

# Latent by Queasy

## Chapter 10

Late evening soon rolled in and Nayla led me to the venue of the Lighting

I didn't know how to feel about seeing Vaughan again.

Oh, I did. And not wanting to see him anymore than I did a syringe of wolfsbane translated to it.

Colourful birds chirped above me, and the heady scent of flowers in the east gardens seeped into my nose.

I noticed a portion of the garden were missing most of their flowers. Frowning, I asked, "Why are their flowers missing?"

Nayla looked at the direction I was staring at. "Oh. That's because the Alpha always has flowers sent to newly weds, and their newborn pups."

I digested that. My fingers trailing over a bed of white roses, I asked a question that'd been unknowingly festering in my subconscious. In spite of myself, soon after I asked it, I instantly became consumed by it, wanting to know...

"Nayla, what is Vaughan like?"

Under her breath she murmured, "I see you both are on first name basis, something must have happened in those forests and I'll give my ears to know what it was." Looking up at me, she flashed me a smile, then appeared thoughtful. "Alpha Vaughan... Hmm..."

Patently I waited as she hummed and ered.

She finally arrived at an answer. Shrugging she said, "No one really knows what he's like, except that he has the pack's best interests at hand; and that's enough for everyone."

But not for me, apparently. "How do you all know he has your best interests at hand?"

A faraway look took camp in her eyes. Cryptically she revealed, "Because he made some sacrifices."

Silence reigned. I leaned in to ask quietly, "What sacrifices?"

She shrugged, breaking the mysterious trance. "Even I don't know, and asking around would be pointless; because the werewolves here are as tight-lipped as they come. But." She briefly looked at me. "I hear the apprehension in your voice, Miss. I know Alpha Vaughan's reputation precedes him, but he's not like a lot of people think he is."

"Yeah but then again, a lot of people don't know what to think of him," I pointed out.

"That's true," she agreed. "And I guess it's partly because he's awfully quiet, never smiles, never laughs, never says or does anything unnecessary. Hmm, we might as well have a robot for an Alpha," she mused. Immediately the words left her mouth, her eyes widened horrifically.

I laughed.

"Oh, my Goddess! Please don't tell anyone I said that! Least of all Gerta. She's going to have my head!"

"Hey," I soothed, then in a conspirational tone, added, "With me you don't have to watch your words or worry about me telling on you."

"Really?" she asked, "Whew, then in that case." A mischievous glint lit her eyes. "I think it's really ridiculous the security wears shades even at night."

A chuckle escaped me. "I know right!"

We broke out into a clear, concreted road. Up ahead we spotted a barred gate. The soft wind blowing through

the extensive gardens swung the black gate on its hinges; and it produced sharp, squeaky sounds

Two colossal stone statues stood at the mouth of the gardens. One was a detailed statue of strip of water being poured out through a giant jar; the other was a frightening structure of a reared wolf with its claws bared.

"Sometimes I feel as if it was frozen in time, and could come roaring and attacking the whole pack at any second," Nayla said, reaching out to the wolverine statue with a dark finger, only to quickly withdraw it.

Staring at the mountainous statue, I silently agreed: it was that life-like.

On we went through the open gates and down a barren path.

Low hanging leaves and overgrown vegetation obscured and choked up another opening. Nayla went ahead to clear it up, I went on to help out. When we'd gotten to the other side, my jaw slackened. It was like a scene straight out of a fairytale.

Carpets of vibrant green turfs spread the perimeters of the entire central garden, getting terminated once in a while by intricate graveled paths, stone statues, tall trees and sheared topiaries. Around several huge fountains bubbling with clear water erected all over the incredibly large area, wooden benches, swings and exotic flower bushes were positioned.

Farther down, we saw the entire pack gathered before a raised platform. On it stood Beta Alister, a few important-looking men and women, and then Alpha Vaughan.

Nayla and I quietly stole our way towards the pack; she turned startled eyes to me when I went on to stand behind the projecting length of a corn maze near the gathering.

She joined me, harshly whispering, "Miss, we can't stay here. It's not proper."

"Says who?" Seeing my unmoving look, she released a deep sigh, coming to stand beside me. Together we observed the proceedings through a gaping hole in the body of the maze.

To earsplitting cheers and clapping, Alpha Vaughan stepped forward, a small smile appearing on his lips. My mind blanked.

How did I not notice before now how devilishly handsome he was, I thought, dazed. My eyes ran over the chiseled planes of his face, the bold slashes of his dark eyebrows, his wide jaw that had a mulish set to it, his sculpted lips that promised wicked things, and his whiskey grey eyes that held countless secrets...

Those eyes suddenly locked on mine. They flashed yellow.

The crowd went deathly silent. Wondering if their Alpha was on the verge of another destructive episode?

My breaths thinned in horror as those eyes continued to hold mine, until I was sharply pulled backward. I tripped over my feet, landing flat on my back, pulling Nayla down with me.

I soon realized she'd thrown herself over me, declaring, "Don't worry, Miss! I'll protect you. I don't know what went on in those forests but telling from his murderous look, it wasn't nice. Don't you just worry. I'll protect

you!"

Suffocated, I wheezed out, "Well, you're not doing a good job of it."

She looked down at my pale face, and immediately stood. A new worry soon surfaced. She paced. "If you'd gotten yourself into some kind of trouble with the Alpha, Greta's going to have my head because I was supposed to..."

Her words drifted into the back of my mind as I stood and dared to peek through the small opening again. Vaughan was now addressing the crowd. A pillar stood before him, and on it was a rusty old lantern; the metal twisting over the transparent cylinder was almost unrecognizable, but yet it attracted lots of revering looks.

Mine locked on it too as I listened to Alpha Vaughan's calm baritone.

\*...Many centuries ago, our progenitors paved a way for the existence of a race of strong and fierce creatures. To their name, we attribute this festival, and to the moongoddess, we attribute our livelihood. This day marks yet another attestation of our strong will, persistence and steadfastness. And I pray to the moongoddess we all live to celebrate this day together again," he concluded, lighting a match. He lit the lantern the same time he said, "Happy Festival of Lanterns."

The crowd cheered as they collectively lit their lanterns. Their loud screams soon merged with the explosive sound of fireworks. Up above, bright, colourful sparks dotted the dark sky. I stared, transfixed.

Next to me, Nayla intoned dazedly, "Beautiful..."

"Yeah." I looked through the opening once again and panicked when I saw Vaughan wasn't on the platform, and then outright had a seizure when I saw him striding through the dispersing crowd to where I was.

The promise of a heated confrontation hovered in the near future, and I wanted no witness to that when it happened. "Nayla," I called softly. "Please go get me a jacket."

Tearing her gaze away from the sky, she looked at me suspiciously. "But it's not cold."

"I need a jacket," I said with finality.

She made to say something then stopped, seeing the steely resolve in my eyes.

Immediately she bowed, then said, "I'm sorry, I'll go get one right away, Miss."

When she left, I started to walk deeper into the maze so she wouldn't find me if she returned. On I slowly went, until I heard the sound of measured footfalls.

"Should I take this to mean what I think it does?"

Facing away from him, I paid an exaggerated deal of attention to a briar rose. "What? That I want you to go. far, far away?"

At length he said, "No. That this maze you've decided to hide in mirrors your personality in a way. Complex. Confounding. Frustrating." He started to draw closer to me and my skin instantly prickled with awareness.

Turning to face him, I ordered, "Stop."

He didn't. He prowled onwards, stopping a hairsbreadth away from me. Awareness crackled to life between us.

My breaths shallowed when he leaned in to whisper beside my ear, "I don't take orders from anyone." His hot

breath making shivers rush up and down my spine. I parted my lips in a silent gasp when his hand slowly rose up my arm to my chin. "As my mate you'll do well to remember that."

He suddenly stepped away from me and then said, all business-like, "I'm afraid we started off on the wrong foot. Allow me to reintroduce myself, I am Vaughan Lupus, and you are?"

Still pulsing with desire, I stared at him, incredulous. How could he be so unaffected. So...so cold? He appeared to be a world away from the man that had chased me through the forest yesterday, raw need stark on his face...

"Not your mate," I replied, gathering my wits. "And I'm afraid, with that arrogance of yours, a wrong footing is what we'll forever start off on."

Instead of appearing offended at my blatant refusal of him, he cocked his head, observing me. "As my mate you'll be Luna," he pointed out.

I rose a brow. "I'll also be miserable."

When his eyes sparked, I took that as my cue to zip it.

"No mate of mine will suffer," he pronounced. "And although I will never love you, I will provide you with anything you could possibly want for," he said simply.

Hurt for some inexplicable reason, I scoffed. "You can't give me the one thing I want."

"Which is?"

I walked away from him, and instead of replying, said, "I'm going home."

His tone went neutral, matter-of-fact. "You don't have a home to go back to."

I turned. "What do you mean?"

Something told me I wouldn't like his reply one bit.

