# THE DO-NOTHING OWL OF CHRISTMAS HILL

by

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Based on a True Event

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EXT. SERIES OF SHOTS OF TOWNS AND VILLAGES - DAY

Glimpses of landscapes, houses, streets, churches, etc. in various regions and different seasons. Over these images the NARRATOR speaks.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

Some people with a poetic turn of mind are convinced there are special places that have a year-round Christmas quality, an enduring Yuletide atmosphere, as if their houses and landscapes were permanently sitting for a Currier and Ives portrait.

EXT. LOCAL PARK - CHESTNUT HILL - PHILADELPHIA - DAY

MARIAN STANLEY, 36, husband, JACK, 38, and their children, SALLY, 14, and JIM, 12, are enjoying a day in the park.

ON MARIAN

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Marian Stanley is one of those poetic souls who believe there are such places. She is a whimsical, imaginative, and good-humored woman who might have been born under the sign of Serendipity. For she possesses the mystical faculty of consistently making happy discoveries

EXT. SERIES OF SHOTS - CHESTNUT HILL'S LANDMARKS

Marian is admiring some of Chestnut Hill's historic houses and landmarks that include Victorian homes, Italianate villas, and Gothic and Georgian homes..

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And once upon a time, in the early Nineteen Sixties, when her serendipity was working overtime, she happily discovered a place she felt was quintessentially Christmas. in looks and feeling.

### EXT. GERMANTOWN AVENUE -DAY

As a trolley CLANKS by, Marian walks along Germantown Avenue with its Colonial-styled buildings, quaint shops, and cobblestoned road ribboned with trolley tracks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Tucked in the northwest corner of Philadelphia and blessed with a country-village atmosphere, it was a quaint suburb called Chestnut Hill. For Marian, Christmas was engraved on its stony architecture and deeply etched in its landscape, as if the two were everlastingly locked in a loving holiday embrace through all four seasons.

### EXT. THE STANLEY HOUSE - DAY

The landscape is ablaze with the colors of autumn. Marian and the children are raking leaves in their front yard. From the house we hear Jack practicing TRUMPET SCALES.

NARRATOR (V. O)

Their home was a an old, robust stone structure, known as a Twin because it housed two families separated by a common wall thick enough to muffle Jack's trumpet playing. Well, almost thick enough.

# INT. JACK'S STUDY - DAY

Photos of famous jazz trumpeters, Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Bunny Berigan, Harry James, Dizzy Gillespie, and others adorn the walls.

Jack is running through SCALES on his trumpet. He glances at the photo of Armstrong, then plays a few bars of Satchmo's classic Introduction to WEST END BLUES.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Besides his day job as a corporate writer, Jack plays with various jazz groups in the Philadelphia area. He's also in charge of the household budget, a job that sometimes transforms him from Jekyll to Hyde faster than you can say Robert Louis Stevenson.

EXT. GERMANTOWN AVENUE - DAY

MARIAN and JACK walk arm in arm as a trolley passes by.

MARIAN

They should re-name this place Christmas Hill. Charles Dickens would feel right at home here.

JACK

You must be his number one fan.

MARIAN

Some of my finest childhood hours were spent reading his books -- David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Our Mutual Friend. Great stuff.

JACK

What about all those slums in Dickens? And nasty characters like Bill Sikes and Uriah Heep? You know, a lot of folks wouldn't agree with your notion about some places being Christmasy all year long.

MARIAN

That's because there's no poetry in their souls.

**JACK** 

They'll say it's only in the eye of the beholder.

MARIAN

They have eyes to see, but they see not. These special places have to be spiritually discerned. Eye of the beholder indeed! Humbug! Humbug!

JACK

There you go. Dickens again. You're incorrigible.

Marian and Jack are approaching the Chestnut Hill Hotel. There's a limousine in front, and a wedding party is entering.

MARIAN

Look -- a wedding party!

JACK

I'll bet that somber gentleman behind the bride and groom is the one footing the bill.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Chestnut Hill's bewitching village atmosphere harmonized with Marian's lively imagination and sense of whimsy. And in these surroundings, she easily conjures up visions of Dickens's characters. And she is quite good at it.

MARIAN

Oh! Oh!

JACK

What?

SPFX: MISS HAVISHAM FROM DICKENS' GREAT EXPECTATIONS MARIAN POV

Wearing a crumbling bridal gown, Miss Havisham is joining the wedding party

MARIAN (O. S.)

I just saw Miss Havisham heading toward the hotel. I think she's going to spook that wedding party.

JACK

Don't tell me one of your imaginary friends is back in town.

Still staring at the wedding party, she ignores his remark.

MARIAN

And she's still wearing the bridal dress that's crumbling and falling apart. I guess she wants to see a freshly baked wedding cake for a change. One without mice nibbling away at it.

JACK

What am I going to do with you? You're the only one who ever sees these characters.

MARIAN

If Elwood P. Dowd had his Harvey, I can have my Miss Havisham.

JACK

Elwood P. Dowd was no more real than his pooka, or Miss Havisham. Or Santa Claus, for that matter.

MARIAN

That's how much you know, Love. Lots of people are still writing letters to Sherlock Holmes. They think he's real.

JACK

I give up!

Marian turns off Germantown Avenue to Highland Avenue.

JACK

Where are we going?

MARIAN

Christmas isn't far off. I'd like to look around in the book store and get some ideas for gifts.

**JACK** 

It's not even Halloween yet.

Marian tugs at his arm, and they head for The Frigate Book Store.

FADE TO BLACK

### EXT. GERMANTOWN AVENUE - NIGHT

A snowy night during Christmas week in the 1960's. People are moving in and out of the quaint shops as a trolley clanks along the Avenue.

A Salvation Army brass ensemble is playing carols while an attendant rings a bell. Marian slips a bill into the donation kettle and continues on her way. She is in a happy mood and enjoying the Yuletide sights and sounds.

# NARRATOR (V.O.)

All year long Marian's insides have been fluttery with great expectations. For she is convinced that the venerable streets, lanes, and avenues, of Chestnut Hill are full of promise, that their nooks and crannies conceal treasures yet to be discovered, and that one of them has her name on it.

She rounds a corner, approaches an elegant gift shop, and glances briefly at the display window as she passes.

After a few steps, she stops, glances back, turns, and pauses before the window.

She gazes in admiration at the sumptuous display of fine craftsmanship in silver, crockery, ceramics, and crystal. Finally, she enters the shop.

INT. GIFT SHOP - NIGHT

Marian browses, pausing here and there to admire the elegant items in tableware, earthenware, silverplate, and objets d'art of all kinds fashioned of glass, wood, and metal.

She catches sight of a large sculptured owl perched high on a table. It is crafted of sheet metal and is more than a foot tall. While gazing at it almost transfixed, she overhears the shopkeeper proudly rhapsodizing over its artistic merits.

## ON SHOPKEEPER AND WOMAN

SHOPKEEPER

A magnificent example of the sculptor's art, wouldn't you say, Madam?

The woman is eyeing the owl warily.

WOMAN

How much?

SHOPKEEPER

It's one of a kind, and no doubt its value will increase substantially over the years.

WOMAN

(impatiently)
The price tag, if you

don't mind!

SHOPKEEPER

One hundred and fifty dollars, and believe me, it's worth much more.

The woman is stunned.

WOMAN

A hundred and fifty bucks? What in God's name does it do for that kind of money, recite the Gettysburg Address?

The shopkeeper is taken aback. Marian moves into the scene and chimes in.

MARIAN

Yes, what does it do for that price. Sing? Dance? Or juggle, maybe?

Just as quickly, Marian flushes with embarrassment.

The man stares sourly at both women.

SHOPKEEPER

DO? What do you mean what does it do? It doesn't do anything. It's a work of art, something to admire, to enjoy, like fine music, a beautiful painting, or --

The woman cuts him off brusquely.

WOMAN

For a hundred and fifty bucks that bird ought to be able to do something more than stand around and collect dust.

SHOPKEEPER

(miffed)

You don't ask Rembrandt or Mozart what their works do. Art is meant to enrich your life, elevate your spirit, celebrate --

Again the woman interrupts.

WOMAN

I still say it's a dust collector. look at all those feathers. It'd take at least half a day just to clean them.

MARIAN

(cautiously)

You know what Oscar Wilde said. All art is quite useless.

WOMAN

Oscar who?

The shopkeeper brightens with recognition.

That's right! Oscar Wilde, of course. I remember.
Let's see. There's more to that quote. Hmm.
Ah, yes! -- the only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

### SHOPKEEPER

It's from Dorian Gray Yes, the Picture of Dorian Gray. A classic book and a fine movie, too.

He smiles proudly as though he had just passed his final exam in English Literature.

WOMAN

(sullenly)
I saw that movie years ago.
If you ask me, that portrait

was pretty ugly.

Marian and the shopkeeper exchange looks.

MARTAN

Only at the end of the film.

The shopkeeper smiles briefly, but it is back to business, and his expression changes. He glances at the owl, then at the sullen woman. He doesn't conceal his exasperation.

SHOPKEEPER

Madam, this wonderful owl, this exquisitely crafted work of art, is not animated like Donald Duck. It's not a mechanical toy with a wind-up key you can buy in any five-and-dime store.

The woman stiffens and snaps back

WOMAN

I didn't come in here to be insulted.

Perhaps you had better look elsewhere for a gift that's more animated than this inactive, do-nothing owl.

The woman shoots a wicked glance at the owl.

WOMAN

You know what you can do With that crummy bird of yours.

The disgruntled woman storms out in an operatic huff like an indignant diva.

Marian looks around in discomfort. She stands there speechless, unable even to make small talk. She tries to avoid the shopkeeper's eyes, feeling they are scanning her suspiciously and weighing the possibility that somehow she might be in league with the huffy woman.

SHOPKEEPER

A friend of yours?

MARIAN

Never saw her before.

SHOPKEEPER

Definitely not a patron of the arts. I guess it takes all kinds. And since we've been quoting, there's an old saying -- art has no enemy except ignorance.

(softening)

By the way, I appreciated that Oscar Wilde quote. You helped jog my memory.

MARIAN

I'm sorry I put my two cents
in. I was being facetious
and spoke out of turn.
 (glancing at the owl)
I do like your owl sculpture.
It's quite handsome.

The man is warmed by her words

Do you like it well enough to buy it? Even if it doesn't do anything?

#### MARIAN

Well I might be a little peeved if he couldn't recite the Gettysburg Address.

The man smiles, then gazes at the owl fondly.

### SHOPKEEPER

When it first arrived, I almost took it home myself. But if doing that becomes a habit, I'll have to close up shop, a victim of good taste but bad business.

(studying Marian's face)
You won't be sorry if you buy it.

### MARIAN

I'd love to, really. But I'm afraid I've just about run out of my Chistmas cash.

# SHOPKEEPER

A check will do. Or you can charge it. We accept all credit cards, Diner's Club, American Express, you name it.

### MARIAN

Charge it? You've got to be kidding. According to my husband, my middle name is charge it. He manages the family budget and thinks I'm the best friend Master Charge ever had, not to mention Wanamakers, Gimbels, and a number of other department stores.

## SHOPKEEPER

Why not put it on layaway? Pay for it monthly and in no time the sculpture will be yours. What do you say? Marian gazes at the sculpture, struggling to decide.

MARIAN

Hmmm. It's mighty tempting. It would be perfect on our mantelpiece. (sighing) But I'll have to say no.

Thanks, anyway.

SHOPKEEPER

I do love selling my wares to those who appreciate beautiful things. And I sense that you do. Right?

MARIAN

True. But reluctantly, I'll have to pass. Sorry.

SHOPKEEPER

Well, your loss will be somebody else's gain. Anyway, I'm happy you like the sculpture for what it is and nothing more.

MARTAN

It's so beautiful, I'm sure you'll sell it in no time. And to someone who will appreciate it.

The shopkeeper glances sourly in the direction of the door.

SHOPKEEPER

Thank God not everyone is like that picklepuss who just left. I'll bet if she went to the Louvre Museum, she'd grumble if the Mona Lisa didn't serenade her.

MARTAN

(edging toward door) I think you're right. Well, Merry Christmas.

SHOPKEEPER

Same to you, Madam.

Marian pauses at the door, turns, gives the owl a final glance, and sighs.

MARIAN

Yes, that owl would really look great over our fireplace.

SHOPKEEPER

If you change your mind, don't wait too long.

He watches her leave, then he, too, glances at the owl and sighs.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marian, Jack, Sally, and Jim are having dinner.

MARIAN

You should have seen that woman. She drove the man crazy asking him what the owl did. I thought he was about ready to strangle her.

JACK

I know the type, the kind that expect musicians to double as stand-up comics, or tap-dance while performing magic tricks. They feel cheated if all you can do is play an instrument.

SALLY

That's one of your pet peeves, Dad, isn't it?

JACK

You bet. Along with people who have a superior, patronizing attitude toward musicians.

Sally is enjoying it all and eggs her Dad on.

SALLY

And what about those greedy nightclub owners, Dad?

JACK

Them. too, Sugar, especially the ones who want you to wear funny hats or outlandish costumes. Just to make the cash register ring little longer. Ugh!

JTM

Tell us more about the owl, Mom. What does it do?

MARIAN

That was the whole point, Jim. The owl doesn't do anything, and that's why the lady got upset. She thought it should do something, maybe walk or talk, who knows?

SALLY

Maybe sing grand opera.

She rises from her chair singing in a high falsetto. Soon, Jim joins her and the two start clowning around yodeling in their teen-age caricature of opera-singing.

Marian and Jack look on indulgently for a few moments.

JACK

Okay, kids, that's enough. Use your mouths for something a little more constructive, like eating your Mom's scrumptious meatloaf.

Sally and Jim return to the table.

JIM

I want to hear about the owl, Mom. Please?

MARIAN

Not much more to tell except the lady and the shopkeeper didn't see eye to eye, and she left in a big huff. She thought the owl should do more than collect dust. JACK

What is it with people who want you to be something you're not? Maybe strangling is too good for them

Sally and Jim giggle. Marian gives Jack a halfhearted slap on his hand.

MARIAN

Jack! You don't mean that.
Where's your Christmas spirit?
And in front of the children.
(glancing at the children)
Children who had better stop giggling.

JACK

I apologize, kids.

While they are still giggling, he gives both a hug, then embraces Marian.

JACK (cont'd)
How much did you say the man wanted for that owl?

MARTAN

A hundred and fifty dollars.

JACK

Whew! A hundred and fifty smackaroos! It must be some owl.

MARIAN

It's beautiful, Jack.

JACK

Maybe so, but a little too rich for our blood. We need a sheet-metal owl the way I need another dent in my trumpet.

MARIAN

I guess you're right.

JACK

Anyway, I'm proud of you, Honey. You showed great financial restraint.

MARIAN

Yes, I thought so, too.

JACK

Knowing you, I'm sure it was difficult.

MARIAN

It was excruciatingly tempting. But then, I asked myself, Who is Jack today, Jekyll or Hyde? And, reluctantly, I said no. (melodramatically)
I probably shall never recover.

**JACK** 

Your unaccustomed prudence merit's a reward, and as guardian of the family budget I will demonstrate my appreciation as follows.

With a great flourish his lips mesh with hers passionately as if wife-kissing were about to be rationed at any moment by governmental edict.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY - ON JACK

Jack is at his typewriter working on an assignment. He stops typing and slides his chair back, pondering, as though he were dreamlng up his next sentence. Gradually, his face crinkles into a smile.

INT. COMMUTER TRAIN - NIGHT

Jack is peering out the window, smiling.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CHESTNUT HILL - NIGHT

Jack steps off the train and begins walking.

EXT. GIFT SHOP - NIGHT

Jack pauses before the display window, glances inside, then enters the shop.

### INT. GIFT SHOP - NIGHT - ON JACK

A few customers are browsng. Jack ambles by the tables and counters, his eyes searching. Soon, he spots the owl perched on he table where Marian had seen it. An older couple is looking it over, but they move on, attracted by other items.

He begins studying the owl meticulously with an exaggerated scholarly demeanor. With his eyes fixed on the owl, he walks slowly and deliberately around the table. When he arrives on the opposite side, he removes a pair of glasses from a shirt pocket.

While they are still folded he peers through one of the lenses, squinting, grimacing, and bending toward the sculpture for an even closer examination. His head bobs back and forth and side to side as he inspects it from every angle.

#### ON SHOPKEEPER

While talking to a customer, the shopkeeper glances at Jack with a trace of curiosity and touch of pleasure on his face, as if anticipating a sale.

#### ON JACK

He takes a step back for a wider view of the owl, ponders a moment, then begins circling the counter again, his eyes never leaving the sculpture.

### ON SHOPKEEPER

He has just completed a sale and observes Jack with more than casual interest.

### ON JACK

Jack peers through one lens of his glasses, his nose practically grazing the owl's metallic snout.

# ON SHOPKEEPER

Puzzled by Jack's behavior, his eyes narrow as he observes him more closely.

## ON JACK

Jack and the sculpture are cheek by jowl.

He sneaks a quick peek at the shopkeeper to gauge his reaction.

ON SHOPKEEPER

He is eyeing Jack quizzically.

ON JACK

More emboldened than ever, Jack studies the owl even more painstakingly.

ON COUPLE

The older couple we saw earlier also observe Jack, then eye each other.

ON JACK

He steps back again, places fingers on his chin meditatively, and tilts his head this way and that.

Once more he eyeballs the bird up close, muttering and mumbling as though he were the world's foremost art expert scrutinizing a supposed Van Gogh painting before exposing it as a forgery. The shopkeeper sidles up to him wearing a broad smile.

SHOPKEEPER

Beautiful, isn't it?

**JACK** 

(indifferently)
Oh, I don't know about that.
I've seen better. What are
you asking for it?

SHOPKEEPER

One hundred and fifty dollars. And it's worth every penny. It's one of a kind, what you might call a very limited edition. It's destined to become a collector's item.

JACK

One fifty? Isn't that a bit much? What does this high-priced bird do anyway, a soft-shoe routine? A few card tricks?

The shopkeeper is startled by Jack's response. As Jack steadfastly maintains a poker face, shock and indignation ripple across the man's face. He fumbles for a reply, sputtering his words.

SHOPKEPER

DO? DO? It doesn't do anything. Why should it? It's something to admire, to enjoy, to---

JACK

(interrupting)
Hold on, I just wanted
to know what -

The shopkeeper is all wound up, and he in turn interrupts Jack.

SHOPKEEPER

You know that giant eagle in Wanamaker's department store downtown?

JACK

The big bird where everyone meets. It's a Philadelphia institution.

SHOPKEEPER

Okay, let me ask you a question. What does that eagle do, eh? Tap-dance with Ginger Rogers? Pitch for the Phillies? Conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra?

(taking a big breath)
Well, I'll tell you what it
does. Nothing! It's a piece
of sculpture, just like this
beautiful owl here.

Jack is undaunted by the man's salvo, and sober-faced as ever, keeps milking as much as possible out of his elaborate charade.

JACK

I just thought for one hundred and fifty smackeroos, your owl should be able to walk, or talk or do something entertaining.

JACK (cont'd)

Maybe even speak a few words like 'We wish you a Merry Christmas.' Don't you agree?

That does it. The embattled shopkeeper can barely conceal his anger and impatience.

SHOPKEEPER

Sir, this is our busiest time of the year! Are you interested in purchasing this fine piece of sculpture or not?

Jack is caught off guard by the finality of the man's words. He is momentarily speechless. Then, to his astonishment, he utters surprising words.

JACK

You talked me into it.

Jack and the shopkeeper exchange startled looks, as though neither can quite believe what Jack has just said. The straight face Jack had maintained so conscientiously during his theatrical performance dissolves, and he explodes into laughter.

The shopkeeper seems alarmed by Jack's strange behavior.

SHOPKEEPER

Are you all right, Sir? Anything wrong?

Jack is still heaving with laughter.

JACK

Looks like my little joke has backfired. Here I am, the family budget director who's supposed to control the domestic purse strings, and the first thing I do is crumble before this expensive hunk of metal, which, believe me, I did not plan to buy.

(mock-heroically)
I've betrayed my oath of
office. After the holidays,
I will do the honorable thing.

JACK (cont'd)

I will resign, a noble sacrifice that will no doubt bring great joy to my wife and children.

SHOPKEEPER

Did I hear you correctly? You do want to buy the sculpture? No joking. After all, you were pulling my leg before, weren't you?

JACK

Yes, I've taken a fancy to the bird and want to buy it, and yes, I was putting you on, and believe me, it wasn't easy. I must have rocks in my head. Better wrap it up before I change my mind.

SHOPKEEPER

Of

course.

gently lifts the owl from the table. and shakes his head.

The shopkeeper He eyes Jack slyly

SHOPKEEPER

You and all that nonsense about what the owl does.

JACK

(bantering)

What did you think of my performance?

The shopkeeper smiles.

SHOPKEEPER

I don't think Spencer Tracy and Laurence Olivier are going to lose any sleep.

They both have a good laugh.

JACK

Guess I won't give up my day job.

The shopkeeper sets the owl next to his cash register.

Funny, there was someone in here yesterday, a rather unpleasant woman who also wanted to know if the owl did anything. And she really meant it.

JACK

Yes, I know.

The shopkeeper almost chokes with embarrassment.

SHOPKEEPER

That - that woman wasn't your -

JACK

(laughing)

Relax. No, she wasn't my wife.

SHOPKEEPER

For a while there, you were giving me a bad case of deja vu. Not again, not two days in a row.

JACK

It was the other one, the nice one, the adorable one, the good-humored lady. That's my wife, not the grumpy one.

SHOPKEEPER

(sighing with relief)
Oh, yes, I recall, the nice lady, a lovely lady.

JACK

That's the one.

SHOPKEEPER

Very understanding, too. Rather enchanting, I thought, if you don't mind my saying so.

JACK

That's my Marian, all right. Enchantment personified. And much, much more, believe me. She's going to be dumbstruck when she sees this bird.

And delighted, I'm sure.
You know, I tried to sell
it to her. I felt it was
really meant for her. And
I'm not pulling your leg.
I'm a good judge of such
things. That other woman,
the crabby one, didn't know
what I was talking about.
Didn't have a clue. But your
wife understood.

JACK

It'll be a perfect match your one-of-a-kind owl and my one-of-a-kind wife.

The man is moved by Jack's words. He lifts the owl gently from the counter.

SHOPKEEPER

Art and love -- It's a great combination. Nothing like it. I'll wrap it for you. Anything special for the lady?

JACK

Her favorite color is blue.

The man goes into a room behind the cash register. Jack takes out his checkbook, begins writing a check, and whispering to himself.

JACK

One hundred and fifty simoleons. But it's worth it just to see her face on Christmas morning.

The shopkeeper returns with a package wrapped in light blue paper and secured with a dark blue ribbon. He holds it up proudly.

SHOPKEEPER

Voila! What do you think?

JACK

Looks great. Can you hold it until tomorrow. I'll pick it up late afternoon after work. Okay?

Jack hands him the check.

SHOPKEEPER

Better make it before six o'clock. I close early on Christmas Eve, and I won't be open again until after New's Year's Day.

JACK

Fine, I'll see you tomorrow.

As Jack turns to leave, the shopkeeper taps his shoulder.

SHOPKEEPER

You know, I'm going to miss that owl. Ever since it arrived, I've had mixed feelings about it, wanting to sell it one day, then keep it the next. But, as you put it so well, my one-of-a-kind owl and your one-of-a-kind wife make a perfect match.

JACK

That's for sure. Well, see you tomorrow.

(suddenly turns)
Oh, just one thing before
I go. You're mistaken about
that Wanamaker eagle. It does
do something. It makes sure
that parents and children,
husbands and wives, friends
and lovers don't lose each
other in the crowds. Now
that's quite a service,
don't you think?

SHOPKEEPER

You've got a point. Give my regards to your lovely wife. (realizing his goof)
Oops!

He quickly clamps a hand over his mouth. At the door Jack wags a scolding finger and smiles.

JACK

I've never been here, and you've never seen me before.

The shopkeeper laughs sheepishly.

SHOPKEEPER

Mum's the word.

Jack nods and leaves.

INT. STANLEY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jack is hanging his coat in the closet. Marian enters from the kitchen and they hug.

MARIAN

You're a little late, Love.

JACK

The Marketing guys wanted changes in the brochure I'm writing for them. They never can make up their minds.

MARIAN

So what else is new when you're dealing with insecure corporate executives?

They laugh, and she nudges him toward the dining room.

JACK

Smells fantastic.

MARIAN

Your all-time favorite dish awaits.

JACK

Lasagna?

MARIAN

Come see, my love.

Arm in arm, they waltz into the dining room.

INT. STANLEY KITCHEN - DAY

As Jack reads the morning newspaper over a cup of coffee, Marian peeks into the coffee container.

MARIAN

Oh! Oh! We're low on coffee. Tomorrow's Christmas and everything will be closed. I'll run out and get some after breakfast.

EXT. GERMANTOWN AVENUE - DAY - ON FRONT OF GROCERY STORE.

Marian emerges from the store carrying a grocery bag. She crosses the Avenue and heads toward home. On her way she passes the gift shop. After taking a few steps, she suddenly stops, turns, and enters the shop.

INT. GIFT SHOP - ON MARIAN

She walks around, her eyes searching the gift-laden tables, counters, and tall hutches and armoires gleaming with figurines, crystalware, china, and other delicate and fragile pieces. Again, she scans the shop, then sighs with disappointment.

SHOPKEEPER (O. S.)

It's gone, Madam.

Marian is staring into space, preoccupied, not sure she has heard the words. The shopkeeper appears at her side, and she turns toward his voice

SHOPKEEPER

The owl, Madam. I sold it yesterday.

MARIAN

(a bit dazed)

Oh?

SHOPKEEPER

I'm sorry. I know how much you admired it. You certainly were right. I did sell it in no time.

MARIAN

Yes, I knew you would. I hope you sold it to someone who will truly appreciate it.

SHOPKEEPER

I can assure you without reservation that it was purchased as a gift for someone who definitely appreciates beautiful things. Just as you do.

He reports the sale matter of factly as he tries to conceal how much he is relishing his role as the guardian of Jack's secret.

MARIAN

I'm happy to hear it and congratulate whoever the lucky person is.

SHOPKEEPER

You're taking it quite well, I see. Not disappointed?

Marian ponders for a moment, then smiles.

MARIAN

Of course I'm disappointed. But Christmas is more about giving than receiving, isn't it?

SHOPKEEPER

You're absolutely right. It's something we're apt to forget at times.

MARIAN

Well, at least it wasn't meant for that woman who stormed out of here the other day. Although you never know. Had she bought the owl, she might have warmed up to it in time.

The shopkeeper roars with laughter.

Believe me, Madam, the owl and that crotchety lady would have made a most incompatible couple. A marriage definitely not made in heaven.

Marian laughs, too.

MARIAN

God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. In any event, I hope the sad lady and her family do have a good Christmas.

SHOPKEEPER

That's most generous of you.

Marian prepares to leave.

MARIAN

I'd better be going. I do like your shop. So many beautiful things.

SHOPKEEPER

Thank you. In my business it wouldn't hurt if the Christmas season came a little more often. Too good to be true, I guess. Too much to wish for.

Marian offers an endearing smile.

MARIAN

I'll let you in on a secret. Your wish has already come true. In Chestnut Hill, it is Christmas every day. In fact, I think we should petition to have its name changed to Christmas Hill. You and I can be the first to sign it. What do you say?

The shopkeeper stares at her with admiration.

Madam, you're really something. I will think about it. Have a Merry Chistmas.

MARIAN

Thank you, and a Merry Christmas to you and your family.

As Marian leaves, his eyes follow her with a knowing look nourished by his possession of a confidence that seems to be burning a hole in his brain. Something about her has touched him. He moves to the door and continues to watch as she vanishes down the street. Then, he whispers.

SHOPKEEPER Lucky fellow that Jack Stanley.

EXT. STREET - DAY - ON MARIAN

Despite her disappointment over the owl, her spirits are high as she walks home. She is in a whimsical mood, and as she rounds a corner, she sees Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig from Dickens's A Christmas Carol dancing with reckless abandon and unmitigated joy.

SPFX: MR. AND MRS. FEZZIWIG - MARIAN'S POV

The animated Fezziwigs are kicking up their heels.

MARIAN (O. S.)

The Fezziwigs! And just in time for Christmas. Marvelous!

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Jack steps off the train and rushes to Germantown Avenue.

EXT. GIFT SHOP - NIGHT

Jack enters the shop slightly out of breath.

INT. GIFT SHOP- NIGHT - ON JACK AND SHOPKEEPER

The shopkeeper hands Jack a large shopping bag.

I'd love to see the look on your wife's face when she opens this.

JACK

He rushes out of the shop.

EXT. STANLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack enters the glassed-in porch as quietly as he can. He looks around, spots a dark corner, and hides the shopping bag. Satisfied, he opens the door leading into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JACK

shouting)

It's Christmas Eve! Let all the joy and merriment begin!

Marian, Sally, and Jim rush into the living room from all directions shouting and surrounding him.

JIM

Don't forget the trumpet, Dad.

MARIAN

It's a tradition, you know.

JACK

And you on piano, too.

SALLY

I'll get the trumpet, Dad.
I know where it is.

JACK

Be careful with it. It's already reached its quota of dents.

Sally rushes away.

MARIAN

What do you say we have dinner first. There's a Christmas Eve roast in the oven.

JIM

I'm starved.

EXT. STANLEY HOUSE - NIGHT

We hear a trumpet playing GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN accompanied by a piano.

INT. STANLEY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The carol continues with Jack playing trumpet, Marian the piano, and Sally and Jim singing along. A fire is blazing in the fireplace.

SERIES OF SHOTS

We hear portions of several carols. The series ends with the playing and singing of SILENT NIGHT.

INT. STAIRWAY, STANLEY HOME - NIGHT

Marian and Jack are sending the children off to bed.

SALLY

Night, Mom. Night Dad. Merry Christmas.

JIM

Night Mom and Dad.

MARIAN

Merry Christmas and pleasant dreams, kids.

JACK

See you in the morning. Merry Christmas.

Marian and Jack watch the children go upstairs to bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marian and Jack re-enter arm in arm.

MARIAN

I'll get the wine. You put some music on.

Marian heads for the dining room as Jack sorts through Christmas albums, selects one, and places the record on the turntable. He then puts some logs on the fire.

Marian enters with glasses of wine and hands one to Jack.

MARIAN

How about dimming the lights.

JACK

Sure thing.

As Marian slumps on the sofa, Jack dims a couple of lamps, then joins her. They clink glasses.

MARION

Merry Christmas, Love.

JACK

Ditto, Dearest Darling.

MARIAN

I like the alliteration.

They kiss, then begin sipping their wine.

MARIAN

(playfully)

An unpretentious wine with just a hint of audacity.

They laugh and settle back on the sofa, snuggling wordlessly, gazing at the comforting flames, and listening to the crackling of logs and spluttering of sparks that blend with the CHRISTMAS.MUSIC. More wordless moments pass before either speaks. Then,

MARIAN

This is the best part, the magical part of. our year-long Christmas in Chestnut Hill. JACK

Christmas Hill, you mean.

MARIAN

Just testing you.

JACK

You know, with your imagination, you should be the writer in the family.

They continue to watch the fire until Marian begins dozing. Jack shakes her gently.

JACK

You're all in. Better get to bed.

MARIAN

(drowsily)

I guess I've had it.

JACK

Night, Love.

MARIAN

Don't stay up too late.

JACK

Someone has to wait up for Santa Claus.

She gives him a sleepy kiss and drags herself upstairs. Jack waits a few minutes, then peeks up the stairway. Satisfied, he rushes to the porch.

INT. PORCH - NIGHT

He removes the package from the shopping bag, then re-enters the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

He kneels by the Christmas tree and places the package behind it as far back as he can manage. Then, he douses the fire, turns off the lamps, and heads upstairs. INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM - DAY

She awakens and leaps out of bed.

INT. JIM'S BEDROOM - DAY

He hears Sally's commotion and catapults out of bed.

INT. STAIRWAY - DAY

Sally and Jim gallop down the stairs and streak toward the Christmas tree in the living room.

Moments later, Marian and Jack, bathrobed and sleepeyed, shuffle down. By the stairway Marian calls to the children.

MARIAN

Hold it. Before you kids go ripping and tearing into presents like ravenous lions, remember the purpose of this special day is to celebrate an important spiritual event in history. It's all about love.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marian and Jack enter the living room.

JACK

Your Mother's right, kids.

SALLY

We know, Dad.

Marian and Jack exchange parental smiles as they watch Sally and Jim poised like sprinters waiting for the gun to signal the start of the 100-yard dash.

MARIAN

One other thing. Remember who gave you your presents so that you can send thank-you cards. And when you're done, put the wrappings in the trash bags

Impatient Sally and Jim are about to bust. Jack bends close to Marian's ear.

JACK

(whispering)

You're wicked.

MARIAN

Okay, kids, go at it.

Sally and Jim oblige and plunge into the heap of packages under the Christmas tree.

#### MONTAGE

The opening and displaying of gifts, and the shouts, laughter, and hugging that go with this annual ritual. The montage ends with Jack displaying the wristwatch Marian has given him.

JACK

It's perfect, Marian. Just the one I wanted.

Marian is kneeling by the tree, and Jack hugs her. While he is embracing her, she grabs a package under the tree. Jack releases his hold, and she begins to unwrap it. She opens the box and screams.

MARIAN

Jack, you didn't!

JACK

Hold it up so we can get a full view.

Marian displays a gauzy blue negligee. Sally and Jim giggle.

SALLY

Try it on, Mom

JIM

Yeah, Mom.

While Marian and the children are preoccupied, Jack hastily camouflages the owl package in the back of the tree with bunches of discarded wrappings. Just as quickly he re-joins the group.

(bussing his cheek)

It's beautiful. Thank you, Dear.

JACK

Wear it in the best of health.

JIM

Aren't you going to try it on, Mom?

MARIAN

You kids concentrate on your own toys.

(hugging Jack)
As always, another Merry
Christmas. What do you
say we now have a merry
breakfast, and then a very
merry day?

Marian glances at the wrapping paper in disarray around the tree.

MARIAN

But first, we clean up. Sally, you're in charge.

Sally grabs a large plastic bag and hands it to Jim.

JACK

What's that?

Jack points to a place behind the tree. Marian, Sally, and Jim turn in the same direction.

MARIAN

What's what?

JACK

(still pointing)

Over there, behind the tree.

Marian, Sally, and Jim crook their heads, and look.

SALLY

(excited)

There is something there, under all that paper.

JIM

Yeah, Mom. I'll get it.

Jim reaches in under the tree and drags out a package. Sally reads the tag.

SALLY

It's for you, Mom.
From Dad.

Marian's eyes dart from the package to Jack and back again. Sally nudges it toward her. Marian studies it, and hefts it carefully.

MARIAN

It's not light, that's for sure. Wrapped in my favorite color, too.

(glancing at Jack)
You finally got me that
blender I've wanted.
You can't fool me.

Jack hangs his head in mock defeat.

JACK

Looks like you've done it again. When will I ever learn.

(shrugging)

Better open it and get it over with.

SALLY

Mom's always good at guessing. You should know by now, Dad.

JACK

Yes, she is.

JIM

She didn't guess about that underwear.

JACK

But one of these days I'm really going to fool her, mark my words.

Marian is stripping the package of its blue wrapping.

That'll be the day.

She opens the package and gasps. She is wonder-struck and spellbound by what she sees. For a few seconds she is an emotion-filled tableau, as motionless as the owl she is beholding.

SALLY

What is it, Mom?

MARIAN

(squealing)

The owl! My owl! I don't believe it!

She removes the owl gently from the box, stares at it in disbelief, then gazes at Jack, her eyes brimming with tears and overflowing with unabashed love.

SALLY

Let me see

JIM

Me, too.

The two children crowd around Marian

JIM

Wow!

SALLY

It's beautiful, Mom.

MARIAN

(to Jack)

You sneaky slyboots, I guess the day of fooling me has finally arrived. But it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. If you're looking for a reward, kneel next to me, and I'll think of something.

Jack quickly obeys her command, and they embrace as Sally and Jim grin.

JACK

Surprised?

How about stunned, astonished, thunderstruck, overwhelmed, flabbergasted. Shall I go on?

JACK

(laughing)

No, I get the point.

As Sally and Jim inspects the owl, Jim spots something.

JIM

Mom! Dad! Look!

There's a little card tucked deep in the owl's metal feathers. Jim removes it, and he and Sally examine it.

SALLY

It's a little card. There's a message on it.

MARIAN

Let's see.

Jim hands her the card. She and Jack read it and burst into laughter.

TIGHT ON CARD

It bears the following handwritten message punctuated by two bold exclamation points:

I DON'T DO ANYTHING !!

MARIAN

This is priceless. The best Christmas ever.

Tears begin welling in Marian's eyes again. She hands Jack the card, and he turns it over.

JACK

It's the man's business card. Now there's a guy with a keen sense of humor. He sure knows how to keep Christmas.

He removes a handkerchief from his robe and offers it to Marian.

(drying her eyes)
I'll bake him one of my
chocolate cakes. A big one.

JACK

Better make it after New Year's He'll be closed until then.

Marian is still sobbing happy tears. Jack and the children embrace her as she sobs away.

NARRATOR (V.O)

An unexpected gift bearing an unexpected message. A double surprise for Marian. The promise she had always sensed lurked somewhere in Chestnut Hill's nooks and hidden corners has been fulfilled, and her great expectations realized in a way even her fanciful and whimsical mind had not imagined.

# INT. STANLEY LIVING ROOM -

Friends and neighbors are gathered by the fireplace conversing and sipping wine. The owl on the mantel has become a great conversation piece.

FIRST WOMAN

It's exquisite, Marian. So different.

SECOND WOMAN

I've never seen anything like it. And a great story to go with it.

She bends close to the owl to read the card tucked in its feathers.

FIRST WOMAN

I could almost cry just reading this.

FIRST MAN

(waggishly)

By the way, Jack, is it male or female?

JACK

Better ask the sculptor.

SECOND MAN

How about a toast to Marian and Jack?

(raising wine glass)
May your beautiful Christmas
owl give you lasting pleasure.

SECOND WOMAN

To a bird that has found a perfect nest.

FIRST MAN

To an owl who's a real hoot.

The pun elicits a collective "Ugh" from the group.

FIRST WOMAN

You two always have something going. What's the big secret?

Marian and Jack gaze at each other.

JACK

Would you believe something called love?

MARIAN

And plenty of laughs. With at least a dash of serendipity. A great recipe, and I heartily recommend it.

Marian glances at the owl.

CLOSE ON OWL

EXT. STREET - DAY - ON MARIAN

It is snowing lightly. Marian, bundled up against the weather, is carrying a box containing her cake She approaches the gift shop and enters.

INT. GIFT SHOP - DAY

The shopkeeper brightens and clasps her hands warmly.

SHOPKEEPER

Happy New Year! How was your Christmas? Any surprises?

MARIAN

(eyeing him slyly) As if you didn't know.

SHOPKEEPER

Well?

MARIAN

Well, what?

SHOPKEEPER

Don't keep me in suspense.

MARIAN

(laughing)

I was flabbergasted, to put it mildly. You and my darling husband are a couple of ornery conspirators, to say the least.

SHOPKEEPER

And the owl?

MARTAN

What can I say. It's now one of our proudest possessions, a part of the family as a matter of fact. And that little card of yours - well, it probably was the biggest surprise of all. You are a sly one. But with a sense humor, and I like that.

She busses his cheek, and he practically disintegrates.

SHOPKEEPER

Well, ah, well.

He is quite discombobulated. To help restore his composure, Marian hands him the box.

MARIAN

Jack and I want to show our thanks for your thoughtfulness. So I baked this especially for you. He is speechless and almost overcome with emotion. Finally, he opens the box.

SHOPKEEPER

Chocolate! This is wonderful. You folks are really something. I thank you both.

He gazes at Marian, and by his look, he hopes to express his thanks non-verbally. Marian quickly senses his intention, and she offers him her cheek.

He hesitates, then plants a kiss there. Flushing with mixed emotions, he backs away.

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)

Happy New Year. God bless both of you.

MARTAN

Well, time to go. Happy New Year to you, too.

SHOPKEEPER

My regards to your husband. Enjoy your owl.

Marian takes a few steps toward the door, then turns.

MARIAN

Oh, speaking of the owl, there's something I forgot to mention.

SHOPKEEPER

Yes.

MARIAN

You said the owl didn't do anything.

SHOPKEEPER

I certainly did.

MARIAN

And most emphatically, too.

SHOPKEEPER

Yes. If I said it once, I must have said it twenty times. -

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)

And I'll say it again. The owl doesn't do anything.

MARIAN

Well, I have news for you.

SHOPKEEPER

News? What news?

With a deadpan expression, Marian speaks as though she were reciting the weather report.

MARIAN

I hate to tell you this, but you were wrong.
Dead wrong.

SHOPKEEPER

What do you mean, wrong?

Marian devises the best poker face her impishness is capable of.

MARIAN

Well, after we went to bed New Year's Eve, we were rudely awakened at three a. m. by a tremendous racket. At first, we thought some drunks were outside our window still celebrating.

Marian pauses long enough to read the shopkeeper's face for his reaction.

SHOPKEEPER

What did you do?

MARIAN

From upstairs we couldn't see any disturbance on our street, so Jack and I crept downstairs to have a look.

SHOPKEEPER

What happened?

When we got downstairs we discovered the racket wasn't coming from outside at all but going on right there in our living room. And you won't believe what we saw.

By now the shopkeeper is hanging on her every word, so she pauses again, stretching it even longer to maintain the suspense.

### MARIAN

That owl you said didn't do anything was dancing up a storm on our mantel and singing to beat the band. You should have heard the clatter all that sheet metal made! Worse than fifty tin cans tied to a car's rear end

SHOPKEEPER

You're joking.

## MARIAN

No, really. First the rascal is singing Auld Lang Syne, then he starts belting out There's No Business Like Show Business. And you should have seen him dance! True, a bit awkward and certainly no threat to Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. But with a little more practice, who knows?

The shopkeeper seems to be grappling with a strong desire to believe the preposterous story being told by someone he admires and finds so charming and fascinating.

SHOPKEEPER

And your husband witnessed all this, too?

MARIAN

You bet! He was right there beside me.

MARIAN (cont'd)

You know, with more practice, that owl might be good enough to join the Rockettes. And if he cultivates his voice a bit more, he could do no worse than most of those Rock and Rollers who mistake cackling and croaking for singing.

By this time the shopkeeper is becoming skeptical.

SHOPKEEPER

That's some news you've brought me.

MARIAN

Aren't you going to ask me what the owl did for an encore?

SHOPKEEPER

I'm sure you're going to tell me.

MARIAN

The son-of-a-gun starts doing cartwheels, and he almost fell off the mantelpiece. What a pile of scrap metal that would have made.

Suddenly, he eyes her with suspicion, then a knowing grin spreads across his face. He has finally caught on to her little game.

SHOPKEEPER

Probably would have served him right for showing off so much.

Marian is tickled by his unexpected comment. Her straight face vanishes and is replaced by a sparkle in her eye. He catches the twinkle and grins broadly.

SHOPKEEPER

You've been pulling my leg, haven't you? Just like that husband of yours?

MARIAN

I just couldn't resist.

SHOPKEEPER

Next thing you'll be telling me is that the owl can recite the Gettysburg Address.

MARIAN

I'll keep you posted.

SHOPKEEPER

Sure is a hell of a way to begin a new year.

MARIAN

Can you think of anything better?

SHOPKEEPER

You know, you and your husband are a couple of screwballs, But quite a happy pair, I'll bet.

MARTAN

You wouldn't lose any money betting on us. Well, you and your family enjoy the cake.

SHOPKEEPER

We will. Thanks, and God bless you.

Marian leaves.

EXT. GERMANTOWN AVENUE - DAY

Snow is falling languidly, almost in slow motion. Marian is in high spirits, nodding and greeting people on her way home.

She hears the CLANKING of a trolley, turns to look, and fancies seeing Mr. Pickwick and his friends from Dickens's Pickwick Papers among the passengers.

SPFX: MR. PICKWICK AND FRIENDS ON TROLLEY WAVING - MARIAN POV

ON MARIAN WAVING

MARIAN

Happy New Year, Mr. Pickwick.

She continues on her way home. At a corner near her house, she fancies seeing Mr. Micawber from Dickens's David Copperfield.

SPFX: MR. MICAWBER STRUTTING UP THE STREET - MARIAN POV

MARIAN (O.S.)
Happy New Year, Mr. Micawber.
I hope something good turns
up for you. It has for me.

She resumes her journey homeward.

NARRATOR (V. 0)
As the New Year begins,
Marian Stanley is as
exhilarated as ever.
For she knows that
the next Christmas has
already begun and that
it will last for another
twelve months in the magical
place she has re-renamed
Christmas Hill.

EXT. MARIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

As Marian approaches her house, she waves to neighbors.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
She is aware of something
else, too. That in some
special places on earth,
there are no lapses of
time between one Christmas
and another. And that those
with perceptive hearts can
barely tell when one Christmas
ends and another begins. For
in these star-blessed places
they all co-exist, past,
present, and future, in
one long, everlasting
continuum.

She arrives at her doorstep.

NARRATOR (V.O. cont'd)

And she recalls what
the new, improved Scrooge
had said on that happy
Christmas morning after
his spooky confrontations
with the three ghosts.
"I will live in the past,
present, and future.
The spirits of all three
shall strive within me."

She opens the door, turns toward the street, and calls out a greeting.

MARIAN

Happy New Year, Christmas Hill! Let another Christmas begin!

She enters her house.

# INT. STANLEY LIVING ROOM- DAY

She removes her coat, then wanders around the living room. She picks up a family photo, stares at it lovingly, puts it down, moves to the fireplace and gazes at the sculptured owl. The shopkeeper's card is still tucked in its metal feathers.

## MARIAN

My chubby friend, since you're going to be with us for a long time, we'll have to give you a name.

(pondering)
Hmmm, let's see, something
from Dickens, of course.
Pickwick, maybe? Or Fezziwig?
Micawber? Uncle Pumblechook?
Copperfield? Mister Jingle?
The Artful Dodger? Hmmm,
how about Pip? Not bad, Not
bad at all. Nice and short.
Easy to pronounce, easy to
remember.

TIGHT ON OWL.

MARIAN (O. S.)

Pip it is, then, my fine-feathered friend.
After all, we both had great expectations, didn't We? And They were fulfilled.
Marvelously, fantastically Fulfilled.

Suddenly, almost imperceptibly, the owl winks.

TIGHT ON MARIAN

She is wide-eyed, open-mouthed, and wonder-struck.

FADE OUT

THE END