

Notorious Film Summary

Notorious by Alfred Hitchcock

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Context

Notorious is the story of Alicia Huberman and T.R. Devlin. Alicia is the daughter of John Huberman, a convicted Nazi spy. Alicia is approached by Devlin on behalf of U.S. intelligence to work as a spy for them in Brazil. Many Nazis have moved to Brazil to continue their work, so Devlin asks Alicia to meet with them to discover their plans.

After Alicia admits to having known one of the Nazis, Alex Sebastian, in the past - in fact, Alex had wanted to marry her - she finally agrees to help with the project. In Brazil, Alicia and Alex begin to see one another again. Alex soon demands that Alicia marry him to show her allegiance to the cause. Against Devlin's better judgment, Alicia marries Alex.

Devlin and Alicia quickly discover that the Nazis are importing uranium to begin work on an atomic bomb. Despite their efforts to avoid detection, Alex learns that Alicia is spying on him. Alex and his mother then begin to poison Alicia to death slowly, but Devlin rescues her just in time. As the film ends, Alex is called inside and viewers expect that, before the night is over, his colleagues will murder him for endangering their mission.

Alfred Hitchcock was unquestionably one of the greatest directors of all time. Countless directors have copied his use of suspense; Hitchcock's nickname is "The Master of Suspense." He directed many successful movies besides *Notorious*, including *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), *Sabotage* (1936) and *Rebecca* (1940). *North By Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960) and *Vertigo* (1958), some of Hitchcock's later works, are among his best-known films.

T.R. Devlin was portrayed by Cary Grant. Grant received his first big break starring opposite Mae West in the 1933 film *She Done Him Wrong*. In 1937's *Topper*, Grant began creating the debonair persona that skyrocketed him to stardom. He starred in dozens of box office hits and won the affection of moviegoers around the world. Some of his most popular films were *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *An Affair to Remember* (1957) and *North By Northwest* (1959).

Ingrid Bergman gave a compelling performance as Alicia Huberman Sebastian. After Bergman became a star in her home country of Sweden, MGM's David O. Selznick brought her to America to film a remake of her earlier film *Intermezzo: A Love Story* (1939). She returned to the States in 1942 to make the classic *Casablanca*, in which she starred opposite Humphrey Bogart. Bergman also starred in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943), *Gaslight* (1944), *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), *Anastasia* (1956) and *Hostsonaten* (1978).

Claude Rains played the role of Alex Sebastian. An accomplished actor, Rains received Oscar nominations for Best Supporting Actor in *Notorious* and in three other films: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942) and *Mr. Skeffington* (1944).

Notorious was nominated for two Oscars: Best Actor in a Supporting Role for Claude Rains and Best Writing, Original Screenplay for Ben Hecht. In addition, Alfred Hitchcock was nominated for the Grand Prize of the Festival at the Cannes Film Festival.



Summary and Analysis

Notorious begins in Miami, Florida at 3:20 p.m. on April 24, 1946. Reporters with cameras are gathered in front of the U.S. District Court in Florida. Inside, a man threatens a judge, saying that even if he is put away, the judge and the country will still get what's coming to them. The man, John Huberman, is sentenced to life in prison. Huberman's daughter, Alicia Huberman, leaves the courtroom and is followed by a policeman.

At her home, Alicia throws a party with friends. When most of the attendees have left, Alicia and T.R. Devlin become acquainted. Leaving a couple of guests who have passed out, they go for a drive. Alicia is intoxicated but drives anyway. When a policeman pulls them over, Alicia complains that she will have to go to jail because this is her second drunk driving offense.

After the policeman sees Devlin's badge, he lets them go. Alicia is terribly angry to discover that Devlin is a cop; he forces her to let him drive. When they finally arrive back at Alicia's house, Devlin gives her something to drink. He tries to convince Alicia that he wants to be friends, but he also tells her that the police have a job for her. He tells her that they are trying to smoke out traitors in Brazil and that she would be an asset to the cause.

At first she refuses to help him, but then Devlin begins to play a recording of a conversation in which she and her father had an argument. She would not help her father betray the U.S. because her mother was from the States. The recording wasn't used at the trial and Alicia tells Devlin that she didn't turn in her father. Devlin says that they didn't expect her to. Alicia tells him that she just wants to have fun with her friends; but eventually, she agrees to work with him.

A friend arrives to remind Alicia of their planned trip to the ocean the next day. When he leaves, Devlin asks her about it, because their plane to Brazil departs early the next morning. Devlin then leaves to complete their travel preparations.

In the morning, Devlin and Alicia find that they are not alone on the plane; the third passenger is Paul Prescott, their new boss. Devlin tells Alicia that Prescott has learned that her father committed suicide that morning by poisoning himself. Although she is upset, Alicia is glad that she no longer has to hate her father or herself. When she learned her father's true identity a few years earlier, she had despised him for his deceit.

Finally they arrive in Rio de Janeiro. As they share a meal, Alicia asks for a maid and a job description. Alicia is proud of herself for being sober and single for eight days, but Devlin doesn't give her the credit she thinks she deserves. She tries to convince him that she can change, but he seems less than convinced. Alicia accuses him of being afraid of falling in love with her and gives him a hard time. She begs him to believe her just a little, but he remains silent. Later, as they climb a cliff, they kiss passionately.



At the U.S. Embassy, several men discuss their plan to have Alicia seduce the Nazi leader, Alexander Sebastian, and find out as much as possible about his affairs. They break up the meeting and head out to tell Devlin and Alicia about the mission.

On the deck at Alicia's place, the couple embraces. Then Devlin calls his hotel to check for messages. There is a message from Prescott so Devlin leaves immediately to meet with him. Prescott tells Devlin about the assignment and Devlin is very angry at the prospect. He discovers that Sebastian was once in love with Alicia, making her the perfect candidate for the job.

Devlin returns to Alicia to tell her about their assignment. He talks to her about Sebastian and she tells him that she was never interested in Sebastian. Devlin tells her that Sebastian is in charge of something big and that she has to contact him. She accuses Devlin of knowing about the assignment beforehand, but he adamantly denies it. Alicia is distraught to learn that she must begin work early the next morning.

Alicia and Devlin go horseback riding the next morning and slowly pass Sebastian so that he'll see Alicia; but Sebastian doesn't appear to recognize her. Then Devlin gives her horse a kick and, as the horse gallops away, Sebastian hurries to Alicia's aid. The two decide to meet later for dinner.

At dinner, Alicia tells Sebastian that she is excited to see him again. He complains that business has made him look and feel old but he thinks that Alicia may be his tonic for youth.

Prescott enters the dining room and Alicia is shocked to see him. She tells Sebastian that intelligence agents are harassing her. Sebastian offers to help her forget her past sorrows, proclaiming his hunger for her and his expectation that they would someday reunite. He asks her about Devlin, but Alicia insists that she has no interest in him. So Sebastian asks her to join him for dinner the next night at a party being hosted by his mother. Although Alicia is obviously uncomfortable with the situation, Alex doesn't seem to notice.

The next night, Devlin and Prescott help Alicia prepare for the dinner. They tell her to get the names and nationalities of all the people at the party. Prescott also instructs Alicia to stay away from Devlin for a few days so as not to arouse suspicion.

Alicia arrives at the house and is met by Madame Anna Sebastian. Madame Sebastian questions Alicia as to why she did not testify at her father's trial; Alicia says that her father did not wish to expose her to the situation. As Alicia enters the party, she is introduced to the many men at the dinner.

During dinner, everyone speaks guardedly, since Alicia is new to the group. Afterwards some of the men gather to discuss what is happening in their organization. Another dinner guest, Emil, walks in and asks the group if they will rejoin the others. Emil is very tired so Eric, one of the group, says that he will happily drive Emil home. One gets the uneasy feeling that Emil will not see the morning.



Alicia goes to the races with Madame Sebastian and Alex. When Alicia leaves their box, Alex insists to his mother that he really wants to have fun with Alicia.

Meanwhile Alicia meets up with Devlin and gives him the names and descriptions of the men at the party. One man, Emil, has not been seen since the dinner party. Alicia tells Devlin that she is now playmates with Alex as well. Devlin tells her that he never believed she had changed. Alicia is upset that Devlin allowed her to be placed in this situation.

As Alicia begins to cry, Alex appears. Devlin quickly takes his leave and Alex tells Alicia that he had not been watching the race; he had been watching her. Alex accuses her of being in love with Devlin. He asks Alicia to convince him that Devlin means nothing to her.

The next day, the investigators find out that a very important scientist is working under an assumed name in Alex's house. Then Alicia arrives at their office, seeking Devlin's advice. Alex wants Alicia to marry him immediately and she has to give him her answer at lunch.

Devlin says that he thinks the move would be useful. Alicia tells him that Alex decided to go this far because he is in love with her and thinks that she's in love with him. She asks Devlin if it's all right; Prescott says that it's perfect for the investigation. Devlin points out that Alicia might end up on a long honeymoon, but she says that she can manage to get back to the house quickly. Then Devlin leaves.

Alex and his mother discuss his decision to marry Alicia. He insists that he will make his own decisions, even though his mother is jealous. He plans to hold the wedding the following week and invites his mother to attend.

After the wedding, Alex and Alicia return to the house, only to find that his mother is already asleep and that she had told everyone else to retire as well. The couple heads to their room.

The next day, Alicia inspects her closets and her new suite of rooms. She attempts to enter one of the rooms but is refused entry. Downstairs the men are discussing their plans when Alicia enters, looking for Alex. She apologizes for the interruption and asks Alex for the keys to some of the rooms. He leaves to retrieve them from his mother while Alicia listens to the men argue. Alex returns with the keys and says that he'll see Alicia at lunch. In the meantime, Alicia is able to investigate the rest of the house except for one room, known as the wine cellar. Only Alex has a key to it.

Alicia meets with Devlin and asks him what she should look for if she gets the key to the wine cellar. Things are not as fun as expected, Alicia says, so Devlin suggests that she convince Alex to throw a party to introduce her to society. Devlin will attend and will attempt to learn the truth about the wine cellar. He encourages Alicia to use her charms to persuade Alex to give the party.



The party is scheduled and on the evening of the gathering, Alicia finds Alex's hidden key. As she secretly takes it, Alex talks to her about Devlin and how jealous he is of him. They embrace and Alicia is barely able to keep the key hidden from him.

Alicia has brought the key downstairs with her and waits nervously for Devlin to arrive. Before he does, though, Alex whisks Alicia into the party. Then she spots Devlin and gives him the key as Alex watches them. He quickly joins them to interrupt their conversation but then must leave to see someone else. Finally, a female guest comes over to talk to Devlin.

Alicia becomes nervous when she realizes that Alex could run out of champagne before the evening is over and would discover that his wine cellar key is missing. She talks to Devlin and they plan to meet outside a little later so that she can show him the wine cellar door. Seeing them together again, Alex quickly returns to his wife's side. Alicia reassures him that Devlin is trying to drown his sorrows.

Alicia finally makes it outside to meet Devlin and they hurry to explore the wine cellar. While searching the cellar for evidence, Devlin accidentally breaks a bottle of wine and discovers some type of metal in another one of the bottles. Alicia helps Alex clean up.

Upstairs, Joseph informs Alex that they are running out of wine. When Devlin and Alicia hear someone coming, Devlin pulls Alicia aside and kisses her. Alex is there and sees them so Alicia pushes Devlin away. Alex is terribly upset and Alicia tries to convince him that she is not in love with Devlin. Devlin leaves the house quickly and Alex asks Alicia to go upstairs to her guests. Then Alex gets Joseph to help him with the wine. When Alex realizes that his key is missing, he says, "You know, Joseph, I don't think they need any more champagne." They return upstairs to the party.

After everyone leaves, Alicia apologizes for what happened with Devlin. Alex says that he must meet with some men so Alicia goes to bed. When Alex enters their room later, he pulls out his keys and tosses them on the dresser. The next morning, Alex finds that his missing key is back on his key chain. He goes to the wine cellar and discovers that one of the bottles is missing; he then finds the broken bottle beneath the shelves.

That morning, Alex visits his mother in her room and tells her that something is wrong with Alicia. She is happy at the news and says that she suspected as much all along; however, she thinks that Alex is referring to Devlin. Then Alex says, "I am married to an American agent."

Madame Sebastian slowly lights a cigarette as they discuss how easy it should have been to figure out. Alex believes that he is now doomed, since Emil was murdered and he hadn't made nearly as big a mistake as Alex has. Alex says that even he would kill such a fool.

Alex's mother says that there is no reason for anyone to find out about Alicia. Alex suggests that he kill Alicia himself. His mother tells him not to be impetuous; she asks Alex to let her arrange things. She says that they should let Alicia go where she wants, but should make sure that she learns no further information. Madame Sebastian says,



"She must go, but it must happen slowly. If she could become ill and remain ill for a time, until...."

The next morning, Alex gives Alicia coffee as she tells him about her plans to go shopping for the day. Later when she meets with Prescott, Alicia says that she has a headache, so he closes the office shades for her.

Prescott says that uranium ore was discovered in the sand in the wine bottle. They want Alicia to find out where the sand is coming from because it is very important to learn its source. Prescott also informs her that she will have a new contact in about a week, since Devlin has asked for a transfer to Spain. Alicia is upset but tries to hide it.

Later we see an almost empty coffee cup and then, as Alex and Alicia walk off, Alicia becomes ill. Joseph runs to check on her but Alicia says that she just needs to go inside.

Alicia meets with Devlin. She apologizes for being late since she was feeling ill. Devlin doesn't tell her that he's being transferred. She tells him that there have been no problems as a result of their escapade the other night. Alicia says that she has a hangover and tries to get Devlin to tell her about his transfer. Finally, when she returns his scarf to him, Devlin realizes that Alicia knows that he's leaving. She says "good-bye" to him but as she walks away, Alicia again becomes very ill.

Later that evening, one of Alex's associates insists that Alicia visit a doctor to find out what's wrong with her. Meanwhile Madame Sebastian fixes her another cup of coffee. Alex tries to convince Alicia to take a boat trip to Spain with his mother, but she refuses. The other man suggests that she go to the mountains but she rejects that idea as well. When he then starts to tell Alicia where she *is* going, Alex stops him.

As the man accidentally reaches for the wrong coffee cup, Alex and his mother cry out.

Alicia finally realizes the truth, even as the man continues to tell her that she needs more rest. Everything becomes fuzzy and Alicia collapses in the foyer. They take her to her room and she begs them to leave her alone. Otto wants to call the hospital but Madame Sebastian won't allow it. Alex then insists that the phone be removed from the room.

The next day, as Devlin waits to meet Alicia at a park bench, we see Alicia in bed, with Madame Sebastian watching over her. When Alicia doesn't arrive, Devlin tells Prescott that he doesn't believe her hangover story. He wants to pay her a call, but Prescott warns him not to disrupt things because they're getting ready to close the case.

When Devlin arrives at the house, Joseph tells him that Alex is in a meeting. Devlin asks about Alicia and is told that she is ill and confined to her bed. Joseph leaves to get Alex and says that he'll be back in a few moments. Devlin decides to go up to Alicia's room and finds her lying in bed, very ill. Alicia tells him that she's being poisoned and has been too weak to escape. Devlin decides to get her out, but Alicia accuses him of



planning to leave her; Devlin says that he was only leaving because he loved her. Alicia is afraid that she won't be able to walk out because she was given sleeping pills.

Alicia tells Devlin that Emil was killed and that the same people will kill Alex too if they learn that she is a spy. She also tells Devlin where the sand is coming from. Alicia is afraid that they can't escape because everyone is in the house.

Alex enters the room and Devlin tells him that, if he tries to stop them, Devlin will tell his friends about what they have been doing to Alicia. Devlin takes Alicia to the hospital;

Alex is left behind. Meanwhile Eric, who killed Emil, checks Alicia's room and verifies that there was no phone there that could have been used to call the hospital. Then Eric calls out to Alex, saying, "Alex, will you come in, please? I wish to talk to you."



Characters

T.R. Devlin, played by Cary Grant

Description

T.R. Devlin works for the Allies as the contact person for Alicia. Devlin first meets her when he appears at a party she holds soon after her father is sent to prison. Alicia had planned to go away in order to avoid all the rumors about her father and her, but Devlin convinces her to become a spy for the Allies instead.

At first Devlin has a very low opinion of Alicia, but as he gets to know her, he gains respect for her bravery and intelligence. The more the two interact, the more Devlin begins to fall in love with Alicia. Finally, he can no longer hide his feelings, but by that time, Alicia has been forced to marry Alex to maintain her cover.

Devlin's concern about Alicia increases as she finds herself in greater danger. During a party hosted by Alicia and Alex, she and Devlin explore the always-locked wine cellar; when Alex discovers them, he realizes Alicia's deception. In the end, against the advice of his superiors, Devlin returns to the house and rescues Alicia from death by poisoning.

Analysis

Devlin is a strong man. He helps Alicia keep going as her situation grows more difficult and is willing to stand up to his superiors when things grow too dangerous for her. Devlin's presence makes Alex uncomfortable, not only because it makes him suspicious of Alicia, but also because he knows that Devlin is watching how he treats Alicia, since the two are friends.

Devlin protects Alicia by being present when possible. He continues to do his job by searching Alex's house during a party. During their time together, Devlin begins to fall in love with Alicia. Although he must hide his feelings because of Alex, Devlin reveals them to Alicia and saves her life when Alex and his mother try to poison her to death.

Alicia Huberman Sebastian, played by Ingrid Bergman

Description

Alicia Huberman Sebastian is the daughter of John Sebastian, a convicted Nazi spy. Alicia knows many of his friends and attends his trial but never condoned his behavior. In fact, when she discovered that her father was working with the Nazis, Alicia reprimanded him for it. Alicia's feelings are discovered by the Allies and they decide to use her as a spy. Alicia seems to be the perfect candidate because no one would doubt her loyalty to her father's cause.



Alicia agrees to help the Allies after some persuasion by Devlin. The plan is that she will become involved with Alex Sebastian, who once wanted to marry her, and spy on both him and his colleagues. In a strange turn of events, Alex soon demands that Alicia marry him to prove her allegiance, so she feels she must agree.

In the meantime, Alicia falls in love with Devlin, her contact person. She feels that she must put her feelings second and focus on her mission so she continues to work with Devlin. After Alex catches Alicia and Devlin investigating the wine cellar, Alex begins to poison her. Eventually, Devlin rescues Alicia from the house.

Analysis

Alicia has gained a reputation for being a "fast" woman. She spends time with many different men, all of whom believe they can win her. Because of her reputation and her father's involvement with the Nazi party, the Allies ask her to become a spy. She agrees because she did not approve of her father's activities.

Alicia remains strong and independent throughout the film. During the most terrible times, she continues to fulfill her mission by doing her best to discover information to help the Allies. Alicia sacrifices her freedom by marrying Alex and sacrifices love when she rejects Devlin.

Alicia's commitment to the cause eventually places her in great danger. Although Alicia tries to escape, Alex and his mother begin to poison her. Alicia expects to die after her true motives are discovered, but Devlin becomes her knight in shining armor and comes to her rescue.

Alexander "Alex" Sebastian, played by Claude Rains

Description

Alex Sebastian works with the Nazis in Brazil, supporting and housing them. Alex is very rich and, at one time, was infatuated with Alicia Huberman. Although Alicia rejected him, Alex still has feelings for her and quickly falls for her when they meet again in Brazil.

Alex lives with his overbearing mother, who never trusts Alicia for a moment. In contrast, Alex believes that Alicia supports his work with the Nazis and that she supported her father's work. Although he is suspicious of her relationship with Devlin, Alex does not discover the truth about Alicia until it is too late. After the rest of his colleagues discover Alicia's true goals, Alex is summoned for a "talk" with Eric and is likely murdered.

Analysis

Alex is wealthy and spoiled. His mother has protected him for many years by using her wealth and influence to control him. Although Alex is involved with the Nazi party and actively supports them, he is very naïve. Alex is totally unaware that Alicia is spying on



him and his colleagues - a mistake that he pays for with his life. He does doubt her in the beginning, but after she marries him, he assumes that she is faithful.

Alex finally seems to grow up and become the cruel person one would expect a Nazi to be after he discovers that Alicia is spying on him. He begins poisoning her so that she will die slowly. However, he appears to take this approach only because his mother insists upon it.

Captain Paul Prescott, played by Louis Calhern

Description

Captain Paul Prescott is the head of the Allied Forces team that is trying to gather more information about Nazi spies and supporters. After learning of Alicia's disagreement with her father's support of the Nazis and of her way with men, Prescott decides that Alicia is the perfect candidate to spy for the Allies.

Prescott's primary concern is the Allied cause rather than Alicia's safety. He seems to feel that, as the daughter of a Nazi spy, Alicia is valuable but dispensable. Devlin contradicts Prescott by expressing his opinion that Alicia's life is just as important as her mission.

Analysis

Like many good leaders, Captain Prescott is totally focused on his goals. He realizes that in order to win the war, the Allies need to stop as much Nazi activity as possible, especially their work in Brazil. Prescott forms a plan based around Alicia, since he knows that she disapproved of her father's involvement with the Nazis.

Prescott's focus, however, puts Alicia in grave danger. When contact from her ceases, Prescott is more concerned about the mission than about Alicia's safety. Because of his attitude, Alicia nearly dies before Devlin selflessly hurries in to save her.

Madame Anna Sebastian, played by Leopoldine Konstantin

Description

Madame Anna Sebastian is Alex's calculating mother. She seems to be more involved in the Nazi plots than Alex is and more trusted by his colleagues and friends.

Unlike Alex, Madame Sebastian doubts Alicia's true motives from the very beginning. She questions both Alicia and Alex carefully, never trusting that Alicia truly loves Alex. Madame Sebastian also helps mastermind the plan to keep Alicia in submission by slowly poisoning her to death.



Analysis

Although at first she seems merely a stately, picky older woman, Madame Anna Sebastian soon shows herself to be a formidable opponent. She watches Alicia closely and she is the first to realize that Alicia's true motives have nothing to do with love for Alex.

Madame Sebastian is also jealously possessive of her son. She is extremely angry when he becomes involved with Alicia and only too happy to report Alicia's deception later. When they make the plan to poison Alicia, Madame Sebastian seems to be doing it partly for the Nazi cause and partly to keep her son's affections to herself.

Professor Wilhelm Renzler alias Dr. Anderson, played by Reinhold Schunzel

Description

Professor Wilhelm Renzler is one of Germany's greatest scientists. He has escaped to Brazil and is living and experimenting in Alex's home. Alicia's reports to Devlin help the Allies learn more about Renzler, who uses the alias Dr. Anderson, and his plans.

Analysis

Professor Renzler is just another disreputable but brilliant person associating with Alex. By being introduced to such men, the viewer learns exactly how dangerous and important Alicia's mission truly is.

Walter Beardsley, played by Moroni Olsen

Description

Walter Beardsley works with Devlin and Prescott. Beardsley considers Alicia to have a loose reputation with men and wants to exploit it. Although Alicia is not in the room, Devlin quickly and vehemently corrects Beardsley.

Analysis

Beardsley's derogatory comment concerning Alicia's reputation helps the viewer to understand Devlin's true, intense feelings for Alicia.



Eric Mathis, played by Ivan Triesault

Description

Eric Mathis is a cruel, conniving man. Of all the men with whom Alex associates, Eric is by far the most dangerous. When Emil makes a grave mistake, Eric is the one who "takes him for a drive," the phrase that signifies that Emil will not be returning.

Analysis

Eric is deadly and dangerous. After Eric kills Emil for making a mistake, we know that he is not someone to be crossed. When Devlin and Alicia leave for the hospital, it is Eric who calls Alex to come inside. We have the feeling that Alex will be going for "a drive" with Eric as well.

Joseph, played by Alex Minotis

Description

Joseph is Alex's butler. He seems like a fairly nice, normal guy compared to the evil, twisted men with whom Alex works. Joseph is genuinely concerned about Alicia's fate and tries to help her when he can.

Analysis

Joseph's motivations are hard to measure. He seems to work for Alex for the good pay, not because he's committed to Alex's ideology.

Emil Hupka, played by Eberhard Krumschmidt

Description

Emil is one of Alex's henchmen. After making some serious mistakes, Emil is murdered by Eric.

Analysis

Emil's death gives us our first insight into the dangers of making a mistake when dealing with Alex, Eric and the others.



Themes

Patriotism

Patriotism is a major theme in *Notorious*. As the film begins, we see that Alicia's father is going to jail for lack of patriotism: he has been working as a Nazi spy in the U.S. Although Alicia did not support her father's work and motives, she does not oppose him publicly. Instead, she chastises him in private but attends his trial, revealing little emotion.

After the trial, U.S. officials contact Alicia through Devlin in order to convince her to work for them as a spy. Since her father's associates do not know Alicia's true feelings, she would be able to infiltrate their ranks and discover valuable information. Additionally, Alex Sebastian, who harbors many of the Nazis in Brazil, once loved Alicia and would be likely to want her back.

By working for the U.S. government, Alicia sacrifices her freedom in order to show her patriotism. She risks her life by contacting Alex and loses all freedom when she marries him. Alicia demonstrates her patriotism in a dramatic way by spying for the Allies.

Fight for Love

Devlin and Alicia must go through many trials after they meet. Their most difficult challenge is that they fall in love while working together. However, in order to maintain their covers, they must ignore their true desires and pretend to be old friends.

Devlin begins to fight for Alicia's love before she is willing to admit her own feelings. When Beardsley insults Alicia's honor at the beginning of the film, Devlin quickly comes to her defense, telling him that Alicia is a much better woman than her reputation suggests. Devlin also encourages the others to forbid Alicia's marriage to Alex. When they don't take his advice, Devlin continues to keep a protective watch over her.

Eventually, though, the couple is ready to fight for their love. As they search Alex's wine cellar, the two share a passionate embrace. They must ignore their feelings so that Alex does not become suspicious, but once Alex realizes the truth, all pretense ends. After Alicia fails to meet him, Devlin rushes to her house and begins his real fight for her love. He demands to see her and carries her out of the house so that he can save her life and care for his true love.

Courage

Both Alicia and Devlin show great courage during the film. Both believe strongly in freedom and equality and are willing to risk their lives to oppose the Nazis. The two



gather strength from one another as they delve into the secrets of the Nazis who are hiding in Brazil.

Alicia courageously agrees to go to Brazil with Devlin so that she can make Alex's acquaintance again. Having planned to go on a fun trip with her friends, Alicia selflessly sacrifices her own desires in order to help the Allies. When Alex asks Alicia to marry him, she is frightened at the thought, but courageously puts aside her own feelings to help the cause.

Devlin also risks his life by associating with Alicia. As her contact, he is in grave danger, especially after Alex becomes both jealous and suspicious. Devlin and Alicia search Alex's wine cellar during a party, putting them both in danger. When Alicia fails to arrive for a meeting, Devlin bravely bursts into Alex's house and saves Alicia from being poisoned to death.

Style and Cinematography

Notorious is much like many other Alfred Hitchcock films. It is a great example of Hitchcock's classic gothic mystery cinema. Hitchcock is one of the most masterful tellers of dark stories in the history of American filmmaking. Using suspense, Hitchcock creates interest and intrigue in the film. Instead of offering a shocking surprise at the end of the film, Hitchcock builds suspense throughout the movie so that the final events are expected.

Suspense also helps keep the audience focused on the characters. When shock is used rather than suspense, viewers are too surprised to pay attention to the relationships between the characters; they focus on the surprises they encounter rather than on the roles and lives of the characters. In *Notorious*, the use of suspense always keeps viewers attuned to the feelings and experiences of the characters, especially to the development of the relationship between Devlin and Alicia.

Hitchcock commonly uses a technique called the "MacGuffin." The MacGuffin is a character or detail that instigates the action of the entire story. In this film, imported uranium hidden in wine bottles for use in bombmaking is the MacGuffin. These wine bottles begin a series of events that lead directly to the adventures of Devlin and Alicia. The existence of the uranium-filled wine bottles is the reason that the relationship between Alicia and Devlin develops in the first place.



Motifs

Cover Stories

Cover stories play an important role in *Notorious*. Although many of the characters retain their real identities, they must create cover stories to help disguise their true motivations. This is true both for Devlin and Alicia and for Alex and his Nazi friends; all use cover stories to disguise their actual goals.

Alicia and Devlin claim that they were friends in the U.S. Although Alex is skeptical at first, he eventually believes Alicia's story. Alicia pretends that she was in league with her father and has come to Brazil to escape the publicity in the U.S. She also pretends to be in love with Alex, even agreeing to marry him. Devlin has an easier story since it is less frequently questioned. While Alex never seems to fully believe Devlin's story, he is completely fooled by Alicia's cover.

Alex and his associates are also working undercover. After escaping Germany and the U.S. to continue the Nazis' mission in Brazil, most of the men acquire aliases to hide their true identities. Alex and his mother hide behind their money and provide cover to their "friends." All the cover stories in the film serve to obscure the actual identities and intentions of each character.

Contact Meetings

The contact meetings between Devlin and Alicia monitor the progress of both their relationship and their spying. When Alicia first meets Devlin, she believes that he is simply a handsome man attending her party. After revealing his true identity, Devlin works to convince Alicia to become a spy for the U.S. From these first heated meetings to their uneasy truce, Devlin and Alicia become friends and, eventually, lovers as they continue to meet.

After getting to know Alicia, Devlin protects her honor when he meets with Beardsley. He also becomes her primary contact while she pursues a relationship with Alex. Each time Devlin and Alicia meet, their relationship changes slightly. Although they go through a difficult time before Alicia decides that she must marry Alex, they soon return to a more comfortable relationship.

One of the most important contact meetings occurs during the party hosted by Alicia and Alex. Alicia steals Alex's key and she and Devlin investigate the contents of the bottles in the wine cellar. In the cellar they embrace passionately, revealing their true feelings to themselves and to Alex simultaneously. Their final contact meeting is the one Alicia misses. Devlin becomes concerned and rushes to her house, ultimately rescuing Alicia from certain death.

"MacGuffin"

The "MacGuffin" is a popular technique used by Alfred Hitchcock in the majority of his films. A MacGuffin is a small detail or character around which the director and writer form the plot. For instance, in the famous film *Vertigo*, the MacGuffin is a woman who died; her death sets off a series of events. Although the detail becomes less important than the events in the plot, the action is initiated and advanced by the MacGuffin.

In *Notorious*, the MacGuffin is the uranium concealed in wine bottles. This substance is needed to manufacture an atomic weapon and the Nazis are excited to finally have some in their possession. Since the atomic bomb had been dropped recently in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, contemporary viewers were well aware of the implications of this.

Although the uranium and the related investigations into the activities of the displaced Nazis begin this story, other plots and relationships eventually become more important. As we watch Devlin and Alicia explore the affairs of Alex and his colleagues, the couple becomes more involved. By the end of the film, viewers are more interested in Devlin and Alicia's relationship than in the Nazis' secrets.

Symbols

Coffee Cup

After Alex and his mother, Madame Sebastian, discover that Alicia is spying on them and their colleagues, they decide to poison her slowly so that her death will appear to be natural. At first they simply lace her coffee with a drug. While they must trick her into drinking it the first time, they later continue to drug her coffee more obviously.

The idea of drugging Alicia comes from Madame Sebastian. We see that the coffee cup symbolizes an evil plan by those who would oppose freedom and equality. We also see that Alex still has little nerve. He cannot seem to do anything without the support and encouragement of his colleagues and his mother.

In addition, Alicia's poisoning via the drugged coffee finally prompts Devlin to reveal his true feelings for her. Although he tried to mask them in the past for Alicia's sake and for the sake of the mission, he can no longer keep them secret once he discovers that she is in danger. Instead, he rushes in to save the life of the woman he loves.

Keys

Alex keeps the keys to his home on a single keychain. One of these keys opens the door to the wine cellar where not only wine is stored, but also bottles full of uranium that are being imported for use in developing an atomic bomb. When Alicia and Alex host a party, she must steal the key so that she and Devlin can search the wine cellar.

Although Alicia believes that she has successfully outwitted Alex, he soon realizes that his key has been stolen. Once the key mysteriously reappears overnight, Alex is certain that Alicia is a spy. The keys symbolize both Alex's and Alicia's secrets.

Alex's secrets are hidden with the key. He uses the key to keep illegal uranium hidden downstairs. Alicia, on the other hand, finds that her secrets are revealed via the same keys. Alex discovers her deception when the keys disappear and reappear in a way that makes him realize that only she could be the guilty party.

Wine Bottles

The wine bottles stored in Alex's wine cellar symbolize danger. We first see these wine bottles when Alicia is privy to a short meeting between Alex and his colleagues. One of the men, Emil, has accidentally brought up the wrong wine bottle and has shared information with the wrong people. As a result, Eric takes Emil for a "drive" so that Emil can never again share their secrets.

Later, Alicia's and Devlin's deception is discovered when Alex finds that one of the wine bottles has been broken. Alicia's life is endangered once her lies are uncovered. Alex and his mother begin to poison Alicia to prevent her from divulging more secrets to the Americans.



Essay Questions

Why is Alicia's father under arrest?

How do Alicia and Devlin meet?

What does the U.S. government want Alicia to do for them?

What makes Alicia agree?

Describe how Alicia meets Alex again.

Why does Alex want her to marry him immediately?

Why is Devlin removed as Alicia's contact person?

How does Alex figure out that Alicia is a spy?

What do Alex and his mother decide to do?

How does Devlin discover their deadly plan and save Alicia?

Explain the significance of the last line of the film, in which Alex is asked to come inside.