

# BLOOD BOX

*Zebya  
Lisowski*



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Executive Editor: Diane Goettel

Chapbook Editor: Kit Frick

Book and Cover Design: Amy Freels

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*On the morning of August 4, 1892 in Fall River, MA, Lizzie Andrew Borden, thirty-two years of age, allegedly hacked her stepmother Abby and father Andrew to death with a hatchet (the weapon never found). Despite no other suspects emerging, Borden was acquitted of the crime June 30, 1893, living in Fall River with her sister Emma the rest of her life.*

# Ingredients for an Axe Girl

Insert girl.

Insert wet.

Insert family hurt axe hand.

Insert locks.

Make a box—kindness, hunger, etcetera.

Insert pear tree, juice dripping over the chin.

(Increase hunger. Increase doors.)

Insert tooth insert tooth insert tooth

She is lonely, and covered with blood.

Her flesh her body taut with thirties.

She is older.

Increase wealth. Increase grief.

I am not trying to build sympathy

but empty beds terrify me,

a thing howling and encrusted

outside the window. House like a coffin.

Decrease distance.

The summer heating like a firing chamber—  
tender appearing in spurts as evaporated milk.

*Questions appear:*

Do you know the throng of cut, of bird?

Do you know this weight toward becoming?

What to do with all this unfurling—

Insert box, insert hand, insert blood box

# If I Did

*Lizzie*

Then I must sleep in a sheet twisted  
tight with blood, stomach heavy through the night.  
Then I know the scream of the ferry.  
Then “family” a word that stirs and stirs.  
What use are doors in this weather? Of course

we hear everything—Father’s moans ghost  
through walls like cheesecloth. Here is a day.

Here is another.

There’s nothing to do but eat,  
piling one plate then the next, pears  
plummeting from the backyard brown as  
blood. Father never  
talks anymore, and Mrs. Borden  
changes in my sleep to someone

who is still alive. *We always* lock our  
rooms. My nightgown the finest terry cloth  
or linen. Look at my face, my flushed cheek,  
my lips. Look at my tenderness.

If I told you it was an intruder who did it,

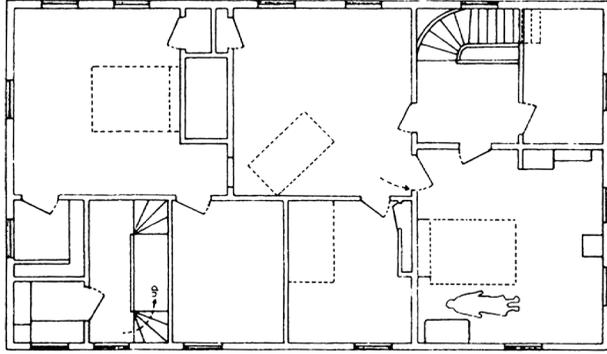
would you take my hand in yours  
and touch my trembling back?

It was. It was. Oh God, it was.

# Poem in Which Nothing Happens, August 3, 1892

Lizzie

First, an ache. Then, click of fingers on latches. I never write about my sister Emma, who is never at ease in this maze, I mean house, I mean spite. She says, *we have walls to keep secrets, and locks to hold them tight*. Father is away most days. Our home looks like this regularly:



but in my dreams it's even more monstrous, walls bent like a crust of whalebone. I will be thirty-two, which also is a type of box. I walk the thin floors of my bedroom every day, hearing the bicker and creak of the house. The only relief we have is supper—another geometry, another violence too.

Zefyr Lisowski also goes by Zef and is a queer poet, artist, and Southern transplant currently based in New York. She's a poetry co-editor for *Apogee Journal*, an instructor at Hunter College, and is also author of the micro-chapbook *Wolf Inventory* (Ghost City Press, 2018). Zef's received support from the Tin House Summer Workshop, the New York Live Arts Fest, and Sundress Academy for the Arts, among other places; her work has appeared in *Muzzle Magazine*, *DIAGRAM*, *Entropy*, *The Texas Review*, and elsewhere. She is a 2018 Pushcart nominee.



Photo: NMEsc