

GOLDIE ALEXANDER'S "UNKIND CUT"

Talking points for book clubs

Though "UnKind Cut" is complete in itself, it is also a sequel to "UnJust Desserts" and features some of the same characters and the same setting. Like its predecessor, this story has a gentle approach to how unexpectedly a crime can alter a community.

Kingston Ellis, the celebrated Shakespearean actor, has retired to the coastal village of Grevillea on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Australia.

As a long dry summer comes to an end, the Galahs are trying to raise money for their Fire Brigade and Broderick Primary School by staging a debut production of *Julius Caesar*. Most of Grevillea has been co-opted. Kingston is to play the title role. Opening night is on the 15th March at the end of a hot, dry summer. However when Kingston is stabbed for real in the assassination scene, it's a real show-stopper.

Detective Inspector Richard Brumby, who is present at the performance, and Detective Alexandria Ramsey (Lexi) set out to find what really happened. Possible culprits abound as Kingston is universally unpopular. These include various members of his family, his employees, and those Grevilleans he has managed to antagonize.

This novel pursues what can happen in a small Australian town when ordinary folk mix with the rich and famous.

Environmental issues can become fraught when rich folk settle into a sensitive area if they demand that things be done their way. Over development is always an issue. Kingston is an extreme example as he has broken just about everyone of his neighbours' rules and they are justified in their annoyance. But given that wealthier residents also bring more business and prestige to an area, how can a decent balance be struck between their demands and that of the environment.

Many characters still carry emotional baggage. Though this story takes place some months later, Olivia is still wary of total commitment to her lover Eddie Wong. Detective Richard Brumby's marriage is failing. Lexi, his 2IC's, lover still can't make that final commitment. Even wealthy Kingston's children and grandchildren are unhappy. How representative

are these characters of contemporary society? Can you see any emotional resolutions? Or are these people destined to continue on as before.

In your opinion, how brave or foolish was Eddie, to involve such a difficult man as Kingston into a local production. Was he just asking for trouble? What other means are there for raising money for local needs that might have been safer for him to try? In your opinion does a production involving a community merely create more unnecessary problems than benefits?

The popularity of the murder/mystery genre lies in its well constructed plot. As a general rule, murder mysteries must have an obvious opening, a decent development, lots of 'red herrings' and a satisfactory resolution. No matter who the characters are or where the setting, this shape is fundamental. It is this basic structure that allows so many themes to be explored, themes that in this novel focus on contemporary issues and characters.

Given you found yourself in the centre of an unsolved crime, how would you handle it? Can you imagine this ever happening to you? What would you do if it did?

Do you like the idea of inserting recipes, or other non-fiction facts, inside what is after all 'only a story'? Did you think it either adds interest or holds up the plot? Have you ever tested a recipe you found inside a novel? How successful was it?