

Sidedoor Season 6 Ep. 5 A Very Cold Case Final Transcription

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Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: On a chilly day, last spring, Emily Niekrasz posted a photograph on Facebook.

Emily Niekrasz: I made a lighthearted joke about wearing the same sweater every day of the week, while working from home.

Lizzie Peabody: It was early in the pandemic's work from home days and part of Emily's job as social media manager for the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, is to pull cool photos and documents from the archives to post online. This one was an old, timey black and white picture of a guy in a fluffy white coat. She called it, "Unidentified male models fur parka".

Emily Niekrasz: He's got this really long beard and perfectly manicured hair. Kinda slicked back, but with like a lot of volume, like he's used some product.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). That is so great. And is he looking into the camera?

Emily Niekrasz: He's kind of gazing away. Like he knows something that we do not.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Emily had posted this picture many times before, because it always got a killer response.

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: So, we've had Instagram followers call him, "mixologist." They said, they've seen this man at, Burning Man...

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Emily Niekrasz: ...on the streets of Brooklyn. They've dropped fire emojis. They called him dreamy.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh, so he's hot?

Emily Niekrasz: He's hunky. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Heidi Moses: He looks like one of the guys that would wear a man bun.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs). Like a hipster?

[MUSIC]

Heidi Moses: Yes. He looked like a hipster. Exactly.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Heidi Moses was scrolling through Facebook when she saw the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives post, but what caught her attention most was the caption "Unidentified male".

Heidi Moses: As soon as they said, they didn't know who the person was. I thought, because I had transcribed some Arctic explorer diaries that, maybe it was one of those persons.

Lizzie Peabody: Heidi lives in Canada and volunteers with the Smithsonian transcription center, an online platform where volunteers can transcribe historical documents, everything from old bank notes to love letters to, in Heidi's case, the diaries of Arctic explorers. She took one look at that fur coat and thought, that is a coat you'd wear in the Arctic.

Heidi Moses: I had helped in the transcription of the diaries of Charles Francis Hall. And I thought, perhaps he was involved with that.

Lizzie Peabody: Heidi was onto something. After some internet sleuthing, she came up with a name.

[MUSIC]

Heidi Moses: Emil Bessels.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: She dropped that name in the Facebook comments.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: So, what did you think when you got her message? What did you do?

Emily Niekrasz: Oh, I scrambled immediately, but I immediately had to email our Photo Archivist. So, within 24 hours, we had confirmed that indeed, this was Emil Bessels. This was our 19th century heartthrob.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Did it ever, ever occur to you, all those times that you posted the picture that this guy might be a murderer?

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: Never.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This time on Sidedoor, we bring you a whale of a tale of Arctic adventure, with shipwreck, mystery, and murder. Maybe even more than one. It's true crime Sidedoor style, after the break.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: All right, let's put aside our dream boat Emil Bessels for just a moment, because this frozen, "who done it" really starts with an Arctic Explorer by the name of Charles Francis Hall.

Stephen Loring: I don't know if we would love him or hate him today, you know, but we would be fascinated by him.

Lizzie Peabody: Here to spin the tale for us is the Smithsonian's own Stephen Loring.

Stephen Loring: Well, here I am. It's Stephen Loring. I'm an Anthropologist and an Archeologist working at the Arctic Study Center at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

Lizzie Peabody: Stephen has spent a lot of his career working and living in the Arctic, and he knows a lot of Arctic explorer stories. And in one way, he says Charles Francis Hall fits right in.

Stephen Loring: The Arctic expedition literature is an unbelievable cavalcade of strange characters.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: And Charles Francis Hall, it's right up there, among the top of them.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: He was just a complete eccentric. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Charles Francis Hall grew up in rural New England in the 1820s, without much education, but he had a habit of following his curiosity. By the time he was 27, he was living in Cincinnati, working as an engraver. When he got tired of that, he started his own newspaper, where he printed a little bit of news and a lot of his own opinions.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: And he was, he just, everything interested him.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Like one Fall, he printed articles almost exclusively about balloons. Ballooning technology, balloon races, ballooning catastrophes. He was the kind of guy who, when he got interested in something, he let you know. Now around that time, the attention of the American public was turning northward to the mysterious disappearance of two British ships, who'd gone in search of a Northwest passage; a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific, through the treacherous icy waters of what is now Northern Canada. In 1845, with great fanfare, the British Royal Navy had sent their two best ships out under the command of Sir John Franklin.

[HARBOR SOUNDS]

Stephen Loring: And it was the pride of the British admiralty, the Sir John Franklin expedition and with it, the best ships, the best equipment, the best men, and they disappeared into the Arctic. And for years afterwards, people went looking for them.

Lizzie Peabody: All told, more than 30 search expeditions went looking for the lost Franklin expedition, sending messages attached to kites, rockets, Arctic foxes, and yes...

Stephen Loring: Balloons that would then release a message that would then parachute down to Earth with the hope that some passing into it, or some Franklin survivor would find these messages and know that people were looking for them.

Lizzie Peabody: Wow! By 1860, 15 years after the Franklin expedition disappeared, most people had given up any hope of finding survivors, but Charles Francis Hall was just getting interested.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: In fact, he was convinced that Franklin's men were alive and in Hall's imagination...

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: They were sort of marooned among heathen savages, that it was his Christian duty to go and search for them.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Why a newspaper man from Cincinnati thought he was the guy to single-handedly accomplish what the combined powers of the British Royal Navy had tried and failed to do for over a decade is ludicrous, but that was Charles Francis Hall for you. He was determined to find and rescue, Sir John Franklin's lost expedition. So, he started teaching himself navigation and raising money.

Stephen Loring: He developed a relationship with the whalers from Connecticut. And it was with one of those captains that he was able to finagle a ride. You know, his thought was that he would go up, they would drop him off and then he would head off to look for Franklin.

Lizzie Peabody: And so, in May 1860, Charles Francis Hall, hopped a ride with a whaling ship heading North, feeling really, really good about this place he'd never been. He wrote in his journal...

[MUSIC]

Charles Francis Hall: Approaching the North axis of the Earth. Everything relating to the Arctic zone is deeply interesting to me. I love the circling sun, the long day, the Arctic night, when the soul can commune with God and silent and reverential awe, I am on a mission of love. I feel to be in performance of a duty, I owe to mankind, myself, God.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Hall's journals are at the Smithsonian, but actually, most of what we know about him comes from his biographer, Chauncey Loomis, who combed through Hall's voluminous scribbles to piece his story together. "No easy task," says Stephen.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: I don't know, I had drinken a cup of coffee or something. And suddenly...

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: ...the lettering will get big and huge.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: And other times it's like, maybe he's running low on ink. And he has a lot to say. It's like the tiniest handwriting you could imagine. He was also a horrible speller.

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: And yet, he just was consumed by a passion to record his story, to tell his story.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: On the voyage North, Hall's diaries reveal a man whose breast swells with optimism and wonder. A man who, when the boat landed for resupply in Greenland, grabbed a handful of dirt, kissed it and yelled...

[MUSIC]

Charles Francis Hall: Greenland's Mountains, I greet you!

Lizzie Peabody: Hall was swept up in this glorified stereotype of the Arctic. That was both romantic and racist, filtered through Western paintings and poems of the era.

Stephen Loring: You look at the early images of these gothic-inspired, towering icebergs, and the Inuit is almost childlike children of nature, and this romanticized landscape that was other worldly and also extraordinarily dangerous.

Lizzie Peabody: After a journey of three months, Hall made it to Baffin Island in late summer. There, his plan was to load up his own small boat, and with a guide, head West, looking for Franklin, but it didn't work out that way.

Stephen Loring: The problem was that the whale boat that was designated to him got wrecked in a storm.

Lizzie Peabody: And the guide he was going to work with got sick and died.

Stephen Loring: So, Hall is suddenly left without a guide, without a lot of the equipment that he planned, but he's so determined. He's not going to go back empty handed.

Lizzie Peabody: Without a boat, Hall was basically stuck where he was for the winter. And in order to go find Franklin, he realized he first needed to survive the winter. So, he made a new plan. He wrote in his journal.

Charles Francis Hall: The fact is, to affect the purpose I have at heart, to carry out successfully what I've undertaken to perform, I must learn to live as Eskimo do.

Lizzie Peabody: And that's what he did with a lot of help from two people in particular.

Stephen Loring: A man Ebierbing and his wife Tookoolito, and the whalers called them Eskimo, "Joe" and "Hannah".

Lizzie Peabody: Ebierbing and Tookoolito spoke English. They'd spent some time in England and even visited Queen Victoria at Buckingham Palace. Since Hall was stuck, they invited him to live with them. On his first night as their guest, he wrote in all capitals, exclamation point...

Charles Francis Hall: FIRST NIGHT IN AN IGLOO!

Lizzie Peabody: Then.

Charles Francis Hall: Second night in an igloo.

Lizzie Peabody: Eventually, and I am not kidding.

Charles Francis Hall: 42nd night in an igloo.

Lizzie Peabody: Hall's enthusiasm, or really, I think what can only be described as, "golden retriever" like sense of wonder, really comes through in these journals. And so does his struggle

to reconcile his need to survive with his own American prudishness. One night early on, Hall's feet were so cold, he was afraid they'd freeze. He later wrote that Tookoolito asked, "Are you cold Mr. Hall?"

Charles Francis Hall: I answered, "My feet are almost frozen. I cannot get them comfortable." Quickest thought, Tookoolito made passage for her hands directly across my feet, seizing them and drawing them a slant to her side. My modesty, however, was quieted when she exclaimed, "Your feet are like ice and must be warmed in Inuit fashion." Tookoolito then resumed her place beneath her tuktu furs, intermingling her hot feet with the ice-cold ones of mine. When I awoke in the morning, as near as I could guess, there were no less than three pairs of warm feet, all woven and interwoven, so that some difficulty was experienced to tell, which were my own.

Lizzie Peabody: Hall's pre-Arctic self would probably have been scandalized, but hypothermia was one of the easiest ways for Arctic explorers to die. And many did. Another danger was starvation.

Stephen Loring: Sir John Franklin himself is famous as the man who ate his boots. There's so many polar accounts of the explorers looking over their wardrobe and deciding what of it could be cut apart and boiled for dinner.

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps). Hall was able to avoid this fate by eating as his hosts did. He drank, with gusto, the hot seal blood passed his way, which he refers to in his journal as quote, "Eskimo Stew." He wrote...

Charles Francis Hall: Let those who will think evil of it. One thing is certain, neither my conscience or stomach condemn the deed.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Over the course of two years, Hall learned new ways to hunt, eat, sleep, and travel on ice. He learned the Inuit language, Inuktitut, and Stephen says this really set him apart from other white explorers of the time.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: He was kind of the first person from away that really immersed himself in Inuit culture. And so much of what he learned, and said, and did afterwards is deeply impacted by that relationship with the Inuit that he had.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You know that cliché, "It's not about the destination, but the friends you make along the way?" Well, that was the case for Hall. He didn't make it far from where he was first dropped off on Baffin Island, but he returned from the Arctic with a great respect for the quote unquote, "heathens" he'd set out to rescue the Franklin party from. When he returned to the United States, he didn't bring any of Franklin's lost men with him. Instead, he brought Ebierbing and Tookoolito.

Lizzie Peabody: Why would they have come back with him to the United States? What reason would they have had to leave their home in that way? I mean, I guess we're kind of speculating here.

Stephen Loring: Speculation is all right. Hall and the whalers must have appeared as other worldly to the Inuit, as the Inuit appeared to them. Here were these strangers that were childlike in their inability to survive...

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: ...were completely...

Lizzie Peabody: Yeah.

Stephen Loring: ...dependent on them and the Inuit are no less adventuresome than other human beings. And the mystery of what lies over the horizon, I think is a human story.

Lizzie Peabody: Once back in the United States, Hall immediately set about fundraising for a second trip to the Arctic, with the help of Tookoolito and Ebierbing, who eventually bought their own house in some land in Groton, Connecticut.

Stephen Loring: That friendship, I think, was a powerful force. It enabled Hall to survive in the first place, and then encouraged his progression of expedition subsequently. And then that brings us to the second expedition, which is the one that for anthropologists is most significant.

Lizzie Peabody: But for our story, the least significant. In short, after his publicity tours and publishing a book, Hall went with Ebierbing and Tookoolito back to the Arctic, looking for Franklin. And this time, he actually brought back evidence of the Franklin expedition's downfall.

Stephen Loring: Including a medicine chest and broken watches and tangible markers to the demise of the Franklin party.

Lizzie Peabody: By this time, even Hall had to admit that Franklin and his men had died, but he hadn't had enough of the Arctic. And by now, he was gaining some public recognition. So, he planned a third expedition, the boldest of them all. Hall set his sights on the North Pole. And this was the Polaris expedition.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: This was the ill-fated Polaris expedition.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: After the break, our hero comes face to face with social media darling and a hunky mystery man, Emil Bessels, on the ill-fated, Polaris expedition. Don't go away.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: In 1871, the North Pole was uncharted territory, which is exactly why self-made explorer Charles Francis Hall wanted to go there.

Stephen Loring: The pursuit of the polar prize, to being the first to get to the North Pole.

Lizzie Peabody: It's like the moonshot.

Stephen Loring: Yeah! Exactly. Exactly. The analogy is not farfetched. At the time, there was considerable geographical mystery about what the North Pole was going to be like.

Lizzie Peabody: There was a popular theory at that time, that a warm ocean current, kind of like the Gulf stream, passed under all the ice, rimming the Arctic regions.

Stephen Loring: To create an open polar sea, and this was the mystery that was calling people forth to doubtlessly bring fame and glory to whoever would discover it.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Charles Francis Hall wanted to be that guy. And the U.S. government agreed to fund his mission.

Stephen Loring: So, this was a big deal. Hall's a national character now, he's got a reputation, he's got demonstrated creds.

Lizzie Peabody: Remember, this is a guy who a few years before was printing newspapers about balloons. Now, he was the official commander of a U.S. sponsored mission to the North Pole.

Stephen Loring: The U.S. Navy gives them a ship. There's a crew, there's a simple science staff that's brought on board.

Lizzie Peabody: A serious science staff, sent by the Smithsonian and the National Academy of Sciences to collect data on geology, meteorology, glaciology, and a bunch of other ologys. The head scientist was the ship's doctor, a handsome young German. Some might say the kind of guy who might sport a man bun, Emil Bessels.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: That's right. Our internet hipster heartthrob wasn't just eye candy. The 24-year-old Emil Bessels was already an accomplished medical doctor and trained naturalist. And like most people with well-manicured hair, he took himself pretty seriously. When the head of the National Academy of Sciences wrote to Hall introducing Bessels, as the man selected as ship's doctor, he warned, "Dr. Bessels is a sensitive man. I beg therefore, you will deal gently with him." In truth, Hall was getting a little nervous that all this science focus might distract from his true goal, to reach the North Pole, but he remained optimistic. After all, apart from the science squad, he'd been able to select his own crew, which of course included Tookoolito and Ebierbing.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: Indeed. Indeed. And so, Hall had his A team, his experienced Arctic travelers.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Just before the Polaris expedition set off, Hall gave a speech at the American Geographic Society, calling his crew...

[MUSIC]

Charles Francis Hall: Men who will stand by me through thick and thin, though we may be surrounded by innumerable icebergs, and though our vessel may be crushed like an egg shell, I believe they will stand by me to the last.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: And, you know what, it's never a happy, it's never a happy party. (Laughs).

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Hall and Bessels, butted heads right away.

Stephen Loring: In short, they all didn't get along. The science staff had agendas that they were pursuing, the officers and crew on board was used to a different kind of...

Lizzie Peabody: Military expedition.

Stephen Loring: A military behavior. And Hall was his own crazy man.

Lizzie Peabody: Although Hall was Commander of the expedition, a title he underlined in his own copy of the ship's orders, Bessels openly defied him. By the time the party reached Greenland for resupply, Hall even asked the Captain of the Navy resupply boat to come aboard and give a lecture about respect for authority. In spite of the discord on board, that summer, the Polaris made it farther North than any ship had ever been. By September, the ice forced them to stop for the Winter, off the coast of Greenland in an inlet Hall named, "Thank God Harbor."

Stephen Loring: And Hall, eager to be off the boat, goes off on a survey trip to just sort of find out where they are, anybody in the neighborhood, and he's gone from the ship for a month or so.

Lizzie Peabody: And when he returns, he gets a warm welcome from the crew.

Stephen Loring: He's greeted hale and hearty, and presented with a cup of coffee, soon after which he becomes violently sick and takes ill.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

Stephen Loring: And this begins this sort of mysterious part of the story.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If we had any of Hall's notebooks from that time, there's no doubt we'd have an emphatically underlined account of his version of events, but those journals mysteriously disappeared. But what we do know, comes from the accounts of other crew members aboard the *Polaris*, which describe the following. Within minutes of drinking his coffee, Hall said he felt sick and began throwing up. Then, he lost consciousness. When he woke up, he was delirious, ranting that someone was trying to kill him. Dr. Bessels administered medicine. And after a few days, Hall appeared to get better. He started eating and walking the decks again. And just as it seemed like he might make a full recovery, he fell into a coma. Hall died the next night, November 8th, 1871 at the age of 50. Dr. Bessels diagnosed the official cause of death, apoplexy, or stroke, due to extreme temperature changes saying quote, "he came back and entered a warm cabin without taking off his heavy fur clothing, and then took a warm cup of coffee. And anybody knows what the consequences of that would be," which, I'm no doctor, but really? Charles Francis Hall was buried, wrapped in an American flag, in a pine coffin in North Greenland. And his crew waited out the dark Winter. With the Spring thaw, Hall's next in command tried to steer the boat South, but it got trapped in the ice.

Stephen Loring: Fearing that it would be crushed by the ice, he unloads a lot of supplies and a portion of the crew onto the ice.

Lizzie Peabody: And this is when things got really bad for the *Polaris* expedition.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: During the night, the ice pack shifts and the boat drifts away from the party left marooned on the ice.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: The 19 crew members marooned on the ice, drift South for days, weeks, months.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: As the ice starts to drift South, the pieces of ice start to break up and they get smaller and smaller until you're more or less on a raft. You're like on this large raft of ice.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: (Gasps).

Stephen Loring: And the only thing that's keeping them alive, I would argue, is the fact that Ebierbing and Tookoolito we're also on board that piece of ice.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: So, Ebierbing would go around the ice pan, he had his kayak with him, and he would harpooned seals. And that was the food that kept them alive. And then the blubber from

the seals, Tookoolito could render down to oil, and use to heat lamps, to provide warmth and cooking for them.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Oh my gosh.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: After drifting for six months and 1,800 miles, the marooned crew were finally rescued by a ship off the coast of Labrador. And were there any casualties?

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: Remarkably not. Remarkable not. They all survived the drift off.

Lizzie Peabody: That's incredible. Meanwhile, the crew that stayed on board the Polaris, which included Emil Bessels, they ran aground and had to abandon the ship, cramming into what was basically their lifeboat. Miraculously, they were rescued too, but once everyone was back on dry land, Congress had some questions for Bessels and the crew of the Polaris, like what the heck happened to Charles Francis Hall?

Stephen Loring: The whole controversy of the Polaris expedition that starts with Hall's mysterious death, and concludes with the loss of a U.S. Naval vessel was extremely upsetting to the powers that be, and Congress and the Navy on the return of the survivors held an inquest, but at the end, the inquiry found no blame. The matters were what they were.

Lizzie Peabody: Wow. What became of Bessels?

Stephen Loring: Bessels, having been absolved of blame, never escaped the kind of the specter of mistrust and malfeasance that kind of lingered over him.

Lizzie Peabody: There's a third M word that lingered over his reputation as well. "Murder." And we'll never know for sure if Emil Bessels murdered Charles Francis Hall, but we do have three clues that you should know before you decide what you think.

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: So, in digging through historical newspapers, we also found that Bessels was engaged.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Here's again, Emily Niekrasz, at Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, and she says that after Bessels returned from the Polaris expedition, he got engaged, but...

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: His wedding postponed twice. On the third time, the third day he was supposed to be married, his fiancé suddenly passed away.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: On their wedding day?

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: On their wedding day.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: And she was fine before?

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: Fine before.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Cause of death? Apoplexy. Six months after the death of his fiancé...

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: His house burns down. So, along with his house goes his manuscripts, a lot of the scientific work he had been working on.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm.

Emily Niekrasz: Right after this fire, he leaves America. And then three years later, we find that he died in Germany. And that's kind of the end of our Bessel story.

Lizzie Peabody: That's not a very satisfying end.

Emily Niekrasz: No, it's not. (Laughs). It's not.

Lizzie Peabody: And luckily for us, Hall's biographer, Chauncey Loomis, wasn't satisfied either, which brings us to clue number two. In 1968, nearly 100 years after Charles Francis Hall died, Loomis got permission from the Danish government to go to Greenland and dig up Hall's body to see if he could find any more hints about his cause of death, which he did.

Stephen Loring: Hall, wrapped in an American flag, was in a remarkable state of preservation. He had been frozen since his death.

Lizzie Peabody: Loomis took hair and fingernail samples from the body, which revealed...

Stephen Loring: Hall had ingested an initial dose of arsenic, time passed, and then there was a second dose administered to him.

Lizzie Peabody: Hmm. Now in Hall's day, arsenic was used as a medical treatment, but in high doses, it's lethal. Our final clue surfaced just a few years ago at an auction, in the form of a letter, written from Charles Francis Hall to the famous sculptor, Vinnie Ream.

Stephen Loring: We could go on about Miss Ream, but apparently, she was quite a handful...

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: ...and she's left a long line of admirers in her wake and Hall was one of them. And Hall apparently took Bessels to a meeting with Miss Ream, just prior to their departure, and Bessels was smitten.

Lizzie Peabody: Ohhh!

Stephen Loring: But it's thought that both having this serious infatuation might have been an underlying source of animosity between the two, whatever.

Lizzie Peabody: So, that's a potential motive.

Stephen Loring: It's another motive.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It's funny, how knowing the story behind an image can change everything about the way you see it, even if nothing about the image itself is different. Let's go back to that black and white photo of Emil Bessels for a moment.

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: He's kind of gazing away. Like he knows something that we do not.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It's true. Emil Bessels knows something we do not, but we know a lot more than we did.

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: And it makes me never feel like I can post a lighthearted joke about him again, without more context.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: One last question.

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Do you think he did it?

[MUSIC]

Emily Niekrasz: I think he did it. Do you think he did it?

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Yeah, I do.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: Now, I believe that Bessels poisoned Charles Francis Hall.

Emily Niekrasz: A hundred percent and then like murdered his fiancé. Yeah. Yeah.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: What a scoundrel.

Emily Niekrasz: (Laughs). What a scoundrel.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you want to try your hand at translating the cursivey jottings of over-caffeinated Arctic explorers, and maybe solve a mystery yourself, you can. The Smithsonian Transcription Center has tons of projects to work on. If you're interested in volunteering, check out their website: transcription.si.edu. You can filter by the subjects that interest you or by museum. We'll also include a link in our newsletter.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This episode would not have been possible without the work of Chauncey Loomis whose biography of Hall was essential to this episode. His book, "Weird and Tragic Shores" is not only fascinating, but also pretty funny. We definitely recommend it if you're interested in learning more about Hall and believe me, there is a lot more to know.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: And it's thanks to the detective work of Russell Potter, who discovered Hall's letter to Vinnie Ream at auction that we now know about this potential love triangle. We'll link to Potter's book, *Visions of the North*, in our newsletter as well.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: And yes, yes of course, we will post a picture of that murderous thirst trap, Emil Bessels in our newsletter too. We'll also include photos of Ebierbing and Tookoolito at the Smithsonian. Subscribe at si.edu/sidedoor.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Special, thanks to Emily Niekrasz and Pam Henson at the Smithsonian Archives and Libraries, Heidi Moses, volunteer and sleuth, with the Smithsonian Transcription Center, and Stephen Loring, Tina Tennessen and Ryan Lavery at the National Museum of Natural History. And special thanks to PJ Tabit for bringing to life the voice of Charles Francis Hall for us.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Our podcast team is Justin O'Neil, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Tammy O'Neill, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch and Sharon Bryant. Episode artwork is by Dave Leonard.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Extra support comes from Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music is by Breakmaster Cylinder. If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship@prx.org. I'm your host Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Loring: And I've had my share of situations, where I didn't want to be on the ice that I was walking on and wondering, what the obituary in the Washington Post was going to look like. "Smithsonian Anthropologist drowns in the ice, but it was what he loved to do. Or somebody says, no, no, no. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).

Stephen Loring: That's not true. I don't want to go down this way. (Laughs).

Lizzie Peabody: (Laughs).