

Saved By Venom (Grabbed #3)

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Sneak Peek #2

Dizzy gasped at the terrible, pained shout that echoed in the forest. Birds scattered as the guttural groan tore the stillness. She slid to a stop in the freezing cold snow and tried to slow her ragged breaths. Was that a man?

Was it the man?

She gulped hard and licked her lips. Glancing back in the direction of the awful sound, she tried to decide what to do. A sky warrior like the rugged, intimidating one who had been eying her would only make a sound like that if he was in big trouble.

The race officials had warned them that people hunted in these woods. The gun laws out here weren't like the strict zero-tolerance laws in The City. It was rumored everyone in the sticks had a weapon. Maybe the sky warrior chasing her had been shot? Did he need help?

She warred with her conscience only a moment before exhaling roughly and turning back in the direction she'd come. Pressing a hand to her temple, she tried to gain control over the dizziness threatening to swamp her. She hated this damn sickness! Running and playing had been nearly impossible as a child. She couldn't predict when the waves of nausea and dizziness would hit her but they usually happened at the worst times.

Like right now.

Bracing herself on a tree, Dizzy closed her eyes. She inhaled steady breaths and performed a series of slow maneuvers that usually helped abate the uncomfortable swirling some. Today, thankfully, it worked. She managed to get moving again without feeling like she was going to puke or fall flat on her face.

The sounds of a struggle met her ears. She heard rattling chains and grunting. Hiding behind a tree, Dizzy licked her lips and gathered her courage before sliding to the side and peeking out at him.

Seated on the snow, he gripped a long, thick chain in both gloved hands and jerked hard. Her eyes widened at his shocking display of strength. When her gaze moved lower, she gasped at the sight of the awful-looking trap closed around his lower leg. The snow around his leg remained white and pristine so he wasn't bleeding badly. Even so, the injury he would sustain if the trap wasn't removed quickly would be a terrible one.

Trembling with cold and fear, she stepped out from behind the tree and revealed herself to him. His gaze snapped to her and she took a nervous step back. He let the chain fall from his hands. The tension

eased from his face, softening his harsh features and making him look less vicious. They stared at one another for the longest time.

Finally, Dizzy found enough courage to move closer to him. Her footsteps crunched on the firm, packed snow. He glanced at her bare feet and scowled. "Why the hell did you take off your shoes?"

Taken aback by his gruff tone, she froze in place. Squeaking with fright, she explained, "The soles were too slippery. I nearly face-planted on a tree stump and decided it wasn't worth the risk."

He grunted. "You'll care when you lose those toes to frostbite."

Her stomach trembled violently and she stared at her frigid feet. "Are you serious? Am I really going to lose my toes?"

His lips twitched with amusement. Was he teasing her? She couldn't tell. With a flick of his fingers, he motioned her closer. "Come here. Let me help you."

She took a few tentative steps toward him. "I think you're the one who needs my help."

His mouth settled into an irritated line. "My leg will keep. Now get over here and let me see your feet."

She frowned at him. "You could be nice about it."

He sighed loudly. "Please. Come here before you freeze to death or need your damn feet amputated."

Though that was hardly nice Dizzy felt sure that pushing him wasn't a good idea. She moved as close as she dared. Apparently that wasn't close enough, because the frightening sky warrior snatched her by the waist and hauled her onto his lap. She squealed with surprise and smacked his chest. "Let me go!"

"Not likely." He gathered her even tighter to his warm, hard body. "Now stop fighting and hold still."

"Like hell," she snapped and pushed at the ridiculously strong arm clamped around her waist. It was no use. His superior strength rendered her desperate shoving futile.

"Stop," he said with a laugh. "You're going to fall off me onto the snow. I'm trying to warm you up. Now behave or I'll toss you over my lap and spank that sweet little ass of yours."

Outraged, she gasped at him. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Oh, sugar, I would." His blue-green eyes glinted with excitement and something else, something she couldn't quite pinpoint. Arousal? Yes, she decided finally. The thought of spanking her bottom aroused him. She wasn't sure what to think about that.

His gloved hand moved down her legs to her feet. She couldn't believe how small her foot looked cupped in his massive palm. He brushed the snow and wetness from her skin. "Can you feel your feet?"

She nodded. "Yes."

He pinched and wiggled her toes. "And here?"

"Yes." She curled her toes under and tried to pull her foot away from him but he held tight.

“Unzip that pocket on my left leg.” He gestured to the pocket in question with his head. “There is an extra pair of socks in there.”

Fingers trembling from cold and nervousness, Dizzy did as instructed. She found the pair of too-big socks and handed them to him. He shook them out and quickly rolled them onto her feet. The tops brushed her knees and the heel was above her ankle but she didn’t care how silly they looked. Her feet began to warm almost instantly. “Thank you.”

He simply nodded and unzipped another pouch on his strange pants. He withdrew two clear plastic bags and two long, thin strips of plastic. “Evidence bags and zip ties,” he explained. “I’m going to use them to secure a barrier around the socks. I don’t want them getting soaked with melted snow.”

She marveled at all the things he kept in his pants. “Don’t these get heavy?”

He flashed a quick smile. The sight of his lips curving in that playful way did crazy things to her belly. “You get used to it.”

Ignoring the wild tremors shaking her core, she asked, “Why do you need all these things?”

“I’m SRU.” He slid the plastic bags over her feet. “Special Response Unit,” he clarified. “We’re small, focused, elite teams who respond to highly dynamic environments and situations.”

“Dynamic environments?”

“Hostage situations, terrorist threats—dangerous stuff that requires some finesse and understanding.” He tightened the zip ties around her ankles. Satisfied with his work, he pulled down the cuffs of the ugly red pants she’d been forced to wear. “What do you do?”

“I’m a seamstress.” It seemed a silly occupation compared to his. “I design clothing for a couple of small boutiques in The City. Well—I used to design for boutiques.”

His gloved hand caressed her cheek. The cold, slightly damp fabric rasped her skin as he slid his fingers under her chin and forced her to meet his unnervingly steady gaze. “I’m keeping you.”

She swallowed hard. Voice barely a whisper, she answered, “I figured.”

Rather generously, he said, “My leg is still caught in this damn trap. If you really want to be free, if you truly want to reach that safe zone, you’d better get up now and start running.” He pointed in a direction to the far right. “It’s that way, honey. You were headed in the wrong direction.”

She blushed with embarrassment. Map reading wasn’t a skill she had ever needed in The City. “Oh.”

He pushed the long wisps of her chin-length bangs behind her ear. “What’s your name?”

“Dizzy.”

His eyebrows rose with surprise. “Dizzy? Is that your real name?”

She shook her head. “It’s the only one I’ll answer to. What’s your name?”

“Venom.”

“Really?” She studied his face to see if he was playing with her. “Are you serious?”

He chuckled softly. "Yes."

"Is that your real name?"

He parroted her earlier reply. "It's the only one I'll answer to, Dizzy."

Hearing her name in his gruff, low voice made her tummy flip-flop. She'd always been attracted to gentler, normal-sized men, the types who worked in the downtown government offices and had degrees from Capitol University. They had soft hands and easy smiles.

But Venom? Well, he was the complete opposite of the men she usually dated but something about him excited her more than any other man ever had. He had the harsh features so common in Harcos men. The square jaw, the straight nose, the hulking frame—he personified the race of alien warriors so perfectly.

Secure in his brawny arms, she allowed herself to imagine what it would be like to wake up every morning to see those strangely hued eyes staring right back at her. Her belly clenched tightly at the realization that this giant sky warrior would be the one to take her virginity. Would he be gentle? Would he show her pleasure?

White-hot currents sizzled through her core as his gloved hand skimmed her jaw and neck. He cupped her nape and gazed into her eyes. "What are you thinking about, sugar?"

She dropped her gaze and tried to get a hold of her crazy emotions. Clearing her throat, she said, "That we really need to get that trap off your leg."

Before he could change the subject, she squirmed out of his grasp and knelt down next to the gnarly trap. She winced with sympathy as she moved her face closer and studied the contraption. "Considering you've been chatting me up for a few minutes, I suppose the injury isn't life-threatening."

Venom snorted. "No, it's just painful. My boots are reinforced on the sides to prevent projectile and shrapnel wounds."

She ran her finger along the weird fabric. The woven fibers astounded her. "I think all that tugging and jerking you were doing when I found you may have weakened the fabric. The teeth of this thing are deep inside the boot."

"Yeah," he agreed gruffly. "I can feel it scratching at my skin."

"Sorry." With her fingers on the cold metal now, she followed the curve of the trap to the bottom.

"Okay, I see the release mechanism."

"I tried it." He started to unzip his jacket. "I think it's stuck."

"Hmm," she hummed and bent even closer. Her fingers were smaller than his so she was able to wiggle them firmly into the spot near the mechanism. She pressed it a few times but nothing happened. When she pulled her fingers back, they were coated with rust. "I think I've found our problem."

Venom slipped out of his jacket and handed it to her. "Put this on."

“Thanks.” She didn’t even try to turn down his offer. The cozy, heated embrace of the jacket instantly soothed her shaking limbs. Venom reached over to zip up the front and turned down the collar. The arms were too long so she shoved them up around her elbows so she could work. “Do you have a screwdriver or a knife in your pockets?”

He shook his head. “We aren’t allowed to bring any types of weapons to the Grab.”

She slid down for a better look at the stuck mechanism. An idea formed. She tugged a hairpin from the spot just behind her ear and forced it open and flat. “I think if I can just clear away some of this rust...”

“Be careful,” he urged.

“I am.” She slid flat onto her belly for the best view and worked the pin into the tight space where the rust had accumulated. After a minute of scraping and stabbing, she pushed hard on the release mechanism but it wouldn’t work.

Venom shoved aside her hand. “Let me try. Sit back first. Please,” he added as an afterthought. “I don’t want this thing to spring open and slam your face.”

She touched her nose and grimaced. “Good call.”

After she’d skittered out of the way, Venom sat up and shifted his weight. Gritting his teeth, he shoved hard against the release button. It took four tries before it finally jerked free. Venom sat back with a relieved exhale while Dizzy hurried closer to pry the jagged metal teeth from his boot. Small drops of blood dripped onto the snow as she pulled the trap out of his ruined boot.

“Are you okay? You’re bleeding!”

“It’s a minor wound.” He leaned forward and unzipped the side panel of his boot. Sure enough, his sock was ripped and bloodied. Ugly scratches marked his skin but there were no puncture wounds. Satisfied by what he had seen, he zipped up his boot. “I’ll live.”

Freed from the trap, Venom swiftly moved to his knees. Even in that position he towered over her. The full reality of her new situation hit her. This man, this blue-eyed giant, owned her now. She scampered backward and put some distance between them.

Venom held up his hands to show he meant her no harm. “Don’t be afraid of me, Dizzy.”

“I don’t want to fear you but you’re so—”

“Big?”

She nodded. “You could really hurt me.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“What...what do you want with me?”

“What do you want with me?”

She frowned at the way he had so neatly turned the question around to her. “I’m not the one chasing a woman through the forest.”

He smiled. "No, but you came back to help me. If you'd really wanted to get away, you would have thanked your lucky stars that I'd been trapped and kept on running. Why did you come back, Dizzy?"

She swallowed hard and considered his query. Finally, she admitted, "I don't have anywhere else to go."

The smile faded from his face. He crawled toward her, lifting his knees and planting them closer to her. His movements pushed aside the powdery snow and left trailing troughs. "Go with me. I'll take care of you, Dizzy. I'll provide a nice, comfortable home for you and all the perks of being an officer's wife. You'll want for nothing if you come with me."

The idea of belonging to this man, of having someone who cared for her and only her, tempted Dizzy a great deal. Since her mother's death, her father had been so forlorn and distant. There were times he looked at her as if he hated her, as if he resented that she had survived and her mother hadn't. Lately he only came around when he needed money or a favor.

Thinking of the way her father had betrayed and used her, she asked, "In exchange for what, Venom?" Her face grew hot as she found the courage to ask, "If I don't...I mean...if I withhold sex will you withhold food or clothing from me?"

His aghast expression reassured her more than his words. There was no faking that offended reaction. "I don't know what you've heard of Harcos men. Considering that protesting crowd outside the fence back there I can only assume you've heard the very worst, but I swear to you now it's not true. I would never punish a woman in that way."

She remembered what he had said earlier. "But you said you would spank me."

Amusement gleamed in his strikingly hued eyes. "And I probably will someday but not as a punishment."

"Why else would you spank someone?"

"Foreplay." He tilted his head. "Have none of your lovers ever smacked your bottom in the heat of the moment?"

Face flaming now, she was forced to admit, "I've never had a lover." Realizing how pathetic that sounded at nearly twenty-three, she hastily amended, "I've had long-term relationships. I've just never...you know."

"I see." He regarded her carefully. "May I ask why?"

She found the courage to meet his curious stare. "It's not safe."

"Safe? You mean disease?"

She shook her head. "I mean that an unmarried mother doesn't last long in my world. The odds are even worse for a child born out of wedlock. It wasn't worth the risk."

Venom crawled even closer, backing her right up against a wide tree trunk. He pressed his hands to the bark on either side of her head and pinned her in place. Lowering his head, he nuzzled her face. The very touch of his skin against hers left her trembling. White-hot arcs sparked through her chest and heat pooled low in her belly as she inhaled his masculine scent.

“There’s no risk with me.” His rough, husky voice washed over her like sunshine, warming her right to her very core.

Gazing up into those pale eyes of his, she gulped. “I’m not so sure about that.”

His mouth slanted in a dangerously sexy smile. “I’m not half as scary as I look.”

She considered how frightening he was. “That’s still pretty scary.”