

A Red Heart and Blue Roses

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Based on the short story
by Mildred Clingerman

FADE IN:

MONTAGE - THE SNARK

-- An ocean of deep BLUE WATER ripples with mystery and emotion.

-- The SIGH OF A SEAGULL floats on the wind.

V.O.

*Come, listen, my men,
while I tell you again
The five unmistakable marks...*

-- Enormous BLUE WAVES crest and crash upon a WHITE SANDY SHORE.

V.O.

*By which you may know,
wheresoever you go,
The warranted genuine Snarks.*

-- A TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS in WHITE SAND that progressively gets smaller and smaller.

-- The distant LAUGHTER OF A CHILD.

-- A framed picture of the MADONNA AND CHILD hangs against a PALE BLUE WALL.

MARGARET (O.S)

*I'm awake. I'm awake. If I was asleep
how should I know the time?*

-- A CLOCK on a PALE BLUE WALL wrinkles into A NAUTICAL COMPASS.

V.O.

*They sought it with thimbles
They sought it with care*

-- A LINE OF NAVAL FLAGS ripple in the wind.

-- An ocean of PINK WATER.

-- Enormous PINK WAVES crest and crash upon a WHITE SANDY SHORE.

V.O.

They pursued it with forks and hope

-- The shore is strewn with THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF RED ROSES.

-- A TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND that leads to a MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE.

V.O.

They threatened its life with a railway share-

-- WAVES OF BLOOD RED WATER crest and crash upon the shore.

END MONTAGE - THE SNARK

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

From a PALE BLUE VOID a warm, motherly VOICE asks:

VOICE (O.S.)

My dear, are you sick?

MARGARET ABBOTT, a frail woman in her early 30's lies in a hospital bed recovering from an operation.

MARGARET

(Cheerful)

Oh no. *They charmed it with smiles and soap.*

She surveys the room catching a dizzy glimpse of:

A CLOCK ON A PALE BLUE WALL, A BOUQUET OF RED ROSES, and A FRAMED PICTURE OF THE MADONNA AND CHILD AND THE BURNING, BLEEDING SACRED HEART.

She focuses on a plump, pink woman, KATE PEMBERTON, middle-aged and wholesome—the very ideal of motherhood.

Kate sits at Margaret's bedside with a book in her lap:

Lewis Carroll's *THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK*

KATE

You were asleep again. Off and on.
You've said some pretty strange things
today, but I haven't minded one bit.
It's taken my mind off my troubles.

Margaret struggles to blink away her disorientation.

KATE

Did you know your husband was here?
You slept right through the whole
visiting hour. He brought you that
lovely bouquet of roses.

Margaret stares dumbfounded at a BOUQUET OF ROSES on a
bedside table.

KATE

He wore the wrong tie with that striped
shirt.

(Laughing)

You were quite brutal about it, but he
seemed awfully pleased.

MARGARET

When did you come in?

Kate answers, moving her mouth but making no sound, until...

KATE

...days ago, but they only moved me in
here with you this morning while you
were asleep. They had me in a private
room,

Kate's voice becomes deep and distorted.

KATE

but finally decided what I needed *least*
was to be alone.

Kate's face and body swell becoming larger and larger and...

KATE

You see, I keep having these nightmares
about a tattoo—

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

NURSE

Tapioca pudding or Jello?

A NURSE hovers over Margaret with a tray of food.

NURSE

Tapioca pudding or Jello?

Margaret struggles to make a decision.

MARGARET

...the pudding, please.

The nurse drops a dish of pudding on Margaret's bed-tray. She makes a couple of brief notes in Margaret's file and then rolls the food cart out of the room.

Margaret stares at the dish realizing the folly of her hasty decision. Suddenly, she becomes aware of a very loud SLURPING SOUND. She drowsily tosses her head to see Kate in a pink bathrobe eating heartily from a tray loaded with food.

Kate smiles warmly at Margaret and then fades into a very large PINK SHADOW.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE - THE SACRED HEART

-- The rhythmic sound of a BEATING HEART is heard.

-- An ocean of deep PINK WATER.

-- A PERISCOPE peaks out of the pink water.

-- View from the periscope of a BEAUTIFULLY WRAPPED PRESENT adrift in an ocean of BLUE ROSES.

-- The view splinters into a kaleidoscope of bleached WHITE SKULLS with eyes of ROTATING RED ROSES.

-- The STEMS of the roses ENTWINE into a WREATH OF THORNS surrounding the image of the VIRGIN MARY. A RED TEARDROP is suspended on her cheek.

-- The TEARDROP runs down her cheek and falls into the ocean, rippling the WATER.

-- A STEEL BLUE ANCHOR plunges into the ocean with a splash, sinking deeper and deeper...

-- Clusters of BUBBLES ascend to the surface.

-- Inside the bubbles are bleached WHITE SKULLS.

-- At the surface, DEAD SAILORS float in BLOOD RED WATER.

-- WAVES OF RED WATER crest and crash upon the shore.

-- The RED WATER washes away a TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS in the sand.

-- From the ocean, A SILHOUETTED FIGURE walks on BLUE WATER towards the shore carrying a SACRED HEART:

-- A CROSS IN FLAMES on top of a BLEEDING HEART bound by a VINE OF THORNS.

-- The HEARTBEAT crescendos louder, louder, louder...

END MONTAGE - THE SACRED HEART

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

KATE

-a son in the Navy.

Kate, wrapped in her pink bathrobe, sits before a mirror brushing her hair.

With much effort, Margaret hauls herself up and collapses against a pillow.

MARGARET

Why, my son's in the Navy, too!

KATE

I know, dear, that's what I was just saying. Your husband told me. *My* son isn't in the Navy. He's in the Army.

Kate scrutinizes her reflection in the mirror.

KATE

They think that might be the source of half my troubles. The nightmares, you know. You see, my father and *all* of my uncles were in the Navy. I married outside the Service, but I'd always thought my son would choose the Navy when the time came.

Kate picks stray hairs from out of her brush.

KATE

Clay's been rather a disappointment in some ways. His math wasn't good enough for Annapolis or West Point. And next year, when he finishes his tour of duty, he wants to apprentice as a mortician. Now, really, what kind of ambition would you call that?

MARGARET

A rather grave one?

Kate slyly turns to Margaret.

KATE

My, we are feeling better, aren't we?

Margaret beams with pride.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT — MORNING

The sun scorches through the peaks of the Catalina Mountains.

Cacti stand tall along the mountainside like a regiment of soldiers marching into combat.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL — MORNING

A SIREN screams as an ambulance races down a road lined with palm trees and passes a sign that reads:

TUCSON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR — MORNING

Nurses in 1960's-style uniforms fill a long hallway as they make their morning rounds.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM — MORNING

Kate and Margaret sit up in their beds. Margaret files her nails, while Kate plays a game of solitaire.

MARGARET

(Bragging)

...He's on one of the new Polaris submarines. Born and brought up in the desert that boy lived and breathed Navy from birth. And as for being underwater, we could never make him swim on the surface. Then in high school, he joined a diving club, and they all sat around for hours on the bottom of the swimming pool.

KATE

Does your son get home often?

MARGARET

Not as often as I would like. And he is just dreadful about writing, but far too handy with the long distance phone calls.

KATE

Collect, of course.

MARGARET

Of course.

KATE

(Nodding her head)

Clay's exactly the same.

Kate re-shuffles her deck. As she lines up the cards, she turns over:

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

KATE

Tell me, has your son ever brought home any of his service buddies? To stay, I mean, in your house.

MARGARET

No. Not so far. But I wouldn't mind it if he did.

KATE

You know, that's exactly what I thought. You'll need to be careful though. There's more than one orphan in the Navy. If that's what he was...

MARGARET

If that's what who was?

Kate turns over:

THE JACK OF HEARTS

KATE

That..boy Clay brought home with him last Christmas. Surely, I mentioned him yesterday?

MARGARET

Now, let me see, I can remember last Christmas, but yesterday...?

KATE

Do you mean to tell me that you were asleep all day? But you had your eyes open, and you even made one or two of

KATE (CONT'D)

your rather pointed comments.

MARGARET

Well, I was hardly sleeping. What I was doing, I think, was concentrating on holding now, without allowing the last now and the next now to get away. It was rather difficult. It took two hands just to hold one now, while all the other nows kept slipping away.

(Sensing Kate's disappointment)

Oh, please forgive me. Did I miss something important?

KATE

My dear, it's entirely appropriate that only a *six-handed* woman could understand the truth about Damon Lucas.

Kate continues her game of solitaire, turning over:

THE KING OF HEARTS

KATE

You see, I think he was some kind of demon. My husband thinks he's a natural-born grifter. And Rhoda—that's my daughter, she's nineteen and oh so pretty—she thinks he's one of those weirdoes who preys on older women. Clay simply says—and I quote—"the guy's a kook".

(Laughing)

You see? Even the people he's happened to can't agree on what he was.

With no remaining options, Kate ends her game of solitaire and collects her cards.

MARGARET

You do realize they've forgotten to give us any lunch.

KATE

Well, it is only nine o'clock, dear. Although...

With an air of mischief, Kate slips out of bed and fishes in a nightstand. She produces a small box of chocolates and shuffles barefoot over to Margaret's bedside.

KATE

Here. Have some of these. In fact, eat them all. You would be doing me a huge favor.

(Patting her stomach)

Be sure to hide them from the nurse though. She's an absolute tyrant.

MARGARET

(Grabbing the box of chocolates)

God bless you.

Margaret devours several chocolates before she realizes her lack of manners.

MARGARET

(With a mouthful of chocolates)

Forgive me. I don't even remember your name.

KATE

Kate. Kate Pemberton, over forty and hips to match.

Kate poses ridiculously and then crawls back into bed.

KATE

You'd think that with a figure like mine I'd be perfectly safe from strange young men for the rest of my days? Well, I thought so, too, 'til Damon started following me around.

MARGARET

Will you be so kind as to start all over? I am beginning to need six hands again.

KATE

Of course, you poor darling. How thoughtless of me.

Kate smiles at Margaret as if she was three years old child.

KATE

At first, we all thought he was handsome. Rhoda was quite taken with him—I know. But after he'd been staying with us for just a few hours, it became painfully clear that he wasn't taken with her. In fact, I don't believe he ever actually looked at her. Now, you can't call that normal, not for an unattached young man of twenty-six, and certainly not when the girl is as pretty and intelligent as Rhoda.

MARGARET

Well, was he...you know...?

KATE

That's exactly what Philip thought—Philip's my husband. But after watching Damon when Clay was around, it became clear that Damon was even less taken with Clay than he was with Rhoda. In fact, it looked as if he positively hated Clay more and more. But by that time, we were all uneasy about Damon, for one reason or another. And sometimes, for no reason at all.

Satisfied by the chocolates, Margaret settles in for a story.

KATE

You know, I wouldn't care...I wouldn't care one bit if that would have been the end of it - a mystery - why, in time, he might even have turned into a family joke. But how could he, when he keeps turning up again? And each time getting younger and younger?

Kate sighs deeply and stares across the room at the framed picture of:

THE MADONNA AND CHILD AND THE BURNING, BLEEDING SACRED HEART.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Garlands of tinsel and holly decorate a busy bus station.

Christmas carols rise above the hustle and bustle of soldiers and sailors from Fort Bragg as they try to make their way home for the Holiday. A loudspeaker occasionally interrupts the festive music to broadcast the latest bus departures.

Suitcases, duffle bags, and bundles of wrapped gifts fill the station with color and confusion.

At a row of telephone booths, servicemen from all branches have animated conversations.

At the last booth, CLAY PEMBERTON, a young man in his early 20's, dials a number. He is boyish and looks somewhat out of place in his serious Army fatigues.

The telephone rings and rings and...

OPERATOR (O.S.)

Collect call for Clay Pemberton. Will you accept the charges?

(Pause)

One moment, please.

CLAY

Mom? Mom? Yeah, mom, it's me. Merry Christmas! Look, mom, my furlough came through. Yeah, it came through—at the last minute. Can you believe it? I know. Looks like I'll be home for Christmas after all.

(He smiles at his mother's reaction)

Well, two of the airlines are all tied up by the strikes, and the other flight is full with a waiting list a mile long.

(Pause)

I know. I am. But the bus station is packed—an absolute madhouse... Don't worry though. Yeah, no. I met this guy. He's driving to Phoenix...

Clay turns to watch DAMON LUCAS, 26, a young man in civilian clothes: blue jeans, a white t-shirt and a red jacket.

Damon is handsome in a blonde and bland sort of way. He stands lost, adrift in a sea of soldiers and sailors. When he notices Clay watching him, he smiles with relief and shuffles his feet in a weird dance-like manner.

CLAY

Mom, look...I know. I know. But if I hitch a ride, I can help pay for the driving expenses, plus I'll get home faster. Besides, you should see this guy's car...it's to die for.

(He slyly turns away from Damon)

I will. I promise. I already took down the license plate number, and I'll call you from the road. Hey, I'm in the Army now, mom. I can take care of myself. Look, I gotta go. Yeah, gotta go. I'll see you soon. I know, I know—I love you too. Bye.

Clay hangs up the phone. He turns around and almost crashes into Damon, who hovers directly behind him.

DAMON

How's Mom?

CLAY

Great. Just great. This is going to be the best Christmas present ever.

Clay tosses his duffel bag over his shoulder, and together, they disappear into the sea of sailors and serviceman.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY — DAY

A Roman Red 1960 Chevrolet Corvette Roadster with a heavy tooth grill, rounded fenders and white-rimmed tires, races down a long highway.

Bobbie Darin's *Beyond the Sea* blasts over the car radio.

CUT TO:

INT. CORVETTE - DAY

Clay sits in the passenger's seat with Damon at the wheel, driving like a demon.

CLAY

...been training. Down in Panama. With the 82nd Airborne Division.

DAMON

An 'All-American'. Say, your folks must be proud.

CLAY

Suppose so. Truth be told, my mom isn't all *that* pleased. She was always hoping I'd join the Navy, like her father and his-

DAMON

No kidding. Just out of the Navy, myself.

CLAY

Really.

DAMON

Petty Officer First Class...aboard the U.S.S. Alabama.

CLAY

Well, I'll be damned...

DAMON

You should have listened to your mother, kid. Time of my life, I tell you. Left a trail of broken hearts all along the shore.

They drive in silence for a bit.

DAMON

Have you seen any combat?

CLAY

Not yet. We finish our training after the Holiday. There are rumors about a possible deployment to Vietnam though—training the South to fight against the Commies in the North.

DAMON

Sure envy you, kid—the risk, the reward, the adventure...

Clay stares out the car window as the wholesome American countryside races by: FARMS, FIELDS, FENCES...

CLAY

(With profound concern)
Have you ever killed anybody?

Damon hesitates in his response.

DAMON

Once.

Clay turns to study Damon, who keeps his eyes focused on the road.

DAMON

Don't worry though. It's easy.

Damon clutches the wheel, and the Corvette speeds off into the sunset. Storm clouds gather on the horizon.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A steady rain pours down on a dark, wet road. Yellow highway divider lines zoom past and are soon dotted with emergency flares.

Damon slows down the corvette as it nears the flashing lights of a patrol car. A POLICEMAN waves the corvette by a fatal head-on collision:

BUCKLED METAL and A SHATTERED WINDSHIELD WITH BLOOD STAINS.

CUT TO:

INT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

The dashboard light illuminates Clay and Damon in an eerie green glow.

Clay is sound asleep. Damon races ahead into the dark, rainy night, driving faster than his tears.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

The SUN sizzles in an afternoon sky.

On the side of the highway, a SNAKE SLITHERS BY A BLEACHED WHITE STEER SKULL.

The WHEELS of the Corvette race by, deeper into the dangerous desert.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEMBERTON FAMILY HOME - DAY

PLASTIC REINDEER and a SANTA CLAUSE IN A SLEIGH are carefully arranged along the roof of a mid-century, ranch-style home that is carefully tucked away in a pleasant desert suburb.

A CACTUS WITH A SANTA HAT on its arm stands in a rock lawn.

CUT TO:

INT. PEMBERTON HOME - DAY

An oven timer BUZZES.

KITCHEN

Kate, wearing a ruffled apron, removes a perfect pie from the oven and places it on the stove to cool.

LIVING ROOM

PHILIP PEMBERTON, a sensible man in his late 40's, reclines in a comfy lounge chair reading the daily newspaper and smoking his pipe.

ENTRY

RHODA PEMBERTON, rebellious at 18, balances on a stool hanging mistletoe. Alerted by the sound of a car in the driveway, she races to a window and draws the curtain.

RHODA

He's here, he's here, he's home!

CUT TO:

EXT. PEMBERTON FAMILY HOME — DAY

Clay and Damon emerge from the Corvette red-eyed and exhausted. Damon opens the trunk, and Clay grabs his duffle bag.

The front door bursts opens. Rhoda runs out of the house to embrace Clay, while Philip and Kate linger on the porch beaming with pride.

RHODA

You made it.

CLAY

Two thousand miles couldn't keep me away.

Arm in arm, Rhoda and Clay march up to the porch. Clay kisses Kate on the cheek. He tries to shake Philip's hand, but Philip pulls him in for a huge hug.

PHILIP

Welcome home, son.

Withdrawn, Damon observes the family from a distance. He slams the trunk shut hard, interrupting the family reunion.

CLAY

Damon... Don't be shy. Come on over here.
Let me introduce you. Everyone...this
here is Damon Lucas. Damon, these are
my folks, and my little sister Rhoda.

Damon struts to the porch and shakes everyone's hand.

Rhoda flashes a flirtatious smile at Damon, but he ignores her, fixating solely on Kate.

DAMON

Pleased to meet you. I feel like I know you already. Clay has told me so much about you.

PHILIP

Well, only the goods things, we hope.

RHODA

What good things?

CLAY

Let's just say it was a very long drive.

DAMON

(Smiling at Kate)

Nothing but good things.

Kate attempts to avoid Damon's unrelenting gaze.

KATE

My...it's hot out here already. Come on in you two. You look absolutely exhausted. Let's get you showered and shaved, and I bet you both must be starving.

CLAY

Hungry as a horse.

(To Damon)

Just you wait. Mom makes the best desserts you've ever tasted...

KATE

Now, Clay, don't exaggerate...

PHILIP

You guys sure made good time. My, you must have flown...

They all disappear into the picture perfect

PEMBERTON FAMILY HOME.

CUT TO:

INT. CLAY'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Darkness. Clay flips the light switch to his room.

Clay's bedroom is built like a sea captain's cabin—very compact and shipshape. Nautical decorations are displayed throughout the room: A CAPTAINS WHEEL MIRROR, A LIGHTHOUSE LAMP.

Philip squeezes his way in and struggles to set up a cot with an old sleeping bag.

PHILIP

Well...I know it's a bit cramped...but you guys are probably used to sleeping in much tighter quarters than this.

CLAY

We're fine, dad. Just fine.

Damon surveys his surroundings with a glowing satisfaction.

PHILIP

Well, let me know if you boys need anything, anything at all.

CLAY

Will do, dad. Thanks.

PHILIP

All righty then. Try to get some rest.

Philip flips the light switch, and the room is blanketed in darkness.

PHILIP

(Whispered)

Really glad you could make it home, son.

Philip gently closes the door.

Clay closes his eyes, turns on his side, and drifts off to sleep. Damon lies on the cot wide-awake, smiling.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Down a darkened hallway that leads into the living room, a HISTORY OF FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS line the wall: Pictures of Clay and Rhoda growing up, Kate and Philip at their wedding, Kate's father and uncles in naval uniforms posing in front of a gigantic battleship.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

By the soft glow of a lamp, Kate reclines in a comfy chair reading a paperback novel and smoking a cigarette. She looks up, and from the shadows, Clay emerges yawning. Kate quickly stubs out her cigarette and sets aside her book.

KATE

I was hoping that was you. Hungry?

Rubbing his eyes, Clay nods in excitement.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Kate cleans up the dishes after cooking. On the kitchen counter are the remains of a meal: an empty plate and salad bowl and a half-eaten piece of pie.

CLAY

...he's just out of the Navy. Plans to settle down somewhere out here—Phoenix most likely.

KATE

Well, that's sensible. More coffee?

CLAY

Please. Has a cousin there—a second cousin—I think it was—who he's never met. The only relative he has left. You see, his parents were killed in a highway automobile accident a few months back. It's his first Christmas

CLAY (CONT'D)
since they died.

KATE
Oh, how awful.

Kate pours Clay some more coffee.

CLAY
After their funeral, he settled the estate, sold the house, and purchased his car with part of the insurance money. Has just enough left over to spend a couple of months looking around for the right job and the perfect place to live.

Clay stirs his coffee. Kate is still somewhat bothered by the news of the accident.

CLAY
He comes across kinda funny-peculiar sort of-but on the drive up, I couldn't help but get to thinkin' about you and dad and Rhoda, and...I don't know, mom, I thought it would be nice if we asked him to stay with us...just for a few days.

KATE
(Hesitant)
Now, Clay, that is very kind of you, but Damon's situation...it has nothing to do with our family.

CLAY
I know, but it's Christmas.
(Pause)
Aren't we supposed to look after those a little less fortunate...especially at this time of year?
(Before Kate can respond with an excuse)
Just because...

Against her better judgment and somewhat proud of her son's charity, Kate concedes with a smile.

KATE

Just because...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Clay holds court surrounded by his family, who hang on his every word.

CLAY

...so then we pulled our chutes and did the normal trash-talking you do before a jump. I got on the airplane, got the six-minute warning, hooked up, and walked to the door. And after I jumped out of the aircraft, I started counting, one thousand, two thousand, but at three thousand I felt this jolt. I looked up and figured that I'd jumped the gun 'cause my chute hadn't come open yet. Figured maybe I had just gotten a hard wind and tumbled a little bit, so I snapped back into a tight body position and that's when I realized I was being towed behind the aircraft.

KATE

Dear god...

RHODA

Weren't you scared?

CLAY

When your training takes over, you don't have time to be scared.

The focus on the family gradually narrows until only Kate is visible.

CLAY

So I looked up at the jumpmaster, and I understood what was going to happen - I knew it right then. The Sergeant cut me loose, and I fell away, falling, falling, fast. I pulled my ripcord,

CLAY (CONT'D)

looked back down at my reserve, which wasn't out yet, and I thought, 'Well, that's not good.' So I jabbed at the reserve with my right hand like a knife, and bam—out it came.

Kate's rapped attention is suddenly distracted.

CLAY

When I finally hit the ground, I tossed my helmet into the air and let out the biggest...

One by one, Clay, Philip and Rhoda all to take notice of Damon, who now commands the room looming large over the family.

DAMON

(Addressing only Kate)

That's a pretty good bed in there. The room's okay, but the cot just sorta crowds it up. I took it down. Clay can sleep in that other room I found at the end of the hall. The bed in there's loaded with Christmas junk, but I guess he's big enough to unload it.

The family just sits bewildered by the interruption and unsure of the best response.

Damon rubs his hands together and gestures with his chin towards the kitchen. He sidles over to Kate and playfully chucks her under the chin.

DAMON

Well...c'mon, Mom. Your new boy's hungry.

In shock, everyone just sort of waits for somebody else to do or say something. Rhoda, at last, giggles and then pretends she didn't. A strange quiet settles over the family.

Displaying tremendous restraint, Kate simply rises from her chair, and without a word, marches out of the living room and down the hallway.

HALLWAY

Philip and Damon follow.

CLAY'S BEDROOM

Kate grabs Damon's duffle bag.

HALLWAY

Philip and Damon halt abruptly in order to make way for Kate.

SPARE BEDROOM

Kate drags Damon's duffle bag into the spare bedroom and sets it down hard.

KATE

Here. You-will-sleep-here.

Both Philip and Damon are somewhat taken aback by Kate's assertiveness.

PHILIP

(Clarifying)

For tonight. You will sleep here for tonight. In the morning, no doubt, you'll want to continue on with your trip.

Crestfallen, Damon's confidence collapses. He stammers, like a fish out of water, to apologize.

DAMON

I...I hope I haven't stepped out of line, sir. It was a joke. A silly joke. I planned it in the bedroom when I woke up.

(Avoiding eye contact)

My folks and I... You see, we used to kid around a lot that way. I guess it was being in a real home again that got me going like that. Mom used to... My mom used to...

Damon chokes up and is unable to finish.

PHILIP

Very well, son. Enough said. Come along. We'll find you something to eat.

Philip pats Damon on the back and heads to the kitchen leaving Damon alone with Kate for a brief moment.

Damon bashfully shuffles his feet in his strange, kind of dance-step.

DAMON

Pop sure is a nice guy, isn't he? Real nice.

Damon looks up at Kate and WINKS at her—a knowing and secretive wink. He then turns and follows Philip into the kitchen.

Unsettled, Kate watches as they both disappear down the dark hallway.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kate sits before her vanity getting ready for bed. She takes a sleeping pill and then brushes her hair over and over again in an attempt to calm her nerves.

Philip soon emerges from the bathroom in a robe and slippers.

PHILIP

I hate to say it, but if you ask me, I think you're just overreacting. He's been badly brought up, that's for sure, but it's Christmas, Kate. He's lonely, lost. Surely you can see that.

Philip pulls down the covers and slips into bed.

KATE

It's not his manners...or lack of that's bothering me, Philip. It was that wink. It felt, I don't know, it felt... dangerous.

PHILIP

Come on now, Kate. It was harmless.

KATE

That doesn't excuse it. That doesn't make it right. It was inappropriate, pure and simple.

PHILIP

Why are you making a mountain out of a molehill?

KATE

Well, I...I wish I knew. I wish there was some rational explanation. But don't you feel it? How the whole house suddenly feels...different. How all of our habits seem silly almost, and everything we own looks either too old or too new or—?

PHILIP

I think we ought to let him stay...so long as he behaves respectfully to you.

Finished, Philip rolls over on his side and goes to sleep.

Kate is still bothered and desperately wants to continue the conversation. Instead, she quiets her nerves by taking another sleeping pill and then slips into bed beside Her husband.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE - NIGHTMARE

-- An EYE WINKS and the BLUE IRIS bleeds into RED.

-- The EYE winks again and in the BLACK HOLE of the PUPIL a BOMB EXPLODES.

-- AN AIRPLANE SOARS through a CLOUD OF SMOKE, depositing PARACHUTES.

-- PARACHUTES sail over a cemetery of WHITE CROSSES covered in VINES OF THORNS.

-- VINES OF THORNS entwine around a BLACK PUPIL.

-- The BLACK PUPIL turns into the PEEP HOLE of a door.

-- Through the PEEP HOLE of a door, TWO MILITARY OFFICERS stand on the porch of the Pemberton Family Home. They hold a PRESENT wrapped in the AMERICAN FLAG.

-- The TOLLING OF A BELL.

-- A WHITE CROSS with THORNS.

-- They slowly lift the LID to reveal...

END MONTAGE - NIGHTMARE

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The TOLLING OF BELLS from a church are heard above the choral singing of *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The congregation finishes singing the hymn. There is a general commotion as everyone takes a seat in long rows of wooden pews.

A PRIEST stands at the pulpit before an open bible.

PRIEST

A reading from the Gospel of Luke...

The Pemberton family is seated in the last pew: Philip surveys the congregation, Rhoda is bored beyond belief, Clay leafs through a hymnal, while Kate listens attentively.

PRIEST (O.S.)

And the angel said to Mary, "Be not afraid, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son."

Near the altar, An ANGEL is suspended above a MANGER SCENE: STATUES OF SHEPHERDS, ANIMALS, and THREE KINGS BEARING GIFTS are arranged around a STRAW MANGER.

PRIEST (O.S.)

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"
And the angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Kate listens eagerly.

PRIEST (O.S.)

Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy. For nothing is impossible with God."

STATUES OF MARY AND JOSEPH kneel before an EMPTY CRIB.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Shoppers stroll down the aisle of a large department store that is lavishly decorated for the Holiday season.

Clay and Rhoda lean against a perfume counter waiting for a sales assistant.

CLAY

Any ideas?

RHODA

Not that I can think of. To tell you the truth, you just being home is the best gift of all. You wouldn't believe how anxious she's been lately. Worried to death about you. Smoking up a storm and going to church a lot more... For the

RHODA (CONT'D)

life of me, I don't know which is worse.

The SALES ASSISTANT returns and hands Rhoda a beautifully wrapped package.

RHODA

(To the Sales Assistant)

Oh, it's beautiful. Thank you so much.

Clay and Rhoda continue their way down the aisle.

RHODA

It's gotten so bad that Dad even made an appointment for her to see a shrink. Gave her a prescription for some pills to help her sleep at night. She keeps having these terrible nightmares, waking up in cold sweats.

CLAY

Nightmares? About what?

RHODA

No one knows. Not even dad. She just keeps it all bottled up inside and won't tell a soul.

Clay and Rhoda pass by a decoration of AN ANGEL BLOWING A TRUMPET WITH A BANNER THAT READS: PEACE ON EARTH

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Kate rests at the kitchen table staring out the window anxiously smoking a cigarette. A basket of folded laundry sits nearby.

Damon enters. Careful not to disturb Kate, he quietly slips into the chair beside her.

DAMON

Mind if I bum a smoke?

KATE

Please. Help yourself. Just finished a load of clean towels if you were planning to wan up.

Damon fishes out a cigarette from the pack on the table.

KATE

You know, Clay and Rhoda should be back soon from shopping. Maybe you could all go into town later tonight. Take in a movie together. Philip's been dying to get me to go see that new Hitchcock film they shot in Phoenix...

Damon strikes a match and lights his cigarette.

KATE

Look, about last night... Clay told me all about your parents...about the accident, I mean. And my heart goes out to you.

Damon exhales slowly.

DAMON

I wasn't an easy child. Trouble followed me around like a stray dog. One time, when I was old enough to have known better, I ran away from home. Packed a few of my things in a knapsack and hit the road. Didn't get too far. The old man caught up with me a couple days later wandering along the railroad tracks. Drug me back to the house cursing and cussing up a storm. Gave me a whooping I'll never forget. But my mother, now mother, God rest her soul, she never said a word. Not one single word. Just went about her household chores like nothing had ever happened. From that day on, I knew I was no longer here little boy. I broke her heart, I did. Broke her heart.

Kate looks at Damon with a mixture of compassion and fear.

KATE

A mother's love never dies.

Kate stares out of the window again.

KATE

You know, my father was a sailor. He used to always tell me, 'Katie, when the waters get rough, your family is your only anchor.'

Damon takes a long drag from his cigarette.

DAMON

They never had a chance really. Nothing anyone could do. Were sound asleep in bed when the fire broke out. Burnt the whole house down. Right down to the ground. Nothing but a pile of ashes.

A look of confusion, suspicion washes over Kate's face, and she stubs out her cigarette in an ashtray with purpose.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Clay stands before a display of men's clothing admiring a bulky GOLD-COLORED SWEATER. Rhoda sneaks up behind him.

RHODA

And I thought you were only allowed to wear green.

Clay turns around smiling.

CLAY

Only for special occasions. Ready? Dad should be done with his round of golf by now.

RHODA

Yep. That about does it for mom's shopping list.

They start to exit the store.

RHODA

Oh, do you mind if we stop by the library on the way home?

CLAY

Sure.

RHODA

There are a couple of books I have to check out for my research paper.

CLAY

Studying over break?

RHODA

There's more to me than just a pretty face. Keep your fingers crossed. Should find out pretty soon if I made it into Berkeley or not.

CLAY

Wait, mom and dad are going to let you go away to school?

RHODA

They don't know I applied. Just let me get in first, okay?

CLAY

Sure thing.

Rhoda stops suddenly to check her shopping list.

RHODA

Oh, shoot. There's something I forgot to get. Why don't you go ahead and get the car. I'll wait for you out front.

Like a good soldier, Clay does as he is told.

Rhoda sneaks back to the display and picks up one of the GOLD-COLORED SWEATERS that Clay had been admiring.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM — DAY

Kate stands over her bed next to the basket of clean laundry and carefully folds a shirt. Unsatisfied with a stubborn wrinkle, she unfolds the shirt, smooths it out, and folds it again.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM — DAY

DROPS OF WATER drip from a faucet rippling warm bath water.
Damon relaxes in the bathtub and sings.

DAMON

*Our boots and clothes are all in pawn
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down
It's flamin' drafty 'round Cape Horn
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down
Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down*

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY — DAY

Kate carries an empty laundry basket. On her way down the hallway, she catches Damon's singing and pauses by the door to listen.

DAMON (O.S.)

*My dear old mom, she wrote to me
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down
My dearest son come home from sea
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down
Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down*

Kate continues on her way to the spare bedroom.

SPARE BEDROOM

Kate collects Damon's dirty clothes from off of the floor.
She notices Damon's DUFFLE BAG.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM — DAY

Damon continues singing, beating the bathwater with his fists.

DAMON

*Just one more pull and that will do
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down
For we're the boys to kick her through
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down...*

CUT TO:

INT. SPARE BEDROOM — DAY

A faint HEARTBEAT is heard as Kate opens Damon's DUFFLE BAG.

In the distance, Damon's singing, almost shouting, can be heard.

DAMON (O.S.)

*Oh, you pinks and posies
Go down, you blood red roses, Go down*

Kate roots through the duffle bag and discovers:

A LARGE JAGGED FISHING KNIFE.

She studies the knife with its dangerous, sharp teeth and then fearfully shoves the knife back into the duffle bag, closing it shut.

Panicked, she suddenly senses that Damon's singing has stopped. She cautiously stands up and turns around to find Damon lurking in the doorway behind her.

Damon wears only a wet, white towel. Beads of water drip from his hair and down his torso.

The faint HEARTBEAT stops.

KATE

Why, Damon...you startled me. I was getting ready to do another load of laundry.

(Pause)

Do you have any dirty clothes that need to be washed?

Damon stares at Kate but does not answer.

Overwhelmed, Kate's attention is distracted by the many tattoos on Damon's body, particularly, the tattoo along his left arm:

A BLEEDING RED HEART, ENCLOSING A BLUE ANCHOR. UNDERNEATH THE ANCHOR THE WORD 'MOM' IN RED LETTERS IS ENTWINED WITH BLUE ROSES.

KATE

Do you have any dirty clothes that need to be washed?

Damon just stares at Kate as an uncomfortable tension grows.

DAMON

You're the best, mom.

The TATTOO flexes and pulses and the sound of a HEARTBEAT crescendos, louder and louder and louder and...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Kate sits up in bed stricken by the memory of the hideous tattoo. Suppressing a scream, she clutches her sheets and looks to Margaret for comfort, but Margaret is sound asleep. She looks away and fixates on the framed picture of:

THE MADONNA AND CHILD AND THE BURNING, BLEEDING SACRED HEART.

Again, a faint HEARTBEAT is heard.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

The sun shines through the hospital room window illuminating Margaret's bouquet of red roses that have started to wilt.

A DOCTOR leans over Margaret listening to a stethoscope.

DOCTOR

...well, your heart rate and blood pressure are normal, and the incision seems to be healing quite well—I'll have the nurse come in shortly and change the bandages.

(He makes a note in his file.)

Now, of course, we still need to do a few more blood tests, but so far everything looks fine, just fine. Have you been experiencing any kind of pain or discomfort?

MARGARET

Only when I use the bathroom.

DOCTOR

Well, that is to be expected. Just keep taking your medication and get as much rest as you possibly can. Tomorrow, we'll see if we can get you up and moving around a bit.

MARGARET

Yes. Thank you, Doctor...

Margaret wishes she could say more, but the Doctor gives her a paternal pat on the head and then disappears behind the curtained partition.

DOCTOR

And how are you today, Kate?

KATE

Oh, fine. Just fine.

DOCTOR

The nurse tells me you slept soundly all through the night. Not even a peep.

KATE

Well, I didn't wake up screaming my lungs out, if that's what you mean?

DOCTOR

That's some progress. And if all goes well again tonight, I think we'll be

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
able to send you home tomorrow.

KATE
But I still—

DOCTOR
Now there is not a thing wrong with you that time won't take care of—time and a little self-discipline, Kate. So, take your medicine and put that silly notion of yours right out of your mind.

KATE
But I still keep thinking about—

DOCTOR
Well, then stop thinking. You're saner than I am and healthy as a horse. Control, that's all you need. Now, get some rest, and I'll check on you both again in the morning.

The Doctor rushes out of the room with a smile.

Kate and Margaret lie in their respective beds quietly with the dividing curtain still drawn.

KATE
(To Margaret)
Oh, well...he has always been a tactless idiot, but a good doctor. And it's true, I am feeling much better. Last night was the first night in weeks that I didn't scream my lungs out, waking from that nightmare. You're lucky not to have heard me. They say I wail like a banshee, enough to lift the hair right off of your...

Margaret begins to cry softly.

KATE
Is everything all right, dear?

Margaret's tears turn into heavy sobs.

KATE

Should I call the nurse?

MARGARET

No. No, please. That's not necessary.

KATE

But if you're in any kind of pain, I think it best if we-

MARGARET

No. That's just the problem. I don't feel anything. Nothing at all.

Margaret's SHADOW moves from behind the drawn dividing curtain.

MARGARET

There was always so much blood. And the doctors...they didn't know... They couldn't find the cause for all the bleeding. An operation, they said, was my only option—an operation to remove the womb.

Margaret is overcome with emotion again.

MARGARET

Now all that's left is just the shadow of a woman.

Kate slides out of her bed and stands protectively near the curtained partition.

KATE

I guess we each have our own nightmare. Don't we?

MARGARET

Then how do we treat them. How do we heal the fear?

Kate pushes aside the curtain.

KATE

By confronting it. And talking about it. Just by telling someone, I suppose.

Margaret dries her eyes with a tissue.

MARGARET

I couldn't help but overhear... Does your nightmare have anything to do with Damon?

KATE

It has everything to do with him.

MARGARET

Then tell me. Please. Tell me everything.

KATE

(Reluctantly)

Well, when I finally told him to leave, I prayed that would be the last of him, but it hasn't.

MARGARET

Then you kicked him out?

KATE

Oh, yes. On Christmas Eve.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM - DAY

A STAR ON TOP OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Strings of lights and boxes of ornaments are strewn about the living room.

Clay balances on a ladder draping the tree with tinsel. Damon sulks on the couch, as Rhoda sits on the living room floor unpacking ornaments that have been carefully wrapped in tissue paper. She reveals:

A TIN SOLDIER.

RHODA

And look what we have here, you little thief. It's the one you stole from the department store.

CLAY

When I was what? 6 or 7?

RHODA

I have never seen mom so mad before.
When we came home and you took this out
of your pocket...

DAMON

(To Clay)

There's too much tinsel...

RHODA

...I thought she was going to kill you.
(Laughing)
It's so ugly. It just has to go in
front.

Rhoda places the tin soldier on the floor and continues
unwrapping the other ornaments.

DAMON

There's too much tinsel on top.

Clay stops decorating to take in the tree for a moment.

CLAY

I think it looks fine.

DAMON

No. No, no, no, no, no. It's all wrong.
Here, let me help.

Damon makes his way towards the Christmas tree attempting
to navigate the obstacle of ornaments and lights.

RHODA

Just watch where you step, okay. Some
of these ornaments are very old.
They've been in the family for—

Damon steps on the tin soldier.

RHODA

Damon! You jerk. Look what you did,
you...

SMASHED TIN SOLDIER

RHODA

You did that on purpose.

DAMON

No, I didn't. It was an accident. I was only trying to help. There was too much tinsel on top of the tree.

Damon looks to Clay for some support, but Clay is just as angry as Rhoda.

Damon storms out of the living room, and Clay climbs down from the ladder to pursue him.

Rhoda delicately picks up the smashed ornament.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM — DAY

The bed is covered with various rolls of wrapping paper and several beautifully wrapped packages with bows.

Kate places the bulky gold-colored sweater that Clay had been admiring in a box and lovingly wraps the gift.

She is interrupted by the sound of Clay and Damon arguing in the hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY — DAY

Clay confronts Damon in the hallway.

CLAY

And where do you think you are going?
The least you could do is apologize.

DAMON

Next year...

Kate pokes her head out the bedroom door.

DAMON

Next year, we're getting an aluminum
tree with no ornaments at all just
lights!

CLAY

(Threatening)

Over my dead body.

KATE

Clay! Mind your manners.

Damon storms off into the spare bedroom and slams the door.

KATE

(To Clay)

What on earth is all the fuss about?

Clay is too frustrated and overwhelmed with anger to
respond. He clenches his teeth and retreats to his room
slamming the door shut behind him.

Kate withdraws into her bedroom as well and closes the
door.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM — DAY

Kate finishes wrapping the present. In her anxious state,
she hastily attaches a bow, and on the nametag, she
mistakenly writes:

DAMON

CUT TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM — DAY

The family CHRISTMAS TREE is all decorated with ornaments
and tinsel.

Kate enters and carefully arranges a stack of presents
under the tree. Hanging on a branch in the front, she
notices the:

THE SMASHED TIN SOLDIER

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhoda sets the dining room table for a formal Christmas Eve Dinner.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clay stands before a mirror trying to decide what to wear for an after-dinner party.

He rummages through his closet and discovers that most of his clothes are missing, only hangers. He makes his way to the spare bedroom to investigate.

SPARE BEDROOM

The door is slightly open. Clay knocks. There is no answer, so he slowly opens the door. The room is a mess. Wrapping paper and boxes are scattered all around the room.

In the corner, Clay finds several of his dress shirts lying crumpled and dirty on the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhoda finishes setting out the silverware and lights the candles.

Kate enters with a piping-hot ham and places it in the center of the perfect Holiday table.

KATE

(Overly pleasant)

Rhoda, be a dear and call everyone to the table. Dinner's ready.

Once Rhoda leaves the room, Kate reveals a hint of exhaustion.

Damon is the first to arrive. He struts into the dining room wearing all the clothes that Kate had bought him, plus the gold sweater that was intended for Clay.

DAMON

I couldn't wait. Saw my name on the packages, and I just had to open them.

Damon turns around showing off how well all of his new clothes fit.

DAMON

Guess someone has been a real good boy this year.

Before Kate has a chance to respond, the rest of the family enters the room and quietly takes their place around the table.

Struggling to suppress her irritation, Kate is the last one to be seated. Philip leads them all in a prayer.

PHILIP

Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty through Christ, our Lord, Amen.

PHILIP, KATE, CLAY AND RHODA

Amen.

Immediately after the prayer, Damon is the first to dish his plate, reaching for food without any apology. The rest of the family politely passes around the various savory dishes—ham, sweet potatoe casserole, green beans, cranberry sauce.

They all enjoy their Holiday meal silently, except for Damon, who eats like an starving animal, the whole family trying their best to ignore him.

CLAY

...so it turn's out the Schmidt's are throwing their annual Christmas Eve Party this evening. Haven't seen Craig since High School. Rhoda and I are planning to head over there after dinner.

KATE

That sounds lovely.

Kate gestures at Clay to invite Damon. Clay reluctantly obeys.

CLAY

You know, you're more than welcome to tag along, if you'd like?

Damon doesn't respond or even acknowledge Clay. He just keeps eating his meal loudly. When he finishes everything on his plate, he reaches across the table and takes some food off of Clay's plate.

Everyone is appalled by his vulgar behavior. Kate looks across the table at Philip to reprimand Damon, but Philip sheepishly avoids her gaze.

CLAY

Well...I must say...you have certainly out done yourself this year, mom. Dinner is absolutely delicious.

DAMON

(With his mouthful)

That's 'cause my mom made it. She just loves to cook for her sailor boy.

Damon giggles to himself and shuffles his feet under the table in his peculiar manner.

Rhoda loses her appetite and patience.

RHODA

You know, she's not your mother, Damon.

KATE

Rhoda...

RHODA

She's not.

(Pause)

Your mother is dead, Damon.

The table falls silent—a tense quiet. Damon stoically gets up from the table and leaves the room.

Kate glares daggers across the table at Rhoda, but Rhoda stares defiantly back. After a moment, Rhoda gets up from the table.

RHODA

(To Clay)

We had better get going if we don't want to be late for the party.

KATE

Rhoda.

Clay wipes his mouth with his napkin and stands up along side Rhoda.

KATE

Rhoda Pemberton.

RHODA

No. No, I won't.

Kate looks to Philip for help, for support, but Philip ignores her and just keeps eating his meal.

The front door slams shut.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEMBERTON HOME - NIGHT

Damon's Corvette peels out of the driveway and roars off into the starry desert night.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Philip and Kate sit across from each other with nothing between them except empty chairs and the remains of the Holiday dinner.

Philip finishes his meal as Kate stares across the table at him with callous contempt.

After a moment, Kate gets up and begins to clear the table.

CUT TO:

EXT. TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

A red, neon sign blinks TATTOOS.

Outside, a gang of lost children huddle together on wooden crates smoking.

Damon's Corvette is parked nearby under a streetlamp.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHMIDT'S CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY

Brenda Lee's *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree* blasts from a stereo hi-fi. The Christmas party is full of PARTYGOERS and merriment.

ENTRY

The front door opens. Clay and Rhoda stand at the door and are greeted with cheers and kisses.

CUT TO:

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

The BUZZING of NEEDLES.

Tacked up on the wall are various sample designs:

SKULLS, ROSES, COBRAS, A FLAMING KNIFE THROUGH A HEART...

Damon enters the parlor through a beaded curtain. The TATTOO ARTIST looks up from his work and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHMIDT'S CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY

Feeling somewhat out of place, Clay makes his way to a refreshment table and pours himself a generous glass of eggnog.

Near the FIREPLACE, Rhoda is the center of attention, surrounded by friends and admirers.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Two old, beat-up, felt Christmas stockings hang from the mantel above the fireplace. The fire and the lights from the Christmas tree fill the room with a romantic glow.

Let It Snow plays softly on the Hi-Fi.

At the bar, Philip pours two cocktails. He hands a glass to Kate and draws his chair up close to the fire beside her.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHMIDT'S CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY

Clay steadies himself against the refreshment table and pours himself yet another glass of eggnog.

He surveys the room with drunken eyes, and spies a YOUNG MAN IN A RED JACKET flirting with Rhoda. From the back, the young man almost resembles Damon.

CUT TO:

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

Damon sits in a chair with his shirtsleeve rolled up. The tattoo artist makes his mark.

NEEDLES and BLOOD

CUT TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Philip and Kate sit before the fireplace. Philip reaches out to take Kate's hand, but she pulls away from him.

NEEDLES AND BLOOD

CUT TO:

INT. SCHMIDT'S CHRISTMAS EVE PARTY

The young man in a red jacket takes Rhoda by the hand and leads her out of the living room.

Disoriented, Clay follows and stumbles into a group of revealers.

NEEDLES and BLOOD

In the ENTRY of the house, Rhoda and the young man in the red jacket stand under the MISTLETOE.

NEEDLES AND BLOOD

Clay staggers into the entry just in time to see the young man in the red jacket lean in and kiss Rhoda on the lips.

NEEDLES AND BLOOD

In Clay's drunken state, the young man in the red jacket looks exactly like Damon. Clay shoves him away from Rhoda.

CLAY

Don't you touch her, you...

Clay grabs Rhoda's hand and pulls her towards the front door.

RHODA

Let me go.

NEEDLES AND BLOOD

The young man in the red jacket intervenes, and Clay wheels around punching him squarely in the face and knocking him to the ground.

NEEDLES and BLOOD

Rhoda pushes Clay asides and cradles the young man in the red jacket in her arms. Partygoers crowd around the scene.

RHODA

What has gotten into you? What are you some kind of heartless brute? I don't need my big brother to rescue me. I can take care of myself.

A DROP OF BLOOD streaks from the young man's nose.

NEEDLES and BLOOD

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The fire CRACKLES. Philip finishes his drink with a gulp.

PHILIP

What would you have me do, Kate? Kick him out? On Christmas Eve? He has nowhere else to go.

KATE

I've had it up to here with your excuses. It's not me he's disrespecting. It's you, Philip.

(Pause)

Your family is drowning while you just stick your head in the sand and surrender.

Philip stands up ready to attack. With great restraint, he retreats from the living room leaving Kate all alone.

In the distance, the bedroom door slams shut.

CUT TO:

INT. TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

Finished with his work, the Tattoo Artist cleans the blood from off of the needles.

Damon rolls down his sleeve. A perfect TEAR rests on his cheek.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Kate pours herself another drink and then begins to fill the Christmas stockings that hang over the fireplace with presents.

She stuffs some cosmetics into Rhoda's stocking. In Clay's stocking, she stuffs some shaving products.

From the shadows, Damon emerges and slowly sidles up behind Kate. He wrenches Clay's stocking out of her hand and tosses it into the fire.

Without thinking, Kate reaches into the fire and rescues the scorched stocking. Kate whirls on Damon like a buzz saw.

KATE

What in the *hell* did you do that for?

Kate's hostility takes Damon by surprise, and he cowers in front of the flames.

KATE

What gave you the idea that you could move into *my* house and ruin *my* Christmas? Who in the hell do you think you are?

DAMON

But he's too old. He's too old to hang a stockings...

KATE

How dare you come into my home and tell me how to run my family? I never wanted you here in the first place...I never wanted you! Get out! Get out! Get out! Out! Out!

DAMON

But look. Look. Look what I did.

While Kate keeps yelling, Damon shucks off his gold sweater and rolls up his shirtsleeve, revealing the new, bloody addition to his tattoo. The tattoo now reads:

MOM, I LOVE YOU

Kate's rage is silenced by the hideous sight of the tattoo.

DAMON

For you. I did it for you. Your Christmas present.

Stunned, Kate hides her face in her hands, as Damon circles around her. The firelight casts menacing shadows around the room.

DAMON

I have it all planned out, see.

TATTOO

DAMON

When your children are grown. When Clay and Rhoda are ready to leave the house for good, I will take their place.

TATTOO

DAMON

I will. I will get a job and take care of you, always.

TATTOO

DAMON

And even if the 'old man' dies...even if he passes away, you will never be alone.

TATTOO

DAMON

Nothing will make me leave you.
Nothing.

TATTOO

DAMON

You are my mom. I have chosen you. Out of the whole wide world, I have chosen you. You are mine, and I am yours, forever and ever and ever and ever...

TATTOO

Suppressing a scream, Kate storms out of the living room into the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kate leans against the sink and tries to catch her breath. She splashes her face with cold water and dries it with a towel.

DAMON (O.S)

Out of the whole wide world, I have
chosen you. You are mine, and I am
yours, forever and ever and ever and
ever...

Kate sneaks down the HALLWAY, as Damon keeps chanting.

CUT TO:

INT. SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kate frantically stuffs Damon's belongs into his duffle bag.

Philip, half-asleep, stands in the doorway behind her.

Kate notices him and then continues packing Damon's belongings. Philip joins her, and she breaks down into tears.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Philip and Kate find Damon lying on the living room floor curled up in a ball before the fire.

DAMON

(Mumbling like a little devil)
Forever and ever and ever and ever. You
are mine, and I am yours, forever and
ever and ever and ever...

Kate gently kneels beside Damon, tears streaking her face.

KATE

Shhh... Shhh... It's time. It's time for
you to go.

Damon lifts his head and looks up at Kate helpless and confused.

PHILIP

Get up now, son. You can't stay here
any longer.

Damon slowly rises to his feet, and Philip offers him his
bag.

PHILIP

Come on now. Let's go.

Damon hesitates and throws a temper tantrum.

DAMON

No. No, I won't. You can't make me.
You can't. You can't just kick me out?
Where will I go? I have nowhere to go.

(Pause)

I fought for you. I bled for you. I
hate you. I hate your guts. Both of
you. You make me sick. Sick, do you
hear? You never loved me at all. Did
you? Well, I'll show you. I'm gonna run
away. I'm gonna run away and never come
back. Then you'll be sorry. Then you'll
be so, so sorry.

Damon stomps on all the presents that are arranged around
the Christmas tree.

DAMON

This is what I think of you and your family..
Your selfish, ungrateful—

KATE

Damon! Leave! Now! Now or I will
call the cops!

Damon looks deep into Kate's eyes, and his temper tantrum
subsides.

KATE

I want you gone. You hear me? Now.

A sly smile spreads across Damon's face.

DAMON

You ain't ever gonna get rid of me.
One way or another, you'll see me
again. A mother's love never dies.

Damon winks at Kate. He grabs his bag and leaves
the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CORVETTE - NIGHT

The Corvette sits in the Pemberton driveway idling.

Elvis Presley's *Blue Christmas* plays softly on the car
radio.

Damon stares at Philip and Kate in the rearview mirror.
Philip and Kate stand on the porch together arm in arm
guarding the front door.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEMBERTON HOUSE - NIGHT

The Corvette peels out of the driveway, and Kate buries
herself into Philip.

Like the eyes of a demon, the RED HEADLIGHTS of the
Corvette fade into the STARRY DESERT NIGHT.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEMBERTON FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

THE STAR on top of the Christmas tree is lit up blinking,
blinking, blinking like a beating heart.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM-EVENING

KATE

That night, I couldn't sleep at all. I
was so terrified he'd come back.

MARGARET

Did he?

KATE

No. He never came back...to the house. I don't know where he went that night. Must have left town. For weeks, we kept watching in traffic for his Corvette, but we never saw it again. And for weeks, I kept remembering his words—like a threat—just before he drove away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEMBERTON FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

SMASHED CHRISTMAS PRESENTS surround the Christmas Tree.

DAMON (O.S.)

You ain't ever gonna get rid of me.
One way or another, you'll see me
again. A mother's love never dies. A
mother's love never dies.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

KATE

I suppose, he's still out there...
Wandering...Searching...Looking for a way
back home.

MARGARET

Have you seen him again?

KATE

Not exactly...

Kate shyly avoids Margaret's look of surprise.

KATE

six months later, when we'd just begun
to forget all about him, Philip got a
long-distance phone call one night from
the San Diego police department.

CUT TO:

EXT. TATTOO PARLOR - NIGHT

A gang of lost children loiter outside of a tattoo parlor smoking.

KATE (V.O.)

It seemed, our twelve-year old runaway son had been picked up hanging around outside some tattoo parlor, and would we please come down and get him.

The darkness is lit up by FLASHING RED and BLUE POLICE LIGHTS. The gang of kids scam, disappearing into the darkness of an alley.

KATE (V.O)

The boy, they said, had told them that he was our son...our name, address, everything. It took us some time to convince them we had no such son. We even had our local police department phone them to verify our statements.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING

KATE

In the meantime, we learned that the boy had escaped from a detention home. To this day, we don't know who the child was.

MARGARET

Or who put him up to it?

KATE

Exactly. But then again this August, Philip and I spent a weekend at the Grand Canyon.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAND CANYON - EARLY EVENING

The sun sets over the Grand Canyon painting the rock formations with vibrant colors.

KATE (V.O.)

We were staying at this lodge right on the rim of the canyon...

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND CANYON LODGE — EARLY EVENING

A BELLBOY pushes a rack loaded with luggage, as Kate descends a staircase.

Philip relaxes in the lobby reading a newspaper.

KATE

A bit of fresh air sounds nice. Care to join me?

PHILIP

Go on without me, dear. Haven't quite finished the paper yet.

Kate briefly catches the front-page headline:

VIET CONG LAUNCH ATTACKS. DIEM REQUESTS MILITARY AID FROM KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION.

Kate kisses Philip on the forehead and exits the Lodge.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAND CANYON — EARLY EVENING

The powerful landscape of the Grand Canyon glows in the light of the setting sun.

Kate strolls down a path along the edge of the rim. She pauses for a moment to take in the magnificent vista.

Suddenly, she hears the panting of someone running in her direction.

LEGS OF A LITTLE BOY leaving A TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS in the sand.

The panting gets louder and louder, and Kate turns around just in time to brace herself as the little boy throws his arms around her legs and buries his face in her skirt.

Kate looks up and notices the silhouette of a BIGGER BOY, who stands off in the distance.

LITTLE BOY

My mom will fix you, ya big old dummy.

The bigger boy pauses momentarily and then turns and runs off out of sight.

The little boy peeks up at Kate from under his sailor cap.

LITTLE BOY

I love you, Mom.

He hugs Kate tightly and then scurries away down the path.

RUNNING LEGS. LAUGHTER.

The little boy leaves a TRAIL OF FOOTPRINTS in the sand that gets smaller and smaller and...

KATE (V.O.)

Then in September, Philip and I went fishing in the White Mountains.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHITE MOUNTAINS LAKE - MORNING

The smooth, glassy surface of the lake reflects the surrounding mountains and the sky above. The figure of a fisherman in a boat floats in the middle of the lake.

KATE (V.O.)

Now that we're older we don't bother camping out anymore. We rent a motel room in Show Low, and Philip drives out very early to the trout streams and lakes.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

A Show Low motel beckons travelers with a blinking neon vacancy sign.

KATE (V.O.)

On this particular day, I stayed behind
because I wanted to write some letters...

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Kate sits at a desk in a low-budget motel room and composes a letter to Clay.

KATE (V.O.)

Dear Son,
It has now been one week and three days
since you were called away on duty.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WHITE MOUNTAINS LAKE - MORNING

Fog rises from the lake. Philip sits in a fishing boat that floats in the middle of the lake.

KATE (V.O.)

Your father sends his love as well. He
keeps your photo with him always and
brags about you to every stranger he
encounters.

Philip casts his line and reels it in.

KATE (V.O.)

Rhoda has started her first semester at
Berkeley. She is becoming so educated,
so independent that sometimes I fear we
are drifting apart. Your father and I
pray that someday she will come to
appreciate your service and sacrifice
as much as we do.

Philip adjusts his lure and pricks his thumb on the hook.

A DROP OF BLOOD falls into the lake rippling the water.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL — MORNING

Kate sits at a desk writing a letter.

KATE (V.O.)

You are my gift from God. And I have faith that he will send you angels to guard over you and lead you through this ordeal. You are always in my heart...

There is a faint TAPPING NOISE at the door. Kate stops writing.

KATE

Occupied. Please come back in about an hour.

Kate returns to her letter and writes:

ALL OF MY LOVE, MOM

Again, there is a faint TAPPING NOISE at the door, and Kate looks up from the letter.

KATE

I said, come back in an hour, please.

She lovingly folds the letter, places it in an envelope, and seals it.

There is a LOUD BANG against the door, which startles her. A faint HEARTBEAT is heard.

KATE

Who's there?

No answer. Kate slowly rises from her chair makes her way to the door to investigate.

TATTOO

KATE

I said, who is there?

TATTOO

Kate cautiously approaches the door and twists the knob.

TATTOO

The door opens, but no one is there. At her feet, Kate discovers a BOTTLE WITH A MESSAGE rolled up inside.

Kate picks up the bottle. She is unable to remove the message with her finger, so she smashes it against the doorframe and unrolls a piece of lined paper torn from a child's school tablet.

Drawn in RED CRAYON is a BLEEDING HEART and in staggering BLOCK LETTERS like those of a child:

MOM, I LOVE YOU!

The paper trembles in Kate's hands.

Kate frantically searches the courtyard from the motel balcony, but no one is there.

COURTYARD

She tears down the stairs and into an empty courtyard with nothing but parked cars.

STREET

She races out on to the street hoping to catch a glimpse of the culprit.

About a block away, she briefly glimpses a SMALL BOY IN A SAILOR SUIT just turning the corner, crying as if his heart would break.

Frozen with fear, Kate stands in the middle of the street clutching the message in her hand:

MOM, I LOVE YOU!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM — DAY

THE MADONNA AND CHILD AND THE BURNING, BLEEDING SACRED
HEART.

Kate's eyes plead for some answer from Margaret.

MARGARET

Coincidence?

KATE

I don't believe it. I *want* to. You don't know how much I'd like to think that I am reading some kind of dark significance into unimportant happenings. But, you see, a few months ago, I started having these nightmares...brought on, no doubt, by far too many of these...coincidences.

MARGARET

Have you told the doctor?

KATE

I haven't dared tell anybody, not even Philip, about all the things I've half-seen and half-heard.

(Raising her voice)

I mean, what kind of mother am I? What kind of mother welcomes a stranger into her home? What kind of mother does nothing as her family falls apart?

MARGARET

It is not your fault, Kate. It is not your fault.

KATE

For the longest time, I've felt stalked, hunted. I've been so angry, so afraid. Afraid to walk down the street, afraid to answer the telephone, afraid to even sleep.

MARGARET

What is it? What is it exactly in the nightmare that makes you scream?

Kate reluctantly turns to Margaret.

KATE

Why, it's the baby of course.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PEMBERTON HOME — MORNING

KATE (V.O.)

I find it on my doorstep, and it's so sweet, so warm, and I'm so delighted with it.

Kate opens the front door and notices A BEAUTIFULLY WRAPPED PRESENT on the porch.

She lifts the lid and finds a BABY IN THE BOX. She cradles the baby in her arms.

KATE (V.O.)

Then, as I hold it and rearrange its clothing—such delicate, lovely clothing—the blanket falls away and reveals...a tattoo...

A BLEEDING RED HEART, ENCLOSING A BLUE ANCHOR, AND UNDERNEATH THE ANCHOR THE WORD, MOM, IN RED LETTERS ENTWINED WITH BLUE ROSES.

The sound of a BABY CRYING crescendos into a hysterical SCREAM.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM— EVENING

Another beautiful BOUQUET OF RED ROSES sits on the table between Kate and Margaret's bed.

Margaret's husband, TED ABBOTT, sits besides her wearing yet another hideous tie.

MARGARET

They truly are lovely. Simply lovely.
They really do brighten up the room.

TED

Not nearly as much as you, dear.

A NURSE enters the room interrupting the visit.

NURSE

I'm afraid visiting hours are over, Mr. Abbott. Your wife needs her rest.

TED

Yes, yes, of course. I was just about to leave anyway.

TED gets up and kisses Margaret on the forehead.

TED

Goodnight, darling. Can't wait to have you home again all to myself.

TED makes his way to the door.

TED

Oh, and goodnight too, Mrs. Pemberton. Thanks for taking such good care of my Margie.

KATE

Not at all. Get home safe, Mr. Abbott.

TED

Sweet dreams, ladies. Sweet dreams.

TED leaves, and there is a solemn moment of quiet.

MARGARET

Who needs children when you have a husband? I mean, really, wasn't that tie just dreadful?

Kate snickers.

KATE

The worst.

MARGARET

The roses really do brighten up the room though.

KATE

Yes. They sure do.

The BOUQUET OF RED ROSES

MARGARET

So, Kate, tell me. If you no longer
feel resentful, then how *do* you feel?

KATE

You know, I've been thinking about that
a lot lately because the nightmare has
changed. I suppose that's why you
haven't heard me scream. It isn't even
a nightmare anymore really... It's more
like a dream...

CUT TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The perfect family CHRISTMAS TREE all decorated with lights
and ornaments and tinsel. Underneath the tree are piles and
piles of beautifully wrapped presents.

KATE (V.O.)

...a dream about a gift. Something
fragile and of great value, which
somebody has brought to me after much
exertion, much danger. And I accept it,
but with reservations. My hands...they
refuse to close around it. And I drop
it, and it breaks. But it doesn't
shatter like glass. No. No, it just
lies there. It just lies there and
bleeds.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

KATE

All that's left when the dream ends—the
residue, if you will, for the daylight
hours—is just sadness. A weary sadness,
that's all.

Lost in her thoughts, Kate stares off into the distance.

With tremendous effort, Margaret manages to hoist herself out of bed for the first time. She shuffles over to Kate and curls up in bed beside her. The two women hold each other close.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PEMBERTON LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Underneath the family CHRISTMAS TREE, PILES OF PRESENTS BLEED.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - MORNING

The sun breaks over the mountains of the Arizona Desert—a desolate and strange landscape.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - MORNING

A nurse walks down a long corridor pushing an empty wheelchair.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

A LARGE PINK SHADOW

Margaret wakes up. She focuses on the large pink shadow and discovers Kate sitting in a wheelchair.

KATE

Good morning, dear. Didn't mean to wake you. I know you how much you need your rest. I am being discharged though and didn't want to leave without saying goodbye.

(Urgently grabbing Margaret's hand)

You will never know what a source of comfort you've been to me over these past few days. It's as if a tremendous weight has been lifted. My heart feels

KATE (CONT'D)

open. Thank you. Thank you for
listening to ravings of a mad, old
woman. I wish you a speedy recovery.

MARGARET

(Referring to the wheelchair)
Are you sure you'll be all right?

KATE

Oh, this? I don't need it really, but
the hospital is determined that no
discharged patients walk out of here on
their own two feet.

MARGARET

More Snark hunting, I suppose?

KATE

(Laughing)
More Snark hunting indeed.

Kate pats Margaret's hand warmly.

NURSE

All right, Mrs. Pemberton. Your husband
is waiting.

(To Margaret)

Someone will be by in a moment, Mrs.
Abbott to give you your pills. And, I
hear tomorrow you're to go home as
well.

Margaret hides her concern as the nurse wheels Kate out of
the room.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY — MORNING

The nurse wheels Kate down a long corridor.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*You may seek it with thimbles—
and seek it with care;
You may hunt it with forks and hope;*

NURSERY

Kate is wheeled past a nursery where a NURSE watches over A ROW OF NEWBORN BABIES.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*You may threaten its life with a
railway-share;
You may charm it with smiles and soap-*

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

A nurse wheels Kate through the waiting room and out the front door.

MARGARET (V.O.)

*But oh, beamish nephew, beware of the
day,
If your Snark be a Boojum! For then*

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

Margaret reads from *THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK*.

MARGARET

*You will softly and suddenly vanish
away,
And never be met with again!*

Margaret closes the book gently. From her window, she spies Philip helping Kate out of the wheelchair and into their car. The nurse closes the passenger door and the car disappears down the road lined with palm trees.

A PETAL FALLS from a bud of the wilting BOUQUET OF RED ROSES.

A Nurse enters and prepares Margaret's medication.

NURSE

The Doctor says it would be a good idea for you to move around a little today. Several patients are getting together in the cafeteria later to play bingo.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Perhaps you would like to join them?

MARGARET

Do you think she'll be all right?

NURSE

What's that?

MARGARET

Mrs. Pemberton. Do you think she'll be all right?

NURSE

Oh, right as rain. Don't you worry. Mrs. Pemberton was only in here for some tests and observations anyway.

The Nurse hands Margaret a small Dixie cup of pills and a glass of water.

NURSE

After all, she is a little too old to be having another baby.

Margaret swallows her medication hard.

NURSE

She's scared, I think. But, you'll see, she'll perk up, and by the time that baby arrives, she'll be convinced there's not another one like hers, anywhere in the entire world... You see, her son is...

The Nurse's speech slurs as Margaret becomes drowsy.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE - THE PRESENT

-- The CLOCK on a PALE BLUE WALL melts into A NAUTICAL COMPASS. The NEEDLE ARROW SPINS wildly into the propellers of an airplane.

-- An AIRPLANE soars through a bright BLUE SKY

-- A BLUE SKY dotted with parachutes

-- PARACHUTES, attached to beautifully wrapped PRESENTS,
softly float through the sky.

--A PRESENT falls into the ocean where it floats upon BLUE
WATER.

--On a WAVE OF RED WATER, THE PRESENT drifts to a beach
strewn with thousands and thousands of other lost PRESENTS,
as far as the eye can see.

THE END