

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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***The Trouble with Harry* (1955)**

Alfred Hitchcock

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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 Based on a Jack Trevor Story novel of the same name, *The Trouble with Harry* is one of Hitchcock's rare forays into comedy. In an attempt to catch autumn in full swing, primary shooting in Craftsbury, Vermont began in late September 1954. To the despair of the production company, little foliage remained on the trees, and it was dropping quickly. Leaves were glued back onto the trees for several scenes to remedy this problem. Difficulties like this plagued the entire production. For many scenes, a local high school gym was converted into a makeshift sound stage due to persistent rain. During filming in the gym, one of the massive technicolor cameras fell, nearly crushing Hitchcock.

Background Sam Marlowe's paintings in the film were made by John Ferren, a notable expressionist artist. Ferren even went so far as to instruct the actor playing Sam on the painting techniques he would be using on screen. Reviewers were surprisingly pleased with this strange, dark comedy: Even the harshest reviews had something positive to say. Despite this, *The Trouble with Harry* only earned \$3.5 million at the box office, showing a lack of popularity among viewers compared to Hitchcock's recently released *Rear Window* and *To Catch a Thief*. At the time of writing, *The Trouble with Harry* has a 74 on Metacritic and an 88% on Rotten Tomatoes. Just like reviews after its premiere, there are few negative reviews, but the acting and the lack of wit in the script remain common complaints.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

The Trouble with Harry may be Hitchcock's strangest film. Even though it is a dark, romantic comedy, the director's thriller styling remains prominent. Using interesting perspectives and dramatic staging, many moments through the film leave the viewer biting their nails only to leave them chuckling or feeling deflated when the comedic elements interrupt the tension. The stilted performances of the film's actors make *The Trouble with Harry* feel more like a stage play than a comedy film. Issues with filming and required some quick thinking and the use of small, simple, hastily constructed sets. This shows in the repeated use of the hilltop where the corpse sits: Originally, these scenes would have taken place in the open woods, but heavy rain changed those plans.

SYNOPSIS

On an idyllic Vermont hillside, the residents of the tiny village of Highwater stumble upon a macabre surprise: A man's corpse. The first to find the body is a young boy, Arnie, who runs home to tell his mother. The next is Captain Wiles, an amateur hunter, who assumes he's accidentally shot the man. When he attempts to hide the body, a local spinster, Miss Gravely, stumbles upon him. She promises not to tell anyone, invites him to an afternoon date, and leaves. Before Captain Wiles can move the body again, Arnie runs back up the hill with his mother, Jennifer, who seems to know the corpse, calling him

'Harry.' The mother and child leave, and a drifter appears, stealing Harry's shoes before leaving. When the Captain tries to hide the corpse yet again, another person, the town's doctor, stumbles up the hills, so engrossed in a poetry book that he doesn't seem to notice the dead man. Exhausted by the repeated stress of nearly being discovered, the Captain falls asleep behind a tree.

Back in town, the local painter, Sam Marlowe, travels to Wiggs' Emporium to present the owner, Mrs. Wiggs, his newest painting to display for sale. There, Miss Gravely enters and buys a 'man-sized' coffee cup for her date that afternoon. Hearing about her romantic pursuits, Marlowe (comically) does her hair and makeup in an attempt to make her look a bit younger. Later that day, Marlowe stumbles upon the body and sketches the dead man. The Captain wakes up and confronts Marlowe, who agrees to help him bury the body if Mrs. Rogers doesn't want to claim her husband. The painter meets with the young mother, who says she doesn't care what happens to Harry, seeds of romance planted between the two as they discuss Jennifer's complicated relationship with the dead man. Around the same time, Miss Gravely confesses that she thinks she killed Harry, driving the Captain to bury Harry with Marlowe later that evening.

Dark comedy ensues when a series of events arises causing the four villagers to repeatedly exhume and rebury Harry until Marlowe proposes to Jennifer: They need to prove that Harry has died to speed along the divorce process. They take Harry's body to Jennifer's house to clean the grave dirt from his body and clothes when the local sheriff's deputy comes to confront Marlowe about his sketch of Harry's face. The drifter was brought into custody and recognized the pastel sketch as the man he stole the fancy shoes from. Marlowe quickly changes the sketch, destroying the evidence, while the Captain steals Harry's shoes from the deputy's car. The four decide to put Harry back on the hill, having Arnie discover him just as he did the day before.

CHARACTERS

Capt. Albert Wiles – A former captain who wishes to become a hunter

Sam Marlowe – An expressionist painter living in the Vermont countryside

Jennifer Rogers – A young, single mother

Miss Ivy Gravely – An older spinster, who is interested in Capt. Wiles

Mrs. Wiggs – The woman who owns and runs the small town's store and post office.

Arnie Rogers – Jennifer's son

Deputy Sheriff Calvin Wiggs – Local police officer and Mrs. Wigg's son

Harry Worp – The dead man

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Capt. Albert Wiles

Captain Wiles is a former tugboat captain and amateur hunter living in the hills of Vermont. He sees the wound on Harry's head and believes that he killed the man, trying to hide the body. When he learns that this isn't true, he does everything he can to keep the women involved from facing legal repercussions.

Trusting The Captain shows his trusting side at many points in the film. First, he believes Miss Gravely when she says she won't tell anyone, and is pleasantly shocked at the ease with which she agrees to silence. Next, he announces himself to Marlowe when he finds the painter sketching the dead man's face. He could have remained behind the tree, but instead, he makes his presence known and tries to explain the situation. In this case, his trust pays off, as the nonconformist Marlowe agrees to help him hide the body, so long as Mrs. Rogers doesn't want to claim it. The Captain's trust expands through the film, growing to include both Jennifer and Miss Gravely as it becomes clear they played key roles in Harry's death. Captain Wiles takes many risks to try and keep them from coming to legal harm.

Lazy While many moments in the film show the Captain hard at work trying to cover up Harry's death, there are almost as many moments when we see the old man's lazy side. The first occurs when the

Captain falls asleep behind the tree after the doctor wanders away: Despite the stress of the situation, the old man finds himself too tired and decides to take a nap before moving Harry. The next shows him trying to make Marlowe do the bulk of the work when digging Harry's grave. Marlowe reminds him of the necessity for speed, and Captain Wiles relents, but we see him sometime later smoking his pipe while Miss Gravely exhumes Harry's corpse. Similarly, if a bit more sympathetically, the Captain sleeps in a rocking chair at Jennifer's house while the others work busily at washing Harry's clothes.

Sam Marlowe

Marlowe is a painter trying to make his name with his expressionist landscapes. He is a bit of an oddball (as stereotypical artists tend to be), rejecting many societal norms and social standards. He falls in love with Jennifer, agreeing to be a father to Arnie toward the film's end.

Unconventional Marlowe is a noted nonconformist. He shows this often, sometimes in simple actions like being the only villager to call Mrs. Wiggs 'Wiggy,' and other times in more overt ways like stating outright his distaste for the police to Deputy Wiggs. It also shows in his art. At the time, expressionism was taking the art world by storm, but many traditional artists and people in general thought it was ugly, childish, or stupid. His lack of convention shows in his requested payment from the millionaire for his paintings: instead of asking for a sack of cash, he asks for the delivery of necessities to his friends in the village, asking for nothing but a double bed for himself.

Artistic Marlowe has a compulsion to look at things from an artistic angle. When he's not sarcastic, he is typically overanalyzing the artistic composition of people and things around him. We see this first when he sizes up Miss Gravely as if she were a sculpture instead of a woman, describing her looks in artistic terms. It shows again when we see him compelled to sketch Henry's dead face, a clue that the deputy almost successfully uses to tie him to Harry's death and disappearance. It's Marlowe's artistic nature that allows Jennifer to trust him enough to talk about Harry, an action that leads to their deep infatuation and marriage.

Jennifer Rogers

Jennifer, like Marlowe, is a bit of an oddball. She doesn't want to be held down by societal views of marriage and women, and she is quick to fall madly in love with Marlowe because of his strange, refreshing attitude. She is Arnie's mother and Harry's estranged wife.

Spontaneous Jennifer has a penchant for the spontaneous. She uses this as a tool to raise Arnie, often to manipulate her son away from potentially incriminating situations, such as her telling him Harry is just in a 'deep sleep' and offering her son lemonade. Jennifer does the same thing to the deputy and Dr. Greenbow, utilizing her wit and penchant for spontaneity to explain away seemingly strange behavior and to keep the deputy from seeing her former husband's dead body. The only time we see Jennifer act in a non-spontaneous manner is when she asks for time to decide whether to accept Marlowe's marriage proposal. Even then, she doesn't take much time to say yes, only the length of a walk from town to her house. Many women take much longer to make such a decision, waiting days or even months before giving their answer.

Tolerant Jennifer tolerates a lot without question. Unlike many mothers of the same period, Jennifer simply accepts and adapts to her son's strange perception of time instead of using punitive measures to make him more normal. This is the same period that saw left-handed children forced to adopt right-handed practices in schools as a matter of course. She also tolerates Marlowe's and the others' discussion of Harry's death and probing into her past easily, never complaining and almost always aiding in helping them to understand their strained relationship.

Miss Ivy Gravely

Miss Gravely is the most conservative member of the strange little group. She finds herself at odds morally with the cover-up of Harry's death, but she also sees the need for it to keep the police and media from prying into her life.

Cautious Miss Gravely takes things slow. She is the opposite of Jennifer, never acting spontaneously outside of striking Harry in self-defense. Her methodical approach to covering up the death almost works, as the Captain believes that he accidentally killed Harry. With an abundance of caution, however, she eventually suggests allowing the authorities to discover Harry, believing that a worse outcome would happen if someone came searching for the missing man. She also shows her cautious side when she states that Harry's body and clothes need to be cleaned toward the film's end, hoping to help Jennifer marry Marlowe more quickly. Because of Miss Gravely's cautious nature, it seems the villagers get away with their strange handling of Harry's body and subsequent restaging of the original scene.

Conservative Miss Gravely is notably conservative in her social mannerisms and beliefs. She finds her asking the Captain out as a subtle breach of this behavior, apologizing for it later in the day when she confesses her part in Harry's death to her new beau. The Captain is the person who tells us most about Miss Gravely's old-fashioned way of acting, calling her a 'high-class lady' and talking about her meek, traditionally gendered mannerisms that she rarely deviates from. It seems these mannerisms have held her back from finding love, but the Captain respects them, finding himself falling in love with her quickly after their date and time spent covering up Harry's death together.

THEMES

Crime An ever-present theme of *The Trouble with Harry* is crime. Although everything done by the villagers to cover up Harry's death is a crime, most of these offenses are fairly minor, ranging from evidence tampering to lying to a police officer. It's possible that Jennifer's or Miss Gravely's actions resulted in Harry's death: while the doctor finds Harry's death to be from either a heart attack or a stroke, both of these may have been the secondary effect of repeated blows to his head causing clotting and blocking his arteries. In Miss Gravely's case, her actions can be interpreted as self-defense, but in Jennifer's case, she seems to have struck Harry out of anger when he refused to leave her porch, something that could get her a second- or third-degree murder charge. Beyond the general evidence tampering, the constant moving of Harry's corpse could be interpreted as mishandling a corpse and impeding a police investigation, misdemeanor offenses. At the film's end, the four villagers commit blatant evidence tampering, cleaning Harry's clothes and body to hide the fact that he had been buried, re-drawing the sketch of Harry's dead face, and stealing Harry's shoes from the deputy's car. Finally, they place Harry's cleaned body back at the place where he was first discovered. These acts are played as comical, but had this been one of Hitchcock's thrillers, the film easily could have ended in a massive court case.

Motherhood This is a small theme that appears frequently when Jennifer interacts with her son, Arnie. She explains that Arnie was Harry's younger brother's son, her first husband, and a man she loved deeply. When he died, she attempted to make herself attracted to Harry in an attempt to assure her son would have a father to help raise him. Unable to reconcile her distaste for Harry, especially his reliance on horoscopes, she ran away to raise Arnie by herself. This story is especially unique for the time, as single motherhood was still highly stigmatized in American society in the 1950s. Jennifer not only succeeds in raising Arnie, but she seems well-suited to raising the strange young boy who exhibits quirky traits like calling today 'yesterday' and the other confusing ways that he perceives the world. While these traits are often used for comic effect, it could also be interpreted as the boy being neurodivergent, another highly stigmatized issue at mid-century.

Love and Marriage Love and Marriage are a constant discussion in this strange and dark romantic comedy. Both Miss Gravely and Jennifer are unlucky in love, looking for a fresh start with the Captain and Marlowe, respectively. Whereas Miss Gravely is incredibly conservative in her approach to courtship, Jennifer is a bit of a rebel, quickly falling for Marlowe and his caustic wit. They agree to have a 'free' marriage, Marlowe promising not to be the domineering type as he loves Jennifer too much to cage her.

The final crimes in the film are committed to speed along Jennifer and Marlowe's marriage, otherwise the couple would have to wait seven years before a court could annul Harry's marriage to Jennifer.

Solidarity Solidarity emerges as a theme early in the film. When Miss Gravelly sees Captain Wiles moving the body, she doesn't stop him and agrees not to tell anyone. While she does allow him to think he's committed the killing, she does tell him later how she believes she killed Harry in self-defense. Jennifer shows herself to be a joiner at the film's end when she argues that Harry should stay buried to keep Miss Gravelly from being investigated by the police, preserving her privacy and social standing. It's decided, however, that to speed along the marriage of Marlowe and Jennifer, Harry needs to be found dead so Jennifer can easily remarry, a final, macabre act of solidarity between the four.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In what ways does *The Trouble with Harry* resemble other Hitchcock films? In what ways does it differ?

What plot devices typical of Hitchcock's thrillers are used in this dark comedy?

How are societal norms broken throughout the film? List as many examples as possible.

How are societal norms upheld throughout the film? List as many examples as possible.

In today's context, does the film's comedy stand the test of time in your opinion?

SCENES

Autumn- A bell tolls in the tower of a small-town church. The shot fades in and out of several pastoral scenes lit up bright orange, yellow, and red by the changing leaves before it finds a lone figure wandering along a hillside. Drawing closer, we can see it's a young boy playing soldier. He goes deeper into the woods when the gentle music is interrupted by the snap of a gunshot. The boy falls to his belly before two more shots ring out. The boy gets up and walks toward the source of the gunshots, barely overhearing a man say, "Okay, I know how to handle your type!" Dramatic brass music blares when the boy discovers a well-dressed man lying on his back in the middle of a hilltop clearing. He looks at the corpse for a minute before running back down the hill, the camera focused on the bottom of the dead man's feet.



Old faithful- Somewhere nearby, an elderly man talks to his hunting rifle while cleaning the barrel. "Well, old faithful," he says as if talking to a dog or child, "that's your shooting for the day. If we haven't rung up at least two rabbits, we deserve to go home empty-handed." He stands, wandering through the woods back toward the town, the camera following his path over the crunching leaves. The old man stops, stooping to pick up a beer can with a bullet hole in it. He praises his aim, wishing the can was a rabbit instead. A nearby sign reads, "No Shooting, Trapping, or Trespassing." It, too, has a bullet hole the man claims credit for before continuing. Soon thereafter, the old man stumbles upon the body of the dead man, a look of horror crossing over his face.



Mr. Worp- Noticing the wound on the dead man's head, the old man blames himself for the death, thinking one of his shots into the brush earlier must have struck the killing blow. "Mother always said I'd come to a bad end," the man says to himself, looking around. He scolds the corpse, lowering his gun gently to the ground before crouching and rifling through the man's pockets for a wallet. Inside the wallet, the man finds the corpse's ID card: "Mr. Harry Worp, 87 Maple Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts," the old man reads. "Well, Worp, you're a long way from home. By the looks of it, you won't get back for Christmas." He begins dragging the body into the woods, stopping in his tracks when someone speaks his name. "Captain Wiles?" A woman asks, trying to keep a shocked expression from overtaking her face. "What seems to be the trouble, Captain?"



Hiding an accident- “What you might call an unavoidable accident,” Captain Wiles stammers, still holding the dead man’s leg. “He’s dead,” he says, and the woman agrees, prodding the corpse with her shoe and getting no response. They ask each other if they know him, but neither does. The woman asks what he plans to do with the corpse, and the Captain says he’s going to hide it. “Are you never going to inform the police, Captain?” she asks. “No,” he says emphatically. “Forget you saw me, Miss Gravely. Chase it out of your mind... It was an accident.” He clutches Miss Gravely’s arm, and she pushes it off before saying that she trusts his judgment. The Captain gets distracted telling a sea tale, Miss Gravely looking uncomfortably at the corpse the whole time. “If I were going to hide an accident,” she interrupts, “I shouldn’t delay.” The Captain thanks her for her suspension of judgment and show of kindness, and she invites him over later that evening for coffee and muffins, “And perhaps a touch of elderberry wine.” “I’ll be there with a clean shirt and a hungry face,” the Captain replies with a grin before they part. With Miss Gravely gone, the Captain turns back to his grim task. Just as he begins to pull the corpse towards the nearby thicket, a young boy shouts out, “There, Mommy!”



“Here he is, Mommy!”- The Captain drops the corpse’s legs and grabs his gun before scrambling to a hiding place behind a dead tree. Peeking around the dead trunk, the Captain watches the young boy from before returning to the scene with his mother. “Don’t touch it, Arnie!” the woman says, grabbing her son before he can put his hands on the dead man. Giving the corpse a better look, she recognizes the corpse: “Harry... Thank Providence, the last of Harry.” The mother and her son have a quick discussion about the man’s condition, the mother saying the man is in “a deep, wonderful sleep.” Unwilling to keep standing by the corpse and hopeful to distract her son, the mother takes the boy back home for a glass of lemonade.



More visitors- The Captain waits for them to go and begins to emerge from his hiding place when a man engrossed in a poetry book stumbles into view. “Couldn’t have had more people here if I’d sold tickets,” the Captain murmurs. Back out of sight, the Captain watches the man trip over Harry’s corpse and apologize to it without noticing anything out of the ordinary. Just as he moves to exit his hiding spot, a drifter appears and eyes the corpse. He sits down at the body’s feet, comparing shoe sizes and looking delighted. He removes Harry’s shoes and puts them on his feet before walking away.



Highwater- Branches bursting with bright orange leaves grace the screen while a man sings a song in the distance. The camera jumps around, finding Miss Gravely exiting her home, the drifter enjoying his new shoes, the mother and Arnie on the porch of their home, and Captain Wiles sleeping in his hiding spot. Finally, the camera rests on Harry's stocking-footed corpse, his bright blue and red socks sitting in the shot's foreground. The singing man crosses a field with a painting under his arm. He soon finds a woman working at a roadside stand outside 'Wiggs' Emporium.' The sign nearby reads "Highwater Post Office." The woman works at the stand, rearranging apple products, such as cider, and brash expressionist paintings.



Mr. Marlowe- The woman greets the man by name while he examines the other paintings at the booth: "Hello, Mr. Marlowe." "Wiggy... Wiggy," Marlowe replies. "You haven't sold my paintings." "So few cars," she responds. "Guess the cider takes their attention." Mrs. Wiggs asks to see his newest painting, but the painter refuses: "What good would it do to show it to you? You don't deserve to see it. How am I going to eat?" They talk about the position of the stand for a moment before Marlowe asks to buy some cigarettes. The camera finds another man nearby working on a Ford Model T. Marlowe asks Mrs. Wiggs what her son does with the cars, and she says he sells them. His pay with the Sheriff's office isn't enough to make ends meet, it seems.



"Shouldn't be any shooting"- Marlowe and Mrs. Wiggs discuss neighbors and his shopping list before entering the general store. Deputy Wiggs calls to Marlowe before they enter, and the painter crosses to speak with him: "Hi, Colin." "Did you hear any shootin'?" Deputy Wiggs asks, but Marlowe says he hasn't. "Well I did," Wiggs says, "And there shouldn't be any shooting around here. It's posted land." "No one around here could hit a freight car with a cannon," Marlowe says sardonically. "All the same," the deputy replies, "the law's the law." Before driving away, he says he'll figure out who has been shooting and levy a fine. "If I can do anything to make it harder for you, let me know," Marlowe says as the Model T rumbles away.



Encouragement- A fancy Chrysler rolls to a stop in front of the roadside stand and the driver exits the car to open the door for a rich-looking man who looks over Marlowe's paintings with great interest. Inside the store, Mrs. Wiggs gathers the items on Marlowe's shopping list when the bell on the door rings. Mrs. Gravely enters, asking if Deputy Wiggs is around, but she's quickly distracted by Marlowe's new painting. She starts praising his artistic abilities and singing voice between Marlowe's sarcastic comments. "I just think people need encouragement sometimes," Mrs. Gravely concludes before the conversation moves to selling Mr. Marlowe's paintings. Mrs. Wiggs states outright that the paintings just don't sell before giving Marlowe a total for his bag of groceries. The painter pats his pockets to show his lack of funds, Mrs. Wiggs saying she'll keep a tab until he manages to sell some paintings. Outside, the rich man eyes the paintings intently, looking around for assistance in buying one.



Haircut- Inside the general store, Miss Gravely looks at a large mug, entranced. She then looks to Mr. Marlowe, asking him to hold the cup and then asking his opinion on its size. "What's the finger size got to do with it?" Marlowe asks, finding Miss Gravely's dreamy demeanor strange. "I wanted to be certain it would fit a man," Miss Gravely replies before telling the others about her upcoming date with the Captain. While ringing up Miss Gravely's purchase, Mrs. Wiggs notices the rich man looking at the stand outside. Miss Gravely asks Marlowe how old she looks, and Marlowe begins evaluating her like a piece of art, concluding that a little makeup and a haircut would make her look at least ten years younger. Mrs. Wiggs emerges from behind the counter to go serve the man by the stand outside when Marlowe places his hand on her chest, stopping her. "We're going to cut her hair," he says, pointing emphatically at Miss Gravely. He rushes to the stand where Mrs. Wiggs said she left her scissors, turning on his heel and ignoring the rich man who gets back in his car and drives away.



Sketch- Somewhere in the hills surrounding Highwater, Marlowe hikes along with a large sketch pad under his arm. Looking out across the vista, he sits and opens the pad across his knee, using pastels to sketch out the scene for a future painting. After a few glances, he notices a pair of feet sticking out from behind a bush clad in bright blue and red socks. Curious, Marlowe approaches. "Hey!" he says to Harry's corpse. "Would you mind getting out of my picture?" The camera glances at The Captain still asleep in his hiding spot. When he doesn't get a response, Marlowe pokes the body with his foot and then checks for a pulse. He begins running back to town, but he thinks better of it. Suspenseful music plays while the painter considers his options. Dropping to one knee, he quickly sketches the dead man's face, finding macabre inspiration in his discovery. Behind the tree, The Captain finally stirs.



Destiny- Seeing Mr. Marlowe intently sketching the body, The Captain mutters to himself, "Next thing you know, they'll be televising the whole thing!" He creeps up behind the painter before making a nervous noise to announce himself. Marlowe looks him up and down, glancing from the gun to the wound in the man's head before asking, "Is this your body, little man?" The Captain begs for mercy, saying it was an accident. To Captain Wiles' surprise, Marlowe accepts what he says without protest, sharing his philosophy instead: "In a way, you should be grateful that you were able to do your share in accomplishing the destiny of a fellow being." The Captain then convinces Marlowe to help him move the corpse and cover up the death. Hearing that a young boy returned with his mother, Marlowe identifies them as Jennifer and Artie Rogers. Hoping to get closer to Jennifer, he agrees to help The Captain bury the body, but only if Mrs. Rogers says she doesn't care what happens to the corpse.



Rabbit for a frog- Sometime later, Mr. Marlowe walks across a road and up to Mrs. Roger's house. "Good afternoon," Jennifer says cheerfully. "You're the most wonderful, beautiful thing I've ever seen," Marlowe replies. "I'd like to paint you." "Some other time, Mr. Marlowe," she responds politely, inviting him to sit on the porch. When she tries to enter the house to get some lemonade, Arnie comes rushing out with a dead rabbit slung over his shoulder. Seeing the bag in Mr. Marlowe's hand, Arnie asks to see what's inside: it's a frog. After some friendly banter, Marlowe agrees to trade the rabbit for the frog. Jennifer takes it inside and Arnie and Marlowe have a conversation about Arnie's confusing perception of time before Jennifer returns with the lemonade. Arnie, having already had his fill of lemonade, asks to 'borrow' the dead rabbit, hoping he can trade it for something else.



The dead man- With the boy gone, Jennifer and Marlowe begin talking about "the man up on the path." "Oh him," Jennifer begins with a chuckle, "that's my husband." "Your husband's dead then?" Marlowe asks politely and Jennifer nods. "Where'd Arnie get the rabbit?" "He found it," Jennifer says. "I think Captain Wiles shot it." Marlowe asks to hear more about Jennifer's life, saying he doesn't know what to do with Harry's body. "You can stuff him for all I care," Jennifer says with a scoff. "What did he do to you, besides marry you?" Marlowe then asks. "Nobody would understand..." Jennifer begins, "but you've got an artistic mind." She says that she was in love with Harry's brother many years before and that after he died Harry stepped in, wanting to feel noble about caring for his younger brother's wife and child.



Terrible truth- Jennifer continues telling her story, describing her second wedding. On their wedding night, Harry decided not to consummate because of his horoscope reading in the newspaper. "I left him on the spot and went home to Mother's," Jennifer concludes. "What a poignant story," Marlowe says appreciatively. "I knew you'd understand," Jennifer says happily. She explains that after Arnie was born, she moved to Vermont and changed her name, hoping Harry wouldn't find her. But he did, and when he wouldn't leave earlier that day, Jennifer hit him over the head with a milk bottle. "He went staggering up towards the woods saying he was gonna find his wife and drag her home if it killed him," Jennifer finishes. "Apparently," says Marlowe, "it did."



"Rough side of things"- The scene opens with Captain Wiles crossing a field while pastoral music plays. He's dressed in his best suit. When he approaches Miss Gravely's cottage, she exits onto the porch with a tray of muffins, placing them on a table on the porch. "What a surprise," Miss Gravely says with a smile when The Captain approaches. "But you invited me, Miss Gravely!" he says, removing his hat. "At least that's how I remember it." "Somehow," she replies, "it's still a surprise." After a shot of Arnie skipping along with the rabbit slung over his shoulder, the camera finds The Captain and Miss Gravely sharing a meal and small talk on her porch. The subject keeps turning toward death, making The Captain react. Miss Gravely apologizes for her rudeness, but Captain Wiles laughs it off, saying, "I'm used to living on the rough side of things."



"Two-muffin rabbit"- After a moment, Arnie interrupts them, giving The Captain the rabbit he shot. Miss Gravely offers him a single muffin, and the boy looks displeased. "That was a two-muffin rabbit," he says seriously. Miss Gravely gives him another with a smile and he skips off out of shot. With the boy gone, the topic returns to Harry's corpse. Miss Gravely wants to know what's to be done with it, suggesting it should be thrown in the pond. "And have him pop up like a cork?" The Captain replies, saying they should bury him. After he mentions that folks from the city cut ice from the pond each winter, Miss Gravely makes a sour face. They both agree that burying the body would satisfy them both, so long as no one contacts the authorities.



Grave digging- Marlowe and The Captain walk up the hillside with shovels slung over their shoulders. Somber, suspenseful music follows them. After making sure Harry's body is undisturbed, Marlowe proposes they'd better find a place for the grave, and quickly. The Captain agrees, and after poking around with their shovels and considering the aesthetics of the grave site, Marlowe begins digging. The Captain walks away, beginning to rest, but Marlowe protests, and the older man soon joins him in digging. After some time, they've accumulated a mound of dirt.



"Pop him in"- "Lay down your shovel, Sam," The Captain says. "I'm deadbeat." Marlowe says he's tired too and climbs out of the grave. After catching their breath for a moment, Marlowe suggests that they "pop him in," referring to Harry's corpse. They walk over to the place where Harry lies and pick him up. The scene fades out and then back in on the two patting down the dirt on the grave with the backs of their shovels. Sam stops and asks The Captain if he has any words. "Harry Worp," the older man says quickly, "don't ever show your face around here again." Both pause when they hear the deputy's Model T driving by, then they start working more quickly. The conversation turns to the rabbit Arnie found and Captain Wiles' date with Miss Gravely. Marlowe talks proudly about his 'transformation' of the older woman, but The Captain seems not to have taken notice. He's simply in love.



Rest- Marlowe recommends that they sit down and take a break. The Captain agrees heartily, propping his shovel beside the tree. They begin smoking, Marlowe one of his half cigarettes and The Captain from a pipe, before the two of them count up the bullets that The Captain shot that morning: One in the beer can, one in the sign, and one in the rabbit.... And one for Harry. This realization startles Captain Wiles. "If I shot the rabbit," The Captain says while he starts digging, "I didn't shoot Harry!" Marlowe tries to reason with him, saying it's easier to leave the body underground, but The Captain ignores him. Soon, Marlowe joins in the effort.



“Tangled up in a murder”- Looking at the body in the grave, both men conclude that the wound on Harry’s head isn’t a bullet wound. “That’s what they call a blow with a blunt instrument,” Marlowe says. Both men begin wondering who would have had the motive to kill Harry aside from Jennifer. Marlowe suggests that maybe Miss Gravely had something to do with it, but The Captain won’t hear it. “Miss Gravely is a lady of genteel habits and upbringing,” he says. Unable to reach a conclusion, they “file Harry away once and for all,” burying the body once again.



Captain Wiles’ house- Light romantic music plays before Captain Wiles invites Miss Gravely into his cramped home. The interior is filled practically to the brim with old sailing tack and other scrimshaw décor. The Captain is embarrassed when he realizes his long underwear is still hanging by the stove to dry, and he hastily stuffs it out of view. “It’s funny, you know. Funny how we got to be so friendly in one afternoon,” The Captain says smiling after completing the task. “I knew you weren’t as prim and starched as they made out.” Very politely, Miss Gravely interrupts him, saying she’d like to explain their date and her coming to his house now: “I’m grateful to you for burying my body. The man you thought you killed was the man I hit over the head with the leather heel of my hiking shoe... And with the metal cleat on the end of it.”



The authorities- The Captain is shocked by this confession, listening to the story of what led Miss Gravely to strike Harry. Harry had tried to pull her into the bushes several times and, unable to escape, Miss Gravely struck him with her shoe that had fallen off in the struggle. “Seems to me,” The Captain says when she finishes, “Mrs. Rogers knocked him silly, and you finished him off.” Miss Gravely is confused, and Captain Wiles tells her about Jennifer’s marriage to Harry and that he appeared earlier in the day. “Poor woman,” Miss Gravely says. “I thought she had better taste.” With this new information, Miss Gravely insists that they take Harry to the authorities. The Captain disagrees, but eventually he agrees to fetch his shovel and show Miss Gravely to the grave he and Marlowe dug.



Coffee with Jennifer- Inside Mrs. Rogers' house, Marlowe looks at a porcelain figurine. Jennifer enters the living room with a tray of coffee and its accouterments, placing it on the coffee table. She pours Marlowe a cup, and they begin talking about how they feel comfortable around each other. "There is one thing I feel uncomfortable about," Jennifer says. "Harry. It's Harry." Marlowe assures her that Harry is "ancient history" before a knock comes on the door. Miss Gravely enters, covered in dirt. The Captain follows her with the shovel. Breathlessly, Miss Graves pops into a nearby rocking chair before beginning her confession: "I killed Harry Worp... We're on our way to get Calvin Wiggs and have him call the state police." The Captain says there's no need, and Marlowe agrees, saying it's indecent as they already gave him a proper burial. It's then he realizes that Miss Gravely and The Captain dug him up again.



Closet door- The closet door swings open as if pushed by an invisible force. Jennifer crosses the room to close the door before rejoining the others. Miss Gravely remains insistent that they go to the police, but Marlowe is equally insistent that they cover up the killing. He tells her that the police and media prying will hound her to death. "I can't see why you're all making such a fuss about Harry," Jennifer says when asked her opinion. "If he was buried, I don't see why you had to dig him up. But since you have, I guess you'd better do what you think best." She doesn't care what they do with Harry 'just as long as you don't bring him back to life.' They all agree to go back out and bury Harry. The closet door swings open after they all leave.



A little service- The four gather around Harry's grave in the dark, the men tapping the ground flat while the women scatter leaves to make the grave less noticeable. "How about a little service?" The Captain suggests. Neither man has anything to say, but Jennifer does: "Bye, Harry. I forgive you." On their way back to town, they hear a strange noise. "It's the call of the phantom stagecoach," Miss Gravely says. They calm her down and keep listening when Marlowe recognizes the voice. "It's Wiggy, old Wiggy!" Mrs. Wiggs approaches breathlessly, telling Marlowe that a millionaire has come to buy all of his paintings. They all rush back to the general store.



Millionaire- Inside the general store, the millionaire talks about art critics, but Marlowe doesn't care about the opinions of critics: "Don't think I'm rude, but it doesn't matter to me what an art critic says. See, I know my paintings are good. He doesn't want them, you do. So all that matters is what you think." "I think they're works of genius, and I want to buy them all," the millionaire replies. Marlowe replies with a grin that he's decided not to sell them. He begins asking the townsfolk what they want, and the millionaire begins taking down a list: two boxes of fresh strawberries every month in perpetuity for Jennifer, a "smelly" chemical set for Arnie, a chromium cash register for Mrs. Wiggs, a hope chest "full of hope" for Miss Gravely, a shotgun with plenty of ammunition and a hunting outfit for The Captain, and a whispered secret for Marlowe. The millionaire shakes his hand, saying he'll be back in the morning for the paintings.



Unique proposal- The townsfolk all congratulate Marlowe on his sale. "Did I do the right thing?" Marlowe asks Jennifer. "You did just the right thing, Sam," she replies with a soft smile. "It's important to me that you think so," he says, leaning close to her. "I love you and I want to marry you." Jennifer looks shocked and then thrilled. She asks if he really does want to marry her, saying she values her newfound freedom. "If you married me," Marlowe says, "you'd keep your freedom. I respect freedom. More than that, I love freedom." "This is very sudden, Sam," Jennifer says, asking for some time to think. "Only fair," Marlowe says. "I'll give you until we get back to your house."



New picture- Deputy Wiggs enters the general store and asks what's going on. "Mr. Marlowe sold all his paintings to a millionaire," Mrs. Wiggs says proudly. When he finds out it wasn't cash that Marlowe got but trade, the deputy scoffs: "I always knew they weren't worth the space." He then shows everyone Harry's shoes, saying he found them on a tramp who'd been taken in for vagrancy. The Captain and Miss Graves barely contain their shocked looks of recognition. "Says he found them on a dead man," the deputy continues while he walks to the telephone on the wall. "Took me to where he said he found him, and I didn't see anybody." He calls for the state police, saying he might have a case for them. The others exit, leaving just Mrs. Wiggs and her son. When he's put on hold, he notices Marlowe's sketch of Harry's face, asking his mother who made it. She replies that it's Marlowe's, and the police begin talking to the deputy once again.



Jennifer's decision- Outside Jennifer's house, The Captain stops Marlowe to talk with him in private: "What do you think, him walking in with Harry Worp's shoes in his hand and then that phone call to the police?" "I don't think he's tied us into it yet," Marlowe reassures him before ushering him inside. In the living room, Jennifer says she's made her decision, saying, "I will marry you... I'm very fond of you and I think you'd make a good father for Arnie and for some other reasons, best left unsaid." "Marriage is a comfortable way to spend the winter," The Captain says, beginning to talk about getting their story straight for the police, but he's interrupted by Jennifer and Marlowe kissing passionately. "What a pretty sight," Miss Gravely says, smiling. The Captain looks at her with a similar smile. "Sam," Jennifer whispers, "what did you ask the millionaire for?" He whispers into her ear, and she says, "That's very practical." They both chuckle to each other.



The trouble with Harry- The Captain and Miss Gravely congratulate the new couple and move to leave, but Marlowe interrupts them. "Hold it," he says repeatedly. "Harry... We're not quite finished with him yet... Before we can get married, you're gonna have to prove that you're free. To prove you're free, you'll have to prove that Harry — is dead." It seems there's only one way out of their predicament. Miss Gravely gives The Captain a knowing look, and he begins to panic, saying, "Sammy! I'll do anything to help you, but please, please don't ask me to dig up Harry again!" Jennifer says Harry should stay buried for Miss Gravely's sake: "Murder is murder, no matter how exonerating the circumstances..." After a little more conversation, Miss Gravely insists that they give Harry over to the authorities. The four of them grab the shovels and head back out into the night.



Final exhumation- The men dig in Harry's grave while the women watch over their work. "I've been thinking," says Jennifer, "maybe we could forget the way it really happened. I could tell how Harry visited me and went off in such a rage today and that's all we'd need to know about his being there." Miss Gravely insists that they stick to the truth: if the police blame anyone else, they may not have as good a reason as self-defense. After pulling Harry from the grave, Marlowe remarks that they need to have a good reason why no one reported the body before, and The Captain points out his poor condition. "We'll just clean him up a bit," Jennifer says. While they discuss this possibility, a voice can be heard in the distance. Now, behind the fallen tree nearby, the four gravediggers watch as Dr. Greenbow, the poetry-obsessed man from before comes into view.



Dr. Greenbow- The doctor recites a poem, coming to a sudden halt when he notices the body on the ground. "I think he met with a bit of an accident, Dr. Greenbow," Marlowe says, standing up. The others follow suit. The doctor is so engrossed with Harry's body that he barely seems to notice, simply asking, "Which of you found him?" Jennifer claims Harry as her husband, surprising the doctor. "What happened to him?" Dr. Greenbow asks. Jennifer starts to speak up, but Marlowe interrupts her: "That's what we'd like to know... Could you tell us what caused his death?" Dr. Greenbow says he won't be able to tell in the darkness, asking to meet them at someone's house later to perform an examination. Jennifer offers up her home. The doctor wanders away to collect his bag and the others quickly carry Harry's corpse to Jennifer's house.



Harry's laundry- Everyone but The Captain is hard at work preparing Harry's clothes. The old man rests in a rocking chair, a weary look on his face. Somewhere outside, Deputy Wiggs' Model T comes rumbling down a dark road. Back inside Jennifer's house, Marlowe prepares Harry's suspenders and pants, and Jennifer jokes about how she never did Harry's laundry before now. The Captain smacks his lips, waking up. He looks forward and sees the closet door drift open as if pushed. He shouts, startled, and the others have a little laugh at his fright. "It's nothing to get excited about, Captain," Miss Gravelly says, closing the door. Outside, the Model T rounds a corner. The sound of the car's engine grows louder and louder inside Jennifer's house, and they realize who it is. Outside Jennifer's house, the deputy steps out of his Model T with Marlowe's sketch pad, walking with purpose towards the home.



Bridge- Deputy Wiggs rings the doorbell repeatedly. After a moment, Jennifer finally comes to the door. The deputy asks to come in and speak to Marlowe. Inside, The Captain and Miss Gravelly play a game of bridge while Marlowe watches, leaning on the closet door. Jennifer joins them, picking up a hand. The deputy gets down to brass tacks: "Where were you today, Sam?" "Working as usual," Marlowe says, shrugging. The deputy asks if he was "down by Mansfield Meadows," and Marlowe says "possibly." "Is that where you painted this?" the deputy asks, opening the sketchbook to the page with Harry's face. "I left that portrait with your mother," Marlowe says indignantly. "What right do you have to carry it around with you? It might be damaged." The others try to speak up in Marlowe's defense, but the deputy cuts them off: "Sam, what I wanna know is, where'd you paint it and who is it?"



Art lesson- “First of all, it’s not a painting,” begins Marlowe, “it’s a drawing. Matter of fact, it’s a pastel, and as for the model, just came to me out of the blue.” The deputy doesn’t believe him: The tramp says it’s a drawing of the dead man he stole the shoes from. “I ain’t educated in fancy art,” says Deputy Wiggs, “but I do know the face of a dead man when I see one, and this is it.” Marlowe takes the sketchpad, saying, “Well, Calvin, perhaps I can educate you to “fancy art.”” He begins sketching over the face, explaining what he’s doing. When he finishes, Marlowe has altered the face to be awake, its eyes open. The Deputy is shocked: “Sam, do you know what you just did? You just destroyed legal evidence.” The Deputy then leaves, saying he knows “something funny’s goin’ on around here.” Just as Wiggs is about to reach the door, Arnie bursts in, asking, “What’s he doin’ in our bathtub?” “That’s where frogs belong,” Jennifer says quickly, ushering her son back into the hallway and closing the door.



Doctor’s examination- Dr. Greenbow enters the house and looks around before asking, “Where is he?” The four conspirators exchange glances for a moment before Jennifer speaks up with a smile, saying, “He’s in the bathtub, playing with his frog.” The doctor looks confused before responding, “Oh.” Marlowe leads him away while Jennifer explains that Arnie isn’t feeling well. Outside, the Model T’s horn blows, and the deputy dashes outside to investigate. There, he finds The Captain playing with the horn, scolding him and telling him he can’t afford to buy the car before driving away.



Half the evidence- Marlowe returns, saying he put Arnie to bed and that the doctor seemed suspicious about Harry’s body. The Captain enters the house and begins telling a tale of sailing, but he stops short, admitting that he was a tugboat captain on the East River, nothing more. The others forgive him for telling tall tales before he produces Harry’s shoes, saying he got them from the deputy’s car. “I figured you were handling half the evidence, Sammy, so it was up to me to take care of the rest.” Soon thereafter, Dr. Greenbow enters the living room, asking why Harry is in the bathtub. Marlowe distracts him by asking what the cause of death is: a heart attack or seizure seems to have killed him. The others act with varying degrees of relief.



Explanation- “Will somebody tell me what he’s doing in the bathtub half undressed?” Dr. Greenbow demands. “Frankly,” Jennifer begins, “We didn’t want Calvin Wiggs to see him. “Besides, he was awful dirty after we dug him up... You see, Harry’s been buried and dug up on and off all day long. Finally, he caused so many complications that we decided to clean him up and put him back where we found him. He upset Captain Wiles because the Captain thought he had shot him. The hole in the head. But as it turned out, it wasn’t the Captain. It was the blow he got from the heel of Miss Gravely’s shoe after he attacked her. He dragged her into the bushes thinking it was me. He was dazed, I suppose, after I hit him on the head with the milk bottle. The Captain and Sam buried him first. The Captain was so scared. But then he accounted for all his bullets, so up Harry came. Then Miss Gravely thought her shoe was responsible for it, so — The Captain, rather gallantly, I thought, pushed him back in again. Then he was out and back and I can’t remember why. But anyway, he’s out again now because Sam and I wanna get married.” Stunned, the doctor stumbles from the home, saying, “This is the first nightmare I’ve had in 25 years.”



Tomorrow is yesterday- “He’s kinda strange, isn’t he?” Jennifer says, closing the door after the doctor. They decide to get Harry dressed. “Wouldn’t it be nice if Arnie found him all over again?” Jennifer asks while they work. “Then he’d run home and tell me, and then I’d phone Calvin Wiggs.” “Yes!” says Marlowe. “Arnie could explain quite clearly to Calvin — “That he found Harry tomorrow!” Jennifer finishes. The others are confused, but Jennifer explains: “To Arnie, tomorrow is yesterday.” The next morning, crouching behind the fallen log, the four watch over Harry’s corpse as Arnie comes marching up the hill with his toy gun. The boy stands and stares at the body, Jennifer whispering, “Go on, Arnie. Run home and tell me about it.” After a few more moments, Arnie does just that, turning around and running down the hill. Before they part, The Captain asks Marlowe a question: “What did you ask the millionaire to bring you?” Marlowe whispers to the Captain and the old man can’t help but giggle. “What was it?” Miss Gravely asks. The Captain leans over and whispers, but this time we can hear: “A double bed.” The film ends with text laid over a shot of Harry’s body, the feet in the foreground: “The trouble with Harry is over...” The screen fades to black.

