

This is a submission for Eric's Sarah Sligo Ghost Story Challenge, Jixemitri Circle Writing Challenge #9. This ghost story takes place in "two worlds": a modern day setting (written by Dana) and in Victorian times (written by Susan, in her *Victoria's Secret* universe).

92 Second Street
A Ghost Story in Two Worlds
by Susan and Dana

"We're staying at a haunted house?" Trixie asked, excitement and glee evident in her voice.

"We're staying at a haunted house?" Honey asked simultaneously, her voice dripping with incredulity.

Matthew Wheeler's green eyes twinkled as he looked at the assembled Bob-Whites. Predictably, Trixie and Mart had grown excited at his announcement. Honey and Di's faces had been portraits of astonishment. Jim, Brian, and Dan had merely grinned, but not one of them could hide their interest.

"Yes, the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast in Fall River, Massachusetts is a real place. In fact, it's the very house that the legendary murders took place in and, according to legend, it *is* haunted."

"And we're going to stay there?" Mart asked, his round blue eyes displaying his intrigue at the thought.

Matthew nodded. "When the power outage shut down Wheeler Enterprises, you all were invaluable in helping me out of a tough spot. I know you can't accept gifts, but call this payment for services rendered."

"Gleeps, Mr. Wheeler! We didn't help you out because we expected payment!" Trixie protested.

"I know you didn't, Trixie, but you'd really be doing me a favor if you accepted my offer." As Trixie looked at him with questioning eyes, Matthew lowered his voice to a stage whisper. "My wife is very curious about the place, but she can't bring herself to go there without Bob-White chaperones."

Everyone laughed as graceful Madeleine Wheeler smiled demurely at her husband. "Say what you like, Matthew, but we both know the truth!" Her hazel eyes twinkled with mischief and Matthew's hearty laugh filled the air.

"Guilty as charged! Growing up in Boston, I heard quite a bit about the Lizzie Borden murders. The Borden House, fifty miles south of Boston, has been a private residence until relatively recently, when it was renovated into the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast and Museum. I *am* a bit curious about the B&B and I thought this would be an educational opportunity for you all as well. It's been restored to its original Victorian condition and the owners have recreated the house as it was on August 4, 1892. They even have much of the original furniture."

"Jeepers, Mr. Wheeler!" Mart exclaimed. "That's great! Thank you!"

The rest of the Bob-Whites added their thanks as well before settling down to listen to Honey and Jim's father explain the history of Lizzie Borden.

"You've heard the poem, I'm sure:

*Lizzie Borden took an ax,
She gave her mother 40 whacks,
When she saw what she had done,
She gave her father 41."*

As Mr. Wheeler recited the famous poem, the familiar shiver of excitement tickled the hairs on the back of Trixie's neck. *Another mystery!* Honey nudged her, anticipation glowing in her hazel eyes.

"The morning of August 4, 1892 was just like any other morning, until someone took an axe nineteen times to Lizzie Borden's stepmother's head while she was making the bed in the guest room. Although Lizzie Borden was acquitted of the crime, a lot of the evidence found shows that she was the only one with opportunity – and she certainly had motive. The maid was outside in the back hanging laundry, Lizzie's father was at work, and no one else was home. There had been a break-in some time before, so all of the outside doors and windows were kept locked at all times. Most of the indoor doors were kept closed and locked at all times as well. This seems strange, but it is a documented fact.

"An hour and a half after the first grizzly murder, Mr. Borden came home for lunch. According to the maid, Lizzie told her father that Mrs. Borden – which, incidentally, is what she called her stepmother – had received a note and gone out. This was obviously a lie, as Mrs. Borden did not go anywhere, nor was she preparing to leave the house. Lizzie then urged her father to take a nap and sent the maid away. It was at this time that Lizzie allegedly swung the axe ten or eleven times on her poor father's head.

"She allegedly cleaned the blood off of herself and the weapon before crying out in alarm and summoning the maid from the attic. When Lizzie told her story to the police, she showed no grief and nor did she cry. She claimed that she had returned from the hayloft in the barn to find her father like that, but when the police investigated, they found that the hayloft was quite dusty, and it was clear no one had visited it in quite some time. Additionally, according to her story and that of the maid, she was home at the time of her stepmother's murder, but could not explain how she had not heard the grizzly event.

"Lizzie stated that she thought that her stepmother had left in response to the note. She was unable to produce this note as evidence, and although a large reward was offered to anyone who had written or delivered the note, no one came forward. There was further evidence against her, and her trial – in June of 1893 – was the 'Trial of the Century' at the time. It lasted fifteen days, and in the end, Lizzie was acquitted. Of course, she was ostracized from the community, but she was a free woman." Mr. Wheeler finished his story.

"You said she had motive, Mr. Wheeler. What was it?" Di spoke up.

"Lizzie Borden was a thirty-two-year-old spinster at the time of the murders. The only way she was going to be able to move out from underneath her father's roof was to get married, a very slim possibility by that point. Although Mr. Borden was one of the richest men in New England, he was a penny-pinching miser. The family lived in a rundown section of town to save money, even though Lizzie craved to live in the fashionable part of town, which the family certainly could have afforded. Mr. Borden refused to even install indoor plumbing. It was no secret that she resented her father's attitude toward money and she downright hated her stepmother. If her father and stepmother were out of the picture, not only would she gain a large inheritance, but it would be perfectly proper for her to live alone. She could move to the fashionable part of town, which is exactly what she did after she was acquitted."

"How much did she inherit?" sensible Brian asked.

"Mr. Borden was worth about half a million dollars at the time of the murders, so Lizzie split that with her sister. By today's standards, her half was worth about six million," the businessman stated matter-of-factly.

Jim whistled. "People have murdered for far less than that."

“And what about the ghost?” Dan wanted to know.

“Well, first of all, cold spots have been felt in many areas of the house. People have reported seeing Mrs. Borden in the house, dusting or making the beds. She was making the bed in the guest room when she was killed.” Matthew paused and looked at his rapt audience. “Some people have even claimed that Mrs. Borden has climbed into bed with them.”

This statement was predictably greeted with shrieks and a chorus of incredulous voices. Mr. Wheeler shared a smile with his wife. “That’s what they claim.”

“What else, Dad?” Jim wondered.

“There have been reports of voices heard, loud female arguments, the opening and closing of doors, and mysterious footsteps.”

“Wow! And no one’s solved the mystery yet,” Trixie stated in *that* voice.

Mart immediately recognized the tone and hurried to put a brake on Trixie’s musings. “Whoa there, sis! Many intelligent investigators have tried to piece together the Borden murders, and no one has come up with a definitive solution to the crime. There are as many theories as there are books on the subject. I hope you don’t think that you’re going to solve the case in one weekend!”

Trixie blushed at her brother’s public admonishment. Of course, although it killed her to admit it, Mart was right about the probability of the Borden murders ever being solved, least of all by the Bob-Whites. “Well, no,” she admitted, “but it would be fun to try!” The mischievous twinkle returned to her ocean blue eyes.

The boys groaned while Honey and Di immediately jumped to their friend’s defense. “Where is your sense of adventure, Mart Belden?” Di chastised her boyfriend.

“You *know* if there is a mystery to be solved, Trixie will solve it!” Honey exclaimed.

Trixie grinned at her friends, appreciating their loyalty. “I’m not going to get my hopes up – Mart has a point – but we can certainly have fun with the ghost!”

Jim’s green eyes twinkled as he looked at Trixie. ““As a friend, I have to tell you, you’ve finally gone around the bend on this ghost business,”” he quoted from a famous movie, and everyone laughed. But even as she laughed, inside Trixie just knew they were about to embark on an exciting adventure!

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The Lizzie Borden house at 92 Second Street was a small Greek revival house near the downtown of Fall River. It had originally been a two-family dwelling that Andrew Borden had converted into a single-family dwelling through a series of small construction projects. The interesting thing about the house was that there were no hallways. It was impossible to get from one place to the next without going through a series of rooms. This had added to the evidence against Lizzie.

The girls occupied a two-room suite on the second floor that had once been Lizzie and her sister Emma’s rooms. The boys occupied a two-room suite on the second floor that had been Andrew and Abby Borden’s rooms. Although the suites were side-by-side, the boys’ suite had been completely walled off from the girls’ suite, forcing anyone who wanted to travel between the two to go down one set of stairs, walk through the entire first floor and climb a second set of stairs to the other suite. Adjacent to the girls’ suite, and accessible from the same staircase, was the John Morse Guest Room, which Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler occupied. Mr. Wheeler had tried to rent out the three attic rooms, but had been told

by the innkeepers that the entire third floor had been rented by one guest. Trixie had caught a glimpse of him when they arrived and couldn't help but grin. Sleepyside certainly had its share of redheaded men, but this man also sported a thick mane of red hair.

Trixie was unpacking her suitcase, placing her clothes in the worn dresser, when she noticed something in the back of one of the drawers. She reached in to pull it out and saw that it was an old, faded, yellowed handkerchief, much like women carried in Victorian times. As she investigated it further, a sudden overwhelming sense of déjà vu enveloped her.

### **June 1893, Fall River, Massachusetts...**

Beatrix turned away from the window overlooking the busy street below her. The ocean voyage from England had not been the exciting, beautiful trip that she had expected. Much to her chagrin, she had been violently and desperately seasick for the entire journey. *My first ocean voyage and I spent it hovered over a basin.* Maddie and Diana had been very sympathetic, but it had not helped the bitter gall of disappointment from rising up in her each time she thought of it. *And I have to make a return voyage in a few weeks?* She shuddered.

Her natural sense of adventure, however, had returned when the ship had reached the bustling Boston port and they had been whisked away by carriage to Maddie's cousin's house, some miles away, in Fall River. The dashing blond had traveled to America on business several years before and had fallen in love with the picturesque town, as well as a dark American beauty, and had not returned to England. After many cables and letters back and forth, Benjamin Riker had insisted that his younger cousin bring her new family out to meet his new family in Massachusetts.

Bea's lips curved into a small smile of satisfaction. Maddie had made great strides since she'd agreed to Brian's ridiculous marriage proposal. In turn, her older brother seemed to be more and more enraptured by the quiet beauty, and the rest of them had found him to be more relaxed, more real and, as Martin put it, "damned easier to be around."

She pulled on a pair of white gloves and glanced at herself in the long mirror with a sigh. It was rather difficult to be seven and twenty and a definite spinster. Diana and Maddie now had several bonds between them that she did not have, and it only emphasized her feelings of loneliness and restlessness. Her lips tightened as she stared at herself, her figure still trim, her curls tightly restrained in the latest fashionable hairstyle. *Even if he did not want you, you are still a worthwhile woman, Beatrix Belden!*

A knock on the door startled her out of her brooding and she glanced up to see Maddie peering around the door, her hazel eyes alight with excitement and interest. Her face relaxed into a welcoming smile. "You look very well today, Lady Belden. Pray tell, have you found yourself a clandestine lover already?" she teased her honey-haired friend.

Maddie snorted as she came into the room, closing the door behind her. "And when would I find the time to meet this clandestine lover, I ask you?"

"In between romantic tête-à-têtes with Brian, mysteries with me and gossip with Diana, of course!" Beatrix laughed.

"Speaking of mysteries, Bea," Maddie said with a grin, "It sounds as if we are right in the middle of one here in Fall River."

Bea's blue eyes widened with interest as she pulled Maddie over to the elegant chairs nestled near the sunny bay window. "A mystery? Maddie! You must tell me everything!"

"Well," Maddie said slowly, "Benjamin told me just last night after you'd retired for the evening that the town is all full of the gossip about two terrible murders that took place last summer!"

"Two murders?" Bea breathed, her face alight with excitement. "Who was murdered?"

"Apparently, a man and his wife, a Mr. and Mrs. Borden, were murdered last year. His daughter from his first marriage is accused of the deed and is now on trial here in Fall River!"

"Did she commit the crime?" Bea demanded. "Perhaps she is innocent of these horrible murders and a killer is on the loose!"

Maddie shivered. "Do not say that, Bea! I would be half afraid for my life!" She hesitated for a moment and leaned forward with a whisper, "Benjamin would not tell me more details, for you know he would never mention the particulars of such a thing in front of a lady such as myself..."

Beatrix rolled her eyes dramatically. "Heavens no! Even though you have been present at a murder yourself..."

"True," her friend said, unable to contain a slight shiver. "Oh, I thought James would never be able to arrive in time!"

Maddie was amazed at how quickly her friend's normal open countenance closed at the mention of the dashing duke. She sighed inwardly. *These two are the most intractable, the most stubborn...* She fussed for a moment with her hair, ignoring the fact that every beautiful strand was in place, before plunging ahead with her description. "Well, Benjamin could not be coaxed. So, Elizabeth sent him away and *she* told me the whole sordid story. It's quite horrifying!"

At Bea's urging, Maddie relayed the story of the axe-wielding murderer, the strange house and the daughter and her maid. As her friend finished, Bea had practically fallen off her chair due to her leaning forward so strenuously. She righted herself briefly before surging to her feet and she began to pace around the room.

"What a terrible, horrible crime!" she declared. "And Miss Borden...to think that a woman could be capable of such a brutal act! With an axe?"

"That is what Elizabeth said," Maddie replied with a nod. "I cannot even fathom of disposing of my parents in such a manner."

Bea raised an eyebrow and looked at her friend in interest. "Oh? And what manner have you thought of disposing your parents in?"

Maddie stared at Bea for a moment, startled, before they both burst into giggles. "Oh, Bea! Do be serious!" Maddie scolded. "As if I would ever do such an awful thing! Or even consider it!"

Bea chuckled. "Of course you would not!" She sighed then, dramatically rolling her eyes. "Although your mother..."

“Yes,” Maddie admitted. “If someone could inspire such depths, it would be my mother,” she said soberly. Her hazel eyes dimmed for a moment before she glanced down at her hands in her lap.

Instantly regretful, Bea grabbed her friend’s hands impulsively and shook them. “Your mother is difficult sometimes, yes, but she is still your mother and you love her. I apologize for being unbearably rude, dear one!”

Maddie squeezed Bea’s hands in reply. “No offense taken, Bea.” She rose to her feet and walked toward the door. “And now that I’ve sent you on the trail of a mystery, my work here is done.” She grinned at her friend. “Will you join the rest of us for a carriage ride in a few minutes? Benjamin would like to show us his adopted town.” Her eyes twinkled. “We may even travel past the courthouse!”

“Yes, that would be grand!” Bea nodded vigorously. “Let me finish here and I will join you downstairs in a few minutes.”

Maddie nodded and left the room. Bea leaned over and grabbed her reticule and her hat, pinning it quickly and adeptly on her head before striding over to the door, determined to forget the sight of James bursting through the door, his green eyes blazing, that seemed to be forever imprinted on her mind.

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Riordan leaned back against his chair, considering his cousin who had his newspaper in front of him as he would a shield. He carefully buttered his toast and shot a wicked glance to the room’s only other occupant.

Daniel raised a dark eyebrow at him before calmly scooping marmalade on to his own toast.

Riordan cleared his throat and said in a low drawl, “The news must be utterly fascinating, James. You have read that particular page for the last fifteen minutes. Might you share with us what has so enraptured you?”

There was no answer from the man hidden behind the newspaper. Riordan could not contain a grin as he slanted a glance at his friend beside him. Daniel grinned in return and jumped into the fray. “Why, Grant, are you that uncouth that you haven’t heard the latest on-dit?”

“I’m afraid the ocean trip rattled my brain. I was seated next to the most pernicious female at meals. Her interest for a main course seemed to be my own delicious personage as opposed to the freshly baked salmon. I have been quite disturbed of mind ever since.” He gestured at him. “Please forgive my lapse in social awareness and make me aware of what important gossip I have missed by being so horribly otherwise engaged.”

“You have heard of the noble Benjamin Riker, have you not?”

“That young fellow who disappeared on a business trip to Boston and surfaced several weeks later engaged to a young American debutante...Elizabeth Howell, I believe?”

“The very one,” Daniel said easily. “They are entertaining this week his cousins from England.”

“Really?” Riordan drawled, enunciating each syllable carefully. He glanced at his cousin and noticed a slight tightening of the fingers that held the newspaper. His grin grew wider. “Would I know these cousins?”

The newspaper came down with a crash, James’ face suddenly appearing, livid, his green eyes blazing. “Oh, you would, Grant, you would. Surely they are the cause of this sudden interest you have in seeing America, Boston in particular.”

Riordan’s eyes widened, innocence written all over his freckled countenance. “Whatever do you mean?”

“You know very well what I mean, Grant,” James said, his tone cold and icy. “It will not work. You cannot throw me at that woman any longer!” With that, he pushed his chair away from the table, got up and stalked away.

Riordan and Daniel looked at each other for a moment or two before bursting into laughter. Daniel shook his head. “Bea has him tied in knots, she does,” he said, his Irish lilt strong with amusement.

“Indeed,” Riordan agreed. “Now if we can just determine if our James has her in the same state, our work will be done.”

Meanwhile...

Beatrix smiled in excitement as she descended the long stairway where the others stood waiting for her. She noted in approval Maddie’s hand tucked firmly on her brother’s arm, held in place by his gloved hand before she glanced at Diana, Mart, Benjamin and Elizabeth. Her smile widened. “I’m sorry to detain you all. I just had to...” Her voice trailed off as a sudden haunting melody began to play...seemingly out of nowhere. The notes almost seemed to have a life of their own, wrapping around her.

An icy shiver ran down her spine and she cocked her head, looking for the source of the music. *Where is that coming from?*

Trixie turned toward the parlor wall, looking for the origin of the mysterious music. *Where is that coming from?* she thought as a strange feeling of dread settled in the pit of her stomach. She listened carefully. Thanks to her music class, she was able to identify it as Liszt’s *Dante Sonata*. *Unfortunately, that still doesn’t tell me where it’s coming from!* she thought ruefully, twisting around, desperately trying to determine the music’s source.

“Trixie?” Honey asked, concern evident in her hazel eyes. “What’s the matter?”

“I’m trying to figure out where that music is coming from,” Trixie stated.

Honey looked blank. “What music?”

Trixie looked at her friend. “That creepy classical music. Can’t you hear it?”

“No,” Honey said, a look of fear settling over her sweet features.

Trixie turned to the rest of the Bob-Whites and Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler, who were all gathered in the parlor enjoying after-dinner refreshments. “Does anybody hear that music?”

The group looked at each other uneasily, before looking back at Trixie. Slowly, one by one, they shook their heads.

"I'm sorry, Trixie, but it appears you're the only one who hears it," Mrs. Wheeler said. "What does it sound like?"

Trixie turned to Mrs. Wheeler, grateful that she seemed to be taking her seriously. She tried to ignore the skepticism on Brian's face as she answered, "It's a single piano playing the *Dante Sonata* by Liszt." She cocked her head, her face a study in concentration. "There! It's gone!"

"If it was ever there at all," Brian muttered to himself.

Mart, predictably, was the first to speak up. "My dearest Beatrix, surely the music you heard was a manifestation of your overactive imagination indubitably brought about by the recent anxiety you experienced while studying for your examination on classical music. I seem to recall you had more than one nightmare during which various composers and life-size musical notes were chasing you!"

Trixie whirled to face her almost-twin, her blue eyes flashing. "It was *not* a figment of my imagination, Mart Belden. I heard it! And...and..."

"And what, Trix?" Lovely Diana urged.

Trixie felt her face grow hot as she mumbled, "Nothing."

"It's not nothing, Trixie, now speak up!" Dan admonished. Mr. Wheeler and Jim added their encouragement to Dan's.

Trixie sighed. Earlier, after finding the antique handkerchief, she had felt an overwhelming sense of déjà vu and an accompanying feeling of peace and serenity, odd though it was. She had tried to describe her feelings to Honey and Di. Unfortunately, the boys had overheard and she hadn't heard the end of it. She certainly didn't want to add more fuel to the fire by describing how hearing the music had made her feel.

"Well, when the music started, I suddenly felt very chilled. A sense of dread settled over me, and my stomach felt as though a million bats had been released in it. I just felt that something was *very* wrong." Trixie looked sheepishly at her family and friends. "It sounds kind of silly, huh?"

"Of course not," loyal Honey immediately interjected. "We're staying in a place where two very violent murders occurred, that is said to be haunted, and you've done so much reading about Lizzie Borden lately that it's no wonder you're feeling very strongly about this place! Why, the very room where we're sitting is where one of the murders took place! And you're sitting on the couch where it happened!"

Trixie was relieved to see the rest of the Bob-Whites and Honey's parents nodding their heads and agreeing with her best friend. Maybe she wasn't crazy after all.

"You know, it's possible that someone was playing a recording of the sonata, Trixie," Mr. Wheeler pointed out.

"But Mr. Grant left after dinner, the innkeepers retired to their house next door shortly after that, and we're the only ones here. And why didn't anyone else hear it?" Trixie wondered.

No one had an answer. Mrs. Wheeler finally broke the silence. "We're all very tired from our trip. Why don't we retire to bed? We have a full day of sightseeing ahead of us tomorrow."

The young people immediately agreed and it wasn't long before the nine guests were settled comfortably in their beds. Trixie heard Honey's even breathing almost instantly and knew she was asleep. Despite the anxiety she felt, Trixie too, was soon drawn into a deep, dreamless slumber.

The next morning, the guests, including the red-haired Mr. Grant, enjoyed a breakfast that replicated the last breakfast of Andrew and Abby Borden: jonny-cakes, bananas, sugar cookies, and coffee. Everyone agreed it was an enchantingly eerie touch.

After breakfast, the Bob-Whites, Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler, and Mr. Grant joined their host, Martha, for a tour of the infamous house.

The Bob-Whites listened politely as the diminutive woman explained about life in Victorian times in a thick New England accent. Although Diana was interested in hearing about the period furniture, everyone else was eager to hear about the famous murders. Finally Martha led them through the dining room and into the parlor.

"According to Lizzie's story, at the time of her father's murder she was out in the barn. She came in, she went into the dining room and laid her hat on the table. She told the police, 'I opened the door and I found my father dead on the couch.'" Everyone looked at the Victorian sofa where Trixie had sat the previous night and heard eerie music. Trixie thought of the crime scene photos of Mr. Borden laying on the couch, slouched over, his head indistinguishable as anything human and shuddered involuntarily.

Honey shuddered sympathetically along side her. "What about the rumors that this house is haunted?" the honey haired girl asked their hostess. "What types of hauntings? Has anyone heard music?"

Martha looked at Honey, surprised. "Why, no, I've heard a lot of stories from guests and from those who lived here before, but no one has ever mentioned hearing ghostly music. Mostly it's unexplained footsteps, voices arguing, and mysterious cold spots. Some have even reported seeing Mrs. Borden. Did you have any reason to ask about music, dear?"

Seeing Trixie's almost imperceptible shake of the head, Honey smiled at Martha. "No real reason. It just seems to be such a clichéd thing in movies that I just wondered is all."

Everyone moved toward the back staircase that led to Lizzie and her sister's rooms and the guest room. "Follow me upstairs, please." As the group walked up the narrow, curving staircase, Martha continued her talk. "Mrs. Borden sustained 19 wounds. She was turned sideways. She saw her murderer coming toward her." The Bob-Whites, the silent Mr. Grant, and Martha were now gathered in the guest room where Abby Borden had been making the bed when she was attacked. "Her first blow hit her like this," Martha stated, indicating that the axe had struck Mrs. Borden in the eye. "She twirled around and went down, almost certainly dead following the first blow. Then the murder had to straddle the body, because there's only a narrow space here as you can see, and administered the other eighteen blows to the head."

Ten pairs of curious eyes took in the site of such violence. The room was decorated in light yellow wallpaper with a flower basket pattern. The thick carpet underneath, like most of the carpets in the house, had a large floral design. The wood furniture was typical of the Victorian era. The silent group followed Martha toward Lizzie's room next door.

Honey, along with Di and Mart, lingered in the guest room after everyone had filed out. Mart and Diana were giggling over some private joke, but Honey's eyes were drawn to the spot on the floor where Abby Borden had been found, brutally murdered. She shuddered as she imagined the slain woman, blood pouring from her horrific wounds. She couldn't believe that her mother and father had slept in this very room last night.

Suddenly, she heard the distinct sound of two females engaged in a very heated argument. She immediately looked to Mart and Di, who had stopped their conversation and were looking at her. Mart was plainly startled and Diana looked confused and frightened.

“Did you hear that?” All three simultaneously asked each other.

“Bea,” Brian said impatiently.

“She’s been transfixed by our collective handsome looks,” Martin quipped, tapping his hat with a gloved hand. “Bea’s never seen such elegance all in one place.”

“Bea?” Diana said softly. “Are you feeling well?”

Beatrix’s eyes refocused and she looked at the others in surprise. “Is someone playing music?”

The group at the bottom of the stairs looked at each other, trying to contain smiles, before one by one, they shook their heads. “Now you’re imagining things as well, Bea?” Martin said with a sigh. “Shall we just take you to Bedlam at this moment and save them the trouble of having to fetch you?”

Beatrix flushed and descended the stairs rapidly. “I heard some sort of odd music. It was...mysterious...sinister. My skin just felt as if a thousand insects were crawling on it.”

“How horrible!” Maddie said sympathetically.

“Truly, Bea,” Elizabeth replied, patting her arm, “there is no music playing. The pianoforte is quite without a musician.” She gestured toward the parlor. “Look for yourself!”

“Perhaps it was a ghost!” Benjamin said with a wicked glint in his eyes. “Perhaps you are the one who will exorcise its presence from this house!”

Elizabeth pushed her husband toward the door. “You and your jokes, Benjamin Riker! Treat our guests better or they will return to England and tell all their friends how idiotic the Americans are.”

Brian chuckled. “Ah, but Elizabeth, since England was the country unfortunate enough to bear your husband, I’m afraid his behavior will reflect more upon us than upon you Americans.”

Diana grinned and threaded her arm through Elizabeth’s. “Indeed. We will not be in a hurry to claim such a one as Benjamin. After all, how long did it take us to rid England of his pernicious presence?”

Benjamin could be heard loudly protesting as he was herded toward the awaiting carriages. Maddie motioned her husband forward and fell back to wrap her arm through Beatrix’s. “Did you really hear the music, Bea? Where do you suppose it came from?”

Beatrix’s hand tightened on Maddie’s arm. “Oh, Maddie, it was even worse than that!” Her blue eyes widened as she whispered, “When Benjamin mentioned a ghost, my entire insides went cold. It was as if he had touched upon the very thing that had inspired the music.”

Maddie’s hazel eyes looked huge in her pale face. Before she could respond, she found herself being assisted into the four-seat carriage in front of her.

Benjamin offered a hand to Beatrix and he adeptly got into the carriage behind her. He motioned to the driver and they took off at a sedate pace down the cobbled street, following the other carriage that carried Brian, Elizabeth, Martin and Diana. He smiled at the two women before saying, "Elizabeth and I thought we would separate and offer our services as a guide to the city. She knew that you two would be interested in a detour by the courthouse where Miss Borden is on trial, so that will be on our agenda." He leaned back into the seat, his handsome face unsuccessful in hiding a grin. "I hear that you two have been busy involving yourselves in murders wherever you go. Perhaps you are here to solve the murders of the poor, unfortunate parents of Miss Borden?"

Beatrix leaned forward with a gleam in her eyes. "We might very well be more successful than you think. Maddie and I are excellent at ferreting out important information."

"Oh, you are, are you?" Benjamin drawled, a blond eyebrow raised in question. "Perhaps we should put these powers of detecting to the test."

Maddie looked askance at her cousin, a slight frown puckering her forehead. "What devilry are you up to, Benjamin Riker? Bea and I have no intention of spending a night in jail."

He grinned at her. "Ah, but what you might learn from its occupants!" He shook his head then and rubbed his hands together. "No, what I am proposing involves a careful eye and a sterner constitution."

Beatrix tried to look indifferent, but it was obvious by the flush of her cheek and the sparkle in her eye that Maddie's cousin had intrigued her. "Oh, yes?" she attempted a lofty tone. "Do continue."

Maddie rolled her eyes and leaned against the carriage wall, eyeing her cousin warily.

"92 Second Street is the address where the murders took place. Elizabeth has, among her acquaintances, a police officer who happens to be stationed these few weeks in front of the Borden house to keep onlookers away and keep them from causing any mischief while the trial proceeds. Perhaps I could convince him to let us peer around...for a moment or two...in assistance with their investigation. One could call it an...international investigative technique." His eyes twinkled as he looked at Beatrix's excited, eager gaze.

"Benjamin!" Maddie protested. "Surely we can't interfere! What would happen were we to damage evidence?"

He chuckled and shook his head. "Any physical evidence has already been examined and removed by the police. Miss Borden had her personal effects and belongings moved into storage. The house is quite empty." He raised an eyebrow at Beatrix. "Minor inconveniences for two such fine detectives as yourselves, wouldn't you say?"

"Oh, Maddie," Bea said, clutching her friend's arm in excitement. "I would so like to just get a glimpse of the house." She grinned at Benjamin. "I'm sure that Martin and Brian could be easily persuaded. They always protest, but then get involved straight to the top of their hat-covered heads."

"Come, come, Cousin," Benjamin said, his eyes gleaming, "where is your sense of adventure?"

Maddie glanced from Benjamin to Beatrix before throwing up her hands in defeat. “All right then,” she said. Her hazel eyes narrowed with warning. “If there is any trouble, I never knew either of you and was an unwilling, kidnapped victim of this escapade.”

Beatrix laughed. “She says that every time!”

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The others had been quick to persuade. Beatrix still was marveling at their acquiescence as the carriages pulled up to the large house in a less than fashionable part of town. Benjamin urged them to wait as he exited the carriage and walked over to the policeman loitering near the fence in front of the house. After a few moments of conversation, he returned to the carriages with a triumphant grin on his face. “He’ll let us look for a half hour. No more than that.”

Benjamin assisted Maddie out of the carriage and then turned, offering his hand to Beatrix. She placed a foot on the step when the horse pulling the carriage suddenly neighed in fright and reared, causing the vehicle to tilt precariously.

Alarmed, Benjamin grabbed Beatrix and swung her forward out of harm’s way, as the driver struggled to regain control of the terrorized horse. After a few tense moments, the driver was able to calm the animal, its magnificent head still tossing.

The others crowded around Beatrix, demanding in worried voices if she was all right. Beatrix smiled wanly and straightened her hat before replying, “I’m perfectly fine. No need to worry. Benjamin was very adept and saved me from falling.”

Diana tucked her arm through Beatrix’s, her dark eyes scanning her friend in concern. “Are you certain, dear? What an awful scare you gave us! I thought for a terrible moment that you would be crushed under the carriage!”

Her smile was stronger this time. “I am well. Do not worry, any of you.” To stave off any protests from her brothers, she began pulling Diana toward the rambling Greek revival house.

Martin and Brian, as one, turned toward the wearied driver with grim looks. “What startled the horse, Jack?” Martin demanded.

Jack shook his head. “Can’t say as I know, Mr. Belden. One moment, she’s content, just resting, and the next...” He glanced uneasily at the house before he said in a hushed voice, “There’re rumors that that house is haunted. I’m surprised you even want to go in!”

Brian and Martin exchanged a glance before Brian shook his head. “My sister is not easily gainsaid, Jack. And besides,” he added, “there are no such things as ghosts.”

“Maybe so,” Jack said slowly, looking again nervously toward the house. “But Mag here doesn’t shy like that for no reason.”

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Beatrix had wandered through the empty rooms, trying to ignore the growing sense of dread that seemed to overtake her. She'd studied the large living room where Mr. Borden had been murdered, looking for clues and seeing very few. She'd puzzled over the divided house, talking with the others about the strange staircases and the limited entrances and exits to the house. The house seemed almost like a prison as she stared, standing in the doorway, at the barbed wire fence across the back of the yard.

With a slight shudder, she turned back into the house and climbed up the separate staircase to the other bedrooms. She hesitated in the doorway of one of the bedrooms, noticing Maddie, Martin and Diana talking quietly as they looked around the room. Beatrix vaguely noted that the room was still furnished with a telling dark stain on the carpet. With a physical reluctance she was at a loss to understand, she stepped into the room when suddenly a cacophony of a noisy argument burst around her. Two women's voices, angry and bitter, but indistinct, were all that she could hear for a moment.

Beatrix shook her head, trying to clear it. *They'll really think I've gone mad now!* She turned to look at her brother and sisters-in-law, poised to speak, when the words fell from her lips.

The three of them had gone silent, eyes widened, looking startled. Beatrix couldn't contain a shiver as a distinct chill seeped through the room. *They feel it too!*

The voices stopped abruptly and Beatrix couldn't find the breath to speak, her vocal cords nearly paralyzed with the sense that there was something...someone in the room that she couldn't see.

When she felt a firm grip on her arm, she let out a frightened shriek and whirled around

Half expecting to see an axe-wielding murderer, she couldn't have been more shocked to see instead a very tall, very handsome redhead with green eyes blazing into her very soul.

Feeling a hand unexpectedly gripping her arm, Trixie stifled a scream as she spun around. Her body sagged in relief as she stared in the green eyes of her boyfriend. "Jim!" she exclaimed.

"What's going on?" Jim asked, anxiety written all over his handsome features.

"I thought I heard arguing, so I came back into the guest room to see what was going on," Trixie explained. "I found Honey, Di, and Mart looking as if...well, looking as if they had seen a ghost and then suddenly you grabbed me. You scared me!"

"I'm sorry, Trix, it's just, well..." Jim was interrupted when the group that had started into Lizzie's bedroom returned to the guest room.

"Is there a problem?" Martha asked.

"No, ma'am," Mart said. "It would appear that we, well..." His voice trailed off. After making fun of his sister, he certainly wasn't prepared to admit that he had heard mysterious arguing – in front of everyone to boot!

Honey had no such reservations. "Mart, Di, and I were the only ones left in the room and we heard the distinct sound of female voices arguing. Trixie here had left the room, but she heard it, too, and returned." She turned to her brother and looked at him with questioning eyes. "And why did you come back, Jim?"

Jim looked almost as sheepish as Mart. “Well, I thought I heard footsteps on the stairway. I knew everyone had gone on into Lizzie’s room. I wanted to check to see if anyone had started down the steps.” He looked at the assembled group, his face serious. “No one had.”

Martha nodded. “It’s not surprising. We often hear guests tell of female voices raised in argument. I’ve heard it several times myself. And the unexplained footsteps are almost a daily occurrence.”

Mrs. Wheeler, Trixie, and Dan looked fascinated at the prospect. Mart and Jim looked as though they were searching for some logical explanation for what they had heard. Honey and Di’s pretty features displayed apprehension, while Mr. Wheeler and Brian remained skeptical. The enigmatic Mr. Grant’s chiseled features were unreadable.

“Well, would you like to hear more about Lizzie or has this shaken you?” their tour guide wondered.

“I think we’re up for the full tour, aren’t we, gang?” Jim looked at his friends and family, who all nodded eagerly. Mr. Grant gave his assent with the slightest nod of the head. Trixie followed him into Lizzie’s room, wondering – not for the first time – what he was doing here by himself, renting out three whole rooms at an extravagant rate. She had read in a New England travel guide that rooms in this bed and breakfast were booked almost a year in advance and fetched top dollar.

Trixie forgot about the redheaded stranger as Martha’s thick New England accent continued the tale of the life and times of Lizbeth Andrews Borden. She finished up with, “This concludes our little tour. Does anybody have any questions?”

Thinking of the handkerchief she had found, Trixie spoke up. “How much of the furniture is the original furniture of the Bordens?”

“Unfortunately, most of the Borden furniture has been sold or destroyed over the last century. All of the original Borden furniture that we were able to salvage and restore is currently in Lizzie and Emma’s suite. The dresser, the armoire, and the bed in Emma’s room are all original pieces.”

Trixie felt a thrill of excitement as she realized that the piece of furniture that she had found the handkerchief in had been used by the Borden family. She wondered about the origin of the handkerchief, but then became confused as she realized a crucial fact: the music, the arguing voices, and the house in general gave her a creepy, eerie feeling. *Almost like Lisgard House*, she reflected. But the feeling that overwhelmed her as she picked up the small piece of cloth was anything but creepy. She had felt a warmth, a kinship, a feeling of serenity that had filled her and buoyed her. *I’m imagining things! I have to be!* she scolded herself. *If I don’t watch it, Mart will be talking about the men in white coats coming for me. Except he’d say the male members of the species Homo sapiens attired in alabaster cloaks were ambulating to abduct me and intern me into the asylum.* Trixie giggled to herself.

It was then that she realized that everyone was filing down toward the dining room for lunch, and Mr. Grant was staring at her curiously.

“Trixie, is it?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr. Grant,” she said politely. “May I help you with something?”

The two hung back from the group, the young sleuth eager to hear what this mysterious man had to say.

“You might wonder what I am doing staying in a haunted bed and breakfast by myself,” Mr. Grant started. “You see, Trixie, my interest in the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast is professional.”

"Are you in real estate?" Trixie asked.

"No, I'm not in so ordinary a profession." Mr. Grant chuckled. It was the first show of emotion Trixie had seen him display. She looked at him, her blue eyes question marks.

"No, Trixie, I am interested in the hauntings that occur here at the bed and breakfast. I am a clairvoyant, a medium as it were, and I would like to invite you and your friends to attend a séance tonight at the stroke of midnight to call the ghost of the Borden woman herself!"

Beatrix could do little more than stare, open-mouthed, at the man who'd haunted her dreams for the better part of three years. Her nerves were still clanging from the fright he'd given her. As the fear began to ebb away, her anger surged forward. She yanked her arm from his grasp, her blue eyes shooting daggers at him. "Just who do you think you are?" she hissed. "Presuming to grab me like some fishmonger's wife?"

James' green eyes narrowed, his tone dripping with ice. "My apologies, Miss. Perhaps I was addressing you too highly? Perhaps *lady* isn't a title suited for you. The *ladies* of my acquaintance do not often enter houses into which they were not invited and parade blatantly in front of all the neighbors their brazen disregard for the police, the law and the very cause of justice itself!"

Beatrix's mouth dropped inelegantly. Behind her, Martin shifted uneasily, glancing between his wife and his sister-in-law. Seemingly with one mind, Maddie and Diana walked forward, each tucking an arm through James' and smiled up at him.

"James, dearest!" Diana said with a wide smile. "Have you come all the way from Surrey just to see us?"

"Truly, I know you were broken-hearted when I married Brian," Maddie said, her hazel eyes innocently flirtatious. "But surely you can forgive a little unwitting soul such as I?"

James looked, startled, from one woman to another before sighing. "How is a man to keep his anger hot when the two of you drain it from him?"

"I can't imagine," Diana said with a flutter of her eyelids.

Her husband merely snorted in response. He walked forward with a grin. "James, you hit us at a very strange time."

"Indeed!" Maddie added, her nod confirming Martin's words. "We heard women arguing. Women who weren't even present!" She shuddered.

James immediately locked gazes with Beatrix who arched a sandy eyebrow at him. Without a word to her, he turned to smile at Maddie. "I usually avoid being present when women argue. I can certainly sympathize with their not wanting to be present at their own argument!"

Maddie giggled as Diana gently slapped his arm. "Oh, James, do be serious!" Diana scolded him. "I believe it must have been spirits." Her violet eyes widened and she gasped. "Perhaps even poor Mrs. Borden!"

James' smile widened into a grin and he looked up at Martin with twinkling green eyes. "Oh, yes," he teased. "Mrs. Borden has nothing better to do than terrorize this house, wouldn't you say, Mart, old boy?"

To his surprise, Martin didn't pick up his teasing. His blue eyes glanced around the room uneasily before they came back to rest on James. "Sorry to say I heard them too," he said quietly. "Damned strange, if you ask me."

"Don't even bother, Mart," Beatrix said coldly. "If he's cast me as less than a lady, then you, by association, must be less than a gentleman." She smiled without mirth. "And of course, only a *gentleman's* word can be trusted."

James gently extricated himself from the gloved hands of Maddie and Diana, who gave each other questioning glances, and gestured at Martin. "Why don't you assist the ladies downstairs, Mart? The others are waiting outside. I will bring Beatrix in a moment."

Martin looked at Beatrix, hesitating. Upon her slight nod, he held out an arm to each lady and quickly made his exit from the room.

James walked over to the door and closed it before turning back to Beatrix, his green eyes furious. "I don't know what game it is you are playing this time, Lady Belden, but it will *not* work."

"Game, Lord Frayne?" she drawled deliberately slowly. "I'm afraid I have no idea to what you refer."

"Are you so determined, then, to find...nay, *court* disaster wherever you travel?" he demanded. He gestured around the room. "This is a house where violent death has occurred! The soles of your boots are trodding where a murderer once did. Does *nothing* affect you?"

"Why do you assume that nothing affects me?" she snapped back angrily. "Furthermore, what business is it of yours? You felt yourself well rid of me two years ago."

James moved suddenly, grabbing her around the waist and pulling her to him. He looked down at her, his green eyes blazing into hers and said roughly, "I was not rid of you two years ago, and I am greatly afraid that I never will be."

Beatrix's eyes widened, but before she could say a word in response, his lips had captured hers in a hard, demanding kiss.

A delicious shiver traveled up from the very tips of her toes, wrapping its way insidiously around her as one of his hands opened against her back, pressing her insistently against him, the other curving around the slender column of her neck.

She couldn't fathom the sensations that filled her. In her wildest dreams, she had not imagined the reality of the hot and heavy feel of his mouth against hers, the almost desperate way he grabbed her to him as if he would not...*could* not...let her go. She had not imagined it, yet it was instantaneously addicting. Moreso than any mystery she had ever tried to solve.

She inched closer to him, wrapping her arms around his neck, giving and taking as much as he. The heat building up in her fought against the chilliness of the room.

In the back of her mind, she heard the murmur of voices, but blocked it, not wanting anything to distract her from the reality of James in her arms, kissing her senseless. The voices, however, continued to grow louder, rising in volume, and suddenly, she felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

In a rush of movement, she found herself, moments later, pushed to the floor, James covering her protectively, as one of the drawers of the dresser flew across the room, slicing through the place where they had just been standing. The drawer crashed against the opposite wall and fell to the floor in splinters.

“Wh-h-at...” she gasped, her chest rising and falling rapidly.

James ran his hands quickly over her body, resting finally on her face. His green eyes looked worriedly into her blue ones. “Are you all right?”

“I’m well, thanks to you,” she said huskily. Beatrix struggled to sit up and James reluctantly backed away from her, resting gingerly against the large double bed behind him.

A few moments later, the door flew open, a conglomeration of people clustered at the door.

Martin’s narrowed glance encompassed the room, flicking first to the splintered drawer before settling on Beatrix and James on the floor. “Good God, Bea! Now you’re throwing furniture at him? Surely you could settle your differences in a less violent manner!”

James and Beatrix exchanged glances before he got to his feet and assisted Beatrix to hers. Finally, he turned to the others and shook his head. “Would that it were only Lady Beatrix throwing things at me.”

Beatrix inwardly groaned as she noted several blonde curls trailing around her face. *Were those from him when we fell? Or from his clever, clever fingers?* She opened her mouth to speak and found that her throat had constricted and a chill of panic unlike any she’d ever known pulsed through her veins.

Suddenly, she felt his hand clasp hers, could feel his strength seeping through his fingers, and the panic slowly unraveled. Beatrix smiled gratefully at him before turning toward the others, pointedly ignoring Maddie and Diana’s speculative looks and Brian’s raised eyebrows. “The drawer...” she broke off, cleared her throat and tried again. “The drawer flew out from the dresser and nearly took my head off. If James hadn’t pushed me to the floor...”

Maddie and Diana gasped. Martin’s face clouded. Brian looked at her in surprise, saying skeptically, “It flew out of the dresser? On its own?”

Beatrix glared at her brother. “Do you call me a liar?”

James tightened his hand around Beatrix’s before he turned to Brian with a rueful expression. “She doesn’t lie. I saw the whole thing myself, Brian.” His gaze turned to Martin. “And those voices you mentioned...they were back again.”

Maddie’s eyes widened as she looked around the room, unable to control a shudder. “There’s something very, very wrong here.”

Diana's violet eyes expanded, looking large in her milky white face. "Perhaps the spirit world is trying to communicate with us!"

Brian instantly protested. "The spirit world, Diana? Please be serious!"

"You didn't hear those voices that the rest of us did, Brian," Diana insisted. "Arguing... angrily."

"Look at all of the things that have happened already today," Martin said quietly. He gestured toward the drawer. "Bea was nearly hurt from that drawer. The voices arguing in this room were heard by five of us at different times."

"Not to mention the horse shying outside," Maddie reminded them.

"What's this about your horse?" demanded James, whirling to face Beatrix. "Were you injured?"

Beatrix shook her head. "No, Benjamin pulled me away from the carriage in time. I am well. Do not worry." In spite of her fear, she felt a warmth seep through her at his words. *Perhaps he has not been as indifferent as I had thought he was!*

"Are you suggesting, then, that all of these incidents today were inspired by ghosts?" Brian said skeptically.

Beatrix roused herself from the distracting pressure of James' hand against hers and stared pointedly at her brother. "And if we are?"

He glanced at the others who all looked at him with similar looks of defiance. Brian sighed and threw up his hands. "Well, I am certainly not clairvoyant. What would you have me do?"

"Clairvoyance!" Diana said, her eyes lighting with interest. "Yes! We can find a medium...hold a séance! Perhaps they can determine if we really have tangled with the spirit world!"

Brian groaned and shook his head, but was quickly overruled by the chatter of his wife, sister and sister-in-law as they plotted and schemed to have Benjamin and Elizabeth set up a séance in their home for the next night.

James offered little in the conversation, but it was apparent to all that he intended to be present, and he never once let go of Beatrix's hand.

It was a serious group of Bob-Whites that gathered in the parlor that night with Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler and the two owners of the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast. They were all eager to hear what Mr. Grant had to say.

"I have received permission from the owners to conduct a séance tonight," Mr. Grant stated in his straightforward manner. "I would be very grateful if everyone present would be willing to participate in this evening's séance. But, before you decide, please listen to what I have to say." The redheaded man stared intently at the assembled group and knew that he had their undivided attention.

"A séance is a gathering where a group of people attempt to make contact with the spirit world. Actually, not just to simply contact the spirit world, but to actually communicate with spirits residing in

that world. I know that if your mind is not open to the possibilities, this may seem like an outrageous statement. But, I assure you, there are many video recordings of séances that prove successful communication with the spirits. There are several organizations, including my employer, the International Society for Paranormal Research, that are dedicated to exploring such phenomenon and proving scientifically the validity of claims of successful contact.

"I myself am a medium who has performed a number of séances – many of them successful. Given the history of this house and the restlessness of the spirits that reside here, I firmly believe that we can have a successful séance tonight. However," Mr. Grant's deep green eyes rested on Brian briefly, "you must be open-minded. I cannot stress enough that this is the most important part of a séance. Spirits are sensitive to skepticism and will not respond while in the presence of skeptics."

Mr. Grant paused, as if considering something. "I think that there are enough open-minded people here and that the desire of the spirits to communicate is so strong, that a little skepticism can be overcome. But no one with a completely closed mind has any business being at a séance.

"We're lucky. It is generally best to have the number of participants be divisible by three, and twelve is the best number. If everyone gathered here participates, there will be exactly twelve, including me." Mr. Grant's voice, normally very reserved and quiet, suddenly became quite impassioned. "I think this could be one of the most exciting séances that I have ever conducted, and we could learn some truly stunning facts about one of the major unsolved crimes of the nineteenth century. I hope you'll consider joining me in my quest."

A profound silence filled the room, almost as if the very house itself was holding its breath, waiting for the response of those gathered in its parlor. Trixie felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

Please do.

The whisper was faint, but the words were unmistakable. Mart's blue eyes were as big as saucers, Diana gasped, and Honey paled. Trixie did not have to ask the others if they had heard the voice. It was clear that they all had.

Something wanted them to perform the séance.

Trixie looked at her oldest brother. Brian's handsome face indicated that he clearly didn't know what to think about the situation. He was a scientist at heart, and therefore a skeptic, but he could not deny that he had heard the mysterious voice.

"I'm in," Trixie said in a loud, clear voice, causing Honey and Di to jump. They both giggled nervously.

"I'm in, too," they both said.

Mart, Dan, and the Wheelers all agreed to participate. Trixie's round blue eyes turned toward Jim. "Jim?" she asked.

The redhead grinned at his girlfriend. "Of course I'm in. I'm the one who would follow you into the bushes after a dinosaur, remember?" Trixie smiled happily at his words.

Honey turned to Brian. "What do you say, Brian? Can you be open-minded?"

Brian paused, but then finally nodded his agreement.

“Great!” Mr. Grant clapped his hands together in anticipation. “I shall get the supplies we’ll need. The best thing you all can do right now is relax. Try to free your minds and get in the mood for the event ahead.”

The Bob-Whites chatted with each other and the owners of the bed and breakfast as they waited for the medium to return with his equipment. Trixie wondered how this séance, led by a true believer, would differ from the debacle directed by that fraud who wanted nothing more than to burn down Lisgard House.

Soon, Mr. Grant called them into the dining room. The long ovular table was covered in a simple white tablecloth. In the center were three candles, two white and one purple. Trixie expected them to be lit, but they were not. The room was filled with the scent of incense, somehow both familiar and exotic at the same time.

The paranormal investigator was setting up a video camera in one corner of the room and looked up as everyone gathered in the dining room. He smiled at everyone and instructed them to find a place around the table. The Bob-Whites and the others did as they were told. Soon, eleven of the twelve participants were seated around the long table, anxiously glancing at each other as their spiritual guide finished setting up the video camera.

Mr. Grant finally adjusted things to his satisfaction and sat in the empty chair at the head of the oval table. He was seated between Trixie, on his right, and Honey, to his left. “You see three candles on the table. The white candles are for purity and peace, while the purple candle is for spirituality. The incense contains three scents: cinnamon, frankincense, and sandalwood. These are essential scents for a séance. The cinnamon releases warmth and energy, while the frankincense expands consciousness and promotes meditation. The sandalwood is grounding and will help us to stay focused.

“I will be leading the séance; the last thing we want is all of us shouting at the spirit, should we contact one. After we join hands, we will do a deep breathing exercise to get us in touch with our senses. After I think we are ready, we will all repeat the following words until we have a response. ‘Abby Borden, we ask that you commune with us and move among us.’ I have decided that of the ghosts that may reside here at 92 Second Street, Abby is the best spirit to contact.

“If we are successful, Abby’s response may be to create a sudden coldness in the room, a rapping sound, or a breeze. You may also possibly feel a light ache in the body part that was significant in Abby’s death. In this case, you may have a slight headache, since she died of a blow to the head.”

“Excuse me,” Trixie asked.

“Yes, Trixie?”

“When you say ‘slight,’ what exactly do you mean?”

“People who report aches in the significant body part say that it is very mild. Noticeable, but mild. It shouldn’t be uncomfortable.”

Reassured, Trixie nodded and waited for the medium to continue.

“If we make contact, I will establish that we are indeed speaking to Abby Borden. I will then hopefully be able to ask her questions and get her responses. If, for whatever reason, Abby – or any spirit we may encounter – gets violent, we will quickly wish the spirit well, tell it to go in peace, break the circle of hands, and turn on the lights.”

Honey involuntarily shivered. Brian, on the other side of her, gently squeezed her hand in reassurance. Although he was curious about the proceedings of the séance and wondered what might lie ahead, he was sure that the evening wouldn't progress to that point.

Mr. Grant's serious gaze swept the table. "Does anybody have any questions?" Seeing that nobody did, he then picked up the three candles from the center of the table.

"We are going to charge the candles. I will pass them around. When it is your turn, hold the candle in your hands and visualize the power emanating from it. When you are charging the white candles, envision white smoke arising from it. When you are holding the purple candle, picture purple smoke."

Brian bit his tongue to keep from smiling at this latest instruction. He was desperately trying to be open-minded about this, but this was going a bit too far!

After everyone had "charged" all of the candles, Mr. Grant placed them in the center of the table and lit them. A flick of the switch darkened the bulbs in the heavy chandelier above them, and the room was plunged into near darkness, the light from the three candles casting an eerie glow over the room.

Mr. Grant returned to his seat and instructed everyone to join hands. "Unless the spirit gets violent, do not break the circle of hands," he instructed them. "Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose and let it out slowly through your mouth. Breathe in...breathe out." After a few minutes of nothing but the rhythmic breathing of the séance participants, Mr. Grant sensed that the mood was relaxed enough to start the séance.

"Abby Borden, we ask that you commune with us and move among us," he intoned. Everybody else took up the chant. Trixie felt it in her bones that Abby would communicate with them and wondered how quickly she would come.

She didn't have long to wait. After the fifth request, her head was suddenly filled with such blinding pain that she gasped out loud and squeezed Jim's hand tightly.

"Trixie? Are you okay?" Mr. Grant asked while everyone else went silent.

"I have a...headache. Bad," Trixie managed to gasp out.

Just as suddenly as the headache struck her, it was gone. At the same moment the room was plunged into such coldness that everyone's breath was forming white vapors in front of them. Madeleine Wheeler shivered from fright as much from the suddenly icy air.

"Abby Borden, if you are present among us, please knock twice," Mr. Grant requested.

Everyone held their breath and waited for a response. The unmistakable sound of two raps filled the air.

Beatrix shivered slightly as she walked into the darkened room. Elizabeth had been instantly supportive when they'd told her of the strange things that had happened in the Borden house. She had quickly called a pair of sisters, Jacqueline and Harriet Burkett, who were long time friends of hers, and accomplished in performing séances. Benjamin had offered no objection, being a man always eager to live on the edge of trouble. James had arrived as well, bringing Riordan and Daniel in tow, the two men warmly welcomed by the others. Riordan's knowing glances as he leaned over Beatrix's hand only served to heighten her nervousness. The hush of anticipation in the air was not only due to the prospect of contacting another world, but of the very real, very live male presence standing protectively behind her.

Diana, Maddie, Brian and Martin rounded out the group of twelve. The heavy burgundy drapes were pulled closed, blocking out the June moonlight. A large extended table stretched through the room which appeared to be a library of sorts, old, weathered books peppering its walls. The table was covered simply with a white linen tablecloth, a few candles flickering on the large expanse.

The men waited quietly until the women had been seated and then they took their seats, looking expectantly at the imposing sisters, seated side by side, dark mahogany hair piled on each patrician head. Jacqueline nodded at them and instructed them, her low, husky voice sending shivers down Beatrix's spine.

"The spirits are very strong this evening," she said slowly, looking around at the assembly, her gaze lingering on Beatrix. "However, it is important to clear your minds and offer a place that is serene and safe for them to appear." She glanced at some of the men who were making valiant efforts to not smile. "As, I suspect, you would want were you to give important information to someone. A place that offered a quiet, listening ear."

With a quelling glance, she then picked up a candle and held it gently in her gloved hands. "We need to infuse these candles with our spirits. As you hold the candle, concentrate on sending power forth. Your spirits calling on those that are forced to linger in between our world and that of the beyond."

The eerie, flickering lights passed from hand to hand, briefly illuminating the faces of the men and women as they traveled around the table. Beatrix took each candle in turn from James, his green eyes searching hers for any discomfort. Her senses felt heightened, despite the darkness of the room. Her gloved fingers lingered on the last candle, the rivulets of wax pulsating briefly before hardening into cold, hard molds along the base of the candle. As she returned the candle to the center of the table, the blue vein patterns threading through her wrist were illuminated in the dark amber glow of the candle. A brief flash in her mind's eye noted the deep red stain on Abby Borden's bedroom carpet and she shuddered. *How quickly our pulses can be stopped.*

"Very good," Harriet said at that point, her gravelly voice scraping through the room. "Take the hands of those sitting next to you. We will need a circle of our spirits joining in the call to those on the other side."

Beatrix felt the warm clasp of Riordan's hand as he curled his fingers around hers with a squeeze and his eternally wicked grin, but a sharp bolt shot through her at the gentle firmness of James' grasp around hers. She glanced, startled, at him and saw the awareness flare in his green eyes and a tiny prick of feminine satisfaction warmed her as a slight smile curved her lips.

She was grateful for the snug masculine hands clasping hers in the next moment, however, as the almost suffocating warmth of the June heat that had bathed the room since their arrival seemed to vanish in an instant. Beatrix felt the cold as an insidious intruder, stealing up, wrapping its way around her legs, through her skirts and shift, chilling each piece of her skin until she felt as if she'd been buried in ice.

She glanced around the table, noting the widened eyes of her friends, the nervousness of her brothers and the inconsistent calm of the two women in the center of the table. Beatrix was almost afraid to exhale as she saw the white plumes that wisped their way out as the others breathed, not saying a word.

Harriet smiled briefly and nodded, continuing in her lowered tones, "Good. Continue to breathe slowly, in and out, and concentrate on bringing a sense of quiet...of openness." Her voice had been so calm, almost hypnotic, that Beatrix started when her voice rose dramatically, intoning in a commanding cadence, "Abby Borden. Are you present amongst us? If you are, please knock twice."

Beatrix held her breath, tightening her grips on Riordan and James' hands, all her energy focused, waiting for any sound. For a few moments, everyone seemed suspended, tied together in a web of apprehension so strong that it made everything surrounding them vanish, the only reality the pulsating warmth of the clasp of hands around the table.

The first rap, when it came, sent an almost palpable shock of fright through the group. Beatrix's eyes widened. Even Brian, his dark eyes still slightly skeptical, glanced around uneasily. The second rap sent a shiver of excitement down her spine, seemingly incongruous to the fear that had been there a moment before. *Abby Borden was here!*

The assembled guests stared at each other. Diana involuntarily squeezed Mart's hand a little tighter. Madeleine Wheeler felt a chill run up her spine. Trixie and Honey, despite their apprehension, eagerly leaned forward, anticipation sharpening their senses as they strained to hear a ghostly voice.

"I would like to confirm we are communicating with the dear, departed spirit of Abby Borden," Mr. Grant said. "Are you the ghost of Abby Borden? Two knocks signify yes, one knock stands for no."

Again, two knocks sounded in the dining room. *Abby is here!* Trixie thought. *We can finally find out what happened!*

"Were you born on January 21, 1828?" Mr. Grant asked, trying to confirm that it was truly the ghost of Abby who was communicating with them. Two knocks answered his question.

"Were you born on Ferry Street?" Mr. Grant asked. A single rap sounded. This surprised the Bob-Whites and Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler, who were expecting an affirmative answer. The medium and the owners of the inn were relieved; it was Lizzie who had been born on Ferry Street, not Abby.

"Were you born on Rodman Street in Fall River?" Mr. Grant asked. Two raps confirmed his question.

"Did your parents name you Abby Durfee Gray?" Again, two raps sounded in answer to the medium's question.

"Did you marry Andrew Jackson Borden on January 18, 1864?" Only one rap was heard. "Was it in 1865?" The ghostly presence responded with two knocks.

"Did you own a cat while you lived in this house?" When the spirit answered in the affirmative, Mr. Grant continued. "Did Lizzie Borden decapitate that cat?"

Diana and Honey gasped at the question, and even Brian was affected. None of them had known that Lizzie had been cruel to animals. The question must have caused a swell of emotion in the spirit communicating with them, because the two knocks were accompanied by the shaking of the chandelier above their heads. Everyone looked up when they heard the sound of tinkling glass, except for Mr. Grant, who had expected an emotional response. He was quite convinced that he was indeed communicating with the spirit of Abby Borden; he felt sure that another spirit, especially that of Lizzie herself, would have responded negatively to that particular question. The accompanying emotion confirmed, in the medium's mind, that he had found the spirit he had been looking for. It was time for the next set of questions.

“Abby Borden, do you wish to tell us about the day you were murdered?”

Again, a profound silence descended upon the house, and all present suddenly felt the air surrounding them become stifflingly oppressive. Brian and Jim, initially skeptical, were still unsure of what they were experiencing, but neither could deny the changes in the air around them. The group waited for Abby Borden’s response.

The rapping sounds they expected did not materialize, and Trixie felt disappointment settling in the pit of her stomach.

The startling sound of breaking glass filled the ears of those gathered as a vase on the sideboard shattered. A moaning, broken voice answered Mr. Grant’s question.

“Yes.”

The questions seemed to roll out like steady tolls of a church’s bells. Beatrix stared, fascinated, as Harriet fired question after question through the darkened room.

“Please answer our questions. One rap for no, two raps for yes. Are you Abby Borden, wife of Andrew Borden?”

Rap, rap.

“Was your residence at 92 Second Street in Fall River, Massachusetts?”

Rap, rap.

“Were you the first wife of Andrew Borden?”

Rap.

The questions continued, each one slow, measured and careful. Beatrix marveled at the ability of the two women to stay calm. She could feel the thundering of her pulse rushing through her head in an almost painful manner. Each breath she took seemed to coat her lungs with ice and it took all her focus and determination to keep her grip on her lifelines, the two men on either side of her.

She barely registered the wide, frightened glances Maddie gave her, or the paleness of Diana’s skin, an eerie white in the darkness of the room. Battling against her innate fear was that insidious, glorious sense of triumph: the prickling that started in her very veins when she knew that a mystery was at hand. Her siren. The inexplicable starting to unravel had never failed to dispel any fear, nor let her go from its tenacious grip once it had taken hold of her.

The hairs on her neck stood on end as she felt the whisper of a breath icily trail its way through the air. Her eyes widened and she did not breathe as Harriet asked, “Do you want to tell us about the day you were murdered?”

The expected raps did not come. Instead, a deep, bottomless sorrow vibrated through the room, enveloping her...choking her. The answer was a cold, grief-stricken whisper against her ear.

“Yes.”

Twelve pairs of startled eyes stared at each other in the dim light. It was hard to see anything clearly in the faint glow of the candlelight, but the fear in the room was palpable. Trixie, tightly gripping Jim’s hand, turned to study Mr. Grant. The redhead’s features did not show fear, to Trixie’s infinite relief, but they clearly showed surprise.

“Abby Borden, can you speak to us?”

Once again, the room was silent for what seemed like forever. Finally, a single knock answered the medium’s question.

“Was it the emotions you felt at the question that gave you a voice, if only briefly?”

The spirit answered affirmatively with two knocks.

“Do you want to continue to answer yes and no questions?”

The single rap sounded angry to Trixie’s ears.

“Do you want to communicate in some other way?”

In answer to the question, a painting fell off the wall, the resulting bang causing everyone to jump. Trixie remembered that Mr. Grant had said that if the spirit became angry or frightening to wish it well and quickly break the circle of hands. But Mr. Grant still seemed calm and in control, so Trixie, her insides like ice, waited for the next question.

“Abby, I understand you are upset, but if we go back to yes or no questions, you can still tell us your message.”

Another painting fell off of the wall, followed by the opening and loud closing of the dining room door. Mr. Grant was about to speak again when a strong, icy wind swept through the room, extinguishing the candles.

The room was plunged into darkness.

Everyone seemed frozen into place. Was the word spoken out loud? Or was it merely something *felt*? Beatrix hardly knew.

Harriet glanced at her sister and continued to ask slow, quiet questions. “Are you still present, Abby?”

Instead of a rap, the table shook underneath their grasped hands. Beatrix lifted her hands reflexively off the table, biting her lip to keep from exclaiming as the candles tilted dangerously under the rattle of the table legs.

“Do you wish to tell us what happened that day?” Harriet pushed further.

The gas light chandelier trembled. All eyes flew upward. Beatrix felt poised to dart and run. Her normal assurance had disappeared. The others looked uneasy, the level of apprehension running from perturbation on Daniel and Benjamin’s faces all the way to sheer terror on Maddie and Diana’s.

“Abby, we realize that you are agitated. Please know that we are here to help you. To listen to you. Please rap twice if you understand this.”

Beatrix waited for the raps. A wait that was in vain. Within a moment, a sea of paper seemed to shroud the room as the books flew off the shelves; a loud litany of thuds vibrating through the floor as the heavy tomes hit the floor hard.

Maddie couldn't contain a muted shriek as the table quivered again. Beatrix crunched her shoulders close to her head instinctively, closing her eyes in fright, feeling almost as if an icy hand had brushed the back of her neck. Seconds later, the growl of a rushing, frigid wind whipped through the room, extinguishing the candles and rippling through the fallen books.

Beatrix opened her tightly shut eyes, but found that she saw nothing. The room was completely void of light.

Shrieks of fright filled the air, but Mr. Grant's voice rose above them. “Do *not* break the circle of hands!” he commanded with such authority that everyone instantly quieted down and obeyed.

“Abby, are you the only spirit present?”

Rap.

“Abby, is Lizzie also present now?”

Rap, rap.

A dizziness assailed Trixie as she processed that bit of information. It had been eerie enough, though exciting, to think that she was in the presence of a ghost. She had been fairly sure that Abby Borden was harmless, so she quelled the initial fear she felt and concentrated on her insatiable curiosity. But now Trixie was apparently in the presence of the ghost of an alleged double murderer!

Suddenly, Trixie became aware of a prickling on the back of her neck. She couldn't explain it, but the young sleuth was convinced that Lizzie Borden's spirit was *standing directly behind her*.

Suddenly, a cacophony of sound replaced the oppressive silence as everyone started to exclaim. Jacqueline's voice broke through the shouts. “Everyone remain calm. Keep your hands together and do not break the circle.”

Harriet began speaking again, asking simple yes and no questions designed to calm the agitated spirit. Beatrix could not fathom how Harriet could remain so measured, so assured when it was all she could do to keep her wits about her.

Reassured by the slight squeeze of James' hand against hers, Beatrix listened again to the questions.

Without any warning, a sharp, blinding pain shot through her forehead. Several groans of the others around her indicated that they too had been struck by the shooting ache.

The table trembled again and the books fluttered. The drapes rustled against the window and the very chair Beatrix sat in seemed to shake as if the earth was quaking beneath her. The chill in the room grew stronger and she could not stop her teeth from chattering as she felt a pulsating puff of air travel down her spine as if Abby's spirit had come to *stand directly behind her*.

The frightened young sleuth took a deep, measured breath, trying to calm herself. The adrenaline pulsing through her veins, causing her heart to feel as though it would leap right out of her chest, did not help the situation. She was prepared to open her mouth, to beg Mr. Grant to stop the séance, when she heard Brian's gasp of pain.

"Brian?" she asked, concern for her older brother overriding not only her fear, but her intention of remaining quiet through the proceedings.

"I'm okay," he managed to state. "It's just...my head."

Trixie, also having experienced the sharp shooting pain through her forehead, knew what Brian was feeling. Abby's spirit seemed to be growing more restless in the presence of her stepdaughter's spirit.

"It's okay," Brian stated a moment later. "It's gone."

"Abby, we don't want to cause you any more pain," Mr. Grant explained. "We'll let you and Lizzie go in peace."

A loud rap sounded once and Trixie knew that Abby Borden desperately wanted, *needed*, to communicate with them. The brutally murdered woman did not want to go before she had told her audience what she needed to. But Trix also intuitively knew that Lizzie had appeared to stop her from communicating. She also believed that Lizzie was a strong enough force to succeed.

A long, evil laugh filled the room, punctuating Trixie's thoughts.

The faint echoes of a very sinister laugh filled the room. Beatrix gasped.

She could hear the frown in Harriet's voice as she demanded, "Abby? Are you there?"

Rap. Rap.

Beatrix filled her lungs with air, not even aware she'd been holding her breath. She could still feel the tremors in her chair and the icy clinch around her neck. *Will she ever tell us what happened?*

"Was that you laughing?" Harriet asked.

A long silence met her question. A silence that grew more crushing as they waited. Suddenly, the table shook with the thunder of a single, crashing...

RAP!

"Abby, I am very sorry, but I don't think it's safe for any of us anymore," Mr. Grant said. "We wish you well, Abby, and ask that you go in peace. Lizzie, if that is you, we also ask that you leave us in peace and may you find peace yourself."

The group breathed a collective sigh of relief, even as a deep swelling of disappointment enveloped Trixie. She had so wanted to hear Abby's story. Would anybody ever know who murdered the Bordens?

Just as they were about to release their hands, there was a sudden movement that swept through the entire room. The force of whatever it was knocked Mr. Grant back in his seat. Trixie and Honey were

still holding the man's hands and their arms were yanked forcefully as something impacted the man's body.

"Mr. Grant?" they both cried.

"I need to tell my story!" Mr. Grant fairly shouted, agony and passion alive in his normally composed voice.

All of the sudden, she felt warm. Warmth streaked through the room, enveloping her in a welcome blanket. The tremors stopped. A sense of calm settled over the table.

Beatrix blinked, still unable to see in the pitch black room. She finally found her voice and ventured, "What happened?"

Her words sparked others and the hushed murmurs rose to fill the oppressive silence.

"I don't understand," Harriet said quietly. "She was so forcefully here...now it's as if she's gone. I..."

"Abby?" Jacqueline asked. "Are you with us?"

No answer. The room remained quiet. Not even a rustle of breeze cooled the normal June heat. Beatrix felt the sweat pool between the fingers of her suddenly too hot gloves, over warmed in the heated grasp of the men on either side. *Where could she have gone?*

"I, Abby Borden, am *here!* I shall have my final peace!" The words spoken in Mr. Grant's voice were so incongruous to his normal countenance that the assembled guests sat flabbergasted, unable to react.

Trixie was the first to regain her speech. "Abby, please tell us, we want to know. Who murdered you? Who murdered you, Abby?"

"It was..."

Just then, there was a blinding flash of light. Trixie looked across the table, expecting to see Honey, who was sitting directly across from her, and Brian, who was seated next to Honey. What she saw was beyond belief.

Beatrix almost felt a sense of disappointment. Now they would never know what had actually happened. She was about to release Riordan and James' hands when a blaze of light filled the room with an eerie golden glow. Her mouth dropped open as she looked across the table, shock filling her every pore.

This can't be! Trixie's brain screamed. It was almost like looking in a mirror. She saw...herself. But herself dressed up as a Victorian woman! *How could this be possible?*

Sitting next to the Victorian version of herself was a handsome redheaded man who looked exactly like Jim, except the suit he was wearing was in fashion over a century ago.

But Jim is sitting next to me! Trixie thought frantically. *I haven't let go of his hand!*

As she turned to look at Jim for reassurance, the light faded, once again plunging the room into darkness.

Beatrice stifled a shriek as she looked across the table. Only it wasn't her table. Maddie and Brian had disappeared, and she found herself staring not at her siblings, but as if she were looking at herself in her pier glass at home. But the startled face staring back at her was younger. Her hair was short and she wore the oddest clothing!

She couldn't stop gaping in fascination when she realized that James also had a mirror image, a younger one who looked back at them, equally stunned.

Impossible! Her brain cried out. She still felt the warmth of his hand in hers. Her only lifeline to sanity. "James?" she asked in a tremulous voice. As Beatrice turned frightened blue eyes to the man next to her, the light diminished and finally vanished all together, leaving them in darkness once more.

The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

Matthew Wheeler immediately jumped up and turned on the lights. "Is everyone okay?"

The shaken Bob-Whites looked at each other. "I think so," Mart managed to state.

Matthew returned to his wife's side and stroked her hair, but Honey's mother was surprisingly composed, considering the situation.

Trixie and Honey turned toward Mr. Grant to see if he was all right. He was slumped in his chair, eyes closed.

"Mr. Grant?" Honey said, afraid that the man was seriously injured. To her relief, his eyes fluttered open. He blinked several times as he tried to focus his eyes.

"Is everyone okay?" he asked weakly.

"I've already checked and everyone appears to be fine, Mr. Grant," Matthew Wheeler said in clipped tones that indicated his anger. "Would you like to tell me what the hell happened, considering you're supposed to be the expert?"

"From what I can tell, Abby Borden became desperate to tell her story and decided to use me as a conduit to communicate with you. Lizzie Borden would not allow that and did everything to stop that communication from happening."

"But that doesn't explain..." Trixie cried out and then stopped abruptly.

"What, Trixie?" Honey asked, pretty sure of what the response was going to be.

Trixie bit her lip and looked at her friends. The sight of the two innkeepers looking at her interestedly only added to her apprehension. She knew no one was going to believe her - she wasn't sure *she* believed herself!

"Well, at the height of the, uhh, confusion, during that bright flash of light, I thought I saw something. But I couldn't have seen what I thought I saw, so skip it," Trixie said, hoping her friends would let her get away with that.

To her surprise, Mart spoke up. "Did you see yourself? Someone who looked like you. but was dressed in antique clothes?"

Trixie gasped and looked at her brother. "Yes! How did you know?"

"I saw it, too," Mart stated.

Diana spoke up. "I did, too, Trix."

Trixie looked around the group. "Did everyone see that?"

Honey and Dan confessed that they had. Brian and Jim exchanged glances, and each reluctantly nodded.

"I didn't see someone who looked like me, but I did briefly think I saw a group of people dressed in Victorian clothes," Madeleine stated. "I thought I was hallucinating, just imagining it, since Abby Borden lived in Victorian times. I didn't realize everyone had seen it."

Matthew and the two owners of 92 Second Street also confessed to seeing Victorian people, although none that had looked like them.

Trixie turned to Mr. Grant. "How do you explain that?"

Mr. Grant looked at the young detective, eagerness and curiosity alive in her round blue eyes. "I can't explain it, Trixie. And, unfortunately, I didn't see it, either. I was contending with being possessed by Abby's spirit."

"Have you ever heard of a group hallucination while conducting a séance, Mr. Grant?" Dan asked.

Mr. Grant shook his head. "No, it is most unusual. I wish I had an explanation for it. Especially since you young people all insist that you saw people who looked like yourselves. This is very puzzling, indeed."

"Well, at least we have proof that Lizzie Borden killed Abby!" Trixie crowed triumphantly.

Brian snorted. "How do you figure that, Trixie? Even if we really were communicating with Abby's spirit, which in and of itself we have no proof of, there was nothing that indicated that Lizzie murdered her parents!"

"Well, Mr. Smarty-Pants," Trixie retorted hotly, "I believe we *were* speaking to Abby's spirit. And Lizzie's spirit was darned anxious to stop her stepmother from saying who murdered her. She wouldn't have done that if she herself weren't the killer."

"Okay, let's just say for argument's sake that we were actually communicating with Abby Borden's ghost. And for argument's sake, we'll even say that it was Lizzie Borden's ghost that appeared. There are a number of reasons that she could have stopped her stepmother from speaking," Brian argued.

"Like what?" Trixie demanded.

"There were several viable theories that held that Lizzie was covering for the person who actually performed the murders. If that's true, she might still be protecting them," Brian stated. "*If* a genuine ghost was present, that is."

"Brian Belden, how can you not believe after what we just saw?"

Brian looked a little sheepish. He didn't want to have this conversation in front of Mr. Grant or the owners of the house.

Before he could speak, Mr. Grant interjected. "Brian needs absolute scientific proof of the spirit world before he'll believe. He has no proof that I didn't cook this whole thing up for my own nefarious reasons." He looked at the young man, who was very obviously embarrassed to have the object of his suspicions voicing them out loud. "It's okay, Brian. I respect that, I really do. You don't know me and you don't know what my motives are. I was surprised you even agreed to participate, but I am happy that you did. You have nothing but my word that I didn't orchestrate the evening's events." The paranormal investigator gestured to the recording equipment that he had set up. "I am hoping to have recorded proof to show all of you."

Trixie's mind was still on Brian's assertion that Lizzie could be protecting the real murder. "But who would Lizzie be protecting?"

Jim answered her. "Well, I did some research, too, Trixie, and it's possible that her Uncle John could have committed the murders. He was staying with the family at the time. He was her mother's brother, and she was quite fond of him. It's possible that she was protecting him."

"But he wasn't even in the house. Only the maid and Lizzie were," Trixie said stubbornly.

"She also could have been protecting the maid," Brian stated.

"The maid? I don't think so!" Trixie scoffed.

"Why would Lizzie protect the maid, Brian?" Honey asked.

"There is a theory that Lizzie was having an affair with the maid," Brian said, ignoring the shocked looks of the other Bob-Whites. "She is known to have had an, uh, a relationship with a female actress after she was acquitted. It's not out of the realm of possibility."

Trixie felt deflated. "Well, I guess there's a lot I didn't know about the Borden murders. I was so sure that Lizzie's interference was proof that she had done it. Now we'll never know!" she wailed.

Diana gave her friend a squeeze. "Maybe there's something on the video tape, Trix. Don't give up hope."

Trixie gave her friend a smile. "Thanks, Di. You always know what to say."

The assembled group looked at Mr. Grant expectantly. He smiled at them and immediately headed over to his recording equipment to examine the tape. He opened the video recorder and paled.

"Oh no!" he exclaimed.

The group looked at the medium, a mixture of fear and dread settling upon them. What *now*?

Mr. Grant's startled green eyes turned to look at Trixie and her friends. "The tape is melted!"

The darkness faded with the strike of a match. Beatrix watched, almost mesmerized as Harriet steadied the fallen candles and lit each one. Jacqueline pushed back her chair, rose to her feet and took one of the candlesticks in hand to guide her before she relit the gas chandelier.

The soft light filled the room and highlighted the wanton destruction around them. Beatrix gasped as her horrified gaze roamed over the fallen volumes of books, bindings broken, pages askew. Riordan and James released her hands and she felt bereft, at sea, unable to comprehend all that she'd just seen.

She lifted a trembling hand to her head and she felt the telltale trace of that damned stubborn curl that never would stay in place. The slight irritation was enough to help her find her footing and say in an incredulous voice, "What in the world just happened?"

The others looked as uneasy and shaken as she felt herself. James shook his head, cleared his throat and said roughly, "That's what I would like to know." He gestured at the fractured room's destruction. "We've all been placed into incredible danger by these falling books and rattling chandeliers." He pinned Jacqueline and Harriet with an icy green glare. "Regardless of whether this was real or unreal, you went too far."

Jacqueline studied him for a long moment and said nothing. Harriet shrugged and got to her feet. "Certainly, it was not our intention to start trouble here. It appears that we were at the mercy of a force stronger than either of us realized." She walked over and began stacking the books, closing them and straightening the loosened pages.

James' jaw tightened and Beatrix noted that the other men had started in angry surprise at the calm disregard Harriet had for their fright. She turned with pleading blue eyes to Elizabeth who immediately responded to the look.

"Incredible danger, Lord Frayne?" she asked softly. "Perhaps. I am more intrigued, however, by the sight I saw. Had you ever seen such odd costumes? Were they actors in a play?"

James looked at her sharply. "You saw that too?"

Riordan's eyes narrowed. "Do not tell me we all saw what I think we saw."

Diana nodded vehemently. "I saw myself. But it wasn't me. She was younger."

"And wearing odd, odd clothing," added Daniel grimly. "Almost like they'd searched through the trash heap for bits and pieces of clothing."

A slight smile curved James' lips. "Rather intriguing fashion...those arms out there, bare, where anyone could see them." He raised an eyebrow at Beatrix who blushed and turned away, tugging on the edges of her sleeves that had ridden up away from her short gloves.

"What caused that light?" demanded Brian. "These supposed spirits?"

Benjamin placed his hand protectively on his wife's shoulder and shook his head. "I wouldn't even venture to guess."

"We'll never know who murdered her now," Maddie said sadly.

Jacqueline's face grew thoughtful. "That may not be true," she said slowly. "Miss Borden's trial is not yet finished. Who knows? Perhaps the truth will be revealed there."

Beatrix glanced at Maddie whose hazel eyes reflected the doubt she felt inside. *If justice was to be served here and now, why would Abby Borden need to contact us so violently?* Her meanderings were distracted by a groan from her brother, Martin. She looked up sharply at him, her lips tightening as she saw his theatrical expression of dismay. “Have you something to add?” she snapped.

“Why do I get the feeling that a hundred years from now, a séance will be held and *your* spirit will be the one knocking books off the shelf and shaking the foundations of the chandelier? Bemoaning this case as the one mystery you never solved?” His blue eyes twinkled as he cocked a sandy eyebrow.

“Heaven preserve us,” muttered Brian.

Beatrix was about to retort an angry response when she felt the warm pressure of a masculine hand against the small of her back. A sudden liquid heat pulsed from the center of her back throughout her body. She glanced at James in surprise. A wicked grin lit his green eyes, the rest of his face impassive. She fought a smile, keeping her eyes lowered to hide the answering grin in her own blue eyes.

“Well,” she said in a quiet, measured voice, “I suppose that there will always be mysteries that I can never solve in one lifetime.” Beatrix carefully tucked the stray curl behind her ear. “Perhaps I must concentrate my efforts on the mysteries that I *can* solve.”

“Well said!” cried Diana with a wide smile.

Within several minutes, the group had risen from their chairs, working to place the books back on the shelves, and had straightened the room to its original neatness. As they prepared to leave, Beatrix lingered at the table, fingering the rivulets of wax on the candles remaining in the center of the table. She felt, rather than heard, James’ presence behind her.

“Are you ready to leave, my lady?” he said in a slightly teasing voice.

She arched a sandy eyebrow at him. “So, now I’m a lady again?”

He merely smiled at her, taking her hand in his. “What now? Are you so terribly disappointed that you may never know what truly happened in that house on Second Street?”

“A little disappointed,” she admitted before she turned to gaze up at him. “But perhaps that is not the only reason Fate brought me to Boston?”

James’ gaze locked with hers for a moment before he glanced at the door to the hallway, still slightly ajar. With a couple of long measured strides, he walked over to the door and closed it. He returned to Beatrix and pulled her to him with a forceful grip, wrapping his arm around her waist and said huskily, “Perhaps not. I know that, for myself, there was one reason and one reason only that I traveled across the ocean to Boston.”

“And that reason would be?” she asked breathlessly.

“Need you even ask?” he demanded just before he claimed her mouth with his own.

Trixie sat in the parlor of 92 Second Street the day following the séance. The other Bob-Whites and the Wheelers were upstairs, packing to go home. Trixie had haphazardly thrown her clothes into a duffle

bag, declared her packing done, and had wandered down to the place where Andrew Borden was murdered. She sat on the sofa, staring hard at it, as if the sofa could provide the answers she sought.

The young sleuth knew it was unrealistic to expect to come to this house and solve a century-old mystery, but a small part of her, the part that succumbed to mysteryitis, had hoped for some small matter of resolution. When she had realized that the mysterious Mr. Grant was a paranormal investigator, Trixie had allowed herself to hope that she could gain some answers.

She supposed, in her mind, she had gained something. Ever since her experience with Sarah Sligo, Trixie had grappled with her thoughts on life after death. Lewis Gregory had confessed to charading as the ghost of Sarah Sligo, but he had vehemently denied that he had used a projection machine to create a transparent image of Sarah. Nor had he whispered "Beware!" to Trixie while she was in the kitchen. To Trixie's mind, that left only one possibility. Adding to that conviction, the young woman could still remember the strong feeling that had overwhelmed her when she had told Sarah to rest; Trixie was sure she had been heard. She had decided then and there that, until someone proved to her that ghosts *didn't* exist, she would keep her mind open to the possibilities.

No matter what Brian had said about the past evening's events, Trixie firmly believed that she had been in the presence of spirits. Mr. Grant had no apparent reason to fake the happenings during the séance. Brian had argued that the fact that Mr. Grant could not produce a tape proved that the man had probably been faking the alleged paranormal activity; in fact, he had probably faked the "melted" tape. Trixie disagreed. Mr. Grant wanted and needed video proof of the haunting. The melted tape had completely wrecked his expensive video equipment, and he gained nothing by putting on a performance just for the Bob-Whites. No, Trixie was sure that the melted tape indicated that something extraordinary had been at work in the dining room of 92 Second Street.

And nothing could explain the weird images they had all seen of Victorian men and women, sitting in a circle so like their own, looking so like them, save for the clothes.

Jim joined Trixie in the parlor just then. "Hi, Sunshine!" he said cheerfully, knowing that his shamus girlfriend would be dejected over not discovering the answers she craved.

Trixie looked up and smiled at the handsome redhead. "Hi, Jim. Is everyone almost ready to go?"

Jim rolled his eyes. "Diana Lynch and my mother can pack *quite* a suitcase! They're both still up there working, with a little help from our friends, I might add." There was a short silence before Jim continued, "Trix, it's okay that you didn't solve the 'Mystery of the Borden Murders,' you know."

Trixie sighed in frustration. "Oh, the logical portion of my brain says that, but my emotions don't seem to want to listen. We usually wrap things up nicely, you know?"

"I know, but there are some mysteries whose solutions can never be known, or even knowable. This happens to be one of them."

Trixie sighed again. "I suppose you're right, Jim."

"Cheer up! I'd tend to believe your explanation of what happened at the séance over Brian's."

His girlfriend looked at him with wide eyes. "You would?"

Jim shrugged. "Brian's explanation has a lot of holes in it. I don't think Mr. Grant put on a show for us, which means that something else was at work. And I still can't fathom what caused that group vision, but I don't believe that *all* of us could have been hallucinating. So, although I may not be a staunch

believer in the supernatural, I think I have more of an open mind now." He held out his hand to the blonde. "C'mon, let's go for a walk down Main Street."

"Just give me a minute, okay?"

"Absolutely. I'll be outside," Jim stated as he left the parlor.

Trixie absentmindedly stroked the handkerchief she had been holding while she sat in the parlor. There was *something* about it...

Just then, Trixie felt a slight raise in the material under her fingers. She brought the handkerchief closer to examine it. There was something raised on the handkerchief, some kind of embroidery, barely recognizable due to age. Trixie bent closer and realized she was staring at two letters. "BB." *My initials!* was her first thought. Upon the heels of that thought, came another. *Impossible!*

Trixie was about to dismiss this new finding as coincidence, when she had a sudden flash of that other her. The slightly older one, her curls tamed in an upsweep, save one unruly one - just like Trixie herself always contended with - her blue eyes startled, but curious, wearing a Victorian-era dress. Trixie stared at the handkerchief, remembering the sense of continuity she had felt when she first held it. As if a kindred spirit had once possessed that same handkerchief. *Could it be?*

"Trix! Where are you?" Jim's voice called from outside.

"Coming, Jim!" she called as she placed the handkerchief carefully inside the duffle bag that lay at her feet. She would save that handkerchief as a souvenir, a talisman as it were, and it would always remind her of the fantastic events of the weekend.

Trixie jumped up and ran outside to meet the man who was, without a doubt, another kindred spirit.

Beatrice stepped down from the carriage, hesitating briefly before her boot touched the cobblestone street beneath her. The horse remained calm, tossing its sable mane in an effort to rid it of the flies that merely returned to their perch on its head.

She stood for a moment, looking at the large, white farmhouse, feeling almost wistful, wondering what secrets the floors and walls held.

It had been several days since the séance. They had all discussed it ad nauseum, but no one had come to any sort of agreement as to what exactly they'd seen, what had been present in the room with them, and who had actually murdered Abby and Andrew Borden. She'd been disappointed, true, that she'd probably never know what had happened to the ill fated couple, but it was no longer their killings that had weighed heavily on her mind.

It was the brilliant flash of light that had shocked her to the core. To see herself with him...younger...almost...timeless in a way...

The pounding of hoofbeats against the cobblestone broke through her reverie and she smiled ruefully to herself. *Dreaming again, Beatrice. Look where that got you last time.* She turned around and accepted the dresser drawer from the tiger on the back of the carriage. "Thank you, Johnny," she said softly.

Before she could get much more than a few steps, she realized that the hoofbeats belonged to a grand black stallion, and its rider had hair the color of a setting sunset, fiery reds, oranges and gold. She took in a deep breath and held it, mesmerized by the picture of masculine beauty.

He dismounted and walked over to her, a slight gleam in his green eyes. He tipped his hat and said with a smile, "Good afternoon, Lady Beatrix."

"Good afternoon, your Grace," she said in reply. Eying him warily, she shifted the weight of the drawer in her hands. "What brings you to Second Street?"

James grabbed the drawer from her hands and gestured at her to walk. "A little bird told me I might be of assistance. And you know I cannot resist a lady in need."

"I see," she said wryly.

The two of them walked toward the house where the police officer they'd met previously waited for them. She tilted her head to look at him as she picked up her skirts to climb the narrow steps into the house. "Are you here to make sure I don't get into trouble again?"

He shook his head and with a rueful smile said, "No, I'm here to make sure that when you do get in trouble, I'll be in trouble right along with you."

She looked at him sharply for a moment before her gaze gentled and turned thoughtful. Without another word, she preceded him into the house.

"Looks like you had the right answer, sir," the policeman murmured under his breath to James.

James flashed his wide grin at him and whispered in reply, "A fellow's got to hit it right at least one time out of a thousand, wouldn't you say?"

A little bit later...

Beatrix slowly pushed the drawer back into the dresser and gently closed it. She looked up to see James leaning against the door to the room, watching her with thoughtful eyes. She smiled a little wanly and shrugged. "I suppose this is the end of my involvement in this mystery." She glanced around the room with a sigh. "I do hate to leave this so unfinished. It really did feel like she wanted to make herself known to us...to tell us something of vast importance."

"Even if she had," James said quietly, "would that honestly make a difference in the trial that progresses even as we speak? Surely an American jury would not listen to evidence gathered during a séance from a ghost's testimony."

"But what if she's guilty?" Beatrix persisted.

"Or what if she's innocent?" James replied, raising a ginger eyebrow. "We'll have to trust that the court will make the best decision possible based on what they know, and hope that the Bordens find their peace somehow, and that their murderer will be brought to justice."

He held out his hand to her. "Let's leave from this place. I think..." his voice trailed off as she took the hand he offered and he frowned.

Beatrix looked at him in surprise. "What's wrong?"

He gestured at the dresser. "Your handkerchief. You must have caught it in the drawer."

Beatrix glanced at the dresser and walked over to it, pulling James along with her. She opened the drawer and pulled out the stitched linen, intending to tuck it into her sleeve when her mind traveled back to the flash of light and the curly haired young woman. A sudden reluctance stole over her as she hesitated. She ran her thumb over the embroidered BB on the handkerchief briefly before tossing it back into the drawer.

"Don't you want the handkerchief?" James demanded.

She smiled at him softly and shook her head. "Something tells me I need to leave it there." She held up her free hand at his immediate protest. "Don't question me further, please, James. I..." She glanced again at the scrap of linen and then shut the drawer closed. "I just have to, that's all."

He sighed and ran his free hand through his wavy hair. "I don't understand, but if that's what you wish..."

"That's what I wish," she said firmly. Beatrix gestured toward the door. "Are we going now?"

This time, it was James who hesitated. He gave her a measuring look before he said, "What happens now?"

"Now?" she asked. A slight frown wrinkled her forehead. "Well, I'm certain Benjamin and Elizabeth would be glad to have you over for luncheon. Would you like to come?"

He shook his head. "Not luncheon." James pulled her into his arms. "I meant...what happens now...with us?" he asked huskily.

"Oh," she said softly, her eyes scanning his. "I...I don't know."

James ran a hand down the curve of her cheek. "I tried living without you." He shook his head. "All that gave me was a definition for hell."

Tears pricked her eyelids at his words and she said hoarsely, "As it did for me."

"We can't go on that way," he said roughly. James pulled her closer and held her with his fierce gaze. "I can't go on that way."

"So what do we do?" Beatrix demanded, locking gazes with him, not backing down from the intensity of his focus for a moment.

He hesitated only a second before he said decisively, "You'll marry me."

Her eyes widened in surprise, but she merely said, "That will solve all our problems?"

“No,” he retorted, “they’ll just be beginning.” Seeing her clouding face, he tilted her chin up and said softly, “But we’ll face them together. And surely, that will make all the difference.”

A tremulous smile curved her lips and she nodded. “I like your way of thinking, James Frayne.”

“Then we’re agreed? You’ll marry me?” he persisted. At her nod, he brought his hands up to cradle her face. “God, I love you so much,” he said huskily.

“I love you,” she replied, tears welling in her eyes.

He leaned down and kissed her, a gentle, soft kiss that wound through her with an aching sweetness. As he stepped back, his green eyes lingering on her like a caress, he suddenly noticed just where they were standing. His eyes widened and then closed as he groaned, “I can’t believe this. I just proposed to you in the very place someone was murdered! Whatever could I have been thinking?”

Beatrix giggled, a well of pure happiness bubbling up in her. She hugged him tightly and looked up at him with a grin. “Where else would you propose to me?”

James looked around him with a deep sigh. “I suppose if I wanted to be more morbid and depressing, I could have proposed in a cemetery or perhaps at a funeral...”

She laughed and leaned up on her toes and kissed him. “My ultimate gentleman. My hero who wipes away my disappointment due to an unsolved mystery by replacing that memory with the one where he made me the happiest woman on earth.”

He grinned at her suddenly, a wicked, dashing grin that lit his eyes with devilish merriment. “Oh, no, my lady,” he said, raising her hand to his lips. “That memory is yet to come.”

Beatrix gave him a considering look, before an answering smile curved her lips. “So confident, are you?”

His grin merely grew wider. She shook her head and rolled her eyes. Before she could reply, the murmurs of a distant argument trickled into the room. An icy trickle of air scraped the back of her neck. Beatrix looked at James, her blue eyes round. Without a word, he grabbed her hand and they ran out of the room, barely making it before the door slammed shut behind them.

They quickly descended the stairs to reach the welcome hot air of the outdoors. They thanked the police officer for his assistance and hurried toward the waiting horse and carriage. As James handed her up into the carriage, Beatrix leaned forward with a wry smile and said, “What in the world have I been drawn into now?”

He grinned, leaned in, kissed her, and replied, “Into the greatest mystery of all.” James winked one twinkling green eye as he said firmly, “Marriage.”

The End

Authors' Notes:

Dana

First and foremost, I must thank Susan, who did not laugh when I approached her with my idea for this story but embraced it. It was her writing and editing skills that made this story far surpass what it would have been if I had written it alone. And the IM plotting sessions were a BLAST!!! Thanks, Susan!

One of the current owners of the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast is indeed named Martha and I do not have her permission to use her in this story.

There were several wonderful websites that helped make this story as realistic as possible: The Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast website (<http://www.lizzie-borden.com>), The Lizzie Borden Virtual Museum and Library (<http://www.lizzieandrewborden.com/LizzieABorden.htm>), The Virtual Lizzie Borden House (<http://www.halfmoon.org/borden/>), and Court TV's Crime Library (<http://www.crimelibrary.com>). Additionally, the Travel Channel happened to air their special *World's Creepiest Destinations* (<http://travel.discovery.com/fansites/worldsbest/creepy/creepy.html>) while we were writing this story. I taped it because the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast ranked number one on their list. It was wonderful to be able to visualize the house. Incidentally, a guide is shown giving a tour of the house to guests. I don't know if it was one of the innkeepers or not, but I assumed it was and "borrowed" the narrative from the tour and placed it, nearly word for word, in the tour that Trixie and her friends are given of the house. No, I did not have permission to do this.

The couch that Trixie sits on is only a reproduction of the one that Andrew Borden was murdered on, although I fudged a little in writing the story. It was more exciting to think of her sitting on the very same couch! :) I plead artistic license!

If you ever want to throw a realistic séance visit the folks at So You Wanna Hold a Séance (<http://www.soyouwanna.com/site/syws/seance/seance.html>) - they'll guide you through it, step by step!

The story of Lizzie Borden and the Borden murders is a fascinating one and, as Mart said, there are as many theories as there are books on the subject. I only wish we could know definitively who the axe-wielding murderer was!

Susan

Disclaimer: All characters are property of Golden/Western/Random House Publishing and no money is being made from their use. All other characters are of my own creation.

Please note (especially those who are unfamiliar with the titles and such...like I am. *g*): Normally, a titled personage (such as Jim's character in this story) would be referred to by the name of his geographical land holding. So, for instance, Jim in this story is James Frayne (his name), Duke of Chessington. Normally, he would be called Lord Chessington. As I didn't want to be any more confusing than I already AM being, I am using the well-known surnames as their titles instead. :) How's that for Honey-speak?

I owe a great deal of help on my story (to get the bare minimal background and to sound sort of like I know what I'm talking about) from several Victorian age websites, weather sites and the book *What Jane Austen ate and Charles Dickens Knew* by Daniel Pool. The titles mentioned above do not necessarily exist and I made them all up. Any inaccuracies as to manners, style or social rules of the time are all my fault. :)

An "on-dit" is literally in French "one says". It's kind of a gossip tidbit about someone else.

"Bedlam" was a London hospital originally intended for the poor suffering from any ailment and for such as might have no other lodging, hence its name, *Bethlehem*, in Hebrew, the "house of bread." During the fourteenth century it began to be used partly as an asylum for the insane, for there is a report of a Royal Commission, in 1405, as to the state of lunatics confined there. The word *Bethlehem* became shortened to *Bedlam* in popular speech, and the confinement of lunatics there gave rise to the use of this word to mean a house of confusion." (Information from New Advent's Catholic Encyclopedia at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02387b.htm>)

Lizzie's actions during the trial (i.e. her storage of furniture, her absence from the house) are fictional and designed to assist the plot here. I'm unaware of what the real Lizzie Borden chose to do at that time and thus this is all fiction. The guarding of Lizzie's house by the police as well is not based on fact as far as I know.

The quotation in the middle of the séance is from Oscar Wilde.

Events in this story pertaining to earlier events in other stories have not been written yet. And no, I have no idea what happened between James and Bea. *g*

Thanks to Dana for her editing and especially for letting me piggy-back off of her tremendous idea!!! I had so much fun plotting this out with you, brainstorm IMing and all your wonderful supportive comments in the process made this a dream story to write. You're da BOMB, baby! :)

Trixie Belden® is a registered trademark of Random House Books. These pages are not affiliated with Random House Books in any way. These pages are not for profit. The Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast Museum does exist; neither author of this story has ever visited the house, nor do we have permission to use the house in this story. But we mean it as an homage to a mystery that has captivated the public for over a century. We mean no disrespect and it *is* free publicity!