

LIMB AWAY 5: ENTER THE DRAGON

by Paul Watson

Doctor Harrison awoke to a sharp staccato rapping on his door. Loud but not as loud as yesterday's intrusion by that Marlo woman. It sounds almost like two people at once. He shrugs on his robe, slouching to the door. He opens it to find Marcia staring back at him, her right hands raised to knock again. To cover her arms she's wearing what looks like a red and gold poncho, a tight top stopping at her ribs to give her second arms some mobility. "Miss Sriupathakan, what are you doing here at this ungodly hour?"

She looks at her watch, "It's after nine. For those of us with jobs, that counts as a reasonable hour. We can't all spend all day and night playing with our toys."

"What do you want?" he replies grouchy.

"We have work to do. Tests to run. Incidentally, sleeping like this is much easier than you'd think. You'd expect my arms to get all in the way, but no..."

"Fascinating, I'm sure. Let me get dressed and get some coffee on and we can discuss."

"You get dressed. I'll make coffee. Your kitchen can't be more of a nightmare than Angel's." she makes shooing motions with her bottom two arms as she adjusts her bag.

He sighs and heads back to his room.

Shortly, he emerges, dressed in a crumpled shirt and trousers, to find Marcia busying herself rearranging his cupboards,. "There you are, Doc. You really need to organise this place." she hands over a steaming mug, taking one for herself.

"Really." he mutters, sipping at the dark coffee.

"We also need some way to get organised about when I come over and so on so I don't interrupt your beauty sleep. Or your..."

"Yes, yes, that sounds..."

"Do I need to make Angel anything or is she still a pile of boobs in your bed?"

"She's...no, she won't be joining us."

"Didn't think so. I took the liberty of making breakfast." she pulls the grill out of the tiny oven, quickly plucking the golden slices and spreading them thickly with butter.

"Took the liberty, indeed." he mutters but he still bites into the slice she puts in front of him.

"No eggs. No idea where you keep them. Anyway, I want to try something. Where's the blue?"

"The...? Oh, there should be some Ahoy still in the lounge from yesterday."

"Back in a second. Don't touch my toast. I need it for what I've got planned."

"Don't touch 'her' toast. Made in my kitchen. With my bread."

"What are you grumbling about, Doc?" She asks, coming back with a small pot of blue gel, already pulling on fresh latex gloves.

He sighs, "It doesn't matter. Now, what 'experiment' are you planning?"

"Well, we know I can talk out of both my mouths, but, can I eat with them? How 'normally' does it work?"

"I see. Those are actually good questions. It might depend on where..."

Marcia dips her gloved finger into the gel and smears it across her stomach.

"Ok. Let's see if this works, then." She holds her toast to her stomach, taking a bite, "It is...surprisingly difficult to...make your mouths...do different things. I keep trying to ...chew up here."

"That is interesting. You had no problem with your arms."

"I know." she swallows, "Ugh. That felt weird."

"Weird how?"

"Like there's this lump being pushed right into my gut. Like constipation in reverse."

"That does not sound very..." there is a series of loud knocks at the door. "Oh for God's sake, my house is not Grand Central fucking Station!"

"That's not what Angelica..."

Huffing Doctor Harrison strides down the corridor to give whoever's at the door a piece of his mind. Flinging it open to stare at Marlo's steely gaze pulls him up immediately, the three very large gentlemen blocking the light behind her taking second place "Ah, Doctor Harrison. Just who I wanted to see. Now, where is Angelica? She didn't call her mother last night like she promised me she would."

"Ah, it must have, ah, slipped her mind."

"Yes. That must be it." she replies making him feel like a mouse staring into the face of a smiling cat, "Can you go get her? Her mother is very worried and would like to see her immediately."

"She isn't..."

"No, she never is, is she? It's ok. Her mother's seen her in all sorts of states of undress and coherence. I'm sure she'll cope."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"Get her out here. Now."

"I am not your..."

"Huey, go get her out here."

Huey sighs, "Yes, ma'am." and pushes himself through the door.

Doctor Harrison steps aside, then thinks better of it as Huey moves past him. He follows along, Marlo calmly entering the hall behind him.

"Oh, hi, Huey. Damn it. Would you like some toast? I've lost my appetite for breakfast."

"No, thank you, ma'am." he turns to the doorway, "Ma'am, I think...I think you'd better come in."

"Oh, really? I wasn't aware we employed you for your thinking ability, Huey.." she breezes past into the kitchen, "Ah, Miss Shirupathakahn. Good to see someone...wait, what is that?"

"What? Do I have toast crumbs on my chin?"

"No, not, that..." she points at the mouth on Marcia's belly that's she's trying to hard keep very still and very closed, "That! What is that?!"

Marcia sighs out of both her mouths, "Well, Doctor Harrison has come up with some..."

Marlo blinks and slowly turns away, "No, I will not be distracted by this. Angelica is clearly not here. Louie, check the bedroom."

"Now, see here..." Doctor Harrison huffs indignantly and futilely as Louie squeezes into the bedroom. Doctor Harrison steps back out of reach.

"No, ma'am. Miss van Dyne is not here. Just some weird sextoy on the bed."

Harrison pales even more. Marcy only manages to stifle the giggle from her normal mouth. Marlo looks over at her but quickly looks away before her mind accepts that there are four hands covering Marcy's mouth, then at Doctor Harrison. "Where is she?" she demands.

"Now, you listen here, Miss...Ms..." he stumbles, "whatever the hell your name is! You can not just barge into my house and accuse me..."

"I don't have time for this. Huey, persuade him."

Huey looms behind her, cracking his knuckles. It is a very persuasive display.

"Marlo! That's quite enough. Huey, back all the way off."

"Miss Shiru..."

"Marlo, Angel's in the bedroom."

Marlo looks through the doorway, "Nonsense. There's just some sort of tawdry adult toy made of plastic breasts there." she looks with undisguised contempt at Doctor Harrison.

"That's Angelica."

"What's Angelica?"

"The...toy. It's Angelica."

"It's what?! No, I've had quite enough of this nonsense. Get the real Angelica out here right now or..."

"That is the real Angelica. Go and touch it. It's not plastic."

"This is most assuredly not a time for jokes, Marcia."

"Good thing I'm not joking then."

"Fine. I'll play along for a few more minutes. Louie, check that...thing out."

"But, Miss Murdoch, if that is Miss van Dyne..."

"Which it clearly isn't."

"Right, but if it is..." he shrugs helplessly, "where do you want me to touch it?"

"What on earth are you..."

"Ma'am, it is mostly boobs. And if it is Miss van Dyne, they'd be her b..."

Marlo pinches the bridge of her nose, "This nonsense is wasting time."

"If only you'd let Angel get that tattoo, huh?"

"Right. That's it. My patience is exhausted. Louie, pick that up. If they're insistent it's Angelica, we'll pretend it is and they can explain to her mother."

"But what about the..."

"Just do it!"

"If you give us ten min..."

"No, you've had quite enough of my time already. Just do it."

"It's ok, Louie. I'll take it...her. Doc, do you have a duffel bag?"

"Not that big. There's a suitcase in the..."

"Just get it!"

Harrison scuttles off, returning with a battered wheeled suitcase. With some help, Marcy fits Angelica into the case and closes it, trying very hard not to notice how hard its many nipples are getting before the lid closes.

"Finally. Dewey, Louie, you take this in the second car. Huey, we'll take these two."

"Ma'am, that would leave you with only one guard to..."

"Don't worry, Louie, I can protect her, I'm well armed."

Marlo huffs, turning on her heel. Marcia pauses long enough to grab handfuls of Limb Ahoy and Away, tucking her arms under the poncho.

"I'm well-armed?"

"I know, Doc, I know. It just kind of slipped out."

"This is not a time for humour, Miss Sriupathakan."

"Doc, for fuck's sake, call me Marcia at least. You've proved you can say it."

The two cars drive off in very uncomfortable silence.

They reach the van Dyne building, home of van Dyne Cosmetics corporate offices, after a short journey, the glass and steel tower sliding into the skyline. "I'll take that." Marcy says as Louie unpacks the suitcase. She pops the handle and wheels it forward through the automatic doors.

"Ms Murdoch, Ms Murdoch, Ms van Dyne is looking for you." Marlo eyes the scurrying PA with her usual steely gaze.

"Yes, Henry, I'm on my way to see her now. Let her know I'm back, would you?"

"Yes'm." he dives back to his deck as Marlo strides past.

"She's always like this, then? I didn't catch her on a bad day."

"Always. And this is a good day."

"You are aware I can hear you both, aren't you?" Both immediately fall silent, "Like dealing with children." she mutters as the executive floor lift arrives, "Huey, Dewey, we won't be needing you for a while. Louie, you come with us."

"Yes, ma'am." they turn away as Louie gets in the suddenly crowded elevator. The floor up is swift and threateningly silent. Louie keeps glancing at either Marcy or the case in her lower hand, while Marlo resolutely stares into the doors, banishing all this from her mind.

The doors slide open onto the light and airy top floor. Marlo leads them up to the plain office doors.

"Ms Murdoch," the PA says without looking up, "Ms van Dyne will see you...all now."

"Thank you, Janet." she pushes on the door which swings open. The room behind is minimalist. The grey carpet running right up to the wall of glass windows. The desk is similarly utilitarian, cream coated woodchip and metal legs rather than mahogany, screaming office furniture rather than CEO. The woman behind it looks up, her dark brown hair in a stylish bob. Her jacket and blouse are stylish, cut perfectly and warm colours.

"Marlo, you took your time. She didn't give you too much trouble did..." she looks over at the rest of the grouping, "...where is she?"

"They claim she's in the suitcase."

Ms van Dyne looks at the suitcase, raising an immaculate eyebrow. "Do they now? I'm not an expert but it seems a trifle...small to hold my daughter. She's never been the most flexible person.

"That is what they say."

"Well, let's get her out and she can tell me all..."

Marcia unzips the case.

"Marlo, am I hallucinating? Or does dear Marcia have four arms?"

"She...seems to have."

"How...extraordinary. I'll have to hear all about it. But, first..." Marcia opens the case and the boobtoy falls out onto the floor. "Marlo, correct me if I'm wrong, but you did say my daughter was in that bag, yes?"

"So they said."

"That's what I thought. So the obvious conclusion is that..." she points, "...that is supposed to be my daughter?"

"So they said."

"I see. I think I might need to hear this for myself. First, Marcia, is that really Angelica?"

"Yes, Ms van Dyne."

"I see. Is she alright?"

"Yes, Ms van Dyne. She asked for..."

"Just answer the questions for now. We can talk properly afterwards. Is she safe?"

"Yes, Ms van Dyne."

"Can she talk?"

"No, Ms van Dyne."

"I see. Can she hear?"

"No, Ms van Dyne. She probably doesn't know what..."

"We'll save that surprise for later then. You can put her back in the case. We don't want her flashing everyone. Poor Louie doesn't know where to look."

Louie looks on impassively but staring at somewhere other than Angelica. Marcia pushes Angelica back into the bag and zips it up.

"Now, who would this be and why is he here?"

"Madam, I..."

"I wasn't talking to you."

"That's Dr Harrison, Ms van Dyne."

"Ah, yes, I remember now, where did I leave that dossier?"

"Dossier?"

"Still wasn't talking to you, Doctor. Now, let's see. Mmmhmm, Doctor Noel Harrison, graduating magna cum lauda, doctorate, attaining a position in faculty. Very impressive. Left under something of a cloud over the Dolly incident."

"Well..."

"You said..."

"'ahem' Not on the central team of things. Would have probably gotten stickier but it does show where your interests lie. Secured another position without tenure but left under another cloud last year after ethics complaints concerning a possible relationship and experimenting on your students."

"That is not what..."

"I'll let you talk in a minute, Doctor. After that, well, two strikes is more than enough for most universities these days, and then you show up at a fetish convention selling a miracle product that does things it has no right to do. Limb Away. Advertised as doing exactly what it promises. I assume that is what is responsible for Angelica's current condition. Although I don't recall it promising quite that. So..." she smiles pleasantly, pressing her fingers together, "...who wants to go first?"

"Humph. Well, you seem to know everything about me already."

"Doctor, there's no need to be so upset. I take my responsibilities very seriously. Especially as that responsibility won't do it herself. You say my information is wrong? What's your version of the story?"

"I suspect the facts are mostly correct. Did I work on Dolly? Yes. In a small part and I'd left the project team long before it went live with the very well known and unfortunate consequences."

"And why did you leave, Doctor?"

"I could tell you it was for all sorts of moral or safety qualms, but I doubt you'd believe me. I left because more senior researchers were taking credit for work I'd done, and upon confronting them I discovered that just being good at your job is not enough. I was a rather idealistic or naïve student in some ways. In hindsight, having my name be very far down the list of contributions proved a blessing but the purge of a faculty desperate to save themselves from a multimillion dollar lawsuit can be very thorough."

"No doubt."

"Fortunately, my reputation for good work carried me through and into another position at another university. I obviously had to swear off doing anything related to the Dolly formula in my work. That meant starting pretty much from raw principles, but I developed most of what became Limb Away and its antidote, Limb Ahoy."

"You really called it Limb Ahoy? Marketing is not your strong point, is it?"

"No. I let my work speak for itself."

Ms van Dyne looks rather pointedly at the suitcase, "Indeed. And how did you come to leave that university's employment, Doctor Harrison?"

"The chemicals were ready to be tested in human trials but the university was stalling on the paperwork, probably fearing another Dolly incident. My students, foolishly, decided to begin their experimental work to get it going before funding became an issue. I'm quite certain they were also motivated by the possibilities for enhanced sexual pleasure available in the work."

"Young students being kinky and foolish? Surely not."

"Slightly older, but apparently, not immune. As a result, I found the...experimental subject, one Jennifer Henriquez, left on my desk."

"According to the reports, she was left rather exposed."

"That is the euphemism they used, yes. In point of fact, she had been reduced to nothing but her vaginal lips."

Ms van Dyne looks up, "I'm sorry she was what?"

"She was left on my desk as a pussy. I restored her, but she was a little out of it from the experience and utterly unclothed, so when my secretary came in, the obvious conclusion was jumped to. The investigation, such as it was, was a kangaroo court of first rate proportions. I was tried, convicted, tarred and feathered. And so I was forced to leave academia. To be involved in one scandal is unfortunate, two looks like carelessness."

"I see. And so you decided to continue your 'research'?"

"I did, yes. I had some funding left, all my notes and was able to improve things. Which led me to the fair as my funds were running low. There, your daughter made me a proposition which I accepted and you almost certainly know the rest of the story."

"I can guess. You took Angelica back to your home and proceeded to have very wild, very vigorous sex, more or less continuously, until Marlo found you. Did you really have no idea who she was?"

"As I told your..." he gestures, "Marlo, it wasn't like we did a lot of talking during her time with me."

"No, I can imagine that. Of course, that doesn't quite explain..." she gestures at the bag.

"No, well, that was..."

"Forgive me, Doctor, but I'd rather hear from Marcia on this side of things. So, Marcia, how did you get mixed up in all this?"

"Well..."

"It's ok. You can tell me it's Angelica's fault. Assuming it is."

"She called me after Marlo had visited."

"Why did she do that?"

"She'd, she had a third arm and she wanted me to see and come over."

"She had a third arm?"

"Yes'm. She sent me a photo. I came over. I didn't believe it, but, well, it was Angel, so..."

"Quite. So?"

"It was real. Doctor Harrison's Limb Ahoy can grow new limbs, as well as restore the ones Limb Away removed."

"I see."

"Please don't ask me how. He's explained it three times and I haven't understood more than half the words yet."

Doctor Harrison harrumphs.

"So, Angel was more interested in getting reduced than enhanced and I..."

"I'm sorry, Marcia, but, could you do something about..."

"About?"

"Your...voice? Voices? It's, it's hard for me to hear you."

"Oh, right. Let me just get some..." she digs into pouches on her poncho, pulling out pots until she gets the Limb Away.

"Is that?"

"It is. Doesn't look like much, does it?" she pulls on a glove, dipping her finger into it, "Now, nothing up my sleeve..." she dabs the Limb Away at her face leaving the skin beneath her nose perfectly smooth. "Ta-da. Is that better?"

Ms van Dyne stares as Marcy's voice emerges from the mouth on her stomach. She blinks and refocuses. "Yes. That sounds much better."

"So, as I said, Angelica excused herself and..."

"Excused herself?"

"Ok, I admit it, I was trying not to tell you this, but she wiped her head out so she could have some quiet and...busied herself."

"Busied'?"

"Ms van Dyne, do you really want me to tell you the details of how Angel 'busies herself'?"

"Oh, I see. That kind of busying. Thank you, do continue."

"So, after talking to Doctor Harrison for a bit to understand things as best I could, the science is way beyond me..."

"It's beyond most people."

"...we applied some Limb Ahoy gel to my sides and..." she raises all four of her arms, "...this is the result. So far, so good. Dr Harrison says Limb Away was tested to 48 hours, but he knows of an example where it's gone for a week and change and restored successfully, so I'm trying this look out. I had six arms and three eyes at one point, but hiding those was too hard."

"Three eyes? Really?"

"Uh-huh." she scratches her forehead, "Anyway, Angelica volunteered..."

"Without her head?"

"We put her face on her stomach to ask..."

"You put her face..."

"Exactly. Anyway, she said yes and we wiped her face out at her request and..." she glances at the bag, putting one hand behind her head, as she fidgets, "...you know how that went."

"Yes. And she volunteered?"

"Yes'm."

"Where did I go wrong as a parent?"

"We did try to restore her before we came, Ms van Dyne..." Dr Harrison starts, "...but your agent was in a rush..." Marlo's glare burns through him as if she was a black-clad refugee from the planet Krypton.

"Yes, probably."

Marlo keeps glaring, "You said immediately, ma'am."

"Marlo, I've told you before, immediately just means as soon as possible, not actually immediately. However, if I hadn't seen the effects of Dr Harrison's work, I most likely wouldn't have believed it. It would hardly be the first time Angelica's gotten involved in things that warp her perception of reality."

"No, ma'am."

"Do you want us to do it now, ma'am?"

"What? Oh, no, Marcia, there's no need. If it's as safe as you say, she's not going to get into any trouble for at least another day and frankly that's better than her usual average."

Doctor Harrison snorts stifling his laugh.

"Now, I don't really think I can approve, as a parent, of my daughter existing as little more than a sextoy for extended periods."

"She is an adult, so..."

"Thank you, Doctor. Your opinion has been noted. As an aside, how are you manufacturing your product? I hope it's not in the kitchen sink. That doesn't sound sanitary."

"Of course not." he huffs, folding his arms indignantly, "My former students are amenable to using the universities facilities for a small gratuity and not exposing their role in my fall from grace."

"I see. Well, that makes things even murkier for me. I can hardly trust my Angelica to a man who's shown a penchant for blackmail. Not with what you can undoubtedly reveal to the press about her."

"Madam, I must..."

Ms van Dyne rises to her full height, which is barely more than when she's seated, hands thrust against the top of the desk, "Be. Quiet."

Doctor Harrison swiftly decides on discretion over valour.

"Now, Doctor, I am being quite reasonable here. I am prepared to purchase your product and its formula..."

"Oh, no, I know how this goes..."

"Ma'am, you cannot be serious..."

"...a very wealthy man if..."

"...you'll take my work and pretend it's yours..."

"...This...person is hardly worth the time to..."

"...you agree to leave..."

"Hey!!" they all fall silent. Marcia realises that she now has everyone's attention, "Uhm...look, ma'am, that is a spectacularly bad idea for three reasons."

Van Dyne settles back into her chair, her fingers steepled. "Go on."

"Ok. One: Dr Harrison is not going to sell easily."

He nods.

"So it will be outrageously expensive, even for you. Two: Reputationally, VDC being involved in this in any way would be a PR disaster. This stuff could maybe be gold dust, but, at the moment, it's pure fetish fuel."

"Hey!"

"Shut up, Doc, I'm trying to save your ass here. Three: Angelica would immediately get the hump and go do something really stupid to spite you."

Ms van Dyne looks meaningfully at the case.

"Yes, even more stupid than this. You shouldn't underestimate Angelica's capacity for self-destructive spite."

"I see. What do you propose, then, Marcia?"

"Propose?" she looks around nervously.

"Well, you've pointed out the flaws in my idea. What would you have me do?"

"I..I...ok, ok, so, counterproposal. You, not VDC, set Dr Harrison up with a lab to manufacture and experiment with this. It will be you as his angel investor, so it's still his product, you can't swoop in and take it from him, not that you would, but he'd be reassured by that, right, Doc?"

"Possibly. It would depend..."

“Great. So we set it up as a business, and Angelica fronts it.”

“Angelica?”

“With respect, Ms van Dyne, her reputation can take knocks far better than yours and has a lot less far to fall. At worst, it'll be seen as a spoiled rich girl playing at being a businesswoman. Or rebelling against her mother by being outrageous.”

“Which wouldn't be far from the truth.” Marlo mutters.

“No, it wouldn't. But that way, she's invested in it, and who knows, it might become a real company.”

“Which Angelica will be running.”

Marlo coughs repeatedly.

“I do hope that wasn't you laughing at the idea, Marlo.”

She coughs again, “Of course not, ma'am.”

“And if Angel's invested in it, she's less likely to be distracted by other...shenanigans.”

“I see. That is an...interesting proposal, Marcy. What's your role in this new company?”

“Me?”

“You. It's your idea, after all. It wouldn't be fair to deny you the chance to build something like this.”

Marcia gulps as she realises how caught in her own plan she's just become.

“And it would make me feel better knowing someone with more business focus than Angelica was there to protect my investment and look after my little girl.”

“Yes'm.”

“However, I must ask that you don't use Angelica in her current form or similar for the marketing.”

Marcia glances at the case. “I'm...fairly sure the FCA wouldn't let advertising like that anywhere near...”

“Marcy, dear, this sort of product wouldn't get anywhere near the FCA in any event. Don't use my Angel for any Internet ads looking like a...a sextoy.”

“Ah. Right. Gotcha. No nudes of Angelica for publicity.”

“Definitely not. Doctor Harrison, I'll be in touch with you about how much a small laboratory and staff would cost.”

“Staff?”

“I can hardly expect you to do all the work, Doctor. Perhaps you could get some of those former students so they can stop misusing university facilities. I think that's enough for now. Get Angelica able to talk and make her call me tonight. If not, this whole thing is off and I will be *very* upset.”

“Understood, ma'am. I'll make her be good.”

“Thank you, Marcia. Well, what are you standing round here for? Some of us have work to do.

Louie, see them back home, would you?

Louie falls into line behind them, eyes averted from the trundling case.