

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Jason Zimmerman

## ***Rear Window* (1954)**

Alfred Hitchcock

### OVERVIEW

*Director* Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is a household name and perhaps the best-known British filmmaker. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Dial M for Murder*, all of which have earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

*Film* *Rear Window* was adapted from the 1942 short story "It Had to Be Murder" by Cornell Woolrich. Production took place at Paramount Studios in California, a marked turn from the director's well-known preference to shoot on location whenever possible. *Rear Window* was a box-office smash hit, earning \$5.3 million in US and Canadian box offices and a total of \$37 million globally, an impressive return on its \$1 million budget.

*Background* Critical response for *Rear Window* was incredibly positive. Most critics noted the artful composition and tense cinematography of the film. More modern reviews still cite the film's exploration of loneliness and voyeurism as universal draws, often calling it one of Hitchcock's better thrillers. *Rear Window* still ranks in the top fifty greatest films ever made. It was added to the National Film Registry in 1997. At the time of writing, the film holds a coveted 100/100 score on Metacritic, the film review aggregator.

### CINEMATIC NARRATION

In *Rear Window*, Hitchcock flawlessly draws us into the world of the voyeur. Utilizing well-timed extras and practical effects, the camera skates around the courtyard, giving us an almost true-to-life look at day-to-day life in Greenwich Village. Despite knowing peeping is impolite, we're drawn in by Jeff's gaze, always looking where he looks, seeing what he sees. The desire to see and hear and know about the lives of strangers draws us to this film: We never learn the names of several characters, yet we find ourselves immersed in their private lives, wondering what life will bring them next. There isn't simply another Hitchcock film that illustrates his cinematic use of voyeurism as a storytelling device. Just watching does so much of the storytelling, you can nearly watch the film without sound.

### SYNOPSIS

In the stifling heat of a New York summer, photographer L. B. "Jeff" Jefferies is confined to his Greenwich Village apartment with a broken leg after a mishap at a racetrack. With nothing but his rear window to entertain him, Jeff becomes fixated on his neighbors' lives. Jeff begins to suspect something after he observes Lars Thorwald's suspicious behavior, including late-night trips and secretive activities. His observations and the sudden absence of the chronically ill Mrs. Thorwald lead Jeff to suspect foul play in Thorwald's household.

Jeff confides in his girlfriend, Lisa Fremont, an old friend on the police force, Lt. Doyle, and a nurse, Stella. All of them initially doubt his theory. However, they become involved when they witness some of Thorwald's questionable actions, such as disposing of a large trunk and scrubbing the walls late at night. When the neighbor's dog is found dead, Jeff is convinced Thorwald is responsible. Determined to uncover the truth, Jeff, Lisa, and Stella devise a risky plan.

Lisa sneaks into Thorwald's apartment while Jeff and Stella keep watch. Their plan takes a dangerous turn when Thorwald unexpectedly returns, catching Lisa in the act. Jeff calls the police, but this leads to Thorwald notice him. Later that night, Thorwald enters Jeff's apartment to confront him. Jeff's bravery ultimately results in Thorwald's arrest, but he is thrown through the rear window in a fight with the murderous salesman. He survives the fall, but it breaks both his legs, leaving him housebound once again.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

*L. B. "Jeff" Jefferies* – A globe-trotting photojournalist made housebound by a fracture in his leg

*Lisa Fremont* – A prominent model and socialite in love with Jeff

*Det. Lt. Thomas J. Doyle* – An old friend of Jeff's and an NYPD detective

*Stella* – The insurance company nurse in charge of Jeff's home care

*Lars Thorwald* – A salesman with a demanding wife, who Jeff suspects of murder

*Mrs. Thorwald* – Mr. Thorwald's wife, a bedridden woman

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Jeff Jefferies**

Jeff is a photojournalist who is injured during a race car crash. Trapped in his apartment while the bones in his leg mend, he takes up the habit of peeping on his neighbors in an attempt to ease his boredom. He enlists his girlfriend, Lisa, and his nurse, Stella, to be his legs and hands in his investigation into Thorwald.

*Determined* Jeff is stubborn. This either drives or is driven by intense determination. Upon getting the hunch that Thorwald is up to something, Jeff is only held back by his broken leg in his investigation. His determination rubs off on Lisa and Stella, both of whom quickly take up his cause. Both can see that something strange is going on, mostly thanks to Jeff's determined arguments that Thorwald is acting suspiciously. Jeff's determination shows most obviously in his final confrontation with Thorwald. Equipped with nothing but flashbulbs, he holds off Thorwald long enough to call for help. While this doesn't keep him from being pushed out the rear window, it saves his life and assures that Thorwald is taken into custody.

*Observant* Jeff is observant by trade. He has an eye both for a story and photographic staging, which aids his investigation. While he's driven by boredom to watch his neighbors, his observant eye quickly finds something wrong with Thorwald's behavior. Jeff can keep track of Thorwald's movements without assistance, reporting his observations to Stella, Lisa, and Doyle. His skill as a photographer comes in handy toward the film's end when he identifies the place where Thorwald has buried something in the garden using a photograph he had taken just a couple of weeks before. His eye for detail shows in these moments.

*Adventurous* Jeff is very adventurous. He laments having to give up his high-paced lifestyle if he marries Lisa, choosing his job over his beautiful lover. Jeff's adventurous attitude fuels his boredom while he sits in his apartment in the sweltering summer heat. When he first tells Doyle about Thorwald's alleged murder, the detective tries to write it off as Jeff's desire for adventure clouding his judgment. By the film's end, Jeff seems to have had his fill of adventure after watching Lisa risk her life to find evidence of Thorwald's crime and being thrown out the window, now choosing Lisa over his photojournalist job.

### **Lisa Fremont**

Lisa is a New York fashionista who is dating Jeff. Her desire to make Jeff as happy as he makes her drives a lot of her decisions. Lisa's intelligence and bravery lead to Thorwald's capture by police.

**Organized** Lisa is incredibly organized. This shows most obviously in her first scenes when Jeff asks about her day, and she says she's been working from morning to night. Not only did she fly in from Paris, but she also attended several events and meetings before ordering dinner and coming to Jeff's apartment. Despite her busy day, Lisa is calm and collected, ready to enjoy the evening with Jeff. She shows off her organizational skills again, by remembering Jeff's comment about living out of a single suitcase and packing her necessities in a small night bag to prove her ability to travel light. Her ability to organize leads Lisa to believe Jeff about Mr. Thorwald before anyone else while they watch his strange behavior.

**Intelligent** Lisa's intelligence shows often throughout the film. Not only is she in charge of her own fashion company, she's well-read and educated. Lisa is more than a match for Jeff in intellect, with his wit wasted mostly on sarcasm and innuendo. Lisa uses her brainpower to try to piece together a way to catch Thorwald in the act. It's Lisa who first suggests that Mrs. Thorwald's wedding ring could serve as evidence of foul play if it were found in Mr. Thorwald's possession. Doyle confirms this. Lisa also shows her intelligence when the police enter Jeff's apartment just before the film's end: Instead of trying to convince the police that Thorwald is a murderer, she submits to being arrested for breaking and entering, removing her from Thorwald's grasp with his wife's wedding ring on her finger.

**Brave** Lisa's bravery leads her to some occasionally reckless behavior. She wants desperately to show Jeff her brave side when he tries to break things off with her because of her upper-class lifestyle. Lisa dives into Jeff's investigation of Thorwald, eventually taking the lead when she pushes Jeff's ominous note under Thorwald's apartment door. She keeps up this behavior, taking chances like digging up Thorwald's garden and breaking into his house to search for evidence. Her risks pay off, providing Lt. Doyle the evidence he needs to get the police to arrest Thorwald.

## **Lars Thorwald**

Mr. Thorwald is a salesman living with his chronically ill wife in the apartment directly across from Jeff's rear window. One day, he begins acting strangely and his wife disappears. His strange behavior escalates until he tries to push Jeff out the window to silence him.

**Asocial** Mr. Thorwald is noted as not very social by his landlord. Similarly, Jeff doesn't see him meet with anyone leading up to his wife's disappearance. It appears that Thorwald is as married to his work as he is Mrs. Thorwald. His antisocial behavior rises to a head when Jeff begins provoking him with notes and phone calls. This behavior comes to a head when he identifies Jeff as the man watching him and making the calls. He finds Jeff's apartment, attempting to murder him to keep him silent.

**Angry** A happy man doesn't murder his wife. Mr. Thorwald's anger at his wife's needs and nagging leads him to murder her after she discovers him speaking to his lover. Thorwald's anger doesn't come up much after this point, but we can see it clearly at the film's end. Instead of fleeing or trying to reason with Jeff, Thorwald simply tries to kill him, first by strangulation, and then by throwing him out the window. Both of these acts would be classified as crimes driven by anger.

## **THEMES**

**Class** Class is a small but potent theme in Jeff and Lisa's relationship. Jeff fancies himself a lower-class everyman while Lisa is an upper-crust socialite. Both of these perceptions are somewhat warped: Jeff isn't just a man on the street, as he has international standing as a globe-trotting photojournalist, and though Lisa appears to be somewhat snooty, she's a respectful, hard-working, self-made woman who runs her own fashion company. On the surface, and based on their family histories, they appear quite different, but the differences in their upbringing and life experiences are based mostly in class and complement each other quite well. Where Jeff has trouble thinking in terms of Lisa's class in positive terms, Lisa has no problem thinking about lower-class people with empathy. She rightly deduces that no woman would leave her home without her handbag and wedding ring. Likewise, a woman would never store her jewelry where it could easily be tarnished or scratched. In these and other ways, she transcends the stereotype of her upper-crust lifestyle. Jeff tries to use class to drive a wedge between himself and

Lisa when he attempts to end their relationship, but—as it often turns out—opposites attract, and they forge a stronger relationship through their shared experience trying to prove that Thorwald is a murderer.

**Gender** Gender is an interesting theme in *Rear Window*. It plays a small role but shows clearly in its treatment of the handful of women portrayed throughout the film. Lisa and Stella are both strong women in character and action. Both are working women who take pride in their professions (though separated by class), and both make their own decisions. Each is intelligent in her own way, often criticising Jeff for his assumptions about Thorwald and the other neighbors. Miss Lonelyheart, Jeff's unlucky-in-love neighbor, gives us a glimpse into the life of an isolated woman, her story almost playing out as a tragedy. Miss Torso, Jeff's ballet dancer neighbor, shows us the intimate challenges beautiful women face in private, acting in some ways as a surface-level foil to Lisa. Jeff's confinement to a wheelchair is an intriguing plot device in terms of gender: he cannot go snooping through Thorwald's garden or apartment, but Lisa and Stella can. All he can do is watch while the women take the risks. In this way, the traditional gender roles of men and women are upended: Jeff is the one who sits at home and worries while his girlfriend takes the risk of investigating a killer's home.

**Crime** Crime is an obvious theme of this thriller. Without crime, there would be no conflict, no plot. Surprisingly, Jeff is the most obvious lawbreaker in the film. He spends the entire film watching his neighbors, an offense, Stella warns him, punishable by hard labor. At first, we only have Jeff's perception and insistence that Thorwald has committed foul play, but as the film continues, we see more and more evidence of Thorwald's heinous crime. Jeff continues his crime of invading other's privacy, adding binoculars and a telephoto lens to his arsenal in an attempt to catch Thorwald doing something he can report to the police. In a strange twist of fate, it's Lisa's crime of breaking and entering and Thorwald's subsequent assault on Lisa that get the police's attention. This also leads to Thorwald spotting Jeff when Lisa signals to him while she's being arrested. Thorwald commits his final crime in attempting to silence Jeff by throwing him out the window, and for this, he is caught and arrested when Doyle returns with Lisa.

**Investigation** Investigation is the main element driving the story of *Rear Window*. Jeff is driven to prove that Thorwald is guilty of murder, observing that his bedbound wife has gone missing and Mr. Thorwald's strange behavior. Acting weird, however, isn't enough to get a search warrant, something Doyle needs before he's willing to look into the matter officially, frustrating Jeff. Jeff turns to his nurse and girlfriend for help, convincing them that something's wrong when they notice several mistakes a man would make if he were trying to make it look as if his wife took a trip. The investigation deepens with their help, both Stella and Lisa taking risks Jeff can't with his broken leg to try to provoke Thorwald to give himself up and to search his apartment for clues. The investigative theme turns on Jeff once he's discovered by Thorwald, the killer salesman, tracking him down and assaulting him in his apartment.

**Isolation** Isolation plays out through Jeff's behavior and Miss Lonelyheart's story. Jeff's isolation is caused by his leg injury and drives him to seek entertainment by spying on his neighbors. This behavior leads him to discover Thorwald's crime, but it also gives him a look into Miss Lonelyheart's life. Unlucky in love, the older woman is desperate for companionship at first. She acts out dates before drinking herself into a stupor and later goes on a ruined date with a young man looking for much more than she's willing to give him. After this failure, thinking herself incapable of finding love, Miss Lonelyheart attempts suicide by preparing to overdose on sleeping pills. She's interrupted when Jeff's songwriting neighbor begins playing one of his beautiful new songs. Miss Lonelyheart soon seeks out the Songwriter, convinced to try finding love once more by his beautiful music. *Rear Window* shows us both characters driven to desperation by their isolation and the rewards of persistence in trying to find love.

**Curiosity** Many of the actions of characters in *Rear Window* are driven by curiosity. Jeff's curiosity is obvious, fueled by his boredom and desire for action while trapped in his cast. Simple curiosity becomes a morbid obsession when he notices Mrs. Thorwald go missing. Stella, Lisa, and Lt. Doyle all refuse to believe Jeff at first, but one by one, their curiosity is piqued. Stella and Lisa are the first to be swayed, their curiosity as to the fate of the missing woman convincing them quickly that something is wrong. Doyle takes a little more convincing, but he is curious, nonetheless, looking into the activities Jeff calls strange. Even as these leads come up cold, at least from the police's perspective, Doyle remains curious, returning to Jeff's apartment many times to hear his friend out. While he eventually dismisses Jeff

because he has no material proof of Mrs. Thorwald's death, he does everything in his power to investigate the possibility of a crime, showing the detective's inherent curiosity.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does the setting of *Rear Window* add to the film's voyeuristic themes?

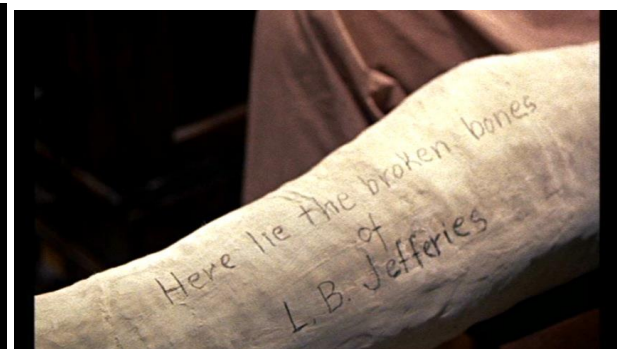
Toward the film's end, Jeff mentions his confusion around "rear window ethics." In your opinion, are Jeff's activities justified since he helps to catch a murderer? Why or why not?

In what ways do Lisa's and Jeff's attitudes toward one another change throughout the film?

Would you call *Rear Window* unique or typical in comparison with Hitchcock's other thrillers? Explain.

#### SCENES

**L.B. Jefferies-** The camera pans around the view of a New York City courtyard, catching glimpses of people's morning routines through windows or on balconies. Inside the apartment from where the camera gazes, a man sits with his eyes closed, sweating: The mercury in a nearby thermometer reads 95 degrees. After one more glance around the courtyard, the camera pans down the sweating man's body. He's seated in a wheelchair with his leg in a cast. "Here lie the broken bones of L.B. Jefferies," the cast reads. Cameras and photographs adorn the surfaces and walls of his home. Sometime later, Jefferies is shaving his face when the phone rings. He answers, finding his editor, Gunnison, on the other end.



**Plaster Cocoon-** Jeff looks out the window while he and Gunnison talk about him getting his cast off. Jeff calls Gunnison a bad editor for missing the details, saying, "Next Wednesday I emerge from this plaster cocoon." Gunnison laments the loss of his best photographer, saying there was a big assignment in Kashmir he hoped Jeff could have taken. Jeff continues talking while spying on his neighbors. "If you don't pull me out of this swamp of boredom," Jeff says when Gunnison tries to hang up, "I'm gonna do something drastic... I'm gonna get married. And then I'll never be able to go anywhere." After Gunnison hangs up, Jeff grimaces, scratching his cast. Looking around in desperation, he finds a back scratcher and threads it under his pants into his cast. He sighs with relief before noticing his neighbors once more. Two of them bicker about watering some flowers.



**"No windows in the workhouse"**- A woman's voice comes from behind Jeff: "New York State sentence for a peeping tom is six months in the workhouse." The camera faces inward when Jeff turns his head, greeting the woman: "Oh, hello, Stella." After mentioning that there aren't any windows in the workhouse, she laments that humans have "become a race of peeping Toms." Jeff complains when Stella pushes a thermometer into his mouth, but Stella ignores him. She talks about how she should have been a fortune-teller instead of a nurse. "I got a nose for trouble," she says proudly. "Can smell it ten miles away." She tells the story of how she predicted the market crash that triggered the Great Depression. Jeff refuses to believe her, but she continues, telling Jeff's fortune: "First you smash your leg, then you get to looking out the window, see things you shouldn't see. Trouble."



**Massage-** With a little effort, Jeff takes off his shirt, then hobbles from the wheelchair and lies on the bed where Stella begins to massage him. “I think you’re right,” Jeff says. “I think there is gonna be trouble around here.” Stella asks what he means and Jeff replies, “Lisa Fremont.... She expects me to marry her.” Stella remarks that such things are normal between men and women. “I don’t want to,” Jeff replies. “I’m not ready for marriage.” Stella asks if he’s being forced into a shotgun wedding. “She’s just not the girl for me,” Jeff responds. “She’s too perfect... Too everything but what I want.” He laments that if he married her, he’d have to give up his globetrotting, high-paced life to settle into the snooty atmosphere of the Park Avenue elite.



**New couple-** With the massage over and Jeff returned to his wheelchair, Stella begins packing up, complaining about the state of modern marriage. Jeff tries to speak up in defense of modern psychology, but Stella won’t hear it: “When I married Myles, we were both a couple of maladjusted misfits. We are still maladjusted misfits, and we have loved every minute of it.” After the conversation, Jeff requests that Stella make him a sandwich, and she moves into the kitchen. Jeff directs his attention back out the rear window, glancing at several of his neighbors before a new couple moving into a long-vacant apartment catches his eye. The real-estate agent hands them their key and leaves, and the husband carries his wife over the threshold. They kiss passionately while Jeff tries—and fails—to avert his gaze. The woman notices him watching and asks her husband to close the blinds.



**“Run-of-the-mill Wednesday”**- The sun sets on the courtyard while the Jeff’s songwriter neighbor and a singer run through some vocal warm-ups. The camera pans from the Songwriter’s apartment past the others until it settles on Jeff’s sleeping face. A shadow creeps up over him, and he opens his eyes, spotting a well-dressed woman. Is he dreaming? She leans in close and kisses him before asking about his leg. He replies that his leg hurts and that he’s hungry before asking who she is. “Reading from top to bottom,” she says, moving around the room and turning on lights, “Lisa Carol Fremont.” Jeff compliments her dress, and she calls it “a steal at \$1,100.” Jeff can’t help but balk at the price. She says she wore it for the “big night.” “Well it’s just an ordinary, run-of-the-mill Wednesday,” Jeff responds. She says since it’s his last week in a cast, she wants to celebrate.



**Catering**- “What would you think of starting off with dinner at ‘21?” Lisa asks. “You have, perhaps, an ambulance downstairs?” Jeff replies with a sarcastic smirk. “No,” Lisa smiles, walking to the door, “better than that.” A man in a waiter’s outfit stands in the hall with a bottle of wine in an ice bucket and a large metal box holding their meal. Lisa thanks him for waiting and directs him to the kitchen. He returns quickly, opening the wine bottle for Jeff, who struggles. Lisa gives him a healthy tip and the waiter bids them farewell. Pouring the wine for them, Lisa tells Jeff about her day, how after Paris she had sales meetings and appearances for the rest of the day.





**“Time you came home?”**- Jeff’s mood turns foul when Lisa mentions that he may want to settle down and open a photography studio someday soon. “How would I run it from, say, Pakistan?” Jeff asks grumpily, gulping his wine. “Isn’t it time you come home?” Lisa asks with concern. She suggests that he leave the magazine. “For what?” Jeff asks. “For yourself and me,” Lisa says. “I could get you a dozen assignments by tomorrow.” Jeff remains unshaken: he wants his adventurous life as an investigative photojournalist, not the steady, easy work of a fashion photographer. Lisa, offended, says she’d better set up dinner and heads to the kitchen.



**Peeping**- Jeff turns his attention to his neighbors again, with *To Know You (Is to Love You)* playing loudly on someone’s record player. Jeff focuses on a woman in a ground-level apartment who hurries around preparing for a date. His attention sticks when he realizes the woman is just practicing, miming a performance of greeting a date. Eventually, she slumps to the table, crying. Noticing Lisa watching him, Jeff says, “Miss Lonelyheart... At least that’s something you’ll never have to worry about.” “You can see my apartment from here?” she asks incredulously. Jeff points out ‘Miss Torso’s’ apartment, the ballet dancer, saying it is probably as popular as Lisa’s. The dancer entertains three suitors, stepping out onto the balcony and kissing one passionately. Lisa leaves again to finish setting up their dinner.



**Marital spat-** Jeff's attention moves to the new couple's apartment, but the shade is drawn, so he casts his eyes across the courtyard to the couple who live just above Miss Lonelyheart. The husband prepares a meal for his bedbound wife, but she is unappreciative, throwing part of her meal onto the covers. Jeff watches with interest while the husband moves into the living room and begins talking on the phone. The wife notices, creeping slowly into the doorway out of Jeff's line of sight. The two begin fighting when the husband hangs up the phone too quickly. Jeff's eyes dart away to the Songwriter's apartment as he pounds away at his latest composition.



**Perfect dinner-** "Where is that wonderful music coming from?" Lisa asks when she returns with their dinner. Jeff points her to the Songwriter, saying he lives alone in the studio apartment. "Oh, it's enchanting. It's almost as if it was being written especially for us." Jeff scoffs, "No wonder he's having so much trouble with it." "At least you can't say the dinner isn't right," Lisa responds. "Lisa, it's perfect," Jeff says. "As always." Lisa sits, looking dejected. The scene fades out.



**“A raincoat in Brazil”**- The scene opens sometime later that evening. Lisa reclines on Jeff’s bed, deep in discussion. “There can’t be that much difference between people and the way they live,” she says. “We all eat, talk, drink, laugh, wear clothes.” Jeff tries to explain, but she cuts him off. “If you’re saying all this because you don’t want to tell me the truth... I can understand.” Jeff is trying to break it off with Lisa, and she’s fighting against it. They go back and forth for a moment until Jeff, frustrated at Lisa’s constant interruptions, snaps, “Shut up!” He lists out the challenges he faces in his line of work: “Try and find a raincoat in Brazil,” he says in a mocking tone, “even when it isn’t raining.” They continue fighting, Jeff is steadfast in his point that Lisa could never adapt to the life he leads. “So that’s it?” Lisa asks, getting up and walking toward the door. Jeff says it is, but panics when she says goodbye. “You mean, ‘good night,’” Jeff says with an edge of panic. “When am I gonna see you again?” “Not for a long time,” Lisa says. “At least not until tomorrow night.”



**A scream and a storm**- Jeff looks sadly at the closed door of his apartment before looking out of his rear window again. All the blinds are shut, but he hears some glass shatter and a woman scream. Unable to find the source of the disturbance, he settles down for the night. Asleep in his wheelchair, the scene fades in on Jeff while thunder rumbles outside. He opens his eyes slowly, his gaze focusing on a couple who’ve been sleeping on the fire escape to beat the heat as they scramble to bring their bedding inside. Jeff can’t help but grin at their antics. Below them, he notices the husband living above Miss Lonelyheart leave his apartment with a large case. Jeff watches him wander across the street and disappear before looking down at his watch: it reads 1:55 AM.



**Strange behaviour-** The scene fades back in and Jeff's watch now reads 2:35. He sees the husband wander back in from the rain. Strangely, he leaves again almost immediately. Sometime later, Jeff wakes up again, the rain still falling outside. He looks at the husband's apartment and, seeing no activity, looks around the courtyard. He spots Miss Torso fending off an amorous suitor before laying eyes on the husband once again. The man enters his apartment and Jeff nods off again.



**Early morning-** A distant boat horn blows while the camera pans around the courtyard, landing on the husband leaving the apartment with a woman dressed all in black. Jeff sleeps soundly, missing them. A couple of hours later, the camera traces the same path around the courtyard, now filled with activity. The woman who sleeps on the fire escape uses a basket and a pulley to lower her little dog down to ground level. The camera pulls back through the window, passing over Jeff, who lies on the bed, receiving a massage from Stella. "You'd think the rain would have cooled things off," she says. "All it did was make the heat wet." She then chastises Jeff for sleeping in his wheelchair, saying he must have been peeping the whole night. Jeff admits to this, listing off some of the activities he spotted in the night.



**“No ordinary look”**- “Might be that the salesman will be available soon,” mentioning the marital spat he noticed between the husband and wife across the courtyard the night before. He then mentions that the salesman went out several times late last night with his sample case. “Well,” Stella says dryly, “he’s a salesman, isn’t he?” Jeff wonders what he could have been selling so late at night, and Stella responds with a list of a half dozen objects, like flashlights and luminous clock hands, etc. Helping Jeff back into his wheelchair, she asks if Jeff’s seen anything strange this morning, and he says the salesman’s shades have been drawn all morning. “Well, they’re up now,” Stella replies. Jeff scrambles to look when he sees the salesman doing the same thing. He pushes his wheelchair back into the shadows, urging Stella to do the same. “I’m not shy,” she says, but Jeff insists. “That’s no ordinary look,” he hisses. “That’s the kind of look a man gives when he’s afraid somebody might be watching him.”



**Binoculars**- Stella begins packing her things and says goodbye, but Jeff barely notices. He’s too busy watching the little dog dig in the salesman’s garden. Jeff looks back up and sees the salesman hastily scrubbing the inside of a large suitcase. Stella approaches with her belongings, telling Jeff not to sleep in his wheelchair again before she tries to leave. Jeff stops her, asking for a pair of binoculars by the door. With several complaints, she complies before finally leaving. Now, using the binoculars, Jeff watches the salesman pack the suitcase with jewelry. Jeff decides the binoculars aren’t powerful enough and pulls out a camera and telephoto lens. With this, he watches while the salesman wraps several large knives in newspaper before lying down for a midday nap.



**“Something terribly wrong”**- The thermometer reads over eighty degrees even after the sun’s gone down. After panning around the courtyard, the camera finds Jeff and Lisa embracing and kissing. “How far does a girl have to go before you’ll notice her?” Jeff makes a couple of jokes, pretending to pay attention. Lisa notices his mind is elsewhere, asking what’s wrong. Jeff asks why the salesman would leave three times with a suitcase on a rainy night and then not work the following weekday. Lisa is more interested in kissing, avoiding answering his questions. “Well, listen,” Jeff says finally. “I’ll answer it, Lisa. There’s something terribly wrong.” Lisa moves away from Jeff and sits on the bed.



**Diseased**- “You’re beginning to scare me a little,” Lisa tells Jeff. Jeff’s attention remains across the courtyard. When Lisa tries to get his attention again, Jeff shushes her. “He’s coming back!” The salesman returns to his apartment with a large bundle of sturdy rope. Jeff reaches for his binoculars, hoping to get a glimpse into the bedroom. He’s interrupted by Lisa, who pulls his wheelchair away from the window. “Jeff,” she scolds, “if you could only see yourself! Sitting around looking out the window to kill time is one thing, but doing it the way you are... is diseased!” Jeff explains his concern, saying the salesman’s wife is an invalid in need of constant care, yet no one has been in to see her all day. This on top of the salesman’s strange behavior has created a mystery Jeff feels compelled to solve. Lisa continues berating him for his behavior, but she eventually stops short. The salesman has opened his blinds, and both Lisa and Jeff clearly see a large trunk bound with rope and the salesman’s wife’s mattress rolled up as if prepared to be thrown out. Lisa asks for Jeff to tell her what he saw again before the screen fades to black.



**Hand at the receiver-** The scene fades in on a tight shot of Jeff's hand on his phone's receiver. He watches while the salesman lights a cigarette across the way, barely letting the phone ring when Lisa calls him. She tells Jeff, "The name on the second-floor rear mailbox reads, 'Mr. and Mrs. Lars Thorwald.'" Jeff thanks Lisa, and she jokingly asks for a new "assignment." Jeff tells her to head home before bidding her good night. Thorwald remains in his living room, smoking in the dark and keeping out of the bedroom. The next morning, Jeff speaks to a man named Doyle on the phone, asking him to come over and take a look at Thorwald. Stella overhears the conversation, asking why Jeff was calling the police before making some macabre statements about dismembering wives and leaking trunks, putting Jeff off his breakfast.



**Trunk-** Jeff looks around the courtyard, smiling to himself when he catches a glimpse of Miss Torso hanging out her laundry and the new couple. Stella returns, excitedly telling Jeff that Thorwald has returned to his apartment. The salesman has returned with two men in tow. He signs a form and the men haul away the trunk. Jeff laments that he'd hoped Doyle would have gotten to see the trunk when Stella says she'll run down to see if she can't get the name of the company from the freight truck. Jeff promises to keep an eye on the alleyway. After Stella leaves, he glances up at Thorwald's apartment, where he notices the salesman place a long-distance call. When he turns his attention back to the alley, the freight truck zips past too quickly for either he or Stella to see the company's name.



**Detective Doyle-** Later that afternoon, Doyle stands in the apartment using Jeff's binoculars to look at Thorwald's apartment. The detective asks how Jeff knows it was murder if he didn't see anything. All Jeff has seen is Thorwald's strange behavior, but that's hardly enough to convince Doyle to look into it. "You've got a lot to learn about homicide," Doyle says, handing back the binoculars. Jeff is offended that his friend could be suggesting that he's seeing things. Doyle says there's probably a simple explanation, such as the wife going on a trip. Doyle agrees to "poke into it" a little before leaving. Jeff looks back out his rear window, watching Thorwald shoo the little dog away from his flowers.



**"How's your wife?"**- Sometime later, Doyle stands in Jeff's apartment, reporting what he's found out from the landlord: Thorwald is a good tenant who pays his rent on time and keeps to himself. He also says he found evidence that both Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald left the apartment at 6 AM the day before, right around the time that Jeff fell asleep. Both men look out the window to see Miss Torso practicing one of her dances, Doyle smirking gently. "How's your wife?" Jeff asks loudly, getting Doyle's attention again. Doyle responds that the superintendent saw the Thorwalds leave for the train station. Multiple sightings of Mr. Thorwald with a woman seems to rule out murder for Doyle, but Jeff keeps protesting, demanding that the detective search Thorwald's apartment illegally. Doyle refuses, saying he can't risk getting in such a large amount of trouble for Jeff's hunch. Before he leaves, Doyle reads a copy of a letter placing Mrs. Thorwald at a resort in Upstate New York.





**Miss Lonelyheart-** Jeff munches on a sandwich while using his telephoto lens to get a good look at Miss Lonelyheart preparing for a date. She drinks heavily as usual, but she leaves instead of pretending to meet a date as she normally does. After glancing at his other neighbors, he catches sight of Miss Lonelyheart entering a nearby café through the alley. Then, Jeff lays eyes on Mr. Thorwald returning home with a small packet of laundry. As the salesman begins packing, Jeff makes a frantic call to Doyle to tell him that Thorwald is planning on escaping. Doyle's wife answers, telling Jeff that her husband is out. Grabbing his telephoto again, Jeff watches Thorwald dig through his wife's purse, retrieving several pieces of jewelry, including a golden wedding band.



**Lisa's opinion-** Lisa enters suddenly, startling Jeff, but he recovers quickly, telling her to look at Thorwald. Lisa doesn't see anything out of the ordinary, but she changes her mind after Jeff explains what Thorwald has just been doing with his wife's handbag and jewelry. They watch as Thorwald leaves, wondering where he's headed. After turning on the lights, Lisa says she's been thinking about Thorwald all day, specifically Mrs. Thorwald. "Women aren't that unpredictable," she says. "A woman has a favorite handbag, and it always hangs on her bedpost, where she can get at it easily. And then, all of a sudden, she goes away on a trip and leaves it behind. Why?" Jeff comments that she wouldn't need the bag, and Lisa says only Thorwald would know that. "And that jewelry," she continues. "Women don't keep their jewelry in a purse getting all twisted and scratched and tangled up... And they don't leave it behind, either." Jeff tells her what Doyle has discovered, but Lisa refuses to believe the witness statement: "We'll agree they saw a woman, but she was not Mrs. Thorwald."



**Songwriter-** Lisa swoops into Jeff's lap and begins kissing him. Jeff is distracted as usual, saying he wishes that Doyle would hurry up. "Don't rush him," Lisa says softly. "We have all night." Jeff has a couple of sarcastic comments for Lisa, and she responds between kisses, saying, "If you say anything else, I'll stay tomorrow night, too." She then shows Jeff the pajamas that she packed when the songwriter begins playing the piano. "There's that song again," Lisa says dreamily. "Where does a man get inspiration to write a song like that?" Jeff replies sarcastically, "From the landlady once a month." Eventually, Lisa offers to make them some coffee and leaves for the kitchen. Jeff wheels his chair closer to the rear window, catching a glimpse of the newlyweds.



**"What else have you got?"**- Doyle enters, and Jeff swings his chair around to face him. The detective overhears Lisa in the kitchen and glances at her pajamas in her open night bag. After staring out the window for a moment, Doyle turns to Jeff and asks, "What else have you got on this man, Thorwald?" Jeff says he was scared Doyle wouldn't get there before Thorwald left. Lisa enters the room with a pair of brandy glasses, introducing herself to Doyle as she hands him a glass. "We think Thorwald's guilty," she says before disappearing back into the kitchen. The phone rings and Jeff answers before passing the receiver to Doyle. Lisa returns after he hangs up, and she and Jeff tell Doyle about the handbag and Mrs. Thorwald's jewelry. After putting down his brandy, Doyle makes a dramatic statement, "Lars Thorwald is no more a murderer than I am."



**Backward logic-** Jeff and Doyle begin arguing about Thorwald's activities, but Doyle refuses to yield. "Your logic is backward," he says resolutely, after explaining the strangeness of people's private lives. Lisa protests and Doyle lists the evidence standing against their claim of murder, namely that a woman assumed to be Mrs. Thorwald was seen getting on a train the morning of the alleged murder and that she sent a letter to Mr. Thorwald the next day. Lisa and Jeff refuse to accept Doyle's explanations. They discuss the trunk, saying it's strange for Mrs. Thorwald to leave with only her clothes. Doyle says it's likely a "family problem," and that unless there's a crime he can't do anything. He suggests they all sit down for a nice drink and forget all about the non-existent murder case. Jeff sits dejectedly with his back to Doyle. Lisa joins him. Doyle looks at his watch and excuses himself when Jeff turns to ask who picked up the trunk. Doyle says that the Merritsville police confirmed that Mrs. Anna Thorwald signed for the trunk.



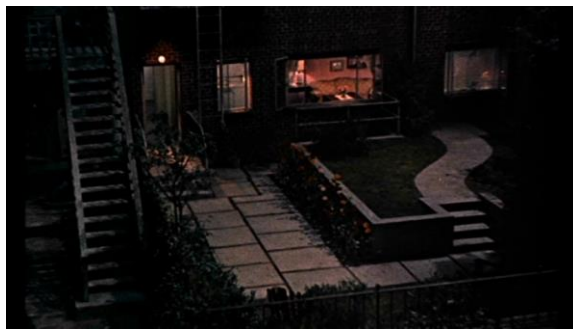
**"Private stuff"**- Jeff and Lisa look around the courtyard, serenaded by the partygoers at the songwriter's apartment. "Look!" Lisa says, pointing at Miss Lonelyheart's apartment. The lonely woman enters with a young man in tow. The two watch with a mixture of confusion and excitement as Miss Lonelyheart pours drinks and proposes a toast. "He's kinda young," Jeff comments. At that moment, the young man begins kissing Miss Lonelyheart, and she bashfully pushes him away before closing her Venetian blinds. Jeff and Lisa watch in shock as the young man pushes Miss Lonelyheart down onto her couch and begins kissing her all over. She manages to fight him off and tells him to leave before dropping to the couch, sobbing. Jeff admits that Doyle may have had a point: "That was pretty private stuff going on out there."



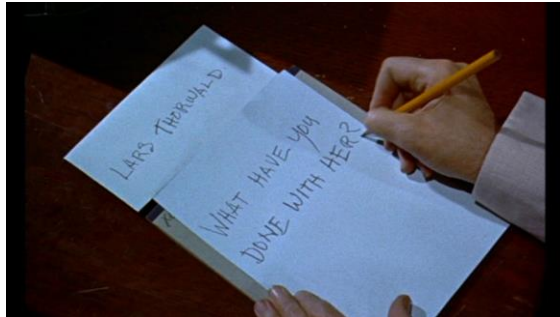
**Nightgown-** Jeff begins some exposition on the ethics of peeping, but Lisa is sick of the negative attitude. “Plunged into despair because we find out a man didn’t kill his wife,” she says, moving behind Jeff and hugging his neck. “You’d think we could be a little bit happy that the poor woman is alive and well.” Jeff begins joking about Miss Torso, making Lisa a little jealous. She closes the blinds, saying, “Show’s over for tonight.” She grabs her valise, walking into Jeff’s bathroom to change. Before Lisa closes the door, she asks Jeff if he thinks Thorwald killed his wife, and Jeff says he doesn’t anymore. She emerges sometime later as the songwriter begins playing another romantic tune. She asks Jeff if he likes the nightgown when a woman screams outside. The woman who sleeps on the fire escape has found her little dog dead. Miss Lonelyheart confirms this before placing the dog’s corpse in the basket. The woman goes on a long tirade about the carelessness of neighbors before her husband manages to coax her back inside. Jeff says that his suspicions have emerged again: Mr. Thorwald was the only person in the courtyard who didn’t come to the window.



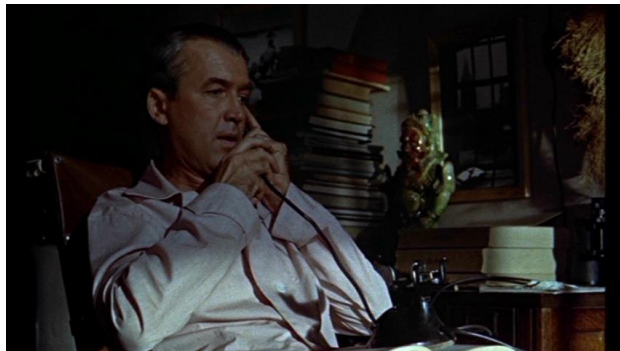
**“One important change”-** Sometime later, Lisa, Stella, and Jeff all watch Mr. Thorwald while he scrubs his bathroom walls. “Must’ve splattered a lot,” Stella says. Lisa reacts with some disgust at her “choice of words.” Jeff notices something in the little courtyard and asks Lisa to retrieve a box from his shelf. From inside, he pulls out a few negatives until he finds the one he’s looking for. The women wonder what he’s talking about while he looks through the little film viewer. “I think I know why Thorwald killed that dog,” he says confidently, passing the viewer to Lisa. The picture he took two weeks ago shows a row of healthy plants, but now two plants at the end of the row are significantly shorter. They all come to the conclusion that part of Mrs. Thorwald must have been buried there. Lisa suggests that she go down later and dig up the garden to see what’s there.



**Letter-** Mr. Thorwald returns to his apartment and begins packing. Jeff frantically writes a letter with the help of Lisa and Stella. It reads, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH HER?" Later, Jeff watches through the telephoto lens, while Lisa slides the letter under Thorwald's door. Thorwald reacts with shock and fear when he reads the letter, exiting his apartment to find the person who delivered it. Lisa manages to get away without being seen, and Thorwald returns to his apartment, throwing the letter aside and packing with renewed vigor. Jeff passes the telephoto to Stella, who sees Miss Lonelyheart prepare for an apparent suicide attempt when Lisa returns, excitedly asking how Thorwald reacted. "It wasn't the kind of expression that would get him a quick loan at the bank," Stella replies wryly. They turn to watch Thorwald as he throws his wife's handbag into a suitcase. Jeff proposes that if Mrs. Thorwald's ring was still in that handbag, it would be enough proof to get the police involved again.



**Phone call-** Lisa suggests that they break in and steal the handbag, but Jeff is against it, saying they should look through the garden instead and then begins looking up Thorwald's number in the Yellow Pages. The trio watches while Thorwald decides whether to answer Jeff's call. "Go on," Jeff urges, "You're curious." Finally, Thorwald picks up the phone. "Did you get my note?" Jeff asks. He tells Thorwald to meet him at the Albert Hotel's bar if he wants to know who he is, providing the women some time for snooping when Thorwald rushes off to follow Jeff's instructions. Stella and Lisa rush off after Jeff tells them he'll signal them if Thorwald comes back.



**Garden-** Jeff grabs a flashbulb to act as a signal before wheeling back to the window just in time to see Stella and Lisa run to the garden with a shovel. The two work quickly, Lisa keeping watch while Stella digs. Jeff dials a hurried call to Doyle's home, finding a babysitter on the other end. She agrees to tell Doyle that Jeff called. Picking up the telephoto lens again, Jeff can clearly see when Stella finds nothing buried in the garden. Lisa has an idea, climbing the fire escape to get into Thorwald's apartment through the open window. Once inside, she grabs the handbag, finding it empty. Jeff urges her to get out, but she goes rifling through Thorwald's dressers instead. Stella returns to Jeff's apartment when they both notice Miss Lonelyheart preparing to take an overdose of sleeping pills. Stella urges him to call the police, but Jeff has trouble getting connected.



**Trapped-** All the action on the other side of the courtyard stops as the songwriter and a group of jazz musicians begin playing a beautiful tune. Miss Lonelyheart seems entranced by the music, and Lisa waves the jewelry she found at Stella and Jeff. Mr. Thorwald appears in the apartment hallway, and Lisa sees his shadow and runs deeper into the apartment to hide. Suddenly, the line connects and Jeff reports an assault at Mr. Thorwald's address, finding some relief that the police are on their way. Thorwald notices the handbag is out of place and turns to find Lisa in his bedroom. She backs away from him, trying to explain her presence, but Thorwald doesn't believe her. He throws her to the couch and demands the jewelry back before he begins to assault her.



**Police-** “Jeff! Jeff!” Lisa cries while Thorwald turns off the lights, but the police arrive before he can do any real harm. Thorwald answers the door when the police ring his bell, a look of fright on his face. Jeff watches through the telephoto. Lisa plays along while Thorwald explains that she was trying to rob him, getting herself arrested and out of Thorwald’s grasp. She signals to Jeff that she has Mrs. Thorwald’s wedding ring while the police haul her away. Thorwald notices, following her gestures, to where Stella and Jeff sit with the telephoto. “Turn off the light!” Jeff hisses to Stella, but it’s too late. They’ve been spotted.



**Bail-** Jeff scrambles to organize some money for Lisa’s bail, sending Stella to the police station to get her out. Unseen by either, Thorwald leaves his apartment, casting one last glance across the courtyard. As Stella leaves, the phone rings. Doyle is on the other end. He’s unhappy to hear that Jeff is still on about Thorwald, but he becomes more interested when Jeff says that Lisa was arrested with Mrs. Thorwald’s wedding ring in her possession. Jeff lists out a few more peculiarities, and Doyle agrees to come over after he’s seen to Lisa’s release.



**Lights out-** Jeff hangs up and looks out his rear window, surprised to find Thorwald's lights out. The phone rings again, and Jeff picks it up, assuming it's Doyle calling back. He says something about Thorwald, but the line is silent before it ominously disconnects. Jeff swallows nervously, staring out the window. From within his apartment, he hears a door slam. Jeff slowly turns his chair to face his front door. A small beam of light leaks in from the hallway. Jeff begins wheeling back and forth frantically, trying to find someplace to hide. Suddenly, the light in the hallway goes out. Jeff wheels back toward the phone, picking up his flashbulb while the footsteps outside grow closer.



**Mr. Thorwald-** Mr. Thorwald enters the apartment quietly, his eyes never leaving Jeff. "What do you want from me?" he asks eventually. Jeff remains silent. Thorwald asks why Lisa didn't turn him in, and again Jeff is silent. Then Thorwald asks if Jeff wants money, saying he doesn't have any. Unable to get any answers, Thorwald demands his wife's ring back. Finally, Jeff speaks, saying the ring is evidence and that the police have it. Thorwald takes a step towards Jeff, and Jeff triggers the flashbulb, temporarily blinding Thorwald. He does this several times. When he sees Lisa and the police outside of Thorwald's apartment, Jeff calls out to them, but Thorwald silences him quickly, trying to strangle him.





**Rear window-** Even if his leg wasn't broken, Jeff would be outmatched by Thorwald. The larger man pushes Jeff from his wheelchair onto his bed and then begins pushing him out of the rear window. Jeff barely manages to hang on as his legs slip out the window. The courtyard is a rush of motion as neighbors come outside to see what's going on and the police rush to Jeff's aid. A trio of policemen enter Jeff's apartment and pull Thorwald away, but it's too late. Jeff plummets to the brick-lined courtyard below, landing hard. He's alive but badly hurt. Doyle rushes to his side, apologizing for taking so long. Lisa and Stella are right behind him, Stella taking charge of the first aid. Jeff says he's proud of Lisa, who cradles his head and asks Doyle, "Do you have enough for a search warrant now?" Doyle grins, saying they do. A detective pokes his head out of Jeff's rear window, reporting to Doyle, "Thorwald's ready to take us on a tour of the East River."



**All's well-** Sometime later, the camera finds Miss Lonelyheart in the Songwriter's apartment. They talk about his new record while it plays. The camera pans left, watching a crew of painters work inside Thorwald's apartment. Upstairs, the woman who sleeps on the fire escape trains a new puppy to use the basket to get down to the courtyard like her last dog. Miss Torso practices one of her routines when she's interrupted by a knock on the door: It's her sweetheart, a shorter man dressed in a military uniform, and they greet each other lovingly. The camera pans quickly over a few more neighbors before finding Jeff's smiling face. He sleeps in his wheelchair. The camera pulls back farther, finding both of his legs in new casts. The camera pans right, finding Lisa sitting on Jeff's bed, smiling and looking at him while she pulls out a magazine. The scene fades to black.

