

Latent by Queasy

Chapter 2 Chapter 2

Present day.

Alaska

The sound of someone popping their gum filled the small room. “Nope, pass,” Eunice, my bosom—but no less aggravating—friend said. “How about this one?” I stifled a longsuffering sigh, holding up yet another ensemble from my closet. She casted her gaze heavenwards. “Hilda,” she groaned. “You’ve been displaying just about the same type of clothes for the past ten hours.” She was right, about the clothes. But there was one thing she was wrong about. “It’s been just two hours, not ten.” She leaned against the wall defeatedly. “Well it feels like it.” I balled up the green top in my hands and threw it towards her direction. It landed splat on her face. “Stop being a spoilsport and come help me look for what to wear.” “It’ll be no use,” she grumbled. Just like my entire existence. Already knowing the answer, I still asked anyway, “How so?” “Because your closet’s filled with just jean shorts and T-shirts. No gowns.” “No occasion’s ever come up for me to wear one.” I pointed at her. “You know that.” She knew. Having gowns meant you had special occasions to wear them to. Parties. Luncheons. Pack conferences. Dinners. Luxuries I couldn’t afford. While my sisters went to different events after the other, I stayed back in the pack-house, hidden away, until I’d memorised every single corner and chip in the walls. I was, in all essence, father’s little, dirty secret. “What are we gonna do now,” she asked I rose a shoulder in a shrug. “I could borrow one from you.” She gave me a deadpan look. Eunice didn’t own a lot of dresses either; she was an Omega. And I was as good as one, if not worse than one. Omegas were the lowliest of the lowliest, the bottom of the pack hierarchy, the ones who cooked, cleaned—did everything beneath the notice and capabilities of the higher tiers. And I was lower than one, because even Omegas could shift into their wolves... Being Latent was a curse that had followed me through the complicated stages of childhood through adulthood, a scar on my very soul. And I had, inevitably, sustained a few monikers during my formative years. Latent Hilda, Latilda and Hilda de Lat, to name a few. My gaze slid towards the single window in the room. Lights from the watchtowers lining the rear ramparts flashed around, casting the forest surrounding the pack-house in a dark, gloomy shadow—although I could still see it as clear as day. Courtesy of my wolf’s night vision. I was Latent, but not without the better powers and baser urges of a werewolf. At that moment a blade of light sliced in through the tiny window, and fell on a spot in the middle of the cramped room. It looked inviting. Tired of ransacking my closet for clothes I won’t find, I went over and sat on it. Eunice stirred from her prone position on the narrow bed, an eyelid flicking open to reveal green eyes. “Why are you sitting?” “Because I want to?” “But we’ve got a party to attend.” “A plan that was entirely your idea.” “Yes.” Her eyes suddenly flashed with determination; I grew weary. “It was my plan,” she proclaimed, “and I’ll see to it that you go out with me to

celebrate your nineteenth birthday.” Sigh. Whenever Eunice got it into her head to do something, she went through with it with the determination a teenage boy asking a girl out for prom. It was my birthday, surprise, surprise. And I planned to do nothing about it, unsurprise, unsurprise. I would treat it as the other pack-members did— like another normal, bland Wednesday. If not one that was a little more bland than was usual. As opposed to me, whenever either one of my sisters had their birthdays, dad threw massive parties for them. The only thing dad threw where I was concerned were massive, physically—and emotionally—crippling pain. Like that time I was thirteen... My muscles acted on base instinct, seizing in preparation for danger. But there was none, only a vivid remembrance of what it felt like to have lethal wolfsbane pumped into my veins. Agonizing. Dad had pumped wolfsbane into me, expecting my dormant wolf to shift on instinct and protect its human. But it hadn’t. And dad hadn’t relented from pumping the burning liquid into my body, either, until I, well, passed out from the pain. I hadn’t known who I hated more then, my dad who continued with the torture for four consecutive years, or my wolf who never shifted to put me out of my misery. ”

Hellooooo,” someone yelled, and snapped a finger in front of my face. “Earth to Hilda! You’re doing that thing where you space out and your face looks like you just drank wolfsbane.” The irony of her sentence wasn’t lost to me. The whole pack, including Eunice, didn’t know about dad injecting wolfsbane into me, but they did know about his open hostility towards me— and did well to play it forward so they could get on his good graces. They had all been harsh, cruel, and the few ones that couldn’t bring themselves to prey on innocent me, ignored my whole existence. Fine by me. For a long while, things remained the same, until one day I’d decided I ‘d had enough. I’d decided to fight back. The violent pushing at highschool during lunch break, the humiliating pranks, the overwhelming gossipy laughter and mocking jokes, the hate... All stopped when I finally put in all that pent anger into good use. And fought back. At first my strength had depended solely on the level of my anger, and I’d like a rogue wolf, sloppily, without practice, and was easily beaten much to the amusement of my bullies. But then, given to the fact I knew the pack-house like the back of my palm, and knew every secret hideout there was fought — I’d started spying on the pack warriors during their training... I’d learned, practiced, honed my skills. Fought. And f*cked shit up like a newly turned rogue. “Aha!” Eunice exclaimed gleefully, holding up a piece of clothing. She walked towards me, excitedly waving the dress high up in the air like it was a victory flag. When she stood before me, she allowed the dress slip from her fingers and fall onto my lap. My hands felt the soft fabric as I examined it. The white slip dress still had its price tag. Distantly I thought aloud, “I can’t remember ever buying a dress like this. Someone must have gifted it to me, but then again who wou— oh!” I exclaimed. “I think I know who it’s from.” Shea. She’d given this to me during my eighteenth birthday. Of my two sisters, Shea was the nicest. When her heavily demanding tracking duty would allow her, she’d always check up on me. At highschool, she was the sister that always told the bullies off whenever they grew too harsh, the sister that sometimes got me out of scrapes. And the sister who actually cared for me. Sadly the same couldn’t be said about Anna. “It was from Shea,” I told Eunice. “She’d given it to me for my eighteenth birthday.” A smile formed on her lips. “Shea, ever so nice.” Yeah, Shea was the nice and considerate one. Anna the moody and closed off one. And I, I was the vulnerable and too trusting one who hid everything behind a steely exterior and a vacant

stare. "Come on. Come try it on," Eunice urged, going over to the full-length mirror on the dresser. I followed, saying, "It was given to me two years ago. I doubt my ass would fit into it." "You're so thin now, your ass would fit into anything," she replied offhandedly. "Including Gerad Justin's hands?" Through the mirror I saw her roll her eyes. "Gerad. Is a jerk." Yeah, I knew. It hadn't stopped me from crushing on him though. Being the school's football team's captain, the beta's son, a six foot hunk and a certified bad boy, he'd had an embarrassing amount of girls trailing after him at high school. Including me. Werewolves began finding their mates at eighteen. At exactly that age I'd looked into Gerad Justin's eyes and was crushed to realize he wasn't my mate. He'd probably looked into mine and thought, 'f*ck. Another one of those weirdos', not aware of the emotional turmoil going on inside me. But all that was in the past. I'd graduated, got over him, and tried to get over the fact that I'd never find my mate. He wasn't in the Stillmoon pack, that I was sure of, and I couldn't travel out to other packs. Dad wouldn't let me. Although, it wasn't like I was in a rush to find my mate or anything. Thinking about it now, I didn't even want to. No one deserved to be shackled to a Latent. As I undressed, I listened to Eunice's excited chattering. "...and next tomorrow's just around the corner, Hil! Alphas are going to be there! Betas an—" I interjected, "How come you're always excited about the Festival of Lanterns, even knowing you're never going to go to Beastclaw?" Her eyes dimmed, and for a moment I was overcome with guilt at having ruined her mood. "For one, it's more like a tradition now, Hil. Celebrating it here would be the same as celebrating it at the Beastclaw pack. Here we'd also have lanterns lighted around until it looked like day at night, there'd be beer and salmon at every dining table, the trees would bear the fresh imprints of claw marks, and howls would fill the night at twelve." She breathed in, saying on a sad note, "The only difference would be that we wouldn't have alphas and betas from different packs around the world come here." I paused in taking off my top. "And that is a bad thing?" She blinked. "Of course." "Eunice, Betas and Alphas are callous, conceited, and think they own the world." Take it from my father, and every other Alpha and their second that have come to our pack to negotiate deals with him. "It is a blessing we don't have an army of them come here each year." Countering my earlier statement, Eunice enunciated, "Wrong. The beta of the Beastclaw pack—the largest werewolf pack in existence, mind you—is known to be kind and humble." I rose a brow. "The beta? What about the Alpha; what about Vaughan Lupus?" Quiet filled the space between us. Eunice's stance wavered for a bit. Then with a glare directed my way, she turned away from me. That's what I thought. . . The beta of the Beastclaw pack—the largest werewolf pack in existence, mind you—is known to be kind and humble." I rose a brow. "The beta? What about the Alpha; what about Vaughan Lupus?" Quiet filled the space between us. Eunice's stance wavered for a bit. Then with a glare directed my way, she turned away from me. That's what I thought. . . The beta of the Beastclaw pack—the largest werewolf pack in existence, mind you—is known to be kind and humble." I rose a brow. "The beta? What about the Alpha; what about Vaughan Lupus?" Quiet filled the space between us. Eunice's stance wavered for a bit. Then with a glare directed my way, she turned away from me. That's what I thought. . .