

THE MEMORY JAR

A Play in Two Acts

By

Kurt A. Schauppner

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Cast of Characters

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <u>Christopher Barrett</u> | Patriarch of the Barrett family, late 70s |
| <u>Cassandra Barrett</u> | His wife, late 60s |
| <u>Alexandra Barrett-Murphy</u> | Their oldest child, early 50s |
| <u>Arthur Barrett</u> | Their oldest son, late 40s |
| <u>Alan Barrett</u> | Their youngest son, early 30s |
| <u>Devin Murphy</u> | Alexandra's husband, early 60s |
| <u>Miss Stasse</u> | A community matriarch, late 80s |
| <u>Sam</u> | Miss Stasse's last foster child, late 20s |

Scene

A small family home in the city of Deseret Valley, somewhere in the southern California Desert

Time

A couple of weeks after thanksgiving.

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

We are in the kitchen/family room of the Barrett family home in Deseret Valley. A small dining room table and chairs dominate the center of the room. To stage left sits a refrigerator, sink and stove. A window over the sink looks out over a desert garden. There is a frying pan on the stove. Next to the sink a strainer holds some dishes, including a cereal bowl, some silverware and the pieces of an old-fashioned coffee percolator. To stage right is a doorway leading to bedrooms. Upstage is a front door. To the left and right of the door are cabinets. The cabinet to the right is decorated with souvenir plates from around the country. The cabinet to the left is covered with Barrett family photos. A ceiling fan spins slowly overhead. A hat rack directly left of the front door holds several trucker caps. There is a cordless phone on the table.

AT RISE:

We are in the semi-darkness of early morning. CHRISTOPHER BARRETT, late 70s, patriarch of the Barrett family, enters from the bedroom area of the house. He has not shaved and is wearing boxers, a t-shirt and a ratty old bathrobe. He seems slightly confused and very annoyed. He searches the room for a few seconds before giving up in disgust. As he moves we realize he is in slight distress and suffers from particular tenderness in his lower, left abdomen, just above the beltline.

CHRISTOPHER

Mother. Mother.

CASSANDRA (calling from a bedroom)

What is it?

CHRISTOPHER

Where's the paper?

CASSANDRA (still calling from a bedroom)

Outside.

(He crosses to and opens the front door.)

Don't go out without your slippers.

CHRISTOPHER

Why the hell not?

CASSANDRA

You'll hurt your feet.

CHRISTOPHER

The hell I will.

(He steps defiantly through the door and slams it behind him. CASSANDRA, late 60s, his wife, enters from the bedroom area. She wears a simple dress and apron. She casts a dubious glance at the front door and waits for her husband to return. Soon we hear his voice.)

CHRISTOPHER (offstage)

Ouch, ouch, damn, ouch, damn, ouch.

(He enters, a scowl on his face and a paper in his hand, and hobbles to the nearest chair where he slams the paper down on the table and sits. After a few seconds he looks up at his wife, who is looking at him as if he were a disobedient child. She shakes her head and crosses to him. She pulls out a chair, sits next to him and pats her lap. He obeys instantly, lifting his foot onto her lap so she can remove the thorns and place them in a pocket in her apron. He watches her intense concentration on the task and begins to smile. She looks up and notices the growing grin.)

CASSANDRA

What?

CHRISTOPHER

Just the way you fuss over me. It's kinda nice.

(Having finished her task, she lets his feet drop with a thump onto the floor. She rises and crosses to the kitchen. He unrolls the paper and tries to read but is frustrated by the lack of light. He looks up, claps his hands and the lights go up.)

CASSANDRA

You want some breakfast?

CHRISTOPHER

Why don't we wait till the kids get here?

(She begins cooking preparations, essentially ignoring what he has just said. He begins reading the paper, essentially ignoring the fact that he is being ignored.)

CASSANDRA

We don't know when they're getting here and you should eat.

CHRISTOPHER

Maybe some cereal?

CASSANDRA

I could make some pancakes.

CHRISTOPHER

Nah.

CASSANDRA

French toast?

CHRISTOPHER

No, thank you.

CASSANDRA

I could make you an omelet.

CHRISTOPHER

Honey, all I want is cereal.

CASSANDRA (putting things away)

All right—

CHRISTOPHER

Hell, I don't even want that. I'm only eating cause you want me to.

CASSANDRA

Sweetie, the doctor said—

CHRISTOPHER

Hell, that doctor says a lot of things. Half of it I can't understand.

CASSANDRA

The other half you pretend not to hear.

CHRISTOPHER (smiles at his own joke)

Huh?

CASSANDRA

The other half, clever.

(She gets a bowl and a box of cereal.)

CHRISTOPHER

What time did you say the kids were getting here?

CASSANDRA

I didn't say.

CHRISTOPHER

I thought you just did.

(She pours cereal into a bowl and
retrieves a bottle of milk from the frig.)

CASSANDRA

No, dear, I said we didn't know when they were coming.

(She pours milk into the bowl and carries
it to him.)

CHRISTOPHER

Why the hell not?

(She places the bowl in front of him. They
exchange glances and then she crossed back to
the kitchen to retrieve a spoon.

CASSANDRA

I don't know, dear, maybe to annoy you.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, it does, I might have something to do.

CASSANDRA

Do you?

(She obtains a spoon and walks it back to
him.)

CHRISTOPHER

That's not the point.

(She sits and watches him eat the cereal
he clearly does not enjoy. He frowns like a
sick child.)

CASSANDRA

You don't feel well, today?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

(He eats some more while she watches; then he sets the spoon down and pushes the bowl away.)

You knew I wasn't feeling well. Is that why the kids are coming?

(They look at each other for a few moments and then she breaks the spell by rising and crossing back to the kitchen where she does some busy work. During the following exchange she keeps her back to him while he stares at her.)

CASSANDRA

The kids just want to come see us, is all.

CHRISTOPHER

All three of them? All at the same time?

CASSANDRA

Yes, and Devin.

CHRISTOPHER

Two weeks after Thanksgiving?

CASSANDRA

Right.

CHRISTOPHER (suddenly very serious)

You can't lie to me, Cassie; I know.

CASSANDRA (her resolve almost cracking)

Oh, for God's sake, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER

Last Thanksgiving, those kids didn't so much as speak to one another for three months after.

CASSANDRA

What do you want?

CHRISTOPHER

I want the truth.

CASSANDRA

What about?

CHRISTOPHER

What that doctor says.

(She smiles through tears, crosses to him and kisses him on the forehead.)

Dammit, don't kiss me on the forehead. It's like you're taking my temperature.

(He looks up and they kiss on the lips.)
That's better. When did you say the kids were coming?

CASSANDRA

I told you, I don't know.

(He picks the paper up, then sets the paper down and rises.)

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I'm gonna get cleaned up; unless you wanna go first.

CASSANDRA

No, I can wait. What about your cereal?

CHRISTOPHER

I told you I wasn't hungry.

(He crosses toward the bedrooms and exits.
She picks up the bowl, crosses to the kitchen
and places it in the sink. There is a knock
on the door. It opens and MISS STASSE, late
80s, a community matriarch, pokes her head in.)

MISS STASSE

Yoo hoo, is everyone decent?

CASSANDRA

As decent as we'll ever be.

MISS STASSE

Well, you'd better be, cause I'm comin' in.

CASSANDRA

Well, come on then.

(Miss Stasse, wearing a brightly-colored
but well-worn caftan, a plastic flower in
her hair and lots of noisy costume jewelry,
enters, carrying a tray of Danishes. She
crosses without a word to the table and sets
them down. Cassandra watches with feigned annoyance.)

What's that you've brought over?

MISS STASSE

Oh, just something for when the kids get here.

CASSANDRA

Honey, you didn't—

MISS STASSE

I wanted to.

(She crosses to Cassandra.)

Anyway, you don't want to be cooking when they get here, you want to visit.

(She takes the younger woman by the hand

and leads her back to the table and sits
her down.)

Now you just relax and have a Danish.

(She picks one up and hands it to her and
then crosses back to the kitchen where she
happily busies herself.)

Do your kids drink coffee?

CASSANDRA

They will if you make it.

(She takes a bite out of the Danish.)

This is good. Who made it?

MISS STASSE

Sam. I got him a job in the bakery at the DV Mart.

CASSANDRA

How did you manage that?

MISS STASSE (chuckles)

Well, the manager owed me a favor.

CASSANDRA

Just the one?

MISS STASSE

A few but I let him off easy.

CASSANDRA

How's he working out?

MISS STASSE

So far, so good.

CASSANDRA

I guess that's why I haven't seen him for awhile. How is he?

(Miss Stasse stops what she is doing. There
is a pause before she answers and then goes
back to work.)

MISS STASSE

Well, he's Sam.

CASSANDRA

Oh, I know how you feel.

MISS STASSE

How is Alan?

CASSANDRA

Well, he behaved himself at Thanksgiving, mostly. I think he was mad that Sam
didn't come over.

(Having finished filling an old percolator with coffee and water, Miss Stasse places it on the stove, crosses back to the table and sits while speaking.)

MISS STASSE

Sam had just started his new job and I... didn't want him getting upset.

(She picks up a Danish and examines it suspiciously.)

CASSANDRA

I understand. He's a good baker.

MISS STASSE

His mother was a good cook, is what I'm told.

CASSANDRA

What do you hear from her?

(Miss Stasse looks at the Danish while speaking.)

MISS STASSE

Nothing, she's not coming back. Even Sam knows that by now.

(She takes a bite of her Danish.)

These are good.

(She wipes her mouth.)

MISS STASSE (Cont.)

That reminds me, I saw Sam at the store with your sandwiches. He should be here any minute. What time is Alan due?

CASSANDRA

Not for awhile.

MISS STASSE

Good.

(She rises suddenly.)

I've got some errands to run. I'll be back later.

(Cassandra rises. They embrace.)

CASSANDRA

You're still protecting Sam, aren't you?

(Miss Stasse crosses to the door while speaking.)

MISS STASSE

Well, I try. See ya. Let me know when Alan gets here.

CASSANDRA

I will. Will it be all right if they see each other?

MISS STASSE

I think so. Does Alan know why they've been asked back?

CASSANDRA

No, we haven't told him.

MISS STASSE

But the other kids know?

CASSANDRA

Yeah. We told Alan his father had a big announcement to make.

MISS STASSE

You like to protect him too, don't you?

CASSANDRA

Well, I try.

(Miss Stasse exits. Cassandra sits. Christopher, dressed in dirty overalls, enters. They catch each other's eyes for a moment and then he heads for the door but is stopped by the sound of his wife's voice just as he is reaching for a cap.)

Where are you going?

CHRISTOPHER

I'm gonna go work on that truck.

CASSANDRA

No, I don't want you to... I don't want you dirty when the kids come.

CHRISTOPHER

Hell, I won't get dirty. I didn't last time.

(She rises.)

CASSANDRA

Yes you did. You were filthy.

CHRISTOPHER

That's not how I remember it.

CASSANDRA

Oh it isn't?

(She crosses to him. When she reaches him she takes his hands in hers and pulls him down so they are at eye level.)

You sure about that?

CHRISTOPHER

Sure.

CASSANDRA

Because I remember everyone waiting on you to take a shower and get into clean clothes.

CHRISTOPHER

You made a fuss.

CASSANDRA

You were filthy.

CHRISTOPHER

I was—

CASSANDRA

--now don't argue with me. The kids'll be here.

CHRISTOPHER

All right, I'll go change.

(He crosses sadly toward the bedrooms. She returns to the table and sits.)

Is Alan coming?

CASSANDRA

Yes, dear.

CHRISTOPHER (suddenly happy)

Good. He can help me with the truck, like he used to.

CASSANDRA

When?

CHRISTOPHER

When he was a kid.

CASSANDRA

No, dear, that was Alexandra.

CHRISTOPHER (confused)

Was it?

CASSANDRA

I think I know the difference between our daughter and our son.

(Here his demeanor takes on the quality of a petulant child.)

CHRISTOPHER

All right, dammit, I'm not one of your children.

CASSANDRA

I know.

CHRISTOPHER

So don't talk to me like that. I'm a grown up man.

CASSANDRA

I'm sorry dear.

CHRISTOPHER

Now, what is it I used to do with Alan?

CASSANDRA

Hiking.

CHRISTOPHER (suddenly happy again)

That's right, what about Arthur?

CASSANDRA

What?

CHRISTOPHER

Arthur, what did I used to do with him?

(She thinks about this.)

CASSANDRA

I can't remember.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh?

(He is about to exit when she speaks.)

CASSANDRA

Arthur always kept to himself.

CHRISTOPHER

Did he?

CASSANDRA

Always staring up at those stars.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, it'll be nice to see 'em again, even so soon after Thanksgiving. Why did you say they was comin' back so soon?

CASSANDRA

I didn't. I think Alexandra has some sort of announcement to make.

CHRISTOPHER

All right... I must be getting old timer's disease, my memory isn't for—

CASSANDRA

Just go get dressed up nice, will you dear?

CHRISTOPHER

All right.

(He exits. After a few moments there is a very soft rapping at the door. Cassandra reacts as if she thinks she has heard something but is not sure. She disregards the sound until it is heard again, this a little more insistent. Now she stands and looks about, curious as to what she may or may not have heard. It happens a third time and now she correctly identifies the source of the sound. She speaks to the door without rising from her seat)

CASSANDRA

Sam, is that you?

SAM (offstage quietly)

What?

CASSANDRA

It that you Sam?

(She continues speaking while crossing to the door.)

Must be, I can't hear a word you're saying.

SAM (offstage quietly)

What?

CASSANDRA

Nothing, why didn't you come on in?

(She opens the door and finds SAM, late 20, wearing jeans, a t-shirt and a baseball cap, laden with boxes.)

Oh. How did you knock?

(In lieu of reply he sticks one foot out.)

CASSANDRA (Cont.)

Oh, well come on in.

SAM

Is it all right?

CASSANDRA

Of course it is, come on in.

(In what is a well-known ritual he scrapes his shoes on the welcome mat four times each, alternating between his right and left foot and counting under his breath as he does. He then steps inside but stops just within the cabin.)

OK?

SAM

That's fine, Sam, come on in.

CASSANDRA

Where?

SAM

In the kitchen.

CASSANDRA

(He crosses to the kitchen but is careful not to turn his back on Cassandra until he has to place his boxes on the kitchen counter. We see that he is a nervous, wiry young man, but with a lot of wounded child left in him.)

Thank you—

(He turns about suddenly, as if startled.)

What?

SAM

I said thank you.

CASSANDRA

Oh.

SAM

(She makes a move toward him but stops when he flinches.)

Sorry.

CASSANDRA

What?

SAM

I didn't mean to startle you.

CASSANDRA

OK.

SAM

(She sits at the kitchen table.)

So thanks again for bringing over the sandwiches.

CASSANDRA

Oh, sure.

SAM

CASSANDRA

Can I get you something, some water or juice?

SAM

No, I, no.

CASSANDRA

Why don't you take one of the sandwiches?

SAM

No.

CASSANDRA

Who made them?

SAM

I did.

CASSANDRA (smiling coyly)

But you won't eat one? That seems a bit suspicious.

SAM

What? No, ma'am, they're fine, I washed my hands and everything.

(She realizes with horror that her attempt at humor has failed.)

CASSANDRA

I'm kidding.

SAM

Oh... I should go.

CASSANDRA

Are you sure? Can't you wait? Mr. Barrett is getting dressed. He'll be sorry he missed you.

SAM

Work.

CASSANDRA

Oh, well, go ahead.

(He crosses back to the door, again making certain not to turn his back on her. He opens the door and is almost out when she rises, crosses toward the doorway to the bedrooms, then turns to Sam while she speaks.)

Come back when you get off work. Alan will be here.

(This freezes Sam. Now he divides his attention between Cassandra and the outdoors.)

You didn't get to see him at Thanksgiving.

SAM

No.

CASSANDRA

That's too bad. You two were real close.

SAM

Yeah.

CASSANDRA

But it's been awhile... since you've seen him... it's been awhile.

SAM

Yeah.

CASSANDRA (after a pause)

He misses you.

SAM

Yeah?

CASSANDRA

He told me, the last time he was here.

SAM

Me too.

CASSANDRA

Come on by when you get off work, won't you?

SAM

Is it OK?

CASSANDRA

Of course.

(He smiles for the first time and then, just as quickly, the smile is gone. He exits, letting the door slam behind him. Cassandra sits again.)

Christopher, now dressed nattily for the day, nice jeans, a dress shirt emblazoned in an American flag motif, a belt paired with suspenders, a bolo tie, enters and crosses to the table.)

CHRISTOPHER (while crossing)

Who was that?

CASSANDRA

Sam.

CHRISTOPHER

What did he want?

(She indicates the groceries.)

CASSANDRA

The sandwiches.

(He crosses to them while speaking.)

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, did you pay for 'em?

(She lets a sort of oh shit look cross her face. He throws his hands up in disgust.)

CASSANDRA

Shoot, I forgot.

CHRISTOPHER

Dammit, Cassie.

CASSANDRA

I'm sorry.

(He begins searching.)

CHRISTOPHER

It's not as if the boy needs any help screwing up.

CASSANDRA

What are you looking for?

CHRISTOPHER

The phone.

(He continues his search. She reaches out in front of her, picks the cordless phone up from its place on the table and lifts it high over her head. He looks at it in disbelief for a moment and then takes it from her and begins dialing.)

CASSANDRA

If you'd look-

(He finishes dialing and holds up his hand to stop her from talking, a move she does not appreciate.)

CHRISTOPHER

Is this the market? Is George there? George. The manager.

CASSANDRA

George doesn't work there anymore.

CHRISTOPHER

Hold on, what are you saying?

CASSANDRA

George doesn't work there anymore, he retired years ago; you know that.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh.

(Into the phone.)

Well, who's in charge down there? You are? Listen, your boy Sam—

CASSANDRA

He's not a boy—

CHRISTOPHER (to Cassandra)

Shhh.

(Into the phone.)

Your boy Sam, uh, oh, my name's Barrett, Chris Barrett, been coming to your store for, longer than I care to remember.

CASSANDRA

Dear?

(Christopher pulls the phone away from his ear.)

CHRISTOPHER

What is it?

CASSANDRA

Can you get to the point?

CHRISTOPHER

Can you stop interrupting me?

(Into the phone.)

Anyway, your boy Sam just brought us a delivery and my wife forgot to pay him.

(He turns his back on her and continues.)

No, it's not the boy's fault, it's the wife's.

(She reacts badly to this statement and to the next.)

You know how they can be. Well, I'll come down.

CASSANDRA

I'll do it.

CHRISTOPHER

I said my wife'll come down tomorrow.

CASSANDRA

Today.

CHRISTOPHER

I said my wife'll come down today and take care of that.

(He makes a point of looking at his wife.)

Is that OK?

(He listens for a few moments.)

OK, then.

(With the press of a button he hangs up phone and hands it to his wife without looking at her. He turns his attention to the sandwich box and begins a futile attempt to open the box.)

CASSANDRA

What are you doing?

CHRISTOPHER

Tryin' to get a sandwich.

CASSANDRA

I thought you weren't hungry.

CHRISTOPHER

I changed my mind.

(He gives up, slamming the box on the counter in defeat.)

Dammit.

(She crosses to him. She feels his forehead. He pulls away.)

CASSANDRA

Why are you cranky all of a sudden?

CHRISTOPHER

I've been thinkin'.

(He lets her lead him back to the table and sit him down.)

CASSANDRA

What have you been thinking about?

CHRISTOPHER

About the kids comin' over so soon after Thanksgiving.

CASSANDRA

What about it?

CHRISTOPHER

Well, I just got the feelin' it's got somethin' to do with me.

CASSANDRA

You?

CHRISTOPHER (touching his sore spot)

And that thing they cut out of me last week.

(She crosses to the sandwiches.)

CASSANDRA

What kind of sandwich do you want?

CHRISTOPHER

Knock it off, will you?

CASSANDRA

I know; we should wait till the kids get here.

CHRISTOPHER

Will you knock it off?

CASSANDRA

I'll have one too.

CHRISTOPHER

Dammit, will you knock it off and talk to me?

CASSANDRA

What do you want me to say?

CHRISTOPHER

Come here.

(She crosses to him. He reaches out,
while still sitting, wraps his arms around
her and leans mournfully against her bosom.)

All I want is what I've always wanted from you, the truth.

CASSANDRA

OK.

CHRISTOPHER

Listen, when I was in Japan, the Japs had this thing where, if someone was really sick, like dyin' they wouldn't tell him.

CASSANDRA

Why not?

CHRISTOPHER

They didn't want to make him feel bad.

CASSANDRA

That's nice, I guess.

(He looks up at her.)

CHRISTOPHER

But, listen, you don't gotta worry about my feelings, you know, cause I can take it, if that thing they cut out of me is cancer, I wanna know.

CASSANDRA

You will. You'll find out the same time I find out.

CHRISTOPHER

When?

CASSANDRA

Tomorrow.

CHRISTOPHER

And that's why the kids are comin' back?

(She turns away from him and moves back toward the kitchen.)

CASSANDRA

Yes, that's why.

CHRISTOPHER

OK.

(He gives her bottom a playful smack.)

Thanks.

(She plays at being offended but is done in by her playful smile. She pulls away from him and crosses back to the sandwiches.)

CASSANDRA

What kind of sandwich do you want?

CHRISTOPHER (enjoying the joke)

Jeez, we can't eat those yet.

CASSANDRA

Why not?

CHRISTOPHER

We haven't paid for 'em yet.

(She quickly realizes he is joking.)

CASSANDRA

Great.

(They both react to the sound of a very loud truck pulling up outside.)

CHRISTOPHER

What the hell is that?

CASSANDRA

It must be Alexandra and Devin.

CHRISTOPHER

What are they driving, the space shuttle?

CASSANDRA

Devin's new truck, it's a bit large.

(She begins crossing to the door when ALEXANDRA, early 50s, very thin, very clean, dressed in very clean jeans, a polo shirt and sensible shoes, enters. She crosses to her mother and embraces her briefly but then begins pacing around the room which seems too small to contain her. She fusses with whatever comes within her reach while mother and father watch, trying and failing to get the occasional word in edgewise.)

ALEXANDRA

Are we the first ones here? That's good, I'd hate to think of what kind of mess the boys would make if they got here before me. Listen to me talking, they haven't been the boys for years but they'll always be the boys as far as I'm concerned, especially Alan.

(She suddenly sees her father. They look at each other solemnly.)

I'll always remember him as that helpless little, of course he wasn't always so helpless but that's another matter isn't it. What's in the boxes? Sandwiches? Did you order sandwiches? I don't know why, I brought some food, Devin is unloading the truck. Oh I hope you don't mind I arranged for a motel room for Devin and me and another for Arthur and ALAN; oh I know you'd rather we stay here but there really isn't enough room, we'd spend the entire weekend bumping into each other and of course we'll only be there for sleeping and showering and what have you and I'll never understand why you got this tiny little cracker box. Dad, why don't you go watch Devin unload the truck? You know he's no good without a supervisor.

(Dad crosses to Alexandra while she keeps talking.)

When he passes her she stops him by taking his arm.)

Well, he was always that way, thank God I came along or he'd still be a working trucker and not the owner of the company. Of course if it weren't for you, Dad, there wouldn't have been a company for him to own.

(He hugs her weakly and exits. She pauses long enough to watch him exit before letting her previously frozen smile melt. She turns her wrath on her mother.)

Have you told him why we're coming back so soon? I only ask because I noticed a hesitance when I hugged him, I mean even more than normal. He knows, doesn't he? You told him.

(Mom sits at the table and looks at her daughter sadly.)

You told him, didn't you?

CASSANDRA

It seems like you already know the answer to that.

ALEXANDRA

I thought we agreed—

CASSANDRA

Actually, you agreed—

ALEXANDRA

That we wouldn't tell him until everyone was here.

CASSANDRA

Well, that didn't work out.

ALEXANDRA

I can see that. What happened?

CASSANDRA

He asked me to tell him the truth.

ALEXANDRA

And?

CASSANDRA

So I told him the truth, sometimes that's good in a marriage.

ALEXANDRA

Maybe you should save your marriage lecture for Arthur.

(The door bursts open and in walks DEVIN, early 60s, dressed like a trucker, down to the cap, laden with groceries. He looks at his wife and then his mother-in-law and realizes he is in the wrong place.)

DEVIN

Well, if you guys go hungry anytime soon, it ain't my fault.

ALEXANDRA

Where's Father?

DEVIN

Well, your paw's out looking at my new truck. He was letting me know everything that was wrong about it so I come in here.

ALEXANDRA

You left him outside, alone?

DEVIN

Well I didn't think he'd wander off.

(Alexandra exits quickly, slamming the door behind her. Devin turns his attention to his mother-in-law. He smiles.)

Or get stolen by gypsies. You just can't depend on those gypsies. Hey ma.

(He crosses to his mother-in-law and kisses her on the cheek.)

CASSANDRA

You're too old to call me 'ma.'

(He continues his cross to the kitchen sink.)

DEVIN

I guess. How ya holdin' up?

CASSANDRA

Not bad. Can you give me a lift into town later?

DEVIN

Sure can, course, Alex prolly already brought whatever you need.

CASSANDRA

I had some sandwiches made and I need to pay for them.

DEVIN

I can take care of that.

CASSANDRA

You don't have to.

DEVIN

But I want to.

CASSANDRA

All right.

DEVIN

Well, now you're talking.

(He begins removing items from the grocery bags.)

CASSANDRA

What did my daughter bring this time?

DEVIN

Oh, a little of this and a little of that.

(He finds what he is looking for, a box of crackers, which he carries back to the table.)

CASSANDRA

Does she think we don't have a grocery store here?

DEVIN

Yep, that does seem to be the impression she has.

(He places the box triumphantly in front of her. She lifts it up and examines the thing.)

CASSANDRA

What are these?

DEVIN

Oh, them's the fancy crackers. You have those with cheese.

CASSANDRA

Oh?

DEVIN

I prefer peanut butter.

CASSANDRA

I got you some. Extra creamy, your favorite.

DEVIN

Well, all right Ma.

(The door opens and Alexandra leads her father by the hand into the room.)

CHRISTOPHER

Your daughter is treating me like a child.

DEVIN

I know how you feel.

CHRISTOPHER

Hey, Devin, have you run my trucking company into the ground yet?

DEVIN

Well, I keep meaning to but something keeps coming up.

(Christopher realizes his daughter is no longer holding his hand, suddenly liberated, he turns and heads for the front door.)

CHRISTOPHER

Don't worry, you'll get to it.

(He exits. Alexandra sighs and follows him.)

DEVIN

I'm gonna go take care of that grocery bill.

CASSANDRA

Right now?

DEVIN

I should prolly get outa your way, family time.

CASSANDRA

You're family.

(He smiles and exits, leaving Cassandra alone. She sighs and frowns. She stands as if she wants to do something but then

immediately sits down again, seemingly

utterly defeated by the world. She covers her face with her hands and lets out a long, slow, pitiful sigh. We hear the very large truck drive away. Alexandra enters and Cassandra, hearing her daughter come in, seems to put on a more cheery demeanor.)

ALEXANDRA

Father is going into town with Devin, I think he just wants a chance to drive that big new truck of Devin's and talk his ear off about the company and how he built it up from but that's fine because it'll give us a chance to talk about how we're going to keep everyone organized and what do you mean he asked you to tell you the truth so you told him?

CASSANDRA

Just what I told you, he was very upset, he doesn't like being lied to.

ALEXANDRA

Liars never do.

CASSANDRA

What are you talking about?

(Alexandra crosses to the table and sits.)

ALEXANDRA

Nothing Mother, it doesn't matter, we're not talking about that, we're talking about you telling father the truth. Did you tell him the whole truth?

CASSANDRA

I told him as much as he needed to know.

ALEXANDRA

So he doesn't know--

CASSANDRA

No. And I'd appreciate it if it stayed that way.

ALEXANDRA

Well I don't know, Mother, what if he asks me to tell him the truth?

CASSANDRA

Do you think that's very likely?

ALEXANDRA (after a pause)

No.

(Cassandra indicates the box of crackers on the table.)

CASSANDRA

Can you help me put this stuff away?

ALEXANDRA

I'll do it.

(She picks up the box and crosses to the kitchen sink where she begins putting groceries away, some under the sink and some in the refrigerator, while she and her mother speak.)

CASSANDRA

I know you think your father betrayed you but he didn't. He just did what he thought was best for everyone. You know how old-fashioned he is.

ALEXANDRA

I know.

CASSANDRA

Funny thing is; he thought you were the betrayer.

ALEXANDRA

Really? He sells the company out from under me--

CASSANDRA

And then you marry the man who buys the company--

ALEXANDRA

And he thought I betrayed him.

CASSANDRA

No, he thought you betrayed yourself.

ALEXANDRA

What?

CASSANDRA

Out of spite, I set him straight. He sees now how much you love Devin and the kids. How are they? Where are they?

ALEXANDRA

Off "finding themselves" in college; sometimes I think they went to college out of state just to get away from me.

CASSANDRA

Well, kids'll do that.

ALEXANDRA

Will they?

CASSANDRA

That's what I hear.

(Alexandra remembers something.)

ALEXANDRA

Can I tell you something?

CASSANDRA

Sure.

(She crosses to the table and sits.

Daughter takes mother's hands in hers.)

CASSANDRA (Cont)

What is it?

ALEXANDRA

It's an idea I had, something for Alan and Arthur and I to do for you and father.

CASSANDRA

What is it?

ALEXANDRA

A memory jar.

CASSANDRA

That sounds wonderful, what is it?

ALEXANDRA

Well, Alan and Arthur and I, and you and father can do it as well.

CASSANDRA

Do what?

ALEXANDRA

We all write down memories, each one on a separate piece of paper, and then we put them all in a jar.

CASSANDRA

What kind of memories?

ALEXANDRA

Well, family memories, beautiful family memories.

(Cassandra smiles.)

CASSANDRA

We have had some good times in this family.

(Cassandra leans back, her eyes well with happy tears.)

ALEXANDRA

Some wonderful times, I'll get the kids to write some down too.

CASSANDRA (crying)

I'm doing it right now.

ALEXANDRA

Doing what?

CASSANDRA

Reliving a memory, a wonderful memory.

(Alexandra rises, stands behind her mother.
She places her hands on her mother's shoulders.)

CASSANDRA (Cont.)

The day you were born, happiest day of my life, you were so beautiful, well you still are.

ALEXANDRA

So, do you like it?

CASSANDRA

I love it. It's a wonderful idea. Are Alan and Arthur on board?

ALEXANDRA

Not yet, I thought I'd talk them into it this weekend.

CASSANDRA

Well, you'd better hurry up; you're running out of time.

(Alexandra leans forward and wraps
her arms around her mother's shoulders.)

Well, calm down, it's not as bad as all that.

ALEXANDRA

Of course not.

(She kisses the side of her mother's
face.)

When are the boys getting here?

CASSANDRA

The bachelors? I don't know.

(Alexandra sits again.)

ALEXANDRA

They are both bachelors, now that Arthur's divorce is final. That's too bad.

CASSANDRA

It wasn't meant to be.

ALEXANDRA

What did he see in her?

CASSANDRA

He loved her.

ALEXANDRA

Did she love him?

CASSANDRA

Who knows?

ALEXANDRA

Did you and Father ever think about getting divorced?

CASSANDRA

Never... What about you and Devin?

ALEXANDRA

Yeah, but we didn't. Do you think Alan will ever get married?

CASSANDRA

No.

ALEXANDRA

Why not?

CASSANDRA

You know.

ALEXANDRA

What do you think about that?

CASSANDRA

It's not the life I'd choose for him but I don't think it's the life he'd choose for himself either. All I know is when he's with someone he's happy and when he's happy I'm happy.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING: The same, later that afternoon.

AT RISE: ARTHUR BARRETT, late 40s, the oldest son of Christopher and Cassandra, sits at the table writing in a notepad. He wears kakis, a short sleeved work shirt and a bland tie. He makes use of reading glasses. There is an advanced-looking calculator in front of him which he makes liberal use of. As is his habit, while he is working, he ignores most people who try to talk to him, including his older sister, who enters from outside and tries to engage him in a conversation. As is her wont, she paces. She ends up standing between her brother and the doorway leading to the bedrooms.

ALEXANDRA

So, where do you think that brother of yours is? Not that he's only your brother; I mean he's my brother too. I just wonder what's taking him so long to get here. I mean he's got the least amount of miles to travel to get here, I think. Anyway, I'm a little worried about him. Remember that, I don't know, I really wouldn't call it a car, that thing he was driving two weeks ago? I think if it hit anything larger than a Doberman it would lose. Arthur?

ARTHUR

What?

ALEXANDRA

Do you think he's afraid of me?

(This forces Arthur to stop writing and put his pencil down. Cassandra appears unseen in the doorway leading to the bedrooms.)

ARTHUR

What?

ALEXANDRA

Do you think Alan is afraid of me? I only ask that because it seems whenever we get together he seems to avoid me like the plague. He always manages to be somewhere I'm not and when I do get a chance to talk to him I can barely get more than two words out of him at any one time.

ARTHUR

Really?

ALEXANDER

I've never understood him, how many times have we offered to help him and he always refuses. It's like he'd rather be homeless than accept help from us, it's like he—

CASSANDRA

Doesn't trust us.

(This stops Alexandra in her tracks and forces Arthur to finally look up from his notepad.)

ALEXANDRA

Why not? What possible reason could he have not to trust his family?

CASSANDRA (entering)

You know why.

(She crosses to the kitchen. Her daughter follows.)

ALEXANDRA

We did not send him away.

CASSANDRA

We didn't stop it either.

ALEXANDRA

Well, that's just stupid. I'm sorry Mother but it's just stupid. After, well, after, well, after, he had to be sent away; he had to get that help.

CASSANDRA

Did it help him?

ALEXANDRA

It was better than the alternative. Don't you think? I mean either way he was going away, better a hospital than a prison, don't you think?

(Cassandra replies with silence.
Alexandra turns to her brother.)

Well?

ARTHUR

Sure.

(She leans over him, pulls the notepad out from under his nose and slams it down on the table a foot and half in front of him.)

ALEXANDRA

I need you to think about this.

(He retrieves the notepad.)

ARTHUR

Why?

(She grabs it again and slams it back on the Table, now further away from her brother.)

ALEXANDRA

Because you were his big brother and I was his big sister and maybe that didn't mean anything to either one of us but maybe it should have, maybe we did everything we could but maybe we didn't.

(He tries again to retrieve his work.)

ARTHUR

So?

(She takes it out of his hand even as he is retrieving it and slams it down.)

ALEXANDRA

So it's something we ought to think about.

ARTHUR

Why? So when it happens again we'll do it right?

ALEXANDRA

You know what I mean.

(He leans back and looks at her.)

ARTHUR

No, I don't. Life is not like golf. There are no mulligans.

(He crosses to the front door.)

I'll be outside helping Dad wait for Alan.

(He exits.)

ALEXANDRA

All right.

(She turns to her mother, who is cleaning a countertop.)

What do you think?

CASSANDRA

I agree with your brother.

(Alexandra crosses to her mother and embraces her. Cassandra does not look from her cleaning.)

ALEXANDRA

It wasn't all bad, was it?

CASSANDRA

Of course not.

ALEXANDRA

Remember that time we rented a cabin up in Big Bear? We woke up early every day, you can't help but wake up early in the mountains. That's what father said and we took long walks in the woods and went fishing on the lake and at

ALEXANDRA (Cont.)

night we sat outside and watched the stars and we all decided that if we could live up there all the time we would.

CASSANDRA

I remember that.

ALEXANDRA

And remember the way father took Arthur and I out to farm country to teach us how to drive? Did he know we both got driver's education in high school? I don't think he cared, he just wanted to be the one to teach us, nearly scared us both to death is what he did, out there among the dill fields and orange groves of Irvine.

(She thinks about this.)

You know, they're all gone now.

CASSANDRA

What are?

ALEXANDRA

All the fields and farms in Irvine, they're all gone. It's all houses and stores and people now.

CASSANDRA

How did that happen?

ALEXANDRA

Progress.

CASSANDRA

So that's why?

ALEXANDRA

That's why I want us to do the memory jar, so all the good times we've had and all our good memories can keep living, no matter what happens, those good times.

CASSANDRA

That's a good thought.

(Alexandra kisses her mother's shoulder.)

ALEXANDRA

I'm going to go outside.

(She crosses to the front door.)

Help everyone wait for Alan.

(She exits. Cassandra lets out a sigh as if she were holding extra air in her lungs and was finally able to expel it. She crosses to the table and sits. There is a knock at the door. She speaks without looking up.)

CASSANDRA

Come on in, Sam.

SAM

Is it OK?

CASSANDRA

Of course it is, come in.

(The door opens. He scrapes his feet on the welcome mat four times for each foot, alternating left and right and then steps across the threshold but stops just inside the door. Cassandra speaks without looking at Sam.)

Come in all the way.

(He crosses to the table.)

Sit down.

(He does.)

Did Devin stop by the market?

SAM

Yes, ma'am.

CASSANDRA

I'm sorry I didn't pay you when you were here.

SAM

That's all right.

CASSANDRA

I hope I didn't get you in trouble.

(She reaches out to lightly touch his hand, which is resting on the table but he pulls it away.)

SAM

No, ma'am. I just won't be making any more deliveries for awhile.

CASSANDRA

I'm sorry.

SAM

I like working in the store better.

CASSANDRA

Well, that's nice. Are you here to see Alan?

No ma'am.

SAM

He's not here yet.

CASSANDRA

I know.

SAM

What brings you down?

CASSANDRA

I, uh, wanted to let you know I took tomorrow off so I could spend some time with Alan, when he gets here, if you want me to.

SAM

Of course.

CASSANDRA

If it's OK.

SAM

You're family. You and Miss Stasse are family.

CASSANDRA

Thanks. What time should I come over tomorrow?

SAM

Whenever you want.

CASSANDRA

OK.

SAM

(He stands.)
Should I call first?

CASSANDRA

Sam, I've long since resigned myself to the fact that this is a "don't call first" town.

SAM

What?

CASSANDRA

Just come on over, bring your mom.

SAM

My what?

CASSANDRA

Bring Miss Stasse.

SAM

OK.

(He crosses to the front door and exits.
Cassandra rises, seemingly determined to get
something done. She then looks around, suddenly
loses all sense of forward momentum, and sits.
She lets out a long, slow, sigh. Alexandra enters.)

ALEXANDRA

He's almost here.

CASSANDRA

Who?

ALEXANDRA

Alan. He's driving up the dirt road.

(She exits. Cassandra rises, straightens herself
up a bit, pushes chairs toward the table and
crosses to the door. Alexandra sticks her head
in the door.)

ALEXANDRA

Wait, he's stopped.

CASSANDRA

What do you mean, he's stopped?

ALEXANDRA

He's stopped alongside Sam's car.

(She looks down the road and then is back.)

I think they're talking.

(She looks again and is back.)

He's moving again. He'll be here soon.

CASSANDRA

That's nice, dear.

(Alexandra steps into the house and closes
door behind her.)

ALEXANDRA

Aren't you excited?

(Cassandra takes her daughter by the hand and
pulls the younger woman away from the front door.)

CASSANDRA

I think you're excited enough for the both of us.

ALEXANDRA

This is family; don't you know how important that is?

CASSANDRA

More and more, every day.

(We hear a sickly automobile pulling up to the house. Alexandra tries to pull away but Cassandra will not let her go.)

Let me give you some advice. Never compare your children's lives, one to the other.

Why not?
ALEXANDRA

Because—
CASSANDRA

(A commotion is heard outside.)

He's here.
ALEXANDRA

I know.
CASSANDRA

(Alexandra tries to cross to the door but is stopped by her mother.)

You know why I'm excited.
ALEXANDRA

He told me he'll have some sort of announcement.
CASSANDRA

Did he tell you what it was?
ALEXANDRA

No, you?
CASSANDRA

No. What if he's finally turned himself around?
ALEXANDRA

What if he's just accepted that the direction he's going is the direction he's going to keep going?
CASSANDRA

(Alexandra does not have an answer for this. Fortunately, the door opens and ALAN, early 30s, looking like nothing if not a poorly made bed or a recently cleaned-up drug addict, enters, followed by his father, older brother and brother-in-law. He wears worn jeans, an old t-shirt under a pendleton shirt and a head band over long, unkempt but clean hair. He smiles and spreads his arms wide like a magician about to say "ta-da.")

ALAN

Hey, look who's not dead yet.

CASSANDRA

There he is.

(She crosses to him and embraces him. He kisses her cheek.)

ALAN

How are you?

CASSANDRA

Good.

ALEXANDRA

Did you have some news for us?

(He breaks away from his mother and crosses to his sister. Christopher crosses to table and sits.)

ALAN

You know I do Zandra.

CASSANDRA

What is it?

ALAN

I finally figured out what I want to do with my life.

CHRISTOPHER

What is it?

ALAN

I'm going to be a folk singer.

(There is a dead silence while the family takes this in. It is ended when Alexandra speaks.)

ALEXANDRA

A lot of money in that?

ALAN

I don't know.

ALEXANDRA

You don't know?

ALAN

I don't care.

ALEXANDRA

Of course not.

(She and her mother exchange looks.)

ALAN

I'm just getting started. I'm waiting tables at a coffee house and, in between espressos I play guitar and sing and I'm working on a CD of songs I wrote and Mr. Patel told me when I'm finished I can sell them at the—

ALEXANDRA

Who's Mr. Patel?

ALAN

He's my boss but I didn't tell you the best part.

ALEXANDRA

There's a best part?

(More mother-daughter glances.)

ALAN

I'm out of the shelter. I've got my own place.

(Suddenly silence again.)

CASSANDRA

Shelter?

ALAN

I've got my own place now, well, it's sort of my own place, it's an apartment behind the coffee house and Mr. Patel lets me stay there so I can uh, keep an eye on the place, cause it's uh in a really bad neighborhood.

CASSANDRA

You were in a shelter?

ALAN

Just for a little while, actually it was more of a halfway house after I got out of... did I forget to tell you that?

(More silence, ended when Christopher reaches up, takes his son by the hand and pulls him to the table where the young man sits. They smile at each other like they were once thick as thieves.)

CHRISTOPHER

So, folk music, what do you play?

ALAN

Guitar.

CHRISTOPHER (smiling)

Oh, like Woody.

ALAN

Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER

How ya doin', kid?

ALAN

I'm good. How are you doin', Pops?

ALEXANDRA

Pops?

CHRISTOPHER

I'm good. You and Sam have a little chat, did ya?

ALAN

Uh, yeah, yeah, he's gonna come by and see us all tomorrow, if that's all right.

CASSANDRA

Of course it's all right.

ALAN

That's what I told him.

CASSANDRA

Why does he keep asking?

ALAN

Something about this place must make him nervous.

CHRISTOPHER

You wanna take a walk after we eat?

ALAN

Sure, I'd like that.

(Alexandra clears her throat.)

Unless Zandra has other plans.

(Alexandra moves forward to a spot at the table between Alan and his father. Somewhere during the following interchange, Arthur sits at the table opposite Alan and takes up his work again, Cassandra moves to her husband's side and Devin backs away, taking up a spot on the far side of the room, in order to take in the whole scene from a safe distance.)

ALEXANDRA

As a matter of fact, I thought we could talk about an idea I had. It's called a memory jar.

CHRISTOPHER

What's a memory jar?

ALEXANDRA

A jar full of memories.

ALAN

Not something that makes you remember something?

ALEXANDRA

Well, it can help you remember things, too. How it works, see, is we all write down memories on little slips of paper and put them in a big jar.

ALAN

And then what?

ALEXANDRA

We give it to Mom and Dad.

ALAN

And then what?

ALEXANDRA

Then, when they are sitting around the house they can pass the time pulling memories out of the jar and reliving them.

ALAN

OK.

ALEXANDRA

And then--

ALAN

Why do they need the jar?

ALEXANDRA

I don't understand the question?

ALAN

It's their lives we're talking about; they were there for most of them.

ALEXANDRA

Not necessarily.

ALAN

I don't know what--

ALEXANDRA

Well, of course, Dad was retired when you were born so you don't remember all the times he was out on the road.

ALAN

And that's a memory you want to include in the jar?

ALEXANDRA
No.

ALAN
Then why'd you bring it up?

ALEXANDRA
To prove a point.

ALAN
What point?

ALEXANDRA
I don't know.

ALAN
OK, never mind that, what memories should we include in this jar?

ALEXANDRA
Well, let me think. I know, Arthur, you remember this.

(Arthur, again working in his notepad,
looks up briefly but then continues.)

ALEXANDRA (cont.)
No matter how busy he was, dad always arranged to make it home Christmas eve.
Sometimes we'd wait up all night just listening for the sound of his big rig.

ALAN
That's a really nice memory.

ALEXANDRA
Yes, it—

ALAN
Has nothing to do with me.

ALEXANDRA
That's not my fault.

ALAN
I'm not saying it's your fault.

ALEXANDRA
What are you saying?

ALAN
Just that it's not one of my memories. I wasn't there.

ALEXANDRA
So it's a memory that Arthur and I share.

ALAN
But not me.

ALEXANDRA

So you feel left out?

ALAN

No, I, forget it.

ALEXANDRA

No, I want to know what you're talking about.

ALAN

I'm talking about a fundamental flaw in your idea, this idea about family memories

ALEXANDRA

Which is?

ALAN

There are no family memories, there are memories that you have, and Mom and Dad have, and Arthur has, and I have, but there are no memories that we all have. Even things we all did together we don't have the same memories of.

ALEXANDRA

I still don't know what your point is.

ALAN

I guess not

(Christopher rises. He pulls his son to a standing position. He is clearly annoyed.)

CHRISTOPHER

Come on, Alan, let's go for a walk.

ALAN

OK pops.

(They cross to the door and exit. Just before he exits, Alan turns just in time to see Alexandra shove his chair in. Arthur, looking up from his work, smiles as they leave and then turns suddenly on his sister.)

ARTHUR

What is wrong with you?

ALEXANDRA

Now you have something to say?

ARTHUR

Why do you let him bait you like that?

ALEXANDRA

You remember. When dad would come home on Christmas Eve and we would wait up and listen for his semi.

ARTHUR

I guess.

ALEXANDRA

You guess?

ARTHUR

Well, I was kind of young when he quit the road, starting running the company full-time.

ALEXANDRA

So you think he's right.

ARTHUR

You know, I really don't like trick questions.

(He exits out the front door.)

ALEXANDRA

What's that supposed to mean?

(She turns to Devin who looks at her and then

Looks at the front door.)

DEVIN

What? Yeah, I'm coming. Gotta go, must be something with the truck.

(Alexandra is left alone with her mother.)

ALEXANDRA

What should I do? At least I'm making an effort to remember good things, to accept that good things happened in this family, at least I'm making an effort to remember the times he came home and not all the times he was gone. You know, Alan never had to put up with that, did he, never had to deal with a father—

(Cassandra takes Arthur's chair while she interrupts her daughter.)

CASSANDRA

Or a husband—

ALEXANDRA

—who was on the road 300 days a year, at least I'm trying to remember the times he wasn't gone, the times we didn't worry about him.

CASSANDRA (suddenly lost in the past)

That blizzard he drove through.

(Alexandra sits opposite her mother as she

speaks.)

ALEXANDRA

We stayed up all night waiting to hear he had made it through.

CASSANDRA

Best phone call I ever got, made me smile.

ALEXANDRA

Made you cry.

CASSANDRA

No, just smile.

ALEXANDRA

Well, Arthur was there.

CASSANDRA

No, Arthur was asleep. He was only six or seven.

ALEXANDRA

Oh.

(She turns away from her mother.)

CASSANDRA

Don't start pouting.

ALEXANDRA

I wasn't—

CASSANDRA

Does it matter?

ALEXANDER

Does what matter?

CASSANDRA

If Alan doesn't take part in this memory jar.

ALEXANDRA

He needs to be part of this family.

CASSANDRA

Why?

ALEXANDRA

He was in a shelter.

(Cassandra leans forward and looks deeply at her daughter.)

CASSANDRA

Still trying to save him?

ALEXANDRA

Who?

CASSANDRA

Your brother, what are trying to save him from? That terrible day?

ALEXANDRA

Yes.

CASSANDRA

You know, he doesn't even believe it happened.

(Alexandra turns to face her mother.)

ALEXANDRA

You don't mean—

CASSANDRA

He thinks it's a dream.

ALEXANDRA

Why would he think that?

CASSANDRA

Because it's easier.

(Alexandra is about to speak when Devin bursts in.)

DEVIN

Something's wrong with Paw.

CASSANDRA

What's wrong?

DEVIN

He collapsed. We called 911.

(He exits. Cassandra crosses to the door and exits, leaving Alexandra alone. She tries to rise but falls back into the chair. Alan, looking like he's just gotten the shock of his life, enters, crosses to the table, and sits.)

ALEXANDRA

What happened?

ALAN

I don't know, Zandra, we were walking and talking and the next thing I knew he was on the ground, and he couldn't breathe, I mean he was breathing, but it wasn't easy.

ALEXANDRA

What did you do?

ALAN

I