

Emma Louise

by Denise Landis

Emma Louise is a statuesque beauty, seventeen years old. She is five foot eight and wearing Manolo Blahnik stilettos, purchased on Ebay. She has a tattoo on her ankle, three earrings in her left ear, and three days ago, to the dismay of most of the boys (and a few of the male teachers) of her senior high school class, cut her waist-length black hair to a short curly bob. It is very early in the morning and she is on her way to school.

Emma Louise is walking over a concrete bridge when she spies, out of the corner of her eye, a man fishing, waist deep, in the river tumbling below. She is thinking that the water must be very cold on this autumn day, when she sees an extraordinary thing. The man takes a step and sinks into the water as if in slow motion, tilting backwards until his head touches the water and vanishes beneath it. He does not resurface.

Emma Louise stares at the water and sees his shape beneath it, moving downstream. She strides to the other side of the bridge, removes her shoes, and skitters down the gravelly embankment. At a dry patch of sand near the water's edge she strips off her cashmere sweater and slim woolen skirt. In her underwear (cotton blend, but stylishly black) she dives into the water. She does not feel the shock of the cold water because she is looking for the man, and there he is. Not for nothing has she won a gold ribbon four years in a row at the annual school Athletic Gymboree. She hooks an arm around his waist and tugs at him, but his chest waders are dragging him down. She unsnaps them and pulls him out of them, tugging him to shore. With his torso on the sand bank, his legs still drifting downstream, she listens to his heart, then pumps his chest. His face is white. He is lifeless. Then he moves, and water heaves out of his mouth.

Emma Louise leaves the man to find her pocketbook. On her cell phone she dials 911. She tells what she saw, she says where she is. She goes back to the man, whose eyes are still closed, but whose

face is now pink. He is breathing but not moving. She looks at her cell phone again and sees that she, who has never been late to school, not ever, will be late to school today if she doesn't hurry. She dries off quickly with a bandanna from her bag, and wriggles back into her skirt and sweater. She checks her hair (wet) and makeup (waterproof) in a small mirror, and picks up her bags. Still, something seems undone. The waders have drifted downstream and are bobbing gently in the shallows nearby.

Emma Louise retrieves the waders, emptying them of water, holding the considerable wet weight of them away from her body. She folds them into a bulky package and lifts the man's arm, tucking them beneath his elbow, and placing his hand on them.

She hears a distant siren. She climbs the embankment and puts on her stilettos. She checks the time on her cell phone, and strides briskly in the direction of school.

