

Hi, crime junkies. I'm your host, Ashley Flowers.
And I'm Britt.
And the story I have for you today is about a woman
who's shocking death left behind a million questions.
Some believe her death was the result
of a mental health crisis.
Some think she died at the hands of another.
Some might say both.
Her grieving family has been pushing for answers,
but with virtually no media coverage,
save for a few YouTube videos and social media,
it has been an uphill battle.
So they reached out to us and I had our reporter, Nina Dighan.
She has been pulling at the threads of this mystery
for nearly a year now.
And I'm warning you, once you fall down this rabbit hole,
you might never get out.
This is the story of Elizabeth Santos.

MUSIC

Lots of people say that Alaska is like a different world.
And maybe it is, but you could probably plunk Rovina Street
down in a million towns across the U.S.
and it would fit right in.
A mix of houses, not too much excitement, good or bad.
Usually it's pretty low-key and quiet.
But that all changes when a scream pierces the air
at around 6 a.m. on Saturday, August 8, 2020.
And about 10 minutes later, a 9-1-1 call comes into dispatch.
The caller is a 45-year-old woman named Lisette Hogland Hall
and the emergency involves her 37-year-old friend,
Elizabeth Santos.
Here is part of that call, which we got from Elizabeth's family.
OK, and what's happening there?
Um, my friend, he has, um, he has a topical breakdown.
And she needs an ambulance.
She needs to be, she needs to go to a hospital for something.
OK, what exactly is going on with her?
Um, she used to, uh, I, she's down scares that I'm,
I'm scared now.
I woke up to her just screaming and she ran out the door
and then came back in, screaming hysterically
and then she, uh, it's like she doesn't even know what she's doing.
She, like, a tasking.
She, um, are you, do you need an ambulance yourself or?

No, no, no, no.

No, no.

All right.

And, um, so what weapons do you?

You know, she, she, um, she came here.

She recently, she didn't have her medication.

And, um, she was visited yesterday, but it just,

she has them unable to sleep for a few days.

And she's not on drugs or anything like that.

Yeah, we're, we're going to get off this out there as soon as we can.

We've already got a co-loaded roster to come out there.

And there's no weapons out or anything.

No.

OK, what, what's going on right now?

She's coming here.

OK, can you stay in a separate room from her until the officers get there?

OK, is it just you and her inside the residence,

or is there somebody else there too?

No, my son, my son is just you.

Oh, your son.

He called me out too.

Two Anchorage police officers respond to Lisette's duplex.

They're let in either by her or her son Desmond,

and they make their way upstairs to what's actually the main floor of the house.

Elizabeth is on a landing at the top of the stairs,

lying on the ground near Lisette's bedroom.

She's naked except for a robe, and to police,

it doesn't seem like she knows what's going on.

Like she can't sit up properly, she can't stand,

she's kind of flailing around,

and her eyes keep rolling back in her head.

Is she even able to tell police what's going on,

like communicate with them at all?

No.

She's mostly incoherent, like just mumbling random words

and spelling her name over and over.

The officers also notice bloody injuries,

maybe some small cuts on Elizabeth's thigh and abdomen,

which they think came from her scratching herself.

But they also make note of a pocket knife

that's folded shut right near the stairs.

Lisette tells these responders that Elizabeth has a history of mental illness,

and she is supposed to be on medication,

but she hasn't been taking it.

So at first glance, it sounds like she could be having a mental health crisis. But for some reason, the officers don't think that's what's going on. They think that Elizabeth is having a reaction to drugs, even though Lisette insists that Elizabeth does not use drugs recreationally, except for weed, which is legal in Alaska. Yeah, and I've never heard of anyone having a reaction like this to weed. No. And she tells them that the only other thing Elizabeth has taken recently was for Benadryl, and that was like a few hours ago. Plus, Lisette adds that her bizarre behavior hasn't just come out of nowhere. It has been happening on and off practically all week. But still, the officers think that she is overdosing on something. So they request paramedics from the Anchorage Fire Department. While they wait for an ambulance, police handcuff her, which they say is for her own safety. DMS gets there at 6.46 a.m., and even though she's still not really making any sense, she's able to say which hospital she wants to go to. And when they ask if she's in pain, it sounds like she gestures to her head. By 6.58, Elizabeth is in the ambulance. She's getting an IV pretty much ready to go. But then the ambulance just stays there outside of Lisette's house for 25 more minutes. Well, why are they not getting her straight to the hospital? I wish I knew. We literally made this like minute-by-minute timeline with the reports that we have. And there are some gaps in there, and this is just one of them. Nothing we have explains why they're sitting there waiting. But it is no exaggeration to say that every minute counts, because at 7.20, while they're still sitting outside the house, Elizabeth goes into cardiac arrest. Paramedics start CPR and finally head to the hospital. But by the time they get her to the emergency room at 7.36, she has no pulse. Thankfully, ER staff manages to get a weak pulse back, but as they're examining her, they realize something. She doesn't have just a few cuts or scratches. She has multiple stab wounds. How did everyone miss multiple stab wounds? I mean, she was only wearing a robe. I have no idea. But once it's clear that Elizabeth is bleeding internally, they rush her into surgery just before 8 a.m. and the hospital updates Anchorage PD on their findings. Once Anchorage PD gets the news, the department sends the same two officers back to Lisette's to bring her and her son Desmond in for questioning.

So when these officers get back for round two,
they find Lisette on the phone with Elizabeth's sister,
Benedicta, who lives in Florida.
Benedicta told our reporter Nina that when she had gotten that call,
she thought the call was coming from Elizabeth
because that's what her caller ID said.
But when she answered, it was Lisette calling from Elizabeth's phone
and she wasn't making much sense.
She told her that Elizabeth had attacked her
or they had fought or something
and that ultimately she was taken to the hospital with quote-unquote holes.
Holes? Meaning what, the stab wounds?
All she said was holes.
But before Benedicta can really even process what she's being told,
Lisette also mentions that the two of them argued over \$500
that Elizabeth owed her
and she was mad about Elizabeth wearing her robe and apparently her ring.
So this is like a complete whirlwind of information
and Benedicta is just trying to make sense of all of this
over the phone from so far away
and that's when suddenly in the background
she overhears police telling Lisette
that Elizabeth is not doing very well.
The officer has Lisette hang up the phone
leaving Benedicta wondering what the heck is happening
and while she starts calling around trying to get more information
Lisette tells police everything she can think of about the past few days.
She says that Elizabeth usually lives with her boyfriend,
this guy named Dustin in Wasilla, like an hour away.
But they weren't getting along
so she had been staying with Lisette and Desmond ever since
and Lisette says that it's been a nightmare
because Elizabeth has made a total mess of her house.
So does she bring up the \$500 she told Benedicta about?
From what I can tell she doesn't mention that right now
but she does insist that whatever is happening
isn't because of illicit drugs like she says that again.
She's like this is about mental illness.
Has Elizabeth actually been diagnosed with a mental health condition?
Well her family says that she'd been treated for depression
and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
but Lisette tells police that she thinks Elizabeth might have had bipolar disorder
and she describes her behavior as manic
but obviously that's not a diagnosis.

Eventually Desmond and Lisette are taken to the police station for questioning and that's when police can really get a sense of their physical state. Neither of them has any blood on them but Lisette does have some injuries from her fight with Elizabeth. She says that her elbow hurts and the patrol officer notes three small red fingernail size cuts on her face. She has a red bump by her eye and another one on the top of her head. So the responding officers missed those too? Or they just weren't visible before? I don't, you know, I think these are kind of small things and in the heat of trying to get Elizabeth who is still alive into the ambulance, I don't know. Now it's about 10.30 in the morning by the time officers start questioning Lisette and Desmond 's interview lasts all of four minutes because he says he doesn't want to speak without a lawyer present but Lisette on the other hand, she has plenty to say. Lisette tells detective that she's known Elizabeth for eight years. She's one of her best friends. They either work together or still do, I'm not totally clear on that but they were exotic dancers and Anchorage and police learn Elizabeth is a Florida transplant who just fell in love with Alaska years ago when she visited with a friend but her family like her mom, two sisters and brothers still live in Miami so she travels back and forth a lot. So all in all, Lisette thinks she knows Elizabeth pretty well but she has never seen her like this before. She says that Elizabeth had barely slept in days. She was like reorganizing Lisette's closets all night. She keeps repeating the same stories and saying strange things random words and phrases, something about a guy named David and the number seven, she tried to make Lisette buy her stuff during a shopping trip and then a couple of nights ago Lisette had found her curled up in a ball just screaming but despite all of this strange behavior the two had never gotten in a physical altercation before this morning. Now she goes on to say that after Elizabeth had been taken to the hospital she then called Dustin who was the boyfriend to let him know what was going on and apparently he said that he had seen this kind of thing from Elizabeth before. He told her that Elizabeth has these types of what he calls episodes every few months especially when she doesn't take her medication. What medication? That is a great question. I think a crucial question but a lot of the details about that are redacted in the records we have.

Benedicta says that Elizabeth was prescribed Zoloft which is an antidepressant
Lisette tells the detective the same thing
and then she says maybe a second medication for ADHD
but that contradicts what she told paramedics earlier
because apparently she told them that she thought Elizabeth was on Saracwil
which is an anti-psychotic used to treat schizophrenia, bipolar disorder
and major depressive disorder.

Meanwhile we've got medical records that appear to be from 2016
showing Elizabeth was prescribed the antidepressants Lexapro and Wilbutron
along with Adderall.

But I mean again 2016 those could be well out of date.

Now what I know is that she had apparently just refilled a prescription for something
again redacted, redacted, redacted

a couple of days before all of this

and we know that she had been taking Benadryl to sleep

which is kind of how this whole situation started this morning

so long story short, medication wise

there are a few possibilities floating around.

Anyway Lisette then goes into more detail about what exactly happened that morning.

She says that around 3 a.m. Elizabeth just like burst into her room

saying that she wanted for Benadryl.

And Lisette's sure she took it.

Well here we get another discrepancy.

So at the house Lisette said that she saw Elizabeth take the Benadryl

but now when she's talking to investigators like formerly at the station

she tells this detective that she only assumed

Elizabeth took the Benadryl she gave her.

So she didn't actually see her take it.

Right.

Now after that Lisette went to sleep but only a few hours later

at around 6 a.m. she woke up to the sound of Elizabeth screaming

at the top of her lungs from somewhere inside the house.

She says that she heard the front door open

and Elizabeth ran outside then came back in screaming the whole time.

That's when Lisette went downstairs

and saw her in the front entrance hallway wearing only a robe.

And this was the last straw.

Lisette told Elizabeth that they needed to get her to a hospital

and that did not go over well she says

because the next thing she knew Elizabeth was attacking her.

Here is some tape from Lisette's actual interview with the detective.

Was she punching you or slapping you?

I didn't feel like punching or slapping

it felt more like a cloning like a like she was saying like

this David murder and I don't know.
And it was like and I just started like saying
Desmond calling women calling women I ran upstairs.
Where was Desmond?
Is he upstairs or downstairs?
He was downstairs but I don't know if he was in the bathroom
or in his bedroom.
Downstairs?
Yes he was downstairs and so I ran upstairs.
Lisette says Elizabeth is a lot bigger than her
she's actually six feet tall and Lisette's like five six
but eventually Lisette says she was able to get away.
She ran upstairs and Desmond followed and they hid in her bedroom
but even though the door was locked
Elizabeth kept trying to get in just banging on the door
so hard that she thought it was going to break.
So you're hiding in your bedroom?
With the doors locked.
Me and my son are both in the bedroom with the doors locked
and we hear her in the kitchen we hear her out there saying stuff
It sounds like it's not really like you can hear it
it's more like a...
So it's like that's my best impression.
Okay.
How long were you guys in there?
Until the police came until we heard the doorbell.
And who answered the door?
I did.
I ran downstairs.
Just a quick side note they don't outright say
but in the police reports officers make it sound like Desmond is downstairs
and Lisette is upstairs with Elizabeth when they got there
which would probably mean Desmond answered the door
but Lisette says she did so I'm not sure what the real deal is
and she also says she didn't notice any injuries on Elizabeth
before she and Desmond locked themselves in the bedroom
but after the cops got there
that's when she noticed blood on Elizabeth's stomach and legs
and a knife by the sofa in the living room
So this is the same knife police noticed when they found Elizabeth then?
No this is actually a different one
the one that you're referring to was a closed pocket knife
and this one is like a full kitchen knife
Oh.

Now while Lisette's interview is going on
surgeons are working frantically to save Elizabeth
they ultimately find 10 stab wounds
two on her abdomen and eight on her thigh
they operate, they give her transfusions
but she goes into cardiac arrest again
and despite attempts to resuscitate her
Elizabeth dies on the operating table at 11.25 that morning
Now that the situation has escalated
investigators get warrants to take Lisette and Desmond's clothing
take their DNA and even swabs of their hands
Wait, were they with the police the whole time?
What do you mean?
I mean, I guess I'm wondering if they're even wearing the same clothes
unless police stayed with them
there's a huge gap of time between when they took Elizabeth away
and when they came back to the house to talk to Lisette and Desmond
Yeah, so you're right
they were not with police like watching them from the time police got there
until this interview
there was like an hour or so where nobody was with them
nobody had eyes on them
but Lisette says that she hasn't changed and she doesn't think Desmond has
but to your point, I mean, there's no way to know for sure
and since police don't have any charges to hold them on
once they take their swabs and whatever, they're free to go
but they're not free to go to their home
because detectives have a warrant to search their house
for stuff like knives, trace evidence of bodily fluids, bloody clothing
Elizabeth's medications or cell phone, all of it
although investigators soon realized that they already have Elizabeth's phone
because they got it from Lisette
but as police start to process the house
there's a huge problem to contend with
the scene has been compromised
Well, I mean, obviously, like I said, they left these two people there all alone
Right, but that's not all
Lisette had admittedly started to wipe up a couple spots of blood in the kitchen
because she didn't want it to stain the floor
and the wild thing is, they didn't do this to your point when they're not being watched
she did this in front of the responding officers
Oh, cool, cool
So police basically watched her clean up a crime scene
and they were like, yeah, sure, go right ahead

I mean, I guess it wasn't considered a crime scene at the time
I mean, really, they don't know if it's a crime scene now?
Okay, but I've been doing this long enough to know that in a good investigation
you treat everything like a crime scene until you know for sure that it's not
You can never go backwards, like backwards in time to redo this
You're not wrong, but they didn't
So it was tampered with and the results are still the same
What's interesting though is that police don't find anything that could have been used to clean the
blood
Like there are no bloody dish rags or paper towels or anything in the kitchen
or even in like the bathroom garbage bins
Which makes zero sense
Right
What I will say is that it's not clear if they checked any other garbage cans inside or outside of the
house
And listen, this is something that the Anchorage PD could clear up pretty easily
but they declined our interview requests
And there are just some details like this again
They're not writing down every garbage bin that they checked in their reports
Not that they shouldn't, like I think it should be there
but they didn't do that and they're not willing to talk to us so we don't know
But here is what I do know that they find
In the garage, which is right off the front entrance way on the first floor
there is an open pocket knife on the ground next to a truck
The blade has this black tar-like substance on it
which is also on some glass on the hood of the truck
On the second floor, there's a Leatherman, which is this multi-tool thing
kind of like a Swiss Army knife
And that's on this half wall, which is next to the stairs
And I think that this knife is what the original reports refer to as the pocket knife
The one that was by Elizabeth when she was lying on the ground outside Lisette's room
like the first one the responders saw
And I think the reason that it's here instead of the floor at the bottom of the stairs
is because one of the officers mentioned that he moved it out of her reach
like when they were still trying to get her to calm down
Okay
So then over in the living room, there is a steak knife on the floor
by this longer couch right where Lisette remembered seeing it
with the tip partially under the couch
And in the kitchen, investigators notice several knives missing from a butcher block
that was set out on the counter
There are two butcher-style knives on a drying rack by the sink
And then in the cabinet under the sink, which appears to be mostly empty
there is another steak knife similar looking to the one that was found in the living room

Is it just me or does this feel like a weird number of knives to have in all these random places?

Yeah, I mean they're just like scattered all around the house

Yeah

And while not all of them have blood on them, the knives from the living room

and the one under the sink both appear to have something that looks like blood on them

Now as for the rest of the house, there is blood on various surfaces upstairs and downstairs

Like there's some on the steps, the banister, the carpet leading into Lisette's bedroom

The front entrance walls

There's even pinkish red stains on the kitchen floor

And then a potted plant in the living room and a chair from the dining area have been like knocked over

And police just see clutter everywhere they look

So investigators start collecting evidence and swabbing various, you know, these stains that they think are blood stains for DNA

They also test a few things for the possible presence of blood

And here are the results

So the steak knife in the living room tests positive

The leathemen from the top of the stairs and the kitchen floor stain are negative

And then the knife under the sink doesn't have enough material to even test

Okay, I literally have to take notes on all these knives

I know

About the pocket knife in the garage, you haven't mentioned that, does that get tested?

They don't test that one

Or even the butcher knives in the drying rack

Why not?

As far as I can tell, the butcher knives just never come up again

And the only thing they say about the pocket knife is that they had to maneuver around a bunch of stuff in the garage to get to it

So, I mean, clearly they, again, they looked at it, they thought it was important

But they must not think it was involved

Who knows?

So that's what's going on with the knives

They're searching the house, they're collecting evidence, and meanwhile, officers canvass the neighborhood

They find a few people who say that they heard a woman screaming outside at around 6am

But it doesn't seem like anyone else called 911

The people living on the other side of Lizette's duplex don't remember any loud banging or pounding noises around the time that Lizette says Elizabeth was trying to get into her room

Although they think that there was some thumping sounds earlier in the morning, anywhere from like 12.30 to 4

So the next day, this would have been August 9th, lead detective Jeff Bell reaches out to Elizabeth's boyfriend Dustin

And this is such a random fact

But Detective Bell is actually the Anchorage officer who helped the FBI interrogate Israel Keys

Which, again, not related to this at all, but just a random crime-jecky fact
Anyway, Dustin tells Detective Bell that he and Elizabeth were together for a decade
And there had been times when she acted manic
He says she was even hospitalized in the past and she was supposed to take medication for ADHD
But when she did, she couldn't sleep, so then she'd take Benadryl
Over the course of their relationship, he says there were multiple concerning incidents
Like, one time he says Elizabeth attacked him by like clawing at him
Another time he says she ran into traffic and he had to pull her out
And there was even a situation, according to him, where she took out a knife
And he thought that she was going to use it on herself, so he had to like tackle her
And he said that lately her mental state had seemed to decline even more
Dustin describes how Elizabeth was usually neat and organized
But recently she has started being super messy
And she also rarely used to drink alcohol, but she had started to drink more and more at work
So their relationship was getting rocky, which is why Elizabeth was living with Lisette
The last time that I can tell that they spoke was at 3.05 a.m. on the morning Elizabeth died
Dustin tells Detective Bell that she had called and texted him, but she wasn't making much sense
She was rambling about ghosts and numbers and her texts were just as odd
Doesn't even forward the text along to police, so they can see and we have them here
Which I think provides a little like insight
So Britt, do you want to read these, like just a couple of them?
Sure, so after she asked him to answer his phone, she texted him
Zombie Ghost M, like just the letter M
Then we stay ready 44
And all of that is one long word, no spaces
And then we are done
I mean, I don't know what any of these mean, Ashley
I don't think anyone does, including Dustin
So after those messages, Dustin says that he told her to just get some sleep
And then the next thing he knew, she was at the hospital
Okay, so at the very least it sounds like she was going through a rough patch
Yes, something is going on, right?
Definitely, but was her family aware of any of this?
No, so they're completely shocked and devastated by this whole thing, especially because no one had
contacted them
With even any concerns about Elizabeth leading up to this
I know Dustin did talk to Elizabeth's brother Eusebius the day that she died
But that was the first time he'd spoken to him ever
Like not just about Elizabeth's like declining state, but ever
Despite Elizabeth and him having been together for like 10 years at this point
Elizabeth's family does not know this guy very well
So anyways, two days after her death, Dustin contacts Eusebius again
Because he wants permission to get Elizabeth's things from Lisette's house
That's when Eusebius finds out that Lisette and Desmond aren't in custody

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Because he and his whole family assumed that they had been arrested the day that Elizabeth died
Because Lisette told Benedicta that they were being taken to the police station
Plus, Elizabeth's family doesn't think she would have stabbed herself
So to them, that only leaves Lisette and Desmond
Yeah, but I actually get Lisette and Desmond not being in custody at this point
Because they don't even know if Elizabeth was murdered
I guess what I don't understand is how no one has updated the family
That is a super frustrating part of this
Because remember, they're in Florida, it's not like they can just hop in their car and be there in a few hours
So the next day, which is the 11th, Benedicta speaks with Detective Bell
And he assures her that they're investigating, but he's like, listen, it's only been a few days
We don't have the official autopsy or the toxicology reports back yet
And again, to put this in context, we're talking 2020, this is the height of COVID
So there are bound to be delays
But in the meantime, Detective Bell does start interviewing Elizabeth's friends and coworkers
They are all stunned to hear about her death
And none of them know of Elizabeth using illegal drugs or misusing medications
They tell the detective that she was just the sweetest person, poised, calm, patient
Basically the exact opposite of what police had been hearing about her recent behavior
In fact, a woman who everyone calls Shayla tells him that Elizabeth has stayed with her
Before she went to stay with Lisette and Desmond
And when they were together, everything seemed fine
But everyone also does seem to have a different opinion about Elizabeth's relationship with Dustin
Some people say that they just needed a break
Some people say they were broken up
Some say that she seemed afraid of him
It's all a confusing web that Detective Bell has to work through
And it gets even more confusing when rumors start to spread among her friends and coworkers
The co-owner of the club where Elizabeth danced had sent a group text to a bunch of employees
This was the day that Elizabeth had died and basically she was just letting everyone know
So naturally everyone had questions, what happened, how
And the co-owner's response
Actually I have a screenshot but can you just read exactly what was sent?
Sure
Quote, she was off medications and stabbed herself in the abdomen and neck
She died during emergency surgery
End quote
Okay, one, that's not a very tactful way of answering those questions
No
And two, the stab wounds were only found on her abdomen and thigh, right?
Bingo, that's the takeaway
So this text basically starts a chain reaction of rumors that are not true
People who got this text told others and then suddenly people are hearing that Elizabeth was

stabbing herself when the cops got there
Or that it happened in a car and so on and so on
Okay, but rumors have to start somewhere
Where did the co-owner originally hear she'd stabbed herself in the neck?
Dude, we sent Nina on a mission to try and find out
There is nothing in the reports that we have about this rumors source
So none of what we have is first hand information
And when Nina talked to Eusebius, he said that two of Elizabeth's friends told him that they had heard it directly from Lisette
But again, this is third hand information, take it with a massive grain of salt
And trying to track down who said what during this time is like trying to make sense of a game of telephone
Everyone is hearing something different and by the end everything has gotten so twisted up, it's hard to know where it even began
So there's kind of this waiting period
Yes, Detective Bell is out there talking to people, but again, all he's getting is like this weird web of information
And police don't get the autopsy or toxicology results back until October
So that's a long, painful wait for Elizabeth's family
But when the reports finally do come in, the investigation takes a turn that no one in her family saw coming
I want to start with the toxicology because there are a lot of issues to unpack
Elizabeth had THC in her system
Oh, which isn't shocking since everyone knew she smoked weed
Right, but there was something else in her blood that no one was expecting
Medazolam, that is a sedative very similar to Valium and it's used in surgery as part of anesthesia or to treat severe agitation
And before you even go, well, she had surgery and she was agitated when the EMS got her to the house
There is no documented reason for this to be an Elizabeth system
EMS reportedly didn't give her any medication and it is not on the list of medications that the hospital administered
But unlike everything else we've talked about so far, this might have a simple explanation
Nina reached out to Dr. James Gill, Connecticut's chief medical examiner and past president of the National Association of Medical Examiners
Okay, then. Yes, very fancy. So she asked him to talk us through all of these complicated findings
And let me just say, dude went above and beyond
Now he couldn't offer an opinion on this specific case, but he looked over the reports and answered a ton of questions for us
And one thing he pointed out is that he didn't see an anesthesia record in the hospital reports
We know she had general anesthesia, but we don't know what she was pre-medicated with
Normally that information would be included and I'm not sure why it isn't here
But for all we know, the hospital has this whole other document explaining this whole thing that we just don't have

Now, it's worth noting that Medazolam is also prescribed for epilepsy, which Dustin has
And there's been some speculation that it might have come from him somehow
Honestly though, I think a missing anesthesia record makes more sense to me
Dr. Gill says that the documented level of Medazolam in Elizabeth's system was consistent with a
typical dose
So we're not talking super high
And if, for argument's sake, that she took it before she was hospitalized, he says that it's unlikely
that that level would have caused the type of reaction that police described
He said it's more likely to have made her, like, relax or sedate it
Then what about the Benadryl? Could that have caused her behavior?
Girl, this is a whole other thing to unpack
So based on the reports and the tests that were ordered, we don't actually know if there was any
Benadryl in her system
Ashley, you have mentioned Benadryl, like, 50 times
How could they not know?
Okay, so to get to that, I have to explain the various types of toxicology tests that can be run
So there's a basic post-mortem blood test, which detects opiates in amphetamines, cocaine, again,
basic stuff that, like, the name implies
But for things like the active ingredient in Benadryl, or Cerakwil, or Zoloft, or any of the medications
that have come up so far, you need an expanded blood test
And in this case, they only did a basic post-mortem blood test, not an expanded one
But if the whole theory, from the very beginning, was that she had some strange drug reaction, why
wouldn't they get an expanded test?
And that's a great question
I don't know! This is what is wild about this case
Again, you can go back and forth, and, you know, we'll get to it at the end, you can go back and forth
of what happened to Elizabeth
What I don't think anyone disagrees on is that the way that her case was handled was so poor
And to your point about this specifically, I really don't understand
Because, again, I brought up Benadryl a bunch of times, because it's come up a bunch of times
And what we know is that high doses of diphenhydramine, which is the active ingredient in
Benadryl, can actually cause delirium
Now, that being said, the dose that Lisette said Elizabeth took, which I remember I think was like
four tablets
Four tablets shouldn't have been enough to cause that kind of reaction
So there are just too many unknown variables to draw any real conclusions
Which is why I just don't understand why that expanded blood test wasn't done
And who decides what test to order anyway, the Emmy or the police?
Dr. Gill told us that it's usually the pathologist, which brings me to the autopsy
So the Emmy determined that Elizabeth died from complications of multiple stab wounds
Two on the right side of her abdomen and eight on her right thigh
The thigh wounds were quote unquote superficial while the abdominal wounds were more serious
They injured her liver and intestines and they penetrated her aorta
The Emmy noted that Elizabeth had a medical history of depression and based on the pattern of the

injuries and the lack of defensive wounds

He said he can't rule out the possibility that these wounds were self-inflicted

So he classified Elizabeth's manner of death as undetermined

And with that ruling, Anchorage PD immediately suspends its investigation

I'm sorry, they suspend the investigation? I mean, can't rule out the possibility is not the same as she 100% stabbed herself

They're basically saying they still do not know what happened to her

Yeah, her family is floored by this

But they basically decide that if police aren't going to try and find out what happened, then they will

Now the silver lining is they have access to more information with the case suspended

So Eusebius submits a bunch of records requests and tries to learn everything he can

But the more he finds out, the more questions he has

So on Thursday, January 21, 2021, what would have been Elizabeth's 38th birthday, he reaches out to Detective Bell again

And that's when he finds out police never sent any of the forensic evidence that they collected for any kind of testing

What? Why not?

Well, Detective Bell tells him that it wouldn't prove anything one way or another

Like, if they found Lisette's or Desmond's fingerprints on one of the knives, it's their knives, it's their house

They would expect to find their fingerprints

Okay, then why don't they test all the freaking knives for Elizabeth's fingerprints?

Well, I mean, police say that it still wouldn't prove anything because even if they didn't find her prints, it doesn't mean she didn't

Stab herself, like people don't always leave fingerprints, at least not ones that are, like, readable

And to their first point, she'd been staying there

So, like, if you do, what does that mean? She could have touched the knives before

It's messy

He basically just tells Eusebius that he doesn't have a theory about what happened

He's not necessarily saying that Elizabeth stabbed herself, but there's also no evidence he says that anyone else stabbed her

And he said the only way that they could prove something like that is if the culprit essentially confessed

Or you could, I don't know, test the evidence, do an expanded blood test, you know, investigate, as the term investigator implies

Yeah, right, like, I understand what they're saying and we could go round and round in circles

But at least try, like, you don't know what you have until you try

Check off a couple boxes for us, would ya?

Yeah, and Eusebius isn't satisfied with Detective Bell's answer either

So in late March, he tries again. This time, he gets on the phone with Sergeant Bianca Cross, who helps oversee the homicide unit

And unlike Detective Bell, Sergeant Cross does have a theory that she's willing to share with him

She thinks that it's very likely that Elizabeth's injuries were self-inflicted

She tells him it doesn't sound like Elizabeth was in very good frame of mind

Maybe there were some mental health or drug-related issues, plus she didn't have any defensive wounds
They're coming back to that
She says that even if one person held Elizabeth down while a second person stabbed her
She would still expect to see more injuries, rug burns, abrasions, scratches, something
And she also thinks that regardless of who did the stabbing, one of two weapons was used
Either the Leatherman or the steak knife found in the living room
And of those two, she and the detective both think that the steak knife is more likely
But she continues to say that they have no plans to test any of the forensic evidence
She also tells Eusebius that if, for argument's sake, Lisette stabbed Elizabeth
The two had a physical altercation beforehand, so if Elizabeth was the attacker
Then Lisette would have had a reason to defend herself
But why are the cops arguing self-defense when Lisette never brought that up in the first place?
It does feel like setting up a defense that nobody has brought up, she never said that that's what
No one's asking for, yeah, this is so fucking frustrating
I mean, bottom line is, if Elizabeth was killed, she deserves justice, end of story
But if she wasn't murdered and her injuries really were self-inflicted
Then this cloud of suspicion is just hanging over Lisette and Desmond until, what, forever?
That's not fair to them either
Yeah, I mean, this is what's so frustrating
Elizabeth's family has a very clear point of view on this
But again, even if you're muddy, like, it's in everyone's interest to get this cleared up
But Elizabeth's family feels that the Anchorage police have been largely dismissive
Not just of them, but of Elizabeth
And they wonder if it's because she was black, or if it was because she was an exotic dancer
Or because she wasn't really a local, or because of early oversights in the investigation
To Yusibia's, police don't even sound very knowledgeable about the case
Although, I mean, no one knows it better than him
Because by the time he talked to Sergeant Cross, he had amassed a pile of reports and audio recordings
And he basically knows the files backward and forward
Now, it's worth noting, though, that for the longest time, he hadn't been able to bring himself to look at the photos of the scene yet
I mean, this is his sister
But this call with Sergeant Cross, it motivates him to finally look at those
Maybe those are gonna tell him something
And when he takes a look, he gets a shock
Britt, I want you to take a look at these evidence photos that Elizabeth's family gave us
Which are also on the blog post for this episode
Okay, so these are the knives from under the couch, the kitchen sink, and the leatherman by the stairs
And there's no blood on the sink knife or the leatherman
And I can just barely make out anything that remotely looks blood-like on the one in the living room
Right, oh, and remember how police didn't test the pocket knife in the garage for whatever reason?

Yeah, they just said like, no thanks
Yeah, bring up that one, look at that photo, like make it large
Oh my god, right away, this is the only knife in these pictures that I can actually see what maybe looks like blood
I mean, there's at least some red stuff on it, in addition to whatever that gunk is
There's definitely enough to be like, yeah, let's test this one
The fact that they didn't? That is baffling, actually
Yeah, again, this just goes back to like, why are you being so picky and weird about what you do test and don't test and like
Get all the information possible because leaving stuff out, even if it's not nefarious
Even like, it just makes this not good
And Eusebius is just so frustrated by this
Now, I think he's frustrated that that knife didn't get tested, I mean, same
But actually the thing that I was really hung up on with the knives were the ones with no blood on them
So we actually went to Dr. Gill for some insight again
But he says that it's not that unusual for a knife to have very little blood on it after a stabbing
Like, when you think about it, it goes into a body quickly when it comes out
Tissue, skin, clothing can kind of like wipe some of the blood off
Which makes sense, but it's not just there's very little blood on these knives
There's like practically no blood
Plus, she wasn't really wearing clothing
Well, actually, I don't know
Were the stab wounds through the robe or like straight onto her bare skin?
I know the paramedics cut her robe off, but I'm not sure if the knife went through it or not
And you know, honestly, this detail might actually play into like the larger question at the heart of this story
Because as rare as this method of suicide and attempted suicide is
There's three classic criteria that indicate a stab wound could be self-inflicted
Now, it doesn't mean these are the only three or that they're always true
But first, there is usually the presence of hesitation marks
Those are these like tentative more superficial cuts that people make to test how it feels
And they're often made next to like a main wound
Next, there's the presence of multiple stab wounds
Which is also a hallmark of a homicidal stabbing, so that one could go both ways
But third, studies show that victims of suicide usually don't stab themselves through their clothes
So, I mean, I'd be curious to know if the wounds were through the robe
But I don't remember seeing anything about that in the reports
And we have, I think, like one or two pictures of the robe itself
And I'm not seeing any holes, but it's also not laid out perfectly to examine it in that way
Oh my god, and speaking of the robe
Britt, I have to show you this picture
Because what the robe shows is that it is saturated in blood
Can you see that?

Yeah, which makes sense
I mean, you said one of the wounds pierced her aorta
This is a bloody, bloody piece of evidence
Which, okay, so I want to take you back to the beginning of this story
Because if you remember, they find her in the house
They think she's having some kind of drug overdose or episode
They take her to the ambulance
They wait, what, 20-some minutes while they're sitting there?
And the whole time, no one notices that she's got stab wounds
And like, obviously she's bleeding out, the robe looks like this
I guess what Eusebius says police told him is that, yeah, it's not like the robe didn't look like that
It looked like that, we all just thought it was sweat
What?
I am so overwhelmed by this case
I feel like I'm getting more and more lost
I know, and specifically with the robe, like, we'll put this picture online as well
Because, like, myself, I kind of understand why they would think sweat
Like, basically, the color is like this pink color
The red doesn't show up like blood red, it's just like this darker color
So I understand
It could just look wet
Theoretically
Well, and it's like one of those things where, like, when you hear hoof beats don't look for zebras
Like, you see this woman in this robe that appears to be, like, dampened by a substance
Maybe this is a 911 situation, like, let's look for wounds
Yeah, I mean, they're handcuffing her, they're taking her out of the place, they're putting her in an
ambulance
You also had to have touched her?
Wouldn't the blood be still wet?
I don't know, I do not know
And so I understand why you say you're getting lost in this case
And I don't know which way is up half the time
But for Eusebius, as he has been taking in this information
As he now sees the photos, as he's getting nowhere with police
He becomes more and more convinced that Elizabeth was murdered
So that's when he starts reaching out to attorneys hoping to launch a wrongful death lawsuit
They don't want the case
They agree that the situation is unusual, but they can't try to prove or disprove that someone else
stabbed Elizabeth
They say that that is a job for police and for prosecutors
Who have already closed the case and probably aren't going to reopen it
Exactly
So then he moves to contact local and national media
But they don't pick up the story

So he thinks, okay, if they're not going to tell Elizabeth's story
I am
He makes a few YouTube videos, he reaches out to others on the platform who publish their own videos
And actually a YouTuber named Justin Black who ran a popular true crime YouTube channel called The Disturbing Truth
Covers the case
And he actually goes and gets a hold of Desmond
Desmond talks to him and tells him that shortly before Elizabeth died
She was displaying some pretty concerning behavior
Here is a clip of that interview which Eusebius gave to us
She had been acting like manic
Like she went out and bought things that she couldn't afford
And was laughing hysterically and was writing down lists of random things and people
She went and rearranged all of my brother and sister's things
And moved them out in the hallway and made a huge mess
She was just doing a lot of weird things and she hadn't been able to sleep for days
On the last day that we saw her she started like running around the street naked
In fact Desmond tells Justin Black that he had a bizarre run-in with Elizabeth
Around one or two in the morning on the Saturday that she died
She approached me but naked as always coming out of the bathroom
Talking about how much she loved me and I practically ignored her
I did ignore her
What? Why are we just hearing about this now?
He says he didn't tell Lizette because he didn't know what to make of the whole situation
I can't really tell if she was coming onto me sexually
Like the state that she was in
She told me that she loved me but she didn't touch me or grab me or anything like that
I don't know, it was weird the state she was in
That brings up a question for me
Did Elizabeth's autopsy include a sexual assault examination?
Not that I can tell, I know there was a standard vaginal exam and that everything appeared normal
Although they did make note that her uterus was enlarged because of these benign tumors called uterine fibroids
But anyways it was just a few hours after Desmond says that this encounter took place
That everything went down
I thought that Elizabeth was fine actually when she left
I thought the police were being overreactive
I thought my mom was being overreactive
I never actually thought that she was gonna die
I thought she put a minor cut on her wrist or something for attention
Now Nina got in touch with Desmond too and he seemed to be considering an interview
We also asked him to put us in touch with Lizette because we couldn't find a working number for her
But after an initial response we just never heard from him again

Dustin didn't want to speak with us either
But according to Eusebius Dustin told him that he doesn't think Elizabeth stabbed herself
He thought it was common sense that she hadn't
Now in addition to police we also reached out to the Anchorage Fire Department, the Alaska State Medical Examiner's office
And the recently retired Detective Bell
But the only other people who agreed to interviews were Dustin's sister and a couple of Elizabeth's friends who worked with her
None of whom think the pieces are adding up
And of course we worked with Elizabeth's family
Eusebius gave us all of his reports and all of his audio, everything he has
But the one thing he didn't have was dashcam footage of the initial police response
Like when the ambulance was there at the house
Now Anchorage PD told him that they only had dashcam footage from the second time police went to Lizette's
So we put in our own records request for it
A request that just specified a period when the cops first arrived until the ambulance left
Now first we were told that the request was going to be filled
Then we were told that it wouldn't be released because of an open civil lawsuit
But we looked, there was no record of anything pending
And so after we brought that to the department's attention we were passed over to the deputy chief who said
Okay, we are going to fill your request
But after that whole back and forth, guess what they gave us?
Uh, gonna go out on a limb here and say nothing
Close
They sent us the exact same footage from the exact same period that they had already given to Eusebius
So we're like, okay, hi, this is what we asked for
And they're like, oh, the footage that you asked for, that doesn't exist
Cool, so that was fun
Awesome
And here we are
More than two and a half years since Elizabeth's death
Her family unequivocally believes that she was murdered
But without a proper investigation, there's no real chance for closure or for answers
Without an expanded blood test, we don't know what exactly was in her system the night she died
We don't know if there's blood on the knives that were never tested
And at the end of the day, I don't know what happened to Elizabeth
All I know is that a woman is dead and many people think that she was cheated out of a thorough investigation
I'm one of them, and no family should ever feel like their loved one doesn't matter
And speaking of her family, they are still trying to figure out what happened in that house the night that Elizabeth died

[Transcript] Crime Junkie / MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF: Elizabeth Santos

So if you want to know how you can continue supporting Elizabeth's case, or if you have any information about her death

You can reach out to justice number four, Elizabeth at Hotmail.com

We'll also have that email linked in our show notes

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts, help is available

We have the numbers for the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the National Suicide Prevention Hotline in our show notes and on our blog post

You can find all the source material for this episode on our website crimejunkiepodcast.com

And you can follow us on Instagram at [crimejunkiepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/crimejunkiepodcast)

We'll be back next week with a brand new episode

Crimejunkie is an audio check production

So, what do you think Chuck? Do you approve?