

*(The parlor in Roeder's house. MRS. ROEDER is reading a newspaper as ROEDER enters with a bottle of Radithor and pours out two glasses—as if drinking it has become a nightly ritual.)*

ROEDER. Very bad?

MRS. ROEDER. You didn't read it?

ROEDER. I make a point not to, these days.

MRS. ROEDER. If only other people would do the same. Mrs. Mitchell from across the street. She walked right past me this morning, didn't say a word to me. I know she saw me. And the women at the market. And the green grocer...the way they glance at each other...and at the club, Mrs. Middleton and the other ladies. The whispers.

ROEDER. Why don't you put that away? Read the Journal. I saw it here the other day. Why don't you read that?

MRS. ROEDER (*overlapping*). At the club today, someone actually had the nerve to say to me: Is it true? Is it true, she said? Did your husband poison those women? I said: "Mrs. Cowles. If you think it is true, then why would you speak to me at all? I certainly would not associate with a woman whose husband did such things."

ROEDER. Why do you go there, then? If that's the way people are.

MRS. ROEDER. I've been a member for years.

ROEDER. What do you want me to say, Diane? I knew we were poisoning people, but we didn't want to stop because we were making too much money. Is that what you want me to say?

MRS. ROEDER. I certainly don't want you to say such a thing.

ROEDER. Even if it were true? (*A silence. In the silence lies a suspicion that ROEDER has never felt before.*) Or especially if it were true?

MRS. ROEDER. Is it true?

ROEDER. Is that what you think?

MRS. ROEDER. What would you like me to think?

ROEDER. For God's sakes, Diane. Don't you see what's going on? It's Von Sochocky. He's behind all this. He's jealous of our success. He's feeding information to the Consumer's League—so they can railroad us.

MRS. ROEDER. Why would the Consumer's League—

ROEDER. Bunch of radical women—do-gooders—half of them are Reds probably—Socialists! That's what they are. Same thing with that club you belong to.

MRS. ROEDER. What?

ROEDER. You women think you can go around and fix the world's problems.

MRS. ROEDER (*overlapping*). I can't. I'm sorry—

ROEDER (*overlapping*). —while your husbands go out and make a living. You're going to quit that club.

MRS. ROEDER. Quit the club!

ROEDER. And stop talking to that idiot Mrs. Middleton. // She doesn't know anything.

MRS. ROEDER (*overlapping on //*). You're not making any sense.

ROEDER. None of those women know anything!! You don't know anything. (*Silence.*)

MRS. ROEDER (*quiet determination*). Did you lie to the Department of Labor?

ROEDER. What? (*MRS. ROEDER holds out the newspaper. He takes it, looks at it.*)

MRS. ROEDER. Did you lie?

ROEDER. I didn't lie. I just... Didn't agree with Drinker's results.

MRS. ROEDER. A. J.