

Vanquished

Enslaved, Book 1

Katie Clark

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Dedication

Lovingly dedicated to all those people who made me
believe that I could.

Praise

[Vanquished is] an emotional and unique take on a world of haves vs. have-nots that will pull you in from the very first page. ~ Kelly Hashway, author of *Touch of Death*

1

The old hospital looms in front of me like some ancient castle from the Early Days. This is where they keep people with the mutation. My heart races at the thought of going inside.

I've never been in a hospital before. In fact, I've never been in a building that big at all. I wish I'd taken Jamie's offer to come with me or had come with Dad last night. I wish that Mom hadn't gotten the mutation at all.

I take a deep breath and push through the double doors.

The quiet lobby area is dim, lit by a few small windows and a couple of glowing lamps. I knew the hospital gets extra electricity allowance, but I've almost never seen anyone use manufactured lighting during the day. I'm awed by the sight. In front of me is an abandoned office area, and to my right is an old cafeteria. A sign dangles over the counter by one chain. It seems like someone would have taken it down by now.

I make a split decision and yank it down. Chains clatter as they plunge to the floor. It stays on the ground, and I turn back to the main lobby. My heartbeat calms at regaining this tiny bit of control.

Beyond the cafeteria, several signs hang on the wall. One points me to the stairs.

My dad said Mom was on the third floor. Back in

the Early Days, they fought the mutation with chemotherapy drugs and something called radiation. We don't have those things anymore, so we fight it with fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Sometimes it works, but most of the time it doesn't. I don't want to think about what this means for Mom.

The door to the stairs is beside the old elevator shafts. I reach out and feel the cool metal doors. They reflect my image back to me, but I don't pay attention to that. I've seen enough of my short blond hair and not-so-tall stature, but I've never actually seen elevators before. I wish the doors would open, and I could peek inside. Riding up to the third floor would be even better, but no one has enough electricity allowance to run elevators, not even the hospital I guess.

I make the climb to the third floor without even getting winded, and more manufactured lighting greets me. Long bulbs line the ceiling. These lights are brighter than the lamps downstairs, and they make an odd buzzing noise. I stumbled into a beehive once, and the angry bees buzzed a lot like the lights.

There are so many rooms down the long hallway, I can't imagine there would ever be enough sick people to fill them all, but then I remember what they tell us about the Early Days. There were a lot more people back then. Now there are so few people I think we could all fit in this hospital together. How would it feel to be around so many people, all the time? Would it feel crowded? I don't think so. I think it would feel safe.

The hallway is empty, but a faint beeping comes from down the hall. I pass an old desk on my way toward the beeping. A dumpy computer sits on the

desk. People still have those?

I pass one door, two doors, and then an irritated voice stops me in my tracks.

"We could give her chemo at the onset to slow things down a bit, and then start the natural healing. The least we can do is to give her a fighting chance. She's a Middle, after all." It's a woman's voice, coming from the room with the faint beeping. Her tone is hushed and angry.

I look at the piece of paper that's been tacked to the wall outside the room.

Maya Norfolk.

I suck in a tight breath. They're talking about Mom? What do they mean by 'a fighting chance'? My heart picks up speed, and I step closer to the room, careful to stay out of view.

"It takes time to get approval for chemo drugs, and what if she talks? Everyone who gets the mutation will start demanding them. What's her occupation?" It's a man's voice, and he sounds just as angry.

Papers shuffle and the woman says, "Professor at the military academy. I say we do it. She knows how to keep secrets if she's worked in the military. What chance does she have otherwise?"

The pause in conversation is excruciating as Mom's life hangs in the balance. Meanwhile my mind spins. Chemo drugs? They're not even supposed to exist. How can they be talking about this so casually? Have the rest of us been lied to all this time?

"Do you need some help?"

I jerk around, my heart thumping like the rain during a torrential downpour. A boy stands in front of me. He doesn't look much older than my seventeen years, but definitely old enough to have taken the Test.

"I was looking for my mom's room," I say quickly. "I've never been here before." I hope that sounded innocent and confused, and not like I'm scared to be caught eavesdropping.

"What's her name?" His dark hair is short, but it has a little curl to it. His chocolaty brown eyes aren't suspicious, not like they'd be if he suspected me of listening to the doctors.

"It's Maya Norfolk. I think this is her room, but I wasn't sure if I was allowed to just walk in."

He smiles kindly. "People are usually nervous, but you don't have to be. You can go on in." His smile makes his cheeks puff out like he's carrying an apple in each one. I could watch him smile all day.

"Thanks," I force myself to look down.

When I turn around, two people are coming out. The doctors, obviously.

"This is Maya Norfolk's daughter," the boy says. "What's your name, miss?"

I lick my lips. Do the doctors suspect I heard any part of their conversation? "Hana. I'm Hana Norfolk."

The woman smiles. "It's nice to meet you, Hana. I'm Dr. Lane, and this is Dr. Bentford. We'll be taking care of your mom." She sticks her hand out.

I've never shaken someone's hand before—I thought it was a tradition that went out with the Early Days. Her hand is warm and rough, and she pumps my hand up and down once. Dr. Bentford reaches forward for his turn and gives my hand a half dozen fast shakes.

People who don't know each other don't typically touch. It feels very strange.

"Nice to meet you," I mumble. "I guess I'll go in now." No one stops me or questions me, and I slip into

Mom's room. It's darker in here, but then I see the curtains. They're drawn, and the light is switched off. My mom is sleeping.

A bed sits in the middle of the room, and there are two chairs on either side of it. A pole stands beside the bed with a bag of fluid. It drips into a long tube that goes into Mom's hand. The bag hangs freely, not plugged up to electricity. I wonder what makes the water run.

She still looks like Mom. The mutation hasn't eaten away her body yet. She hasn't lost weight or her coloring. Back in the Early Days people even lost their hair, but that was from the chemo drugs, not the mutation. I touch her hair softly, remembering all the times she held my hair for me when I was little and got sick. She would give me a cup of water afterward, and then brush my hair. That's always been my favorite—getting my hair brushed.

I look at her hair again, coming out of my fog. Would Mom care if she lost her hair? No, I don't think so. I got that from her, not caring about my looks all that much. Besides, she most likely won't lose her hair anyway. Only if they decide to go ahead with chemotherapy.

Chemo drugs. I take a shaky breath and sit in one of the rickety chairs. Do chemotherapy drugs really still exist? If so, why don't they give them to everyone? The man had said they needed approval for them, and Mom would have to keep it a secret. None of that makes sense to me.

A soft rap comes from behind the door, and the boy from the hallway comes in with a glass of water. "I wasn't sure how long you'd be here," he says. "You might get thirsty."

I take the glass and smile. "Thanks."

He pauses like he wants to say more. "I'm sorry about the diagnosis. The mutation is always hard to hear."

I nod and look down. It *is* hard to hear. Everyone knows it's almost a death sentence. Tears burn my eyes and I blink them away. My mom can't die.

"If you need something just let me know," he says. "I'll do anything I can to help. And if you have any questions, I'm happy to get the doctors for you."

My head bobs up and down like a puppet's. "Sure. Thanks again." Talking is hard because I suddenly have a ball in my throat. I try to swallow it down, but it doesn't help.

"No problem. It was nice to meet you, Hana. I'll see you around." He retreats soundlessly, and I realize I didn't learn his name. He was very kind. I've never seen kindness like that in someone else's eyes. It was almost like he really cared. A thought sprints through my mind, almost gone before I recognize it. What would it be like to be around him all the time?

Why should he care about what happens to me or Mom? Maybe it's his job—part of his training. Maybe medics are supposed to help comfort those who are sick or injured.

I glance at the bag of fluids hanging on the pole. It looks like water, but of course, I wouldn't know. The fluids, along with the glass of water in my hands, make me realize the hospital must get extra water allowance too. That's good. Whoever made up the rules in the government must have known how it felt to have someone they loved in the hospital. They know how to take care of people who are hurting. Our small society may not have many resources, but we pool them and

survive. The more you help the society, the more you are helped, in spite of the million rules we have to follow.

I narrow my eyes and bite my lip. If the Greaters do whatever's best for their citizens, could the chemo drugs help her? I watch Mom's chest move up and down, and a dull ache grows behind my eyes. What will I do if she dies? What will Dad do? What will happen to her?

My mind flashes back to their whispered conversation and an argument about life after death. That was when I was little, but I've never forgotten. I wipe my tears before they run down my face. My mom can't die. A brick wall goes up in my heart. If there are chemotherapy drugs somewhere, I'm going to find out. If there's help for Mom to be found, I'm going to find it.

2

“All of you in this class will be taking your Test in three weeks’ time,” Mrs. Sewell says. She stands in front of our small class and points to the chalkboard. “This is the list of occupations you will be vying for.”

I don’t even glance at the board, since I already know which occupation I hope to get. Really I’m just eager for Mrs. Sewell to finish up. This is the last class of the day, and I want to see Mom. I need to know she’s OK, that she’s hanging in there.

“I want you to take a good look, because we’re going to be discussing each of these occupations today, and you’re going to tell me why you want the job you choose. Later this week is the career fair, and I want you to be prepared.”

A collective groan moves through the room.

Mrs. Sewell smiles and rolls her eyes. “Trust me. It’s better to choose what you want to do with your life and to work toward it, than to let it be chosen for you. Or worse, not to Test at all.”

That statement gets everyone quiet pretty fast. If a citizen chooses not to test, he is automatically demoted to Lesser for the rest of his life. The Lessers get less food and electricity than everyone else. We can barely survive as Middles—we don’t want to try and make it as Lessers.

“Is that how you ended up teaching?” one of the students calls out playfully. It breaks the tension and

everyone laughs.

Mrs. Sewell laughs, too, but shakes her head. "No, I always knew I wanted to teach. Is there anyone here who hopes to be a teacher?"

At first no one says anything. I glance around to see if anyone is brave enough to raise their hand. Finally, Bernadette Dobbs slips up a hand. "I'd like to teach, but I'd rather teach small kids, like the five and six year olds."

Mrs. Sewell nods. "Excellent! Who else knows what they want to do?"

I duck my head. I've never liked speaking in front of a group, but when Mrs. Sewell's eyes hone in on me I know she's going to call on me.

"Hana, what about you?"

Which is ridiculous, since she already knows what I want to do. I've talked with her about it more than once. I clear my throat. "I want to work in the government."

Immediately I hear chuckles from the others. My cheeks tingle, and I look at my notebook. I've doodled cats and birds all over the cover.

Mrs. Sewell puts up her hand to stop the murmurs. "Hana has a great plan. Tell us why you want to do this."

My mouth is suddenly as dry as the sidewalk when it hasn't rained in three weeks. "I want to help the Lessers."

There aren't any chuckles this time. In fact, there's no noise at all. You could hear a pin drop, as they used to say in the Early Days.

"Why would you want to help them?" someone asks.

I turn to Lilith Winters. "Why would you *not*? If

we had more Greaters and Middles, wouldn't the country be better as a whole? Why keep feeding the Lessers' bad habits? We can train them to do better—to be better. They're people too, you know."

Lilith opens her mouth—to argue, I'm sure—but Mrs. Sewell cuts her off. "Do you see how passionate Hana is about her future? It's best to choose something you can be equally as passionate about. Who else can tell me what they hope to do?"

Passionate? I've never thought of myself as passionate. I only want to help them. My mom told me that she gave a Lesser boy her lunch once. She said she was on a walk with her father when she was young, and they came to the fence around a Lesser city. She said the boy was so skinny she could see his bones, so she slipped him the cheese sandwich when her dad wasn't looking.

I've wanted to be like her ever since.

I turn back to the front of the class, but I can feel Lilith behind me, frowning. She's disliked me since we were fifteen. She told everyone in school that year that she hoped to marry my good friend, Keegan. She said she would sing, and Keegan would play his guitar. They would be stars. Keegan had ignored her completely that year, while he continued to hang out with me and Jamie.

Really, I don't know what she expected. The three of us were best friends. I don't understand why she thought she could change that.

After class she meets me in the hallway. Her hair is black and naturally curly. She wears it cut short, so her curls fly around her head wildly. Most of the boys say she's pretty. I guess I can see why, but she's meaner than anyone I've ever met.

“Why do you think you could ever even get a job in the government? You have to have special connections for jobs like that. You don’t have those connections, especially since your dad is only the dean of the agricultural college.” She pronounces each syllable of ‘agricultural’ as if it’s a separate word.

I throw my chin in the air, refusing to bow to her no matter how much fear her words put in me. “That’s not true, Lilith. The Test determines who qualifies for what job. I’ve been studying for this occupation for two years.”

She rolls her eyes. “We’ll see.”

“Why?” I ask. “What occupation are you testing for?”

She smiles coldly, her eyes narrowing like a cat’s. “Entertainment.”

I’m not surprised, but I am through with the conversation. If I stand in the hallway arguing with Lilith all afternoon, I won’t get to see Mom. “Goodbye, Lilith.”

“Bye,” she calls to me. “Just make sure you have a backup plan for when the original fails.” She says it like she’s reminding me to put on fresh underwear and wash behind my ears.

I don’t bother with a wave as I head for the doors and Jamie beyond, but her words echo in my head. What if I don’t get government? What other occupation could I get stuck with? Entertainment’s out, since I’m not at all entertaining. I know how to grow things, thanks to Dad, but the thought of being in agriculture for the rest of my life sounds almost as bad as becoming a Lesser for not testing.

Jamie’s long brown hair sways in a ponytail ahead of me. I’m glad for the distraction.

“Jamie!” I call out, waving over my head.

She turns around and sees me, then waits while I catch up.

Lilith is already forgotten. I lean toward Jamie and say, “Something strange happened yesterday.”

3

“Something strange at the hospital?” she asks. This is why she’s my best friend. She knows what I’m thinking even before I say it.

We walk the four blocks home together, just like we always do. She towers over me. We’re as different in looks as night and day. I’m short, she’s not. I have short blond hair, she has long brown hair. But inside? Kindred spirits.

“I overheard the doctors talking.” My stomach rolls at the memory. “They said they were thinking about giving Mom chemo drugs.” I glance around, remembering how it was supposed to be a secret. Not a single soul can be seen among the blooming trees on the quiet street.

Jamie’s smooth face scrunches up. “Chemo drugs? I thought you said they didn’t have those anymore.”

I had explained all about the mutation and the treatment when Mom was first diagnosed. Jamie had held my hand and cried with me, and then listened as I explained every part of the mutation that I could understand enough to tell.

“Exactly.” I round the corner onto our street. “That’s why it’s strange.”

We stop in front of Jamie’s house so she can put down her school bag. Jamie lives next door to me, but we always go to my house instead of hers after school. I have my own room, and she’s always telling me how

lucky I am for the privacy. I get what she's saying, but sometimes I wish my parents had opted to have both of the allowed two-children-per-family.

I breathe in the heady scent of the newly blooming trees as I wait for her, excited for summer to come. It's three weeks until graduation, and I'm ready for it.

"So, what do you think?" I say as we push through my unlocked front door.

Jamie shrugs and we head up the stairs. She kicks off her shoes and sits on my bed. "Maybe they're calling something else chemo drugs. Or maybe they've come up with a way to make the old ones again."

I bite my lip. "Maybe. The doctors were disagreeing about it, though. They said Mom would have to keep it secret. I guess I wasn't supposed to overhear them. They didn't see me listening." That part confuses me the most. Why shouldn't they help everyone, if they can? I thought that's what the Greaterers were here for.

"Hana, they wouldn't keep secrets from your family. They're going to do all they can to help your mom." She squeezes me in a hug. "Do you want me to go with you to the hospital today?"

"That's OK," I say. I need to come to terms with this scary new life on my own. Besides, I'm not sure I agree with Jamie about the chemo drug issue. Maybe she's right, but I want to find out more before I forget about it completely. Like, if they're calling something else chemo, what is it? And if they can make the old drugs again, why aren't they telling people?

I want to ask her other things—like what she thinks about dying, and what happens afterward—but I don't. She was so quick to take the Greaterers' side about the chemo; she'd probably just remind me about

reincarnation, which is something I've never been too sure of no matter what the Greater tell us.

"There was this medic in training there. He was really nice." I change the subject.

Jamie raises her eyebrows. "Have you already forgotten about Keegan? It's only been a couple of months since you saw him last."

Keegan is my other neighbor and is a year older than Jamie and I. He took his Test last year and has been away for training off and on ever since.

I let out a laugh, hoping my cheeks aren't turning red. I don't want her to know I thought the medic was cute and caring. "Not exactly, even though I think he's forgotten me. I haven't heard from him in at least two weeks. He never even responded to my letter about my mom's diagnosis." We have really great mail service these days. Letters can travel between cities by train within a couple of days. Our teachers tell us about something called email. They say it had traveled around the world in seconds, back in the Early Days. That would be so great.

"He probably just doesn't know what to say," she says. "If he was here he'd have the perfect words for you, but from far away he isn't sure. And he's busy training for his occupation. He'll write soon."

"I guess so," I say, but I'm not really sure of it. Why would he ignore my letter about Mom? We've been inseparable since we were little. I thought he'd be the first to comfort me when I wrote him a few weeks ago, and instead he's the one person I haven't heard from.

She gives me a stare down. "He'll write, Hana. He will."

I sigh and nod. "I know. It's only been two weeks.