

Redeemer

Enslaved, Book 3

Katie Clark

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Redeemer

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Dedication

Dedicated to Jesus, because I know my Redeemer
liveth.

Praise

An action-packed emotional ride, *Redeemer* is a story of finding faith in the darkest of times. ~ Kelly Hashway, author of the *Touch of Death* series.

Hana has been demoted to Lesser City 4, but that only strengthens her determination to be Free. Follow her through the twists and turns of *Redeemer*, the third and final book in the *Enslaved* Series as she and her friends risk everything—including their very lives—to overthrow Supreme Moon's secret plans before it's too late. ~ Donna Marie West, contributing author for *Our Little Friend* and *The Conqueror*

1

I close my eyes and lean my head against the metal paneling of the transport truck. The constant vibrations rattle my teeth, and when we hit a pothole I bite my tongue. I swallow the salty blood.

Every inch of my body hurts, from the cuts running deep and wide along my skin—courtesy of the barbed wire at the prison in Greater City—to the aching muscles from the tumbles over the fences. Escaping a prison riot isn't easy, as I learned.

A single drop of sweat trickles down my left temple. Lesser City 4 is farther south than the other cities, and without any vents in this death wagon, I've never been hotter in my life.

I shift in my seat, but there's no point in moving or trying to stop the vibrations. Enduring the ride isn't a choice, and it's even worse to endure it alone. There's no one to talk to, no one to commiserate with. It's only me. I've been demoted, and I'll probably be alone for the rest of my lonely, miserable life. It wouldn't surprise me if they marked it across my forehead: Hana Norfolk, demoted.

The truck rumbles down the poorly maintained roads for what seems like an eternity. The bounce, bounce, bounce lulls me into some kind of sleepy state. I let my eyelids slide shut and pretend I'm only travelling for an observation visit, the kind I used to go on when I was preparing a way to help the Lessers.

Before I knew there was no help for them.

I've grown so accustomed to the jostling that I'm almost asleep, so when we stop I pull myself from my stupor and look around. I can just reach the window above the door if I stand on my tiptoes. We're stopped at a gate adjoined to a wall. Well, more like a fence. A thick, wooden fence.

My new home sprawls out somewhere behind that wall. I take a nervous, shaky breath.

It doesn't matter that I've visited most of the Lesser cities in our nation. It doesn't matter that Mom was a Lesser before she died, or that my best friend, Jamie, was demoted. I don't want to be a Lesser. I've never wanted to be one, yet I willingly broke a dozen laws to land myself here.

The guards from the truck communicate with the watch tower at the closed gates, and it isn't long before four guards hurry toward the gate. They haul the doors open, and my guards climb back inside the truck. We continue our drive toward the city, and I watch from the window as the same four guards swing the gates shut.

They lock them in place.

My legs burn from the strain of reaching the window, but I'm curious about where they're taking me. I've only been to Lesser City 4 once, and we didn't use this gate. We're in a rural area with nothing but fields for miles around. When we've driven for a while, I begin to make out a skyline. We're approaching the city now.

At least they're not leaving me to die in the wilderness. Frost Moon was so angry with me, I wouldn't have been surprised if he had ordered that.

I let myself relax against the seat as we pull onto a

once-paved street, and I try to rest for the last few minutes of the drive.

“Move out of the way!” one of my guards shouts. The truck’s horn blows, and more shouts follow.

People must be littering the roads. No one stays out of them in the Lesser Cities. After all, there are no cars, so every road is basically a giant walkway.

The shouts die down and the truck pulls to a stop. I tense.

This is it. I’m here, at my new home.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

I count the heartbeats before the lock on the truck door rattles.

I hold my breath as the door swings open. What am I going to see on the other side of this truck? Will they give me a place to live? Food to eat? A work assignment?

I’m prepared to live in squalor. Frost Moon made sure I knew what trouble I’d caused. He made it clear what he thought of me and how little he cared to let me live. Not that I can blame him after I caused a prison riot outside of Greater City and probably incited the hatred of our mother country. In my defense, I wasn’t aware of the mother country, but Supreme Moon didn’t take that into consideration.

I will be left to die in Lesser City 4. My family and friends will never see me again, and if the enemies come, Supreme Moon let me know he hopes I’m the first to suffer the attack.

One of the guards squints as he looks at me in the darkness of the truck bed. “Let’s go.”

I obey without hesitation. What good would rebellion do me at this point?

Lord, help me.

The building I'm looking at has seen better days, and they were about two hundred and fifty years ago. There is no glass in the windows, and a few have battered shutters hanging down by a rusted screw. There is no door in the entry. A few Lessers sit on the steps.

The people are what finally make me pause. Some gaze at me with half curious eyes, but mostly they don't show any evidence they see me at all. Are they indifferent? Docile? Waiting until the guards leave so they can harm me?

I swallow hard, willing myself to move my feet and not be afraid of them. The people in the Lesser cities needed my help only a few months ago, and I was perfectly willing to give it. They still need my help.

"Move it. Yours is the top floor." The guard barks his orders with almost no emotion while holding a Taser to my back. He doesn't know me. He doesn't know why I was demoted. And he doesn't care. He has his orders, and he obeys them, above all.

I clutch my one measly bag to my chest and start moving. The inside of the building is worse than the outside. Trash litters the hallways, and several stairs are missing their wooden planks. I do my best to maneuver over the broken places, and after three flights I reach the top. There's only one door—mine. The guard jiggles the knob and the door creaks open.

"There you go. Good luck." His voice is pleasant, as if he's showing me to a lovely new apartment with a breathtaking view of Greater City.

I whip around and stare at him. "You're leaving already?"

"This is your home now. You're lucky. This one is

furnished.”

“But I don’t have any food. I don’t have anything!”

His face is a blank slate. He nods one last time and exits my room, closing the door behind him.

I’m not sure how long I stare at the closed door. Maybe a minute. Maybe an hour. Maybe a decade.

Finally, I turn to take in my new home. Tears sting my eyes, but I don’t fight them. Why would I? No one is here to see them or judge them. Unlike my apartment in Greater City, there are no cam disks watching me. No HELP comps. No personal guards.

Panic washes over me. I am completely alone.

What happened to Guard Nev? Did he get out of the city or was he caught? He’d already been in trouble recently. If they found him, he might not even be alive.

Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath to calm my racing heart. Slowly, I open them. There’s nothing I can do to help Guard Nev, but I may be able to help myself.

A couch with a tear down the side sits against the far wall, and a table with one chair is cradled in a small nook by the kitchen. No refrigerator, but there is a sink. A doorway leads me to a bedroom with a bed, toilet, and shower—all in the same room.

I place my bag on the bed and remember the last time I moved into a new place. It was in Greater City, and I had Mom’s perfume to remind me of home. To remind me of her.

Here I have nothing but two pairs of pants and two shirts.

Tears burn my throat and I all but run to the kitchen sink and twist the knob on the faucet. Nothing, not even a trickle, comes out. So I can’t drink, wash my clothes, or my body, at least not yet. They’ve left me

alone in Lesser City with no allowances.

It's a good thing I'm too sick to be hungry. In fact, it feels like the life has been sucked right out of me. I'm suddenly tired, so tired I don't even care the bed looks as dirty as the rest of the building.

I shuffle to the bedroom and close the door behind me. This will be my space, this small, closed-in room. I will clean it and care for it, and I will make it my home. Frost Moon can take away many things, but this place will be mine. He will forget about me. He won't remember my name a few years from now, and I'll be able to build a life here.

If any of us live that long.

I lie on the bed and close my eyes. It's not hard to drift away. In fact, it's easy. It's only in my dreams I get to forget my pain—Mom's death, Dad's betrayal. I can forget the friends I'll probably never see again.

Thoughts of Keegan and Fischer clench my stomach, and I take a shaky breath, squeezing my eyes shut tighter.

It is here I can forget my mistakes. And my future.

2

My growling stomach wakes me the next morning. Smells hover in the air, and I wrinkle my nose. This place is worse than I realized. I'm not sure if it's the apartment that stinks, or if it's the city itself, but something smells rotten.

Staying in bed forever is much more tempting than getting up, but when my stomach pains don't stop I throw back my one threadbare cover and pad out to the kitchen.

One by one, I open the cabinets. Empty. Empty. Empty. A small rodent jumps out of the fourth one, and I scream as it escapes under my front door.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. It's gone. I have to believe it's not coming back.

Forcing my eyes back open, I continue my sweep of the kitchen. Every last cabinet is empty. No surprise there. I glance back at my bed and think of how easy it would be to just fall back asleep. I could close my eyes and forget the world.

Pounding feet vibrate the floor from the stairs below my room. "Hurry!" someone shouts.

Fear tightens my stomach, but after a moment, I realize the pounding is going down, not up.

I move to the door and peek out. A small herd of people hurry outside, and I race to the window in my bedroom. People line up in the road, one after another. The line goes on for blocks, making a sea of people

amongst the crumbling buildings.

There is no glass in my window. I work to calm my pounding heart, and I clear my throat and call down to them. "What's going on?" My voice is hoarse and scratchy from all the crying I did last night.

"Allowances," someone shouts up at me.

Allowances!

I pull on my shoes and run for the door. The line is already so long, it looks like I'll be waiting a while, but at least in the end I'll be able to eat and drink.

No one seems to notice me as I take my place at the edge of the sea. It moves so slowly we don't seem to be making progress, but eventually I realize the people are heading inside a building. The line snakes out of the metal doorframe and worms its way down the steps and onto the broken sidewalk. The people are like nothing I've ever seen. Tattered clothes, shoes with holes, frizzy hair, and dirty faces.

In all the times I came to the Lesser cities, I never saw this. That tells me not even the Greater are shown everything. Of course, I should have guessed. The Great Supreme has many secrets. What else isn't he telling us?

Someone bumps me and I recoil.

"Sorry," the boy says. He turns away and continues talking to the girl in front of him.

I glance at my arm, to the spot of filth he left on me. How will I get it off without water?

Shame pulses through me. Jamie has stood in these lines. Fischer has stood in these lines. For all I know, he's here again. Is there any way he escaped the prison riot without getting caught? Did he even make it outside alive? I don't see how.

"The line's moving."

My head snaps up. "Sorry." I shuffle forward.

The woman behind me smiles, and I'm appalled when I realize she's wearing pajamas.

The faster I get this over with, the better.

"What'd you do?" she asks. She must not have noticed I'm not in the mood to talk.

"Excuse me?"

"It's pretty obvious you're new, sugar. What'd you do to get here?" Her skin is dark like cocoa powder, and her black hair sticks out in disarray. White hairs pepper her head, too. Her days of youth were over a long time ago. Still, she seems lithe and able.

My face burns at her comments. It's like I have a sign announcing my status to the world.

"There ain't no reason to be ashamed of it. We're all in the same boat."

I scan the dilapidated crowd, and her words hit me. I'm in the same boat as everyone here. Despised, dirty, and rejected. Like humankind before Christ, and like Christ before humankind.

"I think you've just given me a revelation," I say quietly.

Her eyebrows rise. "Hm. Imagine that. Care to share?"

I chuckle and shake my head. "Never mind. I broke the law, that's all. Were you born here?"

"Nope. I broke it, too, but that was a long time ago." Her dark hair shines in the sunlight, and a thick gap separates her front teeth.

This woman broke the law, and it landed her here. We really are in the same boat.

"Lots of people in this city broke the law. It's where they send all us delinquents."

I look around and see hundreds of faces. They've

all broken a law, done something criminal. How can I live here? How can I trust them?

And then I remember I've broken the law. I've done something criminal. How can they trust me?

"Why do they give out allowances this way?" I ask, trying to change the subject. "At home they were delivered."

The woman smirks. "We're pretty far back in line. I bet you'll get to see why they do it this way."

Her words make no sense and I frown, but I keep my questions to myself.

We finally reach the doorframe everyone has been moving through, and I realize two things. One, there is no door. It makes me wonder if there are doors on any of the buildings in Lesser City 4.

And two, we aren't anywhere near getting our allowances. Now that I'm inside I can see the line stretches on for what feels like miles. Metal catwalks zigzag back and forth. It reminds me of a stadium I saw in a book once. In the Early Days the people used them to play games called sports. The stadiums were splendid and exciting, but this stadium is broken, exposed, and falling apart.

At the end of the catwalk is a field, and people stand shoulder to shoulder in the grass.

"What happens down there?" I ask my new friend.

"When you get to the bottom, you get a number." She peeks over my shoulder to get a better look. "Then you can relax until they call you."

"How can they ask us to wait all this time?" I complain. "What if I get thirsty, or have to use the bathroom?" Speaking of thirsty, my throat is parched. I haven't had anything to eat or drink since yesterday before they took me from Greater City.

The woman laughs. "You better not leave this line, sugar, especially if this is your first time."

Again her words confuse me.

My mouth feels as dry as the vac chamber back in Greater City. The ache in my head beats out a steady rhythm. It reminds me of Keegan, strumming his guitar. Only these notes are off key and painful to listen to.

After what must be an hour, I reach the bottom of the catwalk. I step into the grass and relief washes over me.

"Where do I get my number?" I ask the woman behind me.

"They'll get to you," she says. She isn't looking at me, though. Her gaze stays put on an area of high grass to the right. It's empty space, which is strange since everyone is clustered so tightly together. It seems they—we—should spread out more.

"What's that?" I ask.

"Stay away from it. Anywhere in the city you see a patch of high grass, you keep away."

She doesn't explain, but her tone and intensity tells me she's serious.

I hug my arms around my empty stomach and sidestep to the left.

Just then, a loud whine pierces the air, and everyone in the crowd covers their ears. The speaker behind my head buzzes to life, and a voice streams through it.

"Attention citizens. The allowances have run out. If you haven't received your number, you may return tomorrow to try again."

Chaos erupts from the catwalks. People yell and cuss.

I frown and look to the woman. "What?"

The woman sighs, her shoulders sagging. "I told you we were too far back in line."

I glance around at the people shuffling out, mumbling and grumbling, some shouting and yelling, shaking their fists.

"You mean these people won't get their food or water?" The Greaterers are deciding who will live and who will die, just like always. In spite of the horror of my situation, anger stirs in my heart.

The woman watches me for a moment, studying me, then she sighs. "You ain't got nothing to eat, right?"

I lift my chin. "No, I don't."

"Come on over and you can have something at my place." She begins walking without giving me a second glance.

Her words take a moment to sink in while I focus on the fact that none of these people have enough food.

She's climbing back onto the catwalks to get out of the crowded arena. I consider whether or not to follow her, but my empty stomach and dry throat win out. I jog to catch her. "Thank you," I say. "My name is Hana Norfolk."

Surprise lights up her eyes, but it disappears quickly. She nods and gives me a small smile. "Nice to meet you, Hana. I'm Isabel."

3

The walk through the city streets isn't as intimidating when I walk with Isabel. People wave as we pass, and she has a friendly smile for everyone she sees.

A memory passes through my mind, the memory of when I first met Fischer in Middle City 3. He worked at the hospital where Mom received treatment for the mutation, and his kindness struck me more than anything else.

Isabel is like that.

Something pings in my heart, something telling me I should be connecting the dots, but I'm so hungry and thirsty I can't see a pattern.

Isabel lives a few blocks from my own apartment. It's deeper into the city, and the places here aren't as run down as my own. There is glass in most windows, and some of the brick has been painted a nice, red color. In the distance, I can see the river. I remember the guards calling it the Old Tennessee River.

She leads me inside and up a single flight of stairs. "Watch your head." She ducks under a beam.

I move just in time.

Three doors line the hallway, and we move to the first one. She rattles the knob on her door, and it swings open easily. The inside of her apartment is clean and tidy, even though everything is old and worn. It feels cozy, in a way. Familiar.

An ember of hope sparks to life. Maybe I can make my own dingy place into a home.

I want to ask questions—does Isabel have a family? Does she live alone?

But I've only just met her, and those questions seem way too personal for a city full of cast-out criminals.

She moves soundlessly to her cabinet and pulls out a box, then moves back to me where I stand in front of her door. "It's probably going stale, but at least you won't starve."

I take the box of oats without complaint. "Thank you."

She nods and looks around. "Would you like to stay for a while? It gets lonely around here."

Her offer answers my earlier questions about her family, and I have no interest in going back to my own empty place. "I do have a lot of questions. They didn't tell me anything when they brought me here."

She smirks. "Isn't that something?" She sits on the couch and pulls her legs up under her, then pats the seat beside her.

"Thanks again," I say, holding up the box. My stomach growls, and she laughs.

"Eat while we talk. I don't mind."

I stick my hand right into the box and pull out a hand full of oats. Back home I would have boiled them and sweetened them with honey, but I'm grateful for anything right now.

"What would you like to know?" she asks.

"How often do the allowances come?"

"Once a month if we're lucky," she says without hesitation.

"A month?" In Greater City we were given daily

allowances for food, and we were able to buy whatever else we wanted whenever we wanted it. Back home in Middle City 3, we were given weekly allowances for things like food, water, and entertainment.

She shrugs. "That is, they're monthly if you're one of the lucky ones who get in line on time. Tomorrow should be better, though. We'll get out there earlier."

"What about the elderly? How do they get their food?"

Isabel is quiet for a moment too long, and I know whatever she says isn't going to be pleasant. "Well, mostly there aren't any elderly around here, but we take care of the ones who are."

Sadness fills the room, dimming the sunshine at the windows and chilling the air.

"And what if we don't get in line in time tomorrow?"

"We always store whatever we can, because you never can tell."

Storing up food, in case none comes next month. That makes sense, even if things here are worse than I imagined. If I don't get in line in time tomorrow, I won't have any food for an entire month. A shudder rattles me when I realize this could happen months in a row. There has to be a better way.

Memories fill my head, and a realization dawns. I will plant a garden. I can help the others, too. If I learned anything from Dad, it was how to grow vegetables and fruit. This way we will have food regardless.

"OK, how do we get our assignments?"

Isabel's eyebrows shoot up. "Assignments? Most of us aren't lucky enough to get work. Those of us who were demoted are treated worse than the natural-born