

# Number 17 (1932)

Alfred Hitchcock

## OVERVIEW

*Director* Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is perhaps the best-known British filmmaker and a household name. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, which have all earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

*Film* Fresh from a Caribbean vacation with new ideas for films, Hitchcock was disappointed when British International Pictures co-owner John Maxwell assigned him to a simple adaptation of Joseph Farjeon's crime play *Number 17*. The director complained many times throughout the rest of his life that the play was rife with cliché. Instead, Hitchcock wished to film an adaptation of *London Wall* by John Van Druten. Comically, Thomas Bentley, who directed the adaptation of *London Wall* (titled *After Office Hours*), had wanted to direct the adaptation of *Number 17*. This oversight on BIP's part continued a trend of misusing directorial talent and interest during the transition from silent film to talkies.

*Background* The film's title refers to the address of the house where the majority of the mystery takes place. *Number 17* received poor marks in its time and has not fared any better today. A 1932 *Variety* magazine review said, "Like the play, the story is vague and, despite its intended eeriness, unconvincing." Many similar reviews at the time rated *Number 17* as a failed serious drama instead of a comedic thriller. More recent reviews included on Rotten Tomatoes say the film is an "unsatisfactory early tongue-in-cheek comedy/suspense yarn" and "highly entertaining but practically incomprehensible." Hitchcock is recorded (in the 1966 book *Hitchcock/Truffaut*) as saying that *Number 17* was "quite funny, but the story was rather confusing."

## CINEMATIC NARRATION

There is some interesting play with light and darkness throughout *Number 17*. Shadows are a major component of many shots. The use of candles in the abandoned residence allows for the use of gusts to create sudden darkness. Hands are a common motif and Hitchcock centers them in the suspenseful parts of the film. The most impressive sequences of *Number 17* come toward its end when the criminals board a train bound for Germany via a newly opened train-ferry line. Both full-sized train cars and models are used in tandem, creating a tense and believable portrayal of an escape-turned-train-hijacking. The ferry disaster at the film's end is also expertly done, utilizing models and sound design to create a highly believable train wreck and suspenseful escape from sinking boxcars.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Fordyce – Barton Ben</b>         | A detective tipped off to the exchange of stolen jewelry in the abandoned house<br>A homeless man who finds shelter in the abandoned house |
| <b>Rose Ackroyd</b>                 | A neighbor who is tipped off to the jewel theft by a note delivered to her father  |
| <b>Nora – The 'Deaf-Mute' Girl</b>  | A member of the crime ring who turns on her co-conspirators  |
| <b>Brant – The Well-Dressed Man</b> | The leader of the crime ring and Nora's escort   |
| <b>Henry Doyle – The Nephew</b>     | A man accompanying Nora and Brant  |
| <b>Sheldrake – The Large Man</b>    | The man in charge of hiding the stolen jewelry   |
| <b>Mr. Ackroyd – The Corpse</b>     | Rose's father and a police officer   |

## PLOT

**Up the stairs-** A strong wind blows as the camera pans to follow a bunch of leaves cast along by the wind until a hat is blown into shot. A man follows, stooping to pick it up. As he looks up, he notices a light in the upstairs window and a sign which says, "For sale or would let." The man cautiously approaches the front door and enters the house as pizzicato strings play suspensefully. He pulls a matchbook from his pocket and lights one before climbing the stairs. A figure at the top of the stairs looks down and moved away. A hand dangles from the top landing as the two men meet. One drops his candle as the other stares him down. A train rushes by, creating a cacophony and illuminating a corpse on the ground between the two men.



**"Where's that candle?"**- The man who held the candle rushes down the stairs in a panic, falling and sliding down on his backside. "Oh, God!" he repeatedly cries as the other man runs after him. "Now where's that candle," asks the second man after checking on the man who fell. After finding and lighting the candle, he offers the fallen man a flask to calm his nerves. In a short conversation, it's determined that the frightened man is a homeless fellow who squats in the abandoned home. The first man drags the homeless man up the stairs to survey the scene, his composure and attitude showing that he is most likely a policeman.



**The body-** The two men make their way back up the stairs, the homeless man complaining the entire way. "What's your game?" he asks. "I'm going to have a look at that body," says the other man, "then I'll decide." A fierce gust blows through the open window, snuffing out the candle. The homeless man makes a feeble attempt to escape as the apparent policeman relights the candle. As they reach the top landing, the homeless man comes face to face with the corpse's outstretched hand and comically overreacts. After surveying the body by candlelight, the homeless man asks, "What's done him in, guv'nor?" The policeman responds that it was most likely a blow to the head. "But who hit him?" the homeless man asks.



**The beggar's pockets-** The man with the candle doesn't answer the homeless man, having heard something resembling footsteps. He leaves to look and the homeless man scampers after him, comically over-afraid of the body and unwilling to be left alone in the darkness. The man with the candle confronts the homeless man who sarcastically replies that one doesn't forget about murder like forgetting to post a letter. Unconvinced, the policeman asks the homeless man to empty his pockets. He doesn't have anything suspicious, just a handkerchief, a sausage for dinner, and a photo of his daughter.



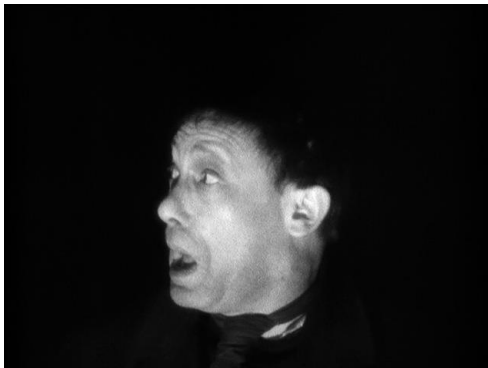
**Downstairs disturbance-** A hand reaches towards the downstairs door and silently turns the knob. Back up the stairs, the homeless man teases the policeman, asking him what's in his pockets. They move to investigate another room when there's a thud from downstairs. Hurriedly, they move back to the top landing, looking down. The policeman tells the homeless man to take the candle. He cries out when he reaches to take it without looking, putting his palm directly over the flame. The policeman descends the stairs, leaving the homeless man afraid and alone with the corpse.



**The dead man's pockets-** The homeless man overcomes his fear for a moment, moving to observe the body more closely. He touches the corpse and speaks to it, assuring himself that the body is dead before leafing through its pockets. "Ello," the man says as he pulls a pair of handcuffs from a coat pocket, "What the 'ell is he doing with bracelets?" From another pocket, the homeless man pulls a gun. He comically ignores all common sense gun safety while examining the revolver, looking down the barrel as he toys with the hammer and trigger.



**Jumping at shadows-** "Got anything else about you, mate?" the homeless man asks the body before the soundtrack strikes a chilling chord. He stands, frightened, pulling scared faces as the candle flickers. The camera focuses on the blood splattered on the floor before panning up behind the homeless man. He moves forward and his shadow grows smaller. Then, he backs up and raises a hand, as if just realizing that it's his own shadow.



**“Messin’ about”**- The policeman returns, saying he found nothing downstairs but another candle. He looks down at the body, noticing the handcuffs. The policeman asks the homeless man where the handcuffs came from to which he responds, “I found ‘em on the body.” The homeless man moves away as the policeman looks at the body again. After a moment, he lights the homeless man’s cigarette, saying, “It always pays for an innocent man to play it straight.” The homeless man responds with a rant, accusing the policeman of ‘messin’ about.’



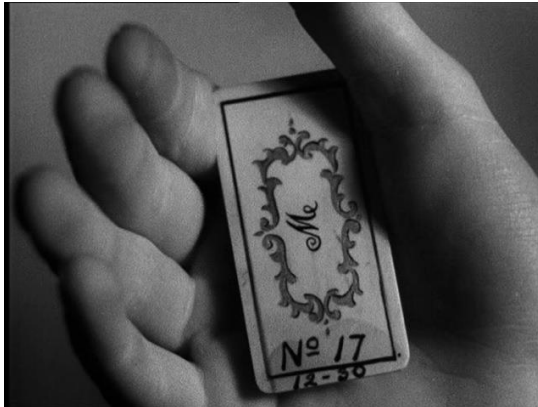
**Rooftop prowler**- A noise from the rooftop interrupts the homeless man’s rant. Both men stare upward as the sound continues: Footsteps. The sound changes, scraping across the roof. They follow the sound down the hallway, watching someone crawl beside the skylight, casting a shadow on the wall. The men continue following the sound. The policeman blows out their candles when he notices plaster falling from the ceiling. The music swells before the figure crawls in front of another window and the ceiling collapses below them.



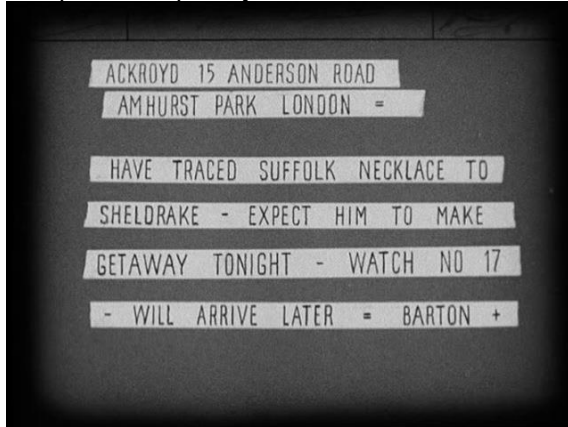
**Distraught daughter-** As the policeman relights the candle, the homeless man shouts, "I've got 'em, Guv'nor!" In the light, they see the person on the roof was a young woman. She's completely unconscious, so the policeman lifts his flask to her lips. This revives her quickly. She begins pushing the men, shouting, "Where's my father?" She pauses when she lays eyes on the corpse, screaming, "Dad! What have you done with my father?" When the policeman offers help, she responds sarcastically about trusting the men who knocked her out. She asks who they are, and the policeman introduces himself as Fordyce before saying he doesn't know the other man's name. The homeless man gives his name as Ben.



**Mystery next door-** The young woman looks up through the hole she made in the roof, asking if the two men have seen anyone on the roof. Fordyce tells Ben to climb up and check it out. Ben complains but finds a means of climbing through the hole while the young woman explains that she and her father live next door at number 16. Her father retired early, and when she tried to bring him a telegram, she found his door was locked and he wasn't responsive. Above them, Ben doesn't spot anything but houses. Fordyce asks the woman to continue. She says that when she found a key to her father's bedroom door, the room was empty and the window was open. By her father's bedside, she found a strange ticket bearing an 'M', 'No 17' and the time '12:30'. Fearing he had lost it, the woman decided to crawl out the window and across to the neighboring house. Ben falls and Fordyce asks if he's alright. Ben replies that he had it worse in the war, when he was "blown up by a mine and came down singing!"



**Half past 12-** Fordyce asks to see the telegram the young woman brought for her father. It says that a 'Suffolk necklace' has been traced to someone named Sheldrake who will be at number 17 later that night. The telegram is signed 'Barton.' This information combined with the strange ticket leads Fordyce to deduct that some sort of criminal meeting will happen at the house at 12:30. He offers to help the young woman when Ben interrupts with a rant about the poor quality of Fordyce's help. The rant is interrupted by a clock chiming half past 12. Ben pulls a frightened face, saying, "Twelve o'clock." Fordyce quips in a whisper, "Half past, you fool."



**Corpse gone-** Downstairs, a hand-pull doorbell rings. Ben begins shouting in a panic as Fordyce shushes him. Fordyce then moves away from the others, creeping down the servant's staircase to have a look downstairs. "Perhaps it's the police," the young woman whispers to Ben. The homeless man pulls the stolen revolver from his pocket, saying he should put it back on the body just in case it is the police. The young woman cries out when she realizes he means that her father is dead, but both are stunned to find the body missing. The camera fades out on the bare floorboards.

**Through the mail slot-** Downstairs, Fordyce navigates through the darkness, looking around before placing his candle on the ground. He moves towards the front door, his shadow shrinking towards him as he advances. In the window above the door, Fordyce sees smoke billowing in puffs: someone must be smoking in front of the door. The camera pans down, landing on the mail slot as a gloved hand reaches inside. It retreats and reappears with a small ticket matching the one we saw just moments ago. Fordyce wipes the sweat from his palms on his jacket before opening the front door. On the other side, a well-dressed man and woman stare at him silently.



**“Better see upstairs”**- The man outside breaks the silence: “The agent said we might see over the house.” Fordyce looks the man and woman in the eye before checking his watch. The other man mirrors him before saying, “Oh, yes. I quite realize that.” He walks into the house, signaling for the woman to follow, “I thought, perhaps, you wouldn’t mind.” As Fordyce closes the door, a foot bars its passage. Another man looks through the gap, asking, “May I come in too? Er... Uncle?” The couple who just entered look a bit confused, but play along. The newcomer asks, “Hadn’t we better see upstairs first, uncle?” The four begin walking up the stairs with Fordyce leading them, holding a candle.



**“Let them come up”**- One of the new men chuckles, saying that they don’t know Fordyce’s name. Fordyce plays it cool, asking if the agent hadn’t told them. The well-dressed newcomer laughs and says he’s forgotten both the agent’s and his contact’s names. Fordyce tries to redirect the newcomers, asking them if they’d like to see some of the rooms. He’s nervous that they’ll discover the body. They see Ben and the young woman at the top of the stairs. Fordyce introduces Ben as his servant. Then the newcomers insist on going upstairs. Fordyce wants to stop them, but Ben invites them up. “They won’t find no blooming body up ‘ere,” he says when Fordyce begins to argue.





**Quickdraw Ben-** The newcomers head up the stairs followed by Fordyce, though the woman lags behind until one of the men motions to her. Fordyce notices that the body is missing as one of the newcomers says, "Nothing unusual up here." Ben makes some jokes about coffins before trying to head down the stairs. The well-dressed man holds out a hand, "Not so fast." Ben makes several jokes about his speed before drawing the pistol from his pocket and pointing it at the man. Fordyce asks where Ben got the gun. The homeless man replies that he found it on the body before saying "There's going to be more corpses" if anyone tries to stop him.



**Misfire-** "You fool!" Fordyce shouts before chastising Ben for threatening the men. Ben begins to rant and rave about the strange things that have happened in the house. He's interrupted by the well-dressed man who draws his own pistol and levels it at Ben. "He's got a gun!" Ben shouts before the other newcomer tries to wrestle the revolver from his grip. During the struggle, the revolver goes off, shooting Fordyce, who steps in front of the woman just in time. "I didn't mean to hit you!" cries Ben as the young woman rushes down the stairs to help Fordyce.



**Hostages-** Surprisingly, Fordyce seems unphased having just been shot. He walks up the stairs, wrapping a handkerchief around his wound. The well-dressed woman moves to help him, obviously thankful for his protection. The well-dressed man commands Ben and the young woman to move, taking them as hostages. Fordyce begins talking to the well-dressed woman, who ignores him and continues to dress his wound. "I'm afraid you're wasting your time," says the well-dressed man. "You see, she can neither hear nor speak." He then points his pistol at Fordyce: "You mind? Hands up!"



**Telegram-** After herding the hostages into another room, the well-dressed man asks his comrade to search Fordyce. Finding nothing of interest, the man moves on to Ben. Ben makes a crack about their captor's familiarity and Fordyce smiles, "I like you, Ben. You make me laugh." Then, Ben gets upset when he begins to over-handle the sausage in his breast pocket. The young woman is incensed when the man begins to pat her down. The man finds the mysterious ticket and pockets it. The deaf woman observes this and motions to the well-dressed man with her eyes. When the man retrieves the telegram from the young woman, the well-dressed man demands to see it.

**Miss Ackroyd-** "Are you Miss Ackroyd?" asks the well-dressed man. "I told you to mind your own business," Miss Ackroyd replies. The other man moves out of the room and begins exploring the house as we hear the well-dressed man interrogate Miss Ackroyd. He notices the handcuffs on the ground and picks them up. The camera lands back in the room with the hostages: "If you ask me any more questions," says Miss Ackroyd, "I shall spit in your eye."

**"Nephew by adoption"-** A train passes outside and the well-dressed man hands his pistol to the deaf woman. He moves to stand beside his comrade on the landing. "Who are you anyway?" he asks. "Your nephew by adoption on the doorstep," the man replies. The interrogation continues for a moment before the nephew drops Sheldrake's name and presents the ticket he lifted off Miss Ackroyd. "Quite sure that's your ticket?" the well-dressed man asks.



**A sudden gust-** The wind blows downstairs, opening doors and snuffing the candles. Ben shouts as a struggle breaks out in the darkness. A gun goes off. Ben sprints down the stairs, but not quickly enough to evade capture. He complains loudly and sarcastically up the stairs, saying they should detain him because he could kill someone with his sausage. "Where should we put him?" asks the well-dressed man. The nephew responds, "In the bathroom." They quickly drag Ben to the end of the hall and lock him in the water closet as he complains: "I'm a liar, then I'm a killer. Now, I'm a bathroom fixture!"



**Man in the water closet-** Ben stares at the bathroom door, frustrated to be locked in. A pair of hands creep into shot and throttle Ben. He slumps to the floor as his assailant, a large man, looks away. Ben opens one eye and snaps it shut as the large man looks back. This happens a few times before the large man assumes Ben is unconscious or dead. The man moves away and Ben catches a glimpse of him retrieving a necklace from the toilet's tank. The large man moves to the door, kneeling beside Ben and listening through the door's lock. Ben quickly picks the man's pocket, placing the necklace in his jacket pocket.



**Hidden too well-** The well-dressed man and the nephew discuss the necklace on the landing. The nephew complains that Sheldrake has “hidden them too well” as the well-dressed man brings up a detective Barton who sent Mr. Ackroyd the telegram. The police activity makes the well-dressed man nervous. They discuss how they’re going to get their shares from Sheldrake, unsure he’ll give them a fair deal. When the nephew mentions that the body could have been Sheldrake, the well-dressed man scoffs and says it takes a lot to kill Sheldrake.



**The corpse walks up the stairs-** “What’s that?!” The nephew shouts as he looks down the stairwell to the first floor. The well-dressed man follows him as do the hostages and the deaf woman. A figure moves below. They all watch as a man slowly climbs the staircase. He seems to take no notice of them until the last set of stairs. Miss Ackroyd screams. “As you say,” the man says as he reaches the top landing, “It takes a lot to kill me.” The man who was the corpse stands before them alive and well, calling himself Sheldrake.



**A little play-** The wounds to Sheldrake’s head are obvious in the candlelight. “You hoped for a train?” he asks the nephew and the well-dressed man who show him their tickets. The deaf woman shows a ticket as well after the well-dressed man gestures to her. Sheldrake is in a hurry, but the well-dressed man is concerned about the hostages alerting the authorities. Sheldrake pulls a cord from the ceiling and wall, using it to tie Fordyce and Miss Ackroyd to the banister. Miss Ackroyd sneaks a wink to Sheldrake as he binds her. The deaf woman watches forlornly before Sheldrake leads them away, saying it’s time to catch their train. As they enter the nearby room, Sheldrake closes the door and locks them in, grinning at Fordyce and Miss Ackroyd.

**Fistfight-** “Alright, Rose?” Sheldrake asks Miss Ackroyd, who nods. “Your father?” asks Fordyce. She nods again. The false Sheldrake -Mr. Ackroyd, Rose’s father- begins to untie Fordyce before Rose asks him to release Ben from his bathroom prison. Her father moves down the hall. In the bathroom, Ben’s assailant hoists the homeless man into the tub and waits in ambush by the door. A fist meets Mr. Ackroyd when he unlocks the bathroom door. Chaos breaks out as the two men throw punch after punch and grows when Ben hops up from the tub and enters the fray. Rose and Fordyce look on with dismay as Mr. Ackroyd is overpowered by the large man. He and Ben are forced back into the bathroom, and the large man locks them in.

**“They’re bluffing”**- Fordyce manages to free himself, but it’s too late. The large man draws a gun and forces him back down the hall. Keeping his eyes and his weapon trained on Fordyce, the large man opens a door, releasing the well-dressed man, the nephew, and the deaf woman. He tells the well-dressed man to tie Fordyce to the banister again. The well-dressed man asks what happened to the man who locked him up and the large man replies that he’s locked in the bathroom. “I suppose you thought it was me,” he says, straightening his tie. The well-dressed man confronts him, asking if he really is Sheldrake. Sheldrake confirms that he is. Rose asks Fordyce if they’ve done something terrible to her father. “They’re bluffing,” he replies.



**“It’s like the pictures”**- The true Sheldrake strikes Fordyce across the chin. The deaf woman reaches out to stop Sheldrake, who spins to face her. “What? You can speak, can’t you?” he asks her when she doesn’t answer his questions. The well-dressed man speaks in her defense. “Aren’t we going?” he asks Sheldrake before they move along, asking Sheldrake to go first. The deaf woman lags, dropping her purse and looking at Fordyce and Rose. “I’m coming back,” she says before hurrying after the well-dressed man and the others. “That deaf and dumb business was a fake,” says Fordyce. He and Rose struggle to get free, giving up as their bindings hold fast. Rose looks over to Fordyce and smiles: “It’s like the pictures, isn’t it?” “Too much for my liking,” he replies.



**Rescue-** The banister gives way and Rose screams as she and Fordyce dangle over the stairway. The woman reappears and quickly starts to untie Fordyce. Rose, having fainted when she first fell, begins to come to. She notes that she fainted before looking down and passing out once more. Fordyce and the woman speak about her involvement with the criminals. She reveals that she is an unwilling participant, but can't find a good way out of the situation. Just as they untie Rose, the broken banister gives way again and crashes to the ground floor. The woman rushes off to rejoin the criminals as Fordyce cradles Rose until she comes to again.



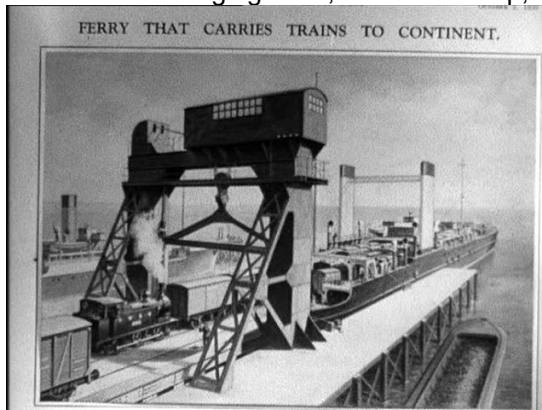
**The Bathroom-** Rose and Fordyce rush up the stairs to rescue the others from the bathroom. Ben rushes out with his head down, throwing blind punches. One clocks Rose on the chin and she falls. Fordyce shoves Ben away and helps Rose to her feet. "That's the second time tonight!" she says before slapping Ben twice. Mr. Ackroyd rests in the bath, critically injured. Rose tells Fordyce and Ben to leave her with her father and the two rush off after the criminals.



**“I’m not going”**- The criminals stand in the cellar as a train passes. They watch the woman, who paces in front of a trap door. “I’m not going,” she says. “Not so dumb after all, eh?” quips Sheldrake. “I’m not going,” she repeats when the well-dressed man complains. During their argument, Ben and Fordyce overhear them through the door. They listen to a vague description of their plan— an empty boxcar will grant them passage on a specialized train ferry to Germany— before the criminals force the woman to come with them. Fordyce tries to break down the door as Sheldrake closes the trap door.



**Cellar-** After they break into the cellar, Ben pleads with Fordyce to call the police. Fordyce rejects the idea, unwilling to have the woman arrested with the criminals. Meanwhile, the criminals find their way down a flight of stairs and onto a nearby train. Fordyce discovers a pistol among the criminal's abandoned belongings and, with Ben's help, opens the trap door.



**Escape via train-** They pursue the criminals down the stairs as the train begins to pull away. Ben manages to climb onto one of the train cars, but Fordyce is kicked from the boxcar by one of the criminals and is unable to match the train's speed. Ben tumbles into the train car and lands among some crates. He looks tired. His face brightens as he reads the labels on the crates he's leaning against: "Emu – Tonic Wine."



**Guard sighted-** Sheldrake leans out of the box car, looking down the length of the train. He spots a guard in the caboose. "The guard's seen us," he says to the well-dressed man. The two climb out of the box car and begin making their way to the rear of the train, followed shortly by the nephew. The guard watches, stupefied. At the rear of the train, the well-dressed man confronts the guard. "I hope we're not intruding," he says before the guard protests. A quick strike with the butt of his pistol knocks the guard out cold. The criminals tie up the guard.



**Bus holdup-** In a phone booth, Fordyce makes a desperate call. Though we can't hear him, he is very animated in his speech and body language. He moves to the street, trying to flag down an oncoming motorcycle that nearly runs him over. Fordyce remembers the gun in his pocket and hefts it for a moment before turning his attention to an oncoming noise. A bus rattles down the street. Fordyce flags it down, walking around and opening the driver's door when it stops. A guard steps off the back of the bus as the bus suddenly speeds off leaving him. Fordyce holds a revolver to the driver's side, seated beside him in the cabin.





**Drunken car hopping-** Ben guzzles some tonic wine as he plays with the diamond necklace. He stands, putting the necklace in his pocket before climbing up onto the train car. Drunk, he slips, unable to find his footing on the speeding train. The ground whizzes past beneath him as he struggles to climb into the boxcar. Ben makes his way inside as the woman speaks: "How on earth did you get in here? You might have been killed!"



**"Can't you see he's a cop?"**- In the caboose, the well-dressed man helps Sheldrake light a cigarette. "What about it?" asks the well-dressed man. Sheldrake seems confused, but the well-dressed man presses: "The diamonds. We're going to split, aren't we?" There's a shot of a speeding bus. The passengers talk excitedly before they're bounced from their seats. In the front sits Fordyce, his revolver still fixed on the driver. With a quick cut to the locomotive, we return to the caboose. The well-dressed man levels his pistol at Sheldrake. "It's no use pretending you left them behind," the nephew says. They argue for a moment about the whereabouts of the necklace before Sheldrake has a realization. "Lower that gun, you fool!" he shouts at the well-dressed man, "Can't you see he's a cop?"



**The necklace-** “My god, Sheldrake, you’re right!” the well-dressed man says as he turns the pistol on the nephew, “I only met him tonight for the first time on that doorstep. And I thought there was something funny about him.” “Keep an eye on him, Brant,” says Sheldrake, calling the nephew ‘Detective Barton.’ The detective admits defeat but says the criminals won’t get away with it. “But won’t I?” Sheldrake asks smugly as he reaches into his pocket for the jewels. He panics as he can’t find it, patting down the rest of his pockets. “You dirty little crook!” he shouts at the detective before Brant recalls the woman dropping her purse at the house. He begins hopping cars toward the boxcar.



**Panic on the green line-** In the boxcar, Brant confronts the woman, calling her Nora and demanding she give him the necklace. Ben pulls a face, looking away to try and hide his reaction. The passengers on the green line bus are no longer excited. They stand at the front of the bus, banging on the divider between their seats and the driver’s cabin. Fordyce keeps his revolver trained on the driver and his eyes locked straight ahead. The camera returns to the train where Brant and Sheldrake hop cars, heading back towards the caboose.



**From jewel thieves to hijackers-** The detective, having seen Sheldrake and Brant leave, makes his way into the boxcar with Ben and Nora. He pushes them aside and kneels, rifling through the straw on the car floor. "Who's been fooling about?" He asks the other two. He pulls out a pair of handcuffs and approaches Nora. Sheldrake and Brant look confused when they find the detective missing from the caboose. They climb on top of the cars and begin hopping toward the engine. They reach the engine's coal car when one of the engineers spots them. Brant shoots him as he yells at them to stay away and Sheldrake moves to incapacitate the other engineer. When the second engineer falls unconscious, hitting his head on a valve, Brant and Sheldrake find themselves unable to control the locomotive.



**Ferry disaster-** This sequence consists mostly of rapid cuts between the bus and the train as they speed toward the port. At several points, Fordyce can nearly make eye contact with Brant and Sheldrake. The passengers panic and the thieves fiddle with the valves and knobs of the train engine, trying without success to slow the train. The special train ferry to Germany docks without issue, but the rail workers notice something in the distance. One of them desperately flags the engine to slow down, jumping away just in time as the speeding train slams into the ferry, pushing it away from the dock. Ben and the woman are still in the box car, Nora handcuffed to a support strut. Fordyce dives into the water and swims to the boxcar, saving Nora as the boxcar begins to sink below the waves.



**Detective Barton-** Ben, Nora, Fordyce, and the detective dry themselves in the dockmaster's office. Ben yawns loudly as Fordyce opens the door to speak to someone. We can't hear him over the many onlookers clamoring outside. "They got wise to me," says the detective, "Found out who I was." Fordyce asks who he is and he replies, "I'm Barton." "I say," says Fordyce, smiling, "Not *the* Barton?" They light each other's cigarettes, discussing the case. When the detective brings up Nora's involvement with the jewel theft, Fordyce speaks on her behalf: "Let's not be too hasty over this." When the detective accuses him of overstepping his authority, Fordyce becomes serious. "Suppose you drop Barton," he says, "and take on your old name of 'Doyle.'" Fordyce reveals himself to be Detective Barton and that Doyle is wanted for, among other things, impersonating a police officer.



**Aftermath-** Nora looks on, blinking in surprise. Doyle can only shrug and scoff: He's been caught. "Hard luck, Henry," says the true Barton. "Good night, Nora," Doyle says to Nora, extending his hand. She doesn't react and he gives up. He laughs at Ben before walking out the door and into police custody. "You're a real live detective," complains Ben, "and you were making me do all the work?" Barton gives Nora a cigarette, asking her what they should do about it. When she responds that she doesn't know, he says, "You'd better come along with me." "Where?" asks Nora, suddenly afraid. "To have some breakfast," Barton smiles. They laugh together before Ben interrupts, offering them "a nice wedding present." He grins and parts his towel, revealing the necklace around his neck.



## THEMES

**Identity/Deception-** Mistaken and assumed identities drive the mystery in *Number 17*. Being a crime thriller, the criminals and the undercover officers are all unwilling to say too much. For most of the film, these characters assume vague identities or the identities of others. Of all the characters, only Ben is forthcoming in revealing his name. Even he, however, refuses to reveal his surname. Barton's true identity isn't revealed until after the climax when he confronts and reveals Doyle as a fraud and a criminal. The man we know as the nephew claims to be Barton both to the criminals on the caboose and at the end of the film to Barton himself. Although he's a skilled con man, Doyle cannot trick the detective out of his own hidden identity. Mr. Ackroyd pretends to be Sheldrake, who we learn is locked in the bathroom with Ben. When Rose realizes her father is alive, she helps him solidify his adoption of Sheldrake's identity, keeping her reaction to herself, save a subtle wink to her father.

**Tenacity-** Personal grit is apparent in all of the characters in *Number 17* and present in many ways. Some characters like Sheldrake and Mr. Ackroyd are physically resilient, dealing with repeated blows and head injuries. Rose is unusually brave in the face of her father's apparent murder. When she finds him missing, she crawls out the window and over a roof in an attempt to find him. While he complains often, Ben too shows tenacity as the plot unfolds. He is as tireless as Barton in his pursuit of the criminals, wishing to see them caught and Nora saved. Although it's possible for him to simply leave, he breaks down a door with Barton and even makes his way onto the train bound for Germany, finding Nora and assuring her safety to the best of his ability. The criminals are indefatigable, too, committing a litany of additional crimes in their attempt to escape, including assault, kidnapping, and murder. Their actions show just how far some people will go to sate their greed. At the film's end, we see Barton dive into the ocean without a second thought to save Nora, showing his unstoppable desire to save her not just from the disaster but also punishment for the heist.

**Curiosity/Investigation-** *Number 17* keeps the viewer guessing until the very end. Unlike some whodunnits, critical information is kept from us until the very end, but there are still many clues left for the attentive viewer. Barton, who first calls himself Fordyce, begins investigating almost immediately upon entering the abandoned house. Finding Ben near the apparent corpse, he believes the homeless man to be his prime suspect. This changes quickly as Barton finds him to be a simple and cowardly man. Rose Ackroyd's curiosity drives her to investigate the disappearance of her father, placing her in great danger when the criminals appear and hold her hostage. The criminals display some lesser skill for investigation, trying to figure out who among them is not a policeman when they realize they've been identified. Barton's reveal at the end of the film is an excellent bit of investigation: He doesn't disclose his true identity to begin with. Instead, he feigns being star-struck, milking as much information as he can from Doyle posing as a detective, building a stronger case against the criminal.

**Crime** As a crime thriller, criminality is key to the plot of *Number 17*. There is the high-level criminality of Brant and Sheldrake, who plan to carry out the jewel heist. When police activity forces them to change their plan, they carry out a litany of additional crimes, including assault, theft, kidnapping, and even murder. While these obvious crimes are the main focus of the plot, other smaller crimes are carried out by the other characters. At the most basic level, everyone present in the abandoned house is trespassing. Ben admits to doing so frequently to seek shelter. While the many minor crimes committed by Mr. Ackroyd and Barton can be excused because of their undercover activity, Barton goes a step further when he hijacks the green line bus. Perhaps it's because he doesn't have his badge with him during the undercover mission, but holding the driver at gunpoint and the bus passengers hostage for an extended period shows us how far desperation and determination will push even officers of the law.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Barton** We first know Barton as Fordyce. Even through his facade, we can tell he's probably an undercover officer from his behavior toward Ben at the beginning of the film. As his investigation continues, he becomes enamored with Nora.

*Determined* Barton's determination drives him to some extremes in his pursuit of the criminals. His determined behavior rubs off on Ben, who is easily pressed into service by the detective's strong will and logic. Even though he's made a hostage multiple times, Barton never gives up on his mission and maintains his false identity under pressure. He's driven to hijack a bus when he's kicked from the train by Sheldrake, maintaining his cover by pressing a revolver to the driver's side. Even though he can't stop the ferry disaster that results from the criminal's escape attempt, he dives into the water and saves Nora from drowning without a second thought. His determination pays off as Doyle and the others are taken into custody with plenty of evidence to put them behind bars.

*Calm* There's not a moment in *Number 17* when Barton isn't collected and in control of his emotions. Although he seems upset at times, it's often an act. He never drops his undercover guise of Fordyce until Doyle and the other criminals are in custody. Even as he dangles from the fallen banister, he remains composed, quickly helping to free Rose once Nora unties him. Even when he hijacks the green line bus, he remains stoic and focused on his goal of catching the jewel thieves and Doyle.

**Nora** We first believe Nora to be deaf and mute. She reveals this to be a disguise when she comes back to save Barton and Rose from the fallen banister. Her unwilling attitude and subtle betrayal allow for the capture of the criminals.

*Independent* Nora is barely willing to assist Brant. At several points, we see her act against orders. She does so first when Brant gives her the pistol to hold Barton and Rose hostage: When there's a sound from downstairs, she lets the hostages run from the room, joining them to lean on the banister and watch a man walk up the stairs. When it's time to board the train headed to the continent, she tells them outright, "I'm not going." Her lack of cooperation with Doyle's interrogation in the boxcar leads to her being handcuffed to a support strut.

*Disloyal* Nora holds no loyalty for the criminals. Although she helps Brant at the beginning of the film, her face betrays her nervousness or unwillingness. She shows herself capable of betrayal when she reveals herself to be able to hear and speak to Barton and Rose, even more so when she returns to save the duo from the fallen banister. While this immense disloyalty to Barton and his comrades hampers the heist, she shows loyalty to Barton in helping him bring the criminals to justice.

*Aware* Nora is incredibly aware. As a deaf and mute woman, most of the characters simply ignore her, giving her an excellent position from which to use this trait. At the beginning of the film, she silently delivers her observations to Brant through subtle glances and nods, telling him that Doyle is stealing items from Rose and that people may not be who they seem. Nora's powers of observation lead her to believe that Barton is a cop, and she drops her purse as an excuse to come back and free him.

**Ben** Ben is a homeless man who often seeks shelter in the abandoned home. He is easily frightened and a bit unpredictable. Although he often complains, he is Barton's steadfast ally.

*Complainer* Ben has many comedic traits, chief among them being that he complains. He voices a complaint almost every time he opens his mouth—he claims to be overworked, dislikes being called a liar, and refuses to stand near a dead body—all within the first eight minutes of the film. It doesn't stop there, either. When he tries to escape the hostage situation, he complains all the way back up the staircase when he's captured and thrown in the bathroom. He complains at length when Rose strikes him after he punches her accidentally. Most of the film's comedy is created by Ben's outbursts and whining.

*Loyal* Although you wouldn't think of him as loyal, Ben becomes Barton's greatest ally. He often complains, but despite that, Ben continues to help Barton as the mystery unfolds. He joins in the charade

when the criminals make their first appearance, playing the role of a servant to inform Barton that the corpse has gone missing. In the bathroom, he feigns unconsciousness, gaining important clues about the missing jewels in an attempt to help Barton further. When the criminals run off, Ben joins Barton in the chase, though he complains. Despite his apparent unwillingness, he breaks down a door with Barton and manages to board the train though the detective is thwarted by the criminals when he tries to board the boxcar.

**Rose** Rose is the daughter of the policeman Mr. Ackroyd. She grows concerned when she can't find her father and climbs onto the roof of number 17 in search of him. She plays a small but important part in the mystery.

*Fearless* Rose's entrance is an excellent example of her brave and spontaneous attitude. When she cannot find her father in his locked bedroom and finds the window open, she climbs out and over to number 17, falling through the rotting roof. She reacts quickly when she wakes up, lashing out at Ben as if he's an attacker. She repeats this behavior, striking Ben twice when he blindly strikes her upon being rescued from the bathroom.

*Controlled* Though she's often spontaneous, she also knows how to hold her cards close to her chest. Rose gives no hint that Mr. Ackroyd is her father when he poses as Sheldrake. Her spontaneity translates to acting ability in this instance. She also shows herself capable of dealing with traumatic events when she quiets herself upon seeing what she believes to be her father's corpse and again after her father is beaten unconscious by Sheldrake. She tells the others to continue without her and begins nursing her father's wounds expertly.