

★ See What I Have Done

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See What I Have Done enters the murder house and, with quiet intensity, creates a memorable place of horror.

Sarah Schmidt's novel *See What I Have Done* revisits the notorious Lizzie Borden murders, weaving finely crafted fiction around actual events. The 1892 killings of Andrew and Abby Borden continue to fascinate due to their grisly nature, the female prime suspect, and undoubtedly the singsong children's chant about Lizzie's forty ax whacks.

The Borden home in Fall River, Massachusetts, is the primary setting, and it is a place of suffocating strangeness. Though Andrew Borden was a successful businessman, he had certain eccentricities and a tendency toward penny-pinching. After his first wife died, Borden married Abby Gray, who then became stepmother to Lizzie and her older sister, Emma. Andrew's parsimonious and controlling nature would affect his family for decades, with, as the novel suggests, ultimately tragic consequences.

Using alternating perspectives that shift from Lizzie, Emma, Bridget the family maid, and Benjamin, a troubled young man with a violent streak, *See What I Have Done* establishes its prevailing mood of tension, resentments, and unnerving New England Gothic detail. Lizzie and Emma are very close, yet also competitive and prickly toward each other. Irish-born Bridget knows more secrets than she tells, beyond being overworked and subject to her employers' emotional ups and downs. Benjamin edges on the cusp of murderous significance, then retreats bitterly away.

Lizzie and Emma's Uncle John is another prominent presence, with an unsettling charm and a perhaps inappropriate relationship with his younger niece. Schmidt's Lizzie is mercurial, impulsive, careless, full of childlike enthusiasms and sharp perceptions, and capable of both compassion and cruelty. When Lizzie recounts a trip to Europe with her cousins, she exults about Italy and France and "how far a woman could travel if she really put her mind to it." Unfortunately, however, she would soon have to travel back to Fall River.

Though its tone is generally broodingly disturbing, the book has quirkier moments, such as when Lizzie and Emma splurge excitedly on fresh fruit while their father is away, or when a small neighborhood boy runs up to the Borden home and triumphantly yells, "I touched the murder house!" *See What I Have Done* enters the murder house before and after that fateful August day and, with quiet intensity, creates a memorable place of horror.

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