*AQA Paper 1*

*Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing*

*The extract is taken from Roald Dahl’s short story, Lamb to the Slaughter, written in 1953.*

*In this extract, Patrick Maloney - a senior police officer – informs his*

*heavily pregnant wife, Mary, that he is ending their marriage.*

'Sit down,' he said. 'Just for a minute, sit down.' It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

'Go on,' he said. 'Sit down.' 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.

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

'What is it, darling? What's the matter?’

He had 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.

'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.' 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.

'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.' 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.

'I'll get the supper,' she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

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 stairs 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, a leg of lamb. 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.

'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. She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

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. 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.

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

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 them 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.

Q1: Read lines 1 to 9 again.

List 4 details which suggest something is not right. (4 marks)

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4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Q2: Read again lines 12 to 29.

How does the writer use language to convey Mary Maloney’s sense of shock? (8 marks)

You could include:

• The writer’s choice of words and phrases

• Language features and techniques

• Sentence forms

Q3: You need to think about the whole extract now.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? (8 marks)

You could write about:

• What the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning

• How and why the writer changes this focus as the extract develops

• Any other structural features that interest you

Q4: Focus this part of your answer on lines 30 to the end. A student, having read this part of the text said: “The writer surprises the reader with this unexpected murder.”

To what extent do you agree? (20 marks)

In your response, you should:

• Write about your own impressions of Mary Maloney

• Evaluate how the writer surprises the reader with this unexpected twist

• Support your opinions with quotations from the text