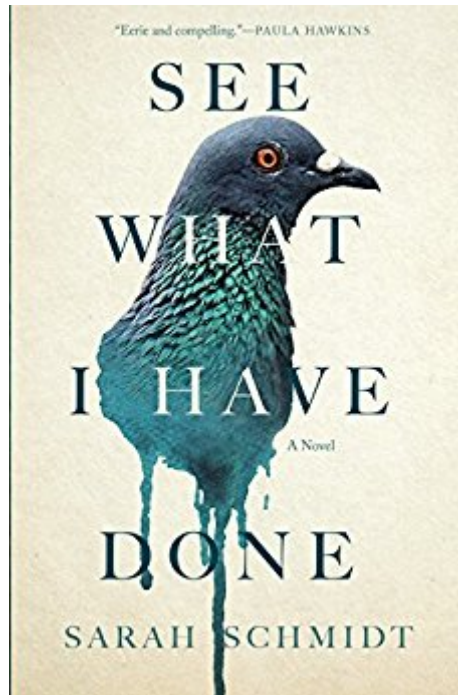




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See What I Have Done



Synopsis

Lizzie Borden took an axe And gave her mother forty whacks. When she saw what she had done, She gave her father forty-one. Or did she? In this riveting debut novel, *See What I Have Done*, Sarah Schmidt recasts one of the most spellbinding murder cases of all time into a sensitive and humane portrait of two sisters caught inside a volatile household—and what it means to be free and truly loved. On the morning of August 4, 1892, Lizzie Borden calls out to her maid Bridget: Someone's killed father. The discovery of the brutal axe-murders of Andrew and Abby Borden under their own roof in Fall River, Massachusetts paralyzes the small community. No one can understand why anyone would want to harm the respected Borden family. But secret witnesses to the crime have a different tale to tell of a father with an explosive temper; a spiteful step-mother; and two spinster sisters, with a bond even stronger than blood, desperate for their independence. As the police search for clues, Emma comforts an increasingly distraught Lizzie whose memories flash in scattered fragments. Had she been in the barn or the pear arbor to escape the stifling heat of the house? Before or after she last spoke to her stepmother? Were they really gone and would everything be better now? Through the overlapping perspectives of the unreliable Lizzie, her older sister Emma, the housemaid Bridget, and the enigmatic stranger Benjamin, we return to what happened on that fateful day.

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Customer Reviews

On 4 August 1892, Andrew and Abby Borden were murdered in their home in Fall River Massachusetts. Andrew's daughter Lizzie, aged thirty-two and still living at home, was immediately suspected of murdering her father and stepmother. Ms Schmidt's debut novel fictionalises this infamous murder, and makes me wonder (yet again) who actually committed the murders. Lizzie Borden was tried and acquitted, and no-one was ever convicted of the murders. Ms Schmidt sets the scene. A claustrophobic household, where doors are kept locked. A frugal household where food is cooked and reheated so that nothing is wasted. The usual inhabitants are Andrew and his second wife Abby Borden, Andrew's adult daughters (from his first marriage) Emma and Lizzie and the family's Irish maid Bridget. At the time of the murders, Emma is away from home. Four different voices tell their stories in the novel: Lizzie, Emma, Bridget and a man named Benjamin who has been hired by Lizzie and Emma's maternal uncle to take care of a problem for him. Lizzie and Emma tell of difficulties between them. Bridget tells of a lack of trust, of frugality, of food which surely contributes to sickness, of the challenges of being the only servant in a house where she is expected to do everything. Can we trust any of these voices? All the spaces between an hour, between life and death, came towards me. Quite a few books have been written about these murders and I've read some of them. What's different about this novel is that by telling the story from a number of different perspectives, Ms Schmidt makes it possible to imagine that others had motivation (and possibly opportunity) to commit the murders. But in my reading, this novel is less about the murders than it is about the middle-class household in which such murders could occur. Behind the blank windows and walls, Ms Schmidt describes a household full of tension, and petty (and sometimes not so petty) grievances. I can feel the heat, feel squeamish over the killing of Lizzie's pigeons, and the pots of food on the stove. I can almost smell the blood after the murders. What I can't do, though, is get inside Lizzie's head. I'm afraid to try. This is not a novel for the squeamish. It invites the reader to step back in time to August 1892 and consider possibilities. Jennifer Cameron-Smith

Super creepy & most intriguingly visceral. Could not read while eating. Very empathic writing style. Unsettling & enthralling at the same time!

Amazing writing. I didn't want to miss a single word. Loved it!

I would like to thank NetGalley/Grove Atlantic for providing me this book in exchange for an honest review. It really breaks my heart to have to write this review. I love true crime more than anything, and I was so excited to read this book since it combines fiction and true crime in a way that I haven't really seen before. I also didn't really know much of anything about Lizzie Borden prior to my starting this book, so I was looking forward to learning more about her both through reading this book and through researching as I read. I didn't like this book as much as I thought I would at all. This has everything to do with Schmidt's writing style. I really don't like multiple-narrator stories, or stories that jump around in time. Most authors who write multiple-narrator stories don't do a very good job of distinguishing the narrators through their voices' diction and syntax (hence, why there's always chapter headings specifying who's talking). With the exception of Lizzie's, the characters' internal monologues all sounded quite the same. Most authors who write stories that jump around in time also don't usually do a very good job of distinguishing the time periods they're writing in. There is a timeline at the end of the book, but the flashbacks and flash-forwards sometimes don't even fit onto the timeline Schmidt gives us. Thus, most of the time, I had no idea what time Schmidt was writing in. And I had even less of an idea as to whether or not some of the instances of jumping time were actual flashbacks and flash-forwards or just recollections of past and future times mixed into the present-day day-of-the-murders narration. Then there was Lizzie herself. And oh, wow! Her narration was just so ridiculous and annoying to read that I almost put the book down. Throughout the first chapter, her period-accurate language was pretty interesting. But it's pretty much gone after that first chapter, to the point where, by the end of the novel, she's talking like a modern person with some really weird exceptions. And by 'weird exceptions', I mean all that word repetition that people keep talking about in their reviews. I get why it's there; Schmidt's writing is very poetic. It's poetic throughout all the POVs in this novel. But that poetic language just seemed very out-of-place in this book. I was really getting impatient towards the end of the novel; so much so that I started skimming entire pages that didn't contain any pertinent plot information. I skimmed so many pages that were essentially nothing but overly poetic purple prose. But even though I didn't like this book at all, I'm giving it two stars. This is because *See What I Have Done* has actually gotten me interested in reading more about the Lizzie Borden

case. So I guess the experience wasn't all bad. But I'm sorry to say that I cannot recommend this book. I wish I could tell you otherwise.

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