

Black of their eyes

Lachlan Macleod, June 2006

Emily put her toothbrush down. She looked up at the mirror and screamed. Although she had looked up seconds before and seen only herself, she now saw someone standing behind her. He was an older boy who she knew to be named Ricky. She stared as he stood there looking at her, smiling. But even in her shocked state, she still made out that he was different to how she knew him. For one, his hair was completely white. His usually green eyes were now pitch black. She didn't turn around.

"Hello Emily," said Ricky, smugly. "I've brought you a present."

Emily looked at the bathroom bench and saw a glasses case that was not usually there. "What is it?"

"Open it."

Opening the case revealed a knife. "What's this for?" Emily asked, still looking at it. She looked up to find only the reflection of herself.

"You'll find out soon enough," came a voice.

Liam's phone rang. He rolled over in his bed to pick it up.

"Hello?"

"Liam, I need you to come over right now."

"Emily? What for?"

"You need to help me."

Liam was halfway through asking for more details when she hung up.

"Strange girl."

He picked up his badge, and started getting ready.

Liam arrived at the house about 30 minutes later. He knocked on the door, and was met by Emily's mother, who looked like she had been crying.

"How can I help you?" she quivered.

"Not sure. Emily called me."

They both looked at each other for a couple of seconds, not knowing what to do.

"Well I don't know why she called you."

"Can I talk to her then? Maybe I could find out."

"She's not here right now. And it's complicated."

There was another short pause. Liam opened his mouth to say "How?" but was cut off.

"Perhaps I had better enlighten you," said the shaking woman. "An hour ago, Emily went into the bathroom to brush her teeth after breakfast, as she normally does. Half an hour later, I heard a clatter, and Emily came out of the bathroom with red eyes, as though she had been crying.

"I asked her why she had been crying, but she shook her head and ran to her room. Wondering if she had seen a cockroach or a spider or something, I wondered into the bathroom... and found..."

Emily's mother started crying. Liam reached his arms around her to comfort her. "What did you find?"

"A body. A dead body. It was lying there in the shower. And to make it worse, I also found a knife sitting in the sink."

Liam's heart began to race. He hadn't expected this. "Perhaps that is why she called me?"

"It would make sense, but I don't know why she would call you, a Private Investigator, when she had just killed someone. Why would she want to be caught?"

Liam was surprised. "You think she did it? Your own daughter?"

"She's not an innocent girl you know, Liam. When she was just 15, she was caught robbing an old man's house. I mean, that's a criminal offence, and I can imagine how 3 years could have grown a thief into a murderer."

"I'd better have a look around." Liam walked into the house, and down the corridor.

"If you find Emily, don't let her get away from you," Emily's mother shouted down the corridor. "She deserves to go to jail."

Liam kept walking. He reached the door to the bathroom, and took a deep breath. Putting rubber gloves on his hands, he walked in. He purposefully ignored the shower. At least until he had looked at everything else. He looked at the sink, and saw the knife. He noticed the glasses case sitting next to the toothbrush, with what looked like new blood stains inside.

After photographing everything on the bench, Liam picked up the knife, and placed it inside a small plastic bag. Looking closely at it, he found it to be a black-handled fishing knife, with serrations on the unsharpened side, used for de-scaling a fish.

Liam knew now that he had nothing else to look at on the bench, and faced the fact that he would have to look in the shower. Taking slow steps, as though creeping around a sleeping baby, Liam walked towards the open shower door. He closed his eyes. Even after all these years around dead bodies, he still hated seeing them. Especially in friend's houses.

He finally opened his eyes. He felt his stomach stir with unease. What he saw inside was the body of a man. It was quite clear; the man had been killed by a knife, and by the fact that there was no large blood trail out of the shower; it was probable that he was killed in the shower.

Eventually, Liam brought himself to photograph the body for evidence. He dragged himself out of the bathroom, feeling quite unpleasant about the whole

thing, and decided that he needed to look somewhere else. He wasn't going to find Emily by looking at a dead body. Liam walked to Emily's room.

At the door, Emily's mother greeted him. "Any luck?"

"I've seen what there was to be seen. Now you said that she was missing?"

"Yes, she ran into her room after murdering that poor man..."

"We haven't completely decided she did it," said Liam.

"Well she ran into her room, and now she's not in there."

"Did anyone see her leave?"

"I stood outside her door, asking her why she was crying, for 15 minutes after she went in. After a while, I decided I needed to talk to her face to face, so I told her I was coming in, and I did."

"And she wasn't there?"

"No, she wasn't."

"I'd better look inside," said Liam, walking through the door. To his surprise, he found that it was quite impossible that Emily had gone anywhere. The only other opening to the door was the window, which was unable to be opened, and had bars across the back, which would have made breaking the window useless. "So where could she possibly have gone?"

"I have no idea."

Liam didn't like the feeling of this situation. Where could Emily have gone? There was no other way out of the room, except for the door which her mother had been guarding. Liam looked around. The room was a mess. There were no sheets on the bed, they were all strewn around on the floor. Half of the drawers in the room had been taken out and thrown around. It looked as though someone had been looking for something.

"This is very unusual you see, Liam. Emily is usually a tidy person. Her room is usually cleaner than mine."

Something caught Liam's attention. It wasn't big, but it was above everything else. On top of a set of drawers with no drawers in it sat a small case. It lay open, and judging by the small imprint in the padding inside, it had previously held a key.

Liam picked up the key box, and looked at it carefully. He looked up suddenly, and saw the closet next to the set of drawers. The door had a keyhole.

Dreading what he would find in the closet, Liam told Emily's mother to walk away and close Emily's door. He felt a shiver run down his spine as he prayed that he would not find another body behind the closed door. He reached his hand out slowly, and felt the coldness of the metal door-handle on his fingers as he twisted it. A small creak cried out as the door opened, to reveal the last thing that Liam had expected.

Inside the closet, Liam found no dead body, no quivering Emily, but what looked like some sort of glowing portal. There was a small arch of rocks, holding together what looked like a watery window. The window seemed to look out into a large office reception area, which Liam knew couldn't possibly be there, simply because the next room was in the way.

"At least we know where Emily could have gone," said Liam to himself, as he stepped through into the reception area.

Liam now stood in a large room, with a single long desk forming a large semi-circle, with a little man sitting on the inside. The little man, as well as being little, had strangely white hair, and scarily black eyes. He wore a bright pink business suit, with a bright yellow tie.

The little man looked up as Liam walked towards him. "Hello, how can I help you?" said the man in a high-pitched voice.

"I'd like to know if a girl has come through here recently."

"You'd like to know if she's coming back?"

Liam was quite surprised by this question, and failed to answer. He just stared at the little man in wonder.

"It's quite rude to stare, you know."

"Sorry."

"What's her name?"

"Emily. Emily Short."

"Well you can take a look at the big board behind me, and if 'Emily Short' is written on there, she's due to come through," explained the little man. He then smiled and waved, as the entire desk revolved, taking him with it through an opening in the wall at one of the ends. An entirely new semicircle of desk now sat in front of Liam, which had nobody sitting at it.

Liam looked up at the board. It was a large board, much like one you would find at an airport. This one, however, had names on it, not flight numbers. Each name was written in the left column, followed by a blank column, followed either by the word 'Transferred' or 'Not successful.' These rules were true, except for one. There was one name right at the top. The name was 'Emily Short.' In the middle column, instead of nothing, there was what looked like a countdown timer, reading '2:37,' and on the far right column, there was the word 'Pending.'

Liam was just trying to figure this out, when he was startled by another man, who had, it seemed, been standing next to him for a while.

"Good day," said the man. "Might I ask your name?"

"My name is Liam Broker. I'm looking for Emily." Liam figured that this man looked friendly enough to admit the truth to, despite the same white hair and black eyes. "I'm kind of lost. I don't know where I am. You see I followed a friend here."

"Yes I figured that you didn't know where you were. It turns out that I'm just the man you would want to see. Emily sent for you I understand?"

Liam began to understand. "Yes, she did."

"She told me you would be here. She also told me to explain a few things to you."

"Wait, where is she?"

"Just a second, I'll take you there now." The man took Liam by the hand, giving him a large static shock.

"Ouch."

"Sorry, bad habit."

The last thing that Liam saw of the reception before being transported to another room was the top of the board, where Emily's name had been shifted down a row, and there was another name being written.

He found himself in a large hall, with a metallic chair sitting on top of a mound of dirt. It had wires hanging down to it from the incredibly high ceiling, and had a large lever on the arm. Liam watched as Emily, who had entered from another door, ran across the large hall to the mound of dirt.

"Emily!" shouted Liam.

Emily looked towards Liam, still running. She had tears in her eyes, but they were accompanied by a look of hard determination. When she got to the top of the mound, Emily sat in the chair, and strapped herself in. She reached for the lever.

Suddenly, inside Liam's head, everything was pieced together. "Wait!" he shouted at the white-haired man. "That's an electric chair, isn't it?"

The man nodded. "Don't worry, Liam."

"Don't worry?" Liam turned around to see Emily reaching for the lever. Tears ran down her cheeks as she gripped it tighter and tighter. Liam gasped in shock as she pulled the lever.

"Why am I still here?" she asked, after a second of realisation.

"I pulled out the cables, Emily," said the man. "It's not your time yet."

"But I have to do this!" Emily screamed down the mound, undoing the straps. "Don't you understand? If I don't, Ricky will be unstoppable."

"There is a back-up plan."

Liam stood shaking, watching Emily run down the mound towards the white haired man.

"I'm not sure I understand completely, yet," said the confused and scared Liam.

The man turned to Liam, "This is a business. I'm sure you've understood that quite clearly."

"I guessed."

"What we deal in is different to other businesses. We deal in a kind of afterlife. A physical life insurance. We have found a way to induce immortality amongst humans. We simply implant a gene into the human, which gives the human immortality after death. Basically, with the gene, after you die, you enter a state of being where you are unaffected by disease, old age, etcetera. You also become faster, stronger, and occasionally... other things."

Liam stood in astonishment at the world that Emily had gotten herself into. "So what's this about Ricky?"

"He's a strange case."

The white-haired man took Liam's hand again. This time, the three of them found themselves in the top story of a building, with a large window looking out over a forest.

"See down there?" said the white-haired man. He pointed down at the forest where there were people fighting. It looked like there was just one man fighting against many men. Liam could see the man who was fighting everybody else had white hair, and he guessed that he had black eyes.

"Is that Ricky?" asked Liam.

"Yes. The police are trying to detain him. He is a murderer, and is using our immortality gene to fight."

Liam watched as Ricky, down in the forest, looked up at the top floor. Liam felt a shiver down his spine as the man in the forest seemed to grin. There were no

police officers left alive in the forest, and Ricky walked into the main entrance of the building.

"Is he coming up here?" asked Liam, panicking.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He wants to kill Emily."

Liam looked at Emily. She was not crying any more, but her face showed signs of fear. She scrunched her face up as the three of them heard the heavy pounding of a large man walking up stairs. They all looked towards the one door. Suddenly, the pounding stopped. The door was locked, but they all knew that that wouldn't stop the man for long.

The door exploded towards them, the settling dust revealing the outline of a large man, standing 6 foot 5, and largely built.

Liam wrapped his arms around the shaking Emily, and watched, as the man in the doorway stepped forward. Immediately, Liam recognised him. This was the man in the shower, only bigger, and with white hair and black eyes. The dead body would have stood about 6 foot 3 at the most.

"That's the dead man in the shower!" said Liam.

"I told you he was a strange case. When he died, his body didn't recover, but instead it doubled, and created another body, stronger than the one he had."

The man from reception stepped forward, and reached out to take the hand of Liam, but Ricky immediately ran at him, and punched him in the neck. Liam watched the man lying on the floor, as he let out a final gasp, "Run!"

Only too happy to obey, Liam took Emily's hand and ran away from Ricky. Ricky snorted, shook his head, and ran after them, bounding along at twice their speed. Ricky caught up easily, and grabbed Liam by the neck.

"What are you going to do now, weakling?"

Liam, gasping for air, flailed his legs at Ricky, kicking him under the chin. In reaction, Ricky pushed his hand quickly into Liam's throat, killing him instantly.

Emily, who had been watching all this, backed against a wall. She wished she had never found that place. She cursed the company which had promised her immortality, but had brought her this.

"You know you didn't have to make it so hard for me, Emily," said Ricky, walking towards her slowly. "If you didn't have that gene inside you, I could have killed you easily like the other two. But thanks to you, I now have to do it the long way. But you know what that is, don't you? I have to kill you now, and then I will have to kill you again."

Emily whimpered, wishing that her friend hadn't pulled the plugs out of the electric chair. Suddenly, to her surprise, something moved behind Ricky. Ricky saw that she had been distracted, and turned around to see Liam's body twitching.

"What now!?" shouted Ricky, who was getting annoyed.

Liam's body, lying on his stomach, now shook furiously. Suddenly, it leapt into the air. Liam's eyes opened, to reveal that they were now black, and his hair slowly turned white. Liam's coat started shaking, and out of the back of it burst two great white wings.

Ricky shouted, and charged towards Liam, who immediately swiped his hand across Liam's face, sending him flying down across the room. Ricky got up and charged again. This time, Liam caught Ricky by the neck, and swung him effortlessly against the roof. Still holding Ricky by the neck, Liam reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out the bag with a knife in it. Without taking it out of the bag, Liam thrust the knife into Ricky's chest.

Ricky, still alive, screamed as Liam dragged him by the neck out the window, and flew upwards. Then, in a sudden turn, Liam powered downwards, hurtling towards the forest below, only pulling up ten meters or so above the ground, to let Ricky hit the hard ground.

Returning to the top floor, Liam staggered over to Emily.

"I didn't know that you had had the gene put in."

"Neither did I."

Back in reception, the little man watched the board as the name above Emily's changed. Now, it said "Liam Broker, Successful." The little man grinned. "Bad habit indeed."