

CHRISTMAS AT THE ORPHEUM

Written by

Todd Bronson

1226 Olive Street Unit 1204
St. Louis, MO 63103
ToddBronson@icloud.com
702-839-8307

FADE IN:

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOFT APARTMENTS - DAY

Snowflakes spiral down past the windows of a ten story early 1900s brick building. Numerous windows hail Christmas with decorations of garland, sparkling lights, and festive trees.

Drifting to an undecorated window on the eighth floor, WARREN (late 60s) labors under a lamp at a tool bench inside.

INT. WARREN'S LOFT - DAY

Warren with his neatly groomed gray hair, trimmed beard and bifocals is a handsome version of Pinocchio's Geppetto. He refreshes the paint on a traditional Santa Claus marionette.

Nat King Cole CAROLS from a CD Player on the bench amongst his woodworking tools and paint brushes.

Framed photos of Warren (30s) hugging a nerdy and handsome CLARK (30s) is next to another photo of the same loving couple twenty-five years later.

The apartment is a puppeteer's workroom with shelves of marionettes of zany animals and human caricatures. Featured on the top shelf is the comical Marx Brother marionettes of Harpo, Chico, and Groucho.

MUFFLED CELL PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

Warren perks his ear and cocks his head. He lays down the brush and stops the CD music. He discovers the RINGING cell phone in a jacket pocket nearby and answers.

WARREN

Hello.

However, his fingers painfully freeze up as he loses his grip and the phone falls to the desktop.

CARLITA (O.S.)
(barely audible)
Merry Christmas Eve!

WARREN

Hold on! Carlita, hold on!

He grimaces while pressing the speaker button as Carlita speaks in a slight Spanish accent.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Sorry, my arthritis struck again.
Can you hear me?

CARLITA (O.S.)

Loud and clear, you old coot.

WARREN

Damn! I forgot my medication from
the pharmacy.

CARLITA (O.S.)

Arthritis and now memory loss.

CHILDREN ARE BANGING BAKING PANS AND YELLING FROM THE CELL
(O.S.)

WARREN

OK, Grandma.

CARLITA (O.S.)

They're making...or trying to make
tamales. Sara, stop picking your
nose. Not in the masa! That'll be a
secret ingredient. Let me gather
some peace. Hold on.

Warren grins while waving a paper drying the Santa paint.

CARLITA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

OK. I'm away from the battlefield.
Let's try this again. Merry
Christmas Eve!

WARREN

Merry Christmas to you...and your
family.

CARLITA (O.S.)

You're still welcome to come to
Chicago.

WARREN

Sounds like you have your hands
full.

CARLITA (O.S.)

Take the train. I'm only hours
away.

WARREN

I have a performance.

CARLITA
At the library?

WARREN
No. Taking the show on the road to
the children's hospital.

CARLITA
You make me feel guilty. You are
always a giver and I, well...

WARREN
You have a family to care for.

CARLITA (O.S.)
I always enjoyed when you performed
"Twas the Night Before Christmas"
for Clark and I.

Warren becomes quiet and sadly glances at the photographs.

WARREN
I'm not performing the poem this
year.

CARLITA (O.S.)
Why not? I can envision your
marionettes. "And then, in a
twinkling, I heard on the roof the
prancing and pawing of each little
hoof. As I drew in my head, and was
turning around..."

WARREN AND CARLITA
"...Down the chimney St. Nicholas
came with a bound."

They both laugh reminiscing.

WARREN
Kids don't have the patience
anymore. Marionettes are but
puppets and poems are replaced by
pop songs.

CARLITA (O.S.)
Why not move up here? There's
nothing keeping you in St Louis.

Warren rises from his chair and stretches.

WARREN

My life is here. We, I like living downtown. Everything is in walking distance. I have memories here.

CARLITA (O.S.)

You can still have those same memories in Chicago. Being old doesn't mean you surrender your life to only memories. Replace the sad memories with new, happy ones.

WARREN

It's like a juke box. A sad song plays and I'm able to punch in an uplifting song. Like "Sounds of Silence" replaced by, I dunno know...

CARLITA (O.S.)

"Good Vibrations." Really a jukebox? You are old.

WARREN

We are old. Look at us, "The Beach Boys?" and "Simon and Garfunkel."

CARLITA

Clark would want more for you. I know a cute old, may I say mature gay guy that lives two houses down from us. He bakes by scratch. His cinnamon rolls are to die for.

WARREN

Again, Miss Matchmaker? First, you know a guy in your office. A gay guy at your gym. A baker at your Krispy Kreme. He wasn't even gay. See a trend?

CARLITA (O.S.)

My radar may have missed blips, but who doesn't want donuts in bed. My odds with frogs may have been off too, but Clark was a prince.

WARREN

That he was.

CHILD (O.S.)

(Crying)

Grandma! Peter hit me with a masa ball.

CARLITA (O.S.)
Ok, I'll be there. Warren, I have a
granny emergency.

Warren grins.

WARREN
Sounds a bit out of control.

CARLITA (O.S.)
Listen. Come up New Years. I'm sure
there will be leftover tamales.

WARREN
With buggers.

CARLITA (O.S.)
(laughs)
With buggers. Have a Merry
Christmas. Break a leg.

WARREN
Thanks. You too. Merry, merry.

CARLITA (O.S.)
Bye! Miss you.

WARREN
Bye.

The call ends as Warren presses the phone.

He walks to the puppet shelf and touches the curly hair of Harpo Marx.

FLASHBACK AND MATCH CUT TO:

INT. WARREN'S LOFT -NIGHT

YOUNG WARREN (Early 30s) wears a Harpo Marx curly wig held down by a shabby black top hat. He is costumed in baggy trousers, a wrinkled raincoat, and a squeeze horn tucked in his belt.

The loft is more of a formal living room with a smaller work area and marionette shelf.

DOOR BUZZER (O.S.)

Young Warren squeezes his horn. HONK! HONK!

YOUNG CARLITA (30s) enters in her Los Muertos flowing flower dress and skeleton makeup. She's a firecracker Frida Kahlo.

They study each other's costume.

YOUNG CARLITA
(Speaking with Spanish
Accent)
Who, What are you?

Young Warren cocks his head exasperated by her question.

YOUNG CARLITA (CONT'D)
A transitioning Orphan Annie.

YOUNG WARREN
Famous silent comedian, film star
Harpo Marx of course.

She circles him in her flowing dress.

YOUNG CARLITA
Of course. You are going to love
Clark. He's a film geek too.

YOUNG WARREN
Your odds aren't good. Zero out of
twelve now.

YOUNG CARLITA
This one has a job. Did I mention
he is a film editor?

She HONKS his horn.

INT. HALLOWEEN PARTY LOFT - NIGHT

Young Carlita and Young Warren enter into a lively party
filled with costumed PARTY GOERS.

YOUNG CARLITA
Go mingle and I'll find your new
boyfriend.

YOUNG WARREN
Find me a double shot of tequila on
the way.

Young Carlita HONKS his horn.

YOUNG CARLITA
Aren't you supposed to be funny?
Loosen up, Piano.

YOUNG WARREN
Harpo.

She dances out of sight amongst the crowd.

YOUNG WARREN (CONT'D)
(to himself)
I'm Harpo.

He squeezes through the crowd and finds an open door leading to an outside patio.

Before he is about to step out another HARPO MARX (YOUNG CLARK 30s) stands in his way. He wears the same exact costume.

They stare at each other for an odd moment.

Young Clark raises his hand.

Young Warren raises his hand mirroring Clark.

Young Clark waves his hand and Warren follows.

Suddenly, it appears they are performing the Groucho and Chico Marx mirror comedy routine as in "Duck Soup."

Young Clark does a jig and Warren follows the same dance.

They scrutinize each other and both HONK their horns at the same time.

They both silently laugh mimicking each other.

Young Clark spins around and Warren stands in one place like he spun already.

Young Clark holds out his hand for a handshake.

This time Warren uses his opposite hand to actually shake his hand.

They both laugh as Carlita finds them both.

YOUNG CARLITA
I see you found each other. Told
you... Perfect match.

Their eyes and smiles never leave each other.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

INT. WARREN'S LOFT - NIGHT

Warren caresses the Harpo puppet's cheek. He quickly checks his watch and grabs a backpack.

EXT. LOFT APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Warren exits in the flurry of snow in his heavy coat and backpack. The head of the Santa puppet sticks out of the backpack.

EXT. DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT STREET - NIGHT

Warren treads along the sidewalk of mostly closed businesses. Only a few FOLKS walk through the falling snow.

EXT. SHAMBALA SMOKE SHOP - NIGHT

Warren walks past a window displaying a neon marijuana leaf under the name "Shambala."

An elderly owner, a Himalayan man, JINPA (60s) smokes a pipe outside wearing a colorful sherpa hat.

Warren nods as he walks near.

JINPA
Merry Christmas!

WARREN
Merry Christmas.

Warren walks by with Santa still sticking his head out of the backpack.

JINPA (O.S.)
Legend says Santa travelled by
sleigh not on one's back.

Warren stops and turns around to him.

WARREN
I'm performing a puppet show for
the kids at the hospital. You
wouldn't have anything for
arthritis? My fingers are painfully
stiff from arthritis and now the
cold. Something that wouldn't get
me high.

Jinpa laughs.

JINPA
I have something special that will
soothe your joints and keep you
warm and fuzzy. Come inside.

Warren rethinks his request.

WARREN

I'm sure I can get something at the hospital. Thank you though.

JINPA

C'mon, let Jinpa help you. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Warren follows the man inside the store.

INT. SHAMBALA SMOKE SHOP - NIGHT

Jinpa goes behind the counter as Warren follows scrutinizing the products. The exotic store sells marijuana paraphernalia, weed, and odd organic pills.

WARREN

I can't get high since kids will be in attendance.

JINPA

Trust Jinpa.

WARREN

What's Jinpa?

JINPA

Me. I'm Jinpa.

Jinpa goes into the backroom as Warren checks his watch.

WARREN

I don't have much time.

Jinpa comes back out carrying a small pudding size container.

JINPA

I cooked it this morning. It's a blending for the holidays. My unique take on the traditional figgy pudding.

Jinpa hands it to Warren who studies it.

WARREN

Figgy pudding? Like "We Wish You a Merry Christmas?"

JINPA

"So bring us some figgy pudding,
and a cup of good cheer." Same but
not the same. My recipe includes
the ingredient from the Bodhi fig
tree.

WARREN

And this will help my arthritis?

Jinpa nods.

JINPA

Santa's an exclusive customer. I
ship figgy pudding to the North
Pole for the elves every year.

Jinpa wiggles his fingers.

JINPA (CONT'D)

Keeps their little fingers nimble
in building toys. Santa's little
helper.

WARREN

Is it an ointment?

JINPA

You eat it, silly man. It's tasty
too.

WARREN

Is there side effects?

Jinpa shrugs.

JINPA

It won't kill you.

Warren cocks his head and checks his watch.

JINPA (CONT'D)

Actually it is known to soothe
memory muscles too and make those
memories more vivid.

WARREN

Whatever, I'll take it. How much?

JINPA

It's Christmas. It's your gift from
the "Halls of Shambala."

Jinpa kisses Warren's cheek to Warren's dismay.

JINPA (CONT'D)
May you rediscover joy and
happiness.

Jinpa provides him a spork.

JINPA (CONT'D)
All I have is a spork.

Jinpa leads him to the door.

JINPA (CONT'D)
Now dash away, dash away all. You
have a performance to attend.

WARREN
Thank you.

Warren nods and leaves with the container and spork.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - NIGHT

Warren eats the figgy pudding while walking in the falling
snow.

EXT. ORPHEUM THEATER - NIGHT

Warren tosses the figgy pudding container in a trash bin
outside the rundown and boarded up entrance to the once
glamorous theater which held vaudeville shows from the early
1900s.

VAUDEVILLE ORGAN PLAYS (O.S.)

Warren stops and spins around to find out where the music
plays.

A sliver of light appears from a crack in a board covering
the theater entrance.

Warren moves closer and the music stops. The sliver of light
turns dark.

Warren backs away and goes back on his journey. He turns his
head to take one last glance but the theater is silent and
dark.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Warren enters the ten story modern building which is eerily
quiet on Christmas Eve.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

The waiting room is transformed into a festive gathering with a colorful Christmas tree, wrapped gifts, and a table of cookies and punch.

An ornate puppet theater draped in garland stands before an audience of chairs. HOSPITAL PERSONNEL tidy the final touches on the decorations.

LILY (40s) tunes her guitar near a seat by the theater as Warren enters. She is a librarian by trade who warms with friendly eyes and a welcoming smile.

LILY

I was a bit scared I would have to go a cappella. Can't play strings on a guitar and puppets at the same time.

WARREN

Sorry I'm late.

Lily gives him a quick hug.

LILY

Kids aren't here yet. Merry Christmas.

WARREN

Merry Christmas.

He takes off his backpack.

WARREN (CONT'D)

I needed to freshen up Santa.

He carefully takes out the Santa puppet from his pack.

He takes hold of the wooden control holding the strings and brings Santa to life.

Santa does a gig and goes into a disco dance pointing his hand in the air.

WARREN (CONT'D)

(singing)

"Feel the city breakin' and everybody shakin' And we're stayin' alive, stayin' alive. Ah, ha, ha, ha, stayin' alive, stayin' alive." Ho, ho, ho...

Lily laughs.

LILY
Let me do the singing.

Suddenly, a cancer PATIENT (8) is pushed in by her MOTHER in a wheelchair.

Warren and Lily watch as she is pushed past the Christmas tree.

Lily pats Warren's shoulder.

LILY (CONT'D)
Let's give them our best
performance.

Warren stares with mournful eyes.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Warren (late 50s) enters where Clark (late 50s) lies in a hospital bed sickly ill and pale.

Warren kisses his forehead as Clark opens his eyes with a painful grin.

CLARK
Did you get something to eat?

Warren nods.

WARREN
I brought you something.

CLARK
A marionette?

Clark glances around as Warren shows him five DVDs of Marx Brother's films.

WARREN
I'm giving you a break from my puppets.

CLARK
I love your shows.

WARREN
I thought we could have our Marx Brother marathon early before New Years.

Clark grasps Warren's arm as Warren begins to sob.

WARREN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

CLARK
It's fine. It shows you love me.

Clark kisses him.

CLARK (CONT'D)
I love you too. I need to tell you
something.

Warren studies him.

CLARK (CONT'D)
I have kept a secret from you since
the day we met.

WARREN
I'd rather not hear it.

CLARK
I need to spill the tea.

WARREN
Don't. I'm happy, content not
knowing.

Clark holds his hand.

CLARK
Our introduction wasn't a
coincidence. Carlita told me you
were showing up to the Halloween
party dressed as Harpo. We planned
to have the same costume.

Warren cocks his head with a smirk.

WARREN
Really? Carlita is such a snake.

CLARK
I loved the Marx Brothers too. I
didn't plan the mirror routine.
That was impromptu and spontaneous.
But the costume...

Warren kisses his hand.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Now since that's off my chest, put
in the movie.

Warren wipes his tears and goes to the DVD player by the TV.

CLARK (CONT'D)
You better put "Cocoanuts" in
first. I may doze off.

HALF HOUR LATER

Warren sits beside the bed holding Clark's hand. Warren
watches TV while Clark fights to keep his eyes open.

WARREN
If I could go back in time. It
would be to see the early Marx
Brother's on the Vaudeville stage.

He glances over at Clark's closed eyes.

WARREN (CONT'D)
I should let you sleep. We can
finish it tomorrow.

CLARK
Stay here with me.

Warren's eyes well up again.

WARREN
Always.

Warren holds his hand in a firm grip.

CLARK
I'll save you a seat at the
Orpheum.

Warren lays his head on Clark's chest and closes his teary
eyes.

FLASHBACK ENDS:

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Crimson curtains open on the puppet theater and the Santa
puppet drops down with a bow.

Hospitalized CHILDREN, PARENTS, NURSES, and DOCTORS clap.

Lily plays her guitar nearby the theater.

LILY

You know who's coming to town?

CHILDREN

Santa!

LILY

Please help me. Sing and clap along.

She strums the guitar to the opening of "Santa Claus is coming to Town."

LILY (CONT'D)

"You better watch out, you better not cry..."

Children and adults join in song as the Santa puppet raises both hands to search the crowd.

LILY (CONT'D)

"Better not pout, I'm telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town."

A doctor, PIERRE (early 60s) watches Santa pull out a long paper list of names. He's a charming Frenchman with a tight beard with facial creases. The puppet brings a smile and a glint to his eyes.

LILY AND AUDIENCE

(singing)

"He's making a list and checking it twice. He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice."

Pierre sings the tag line.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)

(singing)

"Santa Claus is coming to town."

A FEW MINUTES LATER

A Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer puppet flies through the air and lands between two other reindeer.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)

(singing)

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer had a very shiny nose."

Rudolph's nose blinks red as he rubs his head on the other reindeer.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)
(singing)
"And if you ever saw it. You would
even say it glows."

Pierre scans the gleeful children entranced with the puppet show.

MINUTES LATER

A plain unanimated snowman stands amongst two puppet children in the theater.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)
(singing)
"Frosty the snowman is a fairy tale
they say. He was made of snow but
the children know how he came to
life one day."

One child puppet sets a hat on the snowman.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)
(singing)
"There must have been some magic in
that old silk cap they found. For
when they placed it on his head."

The puppet children turn their back to the snowman which is replaced by an animated Frosty puppet who dances around.

LILY AND AUDIENCE (CONT'D)
(singing)
"He began to dance around."

The puppet children join him which brings LAUGHTER to the audience.

MINUTES LATER

The audience CLAPS as Lily bows with the Santa, Rudolph, Frosty, and children puppets in the theater.

Warren pops his head out above the theater which allows for more clapping.

Pierre smiles and claps upon seeing Warren.

EXT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Lily hugs Warren at the entrance where snowflakes float down.

LILY

The library will pick up the theater and trunks on Wednesday. You sure don't need a ride? My sleigh is parked right there.

WARREN

The snow let up. Anyway, I could use the walk.

LILY

How's your arthritis?

Warren wiggles his fingers.

WARREN

I forgot I even had it. The figgy pudding helped.

LILY

Figgy?

WARREN

Nothing. Some organic medicine I bought. Give the kids a hug. I'm sure they are waiting for mom to open gifts.

Lily gives him a kiss on the cheek.

LILY

Merry Christmas.

WARREN

Merry Christmas.

She steps away.

LILY

We put on a great show for those kids.

WARREN

That we did.

Warren watches her leave and walks into the night.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - NIGHT

Warren strolls down the silent and snowy desolate road.

HORSE HOOVES CLIP CLOP (O.S.)

Warren halts and spins around to find out where the horse is.
He is perplexed since no horse is seen.

EXT. ORPHEUM THEATER - NIGHT

Warren walks near the boarded up theater.

HORSE HOOVES CLIP CLOP (O.S.)

Warren spins around as a horse comes toward the theater.

The horse is ridden by ARTHUR (37) a short and slight, dark haired German. His fedora, jacket and baggy trousers reflect 1925.

Warren's eyes are wide and mouth agape as the rider goes past with a tip of the hat.

ARTHUR
Evening.

WARREN
Evening.

Arthur halts the horse with a pull on the reins.

ARTHUR
Do you play pinnacle?

WARREN
Not in awhile.

ARTHUR
But you play?

Warren nods his head.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
We need a fourth. Follow me. Not
too close though. She may take a
shit.

The horse heads to an alley next to the theater.

Warren is frozen with bewilderment.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
You can follow closer. She's not an
hippopotamus.

Warren reluctantly follows.

EXT. BACKSTAGE DOOR - NIGHT

Arthur dismounts from the horse.

ARTHUR
There, there Captain.

The horse NAYS and Arthur NAYS back when Warren goes to their side.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Captain, the horse with the human brain, can be a bit ornery.

WARREN
Is it yours?

Arthur laughs as he tosses the reins over a pole. The horse isn't tied down.

ARTHUR
Naw. I just took him for some hay.

Arthur opens the stage door.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Leonard will be happy I found a fourth. Julius not so much.

Warren hesitates but follows Arthur inside.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Arthur leads Warren down a dark corridor where a light glows under a door.

WARREN
Is it OK that I'm here.

ARTHUR
The stagehand is a big galoot.
You're fine with us.

Arthur opens the door to a messy dressing room where three vintage large trunks lie. LEONARD (38) shuffles cards at a table. He's similar to Arthur in size, but is more handsome.

JULIUS (35) lays on a dingy couch reading a hard copy of "The Great Gatsby." He's similar to them both.

They both wear undershirts and trousers from the bygone 1920s.

LEONARD
Who's the old guy?

WARREN
Warren.

ARTHUR
Found him out in the cold. Warren's
our fourth.

Julius peeks over the pages at Warren.

LEONARD
Pinochle. What are the stakes?

ARTHUR
This is Leonard. He'll gamble his
kids on a fifty-to-win. And the
bookworm is Julius.

LEONARD
Get your nose out and play.

Arthur points to a seat next to Leonard.

ARTHUR
You'll be my partner and that
leaves Julius and Leonard.

JULIUS
Wonderful. I'm stuck with the
disadvantaged. No money. Only
points.

Julius sits across from Leonard as Warren sits across from
Arthur.

LEONARD
C'mon. We can take these saps.

Leonard shuffles the cards.

LEONARD (CONT'D)
Higher or lower than an eight? Bet
anybody five.

ARTHUR
Just deal the cards.

LEONARD
Fifty percent chance.

JULIUS
You're a lousy gambler.

LEONARD
I'm playing with house money.

ARTHUR
That's why you don't own a house.

LEONARD
I won on a twenty-five to one at
Saratoga just last week.

JULIUS
Leonard, the longer you wipe your
butt, you are bound to get shit on
your fingers.

Warren and Arthur laugh.

LEONARD
Ha, ha what does that mean? Did you
pick up that daft philosophy from
Waddel the drunk on second and
ninety-sixth street?

JULIUS
I'd say more deft than daft.

Suddenly the door opens and HERBERT (24) pokes his head in. He's a kindly and handsome Jewish man with similar looks as the others.

MINNIE
We've been moved up. Sigsbee's
Captain galloped away.

JULIUS
The horse with a human brain was
smarter than we thought. Finally
left him.

Warren glances at Arthur who pretends to be oblivious of the conversation.

Herbert claps his hands.

HERBERT
Get dressed.

ARTHUR
Yes, Herbert.

He leaves as Leonard sprays the cards in the air.

LEONARD
Never even got to bid.

The three of them go to separate trunks and open them up.

Warren is perplexed watching each one take out costumes.

WARREN

Are you part of a show?

JULIUS

We're top billing.

Warren watches as Leonard slicks back his hair and puts on an immigrant suit.

Julius rats out his hair and puts on a tuxedo and tails.

Arthur sticks his head between a loop into an already tied loud tie.

WARREN

What year is this?

ARTHUR

1925 I believe.

LEONARD

Could be 1929.

Warren's mouth drops as he realizes he has been playing with his and Clark's favorite celebrity comedians.

Leonard adds a Italian Tydean hat to his head as he becomes Chico Marx.

Julius adds a top hat and wire rimmed glasses as he becomes Groucho Marx. Julius sings the Irving Berlin song "A Little Bungalow."

JULIUS

(singing)

"A little bungalow an hour or so
from anywhere. A little cozy nest,
the kind that's best for two. Among
the shady trees, with birds and
bees, and lots of air. And just
enough o'ground to fool around with
you."

Arthur puts on an orange wig and trench coat as he becomes Harpo Marx. He adds a shabby top hat and horn as a finishing touch.

WARREN

My God. You're the Marx Brothers.

ARTHUR

That's us.

JULIUS

Don't sit there gawking. Help me
with my mustache.

Julius sits and puts black grease paint on the table.

WARREN

Really? Me.

JULIUS

Don't want these knuckleheads to.
They'd give me blackface.

Arthur practices his Harpo "Gookie" face at Julius.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

Keep your "Gookie" for the
audience.

Warren opens the grease paint.

JULIUS (CONT'D)

Use your fingers. The messier the
more laughs I get.

Warren smears the paint on Julius's upper lip.

LEONARD

We need to rethink the "viaduct"
joke. There's no laughs with "Why
you shucking?"

WARREN

You are performing "Cocoanuts."

Arthur touches Warren's nose as Harpo and HONKS his horn.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Have you ever thought of asking
"Why a duck?"

LEONARD

Hmmm, let's try it. Start your
line.

JULIUS

"I say, here is a little peninsula,
and here is a viaduct leading over
to the mainland."

LEONARD
"Alright, why a duck?"

They all laugh.

JULIUS
"I'm not playing "Ask Me Another,"
I say that's a viaduct."

Leonard thinks and speaks in Chico's Italian accent.

LEONARD
Alright! Why a duck? Why that...why
a duck? Why no chicken?"

They all laugh.

JULIUS
We'll adlib it. Great idea, Warren.

Leonard gives Warren a pat on the back.

LEONARD
"Why a duck?" it is. Thanks.

Herbert sticks his head in the room again. He wears makeup
which transforms him into the pretty-boy Zeppo Marx.

HERBERT
Let's get to the stage. We're up.

Herbert leaves as Julius and Leonard follow as Groucho and
Chico.

Arthur gives Warren a hug with a HONK since their bodies
press on the horn.

Warren laughs.

ARTHUR
Let's go.

Warren points to himself.

WARREN
Me.

Arthur opens the door to a LOUD COMMOTION of a lively
backstage.

ARTHUR
C'mon.

Warren follows.

WARREN
Is this real?

Arthur as Harpo stares into Warren's eyes.

ARTHUR
Clark is holding a seat for you.

Arthur spins walking briskly away toward the stage. Warren freezes.

INT. ORPHEUM THEATER - STAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Warren pensively steps toward the stage.

AUDIENCE CLAPS, HOLLARS, AND WHISTLES (O.S.)

Warren reaches the stage which is now magically abandoned and back to its present decay.

He peers into the empty seats where Clark sits eating popcorn. Clark meets his eyes with a sly grin.

Warren begins to tear up and hold his mouth in astonishment.

Clark pats a seat next to him.

CLARK
I saved it for you.

Warren scampers down the stairs and up the aisle to Clark's row.

Clark stands as Warren grips him in a loving embrace.

WARREN
I miss you terribly.

Clark kisses his lips.

CLARK
I miss you too.

WARREN
I can't believe you are real. Is this real? A dream?

CLARK
We don't have much time. Please sit.

Warren and Clark sit together holding hands.

WARREN

I love you.

CLARK

I love you too. The show is about
to start.

Warren hugs him again with tears squeezed out by his closed eyes.

WARREN

Am I dead?

Clark wipes the tears from his cheek and offers him popcorn.

CLARK

No. You are very much alive.
Popcorn?

Suddenly, the theater is alive and packed with a rip-roaring and ruckus CROWD. They are surrounded by THEATER GOERS who STOMP, CLAP, WHISTLE AND HOLLAR.

The theater is transformed to its 1925 pristine glory.

A massive red velvet curtain opens to a large film screen.

Clark smiles over to Warren who is confused.

WARREN

I thought this was 1925.

Clark shrugs with his palms out.

MONTAGE BEGINS:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

On the screen the film "Cocoanuts" begins with dancing girls with an introduction superimposed with "Marx Brothers in Cocoanuts."

Clark leans lovingly into Warren while watching the screen with the packed rousing audience.

INSTRUMENTAL PEANUTS GANG "LINUS & LUCY" BEGINS:

QUICK CUTS:

-- On screen Groucho harasses the demure Margaret Dumont in the hotel lobby at the delight of Clark and Warren.

-- On screen Harpo and Chico playfully follow female hotel guests in the lobby. Harpo honks his horn.

-- On screen Harpo, Chico, Groucho, and Zeppo try to shake hands in the lobby in the run-around slapstick.

-- The Audience laughs uncontrollably.

-- On screen Harpo leads Chico and Groucho in a funny reenactment of the Revolutionary War fife and drum march.

-- On screen Harpo and Chico partake in a silly fight with the Private Dick. Harpo makes his classic "Gookie" facial expression.

-- Warren and Clark bend over sharing a belly laugh.

-- On screen Harpo plays the harp.

-- On screen in wacky slapstick Harpo and Groucho go back and forth into hotel rooms on a split screen.

-- On screen Chico plays piano in his humorous plucky one-finger gag.

-- On screen Harpo comforts a crying lady with a lollipop and to his dismay he gets a loving hug.

-- On screen Harpo drops his hat and magically picks it up like a yo-yo.

-- On screen Chico and Harpo play tic-tac-toe on the Private Dick's undershirt.

-- All the audience claps and whistles when all the Marx Brothers appear on screen shaking each others hands. They break the fourth wall and joyfully wave to the audience.

-- The audience waves back fully entertained.

-- On screen "The End" is shown over the backdrop of a cloudy sky.

MUSIC STOPS AND MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Warren and Clark remain in their seats as all the audience members have left.

They still hold hands facing the screen.

Warren's smile fades as he glances to Clark who greets him with a smile.

WARREN

Stay with me. I don't know what this is, is about, but stay with me.

CLARK

I can't.

WARREN

Then I'll stay here.

CLARK

In a darken theater.

WARREN

I don't want to be alone.

CLARK

You aren't. You are gifted with memories and dreams. However you are still alive.

WARREN

Maybe I don't want to, you know...

CLARK

There is a future beyond the past. There is a life waiting for you outside. You need to live it.

Warren grips him in an unrelenting hug.

WARREN

I want to stay with you.

CLARK

You need to let go.

WARREN

No.

Clark pulls himself away and rises to his feet.

CLARK

I'll always be here saving a seat for you. But it's not your time, Warren.

Clark steps away down the aisle.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Take that love you give me and
share it.

WARREN
I'm old.

Clark grins.

CLARK
Love has no age.

Warren watches as Clark walks toward a lit red exit sign.

Tears fall down Warren's aged cheeks as Clark exits into darkness.

The exit sign goes dark.

EXT. ORPHEUM THEATER - NIGHT

Warren walks out and into snowfall.

He sadly trudges down the snowy barren street.

HORSE HOOVES (O.S.)

He spins around and finds Captain clopping toward him.

WARREN
Captain?

Warren tries to grab his dangling reins, but the horse spooks and shoves him aside.

Warren loses his balance, slides on the ice and falls to the ground. His head hits the ice and he loses unconsciousness as the horse races off.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A hearth is ablaze with crackling fire as "Silent Night" PLAYS.

Pulling back we discover it is on a television a few feet from a bed where Warren lies asleep.

Pierre checks an EKG machine which Warren is attached to wires like a marionette.

Warren stirs, wakes, and opens his eyes. Pierre speaks in a French accent.

PIERRE
Merry Christmas.

Warren scans the room and focuses on Pierre.

WARREN
Merry Christmas. How did I get
here?

PIERRE
It was a Christmas miracle that you
were found. Passed out in the snow.

WARREN
I remember I was trying to catch
Captain.

PIERRE
Captain?

WARREN
Nothing. I slipped.

Pierre puts a pen light beam into Warren's eye.

PIERRE
You got quite a bump on your...
What do you American's say? Noggin?
A man brought you in. An odd
character. He mentioned something
about figgy pudding.

WARREN
Jinpa. He's Himalayan.

PIERRE
You know him?

Warren shakes his head with a smile.

WARREN
Not really.

Pierre steps away from the bed and watches the fireplace on
the TV.

PIERRE
I'm sure you didn't want to spend
Christmas in a hospital.

Pierre stands at the end of the bed facing Warren.

PIERRE (CONT'D)
You already sacrificed your
Christmas Eve for the children with
your marionette performance. The
children loved it. I did too.

Warren meets Pierre's eyes.

WARREN
You were in the audience?

PIERRE
It was magical. Reminded me when I
was a boy going to Jardin du
Luxembourg park in Paris.

WARREN
Where the famous Guignol puppet
performs.

PIERRE
Yes. Did you know Marionette in
French means "little, little Mary?"
The Virgin Mary. A bit of Christmas
trivia. Well, I'll get your
paperwork started. Get you out so
you can enjoy your Christmas.

WARREN
You're also sacrificing your
Christmas to work tonight.

PIERRE
Only been a week in St Louis. I'm
here to train the staff. I let the
doctors have a night off with their
families.

Pierre heads to the door as Warren watches him leave.

WARREN
Hey, doctor...

Pierre spins back.

PIERRE
It's Pierre.

WARREN
...hmmm, thanks Pierre.

Pierre smiles and nods. Pierre turns to leave.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Hey, Pierre. This may sound odd,
but do you like the Marx Brothers?

Pierre turns around again.

PIERRE

Who doesn't? Harpo, Chico, and
Groucho.

WARREN AND PIERRE

And sometimes Zeppo.

They smile together.

WARREN

Would you like to spend Christmas
with me?

PIERRE

Here?

Warren cocks his head.

WARREN

No. My place. I live a few blocks
from here. I'll make dinner.

Pierre studies him.

WARREN (CONT'D)

I understand if you have plans.

PIERRE

Is this a Christmas date?

Warren blushes.

WARREN

Suppose it is.

PIERRE

I'd like that.

Pierre nods and exits.

Warren leans his head back with a grin. He watches the crackling fire on TV. Nat King Cole CAROLS from the TV.

A glint of a metal reflection from the artificial fire catches his eye. He glances at the bed table and discovers Harpo's iconic squeeze horn.

FADE OUT:

THE END.