

the
CURSE of



**A Young Adult Fantasy
from the Land of Dvorak**

Billy Dean

« THE CURSE OF QWERTY »

Billy Dean



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1

« THE MAGIC TYPEWRITER »

On the drive to the antique shop Emily watched the Danube River meander between the cities of Buda and Pest.

That's me, she thought, wandering between who I really am and who Mom and Dad expect me to be. Budapest. What a strange place for a vacation. This is how I'll feel in boarding school when I turn 16. A stranger. Bored and alone—there won't even be any boys.

When they arrived at the shop, she followed her parents inside. The man standing behind the counter said, without smiling, "Jo reggelt kivanok." Emily guessed that meant "Hello." or "Good morning." He looked like a shriveled old potato left too long in the pantry.

The shop looked like its owner—dark and disheveled. The only light came from the sun streaming through the six small windows above the front door, and the shelves were crowded with things covered in dust, and stacked on top of each other. The dust alone convinced Emily his customers had not been fooled by the dim light, that even the owner didn't care about his so-called antiques.

Antiques. What a silly word. Just a way to make junk sound like something valuable. Everything in this shop has been forgotten. Like the stuff in my grandmother's attic where I used to hide to enjoy being forgotten.

The antique store back home in Kansas was named *Good Riddance* and rightfully so because most of the things for sale were not junk. And it was clean and well-lit. This shop reminded Emily of the one in the movie *Gremlins*. Her parents would not have approved of her watching a movie like that, so

she and her friend Zoey had found it on *You Tube*. Emily shuddered to think something like *Gizmo* or *Stripe* could be hiding in *this* shop.



With these thoughts swirling around in the back of her head, Emily ambled toward the back of the shop. Turning a corner, she had a clear view of the windows above the front door and noticed the glass in each of the six rectangular panes had been yellowed with age, softened by the sunlight passing through it. *The windows let the light in because it's welcome here.*

Watching the dust floating in the light, suspended by it, Emily's feelings toward the musty old shop softened, as if she too had permission to be there.

In the next aisle, an old typewriter caught her eye. She leaned over and blew off the dust. The royal-blue case was decorated with gold pin striping and a seal or emblem of some kind on the front. The keys sitting in the long sweeping curve of the faceplate looked like the beads of a necklace around a lady's neck. *Maybe it belonged to a princess,* she thought.

Emily looked around to make sure nobody was watching, took a piece of paper from the notepad in her purse and put it in the typewriter. She leaned forward to type, but noticed the keys were not in the same positions as the keys on her computer keyboard back home. The letters on this typewriter looked as if someone had tossed them onto the keys with no thought whatsoever.

She had to hunt for the keys she wanted but finally typed MY NAME IS EMILY. When she was done, she saw the typewriter had printed MT LAMD G: DMGPT. As Emily stood there wondering why the typewriter had printed different letters than the ones she had typed, the keys began striking the paper by themselves.

Emily stepped back and stared wide-eyed at the typewriter as it printed MT LAMD G: DPG:A directly below the letters she had typed moments before.

"Wow!" yelled Emily, then she turned to see if anyone had heard her outburst. "This is a magic typewriter." she whispered, then ran to find her parents, who were bickering over an old clock.



2

« EMILY MEETS ELISA »

Mom, Dad! I found a magic typewriter. It talks to me!

"Shhhhhsh," scolded her mother, "You will disturb the other shoppers."

"But it puts strange words on the paper."

"Well of course it types strange letters, dear. This is a foreign country."

"But it types all by itself!"

"Emily, your father and I are trying to—"

"Dad, it talks to me. Let's buy it and take it home."

"We'll see, Emily. Now run along until your mother and I decide about this clock."

Emily walked slowly back to the typewriter, "They don't believe me." *They never believe me.*

Her parents were looking for things to take home. Emily wished she could find something to take her through the awkward, mixed feelings of being a tweenager. That's what her friend Zoey called everyone at their middle school in Topeka.

One day on the way home from school, Emily had confessed to Zoey that she didn't want to grow up. "Why grow up, Zoey, and be like our mothers, arguing with our husbands, calling them nincompoops, wishing—"

Zoey had interrupted her, saying, "Emily, that's how we're supposed to feel. We're tweenagers!"

When Emily got back to the typewriter, she leaned forward and typed THEY NEVER BELIEVE ME and watched the keys print KJDT LD>DO NDPGD>D MD. As she looked at her feelings in this strange new language, the keys began striking the paper on their own:

RPDA:D NDPGD>D MD DMGPT
G AM DPG:A LSK A KTRD<OGKDO
JDPR MD NODAV KJD IFO:D SY X<DOKT

Emily ran to find her father and found him looking at smoking pipes carved from wood. "Dad, you have to see this typewriter. It talks to me!"

Absorbed in the pipes, he absentmindedly answered, "Uh, sure Emily. Just a minute."

Emily watched her father look at the pipes until she could no longer wait. "Dad. Please!"

Grabbing his hand, Emily led her father to the back of the shop. "See, there it is!" Emily typed SAY HELLO TO MY FATHER as the typewriter printed :AT JDPPS KS MY YAHJDO.

"Well that's nice, dear, but this is a foreign country, so it types different letters."

"But Dad, shouldn't it print the same letters I type?"

"I'm sure there is a simple explanation, Emily."

"But it answers me. Watch." As Emily leaned forward, all the keys jammed in the neck of the typewriter. Emily reached out to untangle the keys just as her mother came around the corner.

"What are you two doing back here?"

"Emily was showing me this old typewriter. Dusty and in need of repair but quite beautiful in its own way, wouldn't you say dear?"

"Mother, help me fix the keys, they're all—"

"Emily, stop! If you break that typewriter, I will be obligated to buy it!"

"Oh yes, let's buy it and take it home!"

"We do not have time for such silliness. We have a dinner engagement with the Petersens tonight in Buda and I will not embarrass myself by being late."

Emily yanked the paper out of the typewriter just as her mother grabbed her arm. "I'll find out what you said. I promise."

whispered Emily, looking back at the typewriter as her mother led her away.



3

« ERGO THE OGRE »

After Emily and her parents left the shop, Ergo released her grip on Elisa's throat.

"There, there, my little princess. Children should be seen, not heard. Isn't that right, my dear? Heh, heh, heh!" she cackled, wringing her hands in anticipation of completing her mission and receiving her cloak and wand from Qwerty, the Queen of Witches.

Elisa felt something sinister and grotesque standing in the shadows within the typewriter that had become her prison. The image of an ogre crept into her mind, vivid and terrifying. When she was a little girl, Knight Gilbreth would tell her stories about trolls and ogres whenever her parents were away.

They were the King and Queen of Dvorak and traveled frequently to encourage trade and secure allies. Gilbreth said ogres were horribly disfigured creatures with evil minds, dark hearts and sharp teeth. Elisa imagined them to look like the gargoyles she'd seen on the sides of old churches. She shuddered.

"The witches of Dvorak will take notice when I prove I can keep you under the curse of Qwerty." continued Ergo, her voice crackling with smug delight.

"Qwerty?" asked Elisa, struggling to see this evil creature standing in the murky shadows of her prison. "Who is that?"

"The Queen of Witches, and she has commissioned me to guard her curse."

"Emily will break this curse, then put one on you!"

"I am already under a curse, the spell of an ogre. But when I am done with you and your little friend, Qwerty will induct me

into the witches of Dvorak, no longer an ogre but a sorceress with the power to conjure and curse at will.”

“An ogre? Then you are ugly and stupid. Emily is beautiful and clever. You will not defeat her.”

“Oh but I will. Qwerty gave me some very special tricks for you and your friend. Ergo began swirling around Elisa faster and faster, closer and closer.



Girly, girly, you'll lose to Qwerty!
I'm Ergo the Ogre with a secret encoder.
Decipher it and I'll set you free.
Or die little princess
when you tap the wrong key.

"My father will send Knight Gilbreth to destroy you and Qwerty!"

Your father isn't going to do anything but die and your cousin Sholes will replace him as the new King of Dvorak. Nothing can stop us now."

"My father? Dying? Sholes the new King? How can this be?"

"You will not be crowned Queen when your father dies. Your cousin will lament your disappearance, then lead the people of Dvorak into peace and prosperity."

"You mean oppression and poverty. My cousin is selfish and evil!"

“But of course. Why else would Qwerty invade his dark heart? His kingdom will soon be ours.”

"Then I will summon Knight Gilbreth myself." screamed Elisa.

"Gilbreth? Ha! A sentimental old fool, rusty and dull as his sword. It hasn't been out of its scabbard for years. All he is fit to do is drink ale and swap tall tales of the good old days."

As Ergo swirled away, Elisa expelled a sigh of relief, then shuddered with the realization that something powerful and malicious had imprisoned her in a typewriter, then hidden it in an antique shop rarely visited by anyone but tourists caught up in the past of a city forgotten by time. Elisa was terrified that she too had been forgotten. *My only hope is a girl named Emily.*



4

« BUDA AND PEST »

On the drive back to the hotel, Emily couldn't stop thinking about the typewriter. *Had it really typed by itself? Or was that just my imagination?*

Emily was always making up things in her head, especially when she was bored. She didn't like stories about ordinary, everyday things. That was boring. Emily like stories that gave her imagination a place to run wild and free. Emily read stories about "once upon a time" and "lands far, far away."

She was reading a story like that now, and it was more than just a story some writer had made up. *Ink Heart* was a story within a story. Emily's father had read stories to her until she could read them herself. So Emily had been drawn to *Ink Heart* because in that story a father reads stories to his daughter, and as he reads, the characters come to life.

Emily felt like that about the typewriter. She had only typed her name, but that had somehow brought the typewriter to life. She couldn't wait to get back to the hotel and try to figure out what the typewriter had said.

When they arrived at the hotel, Emily went to her room. It was four doors down the hall from her parents' room, which was good, because she wouldn't be able to hear them argue. She had more than an hour to get ready for dinner with the Petersens. She opened her purse and put the paper from the typewriter on her desk. *There must be some connection between what I typed and what the typewriter printed, especially when it typed on its own. How can I—*

Her cell phone rang.

Her mother had bought disposable phones for all three of them at the airport. Emily put her book down, flipped her cell phone open and put it to her ear. "Emily, put your blue dress on and come over to our room. Hurry, we do not have much time."

The blue dress made Emily look twelve years old. She was fifteen but already five foot six. She had inherited her tall slender build, hazel eyes and straw-colored hair from her father. She couldn't imagine what she had gotten from her mother.

"There are seven days in the week," she said out loud. "And *Someday* isn't one of them. But someday I'll put an end to her telling me what to do!"

But Emily knew that arguing with her mother was like shoveling sand against the tide. And showing up in the green dress that made her look 18 would make Emily embarrassed for her father. He would defend her right to choose her own dress. Her mother would turn on him. And the war of words would begin. Emily finished unpacking her clothes, put on the blue dress and walked to her parent's room.

"Emily. Did you buckle your belt like I told you?"

"Of course she did, Lillian. She isn't deaf."

"I know she is not deaf, Frank. She is simply prone to not listening, as you are."

Emily had grown up with her parent's contempt for one another. but had never gotten used to it. When they sparred in public, it embarrassed Emily, and when they did it in private it angered her. Her father never said it aloud, but Emily knew a silent "Yes dear." were the last two words in every argument between them. Emily longed for the day when he would no longer tolerate her mother telling him what to do.

Her father had rented a Mercedes for their vacation in Budapest. This August afternoon was hot and humid, but he couldn't get the air conditioner on, so he had rolled down the window on his side of the car.

Her mother had refused to have her window rolled down, saying, "Leave my window up, Frank. You know I do not approve of my hair blowing in the wind or having to bear the noise and stench of traffic."

Nor did she approve of her husband, an engineer, not being able to operate a modern automobile. She made her feelings about that known all the way to the restaurant.

Emily's father had asked her to research Budapest. She liked doing things her father asked her to do, so she had Googled the word Budapest and discovered Buda and Pest had become Budapest in 1873.

The two cities were joined in the name as positioned on the Danube: Buda on the left, west side of the Danube and Pest on the right, east side of the Danube. Buda, the older side, is where the upper class once lived. It sits on a hill overlooking Pest, the more modern side.



Emily remembered reading how the two cities are connected by a bridge. Over the years, it had become a symbol of East meeting West, a nation growing up, stepping out of the past to become a modern new Hungary. Once again, Emily thought how much she was like these two cities and the river that ran between them.

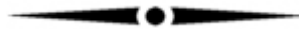
At the Wikipedia website, she had read that the bridge had been decorated with four lions. As her father drove across the bridge, Emily looked for them and there they were, sitting on huge pedestals at each end, two at the East entrance and two at the West entrance.

According to legend, the lions had no tongues. *Maybe they can't roar, thought Emily, but they have teeth and that makes them look dangerous. What are they guarding? Pest from Buda? Or Buda from Pest?*



A few miles after crossing the bridge, her mother said, "There it is, Frank, on the left." She leaned forward and tilted her head up to look at herself in the mirror. "Does my hair look OK?" Her father nodded and found a place to park.

As they walked to the restaurant, Emily looked around. Pest was just another busy city with noisy traffic, tall buildings and too many signs. Buda was more like a town in the country. *I like Buda, she thought. And Buda is where I found that magic typewriter.*



5

« QWERTY CURSES EMILY »

The restaurant was crowded but Emily didn't see someone her age. Her mother had insisted she order something Emily couldn't pronounce. The waiter pronounced it for her, then said it was a kind of meat loaf. Emily hoped it tasted better than it sounded.

It did, but every few minutes she had to endure her mother leaning over and whispering, "Emily, this is Hungary, not Kansas. Put the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left hand."

After dinner, her parents and the Petersens went to the bar for drinks. Emily excused herself to go for a walk outside. Her mother reminded her to be careful and to not wander too far from the restaurant.

On the drive back to the hotel, her parents were unusually quiet. When they arrived, Emily went straight to her room, once again glad she would not have to listen to them bicker or be reminded of her table manners.

In their room, her parents picked up where they had left off after leaving the antique shop earlier that day.

"Frank, our daughter thinks a typewriter is talking to her. Now she wants to bring this fantasy home with her! What if she behaves this way in the boarding school? I will be humiliated, the laughing stock of the neighborhood and my women's club."

"Well dear, if we buy the typewriter, Emily can discover for herself that typewriters are machines, not people. Besides—"

"That is absurd, Frank. She can get that in her silly little head without wasting my money on some ludicrous old typewriter. It is not even in working condition!"

"You're probably right, Lillian."

"There is no probably about it. Typewriters are machines, not people. I am going to end this foolishness."

Mrs. Latham stomped off to Emily's room to do exactly that. With a shrug and a silent *Yes, Dear*, Mr. Latham went back to reading about Lake Balaton, a famous resort area similar to the French Riviera.

Later that evening, with Mrs. Latham snoring in her bed, Frank went to Emily's room and knocked on her door. "Emily, it's me, your father."

Emily had gone back to reading *Ink Heart*. She put it down and opened the door.

"Dad, Mother said—"

"It's OK, Emily. Your mother is worried, that's all. Your mother and I are visiting Lake Balaton tomorrow. While we are gone, my business associate Arany Iskolak is doing some research for me at a library here in Budapest. He has agreed to take you with him. Most of the books are in English, and you love to read, so you should have a good time. Can I trust you to behave yourself for Mr. Iskolak? That typewriter will still be there when we get back."

"Yes, but you have to promise me that you will buy it as soon as you get back."

"I promise. And you must promise to keep your cell phone on while we are in Lake Balleton."

Her father gave her a hug, walked to the door and turned out the light. "Now try to get some sleep, Emily."

As her father closed the door, Emily looked out the window. The Danube River weaved its way between Buda and Pest like a soft blue ribbon reflecting the light of the moon—like the little

creek did back home. Emily propped the pillow up and fell asleep. In her dream, she was walking along the river with the typewriter in her arms when a wretched old woman jumped out of the shadows.



Girly, girly, I'm the curse of Qwerty
Never, never, go back to that shop
Or surely, surely your heart will stop

Startled, Emily tripped over her own feet and fell into the water. As the cold, dark river closed over her and the typewriter, she heard the woman chanting like a witch.

1-2-3 — you belong to me
4-5-6 — I'm blessed with tricks
7-8-9 — find the line
1-2-3 — that sets you free
4-5-6 — type the fix
7-8-9 — is a stitch in time.

Believing the old woman was counting down the last moments of her life, Emily screamed, then struggled to wake herself up. Her father had taught her how to do that when she was a little girl. They had been to a scary movie and he was worried she would have nightmares. As he tucked her into bed, he had told her, "When you feel yourself going to sleep, tell yourself you can stop dreaming anytime you want to."

It had worked that night and every other night she had found herself in a dream she didn't like. Emily made herself wakeup, then whispered, "I'm OK, it was just a dream. That ugly old woman was just a dream."

But she didn't go right back to sleep. Something was different about this dream, something that went beyond a nightmare. *Nightmare. What a strange name for bad dreams. I'll Google it when I get home.* Thinking about the word and how it might have become associated with dreaming helped Emily relax. She smiled, rolled over and fell asleep, her dreams temporarily free of Qwerty the witch.



6

« MISTER ISKOLAK »

Emily liked Mr. Iskolak. His rosy cheeks and a smile that never left his face reminded her of the man who dressed up like Santa Claus at the department store back home in Topeka, Kansas. Her father hired him frequently because he was an ergonomics expert. Emily didn't know what ergonomics meant but knew Mr. Iskolak made machines work right with people.

"Mr. Iskolak. Do you know anything about typewriters?"

"Igen, Miss Latham, a few things. What would you like to know?"

"I'm not sure, but I've got a friend who is having trouble with hers."

"What kind of trouble is she having, Miss Latham?"

"The keys are not where she expected them to be, like somebody mixed them all up."

Emily didn't like to lie to anybody about anything but decided to break her rule until she felt more comfortable about telling Mr. Iskolak what had really happened in the antique shop, that not only did the typewriter print different letters than the ones she typed but that it typed messages on its own.

Mr. Iskolak smiled. "I think I know why your friend is having this problem. The library we are visiting has the largest collection of English language books in both central and eastern Europe. When we arrive I will show you how to find a book on typewriters and how you can use it to help your friend."

"Thank you Mr. Iskolak. My father said you were a genius with mechanical things."

Mr. Iskolak turned off a small street onto the main boulevard that crossed over the Danube, then pointed at the river.

"Hundreds of years ago, the Danube divided Budapest into two separate cities, one called Buda and the other called Pest."

Emily moved forward in her seat. "Yes, I know about the divided city, Mr. Iskolak. My father asked me to study Budapest before we took this trip."

He turned his head and smiled at her. Emily decided he approved of her knowing things about his city.

"I had a dream last night about the river, Mr. Iskolak. A witch named Qwerty cursed me and made me fall into the river and —"

"Slow down, Miss Latham. Did you say Qwerty? Q-W-E-R-T-Y?"

"Yes, that's what it sounded like. What does that mean?"

Mr. Iskolak gave Emily a strange look, then allowed his smile to return.

"She chanted numbers at me like counting down the last seconds of my life and then I screamed and woke up."

Mr. Iskolak said nothing but gave Emily another look. His smile had disappeared. Emily decided she should be quiet for a while. Later, as he turned into the university and parked the car, she decided to end the uneasy silence. "My father says you are an ergonomics expert. What is that?"

"Ergonomics is how we make the man-machine interface more efficient. In simpler terms, I consult with manufacturers to help them design things that are compatible with how the human body and mind work. The typewriter, for example, has been modified many times since it was invented to make it more user-friendly for typists."

The library entrance had two swinging doors, each with a small round window like ports on an ocean liner. Her parents had taken her on several cruises, three to Europe and one to Mexico. Yes, thought Emily. Visiting a library is like a voyage on a ship. In a library, you could sail the seven seas and meet people

from every country on Earth without taking a step or paying a fare.

Inside, Mr. Iskolak stopped and looked around. "I have been in this library hundreds of times, and every visit is like the first. Beautiful, is it not, Miss Latham?"

Emily nodded. The library had three levels, each connected by stairs with oak railings and brass fittings. She and Mr. Iskolak were on the first level. Emily looked up. "Wow." she whispered. "There's two more floors all filled with books. "And look, Mr. Iskolak, there's a tree growing up there on the next level."

Emily liked all libraries but this one made her admire more than just the books. "The dome ceiling with the sunlight shining through those panels makes it look like we're in a cathedral."



Mr. Iskolak gave Emily a look that made her feel he approved of her observation. "Yes, Emily. Libraries are sacred places. The soft light and hushed voices create a holy, church-like atmosphere. Sometimes I imagine the authors of these books watching us, wondering if we will choose the book they wrote. In a library, men and women can speak to you from yesterday or a thousand years ago. Books are a wonderful, amazing thing,

Emily. Even though it is my business to use computers, I never tire of holding a book in my hands, feeling the paper, turning the pages."

Emily watched him turn from his reverie to smile at her. "Follow me." he said, and led her to one of the computer stations on the second level. "Do you have computers in your library back in America?"

"Oh yes, it's a very modern library. I have my own computer at home, too. My father bought it for me the same year he began teaching me how to type."

"Then you are familiar with the procedure for finding a book. As you will discover, this library uses the Library of Congress scheme to catalog and arrange books on the shelves. I hope you find what you are looking for. I will be in the research area on the first level if you need me."



« IN THE LIBRARY »

Mr. Iskolak returned to the first floor, and Emily began her search using the keyword "typewriters" for a subject.

As she scrolled down the list that appeared, an entry titled "Typewriters: Origin and History" caught her eye. She noted the reference number, and within a few minutes had found the shelf and the book. She took it to a nearby table, sat down and began to read. "Computers are fun and fast," she whispered, "but I can't decide if a book is better, or just different." She read the preface and the forward, something her father had taught her to do, then turned to 1 and read:

Latham Sholes invented the typewriter in 1868 but even the slowest typists jammed the keys, so he put the most used keys farther apart from each other so the hammers didn't lock. The result is called the QWERTY arrangement because those are the first six letters on the top row. This was an improvement but typing speeds are still hampered by the QWERTY arrangement. Influenced by Frank Gilbreth, an ergonomics expert, a college professor named August Dvorak decided to end what he called The Curse of Qwerty. Dvorak analyzed thousands of words to determine the frequency of individual letters and word combinations. His discoveries led to the Dvorak arrangement. The Dvorak home row contains all five vowels (AEIOU) and five of the most commonly used consonants (DTHNS). Over 4,000 words can be typed using Dvorak's home row but only 100 using the Qwerty home row.

Something inside Emily got so big she thought she would burst. "Latham Sholes, Frank Gilbreth and The Curse of Qwerty. Latham is my last name. Frank is my father's name and Qwerty—she's the witch who...."

Emily could hear her heart beating in her ears. Remembering her dream, she jumped to her feet and blurted out "That wretched old woman said she is the curse of Qwerty!" The man at the next table said something to the woman sitting with him, then scowled at Emily.

Emily opened her purse and found the paper she had removed from the typewriter in the antique shop. She had looked at the strange letters on that piece of paper dozens of times. She took another look, then got up to find Mr. Iskolak. As she walked down the long elegant stairs to the lower level, she let her hand slide along the smooth oak railing.

The woman sitting at the research desk gave Emily a stern look as she passed, but said nothing. Emily believed most librarians had that look permanently stitched into their faces. Libraries were fun and filled with exciting things to discover. People who work in them should be happy, not sad or mad, as this woman appeared to be.

Mr. Iskolak loves libraries. He isn't sad—serious maybe, but not sad.

Emily found him near the back of the room reading a very large, important-looking book.

"Mr. Iskolak. I found something very strange in this book about typewriters.

He looked up as if his mind were a million miles away. "Strange?" he asked.

"Look at this paragraph and those names." said Emily, "They're the same as my parents. And Qwerty. That woman in my dream said *she* is the curse of Qwerty." Emily tried hard to restrain her excitement, but the word "she" came out louder than a whisper.

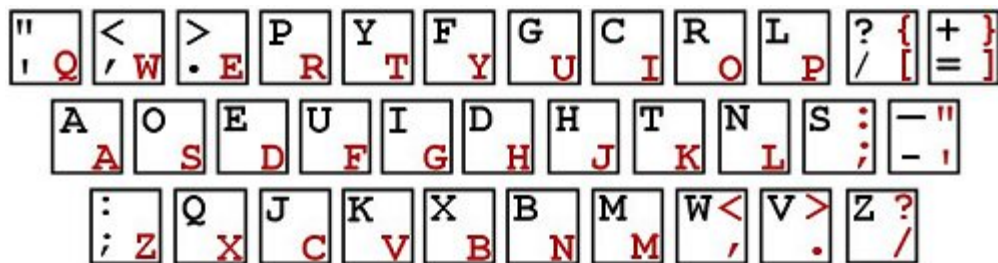
Emily watched him read the book, then removed the paper from her purse. "This is what my friend's typewriter does. I

think it's broken. When I typed MY NAME IS EMILY, it printed MT LAMD G: DMGPT."

Mr. Iskolak took the paper from Emily, frowned, then raised his eyebrows. "When you told me about your friend's problem I was certain she had become confused by the position of the keys because it seemed likely they were arranged according to the Dvorak arrangement. Now that you have showed me your paper, I am myself confused."

Mr. Iskolak turned to the appendices in the back of the book, then tapped his finger on the page in the book where he had found a diagram depicting the Dvorak keyboard.

"Look at this diagram Emily. It shows how the keys are arranged on a typewriter with a Dvorak keyboard. The ones in red are where the keys for a Qwerty keyboard would be. Do you see how the "E" in your name is the "D" on a Qwerty keyboard?"



"Yes, but why doesn't it print the same key I type? Can it be fixed?" asked Emily.

"I would not say it is broken, Miss Latham. I just find it strange that what appears to be a Dvorak typewriter prints as if it were a Qwerty typewriter. The only plausible explanation is the opposite, that it is mechanically a Qwerty typewriter with a Dvorak keyboard. Does your friend have a brother or a boyfriend who might have played a trick on her?"

"It's not a trick, Mr. Iskolak. It's a curse, the curse of Qwerty. It's right here in the book." Emily turned back to the first chapter. "See those names? Latham Sholes, Frank Gilbreth, The

Curse of Qwerty. Latham is my last name. Frank is my father's name and Qwerty is the witch who—"

Mr. Iskolak raised his hand. "The mind is an amazing instrument, Miss Latham, but is sometimes too quick to infer fiction from fact, to connect what is real with what is imaginary, to embrace coincidences as meaningful rather than simultaneous events. The most likely explanation is that you unconsciously saw those letters while you were typing on your friend's typewriter and played them back in your sleep."

He doesn't believe me either. Why do grownups have such a hard time believing things that don't fit their ordinary way of understanding the world? Why is Mr. Iskolak so quick to shoot down these extraordinary things that are happening to me?

"We cannot alter the typewriter's mechanism to change the character it prints when a key is tapped. But we can re-label the keys for the Dvorak arrangement so the key you type and the letter the typewriter prints are the same. I will copy the diagram before we leave the library, then take you to a stationery store where you can buy decals to re-label each key on the typewriter."

Emily sat there looking down at the diagram, not paying much attention to Mr. Iskolak. What she had read in the book and discovered in the antique shop were not meaningless coincidences or the imagination of a silly young girl.



8

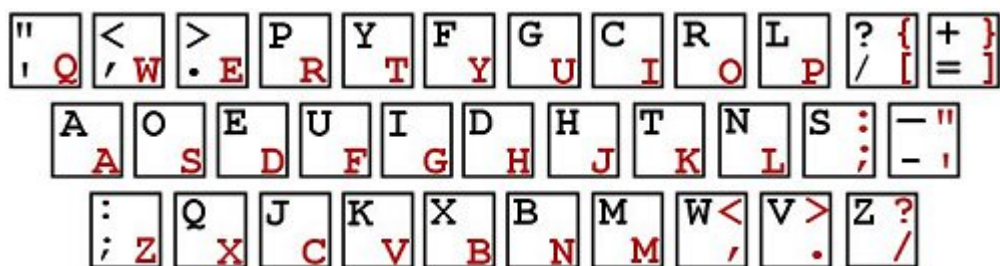
« EMILY DECODES THE MESSAGES »

During the drive back to Budapest, Emily fidgeted with doubt and excitement. The closer they got to the hotel, the more she believed the decals would make things worse.

Her mother would have said it was a woman's intuition and her father would have said it was a hunch. Her mother was always right because she said so, but when she was right her father would say it was just a lucky guess.

Emily didn't care whether her feelings about the decals were intuition, a hunch or a lucky guess. She had the Dvorak-to-Qwerty diagram Mr. Iskolak had copied for her in the library, and knew it would take her one step closer to understanding what the typewriter was saying. If not, she would try the decals.

At the hotel, she found a message from her parents. They had met some very interesting people and would be staying another day. Emily enjoyed being by herself. Now she would have more time to work with the diagram. She hurried up to her room, took the diagram out of her purse and put it on the desk by the window.



She began with what she had typed to see if she could verify what Mr. Iskolak had told her, that the typewriter has a Dvorak keyboard but prints as if it had a Qwerty keyboard.

Letter by letter, Emily converted the keys she had typed to their Qwerty equivalent. Then she compared them to the paper she had taken from the typewriter itself:

MY NAME IS EMILY
MT LAMD G: DMGPT

THEY NEVER BELIEVE ME
KJDT LD>DO NDPGD>D MD

SAY HELLO TO MY FATHER
:AT JDPSS KS MY YAHJDO

They matched. The Dvorak key she had typed became a Qwerty key on the paper. Emily knew that if it always prints the Qwerty key, then the diagram would tell her which Dvorak keys were typed when it printed by itself. She worked through every message the typewriter had printed, translating each message letter by letter:

RPDA:D NDPGD>D MD DMGPT
PLEASE BELIEVE ME EMILY

G AM DPG:A LSK A KTRD<OGKDO
I AM ELISA NOT A TYPEWRITER

JDPR MD NODAV KJD IFO:D SY X<DOKT
HELP ME BREAK THE CURSE OF QWERTY

As she completed the last line, Emily could not restrain her excitement. "Her name is Elisa and she asked me to believe her!" Then in her little voice whispered "I do Elisa. I believe you."

Sobered and intrigued by what she had discovered, Emily leaned back in her chair and watched the Danube wind its way between Buda and Pest. *We are like that, sisters from two different worlds but separated by a curse and a river. Elisa is in Buda, cursed by Qwerty and I am in Pest, cursed by... I don't know what.*

As Emily slipped into the twilight between awake and asleep, the Danube flowing between the two cities became a snake

slithering between Emily and Elisa. *No, nightmares will not run through my dreams tonight.*



9

« TEN THOUSAND FORINTS »

The next morning, Emily couldn't wait to get to the shop and tell Elisa she had broken the curse. She dressed, ran out the door and hailed a cab.

When she arrived at the shop, she paid the taxi driver, then hurried inside. The grouchy old shop owner was helping some people with a chest of drawers and didn't see her enter. Emily slipped quietly past the clock her parents had bickered over and around the huge stacks of books and periodicals to where typewriter sat.

She put a fresh piece of paper in the typewriter, typed HELLO ELISA, THIS IS EMILY then held her breath for Elisa's response. Just when she thought she had imagined the whole thing, the keys started clacking away. Emily removed the diagram from her purse, translated the message letter by letter:

DMGPT TSF AOD NAIV
EMILY YOU ARE BACK

Emily typed her answer as quickly as she could. She liked the Dvorak keyboard. She didn't have to move her fingers as far to type her message.

YES ELISA AND I BELIEVE YOU.
QWERTY HAS CURSED YOU.
WHY DID SHE PUT YOU IN THIS TYPEWRITER?

The keys began moving again. As Emily translated each letter of Elisa's message, she typed it out on the paper:

MY FATHER IS KING OF DVORAK.
QWERTY CURSED ME SO I CAN'T BECOME QUEEN WHEN HE DIES.

Emily was getting faster at using the Dvorak keyboard so it took only a few seconds to answer:

THAT'S TERRIBLE ELISA.

HOW CAN I HELP YOU BREAK THE CURSE?

As before, the keys began clacking by themselves then jammed up in the neck of the typewriter. "Oh no!" Emily cried, and reached forward to free the keys.

"Little girl break typewriter again?"

Emily looked up to see the owner with his hands on his hips and a scowl on his face. She removed the paper from the typewriter, put it in her purse, then put her hands on her hips. "I am fixing the typewriter."

"Not wanting you fix. Break much money."

"How much money?" said Emily.

"Ten thousand forints." he replied, with a smirk on his face.

"Too much, yes? You go now."

Emily looked down at the typewriter. *Ten thousand of anything is a lot.* she thought, then said, "My father has lots of money. Here is a deposit until he comes back from Lake Balleton." Emily dug into her purse and gave the owner the only Hungarian paper money she had: a one thousand forints bill worth about three and a half dollars.



"This hold typewriter one day." said the man, and shuffled off muttering to himself.

When he was out of sight, Emily un-jammed the keys to continue talking with Elisa, but noticed that all the keys were blank. Oh no, she thought. This must be part of the curse.

When Emily got back to the hotel, she removed the paper from her purse and translated the last message from Elisa before the keys had jammed:

: FMMSL UGPNODKJ
SUMMON GILBRETH

Gilbreth, she remembered, was the ergonomics expert who helped Dvorak end the curse of the Qwerty keyboard. Mr. Iskolak is an ergonomics expert. If an ergonomics expert could help Dvorak end the curse of Qwerty a hundred years ago, Mr. Iskolak could help her end the curse of Qwerty now. She didn't like bothering him again but Elisa was depending on her. She would summon Mr. Iskolak. He would be Gilbreth. She would make him believe her.



10

« EMILY SUMMONS GILBRETH »

Mr. Iskolak? This is Emily Latham. You took me to the—

"Yes, Miss Latham. Good morning. Were you able to fix your friend's typewriter?"

"Well, that's what I want to talk to you about. I ran into some problems. Could you come over and help me?"

"I am sorry, Miss Latham, but I am busy with friends this morning. What kind of problems did you encounter?"

"It's kind of hard to explain, but it's urgent. Mr. Iskolak, I know this is going to sound weird, but if I don't fix the typewriter real soon, my friend is going to be in a lot of trouble."

"Have your parents returned from their visit to Lake Balleton?"

"No, they left a message that they would be staying another day."

"Well I am not surprised. It is a most beautiful place with much to do. I will meet you for lunch in the restaurant at your hotel."

Emily found a booth near the back and sat down.

"May I help you?" said a waiter.

"I'm waiting for a friend. We'll order when he comes. Thank you."

A few minutes later, she saw Mr. Iskolak enter the restaurant and look around.

Emily raised her arm and waved to him. "Hello, Mr. Iskolak. Thank you for coming."

"You are quite welcome, Miss Latham. Please tell me what urgent problem you encountered with your friend's typewriter."

"I hope you won't be angry with me but it isn't my friend's typewriter and I didn't put the decals on the keys. I found it and started typing on it and then it started typing back to me—"

"Miss Latham—"

"It's true Mr. Iskolak. Please believe me."

"This typewriter operates by itself? Is that what you are telling me?"

Emily nodded, suddenly out of breath.

Mr. Iskolak paused for a moment to think about what Emily had said. Perhaps it is a teletype, he thought, for that was the only typewriter-like equipment he could think of to explain Emily's claim that it typed automatically, as if by itself.

But teletypes require signals from a remote location to initiate the typing. If it were a teletype, who was sending them and why? And how odd that an industrial piece of equipment would be in an antiques shop, still operating and receiving signals.

"Where is this typewriter?"

"In an antique shop on the Buda side of the river. I'll take you to her."

"Her?"

"Yes. I mean no. Well, her name is Elisa. She told me she's a person, not a typewriter and that a witch named Qwerty imprisoned her in it. It doesn't matter, Mr. Iskolak, whether she's *in* a typewriter or *is* a typewriter. The curse makes it all the same."

Emily took the paper from her purse and showed Mr. Iskolak everything she had translated using the diagram he had given her. Mr. Iskolak studied the paper for a few minutes, then rubbed his chin with his thumb and forefinger.

"I am certainly not angry with you Miss Latham. You have done an excellent job of deciphering this mystery. And you are

correct. Placing decals over the Dvorak keys would have added another layer of complexity to the puzzle."

"She's a princess under a terrible curse. The last thing she told me—" Emily stopped to find the paper with the incomplete message. "I translated this just before I called you this morning. Emily showed him where Elisa had said SUMMON GILBRETH.

"Gilbreth." said Mr. Iskolak, "Jack Gilbreth was the expert in ergonomics who inspired August Dvorak to design a new layout for typewriters that would, well, end the curse of Qwerty. Ergonomics is my field and—"

"Yes, Mr. Iskolak. That's why I called you. If an ergonomics expert could end the curse of Qwerty back then, you can end it now. Elisa told me to summon Gilbreth. You *are* Gilbreth. Please help us."

"I will certainly try, Emily. You have stumbled onto something equally strange and fascinating. Let us go visit this typewriter of yours."

Mr. Iskolak had never before called her Emily. She embraced it as evidence that he not only liked her but believed her, that Elisa would soon be free of the curse and that awful typewriter.



« THE LEGEND OF QWERTY »

"Jo reggelt." greeted the owner as Mr. Iskolak and Emily walked in the shop.

"This is Mr. Iskolak." said Emily, "He has come to see my typewriter. I put a deposit on her. One hundred forints. Come on, Mr. Iskolak. Elisa is right over here."

When they got to the typewriter, Mr. Iskolak leaned forward and examined it. "The keyboard is indeed a Dvorak layout. What would you like me to type, Emily?"

"Tell her you are Gilbreth and you've come to break the curse. Don't forget that you don't have to find the Qwerty-equivalent keys. Elisa understands everything in Dvorak just fine.

"You have learned your Qwerty and Dvorak quite well, Emily. Thank you for reminding me."

Mr. Iskolak stepped forward and typed:

HELLO ELISA. I AM MISTER ISKOLAK. EMILY SUMMONED ME TO BE YOUR GILBRETH.

They waited for what seemed an eternity to Emily, but the typewriter remained silent. Emily squirmed. Mr. Iskolak smiled but said nothing.

"You don't believe me and I don't blame you. I wasted your time. Please don't tell my parents about this, OK?"

"But I do believe you, Emily. There is a legend in our country about the curse of Qwerty. I did not speak to you about it because, well, it says a young girl must solve the mystery by herself. If adults interfere, the curse will become worse."

Emily raised her eyebrows, struggling to believe what he had just told her. "Then why did you help me?"

"I am not sure, Emily. Perhaps to give myself permission to believe your story and thereby believe the legend. I grew up with many stories and legends but never believed any of them were true. My three brothers, two sisters and seven cousins spent many hours at my grandfather's farm listening to him tell tales large and small. He told us a good story is more true than if it had really happened."

Arany paused, momentarily transported back to his childhood. "I wanted to believe him because he needed me to believe him."

"Yes." replied Emily. "My father read to me until I could read myself, so I know what your grandfather meant. Some stories make me feel like it's happening to me."

"If this one is true, Emily, whatever happens to Elisa could happen to you. The Legend of Qwerty is very clear. The fates of the two girls are intertwined like the strands of a rope. I hope your efforts to free Elisa from the Curse of Qwerty are successful, but I cannot, must not help you."

"But you have helped me, Mister Iskolak. You helped me find that book and understand Elisa's messages. And you believe me. That helps most of all."

"Yes, Emily, friends should believe one another. And know each other by their first names. Mine is Arany."

"Thank you for believing me, uh, Arany."

As Emily and Arany left the shop to begin the drive back to Pest, Ergo began tormenting Elisa with the same chant Qwerty had used to torture Emily in her dream days before.



1-2-3 — you belong to me
4-5-6 — I'm blessed with tricks
7-8-9 — find the line
1-2-3 — that sets you free
4-5-6 — type the fix
7-8-9 — is a stitch in time.



12

« QWERTY IS A NIGHTMARE »

Where have you been, Emily? Don't you know we've been worried? How many times must I tell you not to leave the room without telling me where you are going? Do you know what time it is?"

Ignoring her mother, Emily turned to Mr. Latham and said "Dad, please come to the antique shop and buy that typewriter. You can take the money out of my allowance."

Mrs. Latham took Emily by the shoulders. "You won't have any allowance if you don't start behaving. Do you think little girls who misbehave should get an allowance? Well of course not!" she said, answering her own question, then looked at her husband.

"Your mother and I are concerned about your interest in this typewriter. Typewriters are machines, Emily, not people."

"You don't believe me. You never believe me. Poor Elisa is trapped in a typewriter but nobody believes me. I'll get the ten thousand forints myself."

"Now listen here young lady, if you think for one minute—"

"Lillian!"

Hands on her hips, Mrs. Latham faced her husband, "Frank Latham, if you think for one minute—"

"Lillian. Shut up."

Emily could hardly believe her own ears. Her father had never spoken to her mother like that before. Had he decided to never again tolerate her mother's domineering attitude? She hoped so.

With a stern look on his face, her father turned his attention to Emily. "And you young lady have caused us worry we did not

deserve. I should put you on restrictions for the rest of our holiday. But I will not, because your mother and I must take some of the blame ourselves. We have ignored you in pursuit of our own interests. In the morning you and I will go to the shop and buy that typewriter."

Emily thanked her father, gave him a hug and went to her room. When she fell asleep she found herself walking along the Danube holding the typewriter in her arms as if somebody might snatch it away. Suddenly that same wretched old woman jumped out of the shadows. Startled, Emily jumped back and fell into the cold, dark river. As she struggled to stay afloat, the witch begins her wretched chant.



1-2-3 — you belong to me
4-5-6 — I'm blessed with tricks
7-8-9 — find the line
1-2-3 — that sets you free
4-5-6 — type the fix
7-8-9 — is a stitch in time.

Once again, Emily pulled herself awake. "That's the same nightmare I had before but now I know it's not a dream. It's *really* happening. To me. Qwerty isn't counting down the last moments of my life. She's taunting me with the cure for the curse. Emily fell back to sleep knowing what she must do in the morning.



13

« EMILY BUYS THE TYPEWRITER »

Jo napot kivanok. greeted the owner as Mr. Latham walked into the shop.

"Sorry, but I do not speak Hungarian." replied Mr. Latham."

"Ah... Good afternoon. My name Mr. Basil. May I help you?"

"My name is Mr. Latham and this is my daughter Emily. We would like to see a typewriter you have here in your shop."

"Igen, Mr. Latham. Igen, igen. Yes, yes. Mr. Eston, my assistant said girl many times very interested in typewriter. Much money but much rare."

Emily and Mr. Latham followed the owner through the shop. The late afternoon sunlight coming through the west window high up near the ceiling made the dust in the old shop sparkle like small pieces of gold suspended in the air.

Emily bent over the typewriter and whispered, "Elisa, this is my Dad."

The keys were still jammed, just as Ergo had left them. Emily's heart was pounding. She started to touch the keys but Mr. Basil carefully but firmly removed her hand.

"Much money. I fix."

"How much money?" asked Mr. Latham.

"Ten thousand forints."



Emily knew that was less than forty dollars so she was surprised when her father began to bargain for a lower price.

"Ten thousand." echoed Mr. Latham, looking first at Emily and then at the typewriter. "But it's broken. The keys are jammed, it's scratched in several places, the paint has faded and it has a Dvorak instead of the standard Qwerty keyboard."

"Eight thousand. Much rare." countered the owner.

Frank took out his wallet and gave Mr. Basil four American ten dollar bills. "Keep the change. How soon can you repair the typewriter and deliver it to our hotel?"

Koszonom szepen. Thank you, Mr. Latham. My assistant fix typewriter and deliver to your hotel in morning."

On the way to the hotel, Emily was walking on air. "Dad, how did you know about the wicked witch?"

"Wicked witch? What do you mean, Emily?"

"You told Mr. Basil the typewriter isn't a Qwerty keyboard. How did you know about the curse of Qwerty?"

"I'm not sure what you mean Emily, but the Qwerty keyboard is a kind of curse. The first typewriter—"

"It *is* a curse! Qwerty trapped Elisa in a typewriter so she couldn't become the queen and now her father is dying and her evil uncle will become the King of Dvorak unless—"

"Slow down, Emily. How do you know about Dvorak?"

"Elisa told me. She lived in the Land of Dvorak until Qwerty imprisoned her in a typewriter."

Emily told her father everything that had happened since the day she had found the typewriter. When she got to the part about how Mr. Iskolak had helped her to translate from Dvorak to Qwerty, her father interrupted her.

"Mr. Iskolak. Yes, I'm sure you'll be able to fix that old typewriter with his help. He's an ergonomics expert, one of the best, and knows just about everything about machines and how to make them work.



« ELISA DISAPPEARS »

While her parents were sleeping, Emily got up, dressed and hurried down to the hotel lobby.

"Good morning. I am Emily Latham. I'm here to pick up the typewriter."

The man at the counter looked puzzled. "Typewriter?"

"Yes." said Emily. My father paid for it yesterday, and Mr. Basil said he would deliver it to our hotel this morning."

"I am sorry, Miss Latham, but no typewriter has been delivered to this hotel."

Emily could feel her heart beating. Breathlessly she demanded, "But have you checked our box? Where do packages go when they arrive at the hotel?"

"Miss Latham, it is my job to meet delivery trucks every morning and nothing on the truck came addressed to you or your father."

Emily turned and walked slowly back to her room. What could have gone wrong, she thought. Could this, too, be part of the curse? Where is the typewriter? Where is Elisa?

When she got to her room, she called Mr. Basil. "Hello, this is Emily Latham. I need to speak to Mr. Basil."

"Mister Basil not here. Call tomorrow."

"No, I must speak to him now. Give me his number."

"No, you cannot have number."

Emily recognized the voice. It belonged to Mr. Basil's assistant, Mr. Eston, the grouchy old man who had given her so much trouble earlier.

"My father paid for the typewriter yesterday and you were supposed to deliver it to our hotel this morning and I want—"

Click.

Emily looked down at the phone, wishing she could hurt that mean old man by whacking him with it. Instead, she flicked it closed and took a taxi to the shop.

As Emily burst through the door, the little bell rang.

"Stop! Not want girl in store."

"Where's Mr. Basil? I have to see Mr. Basil."

"Mr. Basil not want little girls in shop. You go now." and grabbed Emily's arm to lead her out of the shop.

Emily tried to break free of his grip, but he pushed her out the door.

Emily went around the corner of the shop, leaned up against the wall and struggled to keep tears and panic from overwhelming her. Looking around, she realized she had walked into an alley between the shop and another building.

What if? She walked down the alley to the back of the shop and saw a door slightly ajar. *Yes!* She opened the door and looked in. The back door of the shop. She'd save Elisa yet!

Her heart now racing, she edged through the door past the cluttered shelves and saw the clerk stacking boxes. His back was to her. She quickly slipped around the corner and down the aisle where the typewriter had been when her father came to the shop with her.

The typewriter was gone. I must have gone down the wrong aisle, she thought, then looked around to get her bearings. "There's the old grandfather clock." she whispered. "The typewriter should be right here." No, she wasn't turned around. She could see where the dust had collected around the spot where the typewriter had been.

"Elisa?" she whispered. "That's silly. A typewriter can't hear me."

Emily had no other choice but to ask Mr. Eston where he had put the typewriter. Maybe it's in a back room waiting for Mr. Basil, who had forgotten to put her in a box and deliver her to the hotel. That grumpy old clerk might throw her out again, but she'd have to take the risk. She reached into her purse and removed the lipstick she had stolen from her mother, painted her lips, then walked as bravely as she could to the front of the store.

"Mr. Eston," she said with the biggest most authoritative voice she could muster.

"Igen. You again! Not wanting girl in store!"

"I have important business with you. Mr. Basil said he would put Elisa, I mean the typewriter, in a box and deliver it to my hotel. But the typewriter has not been delivered and it isn't in the shop anymore. Where have you put it?"

Mr. Eston scowled at Emily over the top of his glasses.

"Typewriter not here."

"What do you mean, it isn't here. It's mine. My father paid for it. Eight thousand forints!"

"Man buy for museum. Typewriter gone. You go away." Mr. Eston went back to stacking boxes.

"What man? Museum? Where?" cried Emily. Her squeaky, scared little voice had returned.

The man growled "Not want girl in store."

"That is my typewriter and if you don't get it right now, my father will have Mr. Basil fire you."

He looked as if he would welcome being fired. "Typewriter gone." The old man pushed his glasses back on his nose and continued to stack boxes.

Emily walked slowly out the door. Elisa would be trapped in a typewriter forever and she would be trapped in a boarding school for what would seem like forever. She had failed Elisa and herself. Mister Iskolak had warned her that whatever

happens to Elisa happens to her. She wandered down one street after another, paying little attention to where she was going. It began to rain.

As Emily left the shop, Ergo cackled at Elisa.

"I told you I had some tricks for your little friend. Thanks to Qwerty, men with deceit in their hearts come under my spell quickly and easily, and Mister Eston and the buyer for the museum were no exception."

"Emily will find me, break this curse and put one on you!"

"Not in time to save you or your father, for he is dead."

As Ergo swirled away and back to her dark world, Elisa hung her head in disbelief. She could hear rain beating down on the roof of the shop. She wanted to be a princess, not a queen. Now she would never be a princess or a queen.



Elisa wondered if she *was* the typewriter or just somehow *in* it. How odd it would seem to Emily, if she were here, to see tears streaming down the face of an old typewriter.



« EMILY DISCOVERS THE HOME ROW »

Emily! You're soaking wet! Where have you been? We have called you dozens of times. What good is your cell phone if you never turn it on?"

"Nowhere. Just walking around."

"Now you listen to me, young lady. I will not have you wandering around a foreign country without proper supervision. Your father and I have a dinner engagement with very important friends. Go to your room right now, and stay there until we return. Are you hearing me?"

Emily didn't answer. Her mother wanted obedience, not understanding. When she got to her room, she remembered Arany saying that whatever happens to Elisa will happen to her. Could Qwerty imprison her in a typewriter? How long did a curse last? Forever?

The thought of spending eternity in a typewriter brought goose bumps to her neck. Emily shuddered. *I should call Arany. He is my friend and friends help each other. Even if the legend were true, how much worse could things be if I got him involved again?*

In Budapest, phone numbers were seven digits long, just like back home. She found Arany's number in the phone book, began tapping it into her cell phone, then stopped when she noticed something she had never paid any attention to before: the numbers on her cell phone were arranged like the numbers the witch Qwerty had taunted her with in that horrible dream. And every key had letters associated with the number. Except for the "1" key. There were no letters on the "1" key.



I wish Arany were here. But he said I must break the curse without him. And the numbers and letters on my cell phone give me an idea. There is some connection between the numbers in that chant and the keyboard on that typewriter, and I will find it.

Emily set her cell phone next to the keyboard diagram, then took her notes out of her purse, including her copy of the page in the book at the library where the advantages of the Dvorak keyboard were described.

She tried to find a connection between the keyboard diagram and the numbers on her phone, but her eyes kept glancing over at her copy of the page from the book at the library. She picked it up and began reading about being able to type thousands of words using just the keys on the home row. Emily felt goosebumps rippling up and down her back, the good bumps, not the scary, crawly ones.

She looked at the home row on the diagram. A O E U I and D H T N S. All the vowels and the most commonly used consonants. Emily knew she couldn't type any real word without a vowel so she convinced herself the curse could be broken with a word she could type on the home row.



Using letters from the home row, Emily tried dozens of words but none seemed right. She'd had a long day and began drifting

off to sleep, worrying about what might happen to her and Elisa if she typed the wrong word.

Girly, girly, you belong to me
Never, never, go back to that shop
Or surely, surely your heart will stop.

Emily woke up in a cold sweat. She wondered if Qwerty had been taunting her again or her own mind had been torturing her in her sleep.

If I were a witch, thought Emily, what would I do? I'd frighten people into doing what I wanted them to do, of course. Or what I did not want them to do. Exactly, and Qwerty does not want me to go back to that shop. But I did, and my heart didn't stop. That old witch still doesn't want me in that shop. But why not? Elisa isn't there anymore. Even if I discovered the word to unlock Elisa from that typewriter, I couldn't type it because I don't know where she is.

Emily looked out her window. The moon shined brightly on the Danube river winding its way between Buda and Pest. Yes, she thought. Buda and Pest are two cities divided by water. What divides Elisa and me? Water? No, a typewriter and a curse, the curse of Qwerty.

Emily felt anger rolling over her like a wave of hot lava. She wanted to put her hands around the neck of that ugly old witch and squeeze until—

She stopped her rant and wondered why, with Elisa no longer in the shop, had Qwerty tried to frighten her from going back.

"Because Elisa is still there!" she exclaimed. "And I will go back tonight and find her and no witch can stop me!"



« EMILY FINDS ELISA »

Emily grabbed the flashlight next to her bed, walked down to the lobby and out the large hotel doors.

She looked at her watch. Four minutes before 11. She knew the city bus came by her hotel every hour on the hour, so she didn't call a cab. As she stood there waiting for the bus, she remembered the horrible dream. Despite the warmth of an August night in Pest, Emily shivered.

The bus pulled up with a screech and a cloud of smoke as the driver applied the brakes. She didn't know how old you had to be to ride the bus. But even though she was as tall as most adults, she kept her head down as she walked up the steps and handed him 240 forints. Neither the driver nor the three other people on the bus paid any attention to her.

She took a seat near the double doors in the middle of the bus. It would take 20 minutes or more to get across the river and to the shop in Buda. Sitting there watching the city go by through the large window of the bus, the fear and excitement of her adventure washed over her like a large, dark wave. She was a girl from Topeka, Kansas, riding a bus in a foreign country, looking for a princess trapped in a typewriter because a witch has devised an evil plan for the inhabitants of another world. Who would believe me back home?

Only days before, from the plane, she had watched Buda and Pest come into view. But that seemed like a million years ago. So much had happened. As the bus drove across the bridge, she once again wondered what the four stone lions were guarding. As the bus approached the Buda side of the bridge, she felt

certain the two lions at the west entrance turned their huge heads to follow her with their eyes.

A few days ago, she would have dismissed the lions coming to life as her imagination. She could hear her mother saying, "Emily, it is time for you to grow up and put that childish imagination to work on more important things."

Emily knew what those more important things were, and they always revolved around what her mother wanted. No, tonight she was prepared to believe anything. She had to.

When the bus came to the stop near the antique shop, she got off and walked to the front door. She tried to turn the knob, hoping the clerk, in a hurry to get home, had forgotten to lock it. He had not forgotten.

Then she remembered the back door being ajar the last time she had been there and ran back to the alley. The door was closed. Emily took a deep breath, put her hand on the cold brass knob and twisted it slowly.

"The door isn't locked," she whispered, then worried that somebody had heard her. Nothing. Not even a dog barking. Emily continued turning the knob as quietly as she could, then slowly pushed the door open far enough for her to squeeze into the back of the shop.

She bumped into something and froze. Pitch black. Like when she slipped under her covers at night to read a book before she turned her flashlight on. She remembered the first time it wouldn't turn on. Dead batteries. The surprise of not having light when she needed it had become fear as she discovered how unreliable her expectations had been. And could be again. She had screamed then, but she wouldn't panic now.

The flashlight! She had almost forgotten she had it with her. She flicked it on. The light, sudden and bright, scared her as much as the dark had frightened her a moment before. But she could see, and began to search for Elisa. Her eyes followed the

beam of light as she searched each shelf in the back room of the shop.

Emily moved her flashlight from shelf to shelf looking for a box the right size for a typewriter. The boxes on the lower shelves were all too large or too small, but when she flashed her light on the top shelf she saw one just the right size.



"Elisa, are you there?" she hollered.

"Shssssh." she whispered, scolding herself.

Emily found a stool in the corner of the room and used it to get the box down from the shelf. She set it down on the floor, opened the top flaps and pointed her flashlight into the box.

"Elisa, I knew you'd still be here in the shop. I knew it. I just knew it."

Emily pulled the typewriter out of the box, set it on one of the lower shelves and typed:

ELISA, IT'S ME. THAT MEAN OLD CLERK HID YOU IN THIS BACK ROOM.

As Emily waited for Elisa to answer, the typewriter began to glow, then all the keys jumped forward and jammed in the neck. Emily freed the keys and typed:

ELISA, ARE YOU OK? DID ERGO JAM YOUR KEYS?

After what felt like an eternity to Emily, the keys began tapping against the paper. Emily leaned forward, shined her flashlight on the message and read:

NO, ERGO ISN'T HERE. I'M JUST WORRIED.

I'M WORRIED TOO SO I'M TAKING YOU BACK TO MY ROOM AT THE HOTEL TO BREAK THE CURSE.

THERE ISN'T TIME EMILY. MY FATHER IS DEAD. IF WE DON'T BREAK THE CURSE TONIGHT MY UNCLE WILL BE CROWNED KING AND

I WILL HAVE NO REASON TO GO HOME.

With tears streaming down her face, Emily cried "Elisa, I'm so sorry. I am going to break the curse right here in this old shop where I found you and lost you and then found you again."

Elisa didn't hear Emily. She was still locked in the cold, metallic embrace of a curse, deaf to Emily's world.

Emily knew this would be her last chance to free Elisa. If she failed now, all would be lost. She looked at the Dvorak diagram. In her dream, the witch Qwerty had told her to find the line and type the fix. Earlier in her room, she had guessed the line must be the home row of letters on a Dvorak keyboard, which has all the vowels, AOEUI, and the most commonly used consonants, DHTNS. But what word would be a fix? Then something about a stitch in time. And the numbers. Why the numbers? Could she type a number on the home row? Which one?

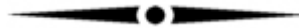
As Emily scanned the keys on the home row, the keys began tapping the paper again. She quickly decoded it:

EMILY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I'M TRYING TO FIND THE SECRET WORD.

I THINK IT'S A NUMBER.

BE QUIET SO I CAN CONCENTRATE.



« A STITCH IN TIME »

I can type ONE. she whispered to herself but not TWO, THREE, FOUR or FIVE.

She continued trying to find the letters for a number she could type on the home row. When she got to NINE, she said to herself, "Yes, I can type NINE. But I can also type TEN. No, ten isn't one of the numbers in that horrible chant. And it's not a number on my phone pad, either.

Emily took a deep breath and slowly, quietly let herself breath out the words "ONE or NINE." She took another look at the keys on the home row, then suddenly remembered an old nursery rhyme and yelled, "***A stitch in time saves nine!***" Somewhere nearby, a dog barked. Emily scolded herself with a whispered "Shssssh."



"NINE. That's it. I can type ONE with the letters on the home row but the number 1 isn't on my phone pad."

Emily didn't think the number 1 on her cell phone was much to go on, certainly not with Elisa's life at stake, and perhaps her life as well. But she did think ***7-8-9... a stitch in time*** in Qwerty's chant ***was*** something to go on. So she decided she would type NINE and hope it would be in time to send Elisa back to be the queen. She put her fingers on the typewriter and typed what she hoped would not be her last message to Elisa.

ELISA, THE WORD IS *NINE*. I'M GOING TO TYPE IT NOW. FORGIVE ME IF IT'S THE WRONG WORD. NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU.

Emily put her fingers on the home row, typed NINE and held her breath. For some strange reason, she decided to count while she waited for the typewriter to print LGLD, the Qwerty-equivalent of NINE.

As she counted, she found herself looking at the sequence of letters on the home row: AOEUIDHTNS. When she got to N, the ninth character in her count, all the keys jumped forward and jammed together in the neck.

"Oh no!" cried Emily. "Nine is the wrong word. I'll never see Elisa again." Trying not to panic, she reached forward and freed the keys, allowing them to fall back into their normal position, then typed another message to Elisa.

ARE YOU THERE ELISA? PLEASE ANSWER!

She waited and waited. Just when she had given up all hope she would ever see Elisa again, the keys began tapping out a message.

YES I AM STILL HERE. I WAS AFRAID NINE WOULD BE THE WRONG WORD SO I STOPPED THE KEYS FROM TYPING IT OUT.

I AM AFRAID TOO, ELISA, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE IT COULD BE AND WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF TIME. I AM GOING TO TYPE IT AGAIN. YOU HAVE TO TRUST ME, ELISA.

Emily put her fingers back on the home row, held her breath, and once again began typing the word NINE. As she typed the final E, she looked up and saw LGL on the paper but no D.

She had set the flashlight along the shelf so it illuminated the keys and the paper in the typewriter, but worried that in her haste to break the curse, she had tapped some other key. Had she tapped it hard enough? Too late to worry about that, so she typed NINE again. Nothing. Panic overcame her as she typed:

ELISA. ARE YOU STILL THERE? OH ELISA. I TYPED THE WRONG WORD. GOODBYE ELISA. GOODBYE.

Emily reached over and turned her flashlight off. Nothing seemed to matter now. She sat in the dark, defeated and alone.



« THE LIONS ROAR »

Standing in the dark feeling sorry for herself and Elisa, Emily heard the typewriter tapping out a new message.

She reached for the flashlight but knocked it off the shelf. She heard it hit the floor and roll. She fell to her knees and began searching the floor.

The rough old boards bit into her fingers and knees but she crawled around until she found it, then flicked the switch. The sudden light blinded her for a moment. She aimed the beam at the typewriter and read:

I STOPPED YOUR TYPING AGAIN EMILY.

Emily felt anger rise up in her.

ELISA, YOU ARE SABOTAGING MY EFFORTS TO BREAK THE CURSE!
NO EMILY, I AM NOT!

Emily didn't want to be angry with Elisa. She sat there looking at the typewriter, then typed:

YOU DON'T WANT TO BE THE QUEEN, DO YOU ELISA?

NO, I WANT TO BE A PRINCESS DANCING AROUND THE CASTLE,
WATCHING MY FATHER WRITING IMPORTANT PAPERS AND LIGHTING
THAT OLD PIPE OF HIS. I WANT TO BE HOME IN DVORAK SEEING
THE TREES BLOOMING AND THE SHIPS SAILING. BUT I DON'T WANT
TO BE TRAPPED IN THIS TYPEWRITER EITHER, SO I MUST BE FREE
OF THIS CURSE SO I CAN BECOME THE QUEEN OF DVORAK.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE EMILY?

Elisa's last sentence was barely visible, as if the ink on the ribbon had dried up, as if Elisa were being very gentle about asking Emily a question like that.

I WISH I COULD BE A PRINCESS TOO, ELISA, OR A QUEEN, BUT
MY PARENTS ARE SENDING ME TO A BOARDING SCHOOL WHEN WE GET
HOME.

Emily thought how bored and alone she will be in a school with strangers. *That will be a kind of trap too—there won't even*

be any boys.

THEN WE WILL BREAK THE CURSE NOW AND I WILL BE QUEEN OF DVORAK AND YOU WILL BE QUEEN OF YOUR BOARDING SCHOOL. LET'S DO IT!

The room swirled and the flashlight dimmed. Emily felt dizzy. As she regained her balance, a slender young woman emerged from the typewriter. She wore a delicate pink dress and her hair was the color of gold.

"Elisa, it's you!"

"Yes, and there you are. my Emily.

"Elisa, I was so afraid I'd type the wrong word."

"But you didn't Emily. You typed the right word. Despite your parent's disapproval, my stubbornness and even your own disbelief, you didn't give up trying to break the curse of that horrible old witch."

They embraced, then shuddered as they remembered the terror of being trapped, perhaps forever, in a typewriter.

"I think it's more than a secret word, Elisa. We broke through the curse of Qwerty by discovering what we must do because of who we are. There is magic in that too. My father is always telling me to be bold and mighty forces will come to my aid."

Emily nodded. "Your father is right, Emily, and tonight proves it."

They giggled as they recalled the joy of escaping the clutches of Ergo and the curse of Qwerty.

"What if Qwerty curses us again? How—"

The roar of a lion interrupted Emily. They turned to see four lions standing in the darkness of the old antique shop. Elisa and Emily stepped back, once again in fear for their lives.

The largest of the four lions stepped forward. "Good evening ladies. You have nothing to fear from us. I am Simba and these are my friends Alex, Leo and Elsa.



"Hello." said Emily and Elisa. In contrast to Simba's deep, authoritative voice, theirs sounded like the peeps of two small birds.

"We were made of stone, or so our sculptor intended, but we are very much alive. Our mission has been to guard the bridge against gargoyles and demons but tonight we are hungry for an ogre and a witch. When we have satisfied our appetite with those two fiends, the bridge will once again be safe for travel in both directions and you will be free of Qwerty and her curse. Forever. It would be undignified for lions of our stature to wave, but our eyes will follow the Princess of Qwerty and the Queen of Dvorak when they cross our bridge. Goodbye and good night."

Simba tossed his head and he and the other lions disappeared in a mighty roar.



« SISTERS ONE »

"**I just knew** the lions guarded something but never imagined they were guarding you and me Elisa, or that they would destroy Qwerty and her ogre."

They regained their composure, laughed and kissed each other on the cheeks.

"I must go now, Emily, before my uncle completes his diabolical plan. The people of Dvorak will embrace my return and banish my uncle forever."

"Wait! How will we stay in touch?"

Elisa grinned so wide Emily thought she would roar like a lion herself. "I almost forgot to tell you a secret. When Queens are crowned in Dvorak, they are given the power to summon anyone anytime they choose, and I will soon summon you Emily, to my coronation."

"But what if I need to summon you, Elisa?"

Elisa removed her necklace and placed it around Emily's neck. "This belongs to you now, Emily, for you are truly a princess in your world. You can summon me just by touching it and saying the word—"

"Don't say it, Elisa. It's our secret word, the one that set us free."

"It isn't *ONE* Emily, it's—"

They laughed, knowing it was a special word to be used only for summoning each other. They hugged again, then Elisa swirled away to her castle in the land of Dvorak.



Emily's flashlight dimmed in the shimmering light of Elisa's departure. She switched it off, took the typewriter in her arms and walked out of the shop into the cool night air. She looked at her watch. Three minutes before midnight. She walked to the bus stop. When it arrived, she dropped her coins in the slot, took a seat near the front and watched the moonlight glisten on the Danube winding its way between Buda and Pest.

As the bus passed the west entrance of the bridge, she watched Alex and Simba follow her with their eyes. As the bus passed the east entrance, she looked back and saw Leo and Elsa follow her with their eyes. Their role in the fate of Ergo and Qwerty made Emily think of hers. She felt a new Emily emerging, an Emily willing to enter the world she had inherited from her parents but eager to take what she had learned from her adventure with Elisa back to the land of here and now and be herself.

Elisa summoned Emily to the Land of Dvorak often, where they continued to help each other take their place in the scheme of things without giving up their own hopes and dreams. Even though they lived in different worlds, they lived in each other. Friends who understood each other more deeply than anyone else ever could. Sisters no longer separated by a curse or a river.



« ABOUT THE AUTHOR »

Billy Dean is a free-lance writer with degrees in English and Engineering. He has written articles for trade journals, been a newspaper columnist, performed poetry at open mic events, and had his essays, memoirs, poems, stories and how-to guides published with on-line magazines and e-book distributors. You can find the other books he has published, and make comments about this one, on his [Author Page](#) at Amazon.

