

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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SHADOW OF A DOUBT (1943)

Alfred Hitchcock

OVERVIEW

Director Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is a household name and perhaps the best-known British filmmaker. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, 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 *Shadow of a Doubt* is a departure for Hitchcock. The psychological thriller aspect is standard for his films, but the story is unusual in that it is played out in the context of a 'typical American family'. The film was popular, however. Critics heaped praise upon it, and it even earned an Academy nomination for 'Best Story.' In a 1964 interview, Hitchcock stated that *Shadow of a Doubt* was his favorite film he'd made, though he would refute this in later interviews. There have been several film and radio adaptations, and it is a major inspiration for Park Chan-wook's 2013 film *Stoker*, showing the film's lasting international influence.

Background Much of the film was shot on location in Santa Rosa, north of San Francisco. The family home featured in the film still stands today at 904 McDonald Avenue, and the train depot has been converted into a visitors' center, but the Carnegie library seen in the film's later scenes was demolished in the 1960s due to structural problems in earthquake-prone California. This was the first film on which composer Dimitri Tiomkin would partner with Hitchcock. They continued collaborating on future projects, such as *Dial M for Murder* and *I Confess*. *Shadow of a Doubt* was selected for preservation in the Library of Congress's National Film Registry in 1991.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

Leitmotif plays a prominent role in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Dimitri Tiomkin would 'quote' Franz Lehár's Merry Widow waltz throughout the film in distorted and disturbing refrains that mirror Charlie's fear and disgust about her uncle as she digs into the secret he is so desperate to hide. Many consider this film to be the first 'true classic' of Hitchcock's films. Review aggregation seems to back that up: *Shadow of a Doubt* has earned a coveted 100% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes. The use of darkness, shadow, and voyeuristic camera placement really shine, making *Shadow of a Doubt* a thriller with near-universal appeal. The setting of the family home and real-life inspiration, which is taken from an infamous 1920s serial killer, 'The Gorilla Man,' make for a unique thriller. Even today, the idea that a beloved family member could be a murderer makes people shudder.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Charlotte ("Charlie") Newton – A girl recently graduated from high school

Charles ("Uncle Charlie") Oakley – Charlie's beloved uncle, who has many aliases

Joseph Newton – Charlie's father

Emma Newton – Charlie's mother and Uncle Charlie's older sister

Jack Graham – An undercover detective tracking a murderer

Fred Saunders – Jack's partner

Herbie Hawkins – The Newtons' nosy neighbor, who shares Mr Newton's love of murder mysteries

Ann Newton – Charlie's younger sister and noted bookworm

Roger Newton – Charlie's younger brother

SYNOPSIS

Charlotte Newton is in a funk. Nothing can seem to cheer her up, and her parents are beginning to worry when she has an idea. She beams while she makes her way to the post office to send a telegram to her Uncle Charlie, hoping he'll come to visit and bring a spark of life to her family's humdrum existence. As if by magic, a telegram from Uncle Charlie awaits at the post office. It says he's on his way to Santa Rosa to stay with the family for a while. The whole family seems elated to see Uncle Charlie after he arrives, but it doesn't take long for Charlie to notice something off about her uncle's behavior: He has a secret. His actions grow more and more suspicious until they drive Charlie to investigate. After finding a copy of the newspaper her uncle defaced at the local library, Charlie begins to suspect he is on the run for murder. A visit from a pair of undercover detectives cements this view and Charlie begins to openly despise her uncle. Uncle Charlie responds by trying to assassinate his niece, first with a sabotaged stair step, and then by locking her in a garage with the car engine running. Charlie survives, and her uncle relents, saying it's time for him to leave. This comes after the news reports that the man suspected of being the 'Merry Widow Murderer' has been killed trying to escape by plane in Maine. Saying goodbye on the train, Uncle Charlie singles out Charlie and tries to push her from the moving train. In the struggle, her uncle falls in front of another train, ending his life. The town of Santa Rosa holds a lavish funeral for the man they've come to admire, while Charlie shares the truth with Detective Jack Graham.

PLOT

Apartment- After gliding along a river and into a derelict industrial area, the camera finds a group of children playing outside a row of brownstone homes. The camera then looks up to a nearby window and seems to move inside. A man lays on a bed in the apartment staring at a cigar he holds just above his chest. A wad of cash lies on his bedside table. Some of it spills onto the floor. A knock comes on the door. "Mr. Spencer," a woman says as she enters the room, "I thought you'd like to know there were two men here. Two men askin' for you." The man speaks with his landlady for a moment before saying he has a headache and asking her to leave, closing his eyes.



Observers- As soon as his landlady leaves, his eyes snap open. He downs the glass of liquid by his bedside before throwing the glass in anger, shattering it. He quickly walks to the window and looks out. Two men loiter on a street corner nearby. "What do you know?" he thinks to himself. "You're bluffing. You've nothing on me." He gathers his belongings and leaves the building, passing right by the men, almost daring them to follow. The two men turn and pursue him but quickly lose him in the confusing back allies. He looks down from a nearby balcony, smoking his cigar.



Santa Rosa- At a bar, the man makes a call to Western Union and dictates a telegram to the person on the other end. The message informs his family in Santa Rosa that he will be stopping by for a visit very soon. He asks the postal worker to sign the telegram 'Uncle Charlie'. The camera passes cars and people on the streets of Santa Rosa before focusing on the window of a family home. Inside, a girl lies on her bed, looking depressed.



Reading- Downstairs in the house in Santa Rosa, a younger bespectacled girl eats an apple while she reads a book. "Ann!" the older girl cries from upstairs. "Answer the telephone!" The younger girl begrudgingly puts down her apple and rises, taking her book with her while she walks toward the phone. Ann reads the whole time as she moves a stool and stands on top in order to pick up the receiver. Ann then greets the caller, her eyes still locked on her book. It's the postmistress calling with a telegram for Ann's mother, but Ann refuses to take it. "I'm trying to keep my mind free of things that don't matter," the young girl says before hanging up.



Home from work- Ann's father enters the home, dropping his hat on a nearby chair. "Where's your mother?" he asks his daughter, Ann. "Out," is the girl's reply, her eyes never leaving her book. She mentions the telegram, blaming her inability to take it down on being unable to find a pencil. Her father supposes that his sister has been in a car accident before kissing his daughter on the cheek. Ann notices the crime stories magazine tucked under her father's arm and comments on his 'questionable' taste in fiction. Her father asks where his other children are: Roger, his youngest, is out, and Charlie, his eldest, is upstairs "thinking," according to Ann.



Telegram- Upstairs, Charlie's father asks her why she's upset. She says the family has 'lost their soul,' and that they don't act like a family should. She seems frustrated that she can't think of a solution while her father tries to comfort her. "All I'm waiting for is a miracle," Charlie says when her mother enters the room. They talk for a moment before they decide to go downstairs, but Charlie has another idea. "I'm going downtown to send a telegram," she reports at the bottom of the stairs. Her mother asks who she's going to message. "What's Uncle Charlie's address?" Charlie asks. She receives the information and leaves. Everyone talks over each other as the family recalls the day's events. When Ann mentions the telegram, her mother calls the post office and hears the message read to her: Uncle Charlie is coming to visit. At the post office, the postmistress hands Charlie the same telegram. She beams in delight as she reads the message and hurries back home.



Mr. Otis- A train blows its whistle while it thunders down the track. In the first-class carriage, a porter checks on the passengers. One man is cloistered behind a curtain. "Mr. Otis?" he says. "We're about to arrive in Santa Rosa." The man behind the curtain responds as if half-asleep. "How you feelin', Mr. Otis?" the porter asks. "A little weak, but pretty well on the whole," comes the reply. At the Santa Rosa train terminal, the Newton family pours out of their car. Charlie, Ann, and their father walk to the station while Roger lags to watch the great steam engine pull to a halt. The porter helps a sick-looking man with a cane from the train carriage and begins unloading his luggage. Looking up, the sick man sees Charlie and adds a spring to his step. Charlie rushes toward him with a grin on her face. "Why, Uncle Charlie," says Charlie, "you're not sick. That was the funniest thing."



Charlie's room- After saying their hellos and packing Uncle Charlie's luggage into the car, the Newtons return home. Mrs. Newton is excited to see her younger brother and rushes down the steps to greet him. Uncle Charlie tells her how young she looks. They embrace while the youngest Newtons talk over each other, unable to get a word in edgewise while their mother and uncle talk. Inside the house, the family unloads all of Uncle Charlie's luggage into Charlie's room. They leave Uncle Charlie to settle in and he takes a moment to look at Charlie's possessions and pictures. He moves to the window and parts the curtain. The suspenseful music seems to sigh with relief when he sees two housewives talking to one another on the street corner. It seems that he's lost his tail.



Dinner and Gifts- Uncle Charlie sits at the head of the table, telling tales from back East while the family eats dinner. Eventually, he begins presenting gifts to everyone around the table. The children seem dissatisfied with their gifts, but they hold their tongues. Mr. and Mrs. Newton, however, are quite pleased with their luxuriant gifts. It's the final gift that gets the whole family's attention: old photos of Grandma and Grandpa. Uncle Charlie says he'd kept them in a safe deposit box all these years. "1888," Roger says, whistling. Charlie says her grandmother was very pretty, and her uncle responds, "Everybody was sweet and pretty then, Charlie. The whole world. A wonderful world. Not like the world today." After dinner, Uncle Charlie approaches Charlie in the kitchen and—despite her protests—gives her an emerald ring.



Waltz- The family sits down to share dessert while Charlie hums a waltz. "Sing at the table," scolds her younger sister, "and you'll marry a crazy husband." Roger makes a face and says, "Superstitions have been proved 100% wrong." Uncle Charlie talks to Mr. Newton about making a large bank deposit the next morning, Charlie humming the whole time. "I can't get that tune out of my head," she says. "Maybe if somebody tells me what it is, I'll forget it." Uncle Charlie gives misleading answers while the family tries to name the tune, The Merry Widow Waltz. The song -or perhaps its title- makes the man nervous. Mrs. Newton dotes over her younger brother in the living room when Mr. Newton notices someone at the door.



Mr. Hawkins- A man with little round glasses and an armful of crime story magazines waits for Mr. Newton. “Had your supper?” Mr. Newton asks. “Had mine an hour ago,” Mr. Hawkins, his friend and neighbor, replies. Mr. Newton introduces Mr. Hawkins to Uncle Charlie before they head outside to speak. “New York man,” Mr. Newton moans outside, discussing Uncle Charlie. “Good for the children. You know what I mean?” They start discussing some of their favorite crime stories, especially ideal murders. Mr. Newton says if he were to try and kill Mr. Hawkins, he would bludgeon him to death. “What’d be the fun of that?” asks Mr. Hawkins. “Where’s your planning? Where’s your clues?” “I don’t want any clues,” replies Mr. Newton. “I want to murder you.” They continue their argument in earnest.



House made out of newspaper- Inside the Newton home, Uncle Charlie smokes a cigar and reads a newspaper. His face is filled with dread when he stumbles upon something on the second page. He looks around the room and spots little Ann reading nearby. Uncle Charlie invites her and then Roger to watch him build a house out of newspaper. Their Uncle quickly folds and tears the newspaper page into a rough rectangular house, completing it by ripping the ‘door’ off. Charlie sees the activity in the living room and scolds her siblings for tearing up their father’s newspaper. “It’s my fault, Charlie,” says Uncle Charlie. “I was showing them a little game.” Charlie forgives him and helps to tidy up the paper while Uncle Charlie stuffs the ‘door’ he ripped off the house into his pocket. Later that evening, Charlie notices the article folded in Uncle Charlie’s pocket and teases him about knowing a secret about him. Uncle Charlie says it’s just gossip.



Breakfast in bed- Mrs. Newton enters Charlie’s room with a tray of coffee and toast for Uncle Charlie’s breakfast. She says she doesn’t understand how he can like breakfast in bed, politely teasing him for the pampering and waking so late. Mrs. Newton then informs him that the newspaper called asking for an interview. “With me?” Uncle Charlie asks, poorly hiding his nerves. “And the women’s club I belong to wants you to give a little talk,” Mrs. Newton continues. Uncle Charlie asks after his favorite niece before the conversation turns back to the newspaper interview. Mrs. Newton says the whole family will be “in the limelight.” Two young men want to interview the Newtons, Uncle Charlie included, for a journalistic study of ‘typical American families.’ Uncle Charlie wants nothing to do with it despite his sister’s polite pressing. Instead, he scolds her for letting strangers into her home. “You ought to have better sense,” he says through a mouthful.



Bank- Charlie enters her bedroom and greets her uncle. She and her mother talk about Uncle Charlie's childhood and his strange distaste for having his picture taken before Mrs. Newton urges her younger brother to finish his breakfast so he can make it to the bank before lunch. After a brisk walk, the pair of Charlies find their way to the bank where Mr. Newton works. "Hello, Joe," says Uncle Charlie. "Can you stop embezzling a minute and give me your attention?" Mr. Newton doesn't appreciate the joke, but Uncle Charlie keeps the act up, seeming to take joy in his in-law's nervous squirming. After bearing the discomfort, Mr. Newton manages to get a meeting with the bank's president where Uncle Charlie flashes forty thousand dollars and asks to open an account. Two women enter the bank and approach the bank's president, his wife and her friend, a widow. Uncle Charlie flirts with the widow before the president ends the meeting to talk with his wife.



Questionnaire men- Back at the Newton home, two men watch as Charlie and her uncle exit the bus and walk toward the house. "Here he is," says one of the watchers. "Those must be the questionnaire men!" Charlie says delightedly while the two men exit their nondescript convertible and approach the house. "They're a whole hour early. I won't see them," says Uncle Charlie. He enlists Charlie as his champion, tasking her with keeping the newspaper men from bothering him. Charlie invites the men inside and calls for her mother. The camera follows Uncle Charlie up the steps. He turns halfway up and gives the men a sour look while they pass.



Pictures in the kitchen- "Nothing's ready now!" Mrs. Newton complains when the questionnaire men introduce themselves. One of them, Jack Graham, sits down in the living room and begins asking Mrs. Newton questions while the other, Fred Saunders, puts his camera together. Charlie chimes in when the interviewer asks about the size of their family, saying Uncle Charlie is just visiting. Graham insists they interview and photograph everyone in the family, but Charlie refuses to relent: "I think when someone asks for privacy, they should have it." Seeing the resistance, the questionnaire men ask to see Mrs. Newton working in the kitchen.



Average family- Mrs. Newton begins working on a cake in the kitchen, but insists on following a complicated recipe instead of just breaking an egg as Saunders asks. The questionnaire men ask if they can go upstairs after asking several questions about Uncle Charlie. "Whose room is that?" Graham asks Charlie. "It's mine," she replies. "My Uncle's using it now, though." Graham asks if they can photograph the room, but Charlie insists they give her uncle privacy. After asking if there are back stairs, Graham makes a bet that Uncle Charlie isn't even in Charlie's room. Charlie takes him up on that bet and is surprised to find her room empty. Saunders moves into the bedroom to take some pictures while Charlie talks to Graham. "You know, your picking us as an average family gave me a funny feeling," she says. "I guess I don't like to be an average girl in an average family."



Awkward encounter- Mrs. Newton calls from downstairs that the cake batter is ready for the eggs. Uncle Charlie approaches the door and Graham asks Charlie if the man is her uncle. When she says yes, Saunders exits her room to take a picture of the hall. At the moment Uncle Charlie steps through the door, Saunders snaps a shot, illuminating the home with a bright flash. Uncle Charlie is incensed. "I don't like being photographed," he says, approaching Saunders. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you for the film." He does more than ask, becoming insistent that the man hand over his film. The questionnaire men apologize for nearly starting "a family feud" over taking Uncle Charlie's picture, and Graham asks Charlie to accompany him around town later that evening. She accepts, blowing off an engagement she already had with a friend that evening.



Little lies- Charlie and Graham laugh together as they exit Gunner's Grill and walk down the street side by side. They soon run into Catherine, Charlie's friend whom she blew off earlier, and another girl. "How's your throat, Charlie?" Catherine asks knowingly. "Oh, much better," Charlie says awkwardly. "Thank you." Charlie and Graham laugh again, and when the girls pass, the scene crossfades into Charlie's concerned face. The camera swings back as she speaks, bringing Graham into view: "I know what you are, really. You're a detective. There's something the matter, and you're a detective." Graham tries to apologize for misleading her and explains that they're tailing two men suspected of being the 'Merry Widow Murderer' and one of them is her Uncle Charlie. The young woman agrees to keep the investigation secret but demands to be taken home. Graham, ever gentlemanly, obliges.



“Home already?”- Graham bids Charlie good night and drives away. The young woman paces on the porch for a moment, watching her uncle and mother talk in the living room while fretful music plays. She decides to take the rear entrance to avoid them when she runs into her father and Mr. Hawkins. “Home already,” her father asks. Charlie says that she’s tired and doesn’t feel like talking before walking up the back steps. The two men walk toward the front porch, still discussing the best ways to kill someone in a murder mystery. Mr. Hawkins tells Mr. Newton that if baking soda were poison, he’d put enough into the coffee to kill him. “I never tasted a thing!” Mr. Newton says, delighted.



Pages 2 & 3- Charlie checks to make sure that her uncle is still preoccupied with talking to her mother before quietly entering her room. She quickly collects every piece of newsprint she can find, rifling through waste bins. In the relative privacy of her temporary sleeping quarters in Ann’s room, she begins to put the torn pieces of paper back together. Charlie’s younger sister asks what she’s doing. “Oh, I’m just looking for a recipe I thought I saw,” she says. “They have papers in the ‘library’,” Ann points out. “New ones and old ones.” “Maybe I’ll go tomorrow,” Charlie says before leaving the room and running down the back steps.



Library- A cacophony of pianos and strings accompanies Charlie’s jogs toward the library. She’s so wrapped up in her thoughts that she nearly steps out in front of a car, earning her a scolding from the crossing guard. When she approaches the library, it’s already closed, but the librarian is inside and responds to her pounding on the door. After a little pleading, the librarian lets Charlie in. She quickly finds the paper she’s after and looks at the story her uncle tore to shreds. “Where is the Marry Widow Murderer?” the headline asks before detailing the high-profile serial killing case. Charlie pulls the emerald ring from her finger and matches a pair of engraved initials with the name of a murder victim listed in the article.



Not quite herself- The Merry Widow waltz plays as a group of dancers crossfades into Uncle Charlie wandering around the yard reading a newspaper. Mrs. Newton leans out the window to say hello to her brother. "Where's Charlie?" he asks. "She's still asleep," Mrs. Newton replies. "I don't want to wake her." Later that evening, Uncle Charlie asks after his niece and Mrs. Newton says she'll be down shortly. "I shouldn't have let her sleep so long, but she needed it," she says, "She doesn't look quite herself." Charlie exits her room soon thereafter, but seeing Uncle Charlie in the living room, she takes the back stairs and goes to the kitchen. There, she helps her mother prepare dinner. Mrs. Newton begins humming the Merry Widow waltz, and Charlie gets agitated, asking her to never sing the tune again. Mrs. Newton is worried for a moment, but Charlie's winning smile calms her. The family gathers for dinner. Ann asks to sit away from Uncle Charlie, and when Mrs. Newton tries to protest, Charlie defends her.



"Nothing special"- "Well, what's going on here?" Uncle Charlie asks while he sits at the dinner table. "Have I lost my little girl?" Mrs. Newton explains that she thought it would be nice for the children to take turns sitting by their uncle, and Uncle Charlie seems to accept Roger taking Ann's place. He takes a newspaper from Mr. Newton and diligently scans the headlines, saying it contains "nothing special." Charlie finally emerges from the kitchen to a bombardment of questions and opinions about her sleeping all day. She responds by saying she had nightmares about Uncle Charlie. Charlie continues, saying it may be time for Uncle Charlie to consider leaving. Uncle Charlie shoots Charlie a nasty look before he asks Roger to fetch a "big red bottle" from the fridge, and the boy does so. Mrs. Newton is delighted and shares several inside jokes with her younger brother from their childhood.



Uncle Charlie's stance on widows- The conversation turns to the speech Uncle Charlie is going to give at Mrs. Newton's women's club. He asks what type of women he'll be speaking to so he can think up a topic. Mrs. Newton replies that it's women like her who are "busy with our homes." "Women keep busy in towns like this," Uncle Charlie muses. "In the cities it's different: Middle-aged widows, husbands dead; husbands who've spent their lives making fortunes, working and working, and then they die and leave their money to their wives- their silly wives." His diatribe continues becoming openly hateful of widows specifically. "But they're alive! They're human beings!" Charlie exclaims. "Are they? Are they, Charlie? Are they human or are they fat, wheezing animals?" The tension in the room is palpable, but Mrs. Newton tries to laugh it off: "Don't talk about women like that in front of my club! You'll be tarred and feathered."



Mushrooms- There's a sound in the front room. "It's Herbert," Mrs Newton says. "He always comes when we're eating." Herbert greets the family one by one as he passes before sitting behind Mr. Newton. "Joe, I picked some mushrooms before dinner," he says timidly. "Mushrooms mean anything to you, Joe?" Mr. Hawkins says he'd eat them if Mr. Hawkins gave them to him. "Then I've got it, you see? The worst I'd be accused of would be manslaughter. Doubt if I'd get that. Accidental death, pure and simple." Mr. Newton brings up his idea for an 'untraceable' murder. The conversation upsets Charlie: "Oh, what's the matter with you two? Do you always have to talk about killing people?" She storms off, and Uncle Charlie says he'll go and talk to her.



What's wrong with Charlie?- Uncle Charlie follows his niece, who walks at a brisk pace downtown. She collides with the crossing guard, who berates her for her careless attitude these past few days. Uncle Charlie catches up with her and guides her away to a more private spot in front of the town hall. "What's the matter, Charlie? What's wrong?" he asks, gripping her arm so tightly it hurts. He forces her into a dive bar where they sit and order drinks from a girl Charlie knows from school.



"So much you don't know"- "Think you know something, don't you?" Uncle Charlie asks after the waitress leaves. "That young fellow told you something." Charlie feigns ignorance, but her uncle presses. "Something's come between us," he says. "I don't want that to happen. Why, we're old friends. More than that. We're like twins. You said so yourself." Charlie doesn't say much, watching while her uncle folds a napkin and speaks. "I guess I've done some pretty foolish things, made some pretty foolish mistakes," says Uncle Charlie as he violently twists the napkin until it makes grotesque, neck-breaking noises. "Nothing serious. Just... foolish." Charlie tries to get up and leave, but her uncle demands that she sit back down. "There's so much you don't know. So much," Uncle Charlie says. "What do you know really? You're just an ordinary little girl living in an ordinary little town." They walk back home together, and outside the house Uncle Charlie begs for one last chance to remain hidden, making veiled threats about Charlie's mother before they enter the house.



Church- Graham and Saunders watch the mass of churchgoers exit the local church the next morning. The Newtons are among them, Roger and Ann causing a small scene when they fight near the street. “There’s my girl,” says Saunders before getting Ann’s attention. The young girl is excited to see the men, who listen to what she has to say. Graham asks her to get Charlie, and Ann agrees, thinking it’s something about marriage. Charlie and her friend Catherine approach the two men. They split up so Saunders can speak to Charlie privately.



Uncle Charlie’s picture- With the others out of earshot, Saunders speaks candidly. He asks if she remembers the picture they took of her uncle, and she recalls Saunders giving him the film. “We gave him the wrong film,” says Saunders. “The minute the witnesses see that picture, we’ll know whether Oakley [Uncle Charlie’s real name] is the man. We’re waiting for the wire now.” He encourages her to convince her uncle to leave town to avoid embarrassment for the rest of her family. Then Saunders asks her to spy on Uncle Charlie and let the detectives know when and how he’s leaving town. Charlie agrees to an abridged version of the plan before returning home with her sister.



“Room enough for everyone”- Uncle Charlie greets Charlie on the porch, cigar in hand. “How was church, Charlie?” he asks. “Did you count the house? Turn anybody away?” Charlie responds icily, “No, room enough for everyone.” At that moment, Mr. Newton and Mr. Hawkins turn the corner by the house. They discuss the news loudly. “A fellow said they caught that other fellow- the Merry Widow Murderer,” says Mr. Hawkins. “Didn’t catch him exactly. He was running away from the police, and they were just about to nab him, at the airport, and he ran into the propeller of a plane.” Uncle Charlie grins like the cat who ate the canary before entering the house. “I think I’ll go get ready for dinner. I’m hungry. I can eat a good dinner today.” Charlie watches her uncle bound up the steps. He stops at the top and turns to face her, a worried look on his face.



Wire from Maine- Uncle Charlie paces in Charlie's bedroom, fiddling with a cigar and peeking out the window. His hands tense as if strangling someone when he sees Charlie outside. His cigar tumbles to the floor. Graham approaches in his nondescript convertible and practically jumps out. He's excited to see Charlie. "I have great news for you!" Graham says. "Where can we talk alone?" Hand in hand, the two of them circle the house and enter the garage. "We got a wire from Maine," says Graham. "So we can call off the job." Charlie is conflicted: She is relieved that the murder case will not create a scandal for her family, but Charlie knows the truth about her uncle. "I'd like to pretend the whole dreadful thing never happened," Charlie says.



Private proposal- Charlie smiles when she notices her mother's dress gloves lying in the garage. "Mother and her gloves," she muses while she retrieves them. "She's always losing things." Graham leans against a nearby chair: "All mothers lose things. Someday, she'll be losing you." Charlie corrects him, saying mothers "gain sons." "Who'd want a detective for a son-in-law?" asks Graham. Charlie says her father would then laughs at Graham's joke about Ann wanting to marry a librarian. "I like it when you laugh," says Graham. "I like it when you don't. I guess I like you whatever you do." He then makes a slightly drawn-out and somewhat awkward marriage proposal. Charlie declines, instead asking for time to think about it. This is good enough for Graham.



Garage door The garage door bangs shut suddenly and ends up jammed. Graham helps Charlie open the door, and they see Uncle Charlie walking around the yard. He jokes about their odd behavior - meeting in the garage instead of the living room - before shaking Graham's hand and bidding him farewell.



Broken step- Charlie calls to her mother about the shopping list from the back stairs. “If I’ve forgotten anything, I’ll send Ann for it later,” Mrs. Newton says before saying goodbye to Charlie. The young woman places the list in her purse, she walks down the steps and falls. One of the steps had broken beneath her weight, sending her tumbling. She is able to escape serious injury by clinging to the railing. That evening, Charlie uses a flashlight to examine the step. It seems to her the plank had been deliberately damaged because the break is too clean.



“I’ll kill you myself”- She hears a board creak above her and walks up the steps. Uncle Charlie watches her. “When are you leaving, Uncle Charlie?” she asks. “I’m not going,” he says eventually. “The most sensible thing for you to do is to be friends with me.” Uncle Charlie makes several veiled threats but he backs away from them, asking Charlie to be civil. “I’m warning you,” Charlie says as menacingly as she can. “Go away, or I’ll kill you myself.”



Trap sprung- Uncle Charlie fiddles with the garage door dressed in a tuxedo. As he closes the door, he looks back inside to see the car exhaust smoke. He slowly walks back to the house while puffing on his cigar. The Newtons rush around inside the house putting the last touches on their dress clothes. Uncle Charlie enters the home and Mrs. Newton praises the handsome appearance of her “two men” before the adults begin arguing about how to get to the women’s club meeting. Uncle Charlie breaks up the argument by saying he’ll call a cab for the family and drive Charlie to the meeting himself. Charlie tries to get out of this, begging her mother to accompany them. Charlie goes out to the garage to ready the car but she’s surprised to find the car running. She rushes into the garage to turn off the car, but the key is missing from the ignition. As she begins choking on the acrid fumes, the garage door swings shut. Charlie chokes and coughs as she desperately tries to open the door.



Plot fails- While Mr. Newton rushes to find an item he's forgotten, Uncle Charlie closes the window and changes the radio from news to music, cranking up the volume. Mrs. Newton complains about the loud music, but the children say they enjoy it. At that moment, Mr. Hawkins rushes through the front door and cries, "Somebody's caught in the garage. They're suffocating!" The family rushes to the garage, but Uncle Charlie leads the charge, determined to get there first. At the garage door, he kicks a stick out of the way, and the door opens easily. Charlie falls to the ground, unconscious. Covering his mouth and nose with a handkerchief, Uncle Charlie enters the garage and produces a key. He turns the engine off and returns to check on Charlie.



"Go away"- Uncle Charlie carries his niece away from the garage and lays her on the grass before asking Mr. Newton to find his flask of whiskey to help revive the girl. He gives the others tasks as well. When Charlie opens her eyes, she's all alone with her uncle. "Go away," she mutters spitefully. "Go away." Mrs. Newton returns and dotes over her daughter. Charlie insists that she's okay, but she wants to stay home and recuperate for the party after the meeting. It takes some convincing, but she manages to convince her family to go without her. They load into the taxi and pull away. Mrs. Newton seems on the verge of an epiphany when the taxi pulls out of sight: "I just don't understand it. First the stairs and..." Charlie watches while her family disappears into the night with her would-be murderer in the back seat.



Party- Charlie tries to contact Graham to no avail. It seems like only moments before a dozen or more people spill through the front door of her home. Uncle Charlie pours champagne for a toast in the parlor while several people speak his praises. When Uncle Charlie is given the opportunity to speak, Charlie comes down the stairs, the incriminating emerald ring on her finger. Uncle Charlie's eyes linger on the ring as he lifts his glass. "Charlie," says Uncle Charlie, "you're just in time for a farewell toast. I hate to break the news to you like this, but tomorrow I must leave Santa Rosa." The other party-goers show varying levels of sadness and disappointment. Charlie is among them. Tears well in her eyes: her once-beloved uncle will escape justice.



“Just a little faster”- The next morning, a train bell rings. Many of the townsfolk gather at the train station to bid Uncle Charlie farewell. The Newtons insist on helping him and his luggage into the train, and Uncle Charlie accepts, saying he’ll make sure the kids get off before the train starts moving. Charlie is alone with her uncle for the first time since being trapped in the garage. She seems nervous, but drops her guard when he says, “I want you to know I think you were right to make me leave.” The train begins to move when Charlie begins to say her last goodbye, but Uncle Charlie pushes her toward a nearby door, opening it and pushing her off balance. “Let go of me!” Charlie cries. “Not yet, Charlie,” says her uncle. “Let it get a little faster. Just a little faster.” Charlie manages to slip out of her uncle’s grasp at the last moment, sending the man tumbling out of the carriage in front of an oncoming train. The dancers from the beginning of the film crossfade into view as the Merry Widow waltz plays.



Funeral- A large crowd attends Uncle Charlie’s funeral. A long train of cars shepherd his remains to the church while everyone watches in eerie silence. The camera zooms in on Graham and Charlie standing outside the church while the priest speaks within: “Santa Rosa has gained and lost a son.” Graham takes Charlie’s hand to comfort her. She looks sad and then conflicted. “I’m glad you were able to come, Jack,” she says. “I couldn’t have faced it without someone who knew.” The eulogy continues from inside the church, but Charlie speaks over it: “He thought the world was a horrible place. He couldn’t have been very happy ever. He didn’t trust people. He seemed to hate them. He hated the whole world.” Graham says the world isn’t all that bad, but it “seems to go crazy every now and then. Like your Uncle Charlie.”



THEMES

Crime Crime is a major theme in *Shadow of a Doubt*. It's obvious from the film's first scenes where we see Uncle Charlie living in a boarding house to avoid the police. It doesn't become clear for a long time what his crimes are, but it's serious enough for multiple plainclothes officers to observe and follow him. It remains shrouded in mystery until the film's midpoint when Charlie finds a copy of the newspaper story her uncle was trying to hide from the family. Now we realize that he is a serial murderer who preys on elderly widows. Not only does Uncle Charlie murder these women, but he also acts as a confidence man to gain access to their life insurance and make him the beneficiary. His fleeing from police is itself also a crime, and Uncle Charlie attempts to murder his niece at least three times after she connects his strange behavior with the news stories of the Merry Widow Murderer. As stated above, this element of the story is loosely based on the 1920's true story of the 'Gorilla Man' (aka Earle Nelson), although the true nature of his crimes wasn't permitted by film censorship of the day and required some major changes.

Gender Gender plays a multifaceted role in this film. Charlie is an incredibly independent and intelligent young woman. Her mother acts as a foil: While she supports her daughters, she also chides them for their 'precocious' behavior, like Ann's constant reading and Charlie's willfulness, believing such traits to be 'unladylike.' Where Mrs. Newton is unable to see through her younger brother's lies, Charlie's inquisitive nature and intelligence lead her to the knowledge that her uncle isn't the kind and gentle man his family sees him as. Uncle Charlie holds many outspoken misogynist points of view. He openly calls his sister and her daughters stupid and inferior based on their gender, and during a family meal, he goes on a long-winded tirade about how useless and disgusting old widows are. This attitude is part of the reason he finds murder so easy and why he targets older women.

Investigation The theme of investigation is potent in *Shadow of a Doubt*, taking both dramatic and comic forms. Not only does Charlie investigate her uncle, but her sister Ann is always called on to answer questions others need answered rapidly because of her studious and inquisitive reading habits. It is seen as a little ridiculous by most of the characters that a nine-year-old girl would know so much, but they still often defer to her knowledge. In a similar comic vein, Mr. Newton and Mr. Hawkins perform their own off-screen investigations into how to 'get away with murder' as they share a love of murder mysteries. They often argue since Mr. Hawkins wants to create a compelling yet solvable mystery while Mr. Newton wishes to be untraceable. The presence of detectives Graham and Saunders is an obvious element of investigation, though the tragic death of another man they're pursuing leads them down the wrong track. The film's end shows a notable lack of investigation. Although Charlie tells Graham the truth, they don't inform anyone else, presumably in order to keep the Newton family -and by extension, Santa Rosa- from experiencing any undue shame and suffering from Uncle Charlie's criminality.

Secrets/Appearance vs. Reality These themes are integral to the success of this unique thriller. During the first several scenes focused on the Newton family, viewers might be tricked into believing *Shadow of a Doubt* is a family film. While Uncle Charlie's behavior is strange, his penchant for keeping secrets makes his motivation unclear until the movie's midpoint. Even then, it seems that only larceny or fraud is his main crime because of Uncle Charlie's charm and manipulation. Uncle Charlie uses a simple disguise at a few points in the film, pretending to be a terminally ill man to avoid detection on his train ride to Santa Rosa and posing as a simple businessman visiting his family to charm the Newtons and Santa Rosa as a whole. When Charlie sees through Uncle Charlie's secret, she is faced with a dilemma. Neither she nor Uncle Charlie believes that Mrs. Newton could survive the shock of learning that her beloved younger brother is a cold-hearted killer (Uncle Charlie seems to insinuate that this is a physical threat against Mrs. Newton to keep Charlie in line). Charlie then has to keep the secret herself to prevent a scandal from erupting in her home. We are given several glimpses of Uncle Charlie's true nature. He shows himself to be impulsive and violent from the get-go, shattering a glass in his apartment at the beginning of the film out of anger and making several veiled threats toward Charlie, his hands tensing as if he's strangling her while he is in private. Like most 'successful' murderers, Uncle Charlie uses his charm as a facade to keep others from looking at him too hard as a dangerous threat when he is just that.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Charlotte "Charlie" Newton

Charlie is a recent high school graduate living with her family, the Newtons. The film mostly follows her, and we receive information about her Uncle Charlie through her perspective. She is intelligent and sensitive, making her an outstanding investigator.

Helpful Charlie is often seen being helpful. She is polite –that is until she's driven to near-panic when she suspects Uncle Charlie of committing a terrible crime– and she is the one cleaning up after her younger siblings and urging her mother out of the kitchen. In fact, Uncle Charlie uses this trait against her. All three of his murder attempts rely on Charlie's helpful attitude. First, Uncle Charlie sabotages the back staircase when he knows she will be helping her mother get groceries. Then, he asks that Charlie pull the car from the garage only to trap her inside and nearly suffocate her with the car's exhaust. Finally, when Charlie agrees to watch her siblings on the train while they say goodbye to their uncle, Uncle Charlie takes the chance to try and push her from the train. This attempt ends in his death when he's knocked off balance and tumbles in front of an oncoming train. Charlie teaches us that even our best traits can be used against us by those who wish us harm.

Inquisitive Much like her younger sister, Ann, Charlie is very inquisitive. We see this best in her search of Uncle Charlie's belongings when she begins to suspect him of odd behavior. Unable to piece together the article he wished to keep from the family, she makes a late-night trip to the library. In her single-minded rush, she is nearly run over by a car and earns the ire of the librarian who had just closed the library: Both she and the crossing guard mention how this is unusual behavior from her. She is completely engrossed in her need to discover Uncle Charlie's secret. While one of Charlie's more minor traits, her drive to find the truth is perfect for a Hitchcock thriller and propels the plot to its most suspenseful moments.

Aware Charlie is very aware. Although her prevailing opinion of her Uncle Charlie is positive, it doesn't take much of his odd behavior for a whisper of doubt to form in her mind. She is aware that his hasty actions and secretive behavior are particularly strange. While others in her family dismiss his actions as stress from his fast-paced business job, his in-your-face attitude, or just quirks, Charlie realizes he has hurt her deliberately when she was playfully teasing him about his secret. She rightly deduces that a loving family member wouldn't behave in such a manner and begins looking deeper into his life. Charlie is aware enough to notice that the broken stair step was sabotaged, after which she stops putting up a front of innocence and ignorance to her uncle, and threatens to kill him if he refuses to leave. Her awareness isn't enough to save her from his next attempt in the garage: Believing that she's protecting her family, she rushes into the garage to pull the car out only to be caught in Uncle Charlie's trap. Charlie shows us the limitations of our awareness, especially under stress.

Charles "Uncle Charlie" Oakley

Uncle Charlie goes by many names throughout the film in his attempts to avoid the investigators hot on his heels. His penchant for aliases and secretive behavior strikes his favorite niece as strange leading her to investigate his sudden appearance from the East. The Newtons' beloved Uncle Charlie is on the run from the law for a string of killings.

Secretive Uncle Charlie is shown as mysterious before we learn his real name. He deliberately misleads his temporary landlady at the film's beginning before dodging his pursuers with incredible skill. Are we looking at the film's hero? It doesn't take long for his strange behavior to alert the audience to his true intentions, and at nearly the same time, young Charlie begins to take notice as well. Through her perceptions, the viewer dives deeply into Uncle Charlie's big secret. Charlie discovers that much of his behavior is suspect and eventually finds that all the gifts Uncle Charlie had given her family were the stolen possessions of dead women. These are Uncle Charlie's attempts to both hide his culpability and perhaps incriminate his family as a further smoke screen for any future police investigation.

Planner While he can be quite spontaneous, Uncle Charlie shows a knack for creating some brilliant and frightening plans. His escape to Santa Rosa is a quickly made plan, but it works well, keeping the police off his back for at least a couple of days. The plan continues to unfold as he uses the family as a smoke screen, enlisting Charlie to keep the investigators from taking a picture of him and planning to house his stolen money at Mr. Newton's bank.

Disloyal From behind his mask, Uncle Charlie acts disloyal. He uses the people around him like a predatory cat hiding in the bushes. This is most obvious in his choice to stay with the Newtons: The typical American family will help him to avoid detection out if and when the detectives find him. All of the family, except for Charlie, seem to be completely happy with Uncle Charlie's presence, and they don't think much of his strange statements or behavior. When Uncle Charlie sees his formerly favorite niece investigate him, he commits a terrible act of disloyalty: He tries to kill her. Abusing the trust and love of his family to throw off a murder investigation is certainly bad enough on its own, but then attempting to kill one of them for having gleaned his secret takes things to a new level. In his disloyal actions against Charlie, we are given a glimpse of the brutality of the Merry Widow Murderer.

Mrs. Newton

Mrs. Newton is Charlie's mother and Uncle Charlie's older sister. She is a fairly typical housewife of the time. Although somewhat progressive, she still chides her female children for their more independent-minded traits, making her a surprisingly nuanced minor character.

Moody While moodiness is certainly a large part of Mrs. Newton's character, it might be more accurate to describe her as 'emotional.' Her moods are obvious, though, especially when she doesn't get her way. This shows best when the questionnaire men visit the Newton home. Saunders wants to take some posed photos, but Mrs. Newton fails to cooperate multiple times, demanding that he not take photos of certain things and refusing to crack an egg until the butter and sugar have been "properly creamed." As stated above, she also scolds her female children for their strong-headed and independent ways. She does the same to her husband when he complains about her scenting his handkerchief, making the family late for Uncle Charlie's speech at the women's club with his forgetfulness.

Trusting Mrs. Newton is a foil to Charlie in this aspect. She can't imagine how her beloved brother could do the family harm. Even when Uncle Charlie makes violently misogynistic statements, Mrs. Newton seems to laugh them off instead of addressing what is a major conflict between herself and her brother. We see this behavior early in the film when Uncle Charlie openly insults her for letting the questionnaire men into her home, telling her she should "have more sense." She seems hurt by this, yet she deflects and tries to avoid the topic from then on out. Despite her trusting nature, she begins to suspect her brother after Charlie is trapped in the garage with the running car. Even at this moment, she is conflicted, still trusting her little brother implicitly.

Mr. Newton

Mr. Newton is Charlie's father. He works as a teller and accountant at a bank in Santa Rosa. He and his friend, Mr. Hawkins, often share their thoughts on recent popular crime stories and come up with obscure and untraceable ways to kill one another in a silly, macabre competition to find the most inventive method.

Complainer Mr. Newton seems to always have something to complain about. He does this both passively and directly. In Mr. Hawkin's first interaction with the family on screen, he sarcastically explains the presence of Uncle Charlie, displaying some barely contained hostility for the man he considers a braggart and hot shot. It slides out of him almost conversationally showing just how often he makes complaints. This trait pops up again and again, from the time Uncle Charlie tries to embarrass him inside the bank to when his wife puts a lightly perfumed handkerchief in his suit pocket. He doesn't like to be troubled by anything it seems. Despite this trait, he seems a fairly attentive and loving father. The only thing he seems to not complain about is his children.

Creative Mr. Newton shows his creativity in his exchanges with Mr. Hawkins. Both share a deep love of crime stories and talk about them together each night. Where his creativity shines is in coming up with methods of murder that could be untraceable and poking holes in Mr. Hawkins' suggestions. The strange game they play together -where Mr. Hawkins tries to persuade Mr. Newton that various methods of poisoning are more effective and less detectable than the physical means Mr. Newton suggests- shows us his thoughtful side. He enjoys tearing apart Mr. Hawkins' suggestions, and many of his critiques are quite valid: Most poison tastes differently (and more strongly) than baking soda, and indiscriminate poisoning with wild mushrooms could hurt more than the intended target, for example. In moments like these, we see where Ann and Charlie get their inquisitive natures.

Herbie Hawkins

Mr. Hawkins is the Newtons' neighbor and Mr. Newton's friend. He has a special interest in crime stories. Mrs. Newton dislikes how he always seems to come over when the family is having dinner.

Creative Mr. Hawkins is a very minor character, but his most notable trait is his creativity. In the film's beginning, he introduces a running gag between himself and Mr. Newton, a light-hearted if macabre competition to figure out the most intriguing yet untraceable way to kill another person. Mr. Hawkins shows himself to be the more creative of the two. While Mr. Newton often suggests brute force, Mr. Hawkins brings forward interesting methods of poisoning. He even tests one out on Mr. Newton -much to his friend's surprise and amusement- by putting an unknown quantity of baking soda into his coffee to prove how hard it is to detect poison by taste. He shows his penchant for thinking outside the box by offering Mr. Newton mushrooms, saying it wouldn't be so hard to pepper a few poisonous varieties among the wild mushrooms to kill someone. This creativity is a comment on the moral panic surrounding crime stories at the time, showing us that some people's obsessions with dark stories and topics can be harmless.