

## LIMBAWAY 14: TRANSITIONS -PART 2

by Paul Watson

It takes Hank a full fortnight of cajoling and explaining, posturing and a little outright pleading, to get his sister to allow Dalia to return to the lab, but he is left in no uncertain terms that if she comes home without her legs, he would be well advised not to come home at all. Ever.

Meanwhile, Loretta's protocol has continued. She's lost a few inches in height, her legs long and shapely, more tuned to a dancer than a lab technician. Her stomach is still slightly over the ideal weight, her hair long, slightly shiny, certainly fewer split-ends than she had before her treatments. Her chest sports a pair of small pert breasts, and her wardrobe is filled with clothes to fit her new-found shape courtesy of LimbAway's marketing department, despite her preference for her black band t-shirts that are now far too big for her. Only one stage of the protocol remains to prove the efficacy and safety of the procedure.

Jennifer's work with Drone has continued, establishing how few limits there are to changing someone without a brain and how many there are when you have one projecting its very firm ideas of what's acceptable for a body to be onto you. Drone has had all sorts of animal features, but Hemming's attempt at a biketaur was ineffective, even after he filtered the idea through Jennifer, as was the attempt to give her chlorophyll. True centaur and humantaur both worked, but proved terribly impractical around a crowded lab sized for humans and not large quadrupeds. Jennifer is still trying to work out where the extra mass comes from. Whatever happened, Drone treated the change as if that had always been its form. "This Drone knows it used to be more human, but it feels like it has always been this," it explained after one such change. So far, no changes erasing Drone's head had been approved, the board too worried about what effect it might have on someone already brainless to mix things there up further. For her part, Jennifer has barely managed to get her skin to sometimes change colour, with no trace of scales or fur or fangs or claws. So a career as an alien on Star Trek was available but frustratingly not what she was attempting to produce. And so Dalia is greeted on her return by a much more feminine Loretta, and a Drone slithering on a colossal serpentine body from the waist down. Dalia is allowed to stroke Drone's flank, finding it warm, the scales very smooth and dry.

"So, nothing much has changed, huh?" she asks, "Where's Uncle Hank?"

"With the mice. He's working on the dosages."

"Dosages?"

"We never did get to that part, did we?" Loretta says, walking along besides her, "LimbAway changes with alcohol. It doesn't remove or add limbs, it just makes them smaller or bigger. Hank's working out what dosage produces what so we don't get another incident where Hemmings faints because his cock got too big for even his boots."

"Uh-huh...wait, what?!"

"I didn't tell you that, if he asks."

"Fine, fine, you can not tell me all the details later, too," she rolls off towards the indicated area of the lab. "Hi, Uncle Hank. How are your...whoa, giant, giant rats," she stares at the cages with rats ranging from cat-sized to smaller than gerbils.

"Hello, Dalia," he doesn't look up from taking the measurements, "I'll be with you in just a moment."

"Sure, sure," she rolls around the counters, "So what's this about? The size-changing formula?"

"Yes. Exactly. When you weren't available, I continued my original line of research."

"Wow. Way to make me feel like I'm a person and not a research animal."

"You know that's not what I meant."

"Yeah, I know, so, is this stuff drinkable?"

"What? Oh, yes, the formula is quite ingestible. The mice licking it from their paws was how we discovered the whole body effect."

"Whole body...so if I drank this?"

Hank pulls the bottle from her hands, "If you drank this one..." he looks at the label, "you'd be

about a foot high.”

“How does it taste?”

“Taste? I’ve no idea. We haven’t really tested it for human consump...”

“What about Hemmings?”

“I’m going to kill Loretta. Hemmings didn’t exactly give a detailed taste breakdown.”

“So you’re saying it still needs testing.”

“I am saying that.”

“Sooooooo...”

“I am also saying you are most certainly not going to test it without written approval and only after we’ve completed the actual tests you’re here for.”

“Really?”

“Really.” he puts the measurements away. “Let’s try to get you fi...sorted.”

“Fixed? Really??”

“I didn’t mean that. You know I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Uh-huh.” Dalia replies, “Sure, Uncle Hank, sure.”

“I didn’t.”

“S’fine.” she replies, folding her arms in a way that indicates anything but. “Can we get on with it?”

Half an hour later, Dalia skitters around the floor, arms emerging from her hips. “This is cool. Who needs legs anyway?” she clambers up onto a stool by the bench, sitting at the countertop, her lower arms shifting to get comfortable, or as comfortable as the stools allow.

“I like mine now.” Loretta replies, staring at the small pot of purple.

“Well sure, you would, they’re lovely. Mine just don’t work so these are way better.” her third hand waves just above the countertop as Loretta blushes.

“Maybe. I might just consider it now that I’m...” she pauses, “...me, I guess.” she returns to staring at the pot.

“Yeah, I get that for you. Me, I want to get something like her.” she points across the lab.

“Like Drone?”

“Yeah. Not the missing brain, but...why would I want boring old human legs when I could have a tail like that? Or be a mermaid? Or a cool spidertaur.”

“Drider.” Loretta responds automatically.

“What?”

She sighs, “Never mind. Good luck with that. But so far it seems the missing brain is what gives her self-image the plasticity to do that.”

“Oh.” she looks thoughtful for a moment, “Well, I guess I don’t need my brain *that* much. Mom always says I’m wasting it anyway.”

“Not going to happen. Drone’s a one time deal. No one’s comfortable wiping away other people’s brains.”

“Well, that’s just unfair.” she pouts, folding both sets of arms.

Loretta shrugs, “If you figure out some other way to turn your brain off, or convince yourself you’re half-animal, let us know.”

“Right. Sounds simple when you...does it work if you’re hypnotised? I mean, if people can be made to believe they’re chickens...”

“Maybe. We don’t know. Hemmings is the only one around here who knows hypnosis and no one would trust him to play with their minds.”

“I see.”

“There you are. Not telling her anything else you shouldn’t, are you, Loretta?”

“No, we’re just talking, Uncle Hank.”

“Right, of course. Anyway, I have the results and we can try again.”

“Right you are, Uncle Hank. Uppies?”

“You’re not five.”

“Want uppies!”

Hank rolls his eyes loudly, "Fine." he turns around and Dalia clambers up his back, holding on with three arms to give a thumbs up to Loretta as she's carried off.

"Well, I guess I have to do this now or the kid's going to show me up." she takes the pot and retreats to the cubicle of the ladies toilets to complete the protocol and remove the most obvious physical sign of maleness left on her body.

Five minutes later, she emerges, wiping her eyes. As she enters the lab, Jennifer looks up, rushing up to enfold her in a hug. "It's ok, I'm ok. It's just a lot. It...I'm whole. I'm me. It's...a lot." she sniffs. "So, Loretta, you're all woman now, right? Do you need any help testing the equip..."

"Fuck all the way off, Hemmings."

"I mean, if that's how you want to..."

"Try it, just try it. I'll put some teeth down there, just for you." she smiles to herself, "Vagina dentata, what a wonderful phrase..." she sings to a tune approaching Hakuna matata.

"Hey, I was only offering to..."

"You!" Hank pushes into the main lab, grabbing for bottles of Limb Away.

"What?"

"What did you say to Dalia?!"

"What?"

"She's...she's got a spider's body below the waist, a giant, human-sized one!"

"She's what?!"

"How did she manage to..." Jennifer starts to ask

"I don't know and I don't care." he snaps, "It's too big. She can't move on it, so she's trapped and who knows what the physiological effects would be, so I'm undoing it. And then we'll have words!" he storms back into the curtained off 'privacy' section of the lab.

"But..."

"Well done, Loretta, I don't think I've seen Hank mad before."

"Dalia! What do you think you're doing?!"

"Shall we see what's going on, ladies? Must be something juicy to get chill Hank good and bothered."

They approach the curtains, "This is such a bad idea." Jennifer murmurs but doesn't stop herself. They pull the curtain aside a little to see Hank remonstrating with Dalia, who stands on the countertop, her torso rising from an arachnid thorax, rising up almost nine inches tall.

"You said I was too big, that the exoskeleton couldn't handle the weight, well, at this size it can."

"That's not the..."

"You're just mad I found out how to do this. You weren't going to tell me it was possible!"

"I am going to kill Loretta."

"No, you're not or I'm telling Mom about all this and she'll ground me which sucks but she'll do much worse to you for not 'protecting' me."

"Why would you even...? We don't know mixing the compounds is safe! That's why we're testing!"

"And I'm helping. You're welcome."

"That isn't what..."

"Yeah, well, it's better than being 'fixed'. I wasn't broken."

"I said I..."

"So, I'll get back to my old normal, if I can do this, human legs should be a cinch, and you'll get me an internship here, and I'll help out some more."

"Your mother..."

"I get college credit here, right? I'll be studying and she'll be so happy to have me out of this chair and normal she'll agree."

Hank hangs his head in defeat. "I'll...talk to the bosses."

"You won't..."

"After you've shown me that you can return to what you called your old normal. And lasted a week to make sure there aren't side effects."

"A whole week?!" she looks up at his darkly steady glare, "Fine, fine, a week."

Half an hour later, a much more human Dalia walks out of the curtains, "Wow, it's weird to be so tall."

"Same, only I'm way shorter." Loretta agrees.

Dalia wobbles, grabbing the counter for support, "And balancing isn't as easy as I remember. I have to think about it."

"Are you doing ok after...?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Uncle Hank always backs down. Mom taught the men in our family well."

"And you're sure you want to work here?"

"Hey! That was going to be a surprise! You weren't supposed to eavesdrop."

Jennifer grabs her hand, "I'm sure it would have been a great surprise. How did you do it?"

"What?"

"Get the gel to produce an animal feature. I've been trying so hard and..."

"Loretta mentioned hypnosis might work and, well, I had some training early on to help with the pain. While Uncle Hank was talking, it was pretty easy to trance out and repeat what form I wanted like a mantra to get it into my head, and then..."

"Could you hypnotise me?"

"I mean, maybe... I haven't tried it on someone else."

"Well, Hank, this is going to be good. We've got a couple of new hotties in the lab, rather than a tranny and a cripple, and no woman can resist the ol' Brad Hemmings charm for long, so...hey, what?!"

Hank slams him against the wall, his forearm pressed on Brad's throat, "If you ever, and I do mean ever, try anything, anything at all, on Dalia, I will end you. Do you understand me, Brad?" Brad coughs, feeling the arm press harder, "I said, do you understand me?"

"Yeah..." he wheezes, "yeah, I understand you."

"Good." Hank pulls back and turns away as Brad slumps down the wall.

"Psycho." he gasps, holding his neck.

At the next board meeting, "So, Dalia seems to be stable. She's getting physio work done to improve her balance, but that's on her regular insurance, not ours. We're not pushing but sooner or later someone's going to go to the media over her miraculous recovery, so Angel, you need to start prepping how we'll handle that. Also, Hank's raised the strong possibility that she'll want to work here on an internship and Jennifer is trying to replicate her findings with hypnosis, so that's the good news. On the bad side of things, Hemmings has formally complained about Hank assaulting him, Loretta has formally complained about Hemmings, and Hank has pre-emptively complained about Hemmings based on what Hemmings has said about Dalia. And as we agree we can't fire him, we need to do something about Hemmings before something blows up. Doc?"

"Hemmings proves remarkably resistant to learning any sort of moral lesson. Punishments tend to annoy him as unfair rather than teach him appropriate behaviour. So I'm not sure what..."

"I'll take him."

"You'll what?"

"Take him. He's a manipulative, devious, charming little shit with no morals. He's an above average scientist, but he's practically tailor made for a marketing role. And I think I can keep him in line."

"Well, good luck to you, Miss van Dyne. Good luck, indeed. You'll need it."