

# **Charade Film Summary**

## **Charade by Stanley Donen**

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## Context

*Charade* was originally written by Peter Stone, but the film was rejected by seven different studios. Finally, he decided to rewrite the screenplay into an extremely successful book that was serialized in *Redbook*. When he finally went back to writing the novel as a screenplay, all the original studios were instantly interested in producing the film.

*Charade* almost did not include star Cary Grant with Audrey Hepburn when Grant considered turning down the role. The studio then considered allowing the parts to go to Warren Beatty and Natalie Wood. However, Grant then reconsidered the offer and the parts went to him and Hepburn.

Stanley Donen had previously made his name directing such films as *On the Town*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *Love is Better Than Ever*, *Funny Face*, *Damn Yankees!*, and *The Grass is Greener*. Donen originally debuted on Broadway at 17, but he got his big break at 25. Producer Arthur Freed and actor Gene Kelly helped Stanley Donen make his name by allowing him to direct *On the Town*, *Singin' in the Rain*, and *Love is Better than Ever*. Donen reignited the life of musicals and transformed them into a new genre almost single-handedly. *Charade* was a different type of film for Donen, but he created this Hitchcock-type drama with all the quaintness and pizzazz of his style.

Cary Grant had already had roles in over 60 movies and been the main star in dozens of those films. *Charade* was actually Grant's final major film other than *Father Goose* and *Walk Don't Run*. Grant starred in such films as *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *The Bishop's Wife*, *I Was a Male War Bride*, *An Affair to Remember*, *North by Northwest*, and *The Grass is Greener*. After turning down many roles starring opposite Audrey Hepburn in films such as *Roman Holiday* and *Sabrina*, Grant finally took his place across from her in *Charade*. He was originally uncomfortable about playing a romantic role with a woman half his age, but after jokes were added to the script about the age difference and it was clear that Hepburn was chasing him, he felt better about the scenes.

Audrey Hepburn was already extremely famous by the time she starred in *Charade* as well. Having played parts in *Roman Holiday*, *Sabrina*, *Funny Face*, and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Early the next year, Hepburn starred in one of her famous roles as Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. She was perfect for her role in *Charade* with her cute and cunning ways that made her appealing even amid all the mystery of the story.

The 1963 Academy Awards nominated Henry Mancini (music) and Johnny Mercer (lyrics) for the Best Music for an Original Song for their song "Charade." At the Golden Globes, Audrey Hepburn was nominated for the Best Motion Picture Actress in a Musical or Comedy, while Cary Grant was nominated for his role for the award of the Best Motion Picture Actor in a Musical or Comedy. The film only won one award, and

that was Audrey Hepburn's win for Best British Actress at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Awards.



## Summary and Analysis

As *Charade* opens, we watch a train rush past the countryside of France. We then see skiers at a restaurant. As a woman, Regina "Reggie" Lampert, eats her lunch at a table in the restaurant, we watch as someone points a gun at her. Suddenly, the trigger is pulled, and she is soaked by Jean-Louis with a water gun. His mother, Sylvie, comes over, and Reggie tells her that she is planning to divorce her husband. Sylvie tries to convince Reggie to stay married so that she can keep her husband's money, but Reggie is terrified that her husband is keeping evil secrets from her.

A man, Peter Joshua, walks up to return the boy. He asks if they know one another, but she puts him off. The woman and boy leave, and Peter and Reggie begin to chat after Peter is "shot" by the boy with the water gun. Reggie tells Peter that she is planning to get a divorce and Peter tells her that he is divorced as well. She tells him to look her up in the phone book in Paris.

The young boy and his mother drop Reggie off at her home. She tells the boy that she plans to stay in Paris even after her divorce. When she comes home to her apartment, she finds it completely empty. Rubbish is lying around the rooms and she is alone. A man, Inspector Eduard Nonke of the British Emissary, comes in and takes her with him. He takes her to the morgue, and she identifies her husband. When the Inspector asks if she loved him, she simply replies that she's very cold.

The Inspector tells her that her husband's body was found in his pajamas lying dead beside the railroad tracks. He was carrying a ticket out of the country on a ship to Venezuela with him at the time. He was Swiss, but she says that she knows nothing about his finances. She also finds out that the week before, her husband sold everything in the apartment. The \$250,000 was not found with his body. The only things with him were a bag with some money, an agenda book, a ticket to Venezuela, and a letter to her. The letter tells her that he hoped to see her soon and that the dentist appointment had changed. Before she leaves, the Inspector shows her several passports all with her husband's face on them. She then returns home.

That night, Peter Joshua shows up at her apartment. He says that he found out about her husband's death in the newspaper that afternoon. She tells him that she plans to get her job back as a translator. She's afraid that the police think she is responsible for his death. The next day, Reggie and her friend attend the funeral alone with only the Inspector. As they talk, Reggie admits that until a few days ago all she knew was her husband's name and apparently she didn't even know that. Suddenly, men come into the funeral home to pay their last respects and make sure that Charlie's really dead. One man tells her that "Charlie had no call of doing it that a way, no siree." Later, a man comes in with a note from H. Bartholomew from the American Embassy that Reggie should meet him the next day.

The next day, Reggie meets with Bartholomew. Bartholomew tells him that he is part of the CIA administration and he tells her that Charles was wanted by the United States



government and the agency itself. She also finds that Charles' real name was Charles Voss. He shows her a photograph to see if she recognizes anyone. She sees Charles and some of the men who came into the funeral the day before. Bartholomew warns her that she's in great danger since these men are looking for Charles's money. Charles stole that money from the United States government and he is convinced that Reggie is the only person who could have the money. He tells her that she needs to start looking for the money since she won't be safe until the government has the money.

Reggie meets with Peter later at a park. As the two of them talk, one of the men from the funeral watches them. Peter offers to help Reggie find out what's going on with the money from Charles. The couple goes out to have a good time that night and to get her mind off the situation. As they play a game, a man holds onto Reggie and threatens her with death because of the money and Reggie runs to call Bartholomew. As she is on the phone, Tex shows up at the door and threatens her as well by dropping burning cigarettes on her dress. Peter finally shows up in the phone booth and she tells him that she's having a nervous breakdown.

Finally, Peter and Reggie return to her hotel and she tries to decide whether to tell Peter about what happened at the restaurant. Peter leaves the hotel after she refuses to say anything. She walks into the room where one of the men attacks her and she calls to Peter, telling him that a man tried to kill her. Peter rushes into the room. Reggie admits how scared she is by the situation. Peter goes out on the balcony to look for the man. After climbing several balconies, Peter watches the other men talking in another hotel room. They all know each other and Peter tries to convince them to back off. He asks for more time to get the money from her and they agree.

Tex has the room next to hers and Peter goes to take care of some things. Tex warns Peter not to forget to tell them about the money when he finds it. Peter returns to Reggie who is glad to see him. He says that he couldn't find the man and he asks for her to tell him the story. She explains about the money and that she does not know where it is. Reggie admits that he's the only person she can trust and begs him to help her find the money. She tries to get him to promise not to lie to her, but then her phone rings. The man from her room calls and wants to talk. He tells her that Peter is also after the money and that she shouldn't trust him. She doesn't tell Peter the truth about the conversation, and he tries to reassure her by telling her that he has taken the room next door.

After leaving her room, Peter carefully places a piece of string between her room and his so that he'll know if she leaves. Reggie calls Bartholomew and tells him that she's leaving as soon as possible. They set up an appointment to meet in fifteen minutes. Looking through the adjoining door, Reggie sees Peter getting ready for bed. However, when the piece of string alerts him of her leaving, he quickly follows. She loses Dyle before leaving the hotel and meets Bartholomew. Bartholomew tells her that Carson Dyle is the only one involved in the situation, but Dyle is dead.

At a restaurant, Bartholomew tells Reggie that five members of the OSS were ordered behind German lines in 1944 to deliver \$250,000 to the French Underground. However,



these men buried and stole it rather than delivering it. Before they could leave, the men were ambushed and Dyle died. The others wanted to wait for the war to end, but Charles beat the men back to the money. Now, they want to find the money. The original money belonged to the CIA, and they want it back. He tells her that the men will continue following her until they catch her. They want her to find out more about Dyle and his real identity.

The next morning, Reggie begins to follow Peter around the city. She follows him to the train station where he asks for some mail for Dyle. Then, he is paged for the telephone and answers to the name Dyle as Reggie watches. Reggie confronts him and demands to know why he lied to her. He admits that Carson Dyle was his brother. He believes that the men killed his brother because he wouldn't go along with their scheme. Carson tells her that the men think he's with them, but he really wants to just pin the murder of his brother on them. He quickly disappears from the station.

Scobie has found Dyle, and they wait until the building is closed and head to the roof. At the edge of the roof, Scobie asks Dyle for the money. Dyle tells him that Reggie has it before pointing out that even if he did have it he wouldn't just hand it to Scobie. The two men get into a fight, and Dyle leaves Scobie hanging off the side of the building. Returning to the hotel, Reggie meets Peter. She is shocked by the state of his clothes, and he tells her what happened that day. She treats his back, and she asks for proof of his identity. He finally tells her that his real first name is Alexander. He explains that he had to find out whose side she was on, and he also tells her that he is still divorced. She begins to seduce him and they joke around about their age difference. Finally, the phone rings, and Tex calls her. He asks her to come down to his room, because they have Jean-Louis, her friend's son.

Peter and Reggie go down to the room, and Reggie wants to call Sylvie. Peter admits that no one seems to have the money and he is beginning to suspect that one of these men actually has the money. The men decide to search Peter and Reggie's rooms, and Peter says they will search the men's' rooms as well. Tex and Gideon go through Charles's bag, but they can not find anything. In the other room, Reggie calls Sylvie to come pick up Jean-Louise. As they wait, Reggie asks Jean-Louise where he would hide a treasure. At the top of a cabinet in Scobie's room, they find a large bag, but when they open it, nothing is there but Scobie's spare hook. Scobie is the only person who didn't come to look at their find, so they go to check Peter's room. Water is running under the door, and Scobie is drowning in the tub. The next morning, the cleaning lady finds Scobie dead in his bed.

Edouard Grandpierre, the inspector that Reggie met, talks to the group. He tells them that until the matter of the deaths are cleared up--no one is allowed to leave. Later, Peter and Reggie debate who killed Scobie. Reggie admits to Alex that she is scared, and she realizes that whoever killed Scobie wants the whole share. She asks Peter to come into her room to bathe so that she doesn't have to stay alone. He tells her to scream if she needs help, so she screams immediately to trick him into coming in her room. He finally decides to shower in all his clothes and makes a complete fool of himself.



Bartholomew calls Reggie, and he tells her that Carson Dyle did not have a brother. He warns her again to be careful. When Peter finishes showering, they decide to go out for dinner. Reggie sulks throughout the evening, and she admits that she's afraid she'll be next. Peter can't seem to understand her changing feelings toward him, and he tells her that she knows Dyle never had a brother. Peter tells her that he became a thief to stay out of the family business. He then tells her that his real name is Adam Canfield. He tells her, "The man's the same even if the name isn't." He admits that he loves his work, but he still claims to be divorced. Peter then tells her that he can barely keep his hands off her, and suddenly Reggie is happy again. They share a long, passionate kiss.

In the middle of the night, Gideon's phone begins to ring, and he is called to the lobby. The elevator continues into the basement, and someone kills Gideon. The bellboy finds him in the elevator. Tex has disappeared, and the Inspector appears to interrogate Peter and Reggie. They are convinced that Tex obviously has the money, and Peter plans to go find him. When Peter goes into his room, Tex calls and tells Peter that he wants his share of the money. Tex says that he will be following Peter around watching his every move.

Peter and Reggie begin looking for the money in Charles's bag again. They realize that something in the bag is worth \$250,000, but they can't seem to find the clue. Before they go to sleep, Reggie tells Adam that she loves him.

At work the next day, Peter shows up with the receipt from the police. The agenda is missing from the bag, and Peter begs Reggie to remember what Charles last appointment was as listed in the book. As she tries to interpret the conference, Reggie remembers the place and time of the appointment. They visit the park where Charles had the appointment and begin snooping around. As they watch, they see Tex nearby, and Peter follows him into the market. As he passes a stamp booth, Tex suddenly makes a connection, and then Peter makes the same connection. Both men race back to the hotel leaving Reggie at the park alone.

In Reggie's room, Peter confronts Tex about the letter with the stamp. Tex is angry that Peter fell for Reggie's scheme. Reggie had torn off the stamp before leaving, and Tex laughs that Peter killed all three men for nothing. At the park, Reggie runs into Sylvie. The boy was terribly excited with the stamps she gave him that morning, and Reggie finally realizes that the stamps are worth a fortune. They run to find Jean-Louis before he trades his stamps. After seeing where Jean-Louis traded the stamps, she runs to find the man's home office. They meet with the man, and they are told that these are very special stamps, all three of which are together worth \$250,000. The man tells her that he knew there was some mistake, and he agrees to return the stamps to Reggie. She apologizes that she must take them back, but he says it was enough to have them for a few moments.

Reggie hurries to the hotel to tell Adam about her find. As she walks in her room, she finds Tex dead in the floor. He has scratched the name Dyle into the carpet. Reggie calls Bartholomew, and she tells him that Dyle killed them all. She tells him that the stamps are what everyone was after. She agrees to meet Bartholomew right away.





Peter is just coming up as she leaves, but she runs away from him through the streets of Paris. At the subway station, Reggie calls the American Embassy for Bartholomew's office. The woman tells her that Bartholomew has left for the day, but Reggie tells her that someone is trying to kill her.

Finally, the woman at the Embassy calls Bartholomew, a different Bartholomew than anyone we've seen, and he says he's never heard of her. He tells the woman to call the French police since Reggie left her location. Peter finally finds Reggie and chases him through the Palais Royale. As she runs to Bartholomew, Peter tells her that this man's name is really Carson Dyle, which is the reason why Tex wrote Dyle in the carpet on the floor. Reggie is terribly confused, and Peter asks her to trust him one more time. He honestly tells her that there's no reason why she should trust him.

Carson tells his story that the men left him alone with five bullets in his body. He decided that he had to kill them for their wrongdoing. Dyle threatens to kill her, but Peter moves around to take a shot at Dyle. As Reggie runs through the courtyard, Dyle follows her into a theatre. Turning the lights on, Dyle prepares to look for her, and Peter finally makes his way inside. Reggie is hiding below the stage, and Dyle overlooks her. Finally, Peter spots Dyle and goes under the stage to catch him. Dyle finds Reggie, and Peter looks at the openings under the stage. By watching and listening, he is able to open the floor at the exact moment that Dyle steps on one of the holes.

Peter makes sure Dyle is dead, and then he and Reggie go home. On the way, Peter rubs Reggie's feet. Reggie asks Peter to prove his love by telling her to go the Embassy the next morning and turn in the stamps. The next morning they go together to the Embassy. Peter waits on her so that he doesn't have to see all that money being given away. When Reggie enters the office, Peter is sitting there waiting on her. She accuses him of being crooked, and he says that he thought she'd be glad to find out he's honest. Finally, Peter announces that his real name is Brian Crookshank. Rather than saying he's divorced, he simply says that the only one is his mother in Detroit. She asks for identification, and he tells her that he'll be happy to put it on a marriage license the next week.

Finally, Reggie realizes what he said, and she says, "Marriage license. Did you say marriage license?" Peter replies, "Don't change the subject. Just give me the stamps." Smiling, Reggie admits, "Oh, I love you, Adam...Alex...Peter...Brian...Whatever your name is. Oh, I love you. I hope we have a lot of boys and we can name them all after you." Peter ends with "But before we start that, may I have the stamps?" Then they embrace and kiss passionately.

# Characters

## Peter Joshua, played by Cary Grant

### Description

Peter Joshua is only one of several names given by Cary Grant's character throughout the course of the film. When Peter and Reggie first meet, the entire thing is a coincidence at a hotel in the mountains. Later, he finds her after he supposedly reads in the paper that her husband has died. While there are many other men after her for her husband's money, Reggie tries to figure out Peter's real motives.

Peter begins by being an innocent bystander. Later, he becomes Carson Dyle's brother who is trying to work both sides to protect Reggie and get the money. He eventually says that his name is Adam and that he is a thief. Through it all, the only part of his story that remains constant is that he is always divorced. Finally, he becomes Bryan Crookshank, an investigator for the CIA.

### Analysis

Peter has a constantly changing role throughout *Charade*. Trying to discover Peter's real motives is one of the main challenges that both Reggie and the viewer must tackle. Peter originally plays the part of an innocent, helpful man, but he seems to turn mean and violent over time. He sides with the bad guys and continues to lie to Reggie. We finally realize that he seems to be making up all those lies in an effort to protect her.

In the end, we are not terribly surprised to learn that Peter is a good guy after all. Because of the way he cares for Reggie even when she runs from him, we begin to suspect that he must care for her at least a little. He ends up being a fairly mild-mannered man who works for the CIA, but he has stolen her heart during their race against fate and time.

## Regina "Reggie" Lampert, played by Audrey Hepburn

### Description

Reggie is a classy young woman whose husband dies almost immediately as the film begins. When we first meet her, Reggie is at a beautiful resort in the mountains with her friends Sylvie and Sylvie's son, Jean-Louis. She meets a handsome man named Peter Joshua when Peter returns Jean-Louis to his mother. She is planning to divorce her husband when she returns home, and she tells Peter to look her up. However, when she returns, she finds her apartment emptied and her husband dead.



Reggie discovers that her husband had \$250,000 that he somehow hid from his murderers. Reggie has no idea what could have become of it, but she discovers that there are numerous people looking for it. As the plot thickens, Reggie does not know which man to believe, but she finds herself leaning toward Peter. Although at several points along the way she loses faith in him because of his lies, Reggie can't seem to help but trust him. She is very attracted to him and begins to seduce him. When they finally find the money and he reveals his true identity, she spontaneously agrees to marry him the next week.

## **Analysis**

Reggie is a smart while somewhat clueless woman. She has become accustomed to a life of leisure with her husband Charles, but she copes well when all that changes. Reggie tries to discover the truth about her husband's money, and in the process, she becomes a sort of spy on the men around her. She is actually more successful spying on the men than they are at spying on her, so she shows her smarts in these scenes.

Throughout the whole ordeal, Reggie remains brave. Although she is scared and sometimes leans on Peter, Reggie actually learns to fend for her self. When she believes that Peter is working against her, she is able to gather her courage and fight back. Reggie shows her strength and her bravery as she races through the streets fighting for her life as men come after her at every side.

## **H. Bartholomew, played by Walter Matthau**

### **Description**

H. Bartholomew sends Reggie a note to the funeral asking her to come to the American Embassy. Bartholomew claims to be with the CIA, and he tells Reggie the story about her husband and his friends stealing the money years before in the war. He is Reggie's only real link to that past, and given his standing at the Embassy, she believes that he is telling her the truth.

Throughout the film, Reggie calls and checks in with Bartholomew to tell him what is going on. He seems to be on her side, and he follows her every move closely. In the final moments, we discover that his real identity is Carl Dyle, the man that Charles and his friends left behind to die. Dyle has come back for the money and for revenge.

### **Analysis**

Bartholomew is a sneaky character. He uses the lunch break at the Embassy to enter an office and pretend to be part of the CIA. By showing his authority, he easily convinces Reggie that he is on her side and that he is the only one she can really trust. However, as she runs from the other men in the plot, little does she know that Bartholomew is her greatest threat.



Bartholomew finally reveals his true identity as Carson Dyle when Dyle, Peter, and Reggie all meet. He says that he wants the money, but he is also out for revenge against those who left him to die. He has killed the other four men, and now Reggie is the only person standing in his way. Dyle is a cruel man, and he is willing to kill Reggie to get what he wants.

## **Tex Panthollow, played by James Coburn**

### **Description**

Tex is one of Charles's friends from the war. Like the others, he has been searching for Charles and the money for years. He tends to be a leader in the group, and he is the final man to be killed by Dyle.

### **Analysis**

Tex seems to have a good head on his shoulders. He is strong-willed and willing to do anything to get the money. We can assume that Dyle suspected Tex of being smart enough to have found the money since he waits until the last moment to kill him.

## **Herman Scobie, played by George Kennedy**

### **Description**

Scobie is one of the men involved in the plot to steal the money. Scobie is the most dangerous of the men because he is the most impatient. He tries to confuse Reggie when she believes Peter's lies, and later he holds Peter at gunpoint when he believes Peter found the money.

### **Analysis**

Scobie is a dangerous man primarily because he has a terrible temper. He does not want to wait any longer to find the money, and because of him, the men have to change their plans. Although Reggie trusts Peter for awhile, Scobie turns her against him by exposing the lies they have told.

## **Leopold W. Gideon, played by Ned Glass**

### **Description**

Gideon is the quietest of the men. He says very little and has a nervous habit of sneezing a lot. Gideon is murdered by Dyle in the elevator.



## **Analysis**

Gideon seems too fragile to be a killer and thief, but he is willing to do whatever it takes to find the money. He seems fairly smart, and Dyle waits until he has killed Scobie to murder Gideon; likely he assumes that Gideon's smarts would help him find the money.

## **Sylvie Gaudel, played by Dominique Minot**

### **Description**

Sylvie is Reggie's only true friend. She has a son named Jean-Louis. We first meet her as she and Reggie relax at a resort in the mountains.

### **Analysis**

Sylvie is a practical woman who believes that Reggie should stay with Charles for the money. Sylvie stands by Reggie through the entire ordeal she faces, and she ends up being the one who helps Reggie find out where the money is hidden.

## **Jean-Louis Gaudel, played by Thomas Chelimsky**

### **Description**

Jean-Louis is Sylvie's young son. He is very interested in stamps, and this interest helps Reggie find out the hiding place for Charles's money.

### **Analysis**

Jean-Louis's actions at the beginning with his water pistol foreshadow the danger throughout the rest of the film. He is a brave young boy who stays strong even when the men kidnap him. His love for stamps reveals Charles's money.

## **Inspector Edouard Grandpierre, played by Jacques Marin**

### **Description**

The Inspector is the first person Reggie meets when she arrives home from the hotel. He tells her of her husband's murder. Throughout the film, the Inspector reappears with every death.



## **Analysis**

The Inspector is a smart man who realizes that the events of the deaths are very suspicious. He tries to help find the truth of the matter, but Reggie discovers it on her own.

## **Mr. Felix, played by Paul Bonifas**

### **Description**

Mr. Felix is a French stamp collector.

### **Analysis**

Mr. Felix's interest in stamps helps him discover the worth of Charles's stamps. He is happy to have held them even for a moment.



# Themes

## Inability to Totally Know Others

*Charade* reminds viewers how difficult it can be to truly know someone else. Each character has multiple personalities and identities. Peter alone goes by at least four different names throughout the course of the movie. The other characters all lie about their identities at some point as well causing Reggie to struggle to believe anyone, including Peter. Even at times when Reggie totally gives him her trust, he is still lying to her. We know eventually that his lies were meant to protect her, but we also discover that it is easy to be deceived. The best intentions cannot always completely make up for deception, and for that reason, we must remember that trusting people is a difficult business.

Although we do recognize that we can never totally know all about others, we do see that the most important traits stand out. Throughout everything, Reggie knows deep down that Peter is someone who can be trusted. His ultimate qualities of kindness and goodness seem to be apparent even when he is speaking completely in lies. We are reassured that we may not know everything, but we can recognize the important qualities in others. These qualities exist deep down in people, and they cannot be overshadowed or changed just by circumstances. Peter's true identity is not shocking since he seems to have positive qualities that are exposed throughout all the dangerous and unusual situations.

## Trust Comes In Many Forms

Trust comes in many forms throughout *Charade*. In the beginning, Reggie is naïve and trusts everyone that she meets. Her innocence is seen in her first conversations with Sylvie when she admits that she doesn't really know what her husband does for a living. She is simply interested in his riches, but she now realizes that those are not even worth her time since she does not love him. She has married a husband who she knows almost nothing about, and eventually she discovers that she never truly even knew his name. From that point, she learns that trust should not be given lightly and that learning more about someone can actually save you.

Reggie experiences trust in many ways as she runs through the streets of Paris. She gives all her trust to Peter at first, simply because they met before she discovered her husband's death. This simple meeting helped to give her a previous impression of him that makes him above suspicion. She also trusts Bartholomew because of his status as an authority figure with the CIA, and his appearance in one of the offices there. However, his true identity is Carson Dyle, so he was by far the least trustworthy person in the film. Reggie eventually discovers that the truest trust has to come from the heart. She can trust Peter without always knowing why because she can feel that he cares for her.



## Changes in Life Challenge and Change Us

Reggie's life completely changes after her husband's death. Before marrying her husband, Reggie worked as a translator in Paris. After their marriage, however, she became a lady of leisure, traveling around on his money. She does not really know what he does, but she simply appreciates the fact that he lets her do as she wants. However, she is planning on leaving him because she does not love him. She had become frivolous with herself and her life, but after Charles's death, Reggie must find a way to keep going. She must deal with many unexpected and unusual situations that occur as a result of his death and his secrets.

Reggie finds that the changes in her life challenge and change her. She can no longer remain the same person after going through these experiences. She had become bored with her easy way of life, and with Charles's death, she becomes a stronger individual. Reggie uses her inner strength to cope with the new changes in her life that come with Charles's death and the subsequent hunt for his money. Reggie's tenacity helps to keep her alive while being chased by numerous scary and deceptive men. By the end of the film, she has become a stronger, more confident woman due to her challenges. She can no longer be the same innocent woman, but she is now a strong woman who has fought her life and survived.



## Style and Cinematography

Stanley Donen creates *Charade* based on traditional themes and techniques used by Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock was one of the greatest directors of suspense thrillers of all time and is best known for films such as *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Pyscho* (1960), and *The Birds*, which was released in 1963 around the same time as *Charade*. Hitchcock used suspense to build up his films rather than straight mystery plots like so many of his predecessors had used. Rather than shocking his viewers, Hitchcock chose to draw them in using mysterious events and people.

Donen uses several techniques that were used commonly by Hitchcock. First, he builds suspense over the course of the movie. From the opening scene when Reggie is "held at" gunpoint by Jean-Louise's water pistol until she is aimed at again by Carson Dyle, the viewer is slowly drawn in to the plot of the story. When we finally learn that Bartholomew is Dyle, we are a bit surprised but then the viewer realizes that they've been wondering about him all along.

A very popular Hitchcock technique that Donen uses well is a "MacGuffin." The "MacGuffin" is a simple detail or character around which the plot for the film forms. The detail may not seem important at first, but eventually it becomes the background cause for the actions of all the characters. For example, in *Vertigo* Hitchcock uses the death of a mysterious woman who is investigated to create his story. Donen uses the money that Charles has hidden in a similar fashion. All the events in the plot center on finding that money, but no one knows where it is or how to find it. Hidden in the stamps, the money is found in the most unlikely place of all.

# Motifs

## Suspense

In the standard form typical of the great Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Donen creates suspense in his film as well. Rather than using surprising shocks throughout the film, suspense builds slowly from the beginning of the film until its final moments. The move is more subtle than using surprises and creates a richer plot. The suspense builds in the film from the moment that we see a train speeding across the country to the moment that we discover Peter's true identity. Donen uses characters, looks, and moments to create suspense in the film. For example, suspense builds as we see Peter join the men who have been chasing Reggie, and we begin to wonder how he fits into their world.

Unlike Hitchcock, though, Donen does throw in a few surprises for his viewers. These surprises help to keep the viewer on their toes as they try to figure out exactly what is happening in the film. Everyone is a suspect, and the suspense grows with each new death and each new event. In the end, viewers have likely become suspicious of Bartholomew who seems to only answer his home phone and is never shown in his office again; however, many viewers gasp in surprise to discover that Bartholomew is actually the dangerous Carson Dyle who was thought to be dead. Additionally, viewers are surprised to learn that Peter is really the one working with the CIA and that he is now a good guy rather than a thief.

## "MacGuffin"

The "MacGuffin" is a popular technique used by Alfred Hitchcock in most of his films. In order to form the plot around which all the action takes place, Hitchcock was known to use a "MacGuffin." Quite simply, a "MacGuffin" is a small detail or character that the director and writer use to form the plot. For instance, in one of Hitchcock's films, the "MacGuffin" is a woman who died, and her death starts off a series of events. Although the detail becomes less important than the events in the plot, the action is instigated and pushed by this "MacGuffin."

In *Charade*, the "MacGuffin" of the plot is the money that Charles hid before he was murdered. Years earlier, Charles and his friends stole money from the government, but he returned and collected it before the others. All this time, they have been searching for him and the \$250,000. Finally, they found him, but he had recently sold all his possessions and planned to leave the country without his wife. Now that he is dead, everyone assumes that Reggie has the money. Thus, the search for the money and her race for her life begin. The "MacGuffin" of the money becomes less important than the relationships between the characters that are searching for the money.



## Chase Scenes

The chase scenes in *Charade* are classic. The scenes were shot on location in Paris and are full of life. One of the first scenes that seems like a chase is actually when Reggie begins to follow Peter. Although she does not exactly run after him through the streets, she does try to secretly follow him to find out his true purposes. We see a quaint picture of Paris life as she seeks to follow him without being discovered. As she sits with random people and hides in corners, we are fascinated by this amusing scene. This version of the chase is funny and charming especially when set against the final chase scene.

In the final chase scene, Reggie is running from Peter for her life. After finding Tex dead in her room, she believes that Peter must be the killer. Since she knows she didn't kill Tex, she realizes that Peter is the only suspect left alive. Reggie has called Bartholomew to meet her so that she can give him the stamps. As she hurries to meet Bartholomew, Peter follows her through the streets of Paris. Little does she know that she is running into the wrong set of arms. She has no way of knowing that Bartholomew is actually Carson Dyle and that he killed all of the men. Suspense builds during this chase scene, and the viewer is filled with concern for Reggie's final fate.



# Symbols

## Jean-Louise's Water Gun

Jean-Louise shoots Reggie with water from his toy water gun at the beginning of the film when they are at the hotel in the mountains. This action foreshadows the danger that Reggie will live in until the end of the movie. Reggie seems completely unaware of any impending danger as we watch a gun being aimed directly at her. We are scared, then shocked to find that rather than a bullet, out comes water from Jean-Louise's water gun. Reggie's life at this moment seems completely perfect, and she is happy to be spending time with friends before returning home to divorce Charles. Little does she know that within hours, she will find that her husband is dead and that there are many men trying to kill her.

For the rest of the film, Reggie is constantly running from other guns - real guns. Because of the money her husband stole, Reggie's very life is in danger from several men who want to find the money. These men had worked with him to steal the money, but he had recovered it first. For years, they had been chasing him, but they had never found the money. In the final scene, Reggie watches as Carson Dyle aims his gun at her as well. He is planning to kill her for her husband's money. However, unlike the beginning scene, Dyle never gets a chance to pull the trigger as he is killed by Peter. The danger to Reggie finally ends as the point of the pistol drops as Dyle falls through the floor.

## The Elevator

After Reggie and Peter begin staying in the hotel, the elevator of the hotel becomes a central focus for the characters. The elevator helps to show the relationships between the characters as they all live in the hotel together. When Scobie and the others first confront Peter again, he must find a way around letting Reggie know that he is involved with them. In this scene, he uses the balcony rather than the elevator as a means to meet the men--this one omission from what could have been a normal walk down the hall points to the secrecy needed.

Additionally, the characters also pass one another on the elevator. When Reggie realizes that Peter may not be on her side, she avoids him by taking the stairs down to the lobby while he takes the elevator up to their floor. Earlier, Gideon was killed in the elevator, because someone thought that he had the money. The elevator shows the relationships between the characters vividly: as Reggie stops trusting Peter, they cross paths because of the elevator. They are no longer close, and the distance between them due to the elevator helps to make this apparent.



## The Stamps

The stamps are symbolic of all that has happened since the fateful day when the five men decided to steal the money from the government. On that day, they believed that they had created a great plan, but through the years, they learned that Charles stole the money and that no one can be trusted. Additionally, the men had no way of knowing that Dyle would live and would spend his life seeking revenge as well. The stamps help to symbolize all the problems that the money has caused over the years. The fact that Charles hid the money in the stamps is ingenious, and this very thought shows how much stock he put in the money.

Charles's stamps also cause all the problems that Reggie must deal with in *Charade*. Had Charles just left the money out in the open, she could have given the men the money and gone on with her life. However, since he sold everything while she was gone and put the money in the stamps, she had no way of knowing what had happened. He seems to have waited until she was gone to make his mysterious move. The stamps end up leading her on a desperate run for her life - a run that ends up with her finding the love she's been looking for in Peter's arms. She ends up finding much more than she bargained for as she finds love with Peter.



## Essay Questions

What types of Hitchcock elements are used in *Charade*?

Who is the "MacGuffin" character in the film?

How does Donen build suspense throughout the film?

How do Peter and Reggie meet?

What happened to Reggie's husband, and how does she find out about it?

Who are the men that show up at Charles's funeral?

Why does Peter keep changing names and roles throughout the course of the film?

Who has really killed everyone in the film? Why did he do this?

Where is Charles's money hidden?

How does the relationship between Reggie and Peter develop and end up?

### Bibliography

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