

LPF Reading Exemplar

Lamb to the Slaughter

Task Description

As part of the 'A Roald Dahl a Week' festival, students read a short story about how a woman killed her husband and how she tried to cover up the murder. In preparation for a book club discussion, they answered questions related to the plot, characterization and elements of this black comedy.

Preparation

Before the reading activity, to help students anticipate what the short story is about, students read the following excerpt from the story and answered the questions that come after it:

... when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

'Patrick!' she called. 'How are you, darling?'

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, 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...

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!...'

- What could be the relationship between 'she' and 'Patrick'?
- What could have happened to 'Patrick'?
- What could the title tell you about the story?

Learning Outcomes: ATMs 7-8

ATM 7

Understanding, inferring and interpreting information, ideas, feelings and opinions in a range of texts with some degree of complexity, using and integrating a range of reading strategies as appropriate

ATM 8

Understanding, inferring and interpreting information, ideas, feelings and opinions in complex texts, using and integrating a range of reading strategies as appropriate

Questions	When students respond to the questions appropriately, they can:
<p>1. Read from Paragraph 1 to ‘... seemed larger, darker than before’ in Paragraph 3.</p> <p>a) Find two pieces of evidence to show that Mary Maloney was expecting her husband to return home any moment.</p> <p><i>(Any two of the following)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>– The curtains were drawn.</i><i>– The drinks were ready, with fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.</i><i>– The room was warm and clean.</i><i>– She checked the time now and again.</i> <p>b) Based on the evidence you have identified in a), describe in your own words (i) how Mary felt about the marriage; and (ii) what role she expected herself to play in the household.</p> <p>(i) <i>She felt that it was a happy marriage.</i></p> <p>(ii) <i>She expected herself to play a domestic, wifely role.</i></p>	<p>ATM 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identify those descriptions of domestic comfort and routines that give readers insights into how Mary Maloney felt about her marriage, e.g.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- In Paragraph 1, the room was described as ‘warm and clean’ with the ‘curtains drawn’ and the drink and ice ready for her husband’s return from work- In Paragraph 3, Mary Maloney was described as in ‘glance up at the clock’ ‘Now and again. ... merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come back’• interpret such descriptions as sketches of a happy marriage and conclude that Mary Maloney was content to play a domestic, wifely role

<p>2. Read from ‘When the clock said ten minutes to five...’ (Paragraph 3) until the end of Paragraph 6.</p> <p>a) Identify those routines that were performed by Mary Maloney after her husband had returned home.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kissing her husband</i> • <i>Greeting her husband verbally</i> • <i>Hanging her husband’s coat</i> • <i>Making her husband a drink</i> <p>b) Identify those actions performed by Patrick Maloney in response to Mary’s.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Greeting his wife</i> • <i>Drinking the whisky prepared by his wife</i> <p>c) What do the interactions between Mary Maloney and her husband, which you have identified in a) and b), say about their relationship at this point of the story?</p> <p><i>The relationship was asymmetrical - the husband was presented as expecting to be kissed, greeted, served and taken care of without having to think about the need to return the attention, while Mary was presented as obedient and dutiful, doing everything for her husband.</i></p>	<p>ATM 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify those routines that were performed by Mary Maloney after her husband had returned home and those actions that were performed by the husband in response to Mary Maloney’s • interpret the routines performed by Mary Maloney as evidence of her being obedient and dutiful and Patrick Maloney’s responses as dry, mechanical and passionless, and draw the conclusion that the descriptions identified were symptomatic of an asymmetrical relationship
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<p>3. Refer to Paragraphs 8 to 23.</p> <p>a) What did Mary Maloney mainly focus on in her conversations with Patrick Maloney? Give one example to illustrate your response.</p> <p><i>Domestic matters like eating, slippers</i></p> <p>b) How could Patrick Maloney's response to Mary Maloney's questions be described? Tick the best option.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. <i>minimal and blunt</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> B. disapproving</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> C. critical</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> D. irrelevant</p> <p>c) What does the way Patrick Maloney responded to Mary Maloney's questions say about how the former felt at that point? Tick the best option(s).</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. <i>irritated</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> B. disgusted</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. <i>uninterested</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> D. embarrassed</p>	<p>ATM 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify domestic matters as the focus of the conversation between Mary and Patrick Maloney as presented from Paragraphs 8 to 20 • recognise Patrick Maloney's minimal response to Mary Maloney's questions, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'No' (Paragraph 14) to the offer '... shall I get your slippers?' (Paragraph 13) - 'No' (Paragraph 19) to the offer 'Would you like me to get you some cheese?' (Paragraph 18) - 'I don't want it' (Paragraph 23) to the offer 'I'll get you some cheese and crackers...' (Paragraph 22) • understand and interpret Patrick Maloney's short, minimal and blunt responses as indicating his lack of interest and increasing irritation at his wife's offers, given all the signs that he was going to broach a difficult subject with her later on
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<p>d) How did the author contrast the situation portrayed in Paragraphs 1 to 7 and that in Paragraphs 8 to 20?</p> <p><i>In Paragraphs 1 to 7, the author painted through features such as the routines Mary performed a picture of her secure domestic world and marital situation.</i></p> <p><i>In Paragraphs 8 to 20, the author painted a picture of Mary's sense of security starting to fall apart as a result of her husband's aloofness and signs of irritation.</i></p>	<p>ATM 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand that, in Paragraph 1 to 7, the author painted a picture of Mary Maloney's secure domestic world and marital situation in terms of the predictable routines she performed • identify those descriptions in Paragraphs 8 to 20 that suggest that something had gone seriously wrong, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - '... he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow...' (Paragraph 9) - '... she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.' (Paragraph 15) <p>and take these unsettling signs as a harbinger of Mary Maloney's contented world taking a turn for the worst, i.e. the image of a happy family would be smashed by some incidents</p>
<p>4. In Paragraph 35, Patrick Maloney said, 'And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you...'. a) What did Patrick Maloney tell his wife? Provide a piece of information to support your response.</p> <p><i>Patrick told his wife that he wanted to leave her. He talked about giving her money and seeing she was looked after.</i></p>	<p>ATM 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise that the author left it vague as regards Patrick Maloney's reasons for leaving his wife, which steers the readers towards the conclusion that his reasons might not be justifiable

<p>b) Was Patrick Maloney’s explanation for his decision presented explicitly? Explain your response.</p> <p><i>No, it wasn’t presented explicitly.</i></p> <p><i>This could be due to the author’s intention to align the readers with Mary Maloney, the victim (or against Patrick Maloney, the guilty party).</i></p> <p><i>By not providing the readers with the reasons, they would have no way to absolve Patrick Maloney’s decision.</i></p> <p>c) Find one more piece of evidence to support your interpretation of the author’s intention as identified in b).</p> <p><i>(Any one of the following)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>– He didn’t offer any evidence to support his claim that there was no other ways to resolve the situation.</i> <i>– He broke the news when Mary Maloney was six months pregnant.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify other facts presented that encourage a more unfavourable evaluation of Patrick Maloney, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ‘...I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn’t any other way.’ (Paragraph 35) • interpret the author’s choice of what information to include or not to include as a means to position the readers against Patrick Maloney
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<p>5. Based on what you have read up to Paragraph 35, write a short letter as if you were Patrick Maloney, explaining to a close friend your intention to leave Mary and imagine two possible reasons for your intention. Back up these two reasons with relevant ideas from the story up till this point.</p> <p><i>(Suggested content)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>He was tired of the routines that Mary Maloney represented. The routines became too predictable. He experienced the same things day after day, week after week – home by 5, drinks prepared, weekly night out on Thursday.</i> • <i>He also felt suffocated by his wife's smothering devotion, which could be interpreted as more an act of control than affection. This was reflected in the tidiness of the room, the routines that bordered on regimen and her insistence that everything be done by her.</i> 	<p>ATM 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify from Paragraphs 1 to 35 ideas that all was not well from Patrick Maloney's point of view despite Mary's perception of their marriage as happy and blissful • synthesise all the ideas gathered and present them in the form of a letter to a close friend, expressing the stifling and claustrophobic feelings that were stirred up by the predictable routines and drawing the conclusion that leaving Mary was the only solution to the problem
<p>6. In the final lines of the story from Paragraph 129 to Paragraph 131, it reads:</p> <p>'Personally, I think <u>it</u>'s right here on the premises.'</p> <p>'Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?'</p> <p>And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.</p> <p>a) What does the underlined 'it' refer to?</p> <p><i>The underlined 'it' refers to the murder weapon.</i></p>	<p>ATM 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand that the final scene was an example of comical dramatic irony as the police officers were made to look stupid - the reader, like Mary Maloney, knew that the police officers were not aware that what they were talking about was in fact true, i.e. the murder weapon was really 'right under our very noses'

b) What did the police officer mean when he said, 'Probably right under our very noses...'? Tick the best option.

- A. They can smell the murder weapon.
- B. They can actually see the murder weapon.
- C. *The murder weapon is right in front of them.*
- D. The murder weapon is hidden somewhere.
- E. The murder weapon was literally under their noses.

c) Did the police officers know where the murder weapon was? Explain your answer in one sentence.

No, they didn't. They were not aware that they were actually downing the murder weapon.

d) What effect do Paragraphs 129 and 130 create? Tick the best option.

- A. horrifying
- B. *comical*
- C. emotional
- D. suspenseful

e) Explain your answer to c.

It produces comical effects as the readers know something that the other characters (i.e. the police officers) in the story didn't. The police officers would never have guessed that they had swallowed the murder weapon (i.e. the murder weapon was literally right under their very noses).

7. a) The way Mary Maloney dealt with the police officers in the second half of the story mirrored the way she tended to Patrick Maloney's needs in the first half of the story. With reference to the paragraphs indicated, compare how Mary Maloney used food, drink and her look of innocence to achieve different ends by completing the table below with the numbered items that follow.

	Dealing with Patrick Maloney (Paragraphs 1 to 22)	Dealing with the police officers (Paragraphs 102 to 131)
Food	<i>10. to fulfil her wifely role</i>	<i>4. to remove the evidence</i>
Drink	<i>11. to provide a warm welcome</i>	<i>9. to make the feelings of hunger more intense</i>
Look of innocence	<i>8. to give the impression that she was obedient, submissive and domestic</i>	<i>3. to give the impression that she was a helpless victim</i>

Options

1. to fulfil her role as a good host
2. to calm nerves
3. to give the impression that she was a helpless victim
4. to remove the evidence
5. to show that she was a good cook
6. to do what Patrick Maloney would have wanted
7. to give the impression that she was strong
8. to give the impression that she was obedient, submissive and domestic
9. to make the feelings of hunger more intense
10. to fulfil her wifely role
11. to provide a warm welcome
12. to give the impression that she was intelligent

ATM 7

- identify the domestic routines performed by Mary Maloney (e.g. pouring drinks, preparing food) and descriptions of her composure in front of her husband, interpret these routines and descriptions as ingredients of what is traditionally perceived as a happy family, and draw the conclusion that she was working hard to hold the family together
- identify Mary's acts of hospitality towards the police officers (e.g. offering food and drinks) and description of her appearing as a distraught widow as if she had nothing to do with the murder (e.g. 'Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here...' (Paragraph 118)), interpret these acts and her pretence as a ploy to entice the police officers into removing the evidence of her crime and draw the conclusion that Mary was trying to manipulate them into not thinking that she was a suspect

b) Based on the comparison above, what could be Mary Maloney's ultimate goal in each situation? Complete the table below.

When Mary Maloney was with her husband	<i>To hold the family together</i>
When Mary Maloney was dealing with the police officers	<i>To manipulate them into thinking that she was not the murderer</i>

c) With reference to your response to a) again, what changes did Mary Maloney undergo as the short story progresses?

She became more independent, pro-active and perhaps, cunning.

d) Some critics of the short story have suggested that Mary Maloney's journey was forced upon her by a society in which men, rather than women, had all the power (i.e. a patriarchy). In the light of such a reading of the short story, how did Mary Maloney's actions represent an assault on the male-dominated society?

- *She killed her husband after he announced his intention to leave her, which made her realise that she had been exploited all along by him.*
- *She ridiculed the police institution, which was dominated by men, by manipulating them into swallowing the murder weapon.*

ATM 8

- analyse the different parts of the short story in the light of an interpretation of the plot that emphasises Mary Maloney's actions being an assault on the male-dominated society, e.g.
 - the first quarter of the short story depicts a traditional woman who was happily subjugated to her husband, which is typical of a patriarchal society
 - the act of murder after the husband's announcement was brought about by a strong sense of betrayal – Mary Maloney felt that her devotion to the family was exploited by the man of her life and this could only be vindicated by getting rid of him
 - the police institution, which was another example of a patriarchy, was a threat to both her and her baby's survival – she needed to undermine and discredit it by making a mockery of the police officers' intelligence, i.e. wrong-footing them and making them swallow the murder weapon

Lamb to the Slaughter

By Roald Dahl

(1) The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight-hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

(2) Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

(3) Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin -for this was her sixth month with child-had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

(4) 'Hullo darling,' she said.

(5) 'Hullo darling,' he answered.

(6) 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; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

(7) For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel-almost as a sunbather feels the sun-that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

(8) 'Tired darling?'

(9) 'Yes,' he said. 'I'm tired,' 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, at least half of it left. She wasn't really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

(10) 'I'll get it!' she cried, jumping up.

(11) 'Sit down,' he said.

(12) When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

(13) 'Darling, shall I get your slippers?'

(14) 'No.'

(15) She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

(16) '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.'

(17) He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

(18) 'Darling,' she said. 'Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday.'

(19) 'No,' he said.

(20) 'If you're too tired to eat out,' she went on, 'it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.'

(21) Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

(22) 'Anyway,' she went on, 'I'll get you some cheese and crackers first.'

(23) 'I don't want it,' he said.

(24) She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. 'But you must eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.'

(25) She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

(26) 'Sit down,' he said. 'Just for a minute, sit down.'

(27) It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

(28) 'Go on,' he said. 'Sit down.'

(29) She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

(30) 'Listen,' he said. 'I've got something to tell you.'

(31) 'What is it, darling? What's the matter?'

(32) He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

(33) 'This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid,' he said. 'But I've thought about it a good deal and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much.'

(34) And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat 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.

(35) '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 and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job.'

(36) Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

- (37) 'I'll get the supper,' she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.
- (38) 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. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.
- (39) A leg of lamb.
- (40) All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.
- (41) 'For God's sake,' he said, hearing her, but not turning round. 'Don't make supper for me. I'm going out.'
- (42) 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.
- (43) She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.
- (44) She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.
- (45) The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.
- (46) All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.
- (47) 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. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, 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?
- (48) Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.
- (49) 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. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.
- (50) 'Hullo Sam,' she said brightly, aloud.
- (51) The voice sounded peculiar too.
- (52) 'I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.'
- (53) That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.
- (54) It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.
- (55) 'Hullo Sam,' she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

- (56) 'Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're you?'
- (57) 'I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas.'
- (58) The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.
- (59) 'Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight,' she told him. 'We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house.'
- (60) 'Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?'
- (61) 'No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer.'
- (62) 'Oh.'
- (63) 'I don't know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?'
- (64) 'Personally,' the grocer said, 'I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?'
- (65) 'Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those.'
- (66) 'Anything else?' The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. 'How about afterwards? What are you going to give him for afterwards?'
- (67) 'Well-what would you suggest, Sam?'
- (68) The man glanced around his shop. 'How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that.'
- (69) 'Perfect,' she said. 'He loves it.'
- (70) And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, 'Thank you, Sam. Goodnight.'
- (71) 'Goodnight, Mrs. Maloney. And thank you.'
- (72) 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 she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; 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 going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.
- (73) 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.
- (74) Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.
- (75) 'Patrick!' she called. 'How are you, darling?'
- (76) She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, 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.

(77) 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!'

(78) 'Who's speaking?'

(79) 'Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney.'

(80) 'You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?'

(81) 'I think so,' she sobbed. 'He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead.'

(82) 'Be right over,' the man said.

(83) The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policemen walked in. She knew them both-she knew nearly all the men at that precinct-and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

(84) 'Is he dead?' she cried.

(85) 'I'm afraid he is. What happened?'

(86) Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

(87) Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. 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. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven - 'it's there now, cooking' - and how she'd slopped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

(88) 'Which grocer?' one of the detectives asked.

(89) She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

(90) In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases- '...acted quite normal...very cheerful...wanted to give him a good supper... peas...cheesecake...impossible that she...'

(91) After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

(92) No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just where she was until she felt better? She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

(93) Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

(94) No, she said. She'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

(95) So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke to her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may've thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

(96) 'It's the old story,' he said. 'Get the weapon, and you've got the man.'

(97) Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing - a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.

(98) They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

(99) 'Or a big spanner?'

(100) She didn't think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

(101) The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

(102) 'Jack,' she said, the next time Sergeant Noonan went by. 'Would you mind giving me a drink?'

(103) 'Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?'

(104) 'Yes, please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.'

(105) He handed her the glass.

(106) 'Why don't you have one yourself,' she said. 'You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me.'

(107) 'Well,' he answered. 'It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.'

(108) One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, 'Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.'

(109) 'Oh dear me!' she cried. 'So it is!'

(110) 'I better turn it off for you, hadn't I?'

(111) 'Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much.'

(112) When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes. 'Jack Noonan,' she said.

(113) 'Yes?'

(114) 'Would you do me a small favour - you and these others?'

(115) 'We can try, Mrs. Maloney.'

(116) 'Well,' she said. 'Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, 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 allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven. It'll be cooked just right by now.'

(117) 'Wouldn't dream of it,' Sergeant Noonan said.

(118) 'Please,' she begged. 'Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favour to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.'

(119) 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. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

(120) 'Have some more, Charlie?'

(121) 'No. Better not finish it.'

(122) 'She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favour.'

(123) 'Okay then. Give me some more.'

(124) 'That's the hell of a big club the gut 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.'

(125) 'That's why it ought to be easy to find.'

(126) 'Exactly what I say.'

(127) 'Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.'

(128) One of them belched.

(129) 'Personally, I think it's right here on the premises.'

(130) 'Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?'

(131) And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

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