

Lizzie Borden - Part 2

The Victims' Complacency

It's hard to believe that neither victim worried that one or both of the sisters might try to pre-empt the looming loss of the legacy, especially after so many episodes of inexplicable illness, but, from their location and postures, we can see that they did not.

One end of the couch was right at the doorway of the parlor. The father's position on the couch, with his back to the doorway and head so close to it, is the most vulnerable attitude he could have chosen. Anyone who enters the room, is behind him, already within arm's length of his head. He wouldn't be able to see that anyone was there, unless he bent his neck back, to look at her, upside down, and he couldn't have done so, in time to react. To strike the first blow, would not even require entering the room; just a bit of reach. If he was so debilitated from the poison, that he could not stand up long enough to get to a safer place than a first-floor room, he would, at least, have faced the other way. Facing the doorway, his head would have been farther away from it, by the length of the couch, presenting his attacker with an approach of several steps, to her target, and his eyesight would have been naturally directed at anyone entering the room, without the need to bend his neck.

The step-mother let Lizzie get behind her and close enough to do the deed. She was stuck from behind. She wasn't just barely inside the door, like the father, but across the room and on the other side of the bed. She must face the door to make the bed. How long could she have been turned so far away from the door, that she would not see someone enter it? Even if Lizzie had approached the door, quietly, and peeked around, waiting for her victim to turn her back, she would have had to get all the way across the room and around the bed, unnoticed.

1} For some of the time she must have had her back turned to the door. She would have faced the dresser, which had a big mirror. It is possible to be so close to a mirror that you are the only thing you can see, but she could not have blocked her own view of someone behind her for the entire time it would take Lizzie to get her. The closer you are, the wider is the angle you can see, behind (unless you are exactly in front of the mirror, completely blocking your view, with your own presence). From that position, very close to the mirror (off-center) you can see a very broad angle, behind. Lizzie had to get around the bed, so she could not hope for her approach to be obscured the whole way, as she might if she could have approached on a direct line. There would be no point on Lizzie's path from the door to her objective, where her reflection would be so unlikely to be seen, as to make a surreptitious approach, possible, except by 'inside-straight' luck. She could not hang such an endeavor on such a slim chance.

2} How perfectly cut and fitted must every floorboard be, and how uncompromised from new, must be the construction, not to make the slightest sound?

3} Women's clothing of that time, made so much noise, that we derive the word, "frou-frou", from the sound. That alone eliminates the possibility that the step-mother did not know when Lizzie

entered the room. A] One movie has her naked for the sake of not getting anything bloody, but, approaching the mother that way, doesn't diminish the risk of being seen, and, if seen like that, Lizzie is foiled. The step-mother would forget everything else, if only to resolve her wonderment. When someone shows up, inappropriately naked, it's hard to look away, whether that person is your cup of sarsaparilla, or far from it. B] Bridget said that Lizzie was wearing a blue dress that morning, and Alice Russell said she saw Lizzie burning a dress in the basement. (It was on that statement that Lizzie was indicted. [The weirdest thing about the case is that someone just walked into the house, between the murders, and strolled around.]) > Even if Lizzie could have entered the room without an outer garment, and with all the stated stipulations stripped away from the situation, it's unlikely that she could get that far, undetected. The step-mother must have turned her back to Lizzie, knowing she was in the room, and approaching her, on the very day, perhaps at the very moment she could expect that John and the father were doing the paperwork of disenfranchising the daughters, to give everything to her.

It's tempting to say that, if the parents had anything but half-a-cabbage where the brain is traditionally housed, they would have been too wary for Lizzie to succeed, but complacency is not rational. Their complacency is the suppression of sensible expectation, encouraged by continuously evading consequences.

How Lizzie Could Have Won By Killing Only One

The father probably did not feel close enough to his wife's family to leave them everything he owned. I assume he would have done so, only to please her, but that impetus would be eliminated by her death. 1} Killing her, would remove Lizzie's most pressing reason to kill him, but the murder would have been alienating. 2} Another reason for giving his money to his in-laws, must have been to spite the sisters for foiling his yen for Emma. > He still would have left it to someone beside the sisters, unless Lizzie had an ace up her bustle. She had a pair up there.

The bloody manner of the first murder, would guide people away from suspecting a woman. The harrowing violence is consistent with her emotional motive, but she could have planned it, rationally, to throw the scent of suspicion, away from herself, with a male signature. In the absence of any obvious motive, there is no explanation for the visceral method, except that men do, sometimes, kill their wives, in a bloody manner. He is, statistically, a far more plausible possibility, and the first person everyone would think of. Because he would have been the default suspect, had he survived, Lizzie wouldn't have to say anything too specific which could be challenged with facts or by comparison to known patterns of such relationships; e.g., 'in recent years, they often argued ... I knew things were getting worse, but I never dreamed ...' Lizzie could only have entertained this hope, combined with the hope that the coroner would say that the step-mother had died no later than the father left the house. The 9:30 death estimate would clear him, if he could convince the police that he had left by 8:30. Even if he had made it to the bank, and disinherited Emma, Lizzie might have persuaded him to change the will, back, to their favor, wielding the threat to frame him, in lieu of an axe. That agreement would have to be settled, between learning of his wife's death and the moment the police arrived.

Lizzie's hope of winning without killing the father, was much lower if she hadn't already fixed

Bridgit to say that he was at home, close to the time of the first murder. If the father had remained alive, everyone would have looked to Bridgit to declare what time he had left the house. It would require a very steely temperament to lie to the police about the father's actions, in his presence. The hope of payment, might steady her nerves. It would help if she knew of Lizzie's motive. (The question of how much Bridgit might have known, is the most intriguing thing about this case.)