

I asked you to come so that I can apologize to you face to face for what has happened.

(Holding out his hand.)

If you could ever forgive me, I'd like very much for us to try to be friends again, as I believe we have been these many years. I don't know what I could have been thinking.

HORVATH. *(Very touched, takes the outstretched hand.)* Of course, Mr. Hammerschmidt. I'd like to apologize to you for my words the other day.

HAMMERSCHMIDT. No, no don't be ridiculous. The fault was all mine. How can I tell you how sorry I am for how rude and unjust I've been to you. But perhaps you will understand when I tell you that it was because of certain circumstances, things that had been happening to me lately, things that made me completely lose my composure and my judgment. I was out of my mind.

(Pause.)

George, what does a man do in a situation like this. Where do you go? Who can you turn to? I was utterly beaten down, shattered. My world was spinning. My stomach ached and my mouth was filled with a bitter bile. So I shouted at everyone, and I made your life hell. God, I hated you.

(Short pause.)

HORVATH. *(Plaintively.)* But why, sir?

HAMMERSCHMIDT. *(Quietly, with a tired smile.)* Because you were my wife's lover.

HORVATH. *(Thunderstruck.)* WHAT?

HAMMERSCHMIDT. Well anyway I thought you were.

HORVATH. *(Shocked.)* But, but sir? Why would you ever think such a thing?

HAMMERSCHMIDT. That's just it, I didn't think my boy. Something like this would never have occurred to me on my own. I was... informed.

I've never been jealous in my life, not even when I was courting. First of all, I had no time for it and then again it's just something that would never have come into my head. So why now? Why now would I start being suspicious of my wife, after twenty-five years of marriage? Can you imagine having a wife and family for so many years and then suddenly, one day being told your wife has a lover? You can't imagine it. I can't imagine it. And yet it was true. *(Sits down on a chair in front of the counter and talks simply.)* It started last Saturday. I received an anonymous letter... here at the shop. I read it over and over again and still couldn't understand it. "You would be advised to look into your wife's affairs as she has been regularly meeting one of your employees without your knowledge for questionable purposes." ... It was signed "A friend."

I couldn't fathom it. Who would write such a thing. What a cowardly, dastardly thing to tell a man. It was too unbelievable. One hears of things like this happening all the time. You read about it in the papers. But when you get a letter like this yourself... it's... it's shattering. First you don't understand it, and then you don't want to understand it, and finally when you do understand it, you refuse to believe it. Is it a horrible joke? Then you begin to make things up, anything to make some other explanation fit the inevitable truth. Maybe it was your wife herself that wrote such a note. Maybe she's testing you. You try to force yourself to think of every other conceivable possibility, except the one possibility that it's true.

(Pause.)

For a day or two you banish it from your mind like it never occurred, but then the reality creeps back into your consciousness, and you are overwhelmed by the weight of it, by the course of action it demands. And so you obey the letter, you bow to your baser instincts, you hire someone to observe your wife's daily affairs still hoping to prove the whole thing a lie.

HORVATH. *(Very softly.)* I'm sorry Mr. Hammerschmidt.

HAMMERSCHMIDT. Do you have a mistress?

HORVATH. A mistress? Oh no, sir.

HAMMERSCHMIDT. No? But you must have somebody?

HORVATH. Well yes I do, sir... but she's not my mistress.