

THE DUCK OF THE BASKERVILLES

A play by:

TOM CONSIDINE

**One act murder mystery, comedy which runs for about 15
minutes**

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THE DUCK OF THE BASKERVILLES

SYNOPSIS

Sir Oswald Baskerville has died in Mysterious Circumstances (a small village near his home). The doctor called in to pronounce him dead discovers a giant duck's footprint on Sir Oswald's chest and suspects foul play. The heir to Sir Oswald's estate may be in danger. The police are baffled. Shylock Casa, the famous insulting detective, and Watsonia, his assistant, are called in and they quickly solve the murder mystery and unmask the murderer.

(Did you notice that the title font is Baskerville old face?)

CAST

Sir Henry Baskerville, the heir to the Baskerville Estate in Devonshire. Youngish man. Has prominent canine teeth.

Doctor Burke, a local doctor. Middle aged, pompous.

Nurse Hare, Dr Burke's assistance, receptionist, etc. Approaching middle age.

Shylock Casa, a private detective. Late 30s, Lean body.

Portia Watsonia, a lawyer and advisor to Shylock Casa. Early 30s.

Inspector le Boulevard, a French Police Inspector. A man in his 40s.

Constable, a young man or woman.

Aged servant, an older woman. (Optional)

Prompt a voice.

STAGE

A lounge with a sofa and chairs and a small coffee table in front of the sofa at stage centre.

A writing desk and chair against the wall on stage left centre.

A door, stage right centre.

A trapdoor on stage left would be useful.

Many pictures, mainly family portraits.

APOLOGIES TO:

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Herman Melville.

THANKS

Kenneth Horne, Barry Took, and Marty Feldman for the idea, and Rae Nash for the improvements.

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ON RISE

Sir Henry Baskerville is sitting in a chair facing the coffee table on right centre stage reading a newspaper. Lighting is bright over the chair where Sir Henry is seated and the door, dimmer on stage left.

There is a knock on the door.

HENRY

(Puts down the newspaper on the coffee table)

Come in.

(Dr Burke enters.) (You could have the aged servant announce him if you prefer.)

HENRY

(Rising from his chair and advancing to Dr Burke. They shake hands.)

Good morning, Dr Burke, I presume?

DOCTOR

Good of you to see me, Sir Henry.

HENRY

Not at all. I have been wanting to see you. Please sit.

DOCTOR

(Dr Burke sits on the sofa.)

Thank you.

HENRY

Can I offer you a drink, sherry perhaps, or something else?

DOCTOR

No thank you, I am on my rounds. When did you arrive?

HENRY

I arrived yesterday. I was on my way here from Cape Town on business; otherwise, I might still be at sea. When I arrived in London, I was told that my Uncle was dead. *(Pause)* How did my uncle die?

DOCTOR

He was killed or, perhaps, murdered in his bedroom.

HENRY

(Stands)

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Murdered, you say. Have the police been called, what do they say?

DOCTOR

The police are baffled, I'm afraid.

HENRY

That is not good enough, is there no one who can help us?

DOCTOR

I confess that I am at a loss, *(Long pause)* but wait; there is perhaps one man who can help us. *(Pause.)* Sir Henry, with your permission, I will call in the famous Italian insulting detective, Shylock Casa.

HENRY

Insulting, *(pause,)* surely you mean consulting?

DOCTOR

He does consult, but insulting is his forte.

HENRY

Is he any good?

DOCTOR

He always gets his pound of flesh.

HENRY

Then he's just the man for us. Contact him right away. Please use the desk to compose your message.

DOCTOR

(Stands and moves to window)

No need, I will contact him *(pause)* on WhatsApp.

HENRY

Apart from my uncle's death, nothing in particular, what's up with you?

(Stands, moves towards and faces Doctor Burke)

DOCTOR

(Turns to face Henry)

No, WhatsApp is an app on my iPhone.

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HENRY
What's a YouPhone?

DOCTOR
Not a YouPhone, an iPhone.

HENRY
That's what I said, a YouPhone.

DOCTOR
No, my phone is an iPhone.

HENRY
Your phone is a Youphone.

DOCTOR
Whatever, Sir Henry, I will WhatsApp Casa.

HENRY
There no one by the name of Casa in this room!

DOCTOR
Never mind! I am going to WhatsApp.

HENRY
(Irritably.)
I told you nothing is up! I wish you would finish your sentences before you start another.
(Suddenly, a man and a woman are standing in the room.)

If you have a trapdoor on the stage you could position the appearance near (but not over) it. The actors could then pop up. You could dim the lights over that part of the stage, with only Sir Henry and Dr Burke in a single spotlight as Shylock and Portia arrive, and then bring up the lights to reveal them. Whatever you chose, Sir Henry and Dr Burke should keep the audience focused on them (perhaps with body movements) to draw attention away from the other side of the stage where they will appear.

(All actors turn and move to centre stage to face each other.)

DOCTOR
Technology is marvellous, Mr. Casa, you look as if you're standing in the same room as we are.

SHYLOCK

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That's because I am, Doctor.

DOCTOR

But how did you know we needed you?

SHYLOCK

Simple, I saw in the paper that Sir Oswald Baskerville had died in Mysterious Circumstances. I deduced that I was needed and came post-haste.

DOCTOR

Yes, I can see the stamp. It's a Penny Black!

PROMPT

Please be careful to use politically- correct language!

DOCTOR

Sorry, I see it's a Penny Previously-disadvantaged stamp.

(Use any other topical phrase here which is current in your country. For example, politically side-lined stamp)

SHYLOCK

Permit me to introduce the famous defence lawyer and my assistant, Portia Watsonia CC.

DOCTOR

Not QC?

SHYLOCK

No.

DOCTOR

Why CC?

SHYLOCK

She can't say no!

HENRY

(To Portia; lasciviously)

Really, what are you doing tomorrow?

PORTIA

Visiting my clients in prison.

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HENRY

That's very good of you, how many of your clients are in prison?

PORTIA

All of them.

HENRY

Why so many?

PORTIA

Win some, *(Pause,)* lose some.

SHYLOCK

Enough chitchat. Give me the facts.

DOCTOR

I'll start at the very beginning. *(Sing, song voice)*

SHYLOCK

That's a very good place to start.

PORTIA

When you begin, you begin with do, re, me.... *(Sing, song voice)*

(Stops at a glance from Shylock)

SHYLOCK

Shut your Trapp, you silly ex-nun! Carry on Doctor.

DOCTOR

The founder of the line, Ishmael Baskerville, sailed on the good ship Pequod with a Captain Ahab who was searching for a giant white duck with the unlikely name of Moby. After the Pequod had found and Captain Ahab had harpooned the duck, Ishmael found one of the duck's eggs. He kept this warm and took it home to England where he settled near the village of Mysterious Circumstances on Dartmoor.

SHYLOCK

Enough history! Pray continue and give me only the pertinent facts.

DOCTOR

Yes, *(pause,)* but.

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SHYLOCK

Enough, Doctor. The facts, as concise as you can make them.

DOCTOR
(Testily)

In that case, the egg hatched but the duck grew too large for its pen and it escaped into the wilderness from which it terrorised the Moors.

SHYLOCK

Luckily enough, there are not too many Moors in Devonshire.

PORTIA

Yes, there are, Dartmoor, Exmoor and.....

SHYLOCK

Not that sort of Moor, Watsonia!

DOCTOR

Exactly, but the duck or its descendants continue to terrorise the Baskerville family.

PORTIA

How so?

DOCTOR

Ishmael Baskerville took a fancy to the stage and became a well-known actor, particularly in Shakespearian roles. It was in one of those roles that he met his untimely end.

SHYLOCK

Playing Othello, I believe?

DOCTOR

Good Heavens, man, how did you know that?

WATSONIA

I was wondering that too?

SHYLOCK

Elementary my dear Watsonia, Othello was a Moor. The duck seems to have a particular hatred for Moors, probably since Captain Ahab was also a Moor.

DOCTOR

Casa, you are astounding.

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SHYLOCK

Not at all, one merely has to use one's brain.

DOCTOR

The ability to act on the stage has been passed down through the generations until the erstwhile or should I say the late Sir Oswald Baskerville.

HENRY

Fortunately, I have no desire to go before the footlights.

SHYLOCK

That is indeed fortunate. It may be the saving of you.

SHYLOCK

(Turning to the doctor, he asked,)

How did he die?

DOCTOR

He was smothered by the duck in his bed.

SHYLOCK

How do you know that, Doctor?

DOCTOR

He had died of suffocation and I saw a large duck footprint on his chest.

PORTIA

I think there is something fowl afoot.

SHYLOCK

Exactly, Watsonia!

SHYLOCK

How did the duck get into the room? I understand that it was giant duck. It could hardly get in through the door or the window.

DOCTOR

That is the mystery that we want you to solve, Mr. Casa.

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