGUESE

To be Portuguese in Fall River in 1892 meant to be constantly under suspicion. As far as the middle- and upper-class citizens were concerned, members of the swarthy-skinned Roman Catholic immigrant population were the first to blame for any unsavory goings-on, and August 4 was no different. One Portuguese man was brought into the police station on the day of the murders for withdrawing his life savings of about sixty dollars (approximately \$1,450 today) from the bank. Another was reported for asking directions to New York.

What motive?

Was it robbery?

Have you any reason, no matter how slight, to suspect anybody?

Even Lizzie's own relatives could not spare her their questions. Shortly after Mullaly and Doherty finished probing her for information, Lizzie's uncle John Morse burst in, demanding, "For God's sake, how did this happen?" Nothing had seemed amiss when he dropped in for an overnight visit the afternoon before.

Just three hours earlier Andrew Borden himself had unhooked the back screen door for him, inviting Morse to finish his errands in time to share their noon meal. Now both his hosts were dead.

Dr. Bowen, returning from the telegraph office just as Mullaly and Wixon arrived, did his best to shield Lizzie from the mounting commotion. He covered Mr. Borden again and instructed Alice Russell to take Lizzie upstairs. "She better go up to her room," the doctor said, "and stay there."

Alice readily agreed. Despite the admirable composure Lizzie had displayed with Mullaly and Doherty, the congestion and disorder on the first floor were becoming too much to expect her to handle. Alice herself was so bewildered by it all, she did not know anymore how many people were in the house.

Without the policemen buzzing around her, Lizzie's thoughts returned to practical matters. "When it is necessary for an undertaker I want Winward," she told Alice upstairs, wanting to make sure Dr. Bowen knew of her wishes concerning funeral arrangements. And there was another, even more personal matter, something she must tell her doctor about. If the policemen found it, they would surely jump to the wrong conclusions—a small pail of bloodstained cloths, soaking in the cellar. Incriminating as it seemed, the bloody little bucket had no bearing on the search. It was instead a spectacularly inconvenient coincidence: at the time of her parents' murder, with the whole of the Fall River police force mobilizing a hunt for a blood-spattered murderer, Miss Lizzie Borden had the misfortune to be menstruating.

With Alice gone to fetch Dr. Bowen, Lizzie stepped into her sister's room. Like many of the rooms on the second floor, the sisters' bedrooms connected. Emma had traded bedrooms with her sister two years ago, and Lizzie's things were now arranged in

the larger of the two. What Lizzie gained in space, however, she'd lost in privacy: anyone who wanted to enter or leave Emma's room had to walk through Lizzie's to do so. Lizzie's bedroom also adjoined the guest room and her parents' bedroom. There were latches on both sides of her parents' door, though, and the guest-room door was not only locked and bolted but blocked by her tall writing desk. No one could enter her room unless she allowed it. Still, on either side of those other doors Lizzie could hear voices, footsteps. Occasionally the handles rattled as another police officer tried to turn them. Emma's room, with its single entrance, was the most private space she had access to just then, and Lizzie Borden wasted no time in taking full advantage of it.

"WE KNEW THE STATE SHE WAS IN"

When Alice returned, she found Lizzie just stepping out of Emma's room, tying a red ribbon at her waist. In the few minutes she was alone, Lizzie had changed from an old blue skirt and blouse into a pink-and-white-striped wrapper—a dress that crossed in the front like a robe and fastened with a bow.

It ought not to have seemed odd. No lady who expected to greet callers would remain in her work dress. Granted, a murder investigation is not exactly a social occasion, but even Alice herself had quickly changed into a fresh dress before running to the Borden house when Bridget came for help. Bridget Sullivan would also steal a few moments to do the same before the afternoon was over. There was something about that pink wrapper of Lizzie's, though. Perhaps it was the bright red ribbon, or the sheen of the pale fabric's finish, but everyone who saw Lizzie in that dress that day seemed to take particular notice of it.

If Lizzie's change of clothes struck Alice as strange at that moment, she brushed off her misgivings. With so many people in the house, she reasoned, Lizzie "wanted to get into a respectable appearance." It wasn't just the police who wanted to see her. By one o'clock, two visitors offering support and condolences arrived at 92 Second Street: the Reverend Edwin Buck and Mrs. Marianna Holmes, mother of one of Lizzie's former schoolmates.

Throughout the afternoon, the two of them helped Alice tend to Lizzie as though she were an invalid. Alice was grateful for the extra hands. She had no intention of leaving Lizzie alone again, knowing the state she was in. "When one was out, another made a point to be there." Lizzie stayed on her little sofa by the windows with Reverend Buck sitting quietly beside her and let them fuss over her. Her head ached. Dr. Bowen brought her a preparation of bromo caffeine—a medicine about as potent as aspirin—to blunt the pain and calm her nerves.

They kept her bedroom door locked, too. Retreating upstairs had gained Lizzie only a little more privacy. Her door stood right at the head of the steps. Everyone who came to view Mrs. Borden's body—policemen, medical examiners, reporters—passed by it on their way to the spare room, and if Lizzie's door was not kept locked, they were "apt to open it" on their way past.

The locked door did not prevent the police from gaining access to Lizzie, however. Two more policemen, first Medley and then Officer Philip Harrington, came knocking and interviewed Lizzie in her bedroom. Next, Mullaly returned with yet more questions. After Mullaly came Assistant Marshal John Fleet in plainclothes.

He asked more of the questions Lizzie had answered at least half a dozen times already: *Where were you? How long? Who has been in the house? Could your uncle or the maid have had anything to do with it?* Lizzie gave him the answers she had given to all the

others. Her story, assembled from the hundreds of questions she answered over that first week, went like this:

There were a few trifling chores to do that morning—handkerchiefs that needed ironing, some clean clothes to put away, a bit of mending. The handkerchiefs lay ready and sprinkled on the little ironing board in the dining room, but her flatirons were not hot enough. As she waited for them to heat on the stove, Lizzie leafed idly through an old Harper's Magazine at the kitchen table.

The house was quiet.

Her father napped in the sitting room—she had just watched him fold his Prince Albert coat into a pillow and stretch out on the sofa. Her stepmother was upstairs making up the guest room, or perhaps by now downstreet doing the one or two errands she'd mentioned to Lizzie earlier. Bridget had finished washing the windows and gone up to her attic bedroom to snatch a catnap of her own before fixing dinner.

DOWNSTREET

Why "downstreet" instead of "downtown"? Because the heart of Fall River lay in a dimple in the landscape. Rising to the north was the Hill, where the mill owners and other well-to-do families had their grand homes. South was the Bordens' neighborhood, an area called the Flats, which ranged across another smaller hill that also pointed downward into the business district. Here, mostly middle-class families lived alongside small groceries, restaurants, laundries, churches, stables, and candy stores.

Whether they came from the Hill or the Flats, most citizens of Fall River had to literally descend the street to reach the city's center.

Lizzie grew bored with the magazine, and still the stubborn flat-irons were not hot. She could not say what made her think, just at that moment, of her fishing poles. She had not used them for five years or so. But a party of friends had arranged a fishing excursion on Monday, and it seemed to Lizzie that there were no sinkers on her lines last time she used them. Perhaps she could find some lead or iron up in the barn for new ones. It was something to do, anyway, while the slow flats heated.

Lizzie left the kitchen and went out into the yard, leaving the side screen door unlatched behind her.

The Bordens' pears were ripe already, riper than the Chagnons' whole orchard just over the back fence. Lizzie dallied to gather a few from the ground beneath a tree near the barn before climbing to the loft. They were still cool from the night's chill, their flesh sweet and light—not at all like that mutton soup the family had been dining on since Wednesday noon. After the way she'd felt the day before, she did not even want to think about meat. She nibbled at one and then another as she straightened the curtain on the window in the west peak—the one that looked down over the house. There she lingered, for no reason in particular, munching on the last of her pears in full view of the side yard and screen door before crossing the loft to rummage through a box of old things on the workbench.

And then—was that a noise? The window was closed; she had heard nothing out of the ordinary before. But now . . . a peculiar noise, it seemed to Lizzie. Something like scraping. Or a groan?

By the time Lizzie Borden reached the screen door, it was wide open.

“A THOUGHT THAT WAS MOST REVOLTING”

Assistant Marshal Fleet listened to Lizzie's story, noting it all down. Then he asked, “Has your father or mother—”

"She is not my mother," Lizzie interrupted, "she is my step-mother; my own mother is dead."

It was a plain and simple fact, but under the circumstances the remark did not sit well with Fleet. To top it off, Lizzie's demeanor struck the assistant marshal as decidedly chilly. More troubling yet, not at any time during the interview had she been in tears.

Fleet's impressions dovetailed all too neatly with the intuitions Officer Harrington felt during his own encounter with the freshly orphaned Miss Borden. Harrington observed that in contrast to Alice Russell, whose deathly pallor; short, sharp breathing; and fidgeting hands had betrayed her anxiety,

Lizzie stood by the foot of the bed, and talked in the most calm and collected manner; her whole bearing was most remarkable under the circumstances. There was not the least indication of agitation, no sign of sorrow or grief, no lamentation of the heart, no comment on the horror of the crime, and no expression of a wish that the criminal be caught. All this, and something that, to me, is indescribable, gave birth to a thought that was most revolting.

Right then and there, with no more evidence than that, Lizzie Borden became the prime suspect.