

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

CHAPTER ONE

SHE was tall, slender as a willow, and elegant in the tailored blazer and high-waisted trousers. The emerald green suit was intended for traveling, and it gave no hint that the young woman who looked so fashionable had just spent the night in a coach seat on Amtrak's California Zephyr because no sleeping compartments were available on the train.

As Lesley Allen walked through Chicago's Union Station, more than one man paused to get a better look, wondering if she was a top-fashion model; her walk had that sort of grace, and her coloring, with silky black hair curling around her heart-shaped face and big green eyes fringed by dark lashes, was just as striking. Several would have liked to do more than look, but Lesley didn't notice. And though her stride didn't appear to be hurried, even the porter had trouble keeping up with her on her way to the cab stand.

He sighed in relief as he shepherded her monogrammed two-suiter and the matching leather travel case into the cab and pocketed his tip.

"The Metro Tower on North Michigan," Lesley told the cabbie, and the vehicle screeched out of the underground loading area and into the bustling traffic of the Loop.

Lesley leaned forward to watch Chicago speed by, and was nearly thrown on to the floor as the cabbie braked for a red light. Four days out of the city and she missed it; she had to readjust her brain with an almost audible click to the frantic pace.

The streets looked ghostly today, wrapped in heavy blankets of fog. Only the bottom twenty stories of the Sears Tower were visible; the building looked as if it had been sheered off. No wonder O'Hare was fog-bound, she thought, and was glad that she had taken the train. She didn't trust instrument flying; she much preferred seeing where she was going. Besides, she could now write a feature for the magazine about the future of American rail service.

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

But the heavy air didn't change the pace at street level. The traffic light turned green and inertia pressed her into the seat as the cabbie floored the accelerator. They don't need all that fancy equipment to train astronauts, Lesley mused. Just let them ride with a Chicago cabbie, and they'd know what to expect on lift off.

The cab made a sharp turn on to Michigan Avenue and crossed the river. Lesley mapped their progress past the Wrigley Building, its brass doors and window frames gleaming even though there was no sunlight today to reflect from them; past the old Chicago Water Tower, one of the few survivors of the great fire that had leveled most of the city. She wanted to throw her arms out and embrace Chicago; it felt so good to be home.

The cab swerved to the curb in front of the Metro Tower and Lesley gathered up handbag, travel bag and two-suiter and slid out. She stood for a moment on the sidewalk, staring straight up the smoke glass wall of the Tower to where the fog hovered, concealing the top two-thirds of the building. *This is where I belong*, she thought. *This is the center of my universe.*

The cabbie leaned out of his window. "Hey, Lady!" he yelled plaintively. "Are you a tourist or what? The fare, lady—pay the fare!"

Lesley pulled a bill from her blazer pocket and thrust it into his hand. He was still shaking his head and muttering invectives as the cab growled into gear and sped off, belching black smoke as it darted into the beginnings of rush-hour traffic.

Lesley glanced at the tiny diamond-studded watch that hung from a gold chain around her neck, and smiled at the businessman who gave the revolving door a push for her. But it was a cool, abstracted smile that gave him no encouragement to speak.

She stopped at the condominium office, and the smiling receptionist handed her a fat plastic bag. "I'm glad you're home, Miss Allen," she said. "Your mailbox has been crammed."

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Lesley returned the smile. “I’m always. the most popular when I’m out of town,” she said.

The same businessman held the elevator for her and tried to start a conversation. Lesley answered in cool, polite monosyllables and revised her plans. If she went on up to her condo, he might follow. She’d stop at the office first instead.

On the thirtieth floor she was greeted by a six-foot- high reproduction of the cover of last month’s *Today’s Woman* magazine. The cover girl really was delicious, Lesley mused. They would use her again. A woman who was still beautiful under twenty-power magnification was hard to find.

Beyond the plate-glass door, the office was bustling. She stood in the doorway a second, drinking in the flavor of her little empire. Then she waved at the receptionist, who was on the telephone.

The girl said something into the receiver and pushed the hold button. “It’s Jay Nichols,” she told Lesley. “Shall I have him hold?”

“Did you tell him I was here?”

“No. I just said I’d check to see if you’d come in yet.”

“I’ll call him back. I want to look through my messages, at least.” Behind the small reception area lay the big single office, filled with desks, that was the brain of the magazine. It was getting crowded, Lesley thought; they needed more space. She’d have to talk to Jay about it.

The two-suiter was getting heavy as she crossed the big, well-lit room to her own tiny glass-walled office. She’d learned years ago to travel light, but even that had been too much this time.

She stopped at her door and childishly traced the nameplate with a slim finger. The sight of that engraved brass plate saying “Lesley Allen, Editor” still brought a light of triumph to her eyes. Not many women under the age of thirty could claim the title. In fact, most of the women’s magazines in the

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

country were still edited by men. It was a remnant of the Dark Ages, Lesley thought.

Her smile as she studied the plaque would have amazed any of the men who had paused that day to take a second look. Her green eyes glowed, and a dimple peeked out at the corner of her mouth. It had been years since any man had seen that smile.

Shelah Evans, the assistant editor, came out of the office next to Lesley's and dropped a folder on their secretary's desk. "Boy, am I glad you're back," she said. She took the two-suiter out of Lesley's hand and followed her into the inner office, a pile of message slips in the other hand.

Lesley flexed her fingers in relief and stowed the bags in her closet. "Why? What's going on?"

"Check the in-basket and you'll see."

A look at the overflowing tray on the corner of her desk made Lesley wince. She slid out of the emerald blazer and hung it up, ran a comb through the artfully tangled curls that wisped around her face, and straightened the neckline of the pastel green blouse.

"Where's Jana?" she asked.

"Your beloved secretary called in sick and dumped the whole mess on me. Do you want me to start from the beginning, or work backward?"

"Just give me today's problems," Lesley said. "If the other stuff has lasted all week, it will keep till tomorrow when she's back."

"You're the boss." Shelah crossed one elegant leg over the other and opened the notebook. "How was our famous movie star, by the way?"

Lesley shrugged. "He still thinks he's Tom Selleck and Burt Reynolds wrapped up in one handy package. He chased me around the house the first two days I was there."

"Did you get the interview?"

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“Do I ever come back without one? And much as I’d like to tear him to shreds, he’ll look great in print. Which reminds me...” She pulled a film pouch—lead-lined to protect the precious film from airport X-rays— out of her handbag.

Shelah reached for it. “I’ll send it to the lab first thing. Rush?”

“Of course. We’re working against deadline with this one. I think I got some really good shots of him.” Lesley was sorting the mail on her desk. “I just pretended I was looking through the sights of a gun.”

“The readers will love it. But what a waste, Lesley. A week with Derek Stone... You should have come back with a dreamy smile, ready to write about what a marvelous lover he is.”

Lesley looked up in surprise. “How would I know whether he’s a marvelous lover?”

“That’s just it, Lesley. Why don’t you know? You’re a liberated, career woman, with nothing to lose, and I’ll bet that he was willing.”

“Shelah, are we going to get to my messages eventually?”

“I would have been in his bed before he knew what hit him. And then I’d have asked some really interesting questions. The readers would love to know the real reasons why Marissa Benton divorced him.”

“If that’s what you want to know, call Marissa Benton.”

“I just might do that.”

“Besides, Shelah, if he was such a terrific lover, you probably couldn’t have remembered your name. That’s why you stayed here, and I interviewed Derek Stone.”

“All right. If you insist that men are unnecessary...”

“I don’t. Remember? I’m engaged to Jay Nichols.” Lesley waved her left hand, with its full-carat marquise diamond, set in antique gold, under Shelah’s nose.

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“You’ve been engaged for two years. If you loved the man, you couldn’t stand not to sleep with him.”

“How would you know whether I’m sleeping with Jay?”

Shelah gave her a knowing, almost pitying, smile. “Because Jay is too conventional. And he’s almost fifty, Lesley.”

“Forty-six is not almost fifty, Shelah!” Lesley snapped. “My messages, if you please?”

“All right, all right,” Shelah muttered and opened the notebook. “Today’s list, from the top—Jay called. Your favorite advice columnist called and wants her salary doubled or she’s quitting. That pediatrician out at the children’s hospital is intrigued by the idea of a monthly column and wants to have lunch with you. Jay called. The premier manufacturer of disposable diapers is not happy with the comparison study in last month’s issue and is threatening to pull his advertising. Jay called. The shipment of appliances that we’re supposed to test for the next issue is stranded on a rail siding by a truckers’ strike. Jay called. The chairperson of one of the women’s lib groups wants to know when you’re going to let your readers know that there is more to life than dishwashers and babies . . .” She paused for a breath.

“Is that all?” Lesley asked dryly.

“No. And Jay called. That’s just today, of course.”

“Have Jana check my calendar for next week and set them all up for lunch. The pediatrician can come to the staff dining room here. I’ll take the diaper man to the Ninety-Fifth—that might impress him. And tell the advice columnist to bring an egg-salad sandwich in her own brown bag.”

“Where do you want to take Jay?” Shelah grinned. “And do you want all the truckers that are on strike? You did say lunch for everyone.”

Lesley didn’t look up. “See if you can persuade the shipping company to do a little extra work. And I’ll call Jay. Why don’t you try for a little respect? The man does still own this magazine, after all.”

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“But not for long, thank God. We might even come up with an owner who believes in putting some of the profits back into the *Woman*.”

Lesley frowned. “Or one who believes in total editorial control. Jay’s not bad, in comparison.”

“You like it when he leaves everything to you. When are you going to stop living and breathing this magazine and start enjoying yourself?”

“Out, Shelah. I have work to do.”

Shelah’s voice turned suddenly serious. “You’re so busy only because you think you have to write fifty percent of every issue. Why don’t you delegate some of the work?”

Lesley looked up with a smile, the dimple peeking out again. “All right. Practice your top management skills and fire the advice columnist. And then you can take her place for a few months. We’ll see how you do.”

“I was thinking more in terms of the pediatrician, Lesley.” The tone was confiding.

“You hate kids, Shelah.”

“But he has such a dreamy voice ...” Shelah floated off to her own office.

Lesley reflected that if Shelah was really as dizzy as she sounded, she’d have been fired long ago. But underneath the fluffy-blonde act, the girl was sharp—a good writer and an incisive editor. Now if she’d just stop chasing every man who came into her vicinity...

She might make a good advice columnist, though; there was scarcely a male-female situation that Shelah hadn’t experienced.

Lesley pulled a sheaf of yellow legal paper out of her handbag and reached for a pen to make corrections on the first draft of the Stone interview. Jana could type it in the morning, and then Lesley could work it over. It would be close to deadline, but she could make it. Too bad Amtrak didn’t provide typewriters, or the article would be done by now.

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Derek Stone. She sat still, thinking about Derek Stone and men like him—men who thought that a woman was a plaything, who refused to believe that she had any value outside the bedroom. No doubt, she thought, that attitude accounted for his divorce.

Lesley had learned early, and hard, about men like Derek Stone. She'd like to write about what she saw; she'd like to describe the way that Derek Stone's eyes roved over a woman and the way that his brain almost visibly calculated the precise amount of charm it would take to get her into his bed. Well, it hadn't worked with Lesley Allen. Derek Stone's charm had left her unmoved.

And of course she wouldn't write it the way she wanted. Her audience wasn't interested in the man's flaws; they would read her prose and sigh as they imagined themselves to be the woman to whom those big blue eyes beckoned. It was fortunate for them, Lesley thought, that they would probably never cross Derek Stone's path. He, and men like him, consumed women and tossed them aside, drained.

She glanced down at the legal pad, where her pen had scribbled a vicious blot that cut through the paper. She laughed at herself shakily. It wasn't fair to take it all out on Derek Stone, she told herself. It wasn't his fault that his attitude, even the tone of his voice, reminded her of those rough lessons learned so long ago at the hands of a man just like him.

She pushed the story into her desk drawer and dug her luggage out of the closet. She was tired. A night's sleep would do wonders.

"I'm going home," she told Shelah, leaning around the corner into the next office.

"To what? A cup of tea and a book? You don't even have a cat to keep you company, for crying out loud. Let's go out and shake up the town. I know a couple of guys who..."

"I spent last night in a coach seat on a train. I'm in no shape to carouse. See you tomorrow." She didn't bother to bring up Jay's name again; Shelah

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

refused to believe that Lesley's long-standing engagement meant anything at all.

Her two-bedroom condo ten floors above the magazine office smelled musty from being shut up for nearly a week. She dropped her luggage in the foyer and turned up the thermostat. Autumn was here, and the stale air felt chilly. First stop, the kitchen, she decided, so she could put the kettle on. Darn Shelah, anyhow—a cup of tea sounded good.

As it always did, coming back to the condo gave her a sense of pride, of achievement. *Not bad for a kid from the boondocks*, she thought, looking around. The little country kitchen with its stained-glass cabinet doors, the tiny second bedroom that she had fixed up as a writing room with white wicker and green plants, the big balcony bedroom with the wrought-iron spiral staircase—she had always wanted spiral stairs. It felt good to know that it was hers—the labor of her own hands.

She dumped the bag of mail on the counter and turned the envelopes over as she waited for the water to boil. A big manila envelope caught her attention, and with trembling hands she tore it open. If it was another rejection slip, she thought, she would not be able to stand the pain.

Twenty pages of carefully typed manuscript slid into her hands—the first section of the book she was working on. And on top of it was a letter—not a printed rejection slip, but a personal letter.

She scanned it in a frenzy, picking up phrases. “Might be made suitable for publication . . . at present, too dry and factual . . . try for a more personal approach to the subject . . . your credentials are excellent . . .”

Lesley laughed at that. Just how much better could credentials be? she wondered. The water boiled, and she made her tea. Then she carried the mug into the living room and curled up with the first twenty pages of her book.

Half an hour later she put it aside and dumped the cold tea down the kitchen drain. It was worth a try, she thought. The editor must know his business, and if he said it needed a more personal touch, perhaps he was

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

right. She'd have a quick supper and then she'd start in again, from a whole new approach. Already sentences were beginning to form in her head.

The telephone shrilled, and Lesley jumped. Damn, she thought, it was probably Jay. She'd completely forgotten to call him back.

"Angel," he said, and there was a thread of relief in his soft voice. "I'm glad you're home safe."

"Jay, I'm sorry I didn't return your call. My desk was buried in work and I forgot."

There was no reproach in Jay Nichols's soft voice. "It's all right, Angel, I know that you're busy. You haven't forgotten that we're having cocktails with Mother tonight, have you?"

Lesley groaned. "Oh, Jay, I forgot. She'll just have to excuse me."

"She won't like it, dear. And she's just now beginning to accept the idea of us being married."

"But I'm exhausted, and I was going to . . ." She sighed. "All right, Jay. I'll get dressed."

She could almost see his sweet smile. "You're a trooper, Angel. I'll pick you up in half an hour, so we won't be too late. You can be ready by then, can't you?"

Lesley sighed and stuffed the manuscript back into the envelope. Maybe someday I can finish it, she thought. "I'll be ready."

She wished her bedroom had a door to slam; it would have helped to lessen her frustration. She could cheerfully consign Jay's mother to the pit of hell tonight. As exhausted as she was, there was nothing that she wanted less than to be exposed to Emily Nichols's saccharine sarcasm. But she knew that if she didn't go to the cocktail party, all the hard-won concessions the old lady had made over the past two years would be gone, and Lesley would be back at the beginning. For months Emily had referred to Lesley as "That

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

Woman who has her claws into poor, dear Jay.” Lesley wasn’t about to start at the beginning again.

She was dressed before the deadline, though she was still using a curling brush on her hair when the doorbell played its chastened version of Beethoven’s Fifth. She put the brush down with a sigh and answered the door.

Jay was elegant in black dinner clothes, his salt-and-pepper hair neatly combed. She looked up into his eyes; Lesley was nearly as tall as he. He put a gentle kiss on her cheek, but looked a little doubtful as he studied her dress.

“Too much of a scarlet woman?” The dress had seemed a good idea when she bought it; the shimmer of brilliant red satin against her creamy skin and black hair could lift her spirits on the dullest of days. But the dress was practically strapless, and the slit up the side was no doubt far past what Emily Nichols would consider to be chaste. The matching red satin shoes were wickedly high-heeled.

“It’s lovely on you. But I’m afraid Mother might...” Jay looked a little worried.

Suddenly Lesley was angry. Just when was Jay going to grow up and stop referring every judgment to his mother? She was certain of one thing, she decided. From now on she would dress to suit herself, and she would never again ask if Emily might be shocked by her choice of clothes.

“It’s this outfit, or I’m staying home,” she said. “There isn’t time to change. And even if there was, everything else I own is at the cleaners.”

Jay glanced at his watch and nodded reluctant agreement. On the way to his mother’s North Shore mansion, though, he was almost silent, and he kept looking over at Lesley with uncertainty in his eyes. It wasn’t until Emily’s butler had taken their coats that Jay spoke. “Angel—we’ll have to leave in an hour. I have dinner reservations.”

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

She nodded her agreement, thinking that she couldn't be more delighted. Usually these affairs dragged on for the entire evening and ended with them invited, with a show of reluctance, to dine with Emily, an invitation which Jay always accepted while Lesley seethed. She did care for Jay, but Emily!

"That's really why I wanted you to come," he said. "I'm negotiating a sale for the magazine."

"Oh? Who's looking?" She tried to sound casual. She had tried for months to talk him out of selling the *Woman*, but it was one thing Jay was adamant about.

Jay smiled at her unconcerned tone and flicked a finger gently across her cheek. "Don't pretend not to care, brat. You made your point about buyers—I'm being very selective. If Randall buys it, the *Woman* will be part of the biggest publishing empire in the country."

"Cade Randall!" The name burst out despite her efforts to keep silent. "Jay, you can't sell it to him!"

Jay frowned. "Why not? The Randall Group is well-run, it's profitable ..."

"And the whole corporation is based on that porno magazine!"

Jay shrugged. "*Monsieur* is Randall's biggest money maker. But it isn't exactly pornography, Lesley."

"Close enough," Lesley muttered.

Jay looked confused. "But you didn't want the *Woman* sold to anyone who wasn't involved with magazines. There just aren't many buyers around."

"Why didn't you tell me you were talking to him about it?"

"I wanted to be certain he was interested before I got your hopes up. I assumed that you'd be delighted."

"Well, you're wrong, Jay."

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

A girl cooed at Lesley's side, "Squabbling again? What a pair of lovebirds. Hi, Daddy. Grandmère is simply livid that you're late." Kara Nichols tipped her cheek up for Jay's dutiful kiss. Then she added, with a frown, "Hello, Lesley."

Kara was sixteen, Lesley reminded herself. Of course a girl of that age didn't appreciate the idea of a stepmother still in her twenties. But that didn't excuse Kara's attitude. In the two weeks that Kara had been staying with her grandmother, Lesley had seen the girl several times. Kara was never quite rude, but the light in her eyes always made Lesley want to strangle her.

Jay was nervous. "We'd better make sure Mother sees us right away," he said. "Do you want a glass of wine, Lesley?"

"No, thanks. As tired as I am, one glass and I'd fall asleep in the punch bowl. I'll just drink Perrier tonight."

She waited a few yards from the bar while he got their drinks.

"Need a drink, Les?" A man in a checked sports jacket tapped her on the shoulder.

"No, thanks, Bob. Jay's getting me one."

"Good for old Jay. When are you girls over at the magazine going to start running full-length novels every month? Everybody else is, and I've got some terrific stuff I'd like to offer you."

Lesley smiled, and the dimple peeked out. "Everybody else turned you down, right?"

"Lesley, how could you think that? You never come second with me."

She turned serious. Bob Merrill was an authors' agent; perhaps he could help her. "Bob, you handle a lot of writers, don't you? I mean, you're pretty well-known."

He shrugged. "I'm getting there, I guess. It puts the food on the table."

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“Would you give me some advice? I have a manuscript that’s been rejected three times, and this time it came back with a letter suggesting that I’ve used the wrong approach. Should I rewrite it?”

His attention was obviously caught. “A personal letter? From whom?” He whistled when she told him the name. “Rewrite it, honey. The man knows his business, and if he took the time to write a letter . . . This time, give it to me before you mail it. I’ll only charge you seven per cent of what you make.”

“Making me a special deal, hmm?”

Bob grinned. “I’m having a half-price sale this week. I have to go prod one of my clients into writing a book— she’s already spent the advance, so she owes them. Then I’m going to escape from this mausoleum and get something to eat. Are you and Jay staying around to dance attendance on his mama?”

“No. Jay has a business dinner. And Bob? Please don’t say anything to Jay about the book. He doesn’t know I’m writing it.”

“Me? Now why would I give away a client’s secrets? See you later, Lesley. And think about putting a novel in the *Woman* one of these months!”

Just thinking about the magazine brought her back to the dinner appointment. She should have expected this to happen, she told herself. When Jay had first started talking about selling *Today’s Woman*, she should have known that the Randall Group would come into it eventually. There were few magazine publishers who were making profits enough to consider purchasing another title, and Jay’s price was high.

Lesley took a deep breath. There was no point in panicking, she told herself. The sale might fall through. And even if it didn’t, she had other places to go. She didn’t want to spend her life editing *Today’s Woman*, anyway. If Cade Randall bought it, she’d find another job.

Another half-dozen deep breaths steadied her pulse, and she was able to smile at Jay when he put the icy glass of Perrier water into her hand.

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

“Am I forgiven?” he asked. “Anyway, Lesley, that’s one of the points we’re arguing about. I’m insisting on it being written into the contract that the *Woman* remain structurally as it is.”

“No matter what he agrees to, if Cade Randall buys it, he’ll change the rules,” Lesley said cynically. “But I don’t want to argue with you, Jay.”

“We’ll talk about it later,” he promised. “We’d better go see Mother.”

The biggest thrill of my evening, Lesley thought, but she put on her best smile as they approached the little dais where Emily Nichols sat. Her silver-blue hair was elaborately drawn up atop her head, and her grey silk dress was both brand-new and in the high kick of fashion twenty years ago.

Lesley gave her points. At least the woman knew that she would have looked ridiculous in today’s clothes. Fashion, after all, should be what was becoming. It would be an interesting feature for the magazine, she thought—adapting the newest of fashion for women of all ages.

Kara was seated beside her grandmother, her red-shaded mouth pouty, her improbably blonde hair flowing around her shoulders. The girl looked as if she was playing at dressing-up, trying to look twenty instead of sixteen.

Emily said to the woman next to her, “Isn’t it marvelous that Joyce has let me borrow Kara for a little while? I can’t imagine the child wanting to leave her mother to come back here, but her devotion to me is so very charming.”

“How is Joyce?” the other woman asked.

“Oh, she’s all right. It nearly broke her heart to have to divorce Jay, of course, when he got involved with that woman, but she’s recovering very well. Living in Paris helps a great deal, of course. She says she will never come back to Chicago as long as Jay and that woman are here.”

“The one who works for his magazine?”

“Yes. He says that he’s going to marry her. I can’t imagine what he’s thinking about ... Hello, Jay dear.” She held her cheek up for his kiss. “I

Deadline for Love

by Leigh Michaels

copyright 1985 2007 by Leigh Michaels
all rights reserved

thought you'd never arrive. And Lesley." Her tone held a noticeable lack of enthusiasm, and her eyes snapped wide open as she surveyed the red satin dress.

Lesley was furious about the conversation they had overheard, but Jay didn't seem to notice. Damn it, she raged to herself, Emily knew perfectly well that she and Jay had never dated until after Joyce Nichols had moved to Paris. And she'd bet that Emily and Joyce had never been as intimate during the marriage as they seemed to be now. But Emily hated the idea of Jay marrying someone who didn't belong to her own social crowd, so she was helping to spread the rumor. And Jay did nothing to stop her.

She loved Jay, she told herself. She really did, but the same gentleness that made him so attractive to her kept him from standing up to Emily. *Well, Lesley, you can't have both*, she told herself. *Emily is a small price to pay, after all, for having Jay.*