

Dahl, Roald, "Lamb to the Slaughter," <http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/lamb.html>, downloaded 16 August 2006 (abbreviated by S.K. Meyer for class; beware: the online text has a lot of typographical errors, which I have corrected, here)

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, on the sideboard, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket. Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work. Her skin--for this was her sixth month with child--had acquired a wonderful translucent quality. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires, the car door slamming, the footsteps, the key. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in. "Hullo darling," she said. "Hullo darling," he answered.

She took his coat, and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over, and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; "Tired darling?" "Yes," he said. And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass, and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it left. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up, and went slowly over to fetch himself another. She noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

"I think it's a shame," she said, "that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long." He didn't answer. "Darling," she said. "I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday." "No," he said. "If you're too tired to eat out," she went on, "there's plenty of stuff in the freezer." She waited, but he made no sign.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. "But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway." She stood up, and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp. "Sit down," he said. "Just for a minute, sit down." It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened. She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink, staring into his empty glass, frowning. He said, "I've got something to tell you."

"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said. "I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much." And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she stayed very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror, as he went further and further away from her with each word. "So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course I'll give you money. But there needn't really be any fuss. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all.... "I'll get the supper," she managed to whisper. When she walked across the room, she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all, except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now--down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. A leg of lamb. All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her. "For God's sake," he said, hearing her, but not turning round. "Don't make supper for me. I'm going out." At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him, and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air, and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.... The violence of the crash, the noise, helped bring her out of her shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. It made no difference to her, it would be a relief. But what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill then both--mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do? Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands, and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door. It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop. "Hullo Sam," she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.... And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband, and he was waiting for his supper; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock, and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything. She was just Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband. That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural, and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she called, "Patrick! How are you, darling?" She went into the living room; and when she saw him, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary. A few minutes later she got up, and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, "Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!"

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in. She knew them both "Is he dead?" she cried. "I'm afraid he is. What happened?" Briefly, she told her story. Soon, other men began to come into the house. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly.... Her husband, they told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument.... They were looking for the weapon. "Get the weapon, and you've got the man."

It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, came out quickly, and said, "Mrs. Maloney. That oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside." "Oh dear me!" she cried. "Would you all do me a small favor? Here you all are, good friends of dear Patrick, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it's long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I didn't offer you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven. It'll be cooked just right by now." There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen, and help themselves. "That's the hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick," one of them was saying. "The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer." "That's why it ought to be easy to find." One of them belched. "Personally, I think it's right here on the premises." "Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?" And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

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GIST: Ms Meyer wants to visit these people, soon; she needs to know their schedules better before she just pops in. **SKIM READ** the terms, then quickly **FIND** and **COUNT** them in the text (**SKIM READ** it **ONCE**), and **CHOOSE** the correct answers in the pulldown menus. Oh, and a nosey neighbor has inserted at least one term not in the text! (**MAX. 5 MINUTES**)

Thursday

Pam

four/4

nine/9.....

DETAILED: Ms Meyer's thinking about becoming a vegetarian, so she's curious to know what they eat. She's also curious because things look kinda fishy in this house.... **READ** the questions twice, then **SCAN READ** the text twice more slowly than before (but not **TOO** slowly) **WITHOUT** looking at the questions, then **TICK** the correct **TRUE (T) | FALSE (F) ANSWERS WITHOUT** looking at the text. (**MAX. 15 MINUTES**)



1. Mary's husband was always punctual, so that's why she was surprised when he came home really late that evening. T | F
2. Mary was six months pregnant, so that's why she didn't drink any alcohol. T | F
3. It was Mary and her husband's night to eat out. T | F
4. It was a bad time for her husband to tell her that he was leaving her because she had already put a leg of lamb into the oven for dinner. T | F
5. Mary knew the penalty for murder, but, for herself, she didn't care. T | F
6. Later, Mary remembered that she had the leg of lamb in the oven. T | F
7. The policemen talked about the murder weapon while eating their leg of lamb dinner. T | F
8. Mary was too afraid to go out of the house after killing him. T | F

EXPRESS YOURSELF: Why is the ending so darkly funny? (**UNGRADED**)

IMAGES: All images are Clipart from the Microsoft Word program used to make this file.