

ALLIGATORS

by

Carol Roper

© Carol Roper 2005

Cast Of Characters

DREW HOBART: Early forties, a corporate tax attorney. The weight of all those corporate secrets make him seem older.

WILLI: the live-in nurse. In her 20's, cheerful to a fault

JACK TUCKER: seventies. Andy and Lily's stepfather. He drinks a lot.

BETTY TUCKER: Larry and Lily's mother, in her 70's.

ALYSE HOBART: 30's, unconventional. A documentary film-maker, there to record her mother's demise.

WEST: A rugged, man with an ageless quality. Alligators are his calling.

Scene

A clapboard house along a Maryland river.

Time

October. Present day.

SCENE I

The screened and glass, patio room of the clapboard house faces the river (the audience). The inhabitants are apparently fond of yellow, as it is the dominant color. A Bamboo sectional takes up a corner, in front of it is a cocktail table to with magazines, and a phone. A portable bar, nearby, well-stocked. To the rear, doors that lead to a living room, and upstairs bedroom. Once a second home, it is now a primary residence, and empty at the moment.

The patio door opens and DREW HOBART enters, in his thirties/forties, a business suit, hair askew, mouth dry, canvas overnight bag slung over his shoulder, a harried look on his face.

DREW

Hullo? Mother? Jack?

(HE steps in, the patio door slams behind him; he jumps, startled)

Jesus! Nice welcome.

(The noise does not bring anyone; HE drops the canvas bag, flips out his cell phone. We HEAR a musical tone. Talks to the phone.)

Service? Come on. Come on work. Roam? No service? Why? This is not the end of the world

(Looks out.)

Although you might be able to see it from here.

(Gives up on cell phone, walks to the rear.)

Mother? Jack?

(Glances at the portable bar. Goes to the telephone, dials a number.)

Of course. Busy. What could go right today?

(HE replaces the receiver, pulls off his tie, stands, stuffs it in his jacket pocket, looks the patio for a sign of life; there is none)

What a place to die.

(He walks off stage to the rear.)

WILLI, enters. SHE wears a floral sundress, is cheerful and gregarious to a fault. SHE carries

wrapped fresh flowers and stuffs them in a vase without water.

DREW enters behind her.)

Who are you?
(SHE shrieks)

DREW

Jesus, God!

WILLI

Sorry to startle you. I'm, Drew Hobart, Mrs. Tucker's son.

DREW

My heart just did a cartwheel.

WILLI

I didn't mean it.

DREW

I know you didn't. Nobody means to frighten another person on purpose.

WILLI

No. Have you seen my mother?

DREW

All the time, I'm her nurse, Willi.

WILLI

Nice to meet you. Where is my mother?

DREW

Isn't she here? She was around here a little while ago, sitting right on that couch reading the paper.

WILLI

No one answers when I call. I don't want to just go barging in upstairs. I mean, in case...I mean I was told it was an emergency.

DREW

Don't worry you won't find her body. She's fine. Back from the hospital.

WILLI

DREW

I've just spent twelve hours on three planes to get here and they're not home.

WILLI

Your mother's really been looking forward to seeing you. It's all she talks about.

DREW

Yes, well that explains the welcome party. Tell me, Willi, do you have any idea where my mother might be?

WILLI

She and Jack are probably out looking for the alligator.

DREW

This is Maryland, there are no alligators.

WILLI

They really like the morning and evening that's the best time for feeding.

DREW

My mother, or the imaginary alligator?

WILLI

It's good you're keeping your sense of humor. Death can be so depressing at times.

DREW

When Jack called me, he was pretty upset. He said she was very sick,

WILLI
(cheerful)

She's at death's door. Lung cancer and it's metzted to the brain, she's a goner. Good thing you came.

DREW

I appreciate your candor.

WILLI

I like death. I'm good at it. Most people try and avoid it, pretend it'll never happen. I help people understand it's the greatest adventure we ever take.

DREW

I'm sure that's a very good way to look at it, but I prefer earthly adventures.

(SHE picks up USA Today, and thumbs through it.)

She hasn't passed away, has she?

WILLI

I don't think so. I'd be the first to know if she did. I'd have to call the coroner.

DREW

The coroner? It's not murder.

WILLI

You don't know much about dying, do you?

DREW

Not as much as you, I'm sure.

WILLI

The government doesn't like it when people die at home. It's hard to keep track of them.

DREW

They're not going anywhere.

WILLI

You're a lawyer, aren't you?

DREW

Yes.

WILLI

Then you understand about paper work.

DREW

Is my mother, is she, in pain?

WILLI

None. That can happen when it's the brain that's affected. Turns off the pain centers.

DREW

Well that's some good news. I wonder if anyone would mind if I made myself a drink?

WILLI

I wouldn't.

(He goes to the bar and makes a martini.)

One for you?
DREW

I'm on duty. Can't drink.
WILLI

Where do you think a woman with a heart condition, respiratory problems, high blood pressure and cancer might be? I mean, if she were lucky?
DREW

Do you believe what you read in the papers?
WILLI
(Puts newspaper down)

It depends.
DREW

We like our stories.
WILLI

My mother?
DREW
(re-directing)

Well, if she's not alligator hunting, she might be having eggplant parmesan at Anthony's Italian Grotto. Your mother really likes Italian food.
WILLI

What I'm wondering is why I was told she only had a few days to live, when it's obviously not true. I mean getting here was a real hassle. I have a job, clients, a family.
DREW

This is your family.
WILLI

(A commotion is heard OUTSIDE)

My foot! Christ, will you be careful?! What the hell are you trying to do to me?
JACK
(O.S.)

Kill you, you son-of-a-bitch.
BETTY
(O.S.)

(The patio door flies open and JACK, who's in his seventies, rolls onto stage in a wheelchair, his foot wrapped in a bandage
DREW grabs JACK's wheelchair to stop him.)

DREW

Jack, what happened to your foot?

JACK

Good question. Ask your mother.

(BETTY, ENTERS. She is in her seventies, a woman who appears to be in uncommonly good health for someone who is supposed to be on her death bed.)

BETTY

DREW! I knew you would be here.

(She pushes Jack's wheelchair out of the way, hurries to embrace DREW. WILLI grabs the wheelchair before it crashes into something.)

I knew you would come because you love me.

DREW

Mom, you look great. Really.

(SHE pulls away.)

BETTY

But I'm not. Tell him, Willi-Nilly.

WILLI

I did, Mrs. Tucker. He knows.

BETTY

It's rotten to be dying and have everyone tell you you look the picture of health.

WILLI

But you do.

BETTY

But I'm not.

JACK

Ah, your mother has been dying for years.

BETTY

Your stepfather won't accept the truth.

JACK

And why should I? What's so great about the truth?

DREW

What happened to your foot?

BETTY

I'll tell you what happened: He's a stupid idiot. He was born stupid and he'll die stupid. That's what happened.

JACK

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

(HE rolls his chair to the bar, withdraws a bottle of whiskey and a glass.)

WILLI

Mrs. Tucker, it's time for me to check your vitals.

BETTY

My eyes are open, I'm breathing.

JACK

Oh, is that what you're doing?

(BETTY starts for his wheelchair.
WILLI stops her.)

WILLI

Mrs. Tucker, calm down. Your mother has very high energy.

BETTY

(to JACK)

I ought to throw you in the river.

JACK

Good idea! You go first and let me know how it is.

(WILLI starts to lead BETTY from the room.)

WILLI

Come to your room and let me check you. And I want to examine your foot when I return, Mr. Tucker.

JACK

I'm waiting with baited breath.

BETTY

(to DREW)

Don't go away, I'll be back. Oh, DREW, I'm so glad you came to save me.

(SHE runs into his arms for a quick embrace
before turning back to WILLI.)

Alright Willi-Nilly, I'm ready.

(THEY exit.)

DREW

(Rubs his forehead)

Why am I here, Jack?

JACK

To save your mother. Didn't you hear her?

DREW

Save her? I'm not a doctor.

JACK

You must be hot.

DREW

A little

JACK

Hotter than hell for October. Should've been snowing by now. Sit down, take a load off. Relax. Have a drink.

(DREW smiles wearily, lifts his glass. JACK looks off the patio toward
the river.)

DREW

Jack, what is going on?

JACK

Your sister's here.

DREW

ALYSE.

JACK

She's making a documentary about your mother's last days.

DREW

Of course, she is. Why did you call me to come?

JACK

Can't you see why?

DREW

No, I can't. I mean, it's crazy. Everybody walking around being weird. That nurse, Willi? Where did you get here? And Mom's dying and everybody's acting like it's a party, or something. Why are you looking at the river?

(JACK turns to DREW)

JACK

Nothing. Well, something, but nothing for now. I called because I need your help. She's driving me crazy. Every second of every minute she needs attention. The nurses quit. All except, Willi. The doctor won't admit her to the hospital. They're tired of her.

DREW

They have to admit her to the hospital if she's dying.

JACK

No, they don't. Dying isn't a disease. The woman doesn't sleep at night. She wakes me up. She wants to go for a drive, she wants a hamburger and fries. The only person in the world who ever got an appetite from chemotherapy.

DREW

She's had chemo?

JACK

Hey, where do you think her hair went? She's Kojak the second without her wigs.

DREW

That's a wig?

JACK

For a college educated guy you don't know much.

DREW

And your ankle?

JACK

Yeah, I was drinking. I'd like to see you take care of her and stay sober.

DREW

So, you were drunk.

JACK

No, Mr. District Attorney, I was not drunk. Your mother slipped and I broke her fall and twisted my ankle.

DREW

(a hand on JACK's shoulder)

I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm tired.

JACK

I thought you were going to bring the family.

DREW

It didn't seem timely.

(BETTY whirls back in the room)

BETTY

I'm hungry. What do you want to eat?

JACK

Steak.

BETTY

Not you

(to DREW adoringly)

DREW

Mom, I'm kind of confused

BETTY

Of course you are. What is it, baby?

DREW

No, I don't mean, I'm personally confused, I mean, I'm confused by the situation.

BETTY
You expected me to be on my death bed?

DREW
No, mom. (yes)

BETTY
The Priest giving last rites?

DREW
I... yes.

BETTY
Are you disappointed? To see your mother looking uncommonly healthy for one who is dying?

DREW
I am delighted to see you up and around.

BETTY
Looks can be deceiving. I could drop dead at any minute. Don't you forget it.

JACK
Keep reminding me. It gives me something to live for.

(WILLI enters.)

WILLI
Mrs. Tucker, your white cells are up. You've cheated death for today.

BETTY
You hear that? Hah! Let's order a pizza.

DREW
(to WILLI)
Should she be eating pizza?

(BETTY picks up the telephone and starts to dial.)

WILLI
Might as well.

BETTY
The condemned woman ate a hearty meal.

JACK

Many hearty meals.

(BETTY throws the telephone at JACK who ducks)

DREW

Mother, for God sakes.

BETTY

I'll kill that bastard!

WILLI

Mrs. Tucker. Remember what we said.

BETTY

What'd we say?

WILLI

You must prepare yourself for the next step. Your body is just a vehicle, an empty vessel for your soul.

DREW

Why are you talking to her that way? Did you train at Satan's Minon's nursing school?

WILLI

Your mother understands what you don't.

BETTY

I understand that I am not dead yet. Jack, on the other hand, has been dead for years.

JACK

Your mother loves to hate me. Combat is her form of communication. I keep you alive, Betty. You should be grateful.

BETTY

I could live very well without you, you mongrel. You call this living? You miserable worm, if it weren't for you I'd have friends. I'd have family who comes to see me. I'd have money. I'd have a life.

(SHE begins to choke. DREW goes to her, helping her towards a chair.)

DREW

Mom, please calm down.

BETTY

Oh, shut up! You're so wishy-washy, you couldn't make a decision and stand by it if your life depended on it. You call yourself a lawyer? A tax accountant, that's all you are. I don't know why you bothered to get a degree. I wanted you to make something of yourself. Someone I could be proud of, another Clarence Darrow.

DREW

If you continue to speak to me this way, I'll leave.

BETTY

(mocking him)

"If you continue to speak. . ."

(HE turns and walks toward the door, reaches it, is opening it and half out before SHE screams)

No, don't leave me! I'll die! I'm scared!

(DREW hesitates. WILLI rushes to BETTY.)

WILLI

Mrs. Tucker, how about a sedative?

JACK

How about one for everybody?

BETTY

(To Willi)

Oh, thank you. How kind you are, Wili-Nilly. How sweet. How young and healthy you are. How strong.

(WILLI helps BETTY off. JACK rolls to DREW who has stayed frozen in the doorway.)

DREW

It's a zoo.

JACK

Hey, Drew, welcome home.

(HE laughs, turns his wheelchair and wheels toward the living room.)

DREW

Christ, I've got to get out of here before they kill me.

(ALYSE, DREW'S sister, an attractive woman in her thirties, ENTERS through outside patio door)

ALYSE

Hello, Drew.

DREW

ALYSE!

ALYSE

I see the war has started without me.

DREW

My God, it's nuts here. I'm so glad to see you.

ALYSE

Are we on hugging terms?

(They embrace her and part.)

DREW

Thank you for being here. I didn't know if you would make it.

ALYSE

I wouldn't miss the greatest adventure we'll ever take.

DREW

Not you, too.

ALYSE

Me, too what?

DREW

The nurse said the same thing... Nevermind. Where have you been hiding?

ALYSE

I'm at the Travelodge. I advise you to do the same. Breakfast is included.

DREW

How long have you been in Maryland?

ALYSE

Forever, but in real time, twenty-four hours.

DREW

You're looking good.

ALYSE

I am good.

(SHE puts a finger in his vest)

And you? Who's your tailor? Ralph Lauren?

DREW

It's just for business. I'm a jeans guy at heart.

(ALYSE notices the flowers. During the following exchange, she unwraps them, goes to the bar, fills vase, arranges flowers.)

DREW

What are you doing?

ALYSE

I don't know. I took my students on a field trip to a nursing home, that is really a euphemism, you know. It's really a warehouse for those society no longer has a no use for.

DREW

Wanda's mother is in a nursing facility and they take very good care of her.

ALYSE

I'm sure that's true, if it's not a county run place. Anyway, there was a woman living there, her name was Elsie, and she was probably ninety, at least that's what she said. While all around her people were in wheelchairs, some frozen in position from strokes Elsie had all these plants she was taking care of on her radiator. Every day she would take different plants to visit the other inmates.

DREW

(sarcastic)

Your students must have loved this trip.

ALYSE

Actually, they got it. The students want to be filmmakers, artists. They wanted an experience outside of their mall life. It was their parents who freaked.

DREW

I'll bet you enjoyed that. You always liked the fringe.

ALYSE

Whoa, Hello? A little invalidation thrown my way , very nice job You manage to insult me and raise yourself at the same time.

DREW

Sorry I didn't mean it the way it sounded.

ALYSE

It was a complement, then? Thank you. How have you been? I hear you're rich.

DREW

No, not really.

ALYSE

Heard you got a sailboat for your birthday.

DREW

Just a small one

ALYSE

How big is small?

DREW

(reluctant)
Forty feet . . .

ALYSE

Forty feet at a thousand dollars a foot, that would be . . .

DREW

Look, Alyse, let's not start this, okay? I have a lot on my mind.

ALYSE

Why is it that people with money never want to talk about it?

DREW

Why is it that people without it, always do? Could we talk about why we're here, instead of our differences?

ALYSE

Well, you're here out of guilt, and I'm here to properly record mother's demise.

DREW

You're kidding? I mean, Jack said something about it, but I thought he was joking.

ALYSE

It was her idea.

DREW

You can't do that.

ALYSE

Why not? She's been preparing for this for years. This is her big chance to be a star.

DREW

Nobody wants to see a video of someone dying.

ALYSE

They do in snuff movies.

DREW

Stop it.

ALYSE

Mother's life has meaning. She believes if we have a document of her dying that she'll live forever. She wants to leave something behind.

DREW

Am I the only sane person in this house?

ALYSE

No, and stop making assumptions about me. You haven't seen me in three years.

DREW

Well, who's fault is that?

ALYSE

First of all, it's not about finding fault, or putting the blame on someone that's an intellectual convenience to let us off the hook. We had an agreement.

DREW

What agreement?

ALYSE

To be there for each other. You dropped me because your wife doesn't like me, doesn't like that we grew up together, have a history that doesn't include her.

(SHE goes to a duffel bag next to the couch and pulls out a video camera.)

DREW

It's just you and Wanda don't like each other because you're so much alike.

ALYSE

Really? I'm a documentary film-maker and Wanda's a pathological liar. I'm missing the connection.

DREW

Try to see this from my point of view.

ALYSE

I am.

DREW

I have a daughter I couldn't do anything to jeopardize her.

ALYSE

And how would spending a weekend with her aunt, put your five year old daughter at risk? I don't use drugs, I'm not a boozer. Kids like me.

DREW

Right now your moral outrage is incidental.

ALYSE

My moral outrage is over-drawn. Everyday there's a new horror that simple common decency could avert, but we seem determined to knock each other off. Eighty million people murdered in the past 100 years, more than in all the centuries of life on earth, killed because we just didn't like them. Genocide. And yet our DNA is the same by fractions.

DREW

I don't how we got from your spending time with Lara to genocide and I'm too tired to think about it.

ALYSE

That's the problem, Drew we're all too tired. Life exhausts us.

DREW

If you could just get off the soap box for one minute.

ALSYE

Hazards of the job, sorry.

DREW

I didn't want to have a fight with Wanda over Lara being with you, okay? I didn't want to spend three days with my wife not speaking to me, and I didn't want to risk that Wanda would take her anger out on our child.

ALYSE

What are you saying?

DREW

That marriage, that life's, a trade off. I don't feel guilty that I have money. I work hard. It's a very stressful job, and I am compensated accordingly.

ALYSE

And "accordingly," would be a hundred times the minimum wage?

DREW

Don't get me started on labor unions.

ALYSE

Don't get me started on child slavery.

DREW

Who are you dating these days, the Reverend Jesse Jackson?

ALYSE

(smiles)

I've missed you, brother.

DREW

Wanda didn't want Lara to go away.

ALYSE

With me. For a weekend. She thought I would taint your child? Fill her with unapproved ideas?

DREW

I'm sorry. I didn't agree with her, but I just didn't want to fight about it. I didn't want Lara growing up the way we did with our parents screaming at each other in the next room.

ALYSE

I used to think they would kill each other.

DREW

I used to think they would kill us. We were just kids and our parents seemed like Gods throwing thunder at each other. I would lay in bed shaking.

ALYSE

I used to come in your room and get under the covers with you, and you would get up and take me back to my room. I was five, you were eleven. You would sit on the end of my bed and tell me pirate stories until I fell asleep. I wanted to be a pirate when I grew up with my own ship. We would be good pirates and rob the rich and help the poor.

DREW

Radical even then. But, I don't remember this. Are you sure it happened? I know nothing about pirates.

ALYSE

You did then. You had an invisible friend, Church, who had been a pirate and he told you the stories.

DREW

Okay, this is making me really uncomfortable. It's like we know two different people. You know someone who told stories, and I know someone else, me, who has no creative abilities and never had an invisible friend, certainly, not one called "Church."

ALYSE

Don't be so hard on yourself. This is one of the reasons I do nonfiction. I document that things exist. You were a good brother to me and I've never forgotten it.

(There is a moment of quiet.)

DREW

I'm sorry I didn't stand up for you with Wanda.

ALYSE

Thank you. I forgive you, and I love you.

DREW

I love you, too, Alyse.

(They briefly hug, part.)

What are we going to do about mom?

ALYSE

We can be here for her. We can observe. We can witness the end of her life, maybe add dignity to an undignified occasion.

DREW

I feel like I've stumbled into a foreign country, where I don't know the culture or speak the language.

ALYSE

Welcome to Wonderland, brother.

DREW

You're enjoying this.

ALYSE

In a sort of bizarre way, it's interesting to me. But, I'm used to the unexpected, you're not. That's one of the illusions about law, all those rules giving us the fantasy of control. We live in monitored homes, gated communities with security guards, seal the border and still we don't feel safe.

DREW

We live in a dangerous world. There's nothing wrong with being prepared.

ALYSE

I live in a friendly world.

DREW

Well, good for you.

(Goes to the bar, adds ice to his drink.)

What do you think?

ALYSE

We're probably going to have a recession before the end of the year.

DREW

My God where does your mind go? It just leaps around linking things that have no relationship.

ALYSE

It keeps me amused.

DREW

It keeps you at arms length from your feelings.

ALYSE

Good observation. Have you been seeing a therapist?.

DREW

As a matter of fact, I have.

ALYSE

Nice work. (pause) I was laid off last June..

DREW

What happened?

ALYSE

Budget cuts. We got an education referendum on the city ballot. For ten cents per person we could keep our music and art departments, but the opponents called ten cents, “a gateway tax to runaway taxation,” and that scared people, even though it wasn’t true. You can’t fight a lie with the truth. People believe what they feel not the facts. We lost and the music and art departments tanked.

DREW

I’m sorry.

ALYSE

Me, too. Music and art is no longer considered essential to education. We wouldn’t want our little drones-in-training to have any interests outside of their eventual jobs.

DREW

If I can help you in, anyway.

(SHE steps toward the patio.)

ALYSE

Thanks, I’m fine. I just got a grant for a piece on America’s high infant mortality rate. Not that people are even having children, anymore... Have you noticed the garden?

DREW

No.

ALYSE

Everything’s dead.

(SHE turns to DREW)

DREW

Mom probably doesn’t have the energy to take care of it, and Jack only took care of the tomatoes.

ALYSE

Well, are you ready for this?

DREW

I’ve been preparing for it since I was ten years old. but am I ready? I don’t know.

ALYSE

I don’t know how I’m going to react when it’s over. It’s been a thirty year dress rehearsal and now this is the grand performance. Do I bow, weep, fall apart? I don’t know.

(He walks to the edge of the patio.)

DREW

One time I was here as a kid -- I don't recall where you were, maybe visiting Dad -- a new boy had moved in a few houses down. I was happy to have someone to play with, but this kid was some kind of junior sadist in training. He told me there was a giant snake on the roof, and if I tried to leave the house it would eat me. I stood frozen by the door for hours willing Mother to wake up and come looking for me. She used to sleep a lot. Do you remember that?

LILY

That was the first summer she didn't leave her room. It was right after she married Jack. You took care of us. Made our meals. Got me ready for day camp.

DREW

I was always such a responsible child. I couldn't have had an invisible friend.

(Finishing his story)

Finally, I decided I don't care if the snake gets me, I'm going home.

LILY

And discovered there was no snake.

DREW

Right... Are you planning to sell this documentary about Mom? Are you going to profit from your work?

ALYSE

Apparently, you've never worked for public television. If you want to be in the video you have to sign a release.

DREW

I'll have to read the release, first. And I reserve the right to edit my contribution.

ALYSE

Read my lips: Kiss my ass. This is not a negotiation.

DREW

Could you be a little less intense? My nerves are shot.

ALYSE

Intense, moi? Yeah, I get that a lot. It really turns guys off. First it turns them on, than it turns them off.

DREW

I'm your brother I'm not turned on.

ALYSE

I'm grateful.

(They stop talking as WILLI breezes in carrying a tray of used needles, cottonballs, etc.)

DREW

How is she?

WILLI

(Cheerful)

Still dying.

(SHE exits through the patio door. We hear garbage cans being opened and closed.)

DREW

Do you believe Willy-Nilly?

ALYSE

Ducky-lucky. I find it best to suspend my disbelief when I visit our parents.

(BETTY enters wearing a dressy blue cocktail dress.)

BETTY

Have you two been arguing?

(ALYSE and DREW throw arms around each other's waists.)

DREW & ALYSE

No!

(BETTY walks away from them adjusting her dress.)

BETTY

Good. You don't know how happy it makes me to see you both together. I hate it when my two children aren't speaking to each other. I want you two to get along from now on. Let bygones be bygones.

(SHE moves flirtatiously)

Well?

DREW

Well, what?

BETTY

What do you think of my dress?

ALYSE

It's a little dressy for pizza delivery.

(JACK rolls in unacknowledged and stops on the edge of the family circle.)

BETTY

It's my burial dress.

JACK

It's going to be a formal funeral. Black tie.

BETTY

Who asked you?

(to DREW)

What do you think?

DREW

It's very pretty.

BETTY

I know. Now, remember this is what I want to be buried in.

DREW

Could we stop talking about death and funerals for a half a minute? Has it occurred to you that your doctors could be wrong? You might live. Jack, can I refresh your drink?

(JACK nods. DREW gets a drink for JACK and himself, while BETTY continues.)

BETTY

That's very sweet of you, son. Now, I want the gold high-heeled slippers. Take a picture of it, Alyse, so there's no foul-up. Now, for flowers.

(ALYSE aims the video camera at her MOTHER and shoots a few feet of film)

I don't want gladiolas. I hate them, they remind me of funerals. I want to be buried near your Uncle Lou.

ALYSE

Uncle Lou died? I didn't hear about it. And did you know Uncle Lou died?.

DREW

No. He taught me to fish.

BETTY

Oh, you're so busy with your career. You were probably in Greece.

ALYSE

(lowers the camera)

I've never been to Greece, Mother.

DREW

Why didn't you tell us Uncle Lou died?

BETTY

Well, I didn't know you would be interested. Who cares? The man is dead and gone. I'm talking about me.

JACK

Her favorite subject.

BETTY

I want to be buried near Lou because his wife takes good care of the grave, and I know my grave will be taken care of, if I'm nearby. I know you children will never come to the cemetery.

DREW

How do you know that?

BETTY

I hardly see you when I'm alive. Why would you come when I'm dead?

JACK

It would be quieter.

(BETTY rushes to JACK's wheelchair and gives it a shove, sending him flying towards the patio door just as WILLI re-enters and catches him.)

BETTY

No, let him go! Let him fall in the river and drown.

WILLI

Oh, Mrs. Tucker, you and your pranks. Someone could get hurt. Are you all right, Mr. Tucker?

JACK

I'm alive.

BETTY

He's breathing. Alive is another matter.

DREW

I just don't believe the way you treat each other. Don't you ever say anything nice? And you wonder why we don't visit?

JACK

What's he mean?

BETTY

Drew, you always were too sensitive.

(SHE takes the wheelchair and rolls it toward
ALYSE)

We're just playing.

JACK

Sure. The last one alive wins. Hey, a word to the wise, don't walk outside at night.

ALYSE

If you're going to tell us it's because there's an alligator out there, I'm not buying it.

JACK

Betty, you tell them. They'll never believe me.

BETTY

I'm planning a funeral.

JACK

Take my word for it then? No explanations needed.

DREW

You guys need to lay off the meds.

JACK

I've sat right here and seen them come up the banks at night, and in the morning.

DREW

Jack, this is Maryland, not Florida. There are no alligators here.

JACK (to BETTY)

Am I lying?

BETTY

There are alligators.

ALYSE

Willi, have you ever seen an alligator since you've been here?

BETTY

Don't you believe your dying mother?

DREW

Mother, we're not children you can tell scary stories to.

BETTY

Don't believe me.

WILLI

I don't go out at night. I hear noises.

JACK

You don't have to believe us if you don't want.

DREW

Alligators can't live here. It's too cold in the winter.

BETTY

Ah-ha, but it's not winter yet, is it?

JACK

They migrate from Florida.

DREW

Are you telling us that alligators migrate across Florida, Georgia and part of the Carolinas in order to get to this river?

BETTY

(comes forward)

Oh, look at that sunset, Drew. It's like raspberry jam. Alyse, take a picture of this it would be good for the opening sequence.

ALYSE

I'm still stuck on the alligator story.

JACK

They fly 'em up.

ALYSE
(aims her camera at JACK)

Who does?

JACK
Tourists. Kids. Bring them home as souvenirs, get tired of them, flush 'em down the toilet, washes them into the river.

DREW
That's a ridiculous superstition. There's not a word of truth in it. Alyse stop filming this.

(Lowers her camera)

ALYSE
Why?

DREW
Because, I asked you to.

ALYSE
Okay.

JACK
One ate a baby about a month ago, sitting out in a swing. Mother went to get some lemonade, old alligator crawled up on the river bank, snatched that baby in one gulp.

WILLI
I believe it!

ALYSE
That's too bizarre, Jack, even for you.

DREW
This is the most outrageous crap I've ever heard.

BETTY
And he's a lawyer. He's heard a lot.

ALYSE
Mother, Drew only wants to be taped if he can edit it.

BETTY
But it's your sister's film, She's the director.

DREW
I think the whole thing is in very poor taste.

BETTY

It will be like a family album you can share with my grandchildren. How is my granddaughter, by the way?

DREW

She's fine. She's just turned eight and she plays soccer. I've brought you pictures.

(Starts to take an envelope from his pocket)

BETTY

Not right now. We have a lot of details to take care of while there's still time. I need a will.

JACK

You don't need a will.

BETTY

You stay out of this.

WILLI

(To JACK)

Let me check your ankle.

(SHE wheels HIM to the other room.)

JACK

(singing)

"PLEASE DON'T TALK ABOUT ME WHEN I'M GONE . . ."

(as he leaves)

BETTY

That Willi is smart.

ALYSE

I didn't notice.

BETTY

She knows I don't want Jack hearing about my will. Now, Alyse, do you want the house?

ALYSE

Jack gets the house.

BETTY

Half of it, yes, but I can will the rest of it to anyone I like. I'm not asking you, Drew, because you already have a house.

And a boat.
ALYSE

I'm going for a walk.
DREW

Better take a stick with you.
BETTY

There are no alligators in Maryland.
DREW

Suit yourself.
BETTY

(DREW exits)

BETTY
Your brother works too hard. It's that bitch he married. She makes him work too hard. I worry about him.

ALYSE
He likes to work, it's how he defines himself.

(ALYSE adjusts the video camera)

BETTY
Do you think something's wrong in his marriage?

ALYSE
We can always hope.

BETTY
Did you notice how he doesn't talk about Wanda?

ALYSE
He has other things on his mind.

BETTY
What did he say?

ALYSE
If you want to know, ask him yourself.

BETTY
You two were always secretive. Had your own little club, your own language. Your brother doesn't know how to relax.

ALYSE

He can relax on his boat.

BETTY

Don't begrudge him.

(ALYSE aims camera at her mother)

ALYSE

We're ready for your close up, now.

BETTY

What have I done? Why is God punishing me this way? What kind of a mother must I have been? I must be a terrible person to die this way.

(SHE starts to weep. ALYSE puts aside camera, comforts her.)

ALYSE

You're not a terrible person.

BETTY

(wailing)

I am. I am.

ALYSE

Mom, you did the best you could, if you could've done better you would've.

BETTY

(Abruptly stops crying)

What the hell does that mean? Is that some sort of veiled criticism?

(Reaches for a tissue)

Young people are so smug. You think dying is a remote possibility, but I'm dying, miserable and alone now!

ALYSE

We're all here with you.

BETTY

Where's your father?

ALYSE

Jack's in the other room.

BETTY

Jack's your stepfather. Do you think I'm losing my mind? Your father, Avery.

ALYSE

Dad died twenty years ago.

BETTY

I saw him at the 7-Eleven. He pretended not to see me, but he knew I was there. I never should have divorced him.

ALYSE

Mom, I think your mind is playing tricks on you. Dad's been dead for years.

BETTY

What do you know? You're not dying. I'm happy you don't smoke. If I hadn't smoked this never would have happened, but you know all the young women, we wanted to look sexy. Have a man reach over and light our cigarette.

(Blows her nose.)

I want you to have all my jewelry. You have to be here when I die, or things will disappear.

ALYSE

This is really depressing. Have you considered that you might live?

BETTY

What do I have to live for?

ALYSE

Me, Drew, your granddaughter.

BETTY

I'm sorry, dear I'm just not the kind of a mother who's happy taking cruises and visiting her children. I'm better off dead.

ALYSE

(sad)

Oh, mom.

BETTY

Refusing a gift is bad luck. Take the jewelry. You don't have a job, or a husband to take care of you.

ALYSE

I've survived, this far. I think you should sell your jewelry and have a good time on the money.

BETTY

Don't be stupid, Alyse, you're thirty-five, now. Take the jewelry. Sell it. You have to start thinking about how you'll pay the bills in thirty years.

ALYSE

No, thank you.

BETTY

Have it your way.

ALYSE

That would be a pleasant change.

BETTY

All right, you don't want the jewelry. What about the house?

ALYSE

The house belongs to Jack.

BETTY

My smart, educated children, a lot they know. The house will be paid off when I go, and he can live here till he dies, which I hope will be sooner than later; then you will inherit the house, unless you want me to give that away too.

ALYSE

I'd like to have the house. We had a lot of great times here when we were kids.

BETTY

Then it's settled. Now, my crystal and silver. Do you want it?

ALYSE

I don't want to talk about this.

BETTY

What else is there to talk about but my life's accumulated effects?

ALYSE

We could talk about my life, what I've been doing.

BETTY

Of course, I want to catch up with my beautiful daughter. Are you seeing anyone?

ALYSE

Uh, no, but I just got a grant to do thirty minutes on the high infant mortality rate in America.

BETTY

That's nice. So, have you met anyone you like?

ALYSE

Mother, I'm not looking.

BETTY

I always wanted to have grandchildren before I died.

ALYSE

You have Lara.

BETTY

WHO?

ALYSE

Drew's daughter.

BETTY

Have you seen her picture?

(On an end table are framed photos of LARA. SHE hands one to ALYSE.)

ALYSE

Yes.

BETTY

(Returns photo to the table)

She's got a mouth as big as the Lincoln Tunnel. I want beautiful grandchildren. You would have beautiful children, if only you would get married. Why do you have to be so independent?

ALYSE

Excuse me, but you're giving me advice on marriage is like Pete Rose giving advice on saving money. And I am not as independent as I would like to be.

BETTY

Why do you hate me?

ALYSE

Let me count the ways.

BETTY

You're a fresh child.

ALYSE

Fresh as a vegetable. You know I don't hate you.

(ALYSE puts her arms around BETTY)

BETTY

You don't love me either. If you loved me, you would do what I want you to do.

ALYSE

I know you're disappointed that love isn't about the complete domination of another person, but there it is.

BETTY

Don't talk to me about love. What do you know about it? I loved your father and look where it got me. I lived for him, I worshiped him, there will never be another man in the world like your father.

(ALYSE moves away.)

ALYSE

Yes, well, thank God for small favors.

BETTY

There was no one like him. He knew how to treat a woman.

ALYSE

As legions will attest.

BETTY

I tried to get a plot near his grave.

ALYSE

You didn't.

BETTY

But then, I thought if his widow found out, she would spit on my grave, if she ever goes to visit him, which I doubt, may she rot in hell.

(WILLI enters.)

WILLI

Mrs. Tucker, it is time for your bath.

(BETTY steps toward WILLI, turns back to ALYSE.)

BETTY

One thing you should know about dying, Alyse. They keep you very clean up until the end, then the undertaker comes in and cleans out your veins too. Nothing but a shell, clean as a lobster's tail after a feast.

WILLI

Don't you want your bath?

BETTY

Oh, yes I want everything I'm paying for, or in this case, everything Medicare is paying for.

WILLI

And I have a nice dinner for you tonight. Roast chicken with mashed potatoes.

BETTY

Gag me with a spoon. I ordered pizza.

WILLI

Oh, Mrs. Tucker, you're such a card.

(WILLI leads BETTY toward the other room.

ALYSE picks up her camera.

SOUNDS from outside of broken branches,
crashing in the underbrush. DREW screams.
ALYSE, drops camera rushes to the patio door,
opens it.)

ALYSE

Drew! What is it? Are you alright?

DREW

(O.S.)

Christ! What! No, get away! Help! Help!

ALYSE

Drew! I'm right here. What is it?

(DREW dashes on the stage, disheveled, his jacket
torn, his pants leg torn, a broken tree limb in his
hand.)

DREW

There's something out there! It was like a tree trunk rolling over.

(JACK ENTERS on crutches.)

JACK

Like an alligator?

DREW

There are no alligators in Maryland!

JACK

Have it your way. Nice suit. Hope you have a spare.

END ACT I

IF YOU ARE A THEATRE COMPANY
INTERESTED IN READING THE COMPLETE
PLAY PLEASE CONTACT THE AUTHOR
THROUGH THIS WEBSITE

Copyright Carol Roper 2005