

- TITLE:** UNSHUT (Pilot: The Posed Body | Season 1: Murder Number One)
- FORMAT:** Premium/Prestige Streaming Series | Period Noir | Inspired by a True Story
- LOGLINE:** *When the LAPD dismisses her uncle's death as suicide, a grieving nurse in 1899 Los Angeles forms an unlikely alliance to overturn the official record—exposing the conspiracy behind the first recorded and still unsolved murder in the city's history.*
- COMPS:** PERRY MASON | THE KNICK | MARE OF EASTTOWN | TRUE DETECTIVE (S1)
- WORLD:** Los Angeles, 1899: a gritty boomtown at the end of the Gilded Age. Newfound oil wealth, political corruption, land grabs, and newspaper sensationalism fuel a civic identity built on progress but plagued by exploitation. Gas lamps, trolley lines, and early electrification create a noir, liminal atmosphere where immigrants, laborers, and working women are the first to disappear—and the last to be counted.
- THEMES:** UNSHUT dramatizes the forces reshaping America today, invoking themes that feel contemporary despite the 1899 setting: the erasure of marginalized communities, women fighting for a voice, media as both truth-telling and personal risk, weaponizing institutions to bury wrongdoing, political forces revising history, and ordinary citizens uncovering conspiracies that powerful people want buried.
- WHY ME:** During my close work as a strategy advisor to former LAPD Chief William Bratton, I learned that the very first homicide ever recorded—that of Danish teamster **Simon Christenson** on September 9, 1899—remains unsolved. My up-close knowledge of the inner workings of powerful systems and how they become corrupt put me in a perfect position to offer a fictionalized but believable story based on the few remaining facts.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

**ANNA CHRISTENSON** (27, Florence Pugh type)—A Danish-American nurse from San Francisco. Empathic, reserved, and trained to stay composed even under enormous pressure, Anna carries a deep flaw: she cannot abide preventable loss, after failing as a young nurse to save her father — Simon's fraternal twin — then lying about it under oath. That wound weaponizes her grief, driving her past caution and into danger. Saving her uncle's name offers Anna a chance at absolution, and her transformation from quiet healer to truth-teller is the backbone of the series.

**VIRGIL VEGA** (32, Diego Boneta type)—A sidelined Mexican-American LAPD detective who has learned to survive corruption by keeping his head down. Anna's resolve reawakens Virgil's buried integrity and forces him to confront a system that he not only serves, but that punishes boat-rockers — and shaped him into a man he never meant to become. Romantic tension between Virgil and Anna blossoms toward the end of the series.

**CLARA BELL GRADY** (24, Olivia Cooke type)—A cheeky Irish-American reporter stuck on the society pages of the Los Angeles Times, doing career penance for a past reporting misstep. Witty, restless, and ambitious, but hiding the personal pain from her past behind her sharp pen, Clara is forced to write under a male pseudonym to publish real reporting. She risks her job (and safety) for the story no one else will touch, earning a byline for a front-page exposé under her real name.

## PILOT: THE POSED BODY

We could open on a freight train rumbling into 1899 Los Angeles on a Saturday night in September, the engineer doing everything he can to stop from hitting something on the tracks up ahead: a mutilated body, that of **Simon Christenson**, a Danish-American teamster. The police declare it a suicide and immediately shut the case—*just another disposable foreigner*.

When **Anna Christenson** arrives from San Francisco to settle her Uncle Simon's affairs, she is shocked to hear newsboys shouting headlines of suicide. Nothing about the story feels right, and she knows that Simon—her only remaining family member—would ever end his own life.

At the Hotel Ramon, **Clara Bell Grady**, a sharp-tongued *L.A. Times* reporter stuck interviewing a high-society biddy, gets tipped off by the hotel clerk that a hot lead—Anna—is at the counter. Sensing a real story, Clara quietly begins following Anna, does some digging on her own, and publishes a provocative piece under a pseudonym.

Anna first visits Simon's lodge, the secretive Independent Order of Odd Fellows, who originally notified her of his death. The lodge secretary offers little help beyond suggesting the police might have the answers she's looking for. She heads to Simon's boarding house to collect his belongings, where the owner, **Miss Hansen**, and housemaid **Ruthy Monroe** mourn him with unsettling restraint. Something about Miss Hansen and the house feels off. Still, Anna accepts her offer to stay in Simon's boarding room for as long as she needs, then heads straight to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), where a hostile desk sergeant stonewalls her and sends her away. As she leaves, sidelined detective **Virgil Vega** discreetly shares a name: **Doc Hays**, the county coroner, who admits that he's skeptical of the suicide claim, yet is hesitant to go on record officially. Only the engineer who found Simon's body gives Anna the unvarnished truth: Simon wasn't hit by a train. As she leaves the railyard, she senses what she can't know: she's being followed.

As she settles into Miller House, Anna finds hidden in a floorboard what may have cost Simon his life: *a ledger tracking suspicious land transfers, maps marked with red stars, a cryptic note, and a sealed letter addressed only "E.H."* She braves a late-evening visit to the undertaker to arrange Simon's burial, only to be haunted by the memory of her father, Simon's fraternal twin.

As she leaves, she collides with Clara and Virgil, both of whom have been following her for different reasons. Virgil tells Anna to bury her uncle and go home. Anna refuses. Discovering that they each have a piece of something they know goes beyond one body, they form an uneasy alliance, not because they want to, but because they have no choice if they're to survive in a city they can't trust.

Virgil sneaks them into the LAPD archives, where they discover Simon's file buried, not sealed; his case wasn't closed, it was never opened. A police photo revealing a time-of-death mismatch confirms the lie. Someone deep inside or very high up buried the truth.

As she returns to Miller House with Clara, Ruthy shows them a shadowy figure watching the house from across the street. The pilot closes with a double cliffhanger: Clara pens another anonymous exposé that puts them all in danger, and Anna gets an ominous midnight visit to her room from none other than Virgil's former partner **Lt. Byron Kettler**—clearly not there with Anna's best interests in mind. His opening line sends chills down her spine: "You have his eyes."

## SEASON 1 STRUCTURE

*The first recorded murder in Los Angeles was never solved...because it was never meant to be.*

**Episode 2: The Red File.** The trio begins tracing the clues Simon left behind, pointing to a targeted pattern of erased neighborhoods. Clara risks her career with a provocative article, Ruthy faces eviction, and Miss Hansen reveals that Simon left Anna with a mysterious key. Kettler warns Virgil to back off. Anna and Clara uncover links to vanished land records, and someone known only as "E.H." The decomposed body of a woman is found near the L.A. riverbed. On her wrist, a charm bracelet with the initials "E.H."

**Episode 3: The City Beneath.** The trio pursues Simon's trail into the city's underbelly, where erased deeds and secret tunnels tell a story of vanished properties. Ruthy's apartment is torched, putting her in the hospital and leaving her homeless. The trio realizes that the forces behind Simon's death are both organized and protected. They believe "E.H." might be missing city councilman Ezekiel Harrington. Meanwhile, L.A. Sheriff's deputy J.B. Loving is assigned to investigate the riverbed corpse.

**Episode 4: The Unfortunate Truth.** The trio closes in on damning evidence. Ruthy returns to Miller House carrying memories too dangerous to speak aloud. Clara leaks confidential information to a rival paper. Virgil discovers records vanishing from police files, forcing him to deal with former partner Lt. Byron Kettler. Miss Hansen's poise begins to crack, and the trio begins to realize Simon may have died knowing far more than he ever shared. The "E.H." charm identifies the river corpse as city clerk Esther Haldeman, but the body mysteriously disappears from the morgue. Romantic tension between Virgil and Anna builds.

**Episode 5: The Dead Reckoning.** Clues point to Simon's employer, C. Leonhardt. As Clara's latest article rattles the city, Virgil corners the shadowy watchers who've been tailing them. C. Leonhardt reveals to Virgil how parcel erasures tie to the coming oil boom. All hard evidence now erased, the trio is left with one option: bait Simon's murderer into the open. Unable to locate the riverbed corpse, Deputy Loving approaches Clara with evidence of the LAPD's complicity, as the two investigations merge. Anna and Virgil share intimate moments.

**Episode 6: Ninth of September.** The city teeters as Clara secures Harrington's testimony. Virgil springs the trap, tricks Kettler into confessing. Anna is devastated to learn Simon's murder was simply a happenstance—covering a shift for Ruthy's brother, Cary. She finally reveals her secret to Virgil. Deputy Loving provides Clara with documents proving LAPD complicity in the Haldeman death. Clara pens her final piece and leaves the Times to start her own "people's voice" sheet. Virgil lays down his badge, and Anna decides to stay in L.A. — to heal, to rebuild, and to pursue her feelings for Virgil. In the silence left behind, the city roars.

The series closes on Kettler seeing his name in Clara's front page piece, THE NINTH OF SEPTEMBER. With two murders pointing toward him, Kettler takes his only way out...to where it all began: the train tracks.

**Because three people refused to accept an open-and-shut lie, the coldest case in Los Angeles history is finally unshut, with the murderer tried in the court of public opinion.**

### SERIES ARC

The title UNSHUT speaks to the show's central ethos: *prying open what the powerful want closed.*

Imagined as a standalone 6-episode series, **UNSHUT** could follow the arc of Anna, Virgil, and Clara as they refuse to accept "open-and-shut" explanations handed down by powerful institutions.

Future seasons see the trio tackle real, historically unsolved cases in different American cities at the turn of the 20th century. Drawn to situations where the official story never matches the evidence, the trio must confront the consequences of seeking truth in places designed to bury it.

#### **Season 2 — The Poison Holiday (San Francisco, 1905)**

When Anna returns north to her home in San Francisco with Virgil on her arm, the trio reunites around the mysterious poisoning of Jane Stanford, co-founder of Stanford University. Official accounts fail to align with the medical evidence; the deeper they dig, the more they uncover a web of academic politics, elite secrecy, and medical malpractice.

As San Francisco approaches the catastrophic 1906 earthquake, pressure mounts and institutions tighten their grip on the narrative.

#### **Season 3 — The Locked Trunk (New York City, 1909)**

Clara, now building a proto-Village Voice paper in Greenwich Village, pulls Anna and Virgil east when the sensational murder of 19-year-old Elsie Sigel explodes across New York media. Found strangled in a locked trunk above a midtown Chinese restaurant, the case exposes deep currents of xenophobia, moral panic, and media exploitation.

As public frenzy grows, the trio faces their most ethically precarious case yet—one that forces them to confront who they are, and who they might become.