

THE ADVENTURE OF THE UNKINDEST CUT

A play by:

TOM CONSIDINE

Edited by Sharp Pencils Creative Writers Group

**One act murder mystery and black comedy which
runs for about 20 minutes**

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THE UNKINDEST CUT

(Did you notice that the title font is Nyala? Nyala is an African antelope which was often killed for meat 18th and 19th centuries. Couldn't find a "Lamb" font.) Chuckle.

Apologies to:

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Synopsis

Mr Drake has been butchered in his prime by a first- grade rascal. Inspector le Boulevard's investigation has come to a cul-de-sac; there is no apparent Motive, no Opportunity and the Means has disappeared, so he calls in Shylock Casa, the famous insulting detective who always gets his pound of flesh, for assistance. Shylock Casa quickly discovers that the slaughter was the result of Mrs Drakes' search for a man who was a cut above the rest.

Presenters Guide

Ages

Suitable for all ages

Sex, nudity

There are three mild double-entendres which should be above children's heads

Violence and Gore

None, a bloody murder is discussed but nothing is shown

Profanatory

None

Alcohol, drugs, smoking

None

Frightening and Intensive scenes

None

Cast

Shylock Casa	A consulting detective. A man in his thirties or forties.
Portia Watsonia	A lawyer who assists Shylock in his work. A woman in her thirties.
Inspector le Boulevard	A man of any age; not elderly. He is French so there is an opportunity for a bad fake French accent to add to the audiences' amusement.

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The widow	Youngish woman.
The widow's sister	About the same age as the widow.
The brother-in-law	About the same age as the sister, it doesn't really matter too much.
Neighbour	A woman or man of any age.

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SUGGESTED STAGE SETTING

Stage

House description from the Apron view

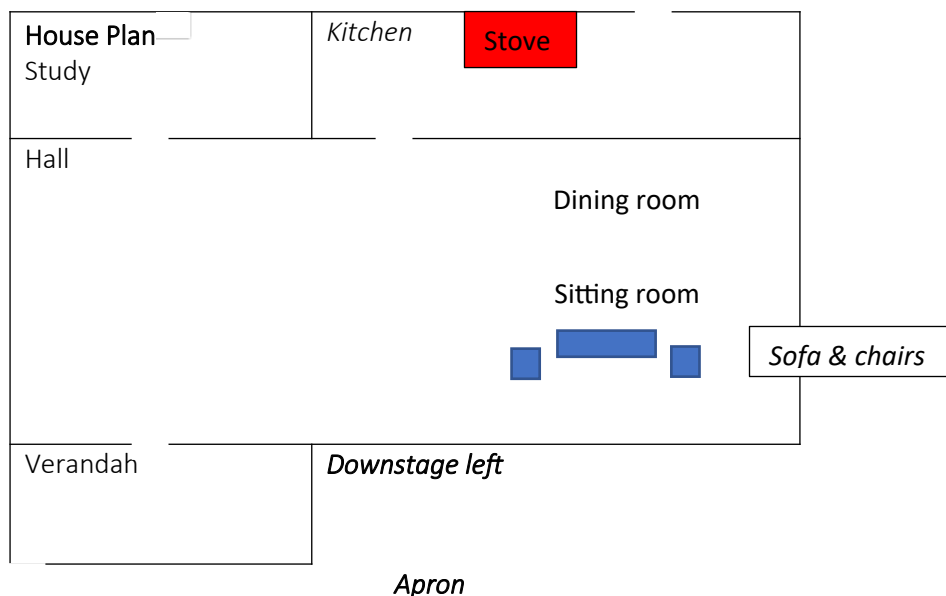
The front door opens on to a hall. The sitting room is on the right. The dining room leads off the sitting room and the kitchen off that. There is a door out onto the kitchen garden. On the left, as you enter the hall is the library cum games room. The husband's study is at the end of the library and hall. In the library, clerestory windows, except for the street side which is a normal-sized window which was closed from the inside. The study and the kitchen have large windows onto the kitchen garden. There is no door from the kitchen onto the passage. The sitting room is open plan onto the hall so no-one could have got to the study without being seen by the wife and the visitors. The dining room may be represented by a small table and 2 chairs.

Ignore the library and games room when dressing the set.

Stage setting

It is not necessary to show the library/ games room on the stage. The hall will be on stage right and the study can be at the end of the hall.

To avoid time-consuming set changes, consider lighting only the hall and only lighting the sitting room when Casa etc goes in. When Casa etc go through the dining room into the kitchen darken the sitting room, light the dining room and when they enter the kitchen, light it then. Do the same for when they go into the study. You might use the front of the stage, in front of the curtain as the verandah.



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Curtain Up

(Casa and Watsonia approach the house.)

(Le Boulevard is sitting at a table on the verandah talking to a neighbour also seated at the table.

Shylock and Watsonia join them.

Le Boulevard

Morning, Casa, morning Watsonia. "We've got a tough one here. Let me introduce you. This is Mrs/Mr Veale from next door. *(To neighbour.)* Shylock Casa and Portia Watsonia. They are assisting in the investigation.

Neighbour

Pleased to meet you.

Shylock and Watsonia

And, we you.

Shylock

Give me just the bare bones of the case to start with.

Le Boulevard:

A man by the name of Peter Drake was killed.

Watsonia

You mean that Mr Drake is a dead duck?

Shylock

Graveyard humour Watsonia?

(Le Boulevard continues talking the neighbour.)

Le Boulevard

Did you see anything suspicious?

Neighbour

Nothing really. The road is a cul-de-sac so there is no passing traffic, no strange vehicles parked,

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nobody walking past.

Shylock

What about the postman?

Neighbour

He only delivers tomorrow. I was working in my garden this morning and saw nothing unusual. Except, Mrs Drake's sister and her husband came about 9:30. She greeted me on her way in. Otherwise everything was quiet.

Shylock

So, they come here often?

Neighbour

Yes, they are very close and Mr Drake travels, oops, sorry, travelled, a lot so they visit quite often.

Le Boulevard

Alone?

Neighbour

Yes, sometimes the sister comes alone and sometimes the brother-in-law.

Shylock

Did you notice if the sister came more often than the brother-in-law?

Neighbour

No.

Le Boulevard

Did you notice if the sister and brother-in-law visited at night?

Neighbour

No, can't say I did. Once or twice the sister came at night, but I can't say how often as I am active in the local church activities so I have and go to a lot of meetings.

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Le Boulevard

How do the Drakes, pardon me; did the Drakes get on?

Neighbour

Oh, they were very happy. When he came home; she would run down the path to meet him and jump up into his arms.

Shylock

Do they have a maid?

Neighbour

They did but she started to get cocky with Mrs Drake and she had to fire her.

Shylock

What was her name?

Neighbour

Susy Atkins.

Le Boulevard

Susy Atkins, I remember the name; she was stabbed in the East End.

Watsonia

Oooh! that's a painful place. I wouldn't like to be stabbed in the East End. Still, it's not as bad as being stabbed in the South End.

Shylock

That was a little close to the bone, Watsonia!

Le Boulevard

I knew that I knew the name Drake from somewhere. The murder was never solved. Mmmm.

Shylock

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Who cleans for her now?

Neighbour

We share a maid, 3 days a week each.

Shylock

Your turn today?

Neighbour

Yes.

Le Boulevard

Thank you, you have been most informative.

Neighbour

It's a tragedy, that poor woman; if I can help, please ask.

Le Boulevard

Thank you, you have been a great help. If we need more information, we will certainly ask you.

(She/he leaves.)

Shylock

How was he killed?

Le Boulevard

With a large blunt instrument which has since disappeared.

Shylock

Large?

Le Boulevard

Yes, about the size of a thick branch. The head was bashed in. The body has gone off to the morgue for detailed examination. The wife is in the front room, totally shattered – being comforted by her sister and her brother-in-law.

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Shylock

Apt turn of phrase, le Boulevard. Tell me about the dead man.

Le Boulevard

High-class meat merchant. Supplied meat to the best clubs and hotels, not to mention rich households. He also gave courses on cooking meat to the same clients.

Shylock

Was the neighbour correct, he was away a lot?

Le Boulevard

(Consults his notebook.) Yes.

Shylock

How was he struck?

Le Boulevard

The man was struck from behind, left side. He fell forward onto the stamps he was working with.

Watsonia

He's been mounted in the big stamp album in the sky.

Shylock

Please. *(To Watsonia.)*

Shylock

Philatelist?

Le Boulevard

Yes, but in an amateur way. He doesn't collect as an investment so he didn't have any Penny Blacks or Cape of Good Hope Triangles if that's what you're thinking. He collected stamps with themes like sport or birds and so on.

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Shylock

Shall we go in.

Le Boulevard

Yes of course. *(He leads the way into the house.)*

(The deceased's wife is sitting on the right of the sofa with the brother-in-law sitting next to her with his arm around her shoulders. She is sobbing uncontrollably. Her sister sits on a chair close to her patting the widow's hands.)

Le Boulevard

(Le Boulevard introduces them.) This is Shylock Casa and Portia Watsonia (CC) they are assisting in the investigation. Mr Casa is a consulting detective and Portia Watsonia is a lawyer. Mrs Drake and Mr and Mrs March.

Brother-in-law

Pleased to meet you. But why a consulting detective?

Le Boulevard

An outsider often has a different perspective on the case.

Brother-in-law

CC not QC? *(To Watsonia.)*

Shylock

She can't say no!

Watsonia

I'm just a girl who can't say no; I'm in a terrible fix.

Shylock

Shut up or I will send you back to Oklahoma.

Brother-in-law

Please, sir. Be fair, the young lady has a pleasant voice.

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Watsonia

Thank you, sir. I think I shall start a palm court orchestra with the name of..... Let me see, I know, Portia and the lawyers.

Shylock

Portia and the liars would be more accurate.

Watsonia

Portia and the attorneys, then?

Shylock

Portia and the torts will be more like it.

Le Boulevard

I must warn you; if you sing in Paree, you will have to show your briefs.

Shylock

Enough of that. We are very sorry for your loss, please accept our sympathy.

Widow

Thank you. *(Cries.)*

Brother-in-law

Are you a criminal lawyer? *(To Watsonia.)*

Watsonia

No, I am totally honest.

Brother-in-law

You are a civil lawyer then?

Shylock

She is always very civil except when she loses a case, when she becomes very abusive.

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Le Boulevard

Excuse us please. Let's take a butchers at the kitchen. [Look= 'butcher's hook' - Rhyming slang]

(They go into the kitchen.)

(Shylock Casa opens the warming drawer in the stove and examines the leg of lamb inside.)

Shylock

Mmmmm. They were going to have lunch together?

Le Boulevard

Yes, how did you know?

Shylock

Cooked lamb in the warming drawer; you can smell it. Karoo lamb, even.

Le Boulevard

How did you know that or are you pulling my leg?

Shylock

No; unless you are a lamb. Elementary, affluent neighbourhood, the husband stocks the best meat in his business. Besides, Karoo lamb has a distinctive flavour, different from Canterbury or Kentish lamb. I have done a small monograph on the 71 different tastes and smells of lamb in the world.

Watsonia

So many?

Shylock

Yes. Actually, I have since discovered 3 more.

Le Boulevard

You never cease to amaze me, Casa.

Shylock

it's now 13:00. Judging from the lamb's aroma, it was cooked quite quickly.

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Le Boulevard

And?

Shylock

Lamb is best cooked slowly; 4 to 5 hours is best if you want to take advantage of the Maillard browning effect.

Watsonia

Perhaps they liked it that way.

Shylock

I doubt it, the husband was a professional cook, it is unlikely that he would eat badly cooked meat. The potatoes were burnt as well.

Le Boulevard

Personally, I prefer my lamb pinkish in the middle. Have you any theories?

Shylock

Hypotheses, please. The answer is yes, 3.

Le Boulevard

Sorry.

Shylock

At what time did he die?

Le Boulevard

The doctor says about 10.00. He is checking at the laboratory.

Shylock

It appears that the wife is left-handed.

Watsonia

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How did you know that?

Shylock

Rubber gloves lying on the sink. The left is more worn than the right. The carving knife is on the left of the chopping board. It has been used recently.

Watsonia

That's remarkable, Casa.

Shylock

There is nothing remarkable about using one's eyes.

Watsonia

The dead man was struck from behind and from the left. So, the wife did it.

Shylock

No, that is one explanation of the facts, there are others.

Le Boulevard

Like what?

Shylock

What is the motive; have you thought about that?

Le Boulevard

We are checking for insurance policies, love affairs and the rest.

Shylock

Nothing stolen?

Le Boulevard

No, as I said he did not collect for profit. So, an invisible, unknown person entered the house, struck the man with a blunt instrument and left, taking nothing with him except the blunt instrument.

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