

SIDE 3

wasn't on her body, in the cabin, on the ground outside, in her car, in her house in town, in her office at the college. You got any ideas where it could be?

POLLY. Not an idea.

DE VITO. Nobody else does either. Well, goodbye again. *(He sees the bust of Socrates on the hall table.)* Hey — Socrates, isn't it?

HENRY. Yes, it is.

DE VITO. Ugly old geezer, wasn't he? But smart.

HENRY. Oh yes.

DE VITO. Really boggles the mind, doesn't it? He's been dead twenty-five hundred years, and he can still pack a wallop! *(De Vito nods cheerfully and goes out.)*

POLLY. *(Furiously.)* Now she loses her Phi Beta Kappa key!

HENRY. You don't suppose—?

POLLY. *(Nodding.)* I do— *(They are suddenly galvanized into action.)*

HENRY. I'll take the front yard and the walk! You take the pantry. *(He runs out the front door, and Polly drops to her knees by the hall table. She searches frantically for a while, lifting the rug, looking behind the bust, pulling open drawers in the table. Then she moves into the livingroom, and gets on her knees, poking under the sofa. Henry reappears from outside, forgetting to shut the front door.)* Nothing out there!

POLLY. Nothing in here either. Damn pretentious woman!

HENRY. Let's be systematic about this — You take this half of the room, I'll take this half. *(They are both scurrying around, searching with increasing panic, when Melvin McMullan wanders in through the front door, shuts it softly behind him, puts his helmet on the hall table. Then he moves to the livingroom archway and watches Polly and Henry with mild curiosity for a while. Finally he speaks up.)*

MELVIN. Is this what you're looking for maybe? *(While they whirl on him in shock, he takes the chain and the Phi Beta Kappa key from his pocket and dangles it in front of him. Polly and Henry, as if hypnotized by it, get slowly to their feet.)*

HENRY. Where did you find that?

POLLY. *(Quickly.)* Whatever it might happen to be!

MELVIN. It's Professor Wilshire's Phi Beta Kappa key. You know, she always used to swing it around when she got excited?

HENRY. (*Moving towards him cautiously.*) Could I take a look at it? It might not be the same one—

MELVIN. (*Instantly pops the key into his pocket.*) It is the same one, believe me.

POLLY. How can you be so sure?

MELVIN. Because otherwise why would it have been on the floor of Professor Wilshire's car — that little MG?

HENRY. The police searched that car.

MELVIN. Oh yeah. But I got there first. (*A long pause, while this sinks in on Polly and Henry. Then Polly moves up to Melvin, putting on her charming motherly smile.*)

POLLY. Melvin dear — Melvin is right, isn't it?

MELVIN. It sure is nice of you to remember my name, Mrs. Lowenthal.

POLLY. I wonder if you realize how much trouble you could get into, dear — telling people you searched through Professor Wilshire's car before the police got there?

MELVIN. I *haven't* been telling people. Only you. (*Polly and Henry exchange glances, then she smiles at Melvin again.*)

POLLY. Why us particularly, Melvin?

MELVIN. *You* know why. Like who else beside Professor Lowenthal drove up to that cabin and took her body out of the car and rolled her—

HENRY. (*Sits down heavily.*) What were you doing there, for God's sake?

MELVIN. Don't you remember what I said to you on Friday? I said I'd go over your head — about getting my grade changed in the Ethics course.

HENRY. Over my head — the chairman of the department!

MELVIN. Her secretary said she went up to her cabin in the mountains, so I drove up there on my motorbike. I got there before you did, so I decided to take a look around.

HENRY. I didn't see any motorbike.

MELVIN. I parked it around the back. The front door wasn't locked — I guess she wasn't worried about burglars or anything, way up there in the middle of nowhere — so I went into the house to kind of see what it was like. I think you can tell a lot about people from the way they fix up their houses. Like *this* house, it's so neat and kind of homelike and inviting — Professor Wilshire's house was a mess, papers and books piled up all over the floor, the same way she keeps her office—

HENRY. Melvin!

MELVIN. Oh there I go, running on again. Well, anyway, about fifteen minutes later I heard a car driving up. I looked out the kitchen window, keeping down real low so I wouldn't be seen, and it was her MG—

POLLY. Why didn't you want to be seen? You came there to talk to her, didn't you?

MELVIN. Sure, but — the thing is, I had this glass of wine in my hand — I found this bottle in her pantry, this expensive French stuff—

POLLY. You thought you'd better put the bottle back and rinse out the glass before she caught you there.

MELVIN. I never did get around to it though. The next thing I knew, Professor Lowenthal was pulling something out of the car. It looked like a big bundle of laundry, I couldn't figure out why Professor Lowenthal should be driving Professor Wilshire's car and delivering her laundry. But then I saw the laundry *was* Professor Wilshire, and she didn't exactly look alive, and Professor Lowenthal carried her over to this rock—

HENRY. All right, that's enough.

MELVIN. Oh sure, I can see how it would be kind of traumatic for you. Anyway, when you were finished, I saw you walk down the road, back in the direction of town — so I waited a few more minutes, then I went back to the rock and looked over the edge, but it was too dark to see anything. Then I went to the car, and I saw something shiny on the floor — it was that chain and that key. So I put them in my pocket, and I decided I'd better get the hell out of there.

POLLY. And you headed straight for the police station, of course, and reported everything you saw.

MELVIN. You *know* I didn't do that, Mrs. Lowenthal. I went to my room at the dorm—

HENRY. Why *didn't* you go to the police?

MELVIN. I remembered something you once said to me in class.

HENRY. My God, the way people have suddenly started hanging on my words!

MELVIN. Ethical problems require careful thought, you said. And since it seemed to me that what I had there was definitely an ethical problem—

POLLY. You've been spending the last three days thinking about it.

MELVIN. You bet. Very carefully.

POLLY. And you've dropped in this morning to give us the fruits of all that careful thought.

MELVIN. I found out you were absolutely right, Professor Lowenthal. About how tough it is to solve an ethical problem. But I think I finally cracked it. I think you're going to be proud of me.

HENRY. Proud of you?

MELVIN. Like I can really show you how much I got out of your course.

HENRY. You can?

MELVIN. What's been uppermost in my mind these last few days, Professor, was that class where you talked about friendship. The obligations and commitments and so on that friends have towards one another. And it occurred to me, you and me have a perfect opportunity to do each other one of those mutual favors which you said, if you remember, are the very essence of true friendship. What I mean is — *my* half of the favor is, I won't tell the police what I saw up there at the cabin, and *your* half is, you won't flunk me in the Ethics course. *(A long pause, while Melvin beams at them, delighted with the simple beauty of it all. Henry and Polly exchange looks.)*

POLLY. Melvin — you seem like a bright boy.

MELVIN. Gosh, thanks, Mrs. Lowenthal.

POLLY. But I wonder if you're thinking this matter through quite deeply enough. Suppose you went to the police and told them your story, what chance is there that they'll believe you?

MELVIN. It's the truth.

POLLY. A crime took place, and you waited three days to report it. Isn't that going to make them just a little suspicious?

MELVIN. I'll tell them I was in a temporary state of shock. I couldn't believe my own eyes — my professor who I respect so much—

POLLY. Who *everybody* respects so much. It'll be your word against Henry's, won't it? The word of a distinguished scholar, a beloved teacher, a man famous for his moral standards — against the word of, excuse me, Melvin, an odd-looking screwed-up little rich kid from the big city. Which one of you will the police believe?

MELVIN. Not me, I guess.

POLLY. Especially when they find out that Henry just failed you in his course. Everybody knows how vindictive a certain type of spoiled brat student can be.

MELVIN. Wow — the way you put it. Mrs. Lowenthal, I don't stand a chance, do I?

POLLY. Well, do you?

MELVIN. I guess I don't. Only — (*Pauses, smiles in a tentative way.*) even if the police don't believe me, it wouldn't look good if they did absolutely *no* investigation, would it? Especially since I'll be able to give them a lot of details that never got mentioned in the newspapers — like I can tell them what Professor Wilshire was wearing, where her car was parked, what rock she rolled off of. And I can tell them there was a bottle of wine on the kitchen table, and a half empty glass right next to it. No, they'd at least have to *check* my story, wouldn't they? And once they start really nosing around — I mean, they might go down the road and find evidence that another car was waiting there awhile. It didn't rain this weekend, and tire marks are pretty easy to trace, if you know what tires you're looking for. And maybe, if they take a look at your shoes or your cuffs or

something, Professor, they'll find pieces of dust or bits of rock or something that matches with stuff from around that cabin — in detective stories that's the kind of clue they're always squinting at through microscopes. The point is, they're not even *looking* in your direction right now, but once somebody makes an accusation — even if it's some odd-looking screwed-up kid.

HENRY. All right, all right!

MELVIN. Gosh, I'm sorry, Professor, I sure don't want to upset you or anything. And believe me, none of these things are going to happen. Because I know the type of person you are, and how much you respect the bonds of friendship!

HENRY. *(In a low voice.)* I already made out my grade list. I put it in the Registrar's box on Saturday.

MELVIN. That's no problem. You could call up the Registrar right now, and tell him you made a mistake, and you don't want McMullan, M. to get an F after all. *(Reaches for the phone.)* I'll dial the number if you want me to.

POLLY. The Registrar's Office closed this morning on account of the memorial service. It won't be open until two o'clock.

MELVIN. Great. I'll come back at two. And I know I can trust you not to call him up at three again and change my grade back to an F. Because even if I didn't find out about that until weeks afterwards, when my father got the transcript, I could still call the police here long distance and tell them what I saw. *(He comes to a stop, with a pleased smirk. Polly looks at him a moment, then speaks softly.)*

POLLY. How can *we* trust *you*, Melvin? If Henry passes you in the course, what guarantees have we got that you won't go to the police anyway?

MELVIN. I'd *never* do that! That would be a — crummy thing to do!

POLLY. And God forbid we should suspect you of even a smidgeon of crumminess!

MELVIN. Besides, once I get that passing grade, I won't have any *reason* to tell the police. Like that would let my father know I really *did* flunk the course — it would be like killing *myself*.

POLLY. People have been known to do that.

MELVIN. Not me. I'm the type that *threatens* to commit suicide — I'm not the type that actually *commits* it. Like I've got plenty of hang-ups, but *none* of my analysts have ever told me I've got a death wish.

HENRY. *None* of them? How many analysts have you patronized?

MELVIN. Eight ... or is it ten—?

HENRY. Never mind, never mind!

MELVIN. (*Gets to his feet.*) Well, I sure am glad we had this talk, and came to a mutual understanding and all. I'll let you have your lunch now, or whatever — I'll be back at two. (*He takes a few steps towards the hallway. Polly stops him.*)

POLLY. Melvin — did it ever occur to you, if Henry and I killed one person, we might not hesitate to kill another? Aren't you afraid we'll kill you? (*Melvin stares at her, then laughs delightedly.*)

MELVIN. Wow! You're really terrific, Mrs. Lowenthal! What a fantastic sense of humor! Everybody knows you wouldn't use *violence* on anybody!

HENRY. But you're saying I used it on Professor Wilshire.

MELVIN. That had to be some kind of freak accident or something — nothing you actually planned out in cold blood. Like even if you *wanted* to hurt somebody — I mean — you're a couple of *old* people! (*Laughing again, he picks up his helmet and leaves. A moment later his motorbike is heard buzzing away. Polly and Henry face each other, and a long probing look passes between them. Henry finally speaks, in a quiet voice.*)

HENRY. I've been teaching for forty years, and I never yet falsified a grade.

POLLY. I know how you're feeling, dear. That the very first time should be for that odious child — But if you don't do it, you know what'll happen.

HENRY. (*After a moment, slowly and thoughtfully.*) And if I do do it?

POLLY. (*A bit confused.*) Why, then he'll — keep his mouth shut about—

HENRY. You listened to him. You observed him. What's your analysis of his character?