

# LIZZIE

## OR: HATCHET HOUR

by Ed Valentine

Cast: 3 Men, 5 Women

*Kennedy Center / American College Theater Festival  
Region II Best Full Length Play Award (2004)*

*Irv Zarkower Award, Hunter College (2003)*

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**DOUBLE-CASTING:**

**The total number of actors needed is EIGHT: 3 Men, 5 Women.**

SPARKER plays *Copper Mullally, Billy Borden, Denton Chink, and Defense Attorney*

UNCLE JOHN plays *the Man in Hat and Lunatic*; later, *Pharmacist and Prosecutor*

FATHER plays *Jury Foreman*

FANNY plays *Miss Alice Russell* in the Trial

**Characters - Fall River**

<b>LIZZIE</b>	32. Corseted. Smart. Deep.
<b>EMMA</b>	41. Lizzie's older sister. Pinched, religious.
<b>FATHER</b>	70. All business. Bearded. Rough.
<b>ABBY</b>	63. Lizzie and Emma's stepmother. Gluttonous. Talks too much.
<b>BRIDGET</b>	25. The Maid. Irish. Also miscalled Maggie.
<b>UNCLE JOHN</b>	69. Andrew Borden's dotty brother-in-law
<b>COPPER MULLALLY</b>	A Fall River policeman. Irish, too.
<b>MAN IN HAT</b>	A bad man.
<b>BILLY BORDEN</b>	35. Filthy, mad.
<b>LUNATIC</b>	Gibbering, dancing fool.
<b>PHARMACIST</b>	Stuffy. Provincial.
<b>DENTIN CHINK</b>	A letter writer.
<b>MISS ALICE RUSSELL</b>	Elderly friend of Lizzie's

**Characters - On the Boat**

<b>FANNY</b>	27. Fond, pretty, sentimental.
<b>THE SPARKER</b>	A young, handsome sailor who sparks Lizzie's fancy.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

The play can be performed as simply or elaborately as the director wishes (and as the budget allows).

If simply: the stage can be nearly bare, the actors visible upstage throughout. They can mime all the props except the hatchets, a windowpane, and a red cloth. They can read some of the stage directions to set each scene.

Simple or elaborate, the most important things are:

- The delineation of the world of melodrama (with music, masks and lights) from the starker world of Lizzie's reality;
- The delineation of stage space between the enclosure of the house and the openness of the ship;
- The smooth and instantaneous flow of each scene into the next.

Music is extremely important to the piece – and, if possible, should be performed as live piano accompaniment for the songs and effects (e.g., stings of music during the melodrama sections).

## LIZZIE, OR: HATCHET HOUR

**Lights up:** The façade of the house. Behind a glass windowpane sits a woman wearing spectacles and shawl. She looks out at us: this is LIZZIE.

A tall man appears out of the darkness. He wears a top hat and a porcelain half mask portraying a stern-looking man with a beard. This is PLAYER FATHER. LIZZIE watches as he sets an easel with a sign that says: *Tonight: 13 Views of Lizzie Borden - A Victorian Melodrama. One Night Only!*

PLAYER FATHER snaps his fingers. Sound of a drum roll. A blood-red curtain descends.

### **Prologue: 13 Views of Lizzie Borden**

**Prologue:** “Beautiful Dreamer” plays in an old fashioned style on a piano or harmonium. The curtains part. LIZZIE appears in a spotlight, in a black dress, spinning, looking upwards. She stops spinning, faces forward. She wears a half-mask made of porcelain, making her look like a puppet or a doll.

She takes a hatchet from somewhere within the folds of her dress. With jerky movements, she stalks the audience. A clock ticks, loudly.

#### WHOLE CAST

*Thirteen views of Lizzie Borden. A Victorian Melodrama. One Night Only.*

#### EMMA’S VOICE

One night only!

#### SPARKER’S VOICE

One night only.

#### FATHER’S VOICE

Time! Time!

(The curtains snap closed. PLAYER LIZZIE disappears.)

*I*

WHOLE CAST

*One.*

(Piano music. Curtains open. Footlights. A small stage set inside the proscenium. LIZZIE stands. PLAYER FATHER without his top-hat sits on sofa, reading the business pages. All the characters in the prologue wear half masks.)

PLAYER FATHER

Business, business, business. All my world is my work, and all my work is my world. I tell you, Lizzie Borden, that business is bad, and none can be trusted!

PLAYER LIZZIE

Yes, Father.

PLAYER FATHER

Why, here comes Maggie the Maid.

PLAYER BRIDGET

Oh, Sir, you know me name's Bridget.

PLAYER FATHER

Maggie, Bridget, it's all the same to us. What's for supper, Maggie?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Sir, I've warmed the mutton.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Mutton again?

PLAYER FATHER

Delightful!

PLAYER LIZZIE

Nothing but mutton. Five days.

PLAYER FATHER

Delicious.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Five days, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Rotten mutton in this heat!

PLAYER FATHER

Frugal Maggie!

PLAYER BRIDGET

Aw, just doin' me job, Mr. Borden, don't you know.

PLAYER FATHER

You ought to be grateful. Plenty of people starving with neither mutton, nor jelly. Remember that, Lizzie. You hear me, Girl?

PLAYER LIZZIE

I hate mutton.

(Hits FATHER in the face with hatchet. Sting of melodramatic piano music. Red ribbons fall out of his mask. Curtains close.)

2

WHOLE CAST

*Two.*

(Curtains open. PLAYER ABBY, primping in a mirror, her back to LIZZIE.)

PLAYER ABBY

Lizzie, do you like these earrings? Yes, no? So hard to get a word out of you sometimes.

PLAYER LIZZIE

No.

PLAYER ABBY

Well. That's something, at least. Hot, isn't it? I can't stand the heat.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Well, I can't stand *you*.

(Hits ABBY in the back of the head with hatchet. Sting of music again. Red scarves flow from ABBY's mask. Curtain.)

3

WHOLE CAST

*Three.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE and FATHER with paper, as before.)

PLAYER LIZZIE

Tell me about your will, Father.

PLAYER FATHER

Yes, right. I'm glad you asked. Now I don't have to pussyfoot around any longer. You know how I hate to pussyfoot.

PLAYER LIZZIE

I know, Father.

PLAYER FATHER

I'm writing you out of my will, Lizzie.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Beg pardon?

PLAYER FATHER

You and Emma. Written out. Next week, when I see my lawyer. Abby's family will get all my money. All my money.

PLAYER LIZZIE

I see.

PLAYER FATHER

And that's an awfully big windfall!

PLAYER LIZZIE

It's just as Emma feared.

PLAYER FATHER

I'm awfully glad you asked.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Oh, I'm glad, too.

(Produces hatchet. Kills FATHER. Music, curtain.)

4

WHOLE CAST

*Four.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE and FATHER with newspaper, as before.)

PLAYER FATHER

I'm writing you out of my will, Lizzie. Next week, when I see my lawyer. Abby's family will get all my money.

PLAYER LIZZIE

It's just as Emma feared.

PLAYER FATHER

I'm awfully glad you asked.

PLAYER LIZZIE

Oh, I'm glad, too.

(EMMA appears, wielding a hatchet, ululating. Strikes FATHER in the face.)

Emma! What are you doing home so soon?

PLAYER EMMA

I caught an early carriage, Sister. Oh, I've already killed the Stepmother upstairs.

PLAYER LIZZIE

My! That *was* an early carriage!

(Music. Curtains close.)

5

WHOLE CAST

*Five.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear. ABBY, upstage, as before.)

PLAYER ABBY

Maggie? Maggie, could you come help me with these earrings? Maggie?

PLAYER BRIDGET (Entering:)

Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am: me name's 'Bridget.'

PLAYER ABBY

What?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Me name's 'Bridget.'

PLAYER ABBY

I'm sure you must be mistaken.

PLAYER BRIDGET

I'm sure I'm not.

PLAYER ABBY

But all this time we've been calling you 'Maggie'!

PLAYER BRIDGET

And don't I know it! Nonetheless...

PLAYER ABBY

Who's 'Maggie,' then?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Your last maid.

PLAYER ABBY

Well! Well, do you mind if we still call you 'Maggie'?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Very much so.

(Produces hatchet. Kills ABBY. Music, curtain.)

6

WHOLE CAST

*Six*

(Curtains open. PLAYER ABBY, as before.)

PLAYER ABBY

Lizzie, do you like these earrings on me?

PLAYER BRIDGET

I'm not Lizzie. I'm Bridget, the Maid, dressed in Miss Lizzie's dress.

(Takes off her LIZZIE mask – shows BRIDGET mask underneath.)

PLAYER ABBY

But, why, Maggie?

PLAYER BRIDGET

I'm mad from the heat and the menstruation! Who knows why women do *anything*?

(Strikes ABBY with hatchet.)

And for the love of Christ, me name is *BRIDGET*!

(Strikes ABBY again. Music, curtain.)

7

WHOLE CAST

*Seven.*

(Curtain. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear. FATHER on his sofa.)

PLAYER JOHN (Entering:)

Andrew!

PLAYER FATHER

As I live and breathe, John V. Morse, my brother-in-law, kin to the long-deceased first Mrs. Borden! What brings you here, John?

PLAYER JOHN

Why, I've come to pay a visit, Andrew!

PLAYER FATHER

Then where's your valise, John?

PLAYER JOHN

I didn't bring a valise, Andrew.

PLAYER FATHER

No luggage at all, John?

PLAYER JOHN

Well, only this, Andrew.

(Kills FATHER. Music, curtain.)

8

WHOLE CAST

*Eight.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear. FATHER on his sofa.)

PLAYER SPARKER (entering:)

Mr. Borden?

PLAYER FATHER

Who are you? How did you get in? The doors are always locked .

PLAYER SPARKER

Well, you see, Sir, I'm a suitor –

PLAYER FATHER

A Sparker!

PLAYER SPARKER

- if you will – for Lizzie.

PLAYER FATHER

I scoff!

PLAYER SPARKER

She's an angel – an angel! I've come to ask for her hand. Though, alas: I'm from the Lower Class.

PLAYER FATHER

You – you Mountebank! You must be after my money!

(They fight. FATHER is winning, has SPARKER down. FATHER produces hatchet.)

I've got you now, Sparker!

PLAYER LIZZIE (Rushing to them:)

But Father - I love him!

(Throws pear at FATHER. SPARKER wrests hatchet away, strikes FATHER in the face. Music, curtain.)

9

WHOLE CAST

*Nine.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear. ABBY, upstage.)

PLAYER ABBY

Maggie? Maggie, could you come help me with these earrings? Maggie?

PLAYER BILLY (Entering:)

Hello, Mrs. Lady Who's Not My Mother...

PLAYER ABBY

Land sakes, who are you? And how did you get in? All the doors are locked.

PLAYER BILLY

I'm Billy Borden, Mr. Borden's bastard son. *Hunnnnnnnh...*

PLAYER ABBY

You seem quite crazy.

PLAYER BILLY

Crazy? I am.

PLAYER ABBY

You're also smelly.

PLAYER BILLY

Smelly in the belly!

PLAYER ABBY

Very smelly. You smell of onions, human waste, four-day rotted mutton, five-day old milk and morning breath.

PLAYER BILLY

I'm sorry.

PLAYER ABBY

You're quite odiferous.

PLAYER BILLY

I want my inheritance!

(Produces hatchet. Kills ABBY.)

And *I WANT MY DADDY!*

(Wails. Music, curtain.)

10

WHOLE CAST

*Ten.*

(Curtains open. LIZZIE, downstage, holding an iron in each hand. She is talking to a COPPER, who is writing in a small notepad. FATHER on his sofa.)

PLAYER LIZZIE

No question, Officer: I saw a man loitering.

COPPER

What kind of man, Miss Borden?

PLAYER LIZZIE

A suspicious man. In a hat. Loitering. Others must have seen him, sure.

COPPER

Sure. What did he look like?

(MAN IN A HAT appears in a pool of light. He wears a wide-brimmed hat and keeps his head down.)

PLAYER LIZZIE

Portuguese.

COPPER

Portuguese?

PLAYER LIZZIE

You can't trust the Portuguese. He wore a wide-brimmed hat.

COPPER

A wide-brimmed hat. You saw his face, then?

PLAYER LIZZIE

Not – clearly...

COPPER

Then how do you know he was Portuguese?

(Beat.)

And what were you doing at the time, Miss Borden?

PLAYER LIZZIE

I was in the barn, up in the loft. Looking for fresh irons.

COPPER

Not eating pears?

PLAYER LIZZIE

No.

COPPER

You told your neighbor you were eating pears in the loft. Five pears precisely.

PLAYER LIZZIE

I wasn't. I didn't. I was looking for irons.

COPPER

And the wide-brimmed-hat-wearing-Portuguese stranger?

PLAYER LIZZIE

Madman! Must have burst into the house at that very moment.

COPPER

While you were eating pears?

PLAYER LIZZIE

Looking for irons.

COPPER

In the barn?

PLAYER LIZZIE

In the loft.

COPPER (Snaps notebook shut.)

I see. Just one thing troubles me: both doors were locked. How could a man get in?

PLAYER LIZZIE

Who can say? He did. He did!

(MAN IN A HAT bursts in and kills FATHER with a hatchet.)

Bad business deal, I gather. Father was tough. Father had enemies.

COPPER

But why, then, would he kill your mother?

PLAYER LIZZIE

She is *not* my mother. She is my *STEP*mother.

(Beat: calmer:)

Who can say why? Who can say?

(Music, curtains snap shut.)

11

WHOLE CAST

*Eleven.*

(Curtains open. BRIDGET, downstage, dabbing at her eyes, talking to COPPER. EMMA, crossing far upstage slowly. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear with one hand and holding an iron in the other. ABBY, upstage, as before.)

PLAYER BRIDGET

Poor Mr. Borden! Poor Mrs. Borden! Some – lunatic!

COPPER

Sure.

PLAYER BRIDGET

A gibbering crazy, no motive at all. The countryside's full of them. Oh, to be back in Ireland, where no one's mad - or at least no one notices. Miss Lizzie's going to pay to send me back to Ireland, you know.

COPPER

Oh?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Now might ye be Irish yourself, Officer Mullally?

COPPER

I might be, Miss, I might.

PLAYER BRIDGET

And a good Catholic Christian?

COPPER

I might be, I might.

PLAYER BRIDGET

Perhaps some good can come of this terrible tragedy!

COPPER

Might you take supper with an Irish Catholic Copper, Miss Bridget?

PLAYER BRIDGET

Oh, I do like your moustache. I might, Sir. I might!

(A LUNATIC appears in a pool of light, doing a wild dance of death.)

PLAYER ABBY

Maggie? Maggie?

(The LUNATIC bounds in and kills ABBY with an axe. Music, curtain.)

12

WHOLE CAST

*Twelve.*

(“Beautiful Dreamer” plays. Curtains open. A bale of hay. A hatchet stuck into a block. A wicker bird coop. Feathers drift through the air. Cooing, fluttering.)

(LIZZIE takes a pear from the folds of her dress. Bites pear, regards the birds. Juice dribbles down her chin. FATHER enters through a trap. Watches.)

13

WHOLE CAST

*Thirteen.*

(Curtains open. Silent scene.)

1. LIZZIE, downstage, eating a pear.
2. FATHER and ABBY both on the sofa.
3. FATHER looks at ABBY.

4. ABBY looks at FATHER.
5. They both take out hatchets and hack each other to death. Factory whistle.
6. EMMA crawls onstage with a sponge. Grim-lipped, straight and silent, she sponges the blood off the floor. Wrings the sponge into a bucket.

(Curtains close. "Beautiful Dreamer" plays with many flourishes. All the PLAYERS except LIZZIE enter quickly in a line and bow. They turn upstage, gesturing for LIZZIE'S entrance through the curtains...

... but LIZZIE does not appear. The PLAYERS, fed up, wander off - all except PLAYER FATHER who stands center. Checks his pocket watch. Removes his mask.)

FATHER'S VOICE

Time, time!

**Scene 1:** The Borden house: dining room. A table with greening food. FATHER and ABBY sit at the table; ABBY ill, a wet cloth to her head. FATHER winding watch.

FATHER

EMMA! LIZZIE! TIME FOR BREAKFAST. Damn those girls. Late again. TIME.

ABBY

Please, Mr. Borden...

FATHER

What, Mrs. Borden?

ABBY

Just please, just for today - if you could be a little more -

FATHER

Quiet?

ABBY

I'm sick.

(FATHER rings bell, loudly.)

FATHER

EMMA, LIZZIE GET DOWN HERE NOW. How was that, Mrs. Borden?

ABBY

Much better, thanks.

FATHER

It's my house, I'll shout as loud as I want.

ABBY

But I'm so sick this morning.

(FATHER rings bell in her ear.)

And so hot. I'm so Sick-hot. Or hot-sick, I don't know which.

FATHER

It's just the usual Summer Complaint. Near impossible to keep food from spoiling in the heat. Nothing we can do.

BRIDGET

We could buy more ice.

FATHER

Ice is costly. And ice melts away.

BRIDGET

But who listens to the maid, I ask you?

FATHER

EMMA! Where the hell -

(Exits. EMMA turns, holding her chamber pot. Starts downstage.)

ABBY

Mr. Borden, I'm sick, but what if it's not the food, if you get my meaning?

FATHER

I don't.

ABBY

Emma and Lizzie aren't sick. That's no accident. What if someone is -

EMMA

Poisoning you?

(LIZZIE turns, holding her chamber pot. Starts downstage.)

FATHER

Breakfast is at nine, Emma, nine o'clock sharp.

EMMA

I keep my own time, thank you.

FATHER

This house runs on time.

EMMA

I'll note it. Who'd poison *you*, Mrs. Borden? Who'd bother?

FATHER

Take a different tone with your mother.

EMMA

Does Mrs. Borden have a complaint with me? If she does, Mrs. Borden should address me personally. *Personally!*

(EMMA storms out, empties the chamber pot off to the side. LIZZIE enters the dining room.)

FATHER

Nine-oh-three, Lizzie. Promptness is a virtue.

ABBY

Morning, Lizzie.

(LIZZIE walks out, as if she hasn't heard. Empties chamber pot, too.)

FATHER

By God, if this house were my factory, I'd fire you all.

ABBY

Did you see that? Did you see that? That's it. Please.

FATHER

Stop.

ABBY

Please! Please talk to them. She's not been right since she returned from the Tour. The Grand Tour was two years ago.

FATHER

They're so ungrateful... ungrateful!

ABBY

And now she's poisoning me. Maybe.

FATHER

You're a fool, Mrs. Borden. A right idiot. Fool ideas - idiot talk: poisoning!

ABBY

But I'm ill!

FATHER

We're all a little ill. I told you, it's summer and food doesn't –  
(EMMA enters. Sits. Angrily butters toast. LIZZIE stands off to the side,  
gazing into the distance.)

ABBY

There's mutton and soup. Are you hungry, Emma? Lizzie?

FATHER

DAMMIT, ANSWER YOUR MOTHER.

EMMA

That woman is not my mother.

FATHER

She's MY WIFE, the wife of ANDREW BORDEN, and I demand you show her respect.

EMMA

I WON'T, I WON'T.

FATHER

Speak civil and plain to her.

EMMA

“Civil?” “Plain?” How plain do you speak to me and Lizzie?

FATHER

As plainly as I can –

EMMA

“As plainly as I can.” Well, here's as plainly as I can speak to Mrs. Borden: the meat is bad. The mutton is spoilt. I won't touch it. Would you feed me POISON?

ABBY

See, see?

EMMA

It should be obvious to all. It's three days old: meat spoils in the heat, so I'll have my toast and like it. Look at the hour. Maggie, see what keeps Lizzie.

BRIDGET

(BRIDGET steps 'outside.')

Miss Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Look: a crow in the trees. Do you see it? Wait: now there's two.

BRIDGET

I don't see them.

LIZZIE

Between the leaves, see them? There. Pecking at something in a nest.

BRIDGET

Maybe it's an angel.

LIZZIE

A most raven-like angel, then. Oh, a third! A third's flown to join them. Maggie, now, look at that: tell me you don't see any birds, any birds between the leaves, pecking at something in a nest?

BRIDGET

Oh, there, I see them. Four of them.

LIZZIE

No, five.

BRIDGET

Five, I see the fifth.

LIZZIE

Now seven crows, nesting in that tree.

BRIDGET

I see them, Miss. I think I do.

LIZZIE

Each crow an hour.

BRIDGET

Miss?

LIZZIE

Which hour is which? Which one's which? And –

BRIDGET

Do you know, Miss Lizzie, you been a bit queer since you come back from that World Tour of yours.

LIZZIE

I've never been away from here.

BRIDGET

Beggin' your pardon, yes'm, you have. You went on a big ship, to the continent.

LIZZIE

Oh, that's right, I remember. Then I came right back here. Like I was never gone at all.

(FATHER stands and watches at the door.)

BRIDGET

Come inside this house and have your breakfast, girl. Lizzie? Do you hear me, Miss?

**Scene 2:** House flies out. Sudden openness, light and air and freedom. Shipboard. Deck. A rail. A sail. Sky. Sea. Downstage, LIZZIE and FANNY play with a ball.

LIZZIE

Toss it to me - to me, to me!

FANNY

Toss it to me - to me, to me!

LIZZIE

Toss it to me - to me, to me!

FANNY

To me? To me? To me!

LIZZIE

Ha! Come get it. Come on!

FANNY

I'm not playing anymore, Lizzie.

LIZZIE

Don't, then. That's the game. Those are the rules. Don't be cross, Fanny, nothing can be wrong. Europe awaits! Lies there like a lover. Stretches across a continent, sprawls out on a bed. Undressed! Wonders await us, Fanny! Wonders await. Not everyone is so lucky.

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