

The Basquet Case

Detective works through the fruit basket to find a
diamond thief. . . .

by Craig Sodaro

Characters

INSPECTOR ANGUS APPLE, *a*

police inspector

PRUNELLA BASQUET, *a wealthy*

matron

LUCY LEMON, *her faithful secre-*
tary

GWEN GRAPE, *her niece and maid*

PETER MELON, *her ne'er-do-well*
nephew

TIME: *The present.*

SETTING: *The individual homes or rooms of the characters. Each has a small basket or bowl of the fruit whose name they bear.*

AT RISE: *INSPECTOR ANGUS APPLE, PRUNELLA BASQUET, LUCY LEMON, and GWEN GRAPE are all on screen, waiting nervously. APPLE checks his watch.*

PRUNELLA (*After a moment, sighing*): Really, Inspector, can't we get on with this?

APPLE: Mr. Melon was notified of the correct time?

LEMON: Of course.

PRUNELLA: Inspector, my secretary, Ms. Lemon, doesn't make mistakes.

GRAPE: Relax, he'll be here.

APPLE: Do you know where he is, Ms. Grape?

GRAPE: I can guess. (*PETER MELON logs on and appears out of breath, drinking from a water bottle.*)

PRUNELLA (*Admonishingly*): Better late than never, Peter.

MELON: At least I made it, Auntie.

PRUNELLA: Please don't call me that. It makes me feel like an old lady.

MELON: Yeah, well, if the shoe fits.

APPLE (*Quickly*): Good of you to join us, Mr. Melon.

MELON: Sorry I'm late, but Fireball was running in the eighth.

GRAPE: How'd she do?

MELON (*Shrugging*): Burned out, came in tenth.

PRUNELLA: Big surprise. So how much did you throw away this time?

MELON: I never bet more than you can afford to lose, Auntie.

PRUNELLA: Inspector, arrest him now! He stole my diamond! My beautiful El Cid!

MELON: Yeah? Well, listen, Auntie, I have an alibi. An air-tight alibi, right, chief?

APPLE: It's Inspector, Mr. Melon. And unfortunately, each of you has an alibi.

LEMON: Then, as I've said all along, it had to be a stranger.

GRAPE: Yeah! Everybody and their brother knew she owns that stupid thing.

PRUNELLA: You don't call El Cid stupid! Its radiance outshines the sun.

GRAPE: If you like that kind of thing, Auntie.

PRUNELLA: Don't you start, too!

GRAPE: You're my aunt even if I am the help. I got the papers to prove it.

APPLE: And you and Mr. Melon are cousins, correct, Ms. Grape?

MELON: We've all got crosses to bear.

GRAPE: Some heavier than others, Cuz.

LEMON: Excuse me, but, Inspector, why did you invite us to this meeting?

APPLE: Just to clarify a few facts.

PRUNELLA: How tiresome!

APPLE: And then arrest the thief. (*General exclamations of surprise*)

GRAPE: You got him?

LEMON: Who is it?

APPLE: One of you. (*All look one to another.*)

MELON: Hold it! Hold it! You just said that we all got alibis.

APPLE: Yes, you do.

LEMON: So, someone is lying.

GRAPE: Or very, very clever.

PRUNELLA: I don't care about that. I just want El Cid back.

APPLE: Let's review what happened the night of November fourth, shall we?

GRAPE (*Sighing*): Again?

APPLE: Humor me. That evening you attended the Opera Gala, correct, Ms. Basquet?

PRUNELLA: I go every year. It's the biggest fundraiser.

GRAPE: The perfect spot for Auntie to show off her jewels.

APPLE: But this year you chose not to wear El Cid.

PRUNELLA: I was wearing Vera Wang in

seafoam. My emeralds complemented my gown better than a yellow diamond.

LEMON: Verified by the fashion critics in the morning papers.

PRUNELLA: Thank you, Ms. Lemon.

APPLE: You left at six and returned at eleven that night, correct?

PRUNELLA: For the umpteenth time, yes. My chauffeur has testified over and over.

APPLE: Before you left, you put all your jewelry—including El Cid—into your locked jewelry box. This has verified by Ms. Grape. (*GRAPE nods.*)

GRAPE: I saw that thing in its case, watched her put it in the jewelry box, lock it up, and put the key in her purse.

APPLE: So you have testified. Now, there is only one key to the jewelry box, correct?

PRUNELLA: Yes. This key. (*She holds up a key.*)

APPLE: And, speaking of keys, you four are the only people who have keys to the Basquet residence, correct?

MELON: As far as I know.

LEMON: I have a key.

GRAPE: Me, too.

PRUNELLA: How many times must I tell you this? There are only four keys!

APPLE: So any one of you could have theoretically entered the house and stolen the jewel.

LEMON: Theoretically. But I left that day at six, met my sister Marla at Le

Bon Pain for dinner, and then we went to see a movie until eleven-thirty.

APPLE: I've checked with your sister, the restaurant, and the theater. It is just as you said.

LEMON (*Offended*): I don't lie, Inspector.

APPLE: I didn't think you would.

GRAPE: But I suppose you think *I* lied! After all, like Melon here, I'm just a poor relation hanging onto Auntie's cashmere coat tails!

APPLE: You, Ms. Grape, said that you locked up the house as Ms. Basquet was getting into the limousine to go to the gala. You got in your car and followed the limousine out of the gates. You then showed up at your gym, which is called. . . (*He looks through his notes.*)

GRAPE: Fit 'n' Fun, just like me!

APPLE: That's right. Their surveillance cameras show you were there until eight-thirty and then you left with a few ladies.

GRAPE: Donna, Ellie, and Sharon. We went to Taco John's.

PRUNELLA: To put on the pounds you worked so hard to get take off!

GRAPE: What's it to you, Auntie?

APPLE: All right, then you went to, let's see. . . (*He checks his notes again.*)

GRAPE: Ellie's condo and stayed until one A.M.

APPLE: And she verified this.

GRAPE: See? I don't lie either.

APPLE: So that leaves Mr. Melon.

MELON: You can't pin this on me! I told you where I was.

APPLE (*Flipping through his notes*): At a card game at the residence of Mr. Harry Horsham, arriving at six P.M. and leaving at one-forty-five in the morning.

MELON: And good old Horseface alibied me, right?

APPLE (*Reading from his notes*): As did Carl "Cock-Eyed" Einstein, Tony "Big Tuna" Tumaso, and Sandy "Cha-Cha" Lee.

GRAPE: So what's your moniker, Pete?

PRUNELLA: What else? Sneaky Pete.

MELON: But I never touched your stupid diamond, Auntie. What would I do with it anyway?

LEMON: No doubt you have a number of acquaintances who would gladly take it off your hands.

MELON: That thing? You can't unload something like that!

APPLE: Mr. Melon has a point.

MELON: See?

PRUNELLA: I'm sure someone with the right connections can find a buyer. Someone who rubs elbows with criminal types.

MELON: You talking about me? Look! Here's my elbow! (*He puts his elbow up to the screen.*) Nice and clean, see that? Nothing criminal about these elbows.

GRAPE: But the guy says one of us swiped it.

LEMON: So, which one of those two stole the diamond?

APPLE: You're referring to Mr. Melon and Ms. Grape?

LEMON: They're obviously the ones who could use a little extra cash.

APPLE: And not yourself?

LEMON: I am very comfortable, thank you.

APPLE: But you'd be more comfortable if you could get that nasty collection agency off your back.

LEMON: What? How did you—

APPLE: It's my job, Ms. Lemon. I've checked your finances. . .actually, I've checked the finances of all of you.

MELON: Ooops!

GRAPE: Then you can tell I never got any (*Using air quotes and glaring at LEMON*) "little extra cash."

LEMON: Our finances are private! You had no right!

APPLE: This is an investigation into grand larceny. I have every right, and it appears you still owe a hefty pile of parking fines.

LEMON: I couldn't help it! Do you know how hard it is to find a parking space in the city? That's why I took this job out in the middle of nowhere.

APPLE: But you still have to pay the tickets.

LEMON: I can assure you I wouldn't know what to do with that stupid jewel if I did steal it.

PRUNELLA: You call El Cid stupid? Really, Ms. Lemon, we will have to talk in the morning.

APPLE: Let's stop for a moment and consider one thing. It is true that unloading a diamond as large and famous as El Cid is almost impossible, especially for an inexperienced and basically inept thief.

MELON: Who are you calling inept?

GRAPE: Shut up! He means us.

MELON: Oh, right.

APPLE: So, I've asked myself who profits from the theft if not the thief?

PRUNELLA: No one!

LEMON: Well, there is the insurance. You recently updated the insurance policy, Ms. Basquet.

APPLE: Yes, half a million dollars, I believe.

PRUNELLA: I have to protect myself!

APPLE: But if the diamond doesn't turn up, you will receive half a million dollars, correct?

PRUNELLA: I'd rather have El Cid!

APPLE: How about both?

PRUNELLA (*Caught off guard*): What. . . what do you mean?

MELON (*Trying not to laugh*): Auntie stole her own diamond?

GRAPE: Well, how do you like that?

PRUNELLA: I did no such thing! You've seen the jewelry box! The lock was broken! Why wouldn't I just use my key?

MELON: So it'd look like a thief took it. Robbery 101.

APPLE: And all the fingerprints were wiped clean.

PRUNELLA: Not to mention the fact that the diamond is nowhere to be found!

APPLE: There is that. We've searched every nook and cranny in your house.

LEMON: I'll vouch for that.

APPLE: And every nook and cranny in each of your houses.

MELON: And you left my nook a mess!

GRAPE: You ought to see my cranny!

PRUNELLA: So you have nothing, Inspector. All this time and money investigating this robbery and I'm left with nothing.

APPLE: You'll have a half million dollars.

PRUNELLA: But where's El Cid?

APPLE: Hm-m-m. . . I've thought long and hard about this. One thing I noticed every time I visited your house was the fact that you have a bowl of—what are those, prunes?—in every room.

PRUNELLA: Can I help it if I'm partial to prunes?

APPLE: Of course not, especially considering your name. Still, not many people have bowls of prunes in every room of their house. Rather odd, I'd say.

PRUNELLA: If you must know, I snack constantly. Prunes are delicious and nutritious.

APPLE: And prunes have pits. (*He picks up a prune from a bowl and examines it.*) Pits about so big. (*He measures a half inch with his fingers.*)

MELON: What're you getting at?

GRAPE: What do prunes have to do with the diamond?

APPLE: Do you want to tell them, Ms. Basquet? Or shall I?

PRUNELLA: I don't know what you're talking about. (*PRUNELLA starts picking through the prunes in her bowl.*)

APPLE: I checked. El Cid is a five carat diamond, and being pear-shaped, it is about a half inch long. (*He pulls a pit from a prune and holds it up.*) It fits perfectly into a pitted prune, doesn't it, Ms. Basquet? (*Loud knocking is heard at PRUNELLA's door.*)

PRUNELLA (*Nervously*): Who's that?

APPLE: Several uniformed police offi-

cers, Ms. Basquet. They have a warrant for your arrest.

PRUNELLA: How dare you! (*PRUNELLA picks prune from bowl and moves it to her mouth.*)

APPLE: Put that prune down! You wouldn't want to choke on a diamond. (*More knocking*) Your precious El Cid has been hiding in plain sight the whole time, hasn't it?

MELON: Better answer the door, Auntie!

APPLE: And I'll now adjourn this meeting!

PRUNELLA (*Angrily*): But. . .but. . .you rat!

APPLE: I prefer to think of myself as a bulldog, Ms. Basquet. I always get my man or in this case. . .woman. Good night!

THE END

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Basquet Case

CHARACTERS: 3 female; 2 male.

PLAYING TIME: 10 minutes.

COSTUMES: Everyday dress. Prunella may wear fancy dress and jewels.

PROPERTIES: Prunella has key. Apple has access to a bowl of prunes off camera.

SETTING: Various homes, nothing specific required. Each character has a small basket or bowl of the fruit whose name they bear.

LIGHTING: No special effects.

SOUND: Knocking on Prunella's door.