

The Morality Play

By Ricki Walters

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Kontrau rushes through the emergency room doors and checks the clock on the wall above the nurses' station. Midnight. The bright, antiseptic light of the hospital corridor contrasts sharply to the darkness found outside the window at the end of the hallway. She rubs her eyes against the light and makes note of the unexpected number of visitors still in the hallway. With an increasing urgency, she weaves her way toward the elevator.

As she comes to the doorway of Room 2380, Kontrau collides with Dr. Ma Le'Spere. The startled doctor adjusts his glasses and regains his composure.

"Excuse me, Ms. Di Lemo. I didn't see you there. Nice to meet you. You know, I've read your work on degenerative movement disorders... a fascinating white paper. Your research saved a world. What do you—"

Kontrau interrupts before he can go further, "I'm not here to discuss my work. I'm here to see my father. How is he?" She gazes inside the room to catch a glimpse of her father, Angelo Di Lemo, asleep on his bed.

Le'Spere steps away from her and quietly closes the door. He leans his head

closer and says, “I was just on my way to call you. I was hoping you could come to the hospital...”

Le’Spere flips through Angelo’s chart and then tucks it under his arm. He sighs deeply, “Your father is doing as well as can be expected, but he is coming to the end stages of the Jameson’s Disease. You’ll notice his lack of facial expression, the absence of blinking. His muscle pain is excruciating and his headaches are piercing. His intellectual capacity is still intact, but we have him on such high doses of morphine that his thinking is often confused.” Le’Spere stops just long enough to take a breath. “You understand that the disease is shutting down his major organs one by one, and that he is having great difficulty breathing. Without the ventilator, your father would likely only survive a few hours.” Le’Spere blinks nervously and finishes, “You have to think about his quality of life. Take him off the life support — there is nothing more to do.”

Kontrau stares daggers at Le’Spere and straightens her shoulders. “Listen to me, you miserable, little worm. There’s a lot that can be done. How about another round of gene therapy, or, perhaps neural transplants? That’s what you should be suggesting!”

“I’m sorry Ms. Di Lemo, we’ve done all we can. We need to make him comfortable in his last hours. The ventilator is just extending his suffering, and he is in great agony.”

“I can’t believe you’re giving up on him!” Kontrau lunges at him, rips the chart from his hands, and throws him against the wall. With her hand pressed against his throat she demands, “Now tell me you’re not going to do any more for my father!”

“We can’t, Kontrau,” Le’Spere croaks. He squirms, trying to get free.

“You’re wrong. You know there are... alternatives... experimental treatments that

could help him. I can help. I have access to cutting-edge technologies.”

“That might be the Kalsan way, but you know we can’t. It would be unethical... illegal... against hospital and insurance policies. It’s time to let your father go.” He covers his face with his arm, expecting another punch.

Kontrau forces Le’Spere to his knees before releasing him. She rubs her hands on her slacks as if they were dirty.

The doctor stands, brushes himself off, and steps toward the middle of the hallway. “I won’t call security because I understand you’re upset, but you also know that we cannot *try* just *anything*. You, of all people, should understand the need to employ best practice and balance. Your work ended the Interlocke Plague. You led the studies on the Jamuridan Outbreak. You understand more than anyone the harm that would result from using prohibited alternatives.”

“Don’t presume to lecture me, *doctor*.” Kontrau abruptly turns away from him, pauses for a moment just outside her father’s room, and then she takes a deep breath to compose herself before entering. A million possibilities, all bleak, run through her mind. *Is there no hope?* Her head aches. A band of pain tightens into a knot behind her eyes.

She pushes the door open and enters. Her father sleeps lightly. His head, hands, and legs tremor constantly now. She steps to the edge of the bed. His skin is hot and dry to her touch. His thinning hair used to be black; like Kontrau’s, but now it is a pale white. The sound of the ventilator fills the room; rising and falling over the quiet drone of a news broadcast. Wires run from her father to the EEG machine behind his bed. Tubes run from his nose to the ventilator and from his arms to an IV drip of pain medication.

Treatment options run through her mind. She can’t let him exist like this, and she

certainly isn't ready to let him die.

Angelo stirs. "Konnie, I'm so happy to see you. Are you really here?" he whispers.

"I'm here, Daddy."

"It's been a long time," her father says. "Ten years?" He pulls her hand to his chest, but she pulls away and steps back.

Kontrau smiles down at him. "Yes, it's been a long time. I've been busy with my research, but I'm here now..."

"Listen, Daddy, I've never had a chance to tell you some things. I know you worked hard and sacrificed everything for me to get the education required by the Kalsan Alliance. You deserve only the best for what you gave me. You should know I've been searching to find a cure for your palsy. I've traveled the galaxy — observing and studying — learning everything I could about treatments and cures. I won't let you down."

"Frankly, you still could have visited, but none of that matters now."

"It was too hard... My search was so useless..."

Her father nods. "Well, I'm glad you came."

"Have you talked with Mother about... you know?" she asked wanting to change the subject.

Angelo shrugs his shoulders.

Kontrau continues, "I just came from the west side of town and stopped by your house to see Mom on the way over. She's under the doctor's care now. Your diagnosis has been hard on her. She's sick with it."

Angelo nods solemnly and for the next several minutes makes small talk with his daughter. He tells her about his last fishing trip, and she tells him about all of her recent adventures.

Finally, Kontrau gets around to what she really wants to say, “No matter what, I’m going to find a treatment.”

Suddenly, a searing headache courses through Kontrau’s head. She presses the heels of her hands up into her eyes and under her eyebrows, hoping the pounding will die down. After a moment of dizziness, she catches a hint of rotten fruit in the air. She looks around for the smell but can’t find anything. Her eyesight blurs, and she takes hold of the bed rail. She stares vacantly across the room, not moving.

After a moment, Angelo calls her softly back to their conversation, “Konnie? What’s wrong?”

She turns back to her father as the headache passes. “It’s nothing for you to worry about.”

In the frailest of voices, he says, “Konnie... I’m ready to die... I just want to make peace between us.”

Kontrau doesn’t reply. Instead, she lifts his arm and applies a delicate pressure to his bicep and tensor muscles assessing their rigidity. She lifts him into a sitting position, testing his flexibility.

“Stop, Kontrau, that hurts; makes it harder to breathe.”

She lays him back on the pillow. “You taught me to never give up — to never lose hope. I don’t plan to quit now. I’ve just begun.” She checks the monitors, reviews the medication sheets, and checks his lab levels — trying to find something, anything,

that would help her quest for a cure.

Frustrated, she turns away from the bed. “I have to leave to think things through. I’ll be back soon. I’ll find something that works. I promise you.” She waves good-bye and flees into the hallway without waiting for a reply. She quickly wipes the tears away from her cheeks before anyone notices.

She reflects on Le’Spere’s diagnosis of despair and kicks a garbage can down the hallway. Two nurses step around the nursing station to see what’s happening. She leans into her stride and storms out the back door of the hospital.

Kontrau steps outside, surprised by a petite woman smoking just outside the door. The two nearly collide, but the woman steps back and quickly conceals her hand behind her back.

Kontrau checks the woman’s hospital identification. “Dr. Aspiri. Hmmm... Oh, this is rich. Isn’t it just a little ironic for a doctor to be smoking?” Kontrau smirks.

“Yeah, just a little,” Aspiri says, “smoking is prohibited on the hospital grounds, so I sneak out here. No one but the garbage collectors come back here.”

Kontrau — her eyes red and swollen with sadness — sits down on the step next to where the doctor is standing.

Dr. Aspiri shifts her weight from one side to the other then asks, “So, what’s bugging you?”

Kontrau tells her the condensed version of her life story, then sniffs at Aspiri. “That’s not tobacco. That’s Dima. Isn’t it? What are you doing smoking that out here?”

“Yeah. It’s illegal. If you need to know...,” she shoots Kontrau a dirty look. “I have brain cancer. The Dima helps with the pain.”

“What?”

“Well, I’ve only just been diagnosed. The hospital doesn’t know yet. They wouldn’t let me practice if they did, but the Dima lets me do my job just fine. Without the Dima, I’d have pain so bad I wouldn’t be able to get out of bed, let alone work. I’d have horrible headaches and seizures that aren’t amenable to medication.”

Kontrau extends her legs out in front of her, crossing her legs at her ankles.

“Dima might have powerful anesthetic qualities, but what about the side effects — the agitation, the paranoia, and violence... the physical changes?”

“I’m very careful about my use. I believe that with carefully controlled dosing I can achieve the anesthetic impact without the contraindications.”

“You’re taking a tremendous risk for pain management,” Kontrau emphasizes.

“I’ve seen Dima nearly destroy the entire population of Jamurida. The Moguls turned the people into Dumizi — mindless, ravenous monsters — with their controlled dosing.”

Kontrau shakes her head. “It’s important to use our technology, training, and medical advances to improve the world, to right the wrongs committed by the corrupt, not to turn a profit or for personal gain.”

“You’re Kalsan. I should have known.”

Her mind elsewhere, Kontrau doesn’t answer. She looks over her shoulder to be sure no one is lurking in the alley or behind a dumpster, and then asks, “I’m curious about your thoughts on Dima. On Jamurida, I studied hundreds of cases and concluded that there is virtually no therapeutic property that outweighs the side effects. What prompted you to use something so dangerous on yourself?”

Dr. Aspiri hesitates and stares at Kontrau, assessing. She takes a breath before

beginning. “I, along with a small group of fellow scientists, have been studying the effect Dima has on stem cells for medicinal purposes.” Her voice rises with excitement. “We’re dosing rats with genetically altered Dima in very specific rates. We’ve found that the Dima increases electrical impulses in the brain and decreases tremors, rigidity, and movement problems in two thirds of the test group. We’ve nearly mapped out the altered Dima’s ability to stimulate the brain in radical ways. The most exciting result is that it decreases the size of brain tumors, shrinking them dramatically. Our work has enormous medical implications, but we’re unable to move into human testing because of Kavaliro Monavida and his special interest groups.” She stops for a moment and drags on the Dima.

Kontrau asks, “Has he tried to stop you?”

“Kavaliro Pompa Monavida caved in to pressure from the Lobby for Life and cut our funding. He’s halted our progress. He hides behind Sing Ardemo and her conservative backers in the Lobby.”

“I know Sing. She interfered with my research two years ago. She’s from an extreme wing of the Haelan Philosophy, who believes that all life, including a stem cell, is sacred.”

“Yes, and Pompa Monavida is using her to distract the public from his own, private initiatives. He redirects funding from scientific research that Sing opposes, and funnels it into his own not-for-profit, and in turn, into his own bank account. No one’s the wiser.” Aspiri looks down the alley again. “They’re both in town now for a medical conference. Along with cutting our funding, he just imposed restrictions on substances like Dima; forbidding testing on humans. We’ve had to move the lab out of the hospital

and into my home so we can continue our work.”

“Hmmm, sorry to hear that.” Kontrau thinks a moment. “You know, I’d be very interested in seeing your research.”

Aspiri raises an eyebrow. “Well... I’m not so sure that would be prudent.” She steps back from Kontrau and looks toward the door.

“I’d be willing to fund your research for the next year, and provide you with all the Kalsan technology you might need. I have a *personal* interest in how this technology might be applied.”

Aspiri bites her lip. She glances at her Dima cigarette, takes a long, slow drag, and then says, “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but... all right.” She digs a business card from her pocket, and scribbles her address on the back for Kontrau.

Kontrau finds Dr. Aspiri’s home without much difficulty. She knocks on the door and looks down the quaint street as she waits for an answer. A covert lab seems out of place here among the cozy, cottage style homes set back from the street and accented with bushes or brickwork. Dr. Aspiri opens the door and quickly ushers Kontrau into her home.

In the cellar, the smell of animals and alcohol greets Kontrau. She finds the lab fully equipped with medical supplies and equipment. Small cages, full of rats, line one wall, and surgical tables and plenty of counter space stretch across the others. Kontrau pulls equipment from her medical bag and sets it up on the counter top.

Dr. Aspiri hands Kontrau her research papers, and she examines them quickly. Long into the night, they conduct tests and document their results. Thanks to Kontrau's new equipment, the two make incredible progress. Finally, Kontrau asks about administering a small dose to a human test subject.

Without hesitation, Aspiri replies, "We don't dare test on humans without the Kavaliro's sanction." Aspiri taps on the counter for emphasis. "They might look the other way for an unsanctioned basement lab, but they'd crush us if they discovered we'd conducted human tests."

"But you use Dima. You're testing on yourself! How is that different than testing on someone else?"

"I choose to smoke Dima to control *my* own pain and headaches. I choose to risk the side effects, the possible addiction, and death. I cannot ask anyone else to take those same risks until we've gone through the proper testing protocols. We *cannot* use humans as test subjects."

"You're being too cautious. All of your data shows that this will work. There isn't enough time for prolonged testing!"

"We're already pushing the limits of the law, not to mention our code of ethics."

"You hypocrite! You ignore what is convenient for your own gain." A headache suddenly strikes, and Kontrau presses her palms against her forehead. The pain throbs behind her eyes.

"I may bend the law for the sake of science, or so I can still function, but everything I do is for the right reasons. My actions are consistent with the way I prescribe any drug. It's like using a small dose of morphine to ease pain, as opposed to using

morphine to end a terminally ill life. Unlike Kavaliro Monavida, who changes the law to reflect the current state of opinion, I have higher principles.”

“Okay. Okay. You’re right! I’m just worried about my father. We’ll test on animals first.” Kontrau brushes her hair back from her face and goes back to work.

After finishing the next series of tests, Kontrau states matter of factly, “We need more Dima.”

“We can get some from Francesco, my source,” Aspiri offers.

Kontrau thinks for a moment, then says, “How about if I get the Dima so you can keep working?”

“Sure. I’ll tell him to expect you.” Aspiri tears a sheet of paper from the bottom of a notebook and writes down the directions.

Two hours later, Kontrau returns — hauling an enormous sack behind her. She drags the bag across the floor and barely manages to heave it onto the surgical table.

“How much Dima did you get?” Aspiri smirks.

Kontrau doesn’t reply. Instead, she opens the sack to reveal a young man.

Aspiri steps back from her work, “Francesco? Kontrau, what have you done?”

As Kontrau straps the unconscious Dima dealer to the table she says, “Think about it. He’s already taken large doses of Dima, so he’ll make the perfect test subject.”

“Stop this right now! You’ve really crossed the line here.”

“Don’t you understand? We’re making history. We have to be willing to make

some sacrifices along the way.”

“You’re insane. I won’t be party to kidnapping *or* murder!”

Kontrau shoots a wicked stare at Aspiri that instantly silences her protest.

Aspiri rips off her lab coat, throws it at Kontrau, and storms up the stairs.

Kontrau raises her eyebrows, but continues working. She attaches the EEG monitor to Francesco and starts an IV line. She administers the altered Dima drip at a moderate dose.

Kontrau conducts the experiment repeatedly — each time increasing the dosage — until daylight begins to illuminate the lab. At a good stopping point, she decides to check on her father. She calls the hospital, and after holding for several minutes, Le’Spere tells her that her father only has a few hours to live. Kontrau berates the doctor and slams the phone on the countertop.

Francesco stirs awake. He lingers on the threshold between life and death. Kontrau checks the monitors and increases the Dima to the highest rate. She finds she can suspend his death by simulating minimal brain activity with the increased drip of Dima. Kontrau is ecstatic; this could be her cure.

She compares his brain activity to Aspiri’s notes. After an hour, she tosses her papers onto the table. “Yes! The key is in the blood and just the right mixture of Dima!”

Kontrau places her index finger on Francesco’s carotid artery, taking his pulse. He snaps at Kontrau, trying to bite her. Kontrau jumps back, startled. Francesco thrashes violently against his restraints, growling and foaming at the mouth. Kontrau examines him, but keeps a safe distance. His face and hands are pasty white. His skin pigmentation is faded.

“Sorry, Francesco. Between what you smoked before I met you and what I gave you here, I think you’ve had a little too much Dima. You’re transforming into a Dumizi. You know what that is, don’t you? A fiend with a rapacious thirst for blood and violence.” Kontrau paces at the end of the surgical table, deciding what to do with him.

She creeps up the stairs to check on Aspiri. Kontrau tries to share her breakthrough with the doctor.

“Please, “ Kontrau pleads, “you’ve given me so much hope already, won’t you help me finish this?”

Too angry to even look at Kontrau, Aspiri refuses to acknowledge her. Dejected, Kontrau returns to the laboratory, unsure how to proceed.

After a few minutes of pacing, Kontrau notices Dr. Aspiri’s identification lanyard and her swipe-card dangling from her lab coat on the floor. A thought occurs to her, and she folds up the coat and tucks it into her satchel.

She approaches Francesco and grips the end of the surgical table. He viciously kicks at her. She says, “There’s no going back now. I’ll just have to put you down, like the animal you are.”

Suddenly, stinging pang hammers through Kontrau’s head like a thunderclap, and she doubles over. Nausea washes over her in waves. She cradles her head, trying to make the pounding stop. Her vision blurs and shimmering flashes of light pulsate at the periphery of her vision. She staggers to a chair in the corner, falls into it, and waits for the headache to pass.

Minutes later, she eases out of the chair. She fills a syringe with potassium chloride and gives Francesco a lethal injection.

Kontrau quickly packs her equipment into her medical bag. She rushes up the stairs and retrieves the Asadian rug from the front entry, returns to the cellar and rolls Francesco into it. Back outside, with the coast clear, she transfers Francesco to the trunk.

On the way to the hospital, she speeds to an abandoned mineshaft that she played near as a child. The only people anywhere near that shaft now are addicts and vagabonds. Even if someone found Francesco's body, it would look like other dealers or Dima addicts killed him. *Hurry, she thinks, there's not much time.*

Kontrau parks blocks away from the bustling activity in front of the hospital. News vans, with satellite dishes extended into the air, line the circle drive. Reporters run toward the hospital as if they're late for something. Demonstrators from Sing Ardemo's Lobby for Life block the street, shoving anyone trying to cross their picket line. The Kavaliro stands at a miked podium, surrounded by media and security officers.

Kontrau draws her cloak over her uniform to blend into the crowd and listens. Kavaliro Pompa Monavida appears to have been speaking for some time. "And... for that reason, we will no longer fund such immoral and depraved research. Now, I'd like to introduce a true voice of light in these dark times. Chairperson of the Morality Committee and Director of the Lobby for Life. Please welcome Sing Ardemo."

The crowd erupts into cheers and thunderous applause.

Sing steps to the podium. The white coif of her habit frames her dark face. Her red veil and scapular accentuate her long white tunic and lean body. She stands a head

taller than Monavida. “Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me here today.” She raises her hands to quiet the crowd. “Several doctors and researchers from this very hospital have been conducting tests using an illegal substance called Dima. Using stem cells to mutate Dima, medical personnel have violated baronial law and desecrated our Great Philosophies. Equipment audits indicate that rogue researchers have stolen several hospital monitors and machines to carryout these vile acts.

“All life is sacred, and must be treated as such. We demand justice and enforcement of the law.”

Kontrau looks over the crowd and realizes she’s not going to get into the hospital through the front door. If Dr. Aspiri has been compromised, it’s very likely that she’s also on the watch list, and she can’t take that risk now. With no time to spare, she takes a deep breath, puts her head down, and darts through the crowd toward the back alley. She uses Aspiri’s swipe-card to open the rear entrance and sneaks inside. Kontrau moves quietly through the hallways and past several nursing stations. No one pays her much attention. Hospital staff and visitors alike are watching the news unfolding outside.

Once inside her father’s room, she locks the door. The ventilator breathes quietly for him. The TV drones in the corner. Kontrau drags the heavy, metal cabinet in front of the door, barricading it. The screeching of the metal legs against the floor wakes Angelo.

“Kontrau, what are you doing?”

“There’s no time, father. I’ve found a treatment and maybe a cure.”

“What do you mean? How?” Angelo whispers. His hands tremor against his chest.

Kontrau steps over to Angelo’s bed and pats his hands. “I found a cure for *both* of us. The truth is, neither of us has much time left. You’re just a little closer to the end than

I am.”

“What?” her father gasps.

“I have Jameson’s Disease too. I discovered it when I ran some detailed tests after being exposed to a solar burst a few years ago. For me, it manifests in these horrible headaches. I’ve had a variety of drug cocktails and treatments. Nothing’s worked... until now.” Kontrau smiles and tucks her father’s hands under a blanket. She gets her bag, and replaces his pain medication with a Dima drip.

He protests for a moment, but an instant later, he’s already more alert. He tries to sit up and smiles at Kontrau. “What did you do?”

Kontrau smiles back, happy that he is responding well to the first infusion.

Suddenly, an emergency call from the headquarters of the Kalsan Alliance comes in on her headset.

The Chief Ambassador tells Kontrau, “A gang of Dumizi is running rampant through the west side of the city.”

“I’m familiar with them from Jamurida,” Kontrau says. “Where on the west side?”

“Scouts indicate that they’ve taken over the third and fourth quarters. They’re in the end, and most violent, stage of their use. They’re attacking everything they encounter, including each other. You need to report to the second quarter—“

Kontrau pulls off her headset, disconnecting the call. She lifts the stethoscope from the hook behind Angelo’s bed and listens to his heartbeat and breathing.

Once his brain activity matches the pattern she found in the lab, she needs to administer the proper amount of altered Dima. Too much Dima, however, and she could

turn him into a Dumizi automaton like Francesco.

Kontrau prepares the syringe and waits. She monitors the EEG carefully then makes the injection at just the right moment. She times each new dose precisely, but her father's vitals don't seem to change. She draws more Dima and pushes the injection through his IV.

In a panic, she checks his breathing and lifts his arm to check for rigidity. She checks his pulse. Her father rouses a bit. The EEG registers a quicker pattern of brain activity. His breathing becomes strong and regular.

“Wake up just a little more, Daddy. I think this might be working!”

Just then, the broadcast on the television draws her attention. She steps over and turns up the volume so she can hear the news update. A nervous reporter stands at a residential intersection in a quiet, familiar neighborhood, and says, “The Dumizi have been rampaging through the west side's third and fourth quarters for an hour now. They've destroyed everything and everyone in their path — men, women, and children. Now, they have taken over the first and second quarter. As shocking as it may seem, it appears as if there are no survivors in this devastated neighborhood.”

Kontrau turns up the volume. “It can't be. That's your street corner, Daddy, just down the block from your house.”

The reporter continues, “Behind me you can see a name written in blood on the wall: *Francesco*. Apparently, the Dumizi are seeking revenge for the death of a Dima dealer and gang leader named Francesco Perforti — who police found murdered in a quarry not far from here.”

Kontrau's headache returns, squeezing at her temples like a vise.

Angelo wakes and his eyes flutter open. Kontrau rushes to his bedside. Only seconds remain for the last injection to have its full impact. Kontrau kisses her father gently. He smiles up at her, his face more relaxed. She checks his breathing. It's regular and strong.

Kontrau has no way to test for tissue regeneration, but his vitals are within normal limits. "Now for the true test. Let's get you breathing on your own." She moves to the wall outlet, pauses for a moment, then unplugs his ventilator.

An alarm rings and buzzers thrum. Kontrau pulls the alarm box from the wall so she can listen more closely to her father's breathing.

Through the wall speaker a nurse asks, "Is everything all right?"

"Yes, I just bumped one of the plugs," Kontrau answers.

She watches her father's chest rise and fall on his own. With each minute, Kontrau monitors and records his pulse and respiration.

However, after several minutes, each heartbeat comes slower and slower. His face pales and his eyes grow sallow. She shakes him and calls to him. When she gets no response, she climbs onto the bed and begins resuscitation.

Angelo coughs and sputters back into wakefulness. As Kontrau steps off the bed, Angelo strikes her from behind with the force of a heavy-weight boxer. She flies from his bed into the corner, smashing her head against the floor. He growls and grits his teeth uncontrollably. Before he has a chance to get out of bed, she restrains him using his sheets and a blanket.

He must have had too much Dima, she thinks. Frustrated with herself for being so distracted during his treatment, she realizes that she desperately needs to lower the Dima

level in his blood.

Kontrau stands in the middle of the room, staring at her father. Her head pounds and pain explodes behind her eyes.

Despite her suffering, she reaches into her bag, pulls out a series of tubes, and connects them to cannulas. Once she has everything set up, she inserts the needles into her arm. As Angelo bucks and thrashes against his restraints, she inserts the second set of needles into his arms.

Usually, such a transfusion would take several hours, but she doesn't have that luxury. So she adapts the equipment using an emergency technique she learned on Interlocke to perform a complete transfusion in a fraction of the time. Although utterly exhausted, she manages to hold down her father while waiting for the process to finalize.

Kontrau slips in an out of consciousness as she tries to dilute the Dima level in his bloodstream. She watches the blood transfer from her body as she takes her father's contaminated blood in the return line.

Some time later, a sound outside the room rouses Kontrau from her reverie. She hears a pounding on the door and someone calling to her father from outside the room. The metal cabinet rocks back and forth and screeches forward, digging furrows into the vinyl floor as Dr. Le'Spere and a hospital security guard force the door open.

Kontrau takes heaving breaths as she stands to face them. A burning rage replaces her throbbing headache. Then, something snaps in her mind.

Kontrau rips the tubes from her arm and pulls the wires from her father's monitors. She hurls the IV stand and the transfusion cart to the floor — blood spilling across the floor. She hurtles across the room, grabs the guard, and bites deeply into his

neck. Struggling brutally, they slip and slide across the floor until the guard pushes free, and Kontrau collapses on the ground in a fit of fury.

The guard quickly moves behind Kontrau and tackles her. She frenziedly writhes and strains to get free.

As she descends into the final phases of Dumizi madness, Kontrau breathes slowly. The drug takes its final toll, and Kontrau's arms and legs stiffen.

Angelo leans against the edge of the bed and reaches out to his daughter. In that moment, their eyes meet, but Angelo is uncertain if there is any recognition found behind the recesses of her ghostly eyes. Finally, she takes her last breath.

Dr. Le'Spere tries unsuccessfully to resuscitate her for several minutes. He then goes to examine Angelo. "What happened in here, Mr. Di Lemo?"

"I don't know," Angelo says, in a quandary.

Le'Spere checks Angelo's vitals and readings. "You're all right," Le'Spere tells Angelo. "Actually, more than all right. Whatever she did, all of your symptoms are completely gone. I don't know how, but your Jameson's is gone, and you, sir, are going to live."