

Regressive Tendencies: The Beginning

By LilJennie

Chapter 2: Inquisition

The next thing Kammy knew, she was bouncing. No, she was being jostled around. No, she was being carried – carried by someone much larger than herself. Her eyes flew open, and she gasped to see the jungle moving away from her – no, she was facing backwards, and she was in the arms of someone who was walking forwards. Had she fallen asleep and been kidnapped by a tribe of giant jungle Sasquatches? No, that was silly. There was no such thing as jungle Sasquatches. Sasquatches lived in the Pacific Northwest. There had been a Sasquatch on her school's basketball team one year. In this jungle they'd be really hot and thirsty, and that reminded Kammy of something, but she couldn't track it down right then because – oh yes, where was she, and why?

Kammy suddenly jerked in panic and began looking frantically around, saying, "What? What? What's going on? Where am I?" causing Dr. Catrileo to very nearly drop her. Kammy kept hearing that crinkling sound every time she moved. What was that again?

"It's OK, sweetheart, you're safe," said Catrileo in a calming voice, stopping to brush Kammy's hair out of her face. Kammy looked around and saw three other familiar faces from the expedition – Dr. da Silva, Sam Thorsen, and ... Simon Leander, whom she automatically scowled at. Oddly, Leander looked surprised at this.

"Safe? What happened? Where are we? Why am I being carried?" Kammy had too many questions, but these were the ones that came out first.

"My, you know a lot of words! We were hoping you could tell us what happened, honey," Dr. Catrileo said. "We're in the rainforest, we were looking for a member of our team who got lost, we found you wandering around deeper in the jungle, and we're taking you to our camp, where we hope we can find out where your parents are. I'm carrying you because you fell asleep."

"M-my parents?" Kammy felt a sudden pang of loss, which she still felt sometimes. She had been living with her Aunt Nadeen since she was seven years old, because her parents had been killed in a terrible auto accident.

"Yes, sweetheart, your mommy and daddy. Do you know where they are?" asked Dr. Catrileo, starting to move again.

This was weird. They didn't know who she was, but they'd gone looking for her? Who did they think they'd found? Why didn't they know her? Kammy was confused. What had happened again? She remembered finding that pool of water, drinking from it ... oh no. She looked down at herself and saw what she was afraid to see. She was wearing nothing but her fur and a disposable diaper, and compared to the others she seemed to be the size of a small child.

But that had been a hallucination ... hadn't it?

At any rate, she was putting an end to this right now. "OK, why can't you tell I'm Kammy? This is freaking me out. I'm glad you went looking for me and all, because I couldn't find my way back to camp, but why do you keep talking to me like you found somebody else?"

Dr. Catrileo stopped again and looked at her again, more closely this time. “K-Kammy?” she said. “That’s not possible. Kammy’s 16. You’re ... not. Although ... I could have sworn your eyes were blue before you fell asleep. You certainly have green eyes like Kammy now.”

Leander immediately said, “She can’t be Kammy. She’s pretending. She must have listened to us talking earlier.” Kammy glared at him again, causing him to blink in surprise. “Although the resemblance is ... uncanny, I must say.”

Dr. da Silva said, “Well, think logically. Either she is Miss Dumeaux, or she isn’t. If she isn’t ... Kammy, we have to explain how we went looking for a teenage husky and found a husky puppy. With precisely the same features, coloration and markings. In the middle of the Amazon jungle.” He paused. “And yet, if she *is* Kammy, we have a different remarkable phenomenon to explain. What’s more likely – a medical breakthrough in an unexplored jungle, or a billions-to-one coincidence? I might remind us all that we came here looking for medical breakthroughs – just nothing like this.”

“We’re almost back to camp, Sir,” said Leander to Dr. da Silva. “Maybe you can, I don’t know, examine her there?”

“You’re right, Simon; let’s keep moving.” The group started walking again.

“Why does everybody keep talking about me like I’m not here?” Kammy asked. Her voice sounded much higher in pitch than she was used to, and yet it sounded very familiar. Had she really been somehow transformed into a puppy again, in body at least, by drinking that strange water? Well, it wasn’t her fault – she’d have died of thirst if she hadn’t. “Ask me anything that Kammy – I mean I would know. I’ll tell you my Social Securritty number,” she went on, slightly mispronouncing the more complicated word, which worried her a bit. “Give me a math problem to do. I’ll derive the formula for the volume of a sphere using a triple inta – integral. Just give me a pencil and some paper.”

“You sure sound like Kammy,” said Dr. Catrileo, who continued to carry her. “Calm down, dear. It’ll be OK. You’ll see, once we get back to camp.”

When they got back to camp about ten minutes later, things were decidedly *not* OK. Kammy was still tiny. Everything and everyone was now huge compared to her. And everybody was staring at her. Then Dr. da Silva took her from Dr. Catrileo and carried her into the first aid tent. While the others watched from outside the mosquito netting, he set her down on the examination bed and got out a few simple medical tools. “Well, a good test would be to ask you a few questions. What’s your full name?”

“Kameron Esmeralda Dumeaux,” Kammy said immediately. OK, she was done with being confused now – she could move on to annoyed. “I’m 16 years old, I live with my aunt, Nadeen Kapersky, and I’m working as an intern for Plainfield Pharma – Pharmaceuticals. Oh, and I’m tired of everybody not believing that I’m me. Just to make sure, you’re Dr. Furio da Silva, M.D., leader of this expedition. You were born in Brazil and went to Columbia Medical.”

He chuckled. “All right, then. You’re Miss Dumeaux, without a doubt. But ... how did this happen? How much do you remember?”

“Well, it was right after breakfast, and Sergeant Leander said we needed firewood, so he told me to go out and gather some.” Da Silva glanced resignedly at Leander, which Kammy didn’t miss, and Leander looked decidedly uncomfortable, which Kammy *definitely* didn’t miss. “I went northwest, but I must have gotten turned around ...” She told him the entire story, up to the point where she

had started to cry. They didn't need to know that. "After that, I don't remember anything until I woke up, being carried by Dr. Catrileo."

"So you noticed yourself – getting smaller – right after you drank the water from the spring you found?"

"That's right," Kammy answered. "I don't know what else it could have been. There was some kind of broken-down old sign there, too. I think it might have been in Spanish –"

"Just a moment," da Silva said to Kammy. He turned to Leander, who was still outside the tent watching intently. "Sergeant, does this remind you of a certain native colt who we keep running into around here?"

"It does indeed, Sir," said Leander. "Want me to go try to find him?"

"Yes, do that. His crazy ramblings might not be so crazy." Da Silva turned back to Kammy. "I'm sorry, Kammy. Now, how do you feel? I'm going to take some routine readings." So, while he took her temperature and blood pressure, looked in her ears and down her throat, examined her teeth, and listened to her heartbeat and breathing, and had her stand up so he could measure her height. "A bit over 82 centimeters," he said. "I'm in pharmaceutical research, not pediatrics, but I think that's about average for, well, a 2-year-old."

"Oh great!" said Kammy, sounding like the most sarcastic toddler ever. "2 years old. And I suppose you've never heard of anything like this happening before, and you have no idea how long it'll take to wear off."

"You read my mind," said Dr. da Silva. "I'm sorry, Kammy, but I really don't know. The only guess I have isn't even a medical opinion. You probably remember the story of the Fountain of Youth."

"You think I discovered the Fountain of – that's crazy! Explorers from Europe crawled up and down both Americas looking for that thing centurrrries ago," said Kammy, finding herself slurring a word that had suddenly become difficult. "Nobody ever found it, because it's just a story."

"Well, many legends have their basis in fact," said da Silva. "You found something, that's for sure. Maybe you found what the legend's based on."

"I don't wanna be in a legend," said Kammy. "I wanna be ..." and she paused, yawning. "Wow, I feel so ... tired ..." Suddenly she could barely keep her eyes open.

"It is mid-afternoon," said Dr. Catrileo from outside the tent. "My kids were all the same when they were at that age. It's naptime. And the poor girl hasn't had anything to eat since breakfast. We should let her get some rest, then get some food into her."

Kammy might have objected to being called a kid, compared to a toddler, or being talked about as if she weren't there, but she had fallen asleep.

When she woke up, she was feeling much better, but very hungry. She sat up in her folding bed and found herself in her tent, with the mosquito netting zipped shut. As she usually did, she propped herself up on one elbow and reached up to open the netting – and found that her paw was nowhere near the zipper. So she threw back the sheet so she could get out of bed and stand up, but stared for a moment at what she was wearing. She had on one of the expedition's day-glow orange shirts, probably the smallest size they had, and still it was long enough to serve as a loose-fitting dress on her. Her underpants felt strange; lifting the shirt up she discovered that she was no longer

wearing a crinkly disposable diaper but a folded towel, fastened on with safety pins. Somebody had been busy, somebody who apparently thought she needed that diaper.

She unsteadily stood up on the bed and reached up to grab the zipper, but then she found out that it was stuck – or at least she couldn't budge it. Great, she had a toddler's size, but it also looked like she had a toddler's strength and muscle coordination. That meant she was stuck in this tent, until she got help. She hated asking for help.

Fortunately she didn't have to ask. "Oh hello, Kammy, I see you're up again," said Dr. Catrileo, unzipping the netting at the tent's front entrance to come inside. "It's probably a bit hard for you to open that up. Let me get it." She opened the mosquito netting around Kammy's bed, and Kammy sat down on the edge of it and jumped down, feeling the fabric of the tent under her bare feet and through it the pad beneath it. Her feet felt really soft and sensitive, more so than they'd felt in years. She didn't have any shoes in her new size, and she was sure nobody else here did either, so she'd have to be careful about what she stepped on. She looked up at Dr. Catrileo, who towered above her now.

"Here," said Dr. Catrileo, offering a paw. "Let's walk to the dining tent. You must be hungry."

"Starving," said Kammy, but she refused to take her paw, exiting the tent unassisted if a bit unsteadily, and Dr. Catrileo followed. But they both heard some kind of commotion going on near Dr. da Silva's tent. "What's that?" Kammy asked. She noticed that Leander was back, with a few others, and there was ... a young boy's voice? "Oh, look, it's that horse kid."

"*¡Déjame en paz!*" the boy was saying. He didn't look much bigger than Kammy now looked. He had a brown and white pinto pattern to his coat, a brown mane and tail, and a dark gray nose. Also, he wore no clothes – who knows, maybe the natives in this area didn't. "*¿Qué quieren?*" he went on. "*¡No hice nada! ¡Déjame sólo!*" Leander was holding the young colt by the forearm in front of Dr. da Silva's tent, and Kammy didn't need to know Spanish to know that the boy was complaining nonstop.

"C'mon, let's go see," said Kammy, her curiosity overcoming her hunger for the moment. Maybe this kid knew something that could help her. She walked toward the scene.

Dr. da Silva had come out of his tent, meanwhile, and had started talking to the boy in Spanish, and was translating so everyone could understand. "As near as I can tell, he's saying his name is Juan, and he's lived in this jungle for some time, but he's talking about longer than he can possibly have been alive – or maybe not ..." He glanced at Kammy, who was now standing nearby and watching.

The colt turned his head and saw Kammy too, and their eyes met. Kammy didn't see a young child there; she saw reason and concern, and perhaps he saw the same in Kammy, because his eyes suddenly widened and he launched into a long string of near-hysterical jabbering. Da Silva tried to follow this and said, "He says Kammy didn't listen to his warnings and didn't read the helpful sign he made. He hopes she only bathed in the water and didn't drink any."

Kammy scowled at the boy. "What? That sign was illegible – illegible – unreadable! It was falling apart, and I can't read Spanish or whatever anyway!"

But da Silva and Juan were talking again. "He says he doesn't know any way for Kammy to return to normal," said da Silva sadly. "But maybe we can find a way. I'm going to see if he can lead us to this spring."

He talked to the young colt again. Juan began vigorously shaking his head and holding up his forehooves, looking as if he was refusing. That was when Dr. da Silva's voice got deeper and started

to sound a bit angry, and he bared a few teeth. Without thinking about it Kammy felt frightened, even though she knew that Dr. da Silva really wouldn't hurt a fly – but being able to look intimidating was an ability he had, being a jaguar, and it sometimes came in handy. Kammy found herself taking a step backward, her heart racing and the hackles rising on the back of her neck. But then she felt a paw on her head, gently stroking her hair in a soothing fashion, and looked up to see Dr. Catrileo looking down at her with a sympathetic expression.

Da Silva's ferocious act worked even better on the young colt. Juan quickly ran behind Kammy, trying to hide behind her, and fearfully babbled something at her.

"He says he'll lead us there if you'll keep me from biting him, Kammy," said da Silva with a chuckle. "He says he'll come tomorrow morning when it's cooler."

"Good," said Kammy, "we're not going now. I'm starving." She walked unsteadily toward the dining tent, leaving a worried-looking Juan behind. Dr. Catrileo followed, too, trying to help.

Kammy didn't go along on the expedition's visit to the spring, although she wanted to. "All my stuff is there! I dropped it when I started shrinking, and then I ... I don't remember. Dr. Catrileo said they found me wandering around in the jungle, but I don't remember that either. So I assume my stuff is still lying around near the spring, and I want it back."

But Dr. da Silva was worried. "Well, we want to be careful. What happens if you get more of that water on you? You might get even younger, or your mind may regress and make you forget who you are, or you may even disappear. The point is that we don't know, and we don't want to take chances. Don't worry. We'll find all your belongings."

Despite the equatorial warmth, Kammy shivered involuntarily at the thought of getting even younger, losing her mind, or perhaps vanishing from existence. She felt tears forming in her eyes. But she pulled herself together and said, "Well, OK. I'll stay here. Just make sure to find my cell phone and car keys."

And they found them, much to Kammy's relief. They also found the baby bottle that her canteen had turned into, and they brought back some carefully-packed samples of the spring water for study. Everybody had been sending frantic emails over the satellite uplink, and it wasn't long before new instructions came from the company. Four days later a caravan of all-terrain vehicles brought more scientists, more equipment, more supplies, and –

"Oh, good, they sent these too," Dr. Catrileo said, holding a box and looking at Kammy for some reason. "Remember how I told you I made sure to requisition for some clothes and supplies for you, Kammy?"

"Uh, I, er, well, thanks, I guess," Kammy spluttered. She was betting that she knew what some of those "supplies" were, and that was embarrassing, but after four days of towels and safety pins, she'd had to admit that she needed some kind of protection, and real diapers might be better than the makeshift approach. But she didn't have to like them.

Then she saw the clothes. "Aw man! Why do they have to look like little kids' clothes?"

"Because they are little kids' clothes," said Dr. Catrileo, holding up a little T-shirt with pink edging and tropical flowers screen-printed on the front. "This is cute ... oh and look at this!" She then took out a bright yellow jumper-style dress with brightly-colored balloons on the front. "Isn't that adorable?"

Kammy stared with wide eyes. "Uh, I'm going to go with 'maybe.' I suppose the idea is that I'm going to wear these things?"

"I guess they're not your favorite style," Dr. Catrileo said, while Kammy shook her head emphatically no, "but this is what they could get off the rack on short notice for a girl your size. After all ... did they tell you that you're going back to America?"

"I'm what?" Kammy's stomach felt like it had dropped out. But all the people who knew what had happened to her were here! They'd at least accepted what had happened, even Leander, whom she'd caught looking at her with a sympathetic expression on his normally severe face. And ... she felt an acute sense of impending loss; she knew she'd miss them all. Kammy unconsciously wiped her eyes with the backs of her paws and was surprised to find them damp with tears. "I ..."

Dr. Catrileo knelt down and stroked her hair comfortingly; it was easy to tell that she had kids. "I know you're going to miss us all, Kammy. But we'll stay in touch. They're sending you to a hospital where they can study your condition carefully and see if there's anything that can be done."

"Oh. But it's just so sudden. When ... do I go?" Kammy had been noticing that she was easily upset lately, but then, with all that had happened, who would blame her?

"In the morning, when the trucks go back to town. Dr. da Silva's talked Juan into going to America for tests too. I'll help you pack your things."

Kammy thought she'd miss Dr. Catrileo most of all, but it's not the sort of thing she'd come out and say. "So we think Juan ... used to be older too? That he drank some of the water?"

"That seems to be what he says. His Spanish isn't always easy to understand. But I'm a botanist, not a linguist. Anyway, so we've gotten you a camp bed that's more your size, and since it's smaller, we can put Juan in your tent too – just for tonight."

Kammy felt irritated. "What? I don't want to sleep with him! Why do I feel like I've been sent off to the kids' table all of a sudden?" she complained.

But after a while she calmed down – it was just for one night, after all. At first, Kammy slept more comfortably than any other night since she'd arrived in the rainforest, with clothes and a bed that actually fit her, although she was again making crinkling sounds whenever she moved. However, in the middle of the night, Kammy awakened with a creepy feeling and noticed Juan lying awake, watching her. They had him in what looked like a Hawaiian shirt by way of pajamas, and he was also diapered for sleep. He was holding some kind of metal helmet like some kids might hold a plush toy, though it was clearly sized for an adult and much too large for his head. "What?" she said, in a loud whisper.

In a low tone of voice Juan said something in Spanish. "Look, horse, I've told you, no hablo el Spanish-o," she said, in a frustrated tone, though still keeping it quiet because everyone else was sleeping.

The next thing he said was in English, though heavily accented.

"You – are doomed too, *perrita*."

And with that he turned over, and maybe he went back to sleep, but he said nothing else. "What? What do you mean by that?" Kammy whispered, but he didn't reply. Kammy didn't sleep very well after that. How old was Juan? Had he been a teenager like Kammy before he drank the water? Had he been an adult? How long had he been like this? What if he was centuries old, but still a young child? Was that going to happen to her too? How would she survive?