



DELIVERANCE

THE BLINDERS ARE OFF. A CHOICE MUST BE MADE.

KATIE CLARK

ENSLAVED, BOOK TWO

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Dedication

Dedicated to Micheal, Emma, and Ashlyn, who are always just as excited as I am about my work.

Praise

Hana's journey continues in this page-turning sequel to *Vanquished*. Greater City is not what Hana hoped or expected and now she must choose between a privileged life of silence and lies or the dangerous road to truth and deliverance. A must read! ~ Donna Marie West, contributing author for *Our Little Friend* and *The Conqueror*

1

I am a Greater.

It seems like such an impossibility. Unreal. Unwanted. I may never see Dad again. Keegan. Fischer. Mom. The thought of Mom makes my throat swell and I push it away, focusing on the here and now.

I look around, taking in the enormous room in front of me.

“How do you like it, Hana?” Cindy is my own personal tour guide, but I don’t feel comfortable around her yet. We met only this morning, when she arrived at my house in Middle City 3 to drag me away from my friends and family and off to Greater City.

This room is my new home, provided for me by the Greaterers as I undergo training and life beyond. Apparently everyone in Greater City gets a place like this to live, but I don’t see why any one person would ever need this much space.

I’m too awed to speak, so I clear my throat.

“It’s fine, thank you.” I have a feeling I’m going to be very lonely here. I don’t know anyone in the entire city, and my training doesn’t start for a week. For the hundredth time today I wonder why Frost Moon brought me here so early. He could have let me stay with Dad for an extra day or two.

Not that Dad would have wanted me to stay.

“That is the bathroom,” she says, pointing to a

door near the bed, “and your food will be delivered at meal times by the food service. Of course, you can always choose to eat out, but we do ask that you message the food service in advance so they don't bring food that you won't need to eat.”

“Message them?”

She nods toward a large black screen that hangs on the wall near the windows. It almost looks like a television, but it's sleeker than any TV I've ever seen. “Use the HELP comp. Do you know how to work one?”

I look at the foreign machine. “No. I've never seen one.”

She glides toward it and touches a button I can't see. The screen glows to life. “The HELP comps are like the old computers, but much more streamlined. Have you ever used a computer?”

It's tempting to dislike her based on the fact she knows so little about Middle life, but I push the feeling aside and shake my head.

She frowns. “Oh. Well, you can listen to music, accept communications, watch television, or study your training sessions. Everything you study at the Training Dome will automatically be uploaded into your comp.”

“Wow. Thank you.” I have never watched television—Middles don't get enough electricity allowance to justify using it for things like entertainment—and I assume the communications are messages such as what I will be able to send to the food service, but listening to music might be nice.

She smiles again and nods. “I will leave you to explore it. Just remember that everything you do on this screen will be monitored.”

Her words hold some sort of unspoken warning that I don't want to think about right now. It reminds me that all is not well in Greater City.

"I'll leave you to get situated," she says. "Dinner is at six o'clock. You'll be ready, I assume?" Sindy seems to be a few years older than me. Her hair is silky and long, pulled into a slick ponytail at the nape of her neck. That wouldn't be so strange, except her clothes are ripped, dirty looking, and old. Everyone in Greater City has this look about them. It must be the style.

I nod in answer to her question, and she smiles before slipping into the hall and closing the door.

The room—my room—stretches out before me. She called it an apartment. She said everyone in Greater City lives in an apartment.

A bed and dressing closet sit in one corner, and another corner has a couch and the HELP comp. The area closest to the front door has a kitchen and table. The whole place is spacious and light, with several windows that brighten the atmosphere.

I take a shaky breath and step toward the bed and dressing closet. I only have one bag of clothes. It will never fill up the closet.

But when I open the door I gasp. Clothes line the inside, clothes similar to the ones Sindy wore. Torn pants, grungy tops, and unraveling scarves. Oddly enough, they don't seem old. They have tags on them.

At least I won't stand out at dinner, or anywhere else in the city.

My bag makes a thud when it hits the bottom of the closet. I only want one thing from it—Mom's perfume. I don't remember the last time she wore it, but I can remember her by its scent. I unscrew the lid and bring it to my nose. Memories pulse through me.

A hospital room. Sunken cheeks. Weary eyes.

The nightstand has a drawer and I shove the perfume inside. Next time I will remember happy things.

The door to the bathroom is on the other side of the closet. It whooshes open when I step close and I peek inside.

It's huge! A tub big enough to lie in sits in one corner, and a mirror with lights around it hangs above the sink. The bathroom at home is barely big enough for two people to squeeze in side by side, and the shower doesn't have enough room to turn around in. This bathroom could fit four people or more.

I gaze at the tub, wondering what the hot water allowance is here. How would it feel to float in a tub of warm water?

I peek at the clock next to my bed. It's only three o'clock. Taking a bath is very tempting, and I do have a few hours to spare. As I turn back to the bathroom, something flashes. A red light—a tiny dot—coming from beneath the clock.

I frown and move toward it.

I have only ever seen flashing lights like this once, past the levy back home. But these lights aren't flying in the sky; they're blinking right here in my own room.

The clock is lightweight in my hands and the red light shines from a small, clear circle near the base. I try to press it, but it doesn't move in like a button.

Why would this be on my clock?

A shiver races down my back and I slam the clock onto the table.

Greater City has too many unknowns. It reminds me right away that I can't trust anything here. Backing away doesn't feel like a strong enough defense, so I

toss a pillow on top of the clock to block it from my sight.

Out of sight, out of mind, as they used to say in the Early Days.

So far? I don't like Greater City. I don't belong here, and surely it won't be long until everyone else realizes this. What will happen then? Will Frost Moon have me demoted immediately? Will I be Middle again or go straight to Lesser?

The muscles in my shoulders tense and I fold myself onto the bed. What if I never see anyone I love ever again? Homesickness sweeps over me. Now that I'm alone, unmonitored, I allow the thoughts to come.

Where is Mom? Is she even alive?

Keegan, Jamie, Dad, Fischer. Of everyone, it seems for sure that I'll see Fischer again. I have to believe that. God led me to him. Why would he be taken away now?

Greater's are allowed to travel to the Middle cities, though. I might see the others again, at least someday. I'll ask Cindy about travel allowances tonight at dinner.

That sliver of hope relaxes me again, and I let myself fall back against a pillow.

At five o'clock I decide to get ready for dinner. The clothes in my dressing closet don't tempt me at all. In Middle City we worked hard to keep ourselves looking respectable. These clothes seem to have the opposite effect. In fact, they're exactly the kinds of clothes I would picture the Lessers wearing, because they have no allowances to buy more.

I slip into a pair of olive green pants with torn cuffs, and I choose a cream colored, cotton top. It doesn't have any holes that I can see, but it doesn't exactly look "clean."

No matter what I think of the clothes, though, I love the shoes. They're so comfortable. My feet are as light as a dust mote. I feel like I'm walking on a cloud.

I spend the rest of the hour looking in the cabinets in the kitchen area. One cabinet is stacked with dishes, and a few food items fill up the refrigerator. At least I know I won't starve before I get my food allowances.

A knock at the door sounds at exactly six o'clock.

"Wow, Sindy's punctual," I say as I move to greet her.

My own personal tour guide isn't waiting on the other side of the door, though.

Frost Moon—or Supreme Moon, as I should start calling him—stands in the hallway, smiling demurely with a bouquet of mixed flowers in his hands. "For our newest citizen," he says, holding the bouquet out to me.

Seeing him freezes me in place. I'm not ready to speak with him, to deal with whatever it is he expects of me.

Move! my mind screams.

I force myself to take the flowers and set them on the small counter behind the door, but I don't invite him in. I hope Supreme Moon never steps foot inside my apartment.

"What do you want?" I ask. I try not to sound too disrespectful, but I'm not going to pretend to be happy about seeing him.

His smile doesn't falter. "I am here to escort you to dinner."

My stomach sinks to my knees. "I'll be eating with you?"

"Of course, Hana. You're smart enough to figure out I wouldn't be here for any other reason." His voice

lowers and he leans in. "You may have gathered that I'm going to be cautious with you. I won't be letting you gallivant around the city unattended, at least not yet."

I swallow hard and take in my nation's Great Supreme. His suit is impeccable, just like the last time we were together. His gray hair is professionally styled. Even his shoes shine.

"Why am I dressed this way?" I demand. "Your clothes look normal."

He shrugs. "The people need a respectable leader. They find a suit more reputable than—that. Don't you agree?"

"Yes, so why am I dressed this way?"

"You're not a leader, Hana. Not yet, anyway. Won't you join me? I have a transporter waiting." He holds out his arm.

I stare at his elbow. The last thing I want to do is go to dinner with this man. Who wants to eat with their mother's murderer?

Too bad that, once again, I don't have a choice.

I take his arm and he leads me to the elevator. Funny that I ever thought it would be exciting to ride in one. Now it appears I'll be riding in one for the rest of my life.

"How do you like your apartment?" he asks as we climb into what he calls a transporter. It's silver and sleek, shaped like something called a subway car, only much smaller. I saw a picture once, in a book from the Early Days. The door slides closed after we climb inside. "Home." At his single word, the transporter glides into the traffic on the street. He turns to me, his eyebrows raised. He is waiting for my reply.

I stare at the machine as we move through the city.

Only Supreme Moon and I sit inside.

I push my confusion aside. "Do we have to talk?"

His smile vanishes for a moment and he leans close to me. His eyes are serious, as if he's imploring me to understand the importance of his words. "I am trying very hard to help you feel at ease, Hana. You have broken the law many times, but I have faith in you. I have invested in you. So yes, we have to talk."

He leans back and his smile reappears. "So? Your room?"

He's invested in me? I don't like the way that sounds. It's going to be a very uncomfortable night.

I opt not to tell him about the blinking red light under my clock, especially since he probably knows it's there. "My room is fine," I say. Then I turn toward the window and watch the city pass us by.

I have too many questions already. How is this transport thing moving? Why doesn't it need a driver? How does it know where to go?

I hate unanswered questions, but asking anything of Supreme Moon is less than tempting. For now I will settle for not knowing.

2

Supreme Moon's home is like nothing I've ever seen. Pillars holding up an enormous porch rise to the sky. The building itself is white, and I count sixteen windows lining the front of both stories. And I thought *my* apartment was enormous.

"It's really something, isn't it?" he asks as the transporter stops at the front door.

A man taps the window and I realize my face is practically pressed against the glass. I quickly move away and he opens the door. "Welcome to the Great Supreme's residence."

I don't reply because I'm not sure if I'm supposed to, but I do let him help me out of the strange machine.

Sindy is here. She smiles at me and takes my arm. I notice right away that her clothes are different. In place of the grunge clothing she wore before, she has on some type of ball gown. It's made from blue silk or satin, or some other expensive material I've never seen. It strikes me as something Lilith Winters would wear. She would have made the perfect Greater. I wonder how my former classmate—the one who hated me—did on her Test.

I glance at my own clothes and grind my teeth. They did this to me on purpose. I was tricked into wearing these clothes so I would feel uncomfortable.

Why? If Supreme Moon hates me so much, why

did he bring me here?

"Come right this way," he says. He heads inside.

Sindy guides me up the grand steps into the mansion. Down an open hallway and to the right, we reach the dining room. I shake my head for ever thinking my apartment was grand. I was sadly mistaken. This dining room could swallow my apartment whole.

A long table with about a million chairs sits in the middle. On a far wall is some type of musical instrument. I think it's called a piano, but I've only seen one once, so I'm not sure. At another end is a window, only it doesn't lead outside. It seems connected to some sort of serving area. People in uniforms line up platters of food on a counter.

"Have a seat," Supreme Moon says. He sweeps his hand toward a padded chair. I sit, and Sindy sits beside me. "The servants will bring the meal."

Servants? I glance at the people with the food. I thought servants only existed in books. Why would anyone need a servant in real life? I can definitely serve my own food.

I sit quietly while they heap steaming food on my plate, and I can't help feeling ridiculous. There are a dozen questions I would like to ask, but asking them at this grand table can't be the right place and time. If I learned anything from Fischer, it was that some things are better discussed in private. Still, I haven't been told about allowances, curfews, or any of the other rules the Greaters follow. Maybe there's a handbook on my HELP comp.

When the servants finish, Supreme Moon takes a bite. This seems to signal that Sindy and I should eat, too, so we do.

For a few minutes there is silence, and then Sindy and Supreme Moon make idle chitchat.

I'm wondering why I'm there. I could have eaten alone in my apartment—would have rather eaten alone in my apartment.

"You must have figured out by now that I have something to discuss with you," Supreme Moon says, interrupting my thoughts.

"I had wondered, yes," I say. It's mostly true, but I hadn't realized he had an actual topic in mind.

"We need to run some tests on you," he says. His tone is easy-going and friendly, as if he's telling me about a new shirt he bought. "The tests won't hurt, but they will let us see into your mind. We do this for anyone who tests as Greater from a lower station in life."

I'm thankful my hand isn't holding a fork because I would probably drop food all over myself if it were. A second Test? "I don't understand."

"Think of the tests as dreams. You will be given medicine to help you sleep, and while you sleep you will have monitors placed on either side of your head. The monitors will read your dreams. That is all. It won't hurt, and it can do no damage."

I swallow hard. I don't see how this could possibly be a good thing, or why it's necessary. Wasn't that what the Test was for in the first place? It's the thing that told them I should be Greater. I didn't claim anything. I have nothing to prove.

I can't argue with the Great Supreme, though, so I say nothing.

"You have questions," he says.

"No questions."

He watches me quietly for a moment. Then he

goes back to eating.

The conversation is finished.

He and Sindy continue their meal, but I was done as soon as Supreme Moon mentioned the tests.

These special tests can only be for one purpose. Supreme Moon tried to get information out of me once, just by asking.

I refused to give it, and now he's going after it another way.

The people I met in Middle City 3—what if I reveal who they are? Where to find them?

I'm glad for the long sleeves of my cotton shirt because they hide my goose bumps. It seems like a lot of trouble, promoting me to Greater just to get the names of a few measly Christians.

When the meal is finished, Supreme Moon invites us into his sitting room.

"I think you'll like it here," Sindy says to me. Her smile seems genuine, but she works for Supreme Moon, so I'm not really sure how much I can trust her. "You must have some questions about the city."

Now's the time, I suppose. "I did wonder about my allowances."

Sindy pauses and glances at Supreme Moon. They both laugh. "I'm sorry, Hana," she says. "I thought you realized. Greater's get no allowances. You can have whatever you want, when you want it. Of course, that's as long as you've earned it."

"Earned it?"

"You earn things by following our rules. Doing what we want. Telling people what we instruct you to tell them. Of course, you also have to perform your work satisfactorily, or in your case, your training. As long as you're doing that, you get what you want."

There is no hiding the truth about the way things are run, not in Greater City. Back home we were coddled and lied to. Here they must tell it like it is.

“And I can use all the electricity and hot water I want?”

Sindy smiles again. “Absolutely.”

I already know what I’ll do as soon as I get back to my apartment. It feels too good to be true.

The night ends, and Supreme Moon stays home while Sindy rides with me back to my apartment.

“Sleep tight, Hana,” she says as I climb from the transporter. “Your tests start in the morning. Be ready.”

I stare for a few minutes before I nod. The morning? “OK.” I hadn’t expected it so soon. In spite of her wishes, I doubt I’ll be getting any sleep at all.