

Emily's Typewriter

By Kirstie Olley

When first I laid eyes upon that infernal contraption I at once knew it would be the death of me. Where this mysterious shade of prophecy came from I know not, but I knew it for the fact it was.

My wife bought the typewriter home on a cool autumn afternoon, her cheeks rosy with her delight. Emily loved to pen stories, but found the nib and ink pot a frustrating method for her pen could never keep pace with her mind. This device she assured me could keep pace with her ever expanding ideas.

She set the typewriter down on a desk by the window that overlooked her beloved garden, the gourd plant she tended daily's leaves framing the scene. The view was pleasing to her and she insisted it would be good for her inspiration.

Her inspiration had the opposite effect on her garden.

Enveloped in her ideas my wife forgot herself. She never left the house to tend her treasured garden, instead she typed. As the leaves of the gourd plant browned and curled in on themselves I noticed the neglect inside the house as well, dust on surfaces, cobwebs lacing the corners and grime smearing the windows.

I would return home of an evening to discover she had not cooked dinner. At first I was furious, but it dawned upon me I had never noticed the extent to which Emily worked each day to make this house our home. It was after this realisation that I began to worry.

She sat ensconced before that typewriter every day tapping away at the keys. The only time she moved from the typewriter was to sleep and more and more it seemed she came to bed later and rose earlier. One day, in a fit of fear for her well-being, I stayed home from work.

All she did was sit there. The entire day passed and she did not even notice I had not left for work. All she did was type, push the small silver handle to begin a new line and feed new paper into the roller. She did not rise to eat. She did not rise to use the outhouse. It was not until I went to retire to bed that she rose from the desk and came to bed.

The next morning I woke to the sound of metal arms flying up to stamp through inked ribbon onto paper. The sun had barely risen and she was already typing.

I knew that something was wrong as I sat there behind her, watching her fingers fly. The sounds of those metal stamps pounding the paper made my stomach wrench as if it were a dish rag Emily was wringing out. Except she no longer did that. The reek of food, still caked onto dishes and rotting wafted from the kitchen where the plates piled so high I wondered if adventurous mountaineers could not be called upon to assist me in cleaning them.

I desperately wished to speak to someone but had no idea whom I could talk to.

Too ill to go to work I sat at her side, softly calling her name while she had eyes only for the letters on her keyboard. I made lunch and placed it on the table beside her typewriter, but it was

ignored. I offered drinks and suggestions to take a stroll together by the river, holding hands as we had when we were newly-wed. She did not respond to anything but the tale she was typing.

As the sun set I lit the lamps and wondered what story was eating her alive.

I picked up a small sheaf of papers bound together with string from the bottom of the pile and read.

A light-hearted romance full of fluttering eyelashes and accidental brushing of hands came from the page. These were the stories my wife loved to read and she told them beautifully, easily a rival for any tale of that ilk. I grabbed another sheaf from the middle and read.

A similar story of lovers. Before long I noticed the setting was unfamiliar. The landscapes were misshapen, houses watched with dark eyes and the horse-drawn carriage was pulled by a beast of scales and claws with a sunken multitude of eyes.

My heart in my throat I threw the sheaf to the ground and snatched the latest story from the top of the pile.

What I read called forth lunch from my stomach.

I opened the back door to deposit my partially digested meal. I put the paper down with a shaking hand. The tears that blurred my vision were only slightly from the acid taste of bile.

My wife sat at her desk undisturbed by the ruckus I had created.

I doused the lamps and went to bed. There I cried myself to sleep like a child.

I was roused in the night by a stirring in the bed. My heart leaped with hope and fear simultaneously. Emily had come to bed at last, but was the woman sliding under the covers beside me still the woman I had married?

I edged closer, trepidation making my pulse thrum through my veins.

“My dearest,” I asked, my voice breaking like a pubescent boy’s. “I was thinking we should go to church tomorrow and talk to Father Peterson...”

My words died in my mouth as my hand touched her cheek. Her skin was slick and oozing. My hand recoiled and I threw back the sheet, fumbling to light the bedside candle.

My wife lay there, eyes closed, her skin pallid like a corpse’s, her cheeks sunken, but this was not what was disturbing. From the pores of her skin seeped a viscous fluid, greenish in colour and it bubbled out, the stream slow but continuous.

I screamed and ran from the room. My feet tore me through the biting chill of the late autumn night to the church where I thumped on the old oak doors until my fists hurt and the Father opened them.

My words tumbled from my mouth. Father Peterson did not believe me, but he followed me like a dutiful parent would follow a child back to their room to show them no monster hid under their bed.

The priest’s face paled upon sighting my wife, lying in the puddle of green ooze on our mattress.

Father Peterson turned at once to the desk that entombed my wife daily and grabbed the typewriter. He raised the damned machine overhead and smashed it upon the desk. On the bed, still laying prone, Emily shrieked, her cry so shrill it stabbed at my ears. He raised and struck the cursed contraption repeatedly, despite the screams of my wife, until it lay in pieces.

Satisfied with the fragments on the ground the priest took the cross from his neck, slid it over my wife's head and gave her a benediction. He left, visibly shaking, assuring me he would return in the morning.

Trembling I swept up the mess and threw it outside. I then took a damp cloth and sponged my beautiful Emily clean.

In the morning Father Peterson returned with more crosses, holy water and acolytes. There was no need for the ceremonies he performed. My wife sat there at the battered desk by the window with the view of a withered gourd plant. She stared out the window, hands on the desk, fingers twitching amongst the splinters typing on unseen keys.

She sits there still, every day staring sadly out the window, her eyes as soulless as her body.

I thought the machine would be the death of me, but it was far worse than that. It was the death of my heart.