

## SIDE 2

~~HENRY. When have I gone back on my commitments?~~

POLLY. Noble gestures, that's all you really care about. As long as you look like the great philosopher, what does it matter who gets hurt?

HENRY. I'm trying to make *up* for hurting her—

POLLY. And what about *me*? Have you given two seconds thought to *my* feelings, to *my* future? If you make that noble phone call, what will the rest of *my* life be like?

HENRY. You won't be implicated in any way. Nobody will ever find out you knew about it.

POLLY. Oh for God's sake, Henry, do you think I'm worrying about getting *arrested*? What will my life be like without *you*?

HENRY. (*Blinking stunned.*) Without me?

POLLY. We've lived together for thirty-five years. I *love* you, can't you get that through your academic head? I love you, and I can't bear the thought of anything happening to you. *That's* the only thing that could hurt me.

HENRY. But — I love you too — you don't think I *want* to hurt you?

POLLY. You're doing a damn good job of it in a fit of absent-mindedness then!

HENRY. But I can't turn my back on my principles, can I?

POLLY. Who says you can't? Isn't our love for each other a principle? And our years together — isn't *that* an ideal? What you owe to me — isn't that a *little* bit more than what you owe to that — that bitch who was trying to destroy you?

HENRY. (*Shaking his head.*) You're confusing me.

POLLY. Well, I certainly *hope* so!

HENRY. I don't know what— (*The doorbell rings. They both freeze. Then Polly gets hold of herself, speaks calmly and quietly.*)

POLLY. I'll get it. (*She goes to the hallway, opens the door to Police Lieutenant De Vito. He is in his thirties, tall, husky, but with an earnest manner and a hint of sensitivity.*)

DE VITO. Mrs. Lowenthal? I'm Dave De Vito. I'm a lieutenant with the police. (*Henry turns his head sharply, wary, confused.*)

POLLY. Come in, Lieutenant. (*Leads him into the livingroom.*)

Lieutenant De Vito, from the police, dear.

DE VITO. (*Shaking Henry's hand.*) Sorry to break in on you like this, Professor Lowenthal. I know you were just at the memorial service, and you probably don't feel like company now.

HENRY. It's all right, Lieutenant.

DE VITO. I'll make this as fast as I can. I'm trying to get some information about Miss — Professor Wilshire. I've been talking to everybody who had contact with her, professionally or socially.

POLLY. What kind of information?

DE VITO. I'm not going to hide anything from you. In a situation like this, even though it's pretty obviously a death by accident, we have to make a hundred percent sure, by covering all the remote possibilities.

HENRY. You think it may *not* have been an accident?

DE VITO. Somebody falls off a mountain, she's a pretty experienced climber — well, there's just an off chance—

HENRY. Of what?

DE VITO. Suicide.

POLLY. Edith Wilshire? No, it really isn't conceivable.

DE VITO. You agree with that, Professor?

HENRY. (*Holding in his agitation.*) Yes — I can't imagine Edith killing herself.

DE VITO. How can you be sure?

HENRY. I don't know — she was so attached to life — all the things she wanted out of it—

DE VITO. What things?

POLLY. (*Seeing Henry's on the verge of losing control.*) Her ambitions for the Philosophy department — wouldn't you say that was a big thing, Henry? She was made chairman two years ago, Lieutenant, and she's been trying to bring in young blood, make the courses more relevant and up to date.

DE VITO. How was she doing?

HENRY. Well — it takes time to change things in an educational institution—

POLLY. Everybody's got a nice cozy little hole, nobody likes to crawl out of it.

DE VITO. Do you think she could've been depressed enough at the slow progress she was making—

POLLY. To jump off a cliff? Not Edith Wilshire. Opposition didn't depress her. If you ask my opinion, she *thrived* on it.

DE VITO. Okay, let's try a different angle. What do you know about her love life?

POLLY. She wasn't married. Whatever her love life was, she didn't advertise it.

DE VITO. You occasionally heard rumors though, didn't you? It's a small college, a small town—

POLLY. Well, I guess we did hear rumors.

DE VITO. To what effect?

POLLY. I really don't like to repeat such things. The poor woman's dead, and I have absolutely no evidence. (*But it didn't take much coaxing.*) Well then, there's been a lot of talk about those "solitary" weekends of hers up in her mountain cabin. The idea is that they weren't always so solitary.

DE VITO. She brought men up there with her?

POLLY. I'm only telling you what I heard, Lieutenant. People can be terribly malicious.

HENRY. I never heard those rumors, Polly!

POLLY. Nobody would repeat such things to you, darling. We know you're above all that.

DE VITO. Did you ever hear the names of any *specific* man mentioned?

POLLY. No, I didn't.

DE VITO. Did you get the impression they were faculty members?

POLLY. Some of them maybe. Or students — visiting lecturers — janitors. Her tastes appear to have been catholic.

DE VITO. Professor — if any of this had ever come out, could it have hurt her career?

HENRY. Possibly. Immoral behavior is one of the few grounds for taking away a professor's tenure.

POLLY. Even so, Edith wouldn't have killed herself. She was the type who'd manage to ride out the storm and end up on top. A

tough cookie.

DE VITO. (*Looking at her harder.*) You didn't like her, Mrs. Lowenthal?

POLLY. (*Meeting his gaze.*) I doubt if too many people did.

DE VITO. (*Grinning.*) Well, my investigation certainly bears that out. Professor Lowenthal, you were chairman of the Philosophy department once, weren't you? Did Professor Wilshire take over from you?

POLLY. (*Quickly.*) Henry gave up the chairmanship seven years ago. All that administrative work was interfering with his teaching and writing.

DE VITO. Teaching and writing, that's really where your heart is?

HENRY. Yes—

DE VITO. It always was, even in my day.

HENRY. Your day? (*Looks at him more closely, his face lights up.*) Of course — I *knew* you looked familiar to me! David De Vito — you were a student at Mesa Grande, weren't you?

DE VITO. I got out a dozen years ago. I was a Sociology major — your Ethics course was the only Philosophy I ever took.

HENRY. I certainly remember you now. (*This discovery seems to have eased his tension a bit.*)

DE VITO. Don't know why you should. I was a pretty punk student. I had to work nights — in the same factory where my old man worked days—

HENRY. You're a local boy?

DE VITO. That's right. I could never give those old philosophers of yours the time they deserved. I was crazy about your course though — as a matter of fact, it had a big influence on me.

HENRY. How so?

DE VITO. What you said in that course — how it isn't enough to have a lot of abstract ideas about ethical behavior — those ideas don't mean a damn until you test them in your own life.

HENRY. Oh yes — I've said it more than once.

DE VITO. That really hit home with me. It was the sixties, and most of the other people at school were forever making idealistic

speeches, demonstrating, ~~walking out of class~~ to protest something or other. But it didn't seem to me that any of them were accomplishing anything *practical*. I decided, if you're sincere about fighting for good against evil, you have to take the responsibility of *doing* something.

HENRY. So my course convinced you to become a policeman? I never realized—

DE VITO. You know, I still read some of those old philosophers occasionally. Plato especially. That Socrates — he knew how to third-degree a suspect! (*Laughs, then more serious.*) I was impressed back then by what he had to say about all men instinctively knowing the moral law and preferring good to evil.

HENRY. It's a profound idea.

DE VITO. It sure is. Of course, ~~once I got out of school,~~ I found it isn't true.

HENRY. (*Shaken.*) It isn't?

DE VITO. I went into police work — that opened my eyes to the reality.

HENRY. (*Urgent, tense again.*) What *is* the reality?

DE VITO. There *is* no moral law. Only the way things are. (*Hastily.*) But don't get me wrong, Professor. I'm all for it, those fairy tales you're feeding to college-age kids. Why not let them feel good about things for a while? They'll get their noses rubbed in reality soon enough. (*He moves to the hall.*) Well, I've taken up enough of your time—

HENRY. (*Starting after him.*) Lieutenant — wait a minute! (*De Vito turns. Polly looks alarmed, and starts over to Henry.*) There's something I have to tell you.

POLLY. (*Coming up next to him.*) Henry!

HENRY. (*Whispering.*) I have to — a moral obligation—

POLLY. (*She gazes into his face, on the verge of tears, then turns away quickly.*) All right. You do what you think you have to do. (*De Vito has been watching them, uneasy and a bit puzzled. Now he clears his throat.*)

DE VITO. I've got some more people to see, Professor. There was something you wanted to tell me?

HENRY. (*Looking up at him, struggling with himself, then sighing.*) Just this. I didn't like Professor Wilshire much either. I don't want you to think I'm any different from anybody else. That wouldn't be morally right.

DE VITO. (*With a grin.*) Okay, you didn't like her. I'll add you to the list. Goodbye now. (*With a special nod to Polly.*) Goodbye. (*De Vito goes out. Polly, whitefaced but smiling, takes Henry's arm and kisses him on the cheek.*)

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