

# Latent by Queasy

## Chapter 7

The discomfiting feeling instantly dissipated once we got into the house. Awe suffused me. The ornate chandeliers hanging several feet above shone down the enormous, white-painted hall.

Around, collections of quaint furnitures and elegant sculptures were classically arranged in varying shades of white. Behind a tall flower vase in the middle of the tiled hall, a wide staircase rose up in all its magnificence to split into opposite directions.

Greta climbed up the stairs and turned right.

Walking along the silver balustrades, we followed as she led into a cavernous hallway. A single chandelier hung down, displaying a riot of exotic oil paintings on the walls. My feet strode on plush red rugs, my eyes soaking up every luxurious detail.

Several twisting hallways and flights of stairs, which I all memorized, led into a narrow hall. The left side of it was lined with tall, elegant vases containing incredibly beautiful flowers, and its walls were completely covered in glass, allowing for a nice view of the rolling hills.

After she'd shown father and the guards to their rooms, she took me further down the hall and through an opening leading into another lavish corridor.

"I do hope the house is to your liking, Miss?"

I was a little startled at the question, not expecting her to begin a conversation with me. "Yes it is," I replied.

"Good." She nodded, pleased, "Alpha Vaughan took pains to ensure it was beyond perfect."

He... Did? That was such a humane thing to do. I may or may not have been thinking of the Alpha as a complete animal.

How can you serve someone with the moongoddess's curse? I wanted to ask. How can you serve a murderer?

"Your room, Miss Hilda," Greta said before I could ask, not that I would have, given her obvious devotion to him. She bowed and left, her figure disappearing into another passageway.

My hand rested on the handle of the white door, and after a beat I turned it open. My mouth went o, my eyes wide and in spite of myself, approving. Turns out the Alpha had a fine eye for details. My bag dropped to the carpeted floors, my feet walking through the unimaginably soft grey rug.

Around a grand bouquet of flowers sat two white settees. And that was how the rest of room went on to look like. Against the backdrop of carved wood, elegant sculptures and high ceilings, collections of furniture lay dispersed around, a mini dinning table here, a group of sofas there. A crescent shaped working table here, an ornate dressing table there.

Silk drapes that fell down to the floors covered tall windows, and through them I could see the silhouettes of colourful flowers lining the sills. At the far end of the room, where there was-holly molly-a very huge queen sized bed: was a large plasma screen TV hung above a set of wooden

drawers.

I couldn't believe I'd be staying here, I thought, turning in slow circles while taking everything in.

After poring through every nook and cranny in the room, I went to take a shower. Although, with all the eye-opening luxuries the house afforded, I shouldn't have been stunned at the opulent state of the bathroom-but stunned I was.

Now done with bathing and bundled in an incredibly soft bathing robe, a towel wrapped around my hair, I padded down to the queen sized bed. I stopped In my tracks upon spotting a trolley packed with

food parked in front of my bed. I almost wept for joy. In fact I did at the first grumble of my stomach.

After unpacking, I took out my phone to go plug it in, and then I remembered I hadn't phoned Euni. Appalled at myself, I quickly dialed her number,

She picked up almost immediately. I squealed into the phone, falling onto the bed with a contented smile on my face. I went on to tell Eunice all about the pack-house and all I'd gleaned from it. The wolves here seemed to be so at peace with themselves, a contrast to our pack where stony faces and murderous looks were the rigueur. And apparently the Alpha had a shitload of money, I relayed, staring up at the glinting chandeliers.

When finally she began to speak, I took note of the sad timbre lacing her tone.

"Euni," I said cutting her off, "what's wrong?"

A pause. Then, "Nothing."

Instantly I sat up. "Eunice, we'd promised not to keep secrets from each other... Even if they're not ours."

I could feel her hesitating over the line. Then she said, "It's Jim." Her boyfriend.

"What about Jim?" I asked, fighting to not raise my voice. "I swear if he so much as tou-"

"It's not like that," she quickly added. "We just had another fight. It's no big deal, I'm sure he'll come around, soon enough."

This time it was me who kept silent. Seeing her unwillingness to go into details about the matter, and not wanting to make her any more uncomfortable, I said, "Okay..."

"Look," she began, infecting lightness into her tone, "this is a once in a life time opportunity-"

"Now you sound like all those pesky touters."

We both giggled.

"You should utilize this opportunity," she continued, "go out there; score an Alpha."

"Yeah, and what if I'm not their mate?"

"Then you might be their wetdream." I thought she winked, albeit awkwardly.

I laughed. "That sounded so weird coming from you."

Laughing as well she said, "I know!"

After ending the call, I switched off the lights and laid on the bed, staring into the darkness.

Moments passed by. I turned, tossed, and then turned again

Deciding It wouldn't be possible for me to get a shut eye, I threw on a large tee shirt and a pair of shorts, slid my feet into my shoes, then exited the room and proceeded to toe it down the hallway.

Relying on my memory, I took a few turns, and when I came across the hall which had its opposite walls made out entirely of glass, I knew I was on the right track. I kept on walking, going through several corridors and down a flight of stairs until finally I stood before the grand staircase.

Below me, omegas on night duty stopped to look up at me, then continued on with their various duties,

paying me no heed, as though it was normal to have stray nineteen year olds snooping around at night.

Exiting the pack-house, I ran across the large field, feeling more alive than I've been in a long while. When I got to the narrow clearing that preceded the cottages, I heard high-pitched laughter. On bursting out, I saw it was a group of children chasing fireflies.

Everywhere was lit, literally. Cris crossing wires had been set up above, and on them dangled bright lanterns shining into the darkness, casting light on vast areas, as well as shadows. I walked in those shadows, watching.

As I walked on I noted grilling stands had been set up, and the smell of smoked salmon flitted into my nose. I came across a forking route, about to take the left lane, but when a group of teens poured into it, chattering and laughing amongst themselves: I quickly took the right, avoiding them. Yeah, I wasn't much of a social bird.

Nearing a wide clearing, I heard the sound of something being dropped rather roughly, and the sound of tinkling glasses following soon after. Thunk. Tinkle. Thunk. Tinkle. Thunk. Tinkle. I spotted a man hunched over the boot of his pickup truck, offloading some crates of beers.

My eyes shifted to the clearing before a group of cottages, and I caught sight of a gathering of girls, all

dressed in white, dancing under the glow of the lantern. A group of boys with violins sat huddled in a corner, playing away as the girls moved. Colourful garlands formed crowns and halos on their heads, the sheer hems of their dresses dancing around their legs.

The thunk-tinkle sound had blended into the background, becoming a prominent part of the noise, that when it stopped I picked up on it immediately. I turned to the man who'd been offloading crates, and was startled to note he was staring directly at me. He held my gaze for a while before he motioned with his head to where the girls were dancing.

"Go on." His voice was gentle; a large contrast to his weathered face and pugilistic stature. "Go have fun. You've been standing there all by yourself for a while now."

After I muttered an okay, my legs took me over to the merry group.

On joining them, I watched their euphoric faces, heard their laughter, imitated their unpracticed movements, and seemed to breathe in their enthusiasm until I became dizzy with it; until I became carelessly happy. The air seemed to instantly charge with life, and a promise of a worry-free day.

I danced until my feet hurt, until the early morning sun warmed the pale skies and submerged the horizon in magical pinks and ethereal yellows. I danced until I couldn't

anymore, bidding the cheerful group goodbye. They waved back energetically, gifting me with a bright yellow lantern.

A lantern I used to light my path as I treaded through a thick woodland they told cut a short route to the pack-house.

Then I felt it. The intense heat on my nape, the shiver sliding down my back.

I realized I wasn't just being watched, I was being followed.