

## What it takes to kill a lamb

*by: A.Swan*

I am just a simple person  
who writes using simple rhymes,  
tells a story of pure courage,  
and a love strong in hard times.

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“Be careful of the large one...  
seems the biggest always goes...”.  
An old, wise shepherd warned us  
as our new lambs struck a pose.

Our triplets stood and tilted.  
Mum recovered from her work.  
The smallest one fell over.  
Its leg buckled with a jerk.

But up and at it once again.  
They were easy to distinguish.  
The large was white, the small was grey,  
and the middle one was brownish.

My husband watched it all.  
He was the first to know.  
He had built their manger.  
He had the straw in stow.

He had watched her belly.  
He was the first to know.  
He had bought the heat lamps.  
He kept out the snow.

So he slightly shook his head,  
and I could see a little grin.  
“Even better than a single.  
There will be extra wool to spin”.

And I felt his sense of pride  
as he looked down on each lamb.  
He had fed the ewe more grain

just before she met the ram.

So then he lingered longer  
making sure the babes were fed.  
I returned back to the house.  
He would be the last to bed.

As the winter days continued.  
Off to the sheep barn he would go,  
The back of navy coveralls  
plodding through heavy, cold, wet snow.

Two weeks is just crucial.  
Three little mouths to feed,  
Just one exhausted ewe  
to keep up with the need.

As he fed the other livestock,  
he kept a watchful eye,  
watched all the little tumbles  
as the days and nights went by.

“The grey one lifts its back leg”,  
he remarked to me one day.  
“Not sure if it’s a problem  
or if it was hurt in play.”

It rallied very quickly  
and nursed like all the rest.  
It seemed to jump the highest.  
It seemed to pass the test.

“The white one is too sluggish”.  
We thought it was the same.  
Maybe it got kicked in play,  
perhaps a little lame.

My husband watched intently  
and the lamb set all apart.  
While the others rushed for milk.  
It just didn’t have the heart.

He bottle fed some extra  
Tried to give a little boost.  
Was the milk just running out?

Maybe more should be produced.

But compliance was an issue  
And the lamb just would not try,  
And the old, wise shepherd warned us  
That “they only try to die”.

But my husband persevered.  
Yes, he was stubborn too.  
Coaxed and prodded gently.  
He would see the battle through.

One day he held the creature  
cradled on his knee.  
It never made a sound,  
just laid there passively.

And an old day came in focus.  
I remembered it so clear.  
The day he held our baby boy  
when I was just wracked with fear.

He had watched my belly.  
He was the first to know.  
He had bought the diapers.  
He had supplies in stow.

He had watched in silence.  
He was the first to know.  
He took me for the help.  
The baby was too low.

So our son came just too early,  
And we knew that he would die.  
Still, he held him when I couldn't.  
He made sure to say goodbye.

His rough, calloused hands  
Held our precious, little one.  
Stroked his waxy skin,  
'Til the last heart beat was done.

I saw those moments in his eyes.  
A memory etched in time.  
As he sat on that old barn floor,

in the muck and straw and grime.

I watched him see that lamb,  
Surely death would take its hand.  
Watching it die slowly.  
How much suffering could it stand?

And when I left for work that day,  
he knew to stay behind.  
Despite his own hard memories,  
he still was just and kind.

He had watched the story  
He was the first to know.  
So his feet moved to the barn again,  
passing through that cold, wet snow.

His rough, calloused hands  
Held the precious, white one.  
Stroked his woolly back,  
Remembering our son.

Just a farmer and his thoughts,  
And a history of strife.  
A farmer with compassion,  
And a great respect for life.

When a grimace struck the creature's face,  
He killed that tiny lamb.  
What does it take to do this act?  
Someone better than I am.