

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## ***Family Plot* (1976)**

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*, *Vertigo*, and *Psycho*, 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* Based on the 1972 novel *The Rainbird Pattern* by Victor Canning, *Family Plot* was adapted for the screen by Ernest Lehman who wanted to create a dark and dramatic vision. Hitchcock, however, urged the screenplay writer toward levity. This would be Lehman's second look at the novel: He had overlooked the title in favor of writing the screenplay for *No Bail for the Judge*, a film Hitchcock was set to direct that was scrapped when its leading lady, Audrey Hepburn, became pregnant before filming could begin. *Family Plot* was a box-office hit, earning a neat \$13 million in rentals, nearly triple Universal Pictures' investment of \$4.5 million.

*Background* Praise for *Family Plot* has been nearly universal. *The New York Times*' Vincent Canby called it "Hitchcock's most cheerful film in a long time, but it's hardly innocent." Other notable critics like Roger Ebert praised the slow tension that builds throughout the film until its final climax, calling it "pure Hitchcock." Leading lady Barbara Harris was nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Comedy Actress at the 34<sup>th</sup> Golden Globe Awards. The film still holds high ratings today, having earned 93% on the review aggregation site Rotten Tomatoes at the time of writing.

### CINEMATIC NARRATION

While many writers and critics call the leap from political and murder thriller to dark comedy something new for Hitchcock, those familiar with his earliest films will see glimmers of his pre-talkie days in the comedic action and use of suspense as a device to hold the viewer's interest for the whole of the film. In the way it is shot and organized, *Family Plot* reminds many of some of Hitchcock's notable silent films such as *The Ring* and *The Manxman*, where the conflict is established early in the film and clearly builds to a grand dramatic conclusion in the final moments without red herrings or misleading subplots. Unlike Hitchcock's previous films *Topaz* or *Torn Curtain*, the various main plots intermingle freely instead of disintegrating into complex subplots and intrigue. The knowledge of what may happen to Blanche and George because of their amateur bumbling creates the suspense, not the absence of information or spy vs spy shenanigans. *Family Plot* relies on screwball antics and crossed wires to create a smashing comedy of errors with a thrilling twist, making it a fitting capstone for Hitchcock's filmography.

### SYNOPSIS

"Psychic" scam artist Blanche Tyler and her boyfriend, George Lumley, set out to locate the long-lost nephew of wealthy, elderly Julia Rainbird, hoping to earn the \$10,000 she's offered for completing the impossible task. The boy, given up for adoption by Julia's deceased sister, was named Edward Shoebridge and is thought to have died young. George discovers that Joseph Maloney paid for Edward's tombstone years after his supposed death, raising suspicions that the grave is empty.

It is revealed that Shoebridge faked his death after murdering his adoptive parents and now lives as Arthur Adamson, a successful San Francisco jeweler. With his girlfriend, Fran, Arthur kidnaps millionaires, ransoming them for valuable gemstones, which he then cuts and sets into rings and necklaces. When Arthur learns George is investigating him, he enlists Maloney to kill the couple. Maloney cuts Blanche's brakes, but the couple survives. Maloney dies in a car accident during a slapdash attempt to kill them.

At Maloney's funeral, George learns from Maloney's widow that Shoebridge's new name is Arthur Adamson. While George works as a cab driver—his real job—Blanche locates Arthur's jewelry store in San Francisco. There, she obtains his home address. Blanche visits Arthur's house just as he and Fran attempt to ransom their latest kidnap victim, Bishop Wood. Arthur drugs Blanche and leaves her in the cellar.

George tracks Blanche to Arthur's house, where he finds her car. Breaking in, he discovers her handbag with blood stains. Hiding inside the house, George overhears Arthur's plan to kill Blanche. When Arthur and Fran attempt to move Blanche, she knocks them down, and George locks them in the cellar. Now free, Blanche suddenly enters a trance, eventually pointing to the diamond in the chandelier. George then calls the police to arrest the kidnappers and recover the jewels.

## CHARACTERS

*Blanche Tyler* – A “psychic” scam artist in a relationship with George

*George Lumley* – Blanche's boyfriend who drives a taxi when he's not helping her pull scams

*Julia Rainbird* – A rich, elderly woman who seeks her sole surviving relative to leave him a fortune

*Arthur Adamson/Edward Shoebridge* – A San Francisco jeweler with a dark secret

*Fran* – Arthur's lover and co-conspirator.

*Joseph P. Maloney* – Arthur's friend, who runs a service station

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **Blanche Tyler**

Blanche is a psychic scam artist trying to break into the big time. She has a big fish on the line with Mrs. Rainbird and her \$10,000 quest. She tries to make up for her lack of spiritual power with gossip and George's good old-fashioned detective work.

*Unconventional* Blanche is a very strange woman. Outside her spiritual medium schtick, she seems a very modern woman, yet instead of finding an ordinary job, she decides to run scams on her clients. Her relationship with George is also strange: Blanche seems to be the overly sexual one if George's complaints are to be taken seriously, and he often spends the night at her place, a practice that was still considered unusual at the time. Blanche thinks outside the box, finding the granules of truth in rumor and memory and turning it into historical fact with the help of public records. While this shows most clearly in George's investigation, he is under her direct orders, acting as a go-between in case anyone who knows her clients sees her digging through the documents at the registrar's office.

*Secretive* Blanche must be secretive as a spiritualist. Her aura of mystique allows her to reel in various suckers, taking their money for sessions and sometimes getting more payouts by essentially reading the public record for them and dressing it up with some mumbo jumbo. George mentions their past schemes, calling the clients “\$25 sardines.” Blanche also asks George to pretend to be a detective or lawyer for her, giving her plausible deniability when ‘Henry’ “reveals” information to her during séances.

*Attentive* While this trait is a bit selective based on her quarrels with George, Blanche is quite attentive, picking up on small bits of gossip while talking to her clients. This allows her to find leads in her investigations to make her seem like a legitimate psychic, digging through public records and meeting with relatives of others to find hints of information to feed to her clients. There are many points throughout the film where Blanche picks up on a little piece of information and is able to chase it down, but it shows

most significantly at the end when, pretending to be in a trance, Blanche walks up the stairs in Arthur's house and points to the diamond hidden in the chandelier. While George believes this was actually the spirits communicating with Blanche, she turns to wink at the camera, reminding us that for part of her time in captivity, she was feigning unconsciousness and heard either Fran or Arthur mention it.

### **George Lumley**

George is a taxi driver and Blanche's boyfriend. He's beginning to feel unappreciated, doing all the groundwork for Blanche's psychic schemes while risking his position at the cab company and losing sleep. Still, the want-to-be conman remains loyal to Blanche as their investigation sinks deeper into danger.

*Serious* While also witty and humorous, George possesses a serious attitude. He takes his roles seriously, playing lawyer and other parts to convince people to give him information about Eddie Shoebridge. He also takes his job as a taxi driver seriously, if only because his position has been put in jeopardy by the time he spends on Blanche's investigation. His serious attitude kicks in during the film's most stressful moments. Despite fear—and Blanche's flailing—George is able to maneuver the out-of-control Mustang safely off the road after Maloney cuts their brakes. Likewise, at the film's end when Blanche goes missing, George makes a big effort to find her in Arthur's house, going far and taking huge risks because of his deep love and admiration for Blanche.

*Disorganized* George doesn't have much of a plan. He seems to play most things by ear, which would be fine if he was a saxophone player. George's boss and Blanche both complain about his lack of forethought, and the taxi driver seems to forget about his shifts. We see his lack of organization in his frantic plea to use Blanche's car to do her investigation into Eddie Shoebridge. He interrupts one of her séances just to ask for her keys, almost starting an argument while Blanche tries to pretend something spiritual is happening.

*Determined* Despite his complaints and apparent hatred of work, George is a determined fellow. This shows especially in the film's beginning when he chases down leads on Eddie Shoebridge for Blanche. At the film's midpoint, we learn he is risking his job to do this for her. George's determination really shines at the film's end when he finds Blanche missing. He tries his hardest to open Arthur's garage door, but when he can't he doesn't give up. He finds a basement window and jimmyes it open with his pocket knife, breaking and entering in an attempt to find the woman he loves. George's determination pays off, allowing him to rescue Blanche by hiding in the dark corners of the basement and trapping the kidnapers in their own secret prison.

### **Arthur Adamson**

Arthur Adamson was once known as Eddie Shoebridge, but he killed his adoptive parents in a house fire to start a new life. Now, Arthur runs a respected jewelry shop with a kidnapping scheme hustle on the side. He is the missing nephew of Mrs. Rainbird, but he believes that George and Blanche are working to expose him as a kidnapper for the FBI reward.

*Planner* Arthur is capable of concocting cunning plans. Fran is able to pull off the ransom pickup without a hitch, leaving no evidence behind for the police, not even a hair, all because of Arthur's thoughtful planning. He plans to commit several more kidnappings and seems to take pleasure in outsmarting the authorities. Even when his plans go awry, such as when Blanche discovers the bishop, he has a contingency plan in his back pocket. He concocts a plan that, without George's interference, would have disposed of Blanche in a practically foolproof way.

*Patient* Like many Hitchcock villains, Arthur possesses some positive traits. His patience is incredible given the stress he places upon himself. He likes to act rather than react, showing this in his dealings with the police when they make a surprise visit to his shop: he simply plays the part of an innocent shopkeeper, asking them about their investigation in unassuming ways. Similarly, we see how his patient

attitude makes him adept at sizing up people when he stakes out Blanche's home. While he is incorrect in deducing why the couple is after him, Arthur figures out what is wrong with their relationship just by listening to a single quarrel, letting the information come to him instead of doing a laborious investigation like George. At the film's end, when confronted by Blanche, many antagonists would simply attack, but ever patient, Arthur waits, asking her what she wants. He is almost able to convince Blanche to leave, but Fran's fear of being caught causes her to open the car door and expose the bishop.

**Mistrustful/Paranoid** Arthur isn't the trusting type. This lack of trust hedges on paranoia at times, making this almost a dual theme. While in many stories this type of trait serves to prove the depravity of the antagonist, in *Family Plot*, it fuels comedy and suspense. Because he doesn't trust anyone and is paranoid about his long-running kidnapping scheme, he believes George and Blanche's bumbling investigation is an attempt to bring him to justice. He misses out on an easy fortune because of his paranoid attitude. Similarly, despite showing great loyalty to Maloney, Arthur decides to "handle things himself" with George and Blanche at first, as he doesn't trust Maloney to be discrete. Arthur's paranoia about being caught overcomes him when he learns of Maloney's failure, causing him to denounce his lifelong friend even at the moment of learning about his demise.

## **Fran**

Fran is Arthur's enthusiastic girlfriend. She happily joins him in his kidnapping scheme. However, Fran eventually begins to change her mind when murder becomes the only solution to their problem with Blanche.

**Follower** Fran isn't really in the thinking business. In the story, she exists to follow Arthur's orders. Fran kidnaps people, prepares the ketamine injections, and even puts herself at risk by picking up the ransom gems. Even when she begins to have her doubts, she still follows Arthur's orders, handing over the ketamine to drug Blanche and helping Arthur to prepare Blanche's staged suicide.

## **Joseph Maloney**

Maloney is an old friend of Arthur's. In their youth, he helped to kill and cover up the death of Arthur's adoptive parents. Now the owner of a service station, Maloney serves as a watchdog for his old friend.

**Cruel** Maloney needs little motivation to murder. He discusses the killing of Arthur's adoptive parents with pride, and it doesn't take more than the request from Arthur for Maloney to consider killing Blanche and George. While many assassins try to finish their targets quickly and quietly, Maloney sets Blanche and George up for a fearful and potentially painful end by damaging both their brakes and accelerator. When his plan fails, he simply tries to run the couple over with his car, a method neither foolproof nor positively fatal. It's almost like he wants them to suffer.

## **THEMES**

**Crime** This theme is central to the plot of *Family Plot*. The film's suspense and a good bit of comedy rides on Arthur's complex kidnapping scheme. While only a small amount of the film actually shows us these crimes, Arthur and Fran go a long way to cover up their connection, as far as to hire Maloney to murder Blanche and George for their investigation of them. Maloney commits many crimes in trying and failing to kill the bumbling couple, leading to his fiery demise. It's also told to us that Maloney and Arthur killed Arthur's adoptive parents in the 50s, and neither man shows any remorse for their part in such an inhumane crime.

**Love** Love plays a somewhat strange role in *Family Plot*. It is in our antagonists that we see the greatest show of love. In their strange, criminal way, Maloney and Arthur love each other. They go to great lengths for each other to keep one another out of prison. Likewise, Fran and Arthur seem to have a fairly healthy love life. Fran's naive attitude may be at play here, but any discomfort she has with her sociopathic boyfriend doesn't show until the very end of the film, and even then, she does what she is

told. Blanche and George seem to have a very rocky love life. In almost every scene, they are only moments away from breaking into a quarrel about something or another. While they have their issues, we do see that they love and care for each other in ways that matter, such as George breaking into Arthur's house at the end of the film when he can't find Blanche. Likewise, Blanche comes to realize how much she relies on George, and many of her complaints have to do with wishing George would stand up for himself more because he deserves respect.

**Appearance vs. Reality** This theme makes up much of the comedy and suspense in the film. The viewer's knowledge of Maloney's connection to Arthur/Eddie gives the film its midpoint push, forcing the two disparate storylines to collide. Similarly, Blanche's faux psychic antics offer comedic value as she tries to hide her mundane interactions with George from her clientele. Arthur and Fran are so skilled at covering up their kidnapping plot that Blanche believes them to be average San Franciscans, placing her in Arthur's grasp when she discovers the unconscious bishop in his car. Using her acting abilities, Blanche convinces her captors that she is unconscious after she has woken up, allowing her to plan the perfect trap for them with George when he discovers her. The film ends with a simultaneously comic and suspenseful twist: Did Blanche guess which crystal was the diamond in the chandelier because she overheard Arthur talking about it, or did the spirits guide her?

**Investigation** Investigation makes up the bulk of the plot. Mrs. Rainbird gives Blanche the nearly impossible task of finding her long-lost nephew. Because it's established early on that Blanche is a psychic hoax, it's natural that she fills in the holes of her inadequate mysticism with good old-fashioned detective work. Or, at least, she has George do it for the majority of the film. Following George through his investigation is the main way the story is introduced to us until Arthur is revealed to be the missing Eddie Shoebridge. Conversely, to George and Blanche, Arthur doesn't spend any time investigating, simply assuming that the two are interested in turning him and Fran in to the police for their kidnapping scheme. If he had taken the time to properly investigate the two, he might have learned of the fortune Mrs. Rainbird wished to give to him *and* continued with his kidnapping spree, but that would have been a far less entertaining film.

**Sexuality** In a break with Hitchcock's previous portrayals of sexuality in films like *Frenzy*, sex and intimacy are sources of humor in *Family Plot*. Both pairs of couples act as foils for one another, especially in this sense. The couples, Blanche with George and Arthur with Fran, are comically similar in their money-making schemes, but where they really differ is in the bedroom. Arthur and Fran seem quite happy with their love life, often making sexual comments on their way home from successful ransom collections and showing clear sexual interest in one another. Blanche and George, however, have an ongoing struggle around sexual intimacy. At one point, George complains so much about Blanche's persistent sexual desire that it blows up into a full-blown domestic dispute. While not a major focus, the sexual element of these main relationships in the film underscores their oddball antics.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do the film's comic elements interplay with the suspenseful ones?

Describe a similarity between this film's story and one of Hitchcock's previous thrillers.

In your opinion, how does Hitchcock's final film stand the test of time?

In what ways do the two main couples act as foils for one another in *Family Plot*?

## SCENES

**Séance** - "Someone is here," a woman says in a dreamy voice, her head floating in a crystal ball. The crystal ball and the table it sits on fade away to show the woman seated in an ornate chair, murmuring in a breathy voice. "Too many memories," she says suddenly in a low, loud, British accent, "too much pain." In her breathy voice, she pleads with 'Henry' to speak up. Across from her, an elderly woman says, "I think I know who it is, Madame Blanche. I think I know what's bothering her." The séance continues, Blanche speaking with 'Henry' and asking questions that illicit shocked responses from the elderly woman, Mrs. Rainbird. Despite Blanche and 'Henry' telling her to keep silent, Mrs. Rainbird speaks up. "Tell her I know what has to be done. I've been wanting to do it for a year." She pleads with Blanche to make her sister's spirit go away but quickly changes her mind. Blanche slips into a new voice, impersonating Mrs. Rainbird's sister, Harriet. Mrs. Rainbird apologizes to Harriet before vowing to find her sister's long-lost son to bestow the family fortune on him. Blanche speaks as 'Henry' again, saying, "In the end, there will be happiness."



**Sherry** - Having brought the séance to an end, Blanche slumps into the chair with a soft moan. Mrs. Rainbird asks if Blanche can remember what happened, and Blanche claims she has no memory of the séance before asking for a glass of sherry. Mrs. Rainbird pours for her before asking Blanche to share the "gist" of what she remembers of the séance. "About forty years ago, you arranged to have your sister Harriet's baby given away without a trace," Blanche says. "And now, your bad dreams and a troubled conscience tell you to find the grown-up person, take him into the family, and bestow your wealth on him." Mrs. Rainbird is delighted to hear the situation summed up so tidily and begins to explain the social situation that necessitated giving the boy away as an infant. Mrs. Rainbird then enlists Blanche and her psychic powers to help her find her heir: "Find her son, whoever he is, wherever he is, and I'll pay you \$10,000." Blanche makes a show of trying to turn down the money before accepting. Afterward, Mrs. Rainbird asks Blanche to leave, as it is her bedtime.



**“How did it go?”**- Outside the Rainbird manor, Blanche steps into a red taxi. It drives away quickly. “So,” the cabbie asks, “how’d it go?” “Having to do Henry is murder on my throat,” Blanche says with a frog in her throat, popping a lozenge into her mouth. “She’s hooked,” she answers eventually, “waiting to be pulled in.” “Another one of your \$25 sardines?” the cabbie asks. “This is a big one, George,” Blanche says, asking him to keep his eyes on the road when he turns around to give her an excited look. Blanche then explains that she was able to get a lot of information out of Mrs. Rainbird when “Henry” mentioned that she was having trouble sleeping, and George’s eyes light up: “So I came through for you again, didn’t I, darling? All that information that I dug up by gabbing to the local druggist.” They bicker for a while about whether it was George’s tip or “Henry’s” spiritual assistance that sealed the deal with Mrs. Rainbird.



**Foreplay-** When Blanche finally mentions the “ten thousand big ones” Mrs. Rainbird is offering her, George can’t keep a greedy look from his face. “Well, what’s the deal?” he asks. “What do we have to do for the money?” “I’ll tell you about it in bed, afterwards,” Blanche replies. “Aw, come on,” George begs. “Give me a hint. Just a little foreplay.” The mood soon changes from pillow talk to anger when Blanche tells him all they have to do is find a man that no one knows with very little evidence to help them. “There’s a possibility of one person who might have known,” Blanche muses. “Trouble is, he’s been dead for twenty-five years.” George begins to complain again and Blanche chastises him, saying, “Don’t start to fret, George, or our water bed will be no fun at all tonight. As an actor, you should know fretting will ruin a performance.” “You’re not gonna have to worry about my performance tonight, honey,” George quips back, turning around to look at her. “On this very evening, you’re gonna see a standing ovation.”



**Pedestrian** - George turns around and slams on his brakes. A tall, blonde woman stands in the road, giving him an angry look for his distracted driving before crossing the street. George's taxi rumbles away, and the camera moves to follow the woman. Dramatic music plays while she approaches a guard shack. She hands a slip of paper to the policeman standing inside, and he gives her a strange look before picking up a phone to report, "She's here." The officer leads the woman inside the nearby police station. She enters the precinct with a pistol drawn, and the detectives waiting inside tell her she won't need it since she has such a valuable hostage. She keeps her gun drawn, picking up a very large diamond from the desk and placing it on a pre-prepared scale to confirm it is what she's asked for. After she's satisfied, the officers lead her outside where a helicopter waits. They've followed her instructions, removing the radio and tracking equipment. "Don't be a hero," a detective says to the officer who will pilot the helicopter before the blonde woman enters.



**Helicopter ride** - The woman taps on the control panel with her pistol and the helicopter takes off. The police officer flying the helicopter tries to strike up a conversation, but the woman never speaks, only pointing to the 'E' on the compass when it's time for them to change their course. "Bet that thing isn't even loaded," the officer says, glancing at the pistol in the woman's hand. Silently, the woman levels the gun and fires a shot, punching a hole in the helicopter's acrylic dome. She motions down, and the pilot lands the helicopter on a golf course, where she gets out and runs to the woods. There, a man unloads an unconscious man from a black car. The blonde woman hands the diamond to the man before turning on a flashlight so he can look at the quality of the gem with a jeweler's lens. The officer from the helicopter sees the light coming from the woods and runs toward it, but the car is gone before he can get close.



**“Tall woman”**- “My feet are killing me,” the woman complains in the car, taking off her gloves and sunglasses. “Damn six-inch heels.” “I happen to like tall women,” says the man behind the wheel. “Everybody likes tall women. In fact, everyone’s going to be looking for a tall woman.” Veiled in the language of small talk, the woman reports that she saw a couple of detectives she thinks she recognized and a man “who just had to be FBI.” She also says that she didn’t say a word and retrieved anything that could potentially be used as evidence, taking off her hat and wig. “Look who’s here,” she says, smiling, before leaning over to kiss the man. “Has anyone seen a tall, blonde woman around here lately?” the man asks. “Gone, poof!” the woman replies with a grin. “Who needs her?” “I do,” the man replies. “At least one



**Hidden Room**- The car pulls to a stop inside a garage, and the man and woman exit, walking through a door and into a nearby basement. The man removes a brick from the wall, revealing a secret lock. Then he removes another similar brick, flicking a light switch before unlocking and opening the secret door. “It seems Mr. Constantine has left us some wine,” the woman muses, moving around the room to clean up after their captive. “I don’t think he likes the imported stuff,” the man jokes as he clears off the table onto a nearby tray. With her arms full, the woman asks the man to empty the chemical toilet before he complains that it’s “a little below the dignity of a jewel collector.” “The wages of sin, Arthur,” the woman muses before he promises to empty it tomorrow and they walk upstairs. Arthur praises his planning and talks about the thrilling nature of committing crimes as the two walk to the upstairs bedroom together. The stolen diamond glistens in a chandelier, hidden in plain sight.



**Mr. Constantine-** A group of men sit in an ornate office as a man behind a large desk speaks: "With all due respect to the FBI... I have no time to play games... I've got a lot of work to catch up on. Now how many more times are we gonna go through this goddamn thing?" "Until we come up with something, Mr. Constantine," one of the investigators says with a meek, soothing tone. After a couple more expressions of his frustration, the FBI men are able to get a description of the basement cell Mr. Constantine was kept in, as well as the fact that it was a man and a woman doing the kidnapping. When they ask how he knew one was a woman if he never saw their faces, Constantine replies, "Because a man would not bother to put the parsley on a filet of sole." After a few more probing questions, another FBI man speaks up,



**"Ready to follow you"**- George walks up to Blanche's home, puffing on his pipe. He's surprised to see a fancy car outside, so he decides to go in the back through the kitchen. Inside, he can hear Blanche giving a rich woman a séance, switching between her dreamy voice and 'Henry's' gravelly baritone. Peeking out from the curtain separating the sitting room, George uses the handle of a flyswatter to gently brush a wind chime hanging near the doorway, getting Blanche's subtle attention before frantically but silently motioning for her to come talk to him. Blanche plays up the spiritual presence angle before saying to 'Henry,' "Ready to follow you wherever you want me to go! Where are you taking me, Henry?" She makes odd noises as she pretends to follow something airborne into the kitchen. There, George whispers his request for her car keys. "What for?" Blanche demands in a harsh whisper. "I've located the daughter of the Rainbird chauffeur," George replies in a whisper between Blanche's shouts to 'Henry,' "and I'm not going around there as a cab driver." After a whispered argument, Blanche gives George the keys and he rushes quietly out the back door before Blanche emerges from the kitchen theatrically.



**Playing detective-** After speaking to the manager at the jewelry section of a department store, George finds himself speaking with Mrs. Hannagan. He claims to be a lawyer and asks for some information on her background, saying that if the information is what he thinks it is, someone will pay her for it. After a little background questioning, George moves on to her father, asking if he was a chauffeur. "How the heck did you know that?" Mrs. Hannagan replies, shocked. "Can you remember anybody being a close friend of your father's?" George asks. Mrs. Hannagan replies that a man named Harry Shoebridge used to be one of her father's pool hall buddies. One day, Shoebridge and his wife adopted a baby boy after countless miscarriages. The Shoebridges, it turns out, died in a house fire. The manager, getting impatient with Mrs. Hannagan, tries to run George off, but he manages to ask one more question before leaving: "This Shoebridge son, where do I look for him?" "Try the Barlow Creek Cemetery," Mrs.



**Family Plot-** George slowly pilots Blanche's white Mustang around a graveyard before pulling to a stop at the groundskeeper's shack. Finding no one inside, George begins to wander among the headstones, reading the names. He refills and lights his pipe before finally stumbling upon the Shoebridge family plot. Somber music plays as he reads the names on the tombstones: Edward Shoebridge is among them. "Dead end, Blanche," George mutters to himself. "Dead and buried." The groundskeeper emerges from a nearby grave, startling George. George asks him about the death, and the groundskeeper gossips for a bit about the work that comes with a full-family funeral like that. George eventually interrupts him to ask why there are two graves and why one of the gravestones is newer than the others. The groundskeeper becomes icy and bids George farewell, wandering off to complete some work.



**Stone cutter** - Loud rock music blares from a transistor radio as a long-haired woman chisels away at a gravestone. George talks with a man several yards away. We can't hear anything they say until the other man shouts, "Turn that damn thing down, Marcella. I can't even hear myself think." She obeys, allowing us to hear George's investigation. Unable to remember the orders for the Shoebridge family gravestones, the stone cutter eventually leads George inside to look through the files. After going through them, he finds a receipt for Mr. and Mrs. Shoebridge's gravestone from 1950, but it takes further digging to find the receipt for Edward's: his wasn't purchased until 1965, fifteen years after he was supposed to have died. The stone cutter mentions that 'Eddie' "wasn't too popular around here. Some say he set that fire himself, you know, to get rid of his family, and then disappeared to make it look like he also died in the fire. He says that a man with a tow truck showed up to pay for and pick up Edward's headstone.



**Registrar** - At the Registrar's office, still in his lawyer's guise, George hunts for Edward Shoebridge's death certificate. "There is no death certificate here for Edward Shoebridge," the clerk says, reading through the records. "Only Harry J. Shoebridge and Sadie L. Shoebridge." She then says someone tried to file for Edward's death certificate in 1965, but he could not furnish proof and must have given up. "Does it say who the applicant was?" George asks, trying to contain his excitement. "Yes," the clerk responds, and she quotes, "Request was made by Joseph P. Maloney, 426 Main Street, Barlow Creek." George thanks the clerk enthusiastically before leaving.



**Service Station** - George sits in Blanche's car, sucking on his pipe, while watching the activity at the Barlow Creek service station across the highway. In clear white letters on the side of the awning is painted "J. Maloney." Eventually, the man working the pumps becomes suspicious of George, going inside to inform someone working there. As they both peek out of the front door, George starts the Mustang and moves into the service bay. The man exits the building and asks George if he wants gas and service, and George says that he does. He gets out of the car, pretending to stretch his road-wearied body, while he asks the man if he owns the place and if he is J. Maloney. Mr. Maloney says he is before turning the questions around on George: "It's funny. You didn't hardly need any gas. Didn't need no oil. Guess you didn't come here for the car, huh, mister?" After establishing himself as a lawyer, George eventually comes right out and tells Maloney that he'll pay for information about the whereabouts of Eddie Shoebridge. Maloney says nothing except asking for payment for the gas. As George drives away,



**"Something kinda urgent"** - Arthur sits in his jewelry store, smiling as he displays a shimmering bracelet to an older woman. "Can I help you, sir?" Arthur's assistant says off-screen, and Arthur turns to see Maloney standing in the doorway, a strange look on his face. Arthur excuses himself, asking his assistant to take over the sale, and invites Maloney into his office. "Eddie, you old son of a bitch," Maloney says, making himself comfortable on the leather couch in Arthur's office. "I prefer Arthur Adamson," Arthur replies. "Now, what in the hell are you doing here?" "I had to see you about something kind of urgent," Maloney says, sounding a bit hurt. He eventually explains that someone came around the service station looking for Edward Shoebridge. He goes on to say that he traced Blanche's car to her address and describes George. They both swear they'll do whatever they can to keep each other safe from facing charges for killing Arthur's parents all those years ago. Maloney offers to murder George, but Arthur says he wants to try and handle things the "quiet way."



**Interrogation-** Arthur's assistant knocks on his office door and enters, saying, "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Adamson. There are two gentlemen here to see you from the police department." Arthur says he'll be right out, telling Maloney to stay put before exiting the office. Two plainclothes detectives stand in his shop, and Arthur speaks amicably with them about the jewel used as payment for Mr. Constantine's ransom. Arthur suggests that they should be looking more closely at the second-hand jewelry market, as reputable jewelers purchase their stock through the wholesale exchange. The detectives thank him for his help and leave. Dramatic music plays while Arthur walks back to his office and opens the door to find the window open and Maloney gone. On his desk rests a note with Blanche's license plate and address.



**No one home-** Later that night, Arthur sits outside Blanche's house, watching a woman wander around the front of the house. We soon see that it's Fran, Arthur's lover. Eventually, she crosses the street and enters Arthur's car, telling him that no one is home. Arthur replies that they'll wait for the man to show up before they take any action. Only a few moments later, George pulls his red taxi to a halt in front of Blanche's home. "That must be her," Arthur comments. After watching George and Blanche fumble comically with their groceries, Arthur whispers that George must be Maloney's "man with the pipe."



**Quarrel-** Suddenly, the door opens and Blanche chases George outside. "I'm going home to my own bed where I can get some sleep," George whines to Blanche loudly. "No, you're not," Blanche says, hinting at her intentions with a gesture back to her house. They begin arguing about not having enough (or from George's standpoint, too much) intimacy. "I'm too pooped to pop!" George begins shouting. "I'd be useless to you!" "You're always useless to me!" Blanche cries back. The argument escalates and George moves toward his taxi, talking about finding Eddie Shoebridge eating up too much of the time he's supposed to be on the clock. He drives off, and Arthur sums up what he understands to be happening



**Another séance-** Sometime later, Blanche performs another séance at Mrs. Rainbird's home. She plays out a spiritual scene where 'Henry' shows her the Rainbird's old chauffeur driving the infant Eddie somewhere. "Oh, more pictures are coming in too fast," she moans. "Henry... A graveyard, a headstone? A Shoe. Bridge. A shoe bridge?" Unable to get a clear answer from 'Henry,' Blanche ends the séance and bids the spirit farewell. "Listen," Mrs. Rainbird says firmly, "your Henry jogged my memory of something I'd completely forgotten." She says that her old chauffeur had made it his business to keep track of her sister's son. "It was the parson who baptized the newborn baby. And there's an additional thing I can tell you."



**“Here we go again”** - There’s a hard cut to Blanche in the back of George’s speeding cab. “Let me guess,” George says sardonically, “500.” “Not a penny,” Blanche replies. “It’s all or nothing, George, until I can produce his name and his present address... She gave me a marvelous clue.” “Here we go again,” George says. Blanche says that the bishop who baptized Eddie would still know his whereabouts, or at least put them on the right trail. George groans and sighs, knowing he’ll be the one putting in all the leg work.



**The bishop-** A church choir sings while George makes his way up the long set of stairs in front of a cathedral. He enters the building and walks up to a priest. “Scuse me,” he barks loudly, pipe in between his teeth. The priest reacts with distaste, motioning for George to put out his pipe. George apologizes and asks if it’s possible to make an appointment to see the bishop. “If you want to make the appointment today, you’ll have to make it through the chaplain,” the priest says quietly. George begins talking loudly again and the priest asks him to wait until the end of the service. The bishop leaves the stage and moves towards the side aisle.



**“Move as one”** - Fran, disguised as a mourner, peeks out from behind a column before approaching the bishop. Just as he passes almost out of view of the parishioners, Fran feints in front of the bishop, who stoops to help her. Arthur appears from near the stage, dressed as a priest, and approaches the scene. Shielding his actions from view, he jabs a syringe into the bishop, who quickly collapses. Then, Arthur and Fran hurry the bishop out of the cathedral and into a waiting car. No one stops or questions them. Fran and Arthur quickly remove their disguises, and Fran worries that they didn't give him enough drugs as the bishop squirms on the floor of the back seat. Arthur praises his planning, but Fran bursts his bubble, wanting to talk about the “man with the pipe.” Arthur says he'll let Maloney “take care of that.” Fran says she doesn't want to know the details. “Come on, now, dear,” Arthur coos. “That's what's so exciting about all of this. We move as one. Everything together. Nothing held back.” The black car



**Dinner**- Blanche sits at the table in her kitchen, complaining about losing the bishop, while George cooks something at her stove. “I didn't lose him, Blanche,” George says. “He was kidnapped.” “Why would anyone want to do that to a bishop?” Blanche asks, while George crosses to the table with a pair of cooked hamburger patties. “For the ransom, dummy,” George replies, beginning to make himself a sandwich with the toppings laid out on the table. Blanche takes the second burger for herself before complaining with her mouth full about the dead end in finding Eddie Shoebridge: “I suppose Henry and I are going to have to exhaust ourselves again doing your work for you.” “What do you mean, my work?” George explodes. “My work is driving a goddamn cab, for Christ's sake!” Their fight begins to escalate, but the phone rings, interrupting them. It's Mr. Maloney, and he hopes he can get a hold of George to give him information, but he demands a fee of \$200. Blanche agrees, and Maloney invites her and George to meet him at Abe & Mable's café off Route 22. Blanche and George squabble comically while scrambling to leave for the meeting with Maloney in 2 hours.



**Abe & Mabel's Café** - Tense music plays while George drives Mabel's Mustang up the winding mountain road. It comes to a sudden halt as they near an empty green car. After they pass, Maloney sits up. A few minutes later, George parks in front of Abe & Mabel's café. Inside, George and Blanche find a seat before ordering two beers. Outside, Maloney pulls up and steps out of his car, looking around suspiciously beside Blanche's Mustang. Inside, a group of children enters with a priest. George and Blanche fidget impatiently, drinking their beers and waiting for Maloney. A woman in a red dress enters the café, and the priest moves to sit with her. George makes jokes about the apparent "arrangement" the priest and the woman have, while outside Maloney throws a bag of tools into his car. The waitress brings Blanche and George two more beers, Blanche asking George to keep his "head on straight." Outside, Maloney and his



**Giving up-** "He's not coming," Blanche says after George downs his second beer. He pays for the drinks, gulping down several mouthfuls of Blanche's untouched beer before walking outside. They hop in the Mustang and pull away, zooming off down the winding highway. Below the car, the camera focuses on the brake line. After a moment, it begins to steadily drip dark fluid. The car comes up on a steep curve, and George presses on the break. Below the car, the drip from the brake line increases. "George," Blanche complains as the car goes screeching around corner after corner, "what's the big hurry?" George, trying not to panic, replies that the accelerator is stuck. "Use the brakes!" Blanche says, fighting down nausea. "The brakes don't work," George says softly, his eyes wide. The car picks up speed. Blanche clings to anything she can reach while George fights to keep the speeding car on the road.



**Off the road-** After dodging car after car and an entire motorcycle club, George realizes he has to stop the car somehow. "Blanche," he says, eyeing a large dirt mound, "just hang on, baby." He veers off the road and into the steep incline of the mound. Barreling through scrub and brush, the car eventually slows, tipping over onto its side before stopping. George and Blanche slowly emerge, unharmed. "Damn you, George Lumley!" Blanche cries. "It wasn't me! It was Maloney!" George replies. "He wasn't driving!" Blanche spits back. "He screwed up the car and broke the brakes," George says, trying to calm her. "Do you think it's a coincidence, Blanche?" They stumble toward the highway to thumb a ride, holding each other. Blanche wonders why Maloney would want them dead. George says he doesn't know "but you can bet it has something to do with your mysterious friend, Eddie Shoebridge."



**"Sorry I'm late"**- A green car comes roaring up the road. Blanche and George turn and stick out their thumbs, surprised to see Maloney pulling up. "Hi there," he says in a friendly voice. "Sorry I'm late. What are you two doing standing in the middle of the road?" He offers them a ride, but George turns him down, saying, "We don't ride in hearses." Maloney tries to convince them, but drives off when they won't back down. Blanche and George begin walking down the road toward town, while up the hill, Maloney pulls a U-turn. Stressful music plays while the car begins rolling back downhill. Blanche and George are stunned to see the green car veer into the wrong lane and speed up toward them. George grabs Blanche's hand and tugs her away, leading her toward the cliff's edge. Another car comes around the corner, and George thinks quickly, turning hard to the right and diving into the hill beside the road. Maloney is right on their heels, but he's forced to whip to the left to dodge the new car and goes careening off the cliff. He screams all the way down. The kids in the car speed away, unwilling to face punishment for the accident. Blanche and George begin their long walk home once more.



**Bad news** - A woman with a large hat enters Arthur's jewelry store. Having heard the door chime, Arthur emerges from his office, grinning and ready to make a sale. His smile fades when he recognizes Fran, and he moves to greet her. They discuss bracelets in stock and go through the motions of making a sale, all the while whispering to each other about the bishop. The authorities have located the stone they demanded as ransom. "Now for the bad news," Fran says, sliding a newspaper to Arthur and pointing out a smaller headline: Man Dies in Freak Highway Accident. Maloney's name is clear just below. Arthur tries to hold back a laugh, but can't. "Incompetent bastard. He blew it. Now we'll have to eliminate these two ourselves." The idea of committing a murder leads to Fran causing a scene when she jumps up and



**Mrs. Maloney**- Many people gather around a grave while a priest leads a graveside service. "Yes, Joseph Maloney, you were a generous man," he says while the camera moves away from the scene, finding George scraping out his pipe a few rows of graves away. He makes eye contact with Mrs. Maloney, who mimes crying to slip away from the mourners. George parallels her through the graveyard until they nearly collide beside the Shoebridge family plot. Mrs. Maloney calls George a killer, but George tells her Mr. Maloney was trying to kill him. "You started it all," she spits, "coming here and messing in things that were none of your business." She tries to walk away, but George grabs her arm, demanding to know why Maloney was willing to kill to keep them from looking for Eddie Shoebridge. After some goading and threats of going to the police about Mr. Maloney's attempted murder, Mrs. Maloney tells George that Eddie Shoebridge lives in the city under the name Arthur Adamson.



**Call from work** - Sometime later, George sits in Blanche's kitchen arguing with his boss over the phone. Blanche wants him to take time off work, but his boss won't let him, demanding that he work the late shift. Blanche is mad that he didn't put up more of a fight, but George is resigned: If he misses any more work, he'll lose his cab and his position at the taxi service. "Lumley, you're thick!" Blanche cries. "You won't have to drive a cab if we can get this thing over and done with and collect the money." "If, darling, if," George replies, buttoning his freshly-laundered uniform shirt. "You're always giving me ifs. I can't eat ifs, and neither can you while Julia Rainbird and you are waltzing around in the great beyond." Blanche says she needs his help, but George is firm in his decision, telling her they'll find Arthur Adamson tomorrow when he doesn't have a shift. "Now would be much better," says Blanche. "A bird in the hand..."



**Solo investigation** - Unable to convince George to skip work, Blanche threatens to find Adamson on her own. "You got no idea what kind of trouble you could get into," George replies, saying he promises to help tomorrow after some rest. Energetic music plays while a montage of Blanche hunting down Arthur Adamson plays out on screen. One by one, she marks names off her list: all the men are too young or too old. Eventually, she finds her way to Adamson's Jewelers. She enters and speaks to Arthur's assistant. She confirms that *this* A. Adamson is likely the man she's looking for based on his age. After a bit of convincing, the assistant agrees to take a message for her boss. After writing the message, Blanche is able to drag an address out of the assistant, saying she'll leave the note for Arthur there as it's urgent. Blanche leaves, triumphant, the assistant locking up after she leaves.



**Message for George-** Dramatic music plays while Blanche pulls up to an awning outside a fancy hotel. The doorman greets her, calling her “Blanche, baby.” Blanche asks if he’s seen George, and the doorman tells her he’s taking a large group of people out to the river valley. “Oh, dear,” she replies. “That could take all night. Would you give him a message for me?” The doorman agrees and repeats what she says to help himself remember. “Just tell him I found him. He lives at 1001 Franklin... And that’s where I’m going now.” She thanks the doorman and drives off, overjoyed to have finally tracked down her key to



**Basement-** Fran sits in the bedroom of Arthur’s house, preparing her tall, blonde persona. “You wanna go over the new pickup spot once again?” Arthur asks, walking into the room. “I know it by heart,” she replies. Arthur asks if she’s alright, noting her nerves. “I will be,” she says tightly. With their nine-thirty deadline coming up, they move down to the basement and prepare to drug and move the bishop. “Have you your vestments on?” Arthur asks through the intercom, and the bishop says he is ready. They turn off all the lights and enter the room, plunging a syringe into the bishop’s arm and knocking him out. Fran takes the needle from Arthur, and they begin to move the unconscious man.



**Doorbell-** Suddenly, the doorbell rings. “We mustn’t be late,” Arthur says to Fran. “See who it is and be careful.” Fran trots upstairs, leaving Arthur to move the bishop on his own. She looks out the peephole to see Blanche ringing the doorbell. Arthur emerges from the basement, apparently done with his work, and Fran scrambles quietly over to him, saying, “It’s that woman, Blanche Tyler!” Fran is near panic, unsure of what to do, but Arthur insists they just pretend no one is home. This seems to work, as Blanche eventually gives up, leaving the note in the crack of the door and walking away. Fran and Arthur scramble back down to the basement, anxious to get their kidnapping plot over and done with.



**Chance encounter-** Walking away from Arthur’s front door, Blanche makes her way up the street to where her Mustang rests. Just then, Fran opens the garage door. Blanche looks in, surprised to see them. “Mr. Adamson?” she asks tentatively, and Arthur exits the car. Blanche trots forward and introduces herself, babbling in a friendly voice about how excited she is to finally meet him. He asks her to move her car, as they’re late for an appointment, but Blanche wants to tell him the news first, calling him ‘Shoebridge.’ Arthur then talks about how he knows that she and George have been tracking him. Taking his aggressive tone in stride, Blanche explains that Mrs. Rainbird wants to make him the heir to her fortune. Arthur shifts his tone, but Fran becomes nervous when she notices part of the bishop’s vestment sticking out from the car door. She moves to open the door and tuck the cloth inside, but in doing so, the bishop tumbles part-way out of the car right in front of Blanche.



**“A little rest”**- Thinking quickly, Arthur closes the garage door, trapping Blanche. She begs and pleads with Arthur, saying she promises not to say anything to anyone about the kidnapping. “It looks like Miss Tyler needs some rest,” Arthur says menacingly. Fran unwillingly gives him a syringe filled with ketamine, and Blanche struggles against him, getting stabbed several times before he can finally inject her. Fran and Arthur move quickly, stowing the unconscious Blanche in the secret basement room before driving to



**Following Blanche**- George pulls up to Arthur’s address and finds Blanches car parked on the street. He goes to ring the bell and finds Blanche’s note. He puts the note in his pocket and walks to her car. George is unsettled to find the keys in the ignition. He then walks to Arthur’s garage door and tries to open it. Despite his best efforts, it remains tightly shut. Looking into a nearby alley, George finds a basement window and manages to jimmy it open with his pocket knife. With a quiet grunt, he clammers through the window and into Arthur’s basement. Across town, Arthur and Fran make their way home.



**In Arthur's house-** Suspenseful music plays while George frantically but quietly looks for Blanche. In the garage, he is frightened to find Blanche's purse covered in blood. He puts it back down just where he found it before moving back upstairs and looking around, speaking Blanche's name softly. Unable to find her on the main floor, he creeps up the stairs. Just as he reaches the top, the garage door begins to open below. "If I'm talking too much," Arthur says as he reaches earshot, "perhaps it's because you're not talking at all." "It's my stomach, Arthur," Fran replies. "Murder doesn't agree with it." "If Joe Maloney had been more efficient," Arthur replies, "they'd both be dead by now."



**Staged suicide-** George listens closely from the upstairs landing as Fran speaks up from the kitchen: "You can have my share, Arthur. You can keep both the diamonds all to yourself if you'll just end it." "I'll tell you what I'll do," Arthur says. "If you help me carry Sleeping Beauty up out of the cellar and load her into the car, and drive her out to some deserted road where a suicide can take place, I promise you we'll talk this thing over." "And what about the cab driver?" Fran asks. Arthur promises to "take care of it" before walking downstairs. George follows after taking off his shoes. He then watches while Arthur opens up the secret room before jogging to the shadows to hide. Arthur walks back upstairs, taking a coil of hose with him. Arthur enters the secret room and finds Blanche feigning unconsciousness. In the garage, Arthur explains to Fran that he'll use Blanche's car to stage a suicide by leaving her unconscious in the car while the hose carries the exhaust into the cabin. He places the hose in the Mustang and returns inside, taking Fran to the secret room to help him carry Blanche out.



**Tables Turned-** Suddenly, Blanche explodes out of the bed, knocking Arthur over and running through the door screaming George's name. He waits behind the door, slamming it shut before Fran or Arthur can react. "Got 'em," George says triumphantly, holding the key. The two discuss what to do about their kidnapers. "You know how much that reward would be if we could find the diamonds," George says, holding Blanche. Ethereal music begins to play and Blanche goes into a trance-like state, wandering up the stairs. George follows her, asking what's wrong. Blanche doesn't answer. She makes her way to the stairs on the main floor and, with her eyes closed, reaches out to point at the diamond hidden in the chandelier. "Blanche!" George shouts. "You did it! You are psychic!" With that, he jogs to the phone in the parlor and dials the police. Blanche sits down on the stairs before turning to the camera and winking.

