

# **Shadow of a Doubt Film Summary**

## **Shadow of a Doubt by Alfred Hitchcock**

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## Context

The classic Alfred Hitchcock film *Shadow of a Doubt* chronicles the story of young Charlie and her suspicious Uncle Charlie. Charlie feels like her uncle is the only one who can understand her, and when she is ready for a little excitement, she decides to invite him to visit before discovering that he's already on his way. After Uncle Charlie arrives, though, a series of unusual happenings begins. Charlie discovers that Uncle Charlie is being chased by detectives who believe that he is the Merry Widow Murderer.

Although Charlie doesn't believe the detectives at first, she realizes that Uncle Charlie actually is guilty. When he finds out that she knows, Uncle Charlie begins trying to murder her. Finally, though, she convinces Uncle Charlie to leave and is able to pursue her new love with the detective, Graham.

Alfred Hitchcock was unquestionably one of the greatest directors of all time. Hitchcock's use of suspense has been copied by countless directors and earned him the nickname of "The Master of Suspense." Hitchcock created several successful movies before *Rebecca* (1940), including *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and *Sabotage* (1936). Hitchcock's later works such as *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960) and *Vertigo* (1958) are among his best known films. Hitchcock, however, considered *Shadow of a Doubt* to be his best film.

Teresa Wright plays the role of Young Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt*. In her first three films, Wright was nominated for three Academy Awards for the films *The Little Foxes* (1941), *Pride of the Yankee* (1942) and *Mrs. Miniver* (1942), for which she won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. Her performance in this film once again reveals her excellent acting skills.

Joseph Cotton plays Uncle Charlie in this film. He got his start in films because of his friendship with the great Orson Welles and debuted in *Citizen Kane* (1941) as drama critic Jed Leland. He went on to appear in such films as *Gaslight* (1944), *I'll Be Seeing You* (1944) and *The Third Man* (1949).

*Shadow of a Doubt* was nominated for just one award: Best Writing, Original Story for Gordon McDonnell.



## Summary and Analysis

*Shadow of a Doubt* begins as viewers watch a couple, without seeing their faces, who are finishing a beautiful dance. Then, we see a man lying in bed smoking a cigar. Money is strewn all over the bedside table. A maid comes in to tell him that two men were looking for him, and she believes they'll be back. She thinks he's tired and needs a rest, and she lets him know that his friends wanted to surprise him. He explains that they're not really friends, and he expects he now has to meet them. She pulls down the blind so he can rest.

As soon as the woman is gone, the man sits up and looks around the room. He throws his glass into the wall and opens the shade to see the men. He thinks they're bluffing because they have nothing on him. The man is Uncle Charlie; he gathers his money and leaves the house.

Outside, Uncle Charlie sees the two men watching, but they don't even notice him. He realizes that they don't actually know what he looks like, so he walks past. They notice, though, and follow him. He crosses an abandoned lot and loses them in the process. He then sends a message to his family letting them know that he's coming to visit them in Santa Rosa, California.

Viewers then see the town and the quiet neighborhood where Uncle Charlie's family lives. Little Charlie, his niece, is bored with her life and thinks nothing interesting happens anymore. The telephone is ringing, and Ann answers it while reading her book. It is Miss Henderson from the Postal Union, calling to say they have a telegram.

Ann's father, Joseph Newton, comes in, and she welcomes him home. She tells him that she would never read the junk he reads and that Charlie is upstairs thinking. Charlie is ready to give up because the family has gone to pieces. She thinks it's terribly boring and wants a miracle. Charlie has decided to send Uncle Charlie a telegram to come visit.

Downstairs, Ann tells them about the telegram. Emma then calls the operator to find out about the telegram. She finds that Uncle Charlie is actually already on his way to visit them. At the Post Office, Charlie starts writing to Uncle Charlie and finds the telegram announcing that Uncle Charlie is coming. She believes that they spoke by telepathy, but the lady working the counter thinks she's crazy.

Uncle Charlie hasn't been feeling well, and he has stayed in his private car all the way. The whole family goes down to the station to meet the train. When Uncle Charlie gets off the train, Charlie runs into his arms. At first, she thinks he is sick and then realizes that he is just fine. They all return home to dinner.

Emma runs out to embrace Uncle Charlie. She is thrilled to finally see her little brother after so many years. Charlie has given up her room for her uncle. Uncle Charlie brings



gifts to share with everyone at dinner. They are all excited with their wonderful gifts. He even gives Emma some pictures of their parents.

Charlie says she doesn't want anything, but everyone knows better. She leaves the room, and Uncle Charlie follows her. She feels that inside him there's something secret that nobody knows. He reminds her that it's never good to know too much. He takes her hands and puts a beautiful emerald ring on her finger. Engraved on it are someone's initials. He offers to have them taken off, but she refuses. As they walk back into the dining room, he remembers the dance from the beginning of the film.

Uncle Charlie asks Joseph to help him put some money into the bank the next day. Uncle Charlie is humming a tune from the music he has been remembering. Finally, Emma remembers the song, but Uncle Charlie interrupts and says it's the Blue Danube Waltz. When Charlie begins to correct him, Uncle Charlie spills his drink and stops her.

A few minutes later, Herb comes in to see the family. Charlie is babied by the family, and Joseph and Herb go outside to talk. They talk about mysteries, and Joseph thinks the best way to kill someone is to hit them on the head with a blunt instrument. Herb says he wouldn't go that way because of fingerprints.

Inside, Uncle Charlie reads his newspaper, and something makes him nervous. He calls to Ann and asks her if she's ever seen a house made of newspapers. He conveniently tears the newspaper to obscure the story he's been reading. They are all shocked that he tore Joseph's paper. The kids tell Charlie that they never touched the paper, but pages three and four are missing. Viewers see that Uncle Charlie has been holding it beside his back.

Later, Charlie comes upstairs and finds out that Uncle Charlie stole a section of the paper. Charlie asks what was in the newspaper about him, but he explains it was just about someone he used to know. He goes over to her and grabs her arms. Uncle Charlie hurts her, and he apologizes when she cries. He says he just didn't want to help spread gossip about someone he once knew. He keeps the paper and sends her to bed.

In Ann's room, she and Charlie talk. Ann is already ready for Uncle Charlie to leave. As she tries to sleep, Charlie hums the song from earlier, and viewers see Uncle Charlie upstairs smoking a cigar in bed.

The next morning, Emma brings Uncle Charlie breakfast in bed. The newspaper and the women's club both called him for interviews. Emma sees that he hasn't finished unpacking, so she decides to help. She also tells him that a young man named Graham called up that morning to interview everyone in the house, and Uncle Charlie begins to get suspicious about the arrangement. Uncle Charlie doesn't want to talk to the man or have his photograph taken by another man.

Uncle Charlie then calls Emma a fool for letting two strangers inside to turn the house upside down. Charlie comes in to talk to them. Emma thinks it's for the public good and the government. Uncle Charlie wants nothing to do with it. He says he's never had his



photograph taken and never will. Emma tells him to stop being silly; she gave Charlie a copy of his photograph.

A few minutes later, Charlie comes in with a photograph of Uncle Charlie. He is a little kid in the picture, and he had just gotten a bicycle for Christmas. A few minutes after the photograph was taken, Uncle Charlie skidded on his bike and was laid up for months after cracking his skull. Uncle Charlie only wants to talk about today now.

The next day, everyone in town stares as Charlie and Uncle Charlie go down to the bank. Once they arrive, Uncle Charlie jokes about embezzling, and everyone in the bank gets nervous. Joseph says he'll go get the bank president and warns Uncle Charlie that jokes will not be well received. Uncle Charlie says that \$40,000 is no joke.

Joseph calls Uncle Charlie in to see Mr. Green, the president of the bank. Uncle Charlie has a large amount of loose cash with him, and Mr. Green seems skeptical. Uncle Charlie then hands over all the money and fills out a deposit slip. Mrs. Green and her friend Mrs. Potter come in to talk to Mr. Green so that they can go shopping. Mrs. Potter says that being a widow is wonderful because you no longer have to ask for money from your husband.

Two men are waiting in front of the house, and they see Uncle Charlie approach. Charlie walks up to the door, and Uncle Charlie hurries inside in front of them. They tell Emma that they just want some pictures of the house, but they're an hour early. Charlie tells the men that Uncle Charlie is just visiting and doesn't want to be bothered.

After a few minutes, Charlie and Emma convince the men that Uncle Charlie cannot be bothered. The men want to take a picture of Emma cooking, but she only wants them to take a picture of her making a cake properly. They ask to go upstairs and check out Charlie's room, but she doesn't want to let him into Uncle Charlie's room. The guy finds out that there are back stairs, and he bets her that Uncle Charlie is gone. She finally lets them in to take a picture of her room.

Charlie tells the men that she's tired of being an average girl. She tells him that she thinks Uncle Charlie is absolutely wonderful. Then she rubs her wrists and asks if he's telling her that everything isn't quite so wonderful. He tells her that he's sure Uncle Charlie is a good guy. As they look out the door, they see Uncle Charlie, and the man asks Charlie if that is her uncle. She tells him that it is, and the photographer comes out to photograph the hall and gets a picture of Uncle Charlie. Then Uncle Charlie demands the film. Charlie seems disturbed by the event.

Emma is ready to be photographed, but the men are out of film. Detective Jack Graham asks if he can have Charlie for the evening, and she agrees to help them look around the town. She is supposed to go to a movie but bails out and then gets caught by her friends while out that night. Charlie then realizes that Graham is a detective. She doesn't want to listen to him. He asks her to trust him and then sits her down to explain.

Graham then goes on to tell Charlie that he's looking for a man, but he hadn't counted on her or her family. Charlie says that she doesn't know much about Uncle Charlie, but



he may be the one that they're looking for. There's another man being chased in the East, so Uncle Charlie might not be guilty. Graham explains that he will catch Uncle Charlie if he has to, but because he cares very much for Charlie, he wants to make things easy for her and her family.

Charlie then asks to go home, and Graham agrees. He tells her goodnight, and she tells him that it will be funny when she discovers she was wrong. As she stands on the porch, she watches Uncle Charlie and Emma talk, and then she walks back out to the side of the house and talks to Joseph and Herb. Joseph says her Uncle Charlie has been asking about her all night. She decides to go up the back way because she's tired.

Herb asks if Joseph noticed anything funny about the coffee that night. Joseph says no, and Herb says that he put just as much in there as he would if he was going to poison Joseph. Herb reminds Joseph that he could be dead right now.

Charlie goes upstairs to her room to pick up the newspaper before going to Ann's room. Ann is curious about what she's doing, and Charlie says she's looking for a recipe. Ann tells her that the librarian will give her whatever she needs, since they keep old newspapers. Charlie says she might go the next day. She wads up the paper and then runs out the back stairs and hurries to the library.

Charlie has only a few minutes, but she makes it to the library just as it closes. She knocks on the door, and the lights come on. She begs to be let in, and the library finally agrees. Mrs. Cochran lets her look at the newspaper for just a few minutes.

Charlie quickly looks through the paper and finds the article, "Where is the Merry Widow Murderer?" She discovers that there's a nationwide search for the strangler of three rich women. The last woman murdered was a brilliant comedy singer with the same initials as are on Charlie's ring. She walks out of the library slowly as the camera pans away from her. The audience sees the dancing once again.

The next day, Uncle Charlie is reading the paper when he asks about Charlie. She's still asleep, and Emma hates to wake her. That evening, Charlie has just woken up, and Emma tells Uncle Charlie that Charlie doesn't look quite herself. Charlie offers to take care of the dinner when she comes down the back stairs. Charlie then asks Emma to stop humming the tune, as she's tired of it. Graham has also been by asking about Charlie.

Ann comes in to see Emma and asks to sit by her. She doesn't want to sit by Uncle Charlie anymore. Joseph brought in the paper to the table, and he lets Uncle Charlie check out the headlines. Charlie gets ready to come in and sees Uncle Charlie looking at the paper. Nobody thinks she will be able to sleep that night, since she slept all day. Charlie says she has nightmares about Uncle Charlie on a train running away from something. Emma doesn't want Uncle Charlie to ever leave, but Charlie thinks they should face facts.

Uncle Charlie asks Richard to bring in a red bottle from the icebox. He has brought wine for the family. Emma has promised that Uncle Charlie will speak to the women's group.



She tells him that the women in town are busy with their families all the time. Uncle Charlie says there are many old, greedy women whose husbands have left them a lot of money. He feels that they are just fat animals. Emma tells him not to talk that way, and she tells him that Mrs. Potter will be there.

Herb arrives and talks to the family. He had dinner an hour ago and is surprised by how much later they keep having their dinner. Herb brings mushrooms that he picked before dinner. Then, Herb shows Joseph that the mushrooms are poisonous, and they discuss whose fault it would be if someone were killed. Joseph says it would be better to pull the legs out from under someone and hold them underwater.

Suddenly, Charlie begins screaming about how morbid everyone is. She hurries out of the house, and Uncle Charlie offers to catch her. He finally catches up with her as she runs into the police officer. He assures the officer that he'll take care of her. She breaks free from Uncle Charlie, and in a deserted alley, he pushes her into a bar.

Charlie and Uncle Charlie sit in the back booth and talk. She introduces Uncle Charlie to Louise Finch. He asks what she knows about him. Uncle Charlie is worried that something has come between them, but she wants nothing to do with him. He begins to play with a napkin while they talk. He considers Charlie to be the head of her family, and he admits that he's done some foolish things. He twists the napkins as she watches and then puts his hands under the table when he realizes what she's thinking.

Charlie then begins asking how Uncle Charlie could do such things. She thought he was so wonderful, but now she doesn't trust him at all. He asks what she knows, and then she moves the ring across the table for him. Louise walks up and says that she'd just about die for a ring like that. Uncle Charlie downs his brandy and asks for another one.

Charlie tries to get up and leave, but Uncle Charlie orders her to sit down. He tells her she doesn't really know anything because she's just an ordinary girl in an ordinary town doing ordinary things. He tells her that she's a sleepwalker, that the world is a hell and that she needs to learn something.

Charlie gets up to leave the bar, and Uncle Charlie follows her. They finally arrive back at the house, and he begs for her help. He's tired of running, and this is his last chance. Uncle Charlie wants to get a chance, and he knows that there's another man they're chasing in the East. No one really knows who did the crime. He begs Charlie not to send him to the electric chair. She tells him to go far away. He goes inside, and she stays outside to compose herself. Inside, Uncle Charlie talks to Emma and plays with the other kids while Charlie cries outside.

Ann and Richard get in a fight outside of church the next day. Graham and Saunders talk to Ann and ask her to bring Charlie over to them. Charlie comes over along with Katherine. Saunders wants to talk to Charlie, so they walk together. Saunders tells her that they still have the photograph, and there are witnesses who can identify Uncle Charlie. The detectives thought she could get her uncle out of town in the next couple of hours. Saunders thinks Charlie seems sure about his guilt, and he asks her to tell them





about where Uncle Charlie goes. They try to explain to her that Uncle Charlie could be dangerous.

Saunders says that he and Ann have been playing games. He asks the questions, and she always knows the answers. Charlie asks her to pick a few flowers. Uncle Charlie sees them coming and asks how church went. She walks up to the house as Joseph and Herb come around the corner. They are discussing how the Merry Widow Murderer was found and identified by his clothes. Uncle Charlie then runs inside to get ready because he could have a good dinner today.

As Uncle Charlie runs up the stairs, he slows down and looks back down the stairs at Charlie standing in the doorway. Upstairs in his room, he paces back and forth, and the audience sees him drop his cigar as he makes a strangling symbol. Graham then arrives and tells her he has good news for her.

Uncle Charlie listens out the window, and Charlie says she wants to pretend these things never happened. Graham is surprised to find out that Charlie's father wouldn't disown her for marrying a detective. Graham says he really likes her, and she feels the same way. He meant to wait until later to tell her, but he loves her. He apologizes for his timing and asks her to think about loving him. Charlie wants to know about them being friends and asks him to come back.

Graham takes Charlie's hands and asks her to go back to the square because that's where he first knew he loved her. Suddenly, the door closes behind them, and Charlie finds that it's stuck. They walk out and see Uncle Charlie smoking a cigar and pacing back and forth. Graham reassures Uncle Charlie that he'll be seeing him around on personal matters.

Graham leaves, and Charlie tells him goodbye. She tries to call to him at the last minute, but he's already gone. Then she turns around and sees Uncle Charlie waiting for her on the porch. She walks inside quickly.

The next day, Charlie goes out to the store for her mother, but as she goes down the stairs, she suddenly trips and falls. Uncle Charlie watches as she catches herself on the banister. He moves out of sight as Emma comes down to check on her. She says Charlie might have been killed, and she gets suspicious. Charlie notices that a piece of the wood broke off.

That night, Charlie goes outside to inspect the stairs. While looking at them, she hears someone walking around and finds Uncle Charlie watching her. She asks when he'll be leaving, but he says he's not going yet. He wants to settle down and be part of the family. If she'll be sensible, then they can be friends. Charlie wishes she had told her mother about him. Uncle Charlie accuses her of being selfish and reminds her that no one would believe her now. Even though she might have had the ring before, she doesn't have it now. Charlie warns Uncle Charlie to go away, or she'll kill him herself.

Uncle Charlie sneaks out of the garage in the evening, wearing a nice tux. He wipes off his hands as the family gets ready to go to the party. Uncle Charlie and Charlie decide



to take a taxi, and Richard wants to go as well. Charlie begs Emma to ride with her, and then she goes out to the garage to get the car as Uncle Charlie instructed her.

When Charlie opens the car door, the car is already running, and the garage is full of smoke. She tries to stop the car but can't get it turned off. Then, the garage door is stuck so she can't get out. Inside, Uncle Charlie tells everyone to take their time, closes the windows and turns up the music.

Herb suddenly rushes in and says that someone is stuck in the garage. Something is wrong with the door, and they run out to open it. Uncle Charlie gets the door open easily and turns off the car, since he knew exactly how it was messed up. Charlie comes to and tells Uncle Charlie to go away. Emma then goes to her and babies her. They want to call the doctor, and Uncle Charlie says the key was there when he looked.

Although the family decides not to go to the lecture, Charlie insists and decides to stay home on her own to get things ready for the party. Emma can't understand why so many bad things are happening to Charlie. Once they are gone, Charlie runs inside to call Graham. He's not in his hotel, and they aren't expecting him at any of the numbers.

Charlie then hurries upstairs to Uncle Charlie's room. She looks through the drawers and finally finds the ring. The family finally returns, and Charlie goes downstairs to join the party. Uncle Charlie is disturbed that Charlie isn't down yet, and the men begin proposing toasts. Charlie finally comes downstairs, and Uncle Charlie notices the ring on her finger. He begins to offer his farewell toast. He tells Emma that he'll miss her and says he'll always think of the town as a place of hospitality, kindness and home.

Uncle Charlie says that he's arranged for a memorial for the children. Emma just can't bear the thought of him going so far away again and begins crying. Charlie cries as well. The townspeople say goodbye to Uncle Charlie and thank him for his generosity. Uncle Charlie asks Charlie to come and see him off.

At the train station, Uncle Charlie tells Emma and Joseph goodbye. Then he gets on the train as Ann, Roger and Charlie look around the compartment. Uncle Charlie waves to Mrs. Potter. He stops Charlie as she goes to get off the train and thanks her for making him leave. Uncle Charlie realizes that Emma couldn't take the shock.

The train begins to move. Charlie tries to get off, but Uncle Charlie pulls her back. He begins to move his hands as if he is going to strangle her, and she tries to run away, screaming. He covers her mouth and begins to strangle her because of what she knows. He gets the door open, and he tries to throw her off the train. Finally, though, she turns enough so that Uncle Charlie falls off instead. Then, the audience sees the dancing again.

Soon after, a huge funeral is held in Uncle Charlie's honor. Graham and Charlie stand in the back together. She tells him that she wanted him to know the truth but couldn't tell him. She realizes that Uncle Charlie was unhappy and hated the whole world. She says that Uncle Charlie said no one there knew what the world was really like, and Graham

says that sometimes it just needs a little watching, that's all. Then the film ends, as viewers see the outside of the church with the hearse out front.



# Characters

## Young Charlie, played by Teresa Wright

### Description

Young Charlie is a girl of about sixteen. She lives at home with a family that she considers extremely boring. After becoming tired of family life, she decides to invite her uncle, after whom she is named, to come for a visit. In the meantime, he is fleeing the police and is already on his way.

Charlie adores her Uncle Charlie, but after several unusual events, she begins to become skeptical about his true motives for visiting. Charlie is surprised to meet Graham and his partner, who are actually investigating Uncle Charlie. Charlie at first refuses to believe them, but finally she realizes that Graham is right. Her uncle is a murderer.

After Charlie confronts Uncle Charlie, she realizes that her life is being threatened. She has fallen in love with Graham but can't seem to get in touch with him. In the end, Charlie almost dies before she is able to send her uncle packing. Even then, he tries to kill her as he is leaving and ends up dying in the struggle. Then, Graham returns, and he and Charlie begin a new life together.

### Analysis

Charlie is a young, temperamental girl. Like many girls her age, she is sick and tired of her family and ready for a change. Little does she know that her favorite Uncle Charlie is not all that he seems.

Charlie grows up during the course of the film. She goes from being a petulant girl to a mature young woman. As she discovers more of the truth about Uncle Charlie, she realizes that it is completely up to her to protect her family, since she recognizes that the truth will break her mother's heart.

Charlie also falls in love during the film. Although she doesn't trust Graham at first, she falls in love with him by the end. After Uncle Charlie's death, she is able to truly enjoy the entire experience of love.



## Uncle Charlie, played by Joseph Cotten

### Description

Uncle Charlie is Charlie's favorite family member. They have always been close, and he adores her as well. Once he realizes that he's being chased by the police, Uncle Charlie decides that he is long overdue a visit to see his family in California.

When Uncle Charlie arrives, he is welcomed with open arms. Once he sees an article about his crimes in the newspaper, though, he realizes that he needs to be on his guard. He becomes angry with his sister when she allows the detectives in the house, but he prevents his photograph from being taken.

After Charlie confronts Uncle Charlie with her knowledge of his crimes, he begins to become violent toward her. Although he always loved her, he cannot bear the thought of being turned over to the police. He convinces her that her mother could never handle the truth and then begins a series of attempts to murder Charlie. When all his attempts fail, he is forced to leave. During a last attempt to murder Charlie, he meets his own end.

### Analysis

Uncle Charlie is a demented man who has created a career for himself by murdering widows and stealing their jewels and money. Once he is hunted, he finds that staying with his family might be a convenient way to outrun the cops. Uncle Charlie may be attractive and charming, but his pleasant exterior hides a ruthless and greedy personality. He is filled with hatred and considers wealthy widows to be useless and worthy of death.

Once Charlie realizes the truth, Uncle Charlie is a man on a mission. He convinces himself that she is a danger to him and begins trying to kill her in unsuspecting household accidents. Uncle Charlie turns from a kind man into a murderous killer who is even willing to sacrifice his own family.

## Det. Jack Graham, played by Macdonald Carey

### Description

Detective Jack Graham is on the search for the Merry Widow Murderer. He and Saunders arrive at the Newtons' house pretending to be reporters so that they can try to photograph Uncle Charlie. Although this line of investigation is unsuccessful, they refuse to give up.



Graham talks to Charlie and tells her what he believes to be the truth about Uncle Charlie. This is one of the hardest moments of his life, since he has started to fall in love with her and hates to tell her such a terrible thing about her favorite uncle.

When Charlie calls Graham back, he finally arrives to save her. They express their love for each other and make plans to continue their courtship. They both want to spend the rest of their lives together.

## **Analysis**

Detective Jack Graham is a strong, smart young man. He is good at his job and believes in justice. Graham doesn't want to hurt Charlie, but he also realizes that he simply has to tell her the truth both for her protection and to do his job.

Graham later shows his love for Charlie by trying to watch out for her. After the police believe the Merry Widow Murderer is dead, Graham has to leave Charlie, but he promises to return because over the past few days he has fallen for her. Although he isn't there when she needs saving, he does return for her so that they can live happily ever after.

## **Joseph Newton, played by Henry Travers**

### **Description**

Joseph Newton is Charlie's father. He is a smart man who is always talking to their young neighbor, Herbie Hawkins. They often discuss ways to kill each other secretly. Joseph tries to keep his family in line and welcomes his wife's brother with open arms.

### **Analysis**

Joseph is a smart man and clearly the head of his household. He refuses to let his children get out of control and respects his wife. He works at the local bank and happily helps Uncle Charlie make a deposit. Joseph is the normal, upper middle class bank man of film.

## **Emma Newton, played by Patricia Collinge**

### **Description**

Emma Newton is Joseph's wife and Uncle Charlie's sister. She has always adored her younger brother and believed he could do no wrong. When Uncle Charlie says he is coming to visit, she is thrilled. She is also the main reason that Charlie doesn't turn her uncle into the police.



## **Analysis**

Emma is a kind but frail woman. When Charlie realizes the truth about her uncle, she also realizes that Emma could never handle the truth. Thus, Charlie struggles to survive while keeping the truth a secret from Emma.

## **Herbie Hawkins, played by Hume Cronyn**

### **Description**

Herbie Hawkins is a young neighbor who is good friends with Joseph Newton. Herbie and Joseph often discuss the best ways to murder each other without anyone suspecting anything.

### **Analysis**

Herbie is a smart young man who is primarily concerned with the life of imagination and books. Herbie makes a good friend for Joseph and adds tension to the plot by keeping the idea of murder in the viewer's mind.

## **Det. Fred Saunders, played by Wallace Ford**

### **Description**

Detective Fred Saunders is Graham's partner. They are chasing the Merry Widow Murderer and believe that Uncle Charlie is the guilty party. Saunders takes the pictures while Graham distracts everyone else while they investigate the house.

### **Analysis**

Saunders plays only a small role, since Graham takes center stage as Charlie's love interest. He helps lead the investigation and tries to get the photographs and information needed to convict Uncle Charlie.

## **Ann Newton, played by Edna May Wonacott**

### **Description**

Ann Newton is Charlie's younger sister. Ann is completely taken with Uncle Charlie and can't understand why Charlie is suddenly so rude to him. She's a good kid but drives Charlie crazy, since she's her little sister.

## **Analysis**

Ann is a kind young girl who loves her family. She loves Uncle Charlie and simply cannot understand all the fuss.





# Themes

## Putting Family First

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the characters learn the importance of family. Charlie is sick and tired of her family when the film begins. She wants her Uncle Charlie to come visit so that something interesting will finally happen.

As the film continues, though, Charlie learns that family is not always what it seems. She is shocked to learn that Uncle Charlie is actually a murderer being chased across the country by police. When she wants to turn him in, though, she remembers the feelings of her family and realizes that she should put them first.

Charlie protects her family's feelings by keeping Uncle Charlie's real activities quiet. He tries to kill her, but she still wants to protect her mother and the rest of the family. In the end, she tries to solve her dilemma by forcing Uncle Charlie to leave for good, but her plan does not work quite as she'd hoped. In a last ditch effort to kill Charlie, Uncle Charlie brings about his own death.

## Need for Someone Who Understands

Everyone needs someone who can truly understand what they're going through. Charlie feels that her parents and friends don't understand her at all. She wants to stir things up and decides that her Uncle Charlie is the key to change.

When Charlie goes to send for her Uncle Charlie, she receives a telegram saying that he is already on his way. Little does Charlie know that this visit will not reveal someone who understands but someone who endangers them all.

Although we all need someone who understands, Charlie learns that not everyone can be trusted. Uncle Charlie turns out to be a terrible friend, and Charlie discovers that Graham is really the person who truly understands her. As they fall in love, Charlie begins to feel less and less alone.

## Falling in Love

Charlie is completely focused on everything other than falling in love. She wants to have fun and wants to spice up her family life. After Uncle Charlie comes to visit, many things change, but for Charlie, the most dramatic change in her life is falling in love with Graham.

Charlie feels alone and neglected at the beginning of the film, but as events unfold, she feels less deserted. After going through a difficult time, she finds out that she can really trust Graham. They fall madly in love, and Charlie is finally no longer alone.

## Style and Cinematography

*Shadow of a Doubt* is a classic Alfred Hitchcock film. He considered it to be the greatest of his films, and many viewers would agree. He uses many of his famous techniques, and although we suspect the truth about Uncle Charlie long before it's revealed, our suspense continues to grow.

The "MacGuffin" is a type of plot device used by Alfred Hitchcock in most of his films, including *Shadow of a Doubt*. A MacGuffin is an element in the plot that serves no other function than to motivate the characters and instigate the plot. It is not integral to the plot itself, but instead serves to push the action forward through affecting the characters. For instance, in the famous film *Vertigo*, the MacGuffin is a woman who died, and her death starts off a series of events. Although the instigating detail becomes less important than the events in the plot, the action is instigated and pushed by this MacGuffin.

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the MacGuffin of the plot is the Merry Widow Murders. Because Uncle Charlie has committed these crimes, he goes to visit his family out West and sets an entire course of events in motion. Eventually this MacGuffin is overshadowed in importance by the actions and feelings of Charlie and the other characters. It is ultimately unimportant what Uncle Charlie's crime is, and he could just as easily have been a kidnapper who killed a child. Charlie's fight for her life becomes the central point of the film.



# Motifs

## The Newspaper

After Uncle Charlie arrives, he makes sure to get the newspaper every day. He knows that there are stories about the murders in the papers that reveal that police are searching for the murderer out West as well as in the East.

The newspaper gives the viewers a lot of information both about Uncle Charlie's crimes and his personality. We first learn more details about the murders from the papers before Graham and Saunders even arrive on the scene.

The newspaper also lets viewers know how close the police believe they are to catching the killer. The more confident they feel, the more nervous and demanding Uncle Charlie becomes. Charlie finally realizes the truth and seeks to get Uncle Charlie out of their house and their lives.

## Trips into Town

The trips into town help frame the events in the film. When Charlie first goes to town, she is planning to invite her uncle to come visit only to discover that he is already on his way. In this way, the real action of the story begins.

Later, Charlie's trips into town include Uncle Charlie. She shows him around town and helps him deposit money in the bank. All these happy trips suddenly change when Charlie finds the article from the newspaper in the library after hearing everything Graham told her while they were in town.

Charlie's final trip into town also includes Uncle Charlie. He is angry that she won't tell him what she knows. He pulls her into a tiny bar and forces information out of her. She is angry and threatens to turn him in. After this point, Charlie must fight for her life until she is finally able to make Uncle Charlie leave.

## Family Dinners

Charlie and her family always gather together each night for dinner. Herbie often joins them for dinner, as does Uncle Charlie after he arrives. At these times, the family talks and lets out their feelings. Many times, Charlie gets in trouble for saying inappropriate things or yelling at other members of the family.

The family dinners are also a time when Uncle Charlie's secrets begin to be revealed. When Charlie hums the tune that played during the dances before the widows died, Uncle Charlie becomes nervous and tries to keep her from revealing the name of the song. He becomes more worried during the course of the film, and the final night when

others are over, Charlie says but a few words to Uncle Charlie and convinces him that it is finally time to leave.

# Symbols

## The Dance Scenes

As *Shadow of a Doubt* begins, viewers see a couple dancing. We don't see their faces, but we hear the music and see the bottom part of their bodies. Although we don't know it yet, this will be one of the most important scenes of the film.

The dance scenes are symbolic of Uncle Charlie's guilt. They replay throughout the film, and after viewers learn the details about the Merry Widow Murderer, there is no doubt that Uncle Charlie is the guilty party. The scenes continue to play throughout and remind viewers of his guilt.

## The Broken Step

After Uncle Charlie finds out that Charlie knows the truth and realizes that she will not give up, he decides to get rid of her. He begins planning household accidents that could either scare or kill her but would not lead anyone to be suspicious. The first of these accidents is a broken step.

Charlie falls down through the broken step and almost falls and breaks her neck. She hurts her ankle severely, and Uncle Charlie watches, disappointed that she was not more badly hurt.

The broken step is symbolic of Charlie's loss of innocence and her broken life. She has always believed the best about people, but Uncle Charlie's betrayal is great. By the end of the film, though, Charlie's hopes are healed. Uncle Charlie is killed. Graham returns, and their love continues to grow.

## The Garage

Charlie finally discovers the truth about Uncle Charlie. One afternoon as she talks to Graham in the garage, Uncle Charlie rigs the door shut but Graham gets them out. This foreshadows her later incident in the garage when Uncle Charlie tries to kill her with carbon monoxide poison.

The garage symbolizes Uncle Charlie's growing commitment to kill Charlie. When he locks her inside the garage, he leaves the car running without the key. She almost dies while inside, but the rest of the family doesn't suspect anything.

That night, the series of events finally comes to an end when Charlie threatens her uncle and gets him to leave. He realizes that even though he almost killed her, she is not willing to give up without a fight. The garage brings the film to a final point of resolution.



## Essay Questions

Why does Charlie want her uncle to come visit? What does this say about her personality?

What does Charlie discover when she goes to invite her uncle to visit?

Why does Uncle Charlie tear a section out of the newspaper?

Why do Graham and his partner show up?

Describe Graham and his partner's investigation.

What does Charlie finally realize?

Describe the relationship between Charlie and Graham.

How does Uncle Charlie try to punish Charlie? Why?

Why does Charlie decide not to tell her family the truth about her uncle? Do you think her decision is justified?

Why does Uncle Charlie finally agree to leave?