

EMMA

Rothario: describe yourself

> I am dark haired, romantic looking, deep eyes

Truth be told, she was distinctly bovine. There was no way around it. Her big nostrils and cow eyes had kept her from beauty even as a thin youth. (It had not mattered. She managed to marry well anyway, a doctor.) Now she was fat as well. She had never lost weight after having children and no longer cared now that her children were grown. Her husband, asleep in the bedroom, no longer looked at her in that way, and she had no intention of ever meeting her online lovers.

Rothario: how about your body?

> average to middling, as they say...

She felt guilty chatting to another man while Howard was offline, but she was bored. Howard was her regular chat partner. She met him on a Christian site, so she avoided most of the sex stuff, although she was titillated by Rothario tonight. Howard was sweet and cared for her and had outlasted the few months most online romances allotted before demanding a meet. Howard had no interest in a meet. Perhaps he was ugly. She did not care. She believed he was a man though. His manners were manly.

Roathario: ever done it in a luxury sedan backseat?

> how about not?

Emma found herself typing. Where had Howard been this past week? She found to her surprise that she loved him and did want to meet after all. This was ironic because her husband had bought her the computer to save the marriage. He did love her but would not let her go- divorce was ugly to him. She was bored at home while he worked. She had no friends except the pharmacist. She was a hypochondriac.

Roathario: i m in 1st gear already babe, hand on the gear shaft

> thrust it into second man

She had her hand between her legs. What was she doing? Of course at first she had not sought out the chat sites. She researched her areas of interest: knitting, poetry, gospel, but popped onto some scary sex sites before she realized how to block them.

Rothario: what are you wearing?

> Nothing.

She took her clothes off to make this true, not caring if her husband woke up and came out to catch her. It had been years since he took late night calls, since his residency. She meanwhile became addicted to being online. She created identities for herself, applied for (and was offered!) jobs on resorts, abroad, in the circus. She shopped for online brides and everything else, always stopping just before paying, then she checked out some of those sex sites. It was all the same to her. Web dating felt like shopping for CDs- wink at one, poke another, create a favorites or wish list, move some to your shopping cart... Finally she met Howard. Now she knew she loved Howard. She wanted something else now.

Rothario: climb into the bucket seat spread eagle baby

> gotta go sorry

Emma signed out and then signed in on another site, the one where she had met Howard. She knew he chatted to other girls, but he promised there were none like her. He had been offline now for a week without explanation. Emma had a sinking feeling in her stomach. There was a message for her. Click open.

Howard: Emma, this is a hard message for me to write. I have never really met you but I have cared for you deeply, and while I did so my wife and I drifted apart. In the end I want my marriage to work and if I continue to chat with you I will never repair my marriage. I am very sorry and want you to be happy but I cannot chat with you anymore. Be well.

> goodbye

She looked in on her husband and noticed a book on his bedside table. He was not a big reader so she took a look and it was a book on "How to Save Your Marriage". She went to the medicine cabinet and took all the pills in it. She went back to the computer and typed a short email message to everyone in her address book: kids, family, friends, church... She clicked send.

She decided to read the emails she had in her inbox without answering any and there was spam and other business and event notifications and a few chatty ones from friends, one update from her daughter about her granddaughter's health, and a forwarded chain letter.

ONE MAN IN IDAHO FORWARDED THIS TO TEN PEOPLE AND WON THE LOTTERY. ONE WOMAN IN HAWAII BROKE THE CHAIN AND THE NEXT DAY BROKE HER ARM.

Emma decided to forward it. What the hell! The joke it contained was kind of funny anyway. Maybe it was because of the situation but she just had to laugh. Then she felt very sleepy.