

THE LIZZIE BORDEN CHRONICLES  
HOUR ONE

by

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LIZZIE BORDEN. Eyes locked on Almy, expression tight.

RESUME SECRETARY

Studying Lizzie. Her "work" is a penciled caricature (on Pelton letterhead) depicting Lizzie as a skulking, skirted demon replete with forked tail and hooves.

The Secretary writes: "*Lizzie on the Hunt*".

The Secretary looks up to see --

LIZZIE BORDEN, through the glass, STARING AT HER. SPOOKY.

The Secretary BARKS A STARTLED SCREAM. The OFFICE MANAGER appears (she SCREAMS again) and snatches the sketch in anger before hurrying toward the entrance, shooing the Kids.

The Secretary sneaks a look to see Lizzie, grinning in dark satisfaction before looking back to the men.

9

**INT. PELTON'S GLASS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

9

Emma is angry. Lizzie is disinterested. Almy winds his pocket watch before dropping it by its chain into his vest pocket.

EMMA

Mr. Almy, you're denying us the life we're owed.

(to Pelton)

And you are denying our father's last wishes.

PELTON

I work with the law, not wishes.

EMMA

How do we owe you this much money?  
Father's will states --

\*

ALMY

It's very simple. Andrew Borden's assets and debts are yours now. And since I'm the estate's largest creditor --

\*

\*

\*

LIZZIE

-- you're first at the trough.

PELTON

All right, all right --

\*

EMMA

Perhaps an equitable arrangement --

ALMY

You have no position.

PELTON

You could give them one.

ALMY

Why would I do that?

EMMA

You have no decency.

LIZZIE

(to Emma; sweetly)

Indecency is Mr. Almy's stock-in-trade. \*

ALMY

(snaps)

Says the woman who -- \*

PELTON \*

(interrupting) \*

Please. I suggest we stop for today. \*

Resume when tempers have cooled. \*

10

**INT. OFFICES OF PELTON & JAMES, ATTYS AT LAW - CONTINUOUS 10**

The Secretary watches Lizzie, Emma and Pelton reach the front doors where he halts them. The Kids are gone.

WITH LIZZIE, EMMA AND PELTON

PELTON

Almy is entitled to collect on his debt. \*  
And he will, if only to keep him \*  
legitimate in the eyes of his colleagues.

EMMA

Because robbing orphaned young women  
protects his reputation.

PELTON

(beat; "orphaned")

Right. We just have to be willing to -- \*

LIZZIE

(revealing a hidden shrewdness)

Tell him we'll pay a one-time percentage  
of father's debt to make him go away.

PELTON

What percentage?

LIZZIE

Ten. That's final.

\*

PELTON

Ten percent? He'll need to negotiate --

\*

LIZZIE

Start at nine.

\*

\*

Lizzie exits. Emma follows. Pelton sighs.

11 **EXT. FALL RIVER MAIN STREET - DAY**

11

Emma catches up to Lizzie. As they walk we'll notice TOWNSFOLK giving them the subtle pariah treatment.

EMMA

Lizzie, it does no good to antagonize Mr Almy.

\*

LIZZIE

It does me wonders. He needs to learn we can't be pushed around.

\*

\*

We HEAR, from a distance, the Kids' off-screen chant --

THE KIDS (O.S.)

*Lizzie Borden took an axe...  
Gave her mother forty whacks...*

LIZZIE

(off Emma's sad reaction)  
Ignore it. Let's go home.

\*

12 **EXT. STREET PARALLEL TO MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS**

12

The Kids scurry, pacing Lizzie and Emma on the other street, glimpsing them down the short, perpendicular alleys between the buildings. They giggle and goad each other as --

THE KIDS

*When she found out what she'd done...*

13 **EXT. FALL RIVER MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS**

13

Lizzie and Emma continue walking, ignoring the Kids pacing them on the other, alley-connected street.

EMMA

I think you want a fight with Mr. Almy.

\*

LIZZIE

I want peace, Emma. And respect. Is that too much?

\*

\*

The sniggering Kids flash across the far end of the alley.

THE KIDS

*She gave her father forty-one!*

Lizzie and Emma approach a smoke shop/pharmacy identified by the cigar store Indian rooted out front --

LIZZIE

We can run father's business. We can earn  
a solid living and keep people employed.

\*  
\*

EMMA

We don't know the first thing about --

\*  
\*

LIZZIE

I know how to handle problems. And the  
problem now is everyone thinking we're  
fair game. That's going to stop.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

THE KIDS (O.S.)

(from the street over)  
*Emma Borden watched that axe,  
Gave her sister a loving smack.*

\*

EMMA

(stunned by the lyric)  
That's new.

LIZZIE

(mood darkening)  
Yes, it is.

Lizzie's eyes fall to the wooden Indian. In one fist at the end of its crossed arms is a large wooden hatchet.

THE KIDS (O.S.)

*When she saw what Lizzie'd done,  
She wished for more good bloody fun!*

Emma gasps. Lizzie's eyes grow dark.

EMMA

Lizzie, no --

\*

14

**EXT. STREET PARALLEL TO MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS**

14

The Kids run to the next alley entrance, laughing, revved up.

TALL BOY

Okay, louder this time!

THE KIDS

*Lizzie Borden took an axe!*

They round the corner into the alley and meet Lizzie standing there with the large wooden hatchet gripped threateningly at her side. THE KIDS SHRIEK AND SCATTER!

Except for the Tall Boy who stumbles backward and falls, scuttling in retreat as Lizzie moves toward him.

LIZZIE

You know what I love about children?

The terrified Tall Boy is unaware he's pissing his pants.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

Their breath is so sweet. Especially the last one.

The Pigtailed Girl skids in between Lizzie and the Tall Boy.

PIGTAILED GIRL

Leave him alone.

LIZZIE

Or what?

PIGTAILED GIRL

I'm not afraid of you.

LIZZIE

(beat)

Then you haven't been paying attention.

\*  
\*

Then, like that, her expression turns sweet. Creepy sweet.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF TEASER



ACT ONE

FADE IN:

15      **EXT. VERMONT'S GREEN MOUNTAINS - DAY**      15

STOCK FOOTAGE: Establish this breathtaking region.

16      **EXT. THE SLOPE OF KILLINGTON PEAK, VERMONT - CONTINUOUS**      16

Forested. A horse's hooves CLACK against the rocks as we meet WARREN STARK (40s) leading his burdened horse up the trail.

**SUPER: KILLINGTON PEAK, VERMONT.**

Stark is huge. Been on the move for weeks, looks the meaner for it. Two large revolvers strapped across his chest. A big knife in its scabbard.

He stops. Removes his hat to scrape out the sweat and dirt. He eyes the horizon. A scan of the trail behind him. Coast clear, he hats himself, pulls the laboring horse after him.

17      **EXT. STARK'S CAMPSITE - DAY**      17      \*

Stark has shed some of his outerwear but it does little to reduce his bulk. He sits on his bed roll before a small fire. A well-used map lies across his lap as he drinks coffee.

ANGLE ON THE MAP:

Depicts a route into Canada. Stark's route. With a stubby pencil, Stark marks his current location.

RESUME STARK

Counting days and adding miles on his fingers. Challenging. His unsaddled, unburdened horse SNORTS. Ears twitching.

Stark freezes. Grabs up the can of dirt beside the fire and smothers the flames.

Stark listens. Reaches to withdraw a pistol and the knife. He stands. Aware. He's not alone.

18      **EXT. UP THE SLOPE FROM STARK'S CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS**      18

CAMERA TRUCKS RIGHT putting tree trunks between us and Stark (down there, on high alert) until we come to --

CHARLIE SIRINGO. He's 35. Hatless, he stands with his back against a tree trunk just wide enough to obscure him. His clothes and longcoat are dark, mottled by earth and weather.

His face is sun-worn, his dark hair ruffled. His beard stubble competes with his mustache.

His black-gloved hand holds a long-barreled grey steel revolver against his vested chest.

Siringo listens to Stark's quiet approach up the slope toward his position.

WITH STARK

Moving cautiously up the slope to the advantage of higher ground. We stay with him, tension building as we know Siringo is up ahead. Until --

Stark stops, staring at Siringo's hat at the base of that tree. Siringo is gone. Stark swallows hard.

STARK

Charlie?!

Sounds of wildlife. Stark bolts down the slope, running fast toward his waiting horse.

AT THE HORSE

Stark reaches the animal, struggles to board it (no saddle) to make a hasty escape.

BOOM! An unseen gun fires and Stark's horse stumbles then collapses dead to the ground, taking Stark down with it. Stark SCREAMS in agony as the horse crushes his leg, pinning Stark under its dead, enormous weight. \*

Siringo approaches through billowing gun smoke, gun up and ready to fire again. Stark SCREAMS IN AGONY. \*

Siringo kicks the gun from Stark's hand then SHOOTS THE KNIFE from his other hand, exploding Stark's wrist, his useless hand flops back. \*

Stark SCREAMS again, trapped under the dead horse. \*

Siringo squats calmly near Stark. Stark keeps SCREAMING.

SIRINGO

Warren? Hey. Shh. Warren.

Chest heaving, eyes wild, Stark shuts up. Siringo waits until Stark manages, considering, to pull himself together.

STARK

Bastard. Couldn't just let me go? \*

SIRINGO

No, I could not.

STARK

My leg is broke.

SIRINGO

Yeah. Heard it go. Gonna make bringing  
you back harder than I'd hoped. \*

STARK

They're going to hang me.

SIRINGO

Yep.

STARK

Hardly worth the trip home.

(beat)

Where's my hand?

SIRINGO

It's there.

STARK

Can't feel it. I'm a mess. Jesus,  
Charlie. \*

SIRINGO

Wasn't taking any chances. You made two  
widows back in Burlington.

STARK

The other guy died?

SIRINGO

Hard to go on with half his head in the  
chandelier.

Both men in quiet contemplation of the universal mysteries. \*

SIRINGO (CONT'D)

Sorry about the horse. Was aiming for  
your gun hand.

STARK

You always were a bad shot.

SIRINGO

Better up close.

STARK

Then do the honors and don't fu--

Siringo's gun FIRES, slamming a bullet through Stark's skull.

Beat. Siringo wonders if he can find his hat up there amid the trees. The returning birdsong will make the search tolerable, at least.

19 **INT. POLICE STATION, BURLINGTON VERMONT - DAY** 19

Siringo enters looking bad-ass enough to startle the COPS and the FEW CITIZENS there on business. He shoulders a saddlebag bulging with gruesome cargo.

SIRINGO  
(to the DESK SERGEANT)  
I need to see him.

20 **INT. BURLINGTON POLICE CHIEF'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER** 20

ANGLE ON Stark's decapitated, bullet-holed head in the open saddlebag on the Police Chief's desk.

Siringo at the window. The POLICE CHIEF studies the head.

POLICE CHIEF  
Where's the rest of him?

\*  
\*

SIRINGO  
Under a dead horse on Killington Peak. I had to improvise. Sign the paperwork so I can get a bath.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

A YOUNG COP enters with a sealed telegram.

YOUNG COP  
Are you Charles Siringo of the Pinkertons?

POLICE CHIEF  
He is. And that's Warren Stark.

YOUNG COP  
Where's the rest of him?

SIRINGO  
(to Young Cop)  
What is it?

YOUNG COP  
This telegram came in for you last week.

Siringo takes the envelope, unfolds it to read the telegram. Behind him the Young Cop steals a look at Stark's head.

YOUNG COP (CONT'D)  
Weren't you two friends? \*

SIRINGO  
(reading)  
He was my boss a few years back.

YOUNG COP  
He was a Pinkerton?

SIRINGO  
(exiting) \*

He was a train robber. \*

The Young Cop gets the implication: So was Siringo. \*

SIRINGO (CONT'D) \*

The home office will send you the bill. \*

POLICE CHIEF  
Where are you going?

SIRINGO  
(out the door) \*

Another job. \*

DISSOLVE TO: \*

21 **EXT. BORDEN HOUSE AT 92 2ND STREET, FALL RIVER - DAY** 21

Establishing this gloomy, two-story box of a house.

22 **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - PARLOR - DAY** 22

Lizzie sits in the modest parlor, her face hidden behind the newly-published novel, *Irretrievable*, by Theodor Fontane. She strokes a sleeping Boston Bull Terrier in her lap.

We HEAR A DRIPPING SOUND.

Lizzie, hearing it too, lowers her book to look at the couch across from her.

LIZZIE'S POV: HER DEAD FATHER LYING ON THE COUCH, FACE OBLITERATED, SKULL SMASHED, BLOOD PUDDLING ON THE FLOOR.

RESUME LIZZIE

Contemplative, then irked by the memory --

LIZZIE  
Emma?!

Emma enters, wiping her hands on a dish towel, stops beside the now pristine couch (no Dead Dad). Lizzie closes her book.

EMMA

Yes, what is it?

LIZZIE

We need a change of scenery.

Off Lizzie. Cheery.

23

**EXT. FALL RIVER TRAIN STATION - DAY**

23

PUSHING IN low toward the station's closed doors as they open out onto the street disgorging a SWEET FAMILY happily welcoming a FATHER home from some travail.

The Family clears to reveal Charlie Siringo, cleaned up, well-tailored, eyes shadowed by his hat. Handsome and relaxed, he steps onto the sidewalk with a suitcase in one hand and a pearl-handled doctor's bag in the other.

He surveys the street, inhaling deeply, noting Fall River's mind-numbing similarity to every other monotonous east coast town. He sets off in search of room and board.

24

**EXT. MAPLECROFT MANSION - DAY**

24

Compared to the Borden house this place is a palace. The epitome of upper class suburbia circa 1890. And, from the posted sign, it's for sale (The Fall River Land Company).

CRANING DOWN REVEALS Lizzie and Emma admiring the house.

EMMA

It's beautiful.

LIZZIE

It is. On the inside, too.

Emma reads Lizzie's swallowed-canary grin.

EMMA

(maternally strict)  
Lizzie, no.

LIZZIE

Let's buy it. We can afford it.

EMMA

It's too ostentatious.

LIZZIE

That's father talking.

EMMA

He's right.

LIZZIE

He's not here. Emma. We need to leave 2nd Street behind us. Put the past to rest.

EMMA

(the house beckons)  
It's so big.

LIZZIE

We'll fill it.

EMMA

With what?

LIZZIE

With life. \*

EMMA

If Almy has his way --

LIZZIE

It's not Almy's money yet. We can't live in fear of what might or might not happen.

EMMA

You sound like me.

LIZZIE

Because I listen to you.

EMMA

When you want to.

Lizzie, with humor, turns Emma once more to face the grand house.

LIZZIE

(as if the house could talk)  
Listen to that.

EMMA

Maybe you're right.

LIZZIE

There's my Emma.

Beat. Then --

OFFICER TROTWOOD (O.S.)

Excuse me, ladies?

Lizzie and Emma break their embrace to see the tall, portly OFFICER LESLIE TROTWOOD (late 30s), standing to the side, hat in hand. Lizzie smiles genuinely, reaches for his hand.

LIZZIE

Mr. Trotwood! How are you?

OFFICER TROTWOOD

I'm fine, Miss Borden.

(to Emma)

Miss Borden. You might not remember me.

EMMA

Of course I do, Mr. Trotwood. You were very kind to my sister all through the unpleasantness.

LIZZIE

It's good to see you.

OFFICER TROTWOOD

Oh, this isn't a social -- we have a... There's a situation. Marshal Hilliard needs to see you downtown. \*

LIZZIE

About what? \*

OFFICER TROTWOOD

I think it's better if Marshal Hilliard explained.

The sisters trade a glance. Then --

25

**INT. FALL RIVER POLICE STATION - DAY**

25

\*

MARSHAL RUFUS HILLIARD, 30s, steps purposefully from his office and walks the corridor out to the waiting area where --

Lizzie is as cool as can be. Emma is anxious. Officer Trotwood looks busy filing reports.

Hilliard stops in front of them.

EMMA

Marshal Hilliard. How can we help?

MARSHAL HILLIARD

Could you both come with me, please? This way.



LIZZIE  
(feigned amusement)  
That way is the holding cells. Are we  
being held? \*

MARSHAL HILLIARD  
You're being notified. \*

LIZZIE  
Of what? \*

MARSHAL HILLIARD  
Property theft and threat to inflict  
bodily harm. \*

LIZZIE  
The children are lying. \*

MARSHAL HILLIARD  
(beat; eyebrow up)  
This isn't about children. \*

Off Lizzie, waiting for the shoe to drop. \*

26

**INT. FALL RIVER POLICE STATION - CELLS - CONTINUOUS**

26

WILLIAM BORDEN (37), sits on the floor of a cell biding his  
time. He's rough looking, filthy and not fully sober. Lizzie  
and Emma step somberly to the bars. Trotwood hangs back. \*

LIZZIE  
Well. Look what the cop dragged in.

WILLIAM  
Hello, Lizzie. I like what you did with  
the place.

EMMA  
Stand up, William. We're taking you home.

Trotwood approaches with keys to unlock the cell door.

WILLIAM  
I got evicted. No home to go to. They  
tell you that? And when I go in to get  
what's mine they arrest me! \*

Trotwood hauls William up.

EMMA  
You're coming home with us.

WILLIAM  
What, to the house?

Emma turns and exits back down the corridor. As she passes Trotwood, it's clear he's giving her his sympathies.

EMMA

We'll be waiting out back, Mr. Trotwood.  
Lizzie?

As Lizzie exits, Trotwood whispers to William --

TROTWOOD

If you make any more trouble for your  
sisters, I'll pull your spine out your  
ass. You hear me?

Trotwood flings William out of the cell.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE



Siringo makes use of his napkin before eyeing Ezekiel.

SIRINGO

Private. I'm sure you understand.

EZEKIEL

I do. Didn't mean to pry. When you were checking in yesterday I noticed that strap there under your arm. That would be a holstered gun, yes?

SIRINGO

(passively aggressive)

Now you mean to pry.

EZEKIEL

I was at Homestead last year. Supporting my brother during the strike.

SIRINGO

That was a bad time.

EZEKIEL

Shameful, actually. Saw a lot of those holsters on the Pinkertons while they were shooting up the boys.

SIRINGO

It's a common make.

Tense moment. Ezekiel's hatred for all things Pinkerton is barely subdued.

EZEKIEL

If you say so.

\*  
\*

Ezekiel nods, a tight smile, turns (smile dying) and WE MOVE WITH HIM into --

\*

29

**INT. DANFORTH INN - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

29

-- the lobby where ISABEL DANFORTH (30s) polishes the counter. A scar cuts from one eyebrow, across her nose and deep into her opposite cheek. Her smile is sweet if uneven and, in spite of the scar, she is simply beautiful.

EZEKIEL

(coarse)

Stop that. Go change his linens.

ISABEL

They're fresh yesterday.

EZEKIEL

Get up there and find out what you can.  
Go through everything.

\*

Isabel moves. Ezekiel watches Siringo in the dining room.

30

**INT. BORDEN HOUSE - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS - DAY**

30

CLOSE ON a spider scuttling up the wallpaper near a window.

William, looking not much better after a night's sleep,  
watches the spider's progress with dull interest.

WILLIAM

(calling out)  
Have you looked everywhere?!

Emma, dressed for church and pinning her hat, enters.

EMMA

(irritated)  
Are you going to church? You're  
absolutely slovenly.

WILLIAM

The old man hid something around here.  
You know he had to. He wouldn't just  
leave everything in the bank.

Lizzie enters, looking radiant and perhaps a bit too  
extravagantly dressed for Sunday services.

LIZZIE

(bright and --)  
I'm ready.

WILLIAM

(Lizzie's dress)  
How many upholsterers died making that?

LIZZIE

(-- chipper)  
I lost count at fifteen.

\*

EMMA

When we get back we'll discuss the length  
of your stay and the terms of your rent.

WILLIAM

Rent? My last name is Borden. I --

EMMA

Borden Street is three blocks that way.  
You can stay in the gutter for free if  
that suits you better.

WILLIAM

Whatever he left you, I deserve a piece.  
I'm his son.

LIZZIE

You're a disowned bastard. You want  
something for nothing. You always have. \*

WILLIAM

And what did you do to deserve anything  
of his?

LIZZIE

Lived with him.

William stares at Lizzie, his mind moving toward a dark  
assumption. He looks at Emma, who meets his stare head-on.  
William almost grins.

WILLIAM

Well, shit. At least I was spared that  
pleasure.

LIZZIE

A shame we're not spared yours.

Lizzie exits. Emma and William eye each other.

EMMA

Take a bath.

WILLIAM

Kiss my ass.

Without a change in expression, Emma leaves. William glances  
down at Lizzie's dog staring up at him from a chair. He turns  
to that spider still on the wall. SLAMS HIS PALM AGAINST IT.

31

**INT. DANFORTH INN - SIRINGO'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY** 31

CLOSE ON the black and white crime scene photo of Lizzie's  
father, Andrew Borden, lying dead on the couch, his head  
split open.

REVERSE ON Isabel, carrying a wicker basket of fresh bed  
linens, staring in shock at the photo. Almost the entire  
contents (including plenty of gruesome photos) of one wooden  
and open-padlocked box is spread out across the bed, the

desk, and part of the floor. It includes bloody clothes and an axe head with a sawed-off handle.

Isabel is surrounded by criminal horror. She turns to get out of there and almost collides with --

Siringo standing calmly in the open door.

SIRINGO

Well, that was my own damn fault.

ISABEL

(moves to exit)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to --

SIRINGO

(stops her; closes the door)

Hold on. Stop.

ISABEL

Do I need to scream?

SIRINGO

Wouldn't blame you if you did. That's awful stuff.

ISABEL

Let me go. Mr. Siringo --

SIRINGO

Isabel, right? It's important that you tell no one about this. \*

ISABEL

Who are you? \*

SIRINGO

I was hired to review the Borden case.

ISABEL

(puts down the linen basket)

No. You can't. Don't open this up again. \*

SIRINGO

How well do you know her?

ISABEL

I'm not going to do this. Hundreds of reporters stayed here. Camped here. In hallways. In the kitchen. My husband couldn't have been happier but it was ghoulish and terrible and it needs to be put to rest.

SIRINGO  
Your husband. Mr. Danforth.

ISABEL  
Ezekiel. Yes.

SIRINGO  
He the sonofabitch he pretends to be?  
(her scar)  
He give you that?

Isabel says nothing, steps past him and opens the door. As she exits to the hallway --

\*  
\*

SIRINGO (CONT'D)  
Isabel.  
(she halts)  
I'm not here to cause trouble. I promise.

\*  
\*

ISABEL  
You can change your own sheets.

She exits down the hallway. Siringo watches. Likes her.

32

**INT. DANFORTH INN - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS**

32

Ezekiel looks up from his accounting as Isabel passes by on her way to the kitchen.

EZEKIEL  
What did you find out?

ISABEL  
(without turning)  
He's a detective.

EZEKIEL  
I know that. He's Pinkerton.

ISABEL  
(blinks at the Pinkerton news)  
He's in town investigating the possible source of obscene photographs and literature.

EZEKIEL  
That's all?

ISABEL  
Not unless you try and sell him a dirty picture and he has you arrested. I suggest you destroy your collection.

Isabel exits. Ezekiel looks concerned.



33           **INT. CENTRAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - FALL RIVER - DAY**           33

A white-haired, bearded REVEREND JUBB sermonizes.

REVEREND JUBB

“Love... Thy... Neighbor!” God said it,  
Moses wrote it, Jesus quoted it, Paul  
explained it. So what does it mean?

Reverend Jubb looks out over his congregation. The church is filled to capacity -- except for a shunning circle of empty pews around Lizzie and Emma near the front.

NEAR THE BACK

As the reverend preaches (DIALOG TBD), CAMARA PANS a few parishioners to REVEAL Siringo, studying Lizzie and Emma up front.

34           **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - THE BARN - DAY**           34

About the size of a two-carriage garage. Dark with blades of dust mote sunlight cutting through the clapboard seams.

William, more disheveled than before, tears through cluttering junk, lifting the empty pigeon cage.

WILLIAM

Where'd you put it?! Where is it?!

William climbs the ladder to a small, junk-filled loft. He pulls the edge of a wooden box. It tips over on him, spilling 8 horse shoes, workman's gloves, a driving hammer and nails onto his head. He tumbles down, cursing.

On his ass in the dirt, William HEARS Lizzie's dog start barking. And then a shout --

PELTON (O.S.)

Hello? It's Mr. Pelton. Is anyone home?

WILLIAM

Goddammit.

35           **EXT. BORDEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**           35

Pelton knocks on the front door. The dog BARKS from inside.

PELTON

Miss Lizzie? Miss Emma?

The door is pulled open to reveal William, dirty, brusque.

WILLIAM

They're at church. Come back later.

PELTON

Ah, well, I -- I'm sorry, what is your name?

WILLIAM

William Borden. I'm the brother.

PELTON

The brother? They don't have -- ah, yes --  
(uncomfortable)  
Andrew Borden's boy. William, is it? I'm  
Mr. Pelton, the attorney representing  
your half-sisters' interests and --

\*

WILLIAM

Money? That what you're talking about?

PELTON

Um, yes, to a certain --

WILLIAM

(hauling Pelton inside)  
You wanna come in? Wait for 'em? C'mon  
in. S'okay. Meantime I can ask you a few  
things.

36

**EXT. FALL RIVER STREET/BORDEN HOUSE - MINUTES LATER - DAY 36**

Lizzie and Emma stroll after church, Lizzie's arm looped  
through Emma's. In mid-conversation --

EMMA

It's their perception, Lizzie. Perception  
based on misunderstanding.

LIZZIE

They don't want to understand.

ANGLE ON SIRINGO FOLLOWING LIZZIE AND EMMA AT A DISTANCE.

Taking it slow. Good at his job.

RESUME LIZZIE AND EMMA

EMMA

(confident in some as yet  
unknown knowledge)  
They will. The truth will come out and  
their perceptions will change.

Emma looks toward their house.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Oh, my.

THEIR POV: William standing on the walk in front of their house angrily waving at them to hurry the hell up, pointing out that there's someone in the house.

37

**INT. BORDEN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER - DAY**

37

Pelton uncomfortably delivers bad news. Lizzie and Emma sit in chairs while William gnaws his thumbnail and paces.

PELTON

There will be no settlement. Mr. Almy has made it very clear that he intends to take everything owed to him, with interest -- staggering interest, I might add, after citing an obscure penalty clause dredged up from a 1782 statute.

WILLIAM

So what do we have? What's left?

PELTON

What do you --? Well, Miss Lizzie and Miss Emma will have...

EMMA

How much?

PELTON

Um. You're in debt to Mr. Almy --

EMMA

Once he takes what father owed him, what is left?

PELTON

No, that's what I mean. I mean, your father's estate, all of it, won't cover what Mr. Almy is demanding. You, and Emma, will continue to owe him --

WILLIAM

Just them. Not me, right? Not me.

LIZZIE

William, shut up.

PELTON

You'll be wiped out. I'm sorry.

Emma takes this in. Stands. As she walks to a window --

LIZZIE \*  
We'll never be out from under him.

PELTON \*  
I'm afraid not. \*

WILLIAM  
So there's nothing? Nothing! Let me talk  
to him. I'll go talk to him! I can  
explain things! I'll make him see!

PELTON  
I don't think that's a good idea.

WILLIAM  
He needs to know what he's doing here!  
How he's destroying this family.

EMMA  
(turns to Pelton; almost sad)  
He knows.

WILLIAM  
(angry)  
Let me talk to him!

LIZZIE  
(taking charge)  
William. Thank you, Mr. Pelton. Thank  
you. We appreciate everything you've  
done. It's all right. Have a good day.

PELTON  
Yes, I can... I can see myself out.

Pelton exits with alacrity. Emma, unable to stay in this  
room, exits to another. William fumes.

WILLIAM  
I could fix this. I can.  
(slams the doorjamb; exits)  
Goddamn sonofabitch!

Lizzie stares at William. Perhaps he could fix this.

DISSOLVE TO:

38

**INT. BORDEN HOUSE - EMMA'S ROOM - LATER - NIGHT**

38

Emma, dressed for bed, sits on the edge of her mattress lost  
in sad thought. A GENTLE KNOCK on her door.

EMMA  
Yes.

The door opens. Lizzie. Dressed to go out.

LIZZIE

I can't sleep. I'm going for a walk.

EMMA

Where's William? He should go with you.

LIZZIE

I'll be fine. We both will. \*

EMMA

We can't get the house. How can we?

LIZZIE

Emma. Look at me. Do you trust me? \*

EMMA \*

Of course I do. \*

LIZZIE \*

It's all going to work out. I know it. \*  
We're going to be okay. Get some sleep. \*  
Have a good dream. Things will be better \*  
in the morning. \*

EMMA \*

(sweetly sad) \*

I think you're the one who might be \*  
dreaming. \*

LIZZIE \*

(soothing) \*

I've never been more awake in my life. \*

39 **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - NIGHT**

39 \*

Lizzie moves purposefully toward the back door. We see William peer out from the behind the almost closed basement door. Lizzie exits. William pulls the basement door closed.

40 **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

40

William moves down the steps into the basement lit by two kerosene lanterns. With a small shovel and pick-axe he has dug holes in the dirt floor and chipped away at a half-dozen places on the stone walls. He stands there, lit from below, staring at the socket-like holes surrounding him.

WILLIAM

There's something in here. I know it, old man. You and I both know it.

41           **INT. WILLIAM ALMY'S HOME - PARLOR - LATER - NIGHT**           41

TEN MEN, powerful scions and self-made millionaires, are led through an open door by Almy laughing, small-talking, in good humor with much back-slapping. We see beyond that door --

-- their WIVES in elegant dress rising from a long dinner table being cleared by SERVANTS.

42           **EXT. WILLIAM ALMY'S HOME - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS**           42

From outside the home, through the leaded glass of tall, Gothic windows, we watch this group of movers and shakers luxuriate in the security of their riches, their cigars and sherry.

REVERSE ON Lizzie

Standing in the treeline shadow. Her eyes locked on Almy.

LIZZIE'S POV: ALMY. RELAXED AND LAUGHING, WE CAN SEE HOW HANDSOME, HOW CHARMING HE MIGHT HAVE ONCE BEEN

43           **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**           43

CLOSE ON William as his face, eerily lit, registers surprise as he finds something in a new hole he's dug into the wall.

Eyes wide, fingers scrabbling, William withdraws a narrow, wooden box, its brass detail soured by the dirt and dampness.

He excitedly puts it on the ground near a flickering lantern.

WILLIAM

Holy hell.

\*

Rubbing the dirt off his fingers, William slowly opens the lid. A wrapped bundle lies within. The cotton fabric is stained with dark, faded splotches.

William peels back the wrapping... slowly... anticipating his payday. He stops, confused by what he sees.

A rumpled, soiled baby's bonnet. And a tiny nightshirt. On the body of a dead, desiccated, mummified infant curled up in a nightmare sleep.

William stares in horror.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

44           **INT. BORDEN HOUSE - EMMA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY**           44

Emma wakes up in bed. No chirping birds for her. No good news to look forward to. Just the deadening weight of impending insolvency. Then she sees the sealed envelope on her pillow. Her name written in Lizzie's handwriting.

Emma's concern is obvious as she takes up the note.

45           **EXT. JERUSALEM ROW/THE WHALE & TAR - LATE - DAY**           45

Establishing. A grim and tragic section of town. Not much life on the streets except for the DRUNK in the gutter. CAMERA ANGLES to a tavern called The Whale & Tar.

46           **INT. WHALE & TAR - CONTINUOUS**           46

The grizzled BARTENDER (LUCIUS) kicks aside a broken chair and continues mopping puke and blood off the floor.

The place is otherwise empty except for William Borden in a stuporous alcoholic haze at a back table. He stares past a couple empty whiskey bottles and a half-full glass at --

The wooden box (containing the infant's remains) on the table in front of him.

The door opens and a heavy-booted, stubble-jawed, broken-nosed brute enters. He slams the door and looks to the Bartender. This is SKIPJACK. He rubs his hands together. \*

SKIPJACK

Good morning, Lucius. \*

BARTENDER

(heads for the bar)

You want a drink?

SKIPJACK

You know what I want. Suggest you hand it over while you still got hands. \*

Skipjack sees William in the corner.

SKIPJACK (CONT'D)

Is that Billy? Billy Borden?

Skipjack ambles over and sits across from drunk-ass William.

SKIPJACK (CONT'D)

How you been? Bill? Hello?

(leans close)

Hey. Do me a favor. Next time you see your sister, tell her from me I think she's got a nice ax.

(laughs; then --)

What's in the box?

WILLIAM

What?

SKIPJACK

Said what's in the box.

WILLIAM

A dead baby.

SKIPJACK

No kidding. Can I take a peek?

WILLIAM

Sure.

SKIPJACK

(doesn't look)

What is it really?

WILLIAM

My fortune.

SKIPJACK

Your fortune? \*

WILLIAM

And my future.

SKIPJACK

Really. All that inside that tiny box? \*

The Bartender sets a drink and a roll of cash on the table.

BARTENDER

Tell Flowers that's this week's plus what I owed from last week. \*

Skipjack down the drink, takes the money.

SKIPJACK

Would that be the truth?

BARTENDER

You want to count it?



SKIPJACK

I wanna get outta here before this Borden  
does something crazy. Nice day, gents.

\*  
\*

Skipjack exits as we linger on William and that box.

47

**EXT. MAPLECROFT MANSION - DAY**

47

EMMA'S POV: APPROACHING LIZZIE STANDING BEATIFIC ON THE  
SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF MAPLECROFT, SMILING AT US AS WE  
APPROACH.

REVERSE ON EMMA

EMMA

(trepidation)

Obviously I got your note. What are we  
doing here?

Lizzie takes Emma's hand and leads her up the walk, up the  
stoop, to Maplecroft's front door.

LIZZIE

Come with me.

EMMA

We've done this, Lizzie. I'd rather not  
do it again. Why are we here?

LIZZIE

Because dreams are nice.

Lizzie swings the front door wide.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

But they're much better when they come  
true.

\*

48

**INT. MAPLECROFT MANSION - CONTINUOUS**

48

From deep in the front room (no furniture) looking back at  
Lizzie and Emma on the stoop beyond the wide open door.  
Lizzie smiles. Emma is almost speechless.

EMMA

Lizzie. What did you do?

LIZZIE

I damned the torpedoes.

Emma stares as Lizzie, delighted, enters Maplecroft.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

The house is ours.

EMMA

You bought it?

LIZZIE

We bought it.

EMMA

(joining Lizzie)

We -- We don't have the money for this!  
We won't have the money!

LIZZIE

We'll fight Almy in court. You read Bleak House. There will be a trial. Who knows when. And we'll make it last as long as we can. As difficult as we can make it. It could take years before he --

EMMA

Bleak House is fiction! This is our lives!

\*

LIZZIE

Then we should live them.

\*

EMMA

What have you done?

LIZZIE

What was necessary. For both of us.

Lizzie hugs Emma. Emma is stiff, angry, her arms enfolding Lizzie reflexively.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

And here's the best part. I've already sent out invitations to all our old friends and neighbors to help us celebrate our housewarming.

EMMA

Our friends? Lizzie --

LIZZIE

Shh. It's going to be wonderful.

Lizzie, over Emma's shoulder, knows this storm is temporary. They always are.

MRS. KENNEY (50s), a sour, disagreeable woman of means, glares from her window, looking into Maplecroft at Lizzie and Emma hugging inside the house.

MRS. KENNEY

Oh, no. No.

We hear the STEADY STREAM OF PIDDLING. Mrs. Kenney turns to see her Cocker Spaniel pissing on the rug.

MRS. KENNEY (CONT'D)

(kicks at the dog)

Stop it! Stop it!

50

**EXT. UPSCALE HOME IN NEW BEDFORD - DAY**

50

Siringo KNOCKS on the door and waits --

**SUPER: NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS**

-- until it's opened by the maid. BRIDGET SULLIVAN (mid-20s), plain but pretty.

BRIDGET

(Irish accent)

Yes, sir?

SIRINGO

Good afternoon. Is you're name Bridget Sullivan?

BRIDGET

(wary)

It is. What is this about?

SIRINGO

I've been hired by the state of Massachusetts --

BRIDGET

Oh, dear --

SIRINGO

Nothing to worry about. I'm writing a history of Fall River and, of course, that means acknowledging --

\*  
\*  
\*

BRIDGET

(reacts to "Fall River")

I've got nothing to say.

SIRINGO

Miss Sullivan --

BRIDGET

I said everything necessary at the inquest and trial and that's all.

SIRINGO

Please. You knew Lizzie. You worked at  
the house. \*

BRIDGET

(suspects bullshit) \*  
Who are you?  
(attempts to close the door)  
You need to go.

SIRINGO

Miss Sullivan, please. Do you believe  
Miss Borden is innocent.

BRIDGET

She was acquitted.

SIRINGO

Not the same thing.

BRIDGET

Do you think me an idiot?

SIRINGO

I'm trying to understand her. You knew  
her well before the trouble. \*  
\*

BRIDGET

There was always trouble.

SIRINGO

How do you mean?

BRIDGET

(beat)  
It wasn't just the pigeons.

SIRINGO

What?

Bridget SLAMS the door in his face. But he heard her. Off  
Siringo.

51

**INT. BORDEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

51

ANGLE ON the dirty baby bonnet in the foreground on the  
kitchen table. The doorway to the kitchen is in the  
background, now filled by Lizzie and Emma entering.

EMMA

(pragmatic)  
What if we don't have enough furniture to  
fill the place?

LIZZIE

Then we'll buy more.

They stop, startled, seeing the bonnet and --

-- William, drunk, seated at the kitchen table. \*

The bonnet registers with Emma and she gasps. Lizzie freezes, hard eyes on William.

WILLIAM

Evening, sisters.

EMMA

William? What did you do?

WILLIAM

Dug up some of the family tree, I'm guessing.

Emma, weakening, puts a hand on the counter to steady herself.

WILLIAM (CONT'D) \*

(pleased by Emma's reaction) \*

Guess I'm right. \*

LIZZIE

What do you want?

WILLIAM

I want my cut. Half. You two can split the other. Or I tell the police about the dead kid I found in the Borden sisters' basement.

LIZZIE

After Almy takes our money there won't be anything to split.

WILLIAM

Then you better make sure he doesn't -- \*

LIZZIE

(fierce, leaning in close)

Listen to me. Do whatever you want with whatever you found because it doesn't matter. \*

WILLIAM

A dead baby doesn't --?! \*

LIZZIE

Who knows where you got it? You're a liar  
and a thief, William Borden. You'll do  
and say anything to get what you want and  
everybody knows it.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

WILLIAM

And I know you.

LIZZIE

You think so?  
(grabs the bonnet)  
Play this out. Let's see what you know.

\*  
\*

William has had enough. Shaken, he backs out the kitchen door  
and exits.

Lizzie looks at the bonnet. Then turns to Emma who stares at  
her with a "could things get any worse" expression. Lizzie  
goes to her, pulls her shocked sister close.

\*  
\*  
\*

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

Don't you worry. We'll find him. We'll  
find Benjamin and bring him home. I  
promise. I promise.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

52

**EXT. THE FIRST BANK OF FALL RIVER - DAY**

52

Morning. Almy and SEVERAL ASSOCIATES exit the bank discussing masters-of-the-universe stuff.

ALMY

It's a different method for making stronger steel. What the man is selling is a slower --

A whiskey bottle SMASHES at Almy's feet. William dominates the sidewalk in front of them. Drunk.

WILLIAM

Carving up the world?

ASSOCIATE

That's enough, just back up and --

A short crowbar drops from William's sleeve to be gripped in his fist before he SWINGS AND CONNECTS with the Associate's arm, SNAPPING IT.

WILLIAM

Were you going to leave anything for anybody else? Any scraps?!

Almy trips, falls backward onto several men, his hands raised to ward off an incoming blow.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

You have no right to take my money!

William swings the crowbar into Almy's hand. Bones break and Almy SCREAMS. William is tackled by two Associates.

William fights swings the crowbar, stabs with it, stuns the two Associates. William scrambles to his feet, drops the crowbar, and runs off.

Some Associates move to pursue, are halted.

ALMY

(glaring after William)  
No! No one else gets hurt. Let the police have it.

Off Almy, in pain, in fury.

53

**EXT. BORDEN HOUSE - FRONT STOOP - CONTINUOUS**

53

Lizzie and Emma open the door to see Marshal Hilliard, Trotwood, and FOUR OTHER OFFICERS.

MARSHAL HILLIARD

We're looking for William.

LIZZIE

He's not here.

EMMA

What happened?

MARSHAL HILLIARD

I'll get a warrant.

Lizzie sighs disagreeably and opens the door. As Hilliard and the Officers enter --

MARSHAL HILLIARD (CONT'D)

Everywhere. Top to bottom. Go.

Trotwood hesitates.

EMMA

What did he do?

TROTWOOD

He attacked Almy and his managers outside the bank.

\*

LIZZIE

How badly was he hurt?

TROTWOOD

Who?

LIZZIE

Almy.

EMMA

William.

TROTWOOD

William fled unharmed. Almy's wrist was broken.

MARSHAL HILLIARD

(from a doorway; angry)

Trotwood!

Trotwood runs to join the search.

54

**INT. BORDEN HOUSE - THE BARN - MINUTES LATER - DAY**

54

Inside the gloomy barn as Lizzie opens the side door to let several Officers in. They enter, searching corners and behind stored junk. One Officer climbs the ladder up to the cluttered barn loft.



Lizzie spies the spilled box of horseshoes, nails, gloves and that hammer on the ground.

55

**INT. BARN LOFT - CONTINUOUS**

55

The Officer's head and shoulders appear as he climbs the ladder and stops long enough to give the cluttered space a half-assed inspection.

OFFICER'S POV: NOTHING BUT BOXES, TOOLS, CHAINS AND SEVERAL LONG COILS OF ROPE (PROMINENTLY PLACED SO DON'T MISS THEM).

Satisfied, the Officer climbs down the ladder and joins his colleagues heading out the door.

Lizzie looks up at the barn loft. Studies the bottom of it. The wood, the cracks between the planks.

Lizzie, not exiting, kicks the doorjamb with her shoe. Sounds just like a door SLAM.

A subtle shift of movement up on the barn loft. A small trickle of dirt falls from the cracks between the planks through a shaft of sunlight.

Lizzie knows William is hiding up there. Without expression, she exits, pulling the door quietly closed.

56

**INT. DANFORTH INN - DINING ROOM - DAY**

56

Siringo is finishing lunch when Isabel approaches with a piece of pie and coffee. She's a bit icy.

SIRINGO

Thanks. For keeping quiet, I mean.

\*

ISABEL

As much for you as it was for me.

SIRINGO

The trial transcripts mention pigeons in the Borden's barn. Pigeons killed by Lizzie's father some days before the murders.

ISABEL

It was in the papers, too.

SIRINGO

Could she have killed them? She have a thing against birds?

ISABEL

(beat)

Not just birds. Most animals. Except dogs.

SIRINGO

Why not dogs?

ISABEL

Who doesn't want loyal devotion?

SIRINGO

How do you know this?

ISABEL

I went to grade school with Lizzie.

Isabel starts to exit, stops.

ISABEL (CONT'D)

We had a rat problem at the school. The rats drew cats. Before they could do anything about it the problem was gone.

\*

SIRINGO

What happened?

ISABEL

They found the rats dead under the school. Poisoned. The cats just vanished. The school smelled for weeks.

SIRINGO

You think Lizzie had something to do with that?

Isabel almost shrugs, then exits. Siringo looks at his pie. Appetite gone.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR



-- the TING OF GLASSWARE. William raises his head to see Lizzie, in her nightgown, sitting at the edge of the loft with two crystal-cut glasses and a decanter of bourbon. She smiles at him.

LIZZIE

Come here.

WILLIAM

No. How did you --?

LIZZIE

William. We're going to have a drink. We're going to be civil. And, after what you did to Mr. Almy, you're going to help me figure out a plan to get you gone from here with enough money to keep you comfortable.

William considers it. Then --

WILLIAM

Why are you helping me?

LIZZIE

Because, at the end of the day, which it is, we're family.

WILLIAM

You just want to know where I hid the baby.

LIZZIE

If you want to tell me later, fine.

She pours him a drink. Pats the boards next to her.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

But right now, come over here. Let's work this problem out toward getting you taken care of. C'mon. Daddy's bourbon isn't drinking itself.

Off William. Moving to join her. Past those coils of rope.

61

**INT. FALL RIVER GRADE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NIGHT**

61

Dark and weirdly sinister in spite of all the childrens' paper decorations and small desks and chairs.

Siringo is here with a lantern. Leans against the desk, arms crossed, getting a feel for the place. He walks to the center of the room, kneels, puts his hand on the floor as if he

might be trying to pick up some ancient vibrations. He feels foolish.

He walks to the cloakroom and looks inside.

A small trap door in the floor for access to the crawl space.

Siringo looks up. Another trap door in the ceiling. To the attic.

62

**INT. SCHOOL ROOM ATTIC - CONTINUOUS**

62

That trap door rises slowly, light from Siringo's lantern flooding up, spreading out across the dusty darkness under the angled roof.

Siringo's arm pushes back the door and he rises up with the lantern. He freezes, stock still, staring at --

-- three dozen dead, skin and bone cats hung from their scrawny necks by wire nailed to the rafters. It's horrifying. In the shifting shadows of Siringo's lantern the dead cats seem to be moving, swinging, alive...

Off Siringo. Jesus Christ.

63

**INT. WILLIAM ALMY'S HOME - PARLOR - LATER - NIGHT**

63

Shadowed and dark. Almy, wearing his dressing gown, glasses, and with his hand bandaged, enters the office and walks to his desk. He is sorting through papers searching for something.

He finds it. His watch. He's about to leave when...

...he senses movement in the shadows behind him.

He turns...

...to look into the far corner of the room. A shadow shifts.

It's Lizzie. Smiling at him. Her hair pinned up. Amid the moving shadows of breeze-stirred leaves outside she looks like a seductive dream.

Almy is speechless.

LIZZIE

You never fixed that cellar window. Not after all these years.

ALMY

What do you want?

LIZZIE

You're behavior in Mr. Pelton's office made it very difficult for me to concentrate. So tough. So strong and determined. That's what made me leave so suddenly. You reminded me of our old days. You felt it too, didn't you.

\*  
\*

Somehow, without his noticing, Lizzie has moved closer to Almy. Like a snake hypnotizing prey.

ALMY

Lizzie. We're not doing this. Not anymore.

\*

LIZZIE

That's exactly what you said last time. Broke my heart.

She pushes him into his chair and sits sidesaddle on his lap. \*

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

But this isn't about love. This is business. About how we might work together... instead of against each other.

Lizzie pulls the long silver pin from her hair, letting it fall to her shoulders. Almy breathes in the smell of her, unable to stop himself.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)

Although the latter had its benefits.

She leans into to kiss him. Almy anticipates. Then HE FREEZES, A LOOK OF PAINED SHOCK ON HIS FACE! He gasps, going limp, trying to speak, his eyes wild but his body loosening.

Lizzie's fist has driven her long pin into the nape of Almy's neck. He is paralyzed.

Lizzie studies him. Lets him buck under her before he settles.

Then she stands quickly and, as his body begins to slip, she kicks the chair out from under him. He lands hard on the floor, flat on his back.

She grips the bloody pin in her hand. She wipes it on his lapel. His eyes follow her.

Lizzie walks fast back to the shadowed corner where she began this moment. She picks something up, heavy items, then walks back to Almy.

