

CH 10 - Kingsley

Kingsley POV

I woke up with a hollow weight pressing down on my chest. It wasn't the comforter, and it sure as hell wasn't the weight of last night's whiskey. It was her absence.

Kai.

The suite felt emptier than usual, even though it hadn't changed at all. Same matte black walls, same dark wooden panels, same old photographs of us four brothers laughing around a bonfire or covered in mud after a sparring session. The problem wasn't the room. It was me.

It was what was missing.

Yesterday we said goodbye. My little sister—our little Kai—had left for the Alpha College.

I rubbed a hand down my face and exhaled hard, still half under the covers. We'd fought it, all of us. My brothers, our parents... hell, even old Counselor Martin tried to talk the King out of it. But there was no option. No exception. King Vaden had made the rules, and once that man puts a law in place, not even a Goddess's tear can change it.

Every alpha male born must attend Alpha College. One year. No excuses.

Kai... raised as a boy for her own damn safety, trained like the rest of us, stronger and smarter than most males her age... had to go too. If she wanted to keep hiding in plain sight, to stay protected from those who would hunt her if they knew, she had to go through it like the rest of us did.

Goddess, I hated it.

But she smiled at me when she hugged me goodbye. Told me she'd be here.

And I almost believed her.

She'd always been closer to me than to Kyle, Keegan, or Kendrick. Maybe because we were the two youngest, maybe because we were the only ones who didn't constantly compete with each other. Kai and I? We understood each other without needing too many words.

Which made the silence now all the more unbearable.

"Suck it up, Kingsley," I muttered to myself, swinging my legs off the bed. "She's strong. She'll come back stronger."

I'd pray for it. I'd ask the Moon Goddess every damn night if that's what it took.

Just as I was dragging myself out of bed, a mindlink sparked through my head. Kendrick.

"Dr. House said the new doctor's arriving today. You'll have the pleasure of the initiation, brother."

I rolled my eyes and answered back with a snort through the link. "Lucky me."

Still, I agreed. Someone had to take care of the formal welcome. Kyle was in no mood for pleasantries—he'd been growing more impatient with every passing moon, waiting for his damn mate to show up. It was starting to mess with his focus, and Keegan and Kendrick had already planned a brutal sparring session to help him burn it off.

So yeah, my new duty was all mine today. Paperwork, meetings, and the "new doctor welcome package."

Perfect.

I showered quickly and threw on dark jeans and a fitted black Henley before heading straight to the administrative wing. The Pack Office sat on the east side of the main lodge, surrounded by dense pine trees and a wall of silent snow.

As soon as I pushed the heavy double doors open, I spotted Karen, our head omega, and dragged her down with a nod. "Hey, Karen. I'll need coffee and a full breakfast in the office. Extra cinnamon if you have it."

She smiled politely, always efficient and never overly chatty—another reason I liked working with her. "Of course, Alpha Kingsley. I'll bring it right in."

I headed into my office and sighed at the stack of paperwork already waiting on the desk. Border patrol reports. Supply inventories. Training schedules. And at least a dozen updates from other packs.

Goddess. Why did everything require fifteen signatures and three stamps?

A knock at the door made me glance up.

Finally. Coffee.

I caught the scent even before the tray entered—dark roast with a hint of cinnamon, the exact blend our mom loved and passed down to all of us. The smell alone started to chase the weight off my chest.

But then I saw her, and the scowl that followed came so fast it almost hurt my face.

Standing in the doorway, tray in hand, was Margherite.

Of all the omegas Karen could have sent.

Her clothes—or whatever the hell she was pretending to wear—looked like they belonged in the closet of a third-rate exotic dancer, not in the Winter Pack's main office. Tight, glittery, and revealing enough to make my coffee go cold on sight. The top barely covered anything. The skirt didn't even try.

"Morning, Alpha Kingsley," she said in a syrupy voice, stepping inside like she owned the room. "Karen had her hands full with something, so I thought I'd do the honors today."

Of course you did, I thought.

I forced a smile—barely. "Thanks. You can leave it on the desk."

She set the tray down much too slowly, making a whole show of bending forward. I looked away.

"Would you like anything else?" she purred. "Something to help you... unwind before your busy day?"

I narrowed my eyes and met hers. "Margherite, what I want is for you to stop trying to seduce me in the middle of Pack business. You're not my type. You've never been. Now get out."

Her smile faltered, and her eyes flashed briefly with something that looked a lot like frustration. But she covered it quickly, batting her lashes as if it would somehow erase the past five years of me turning her down.

"You're grumpy this morning," she murmured. "Is it because your little sister left for school?"

I stood up fast. "Don't talk about Kai."

She took a step back, clearly recognizing the tone. She might be pushy, but she wasn't stupid.

"Fine," she huffed, flipping her long hair over one shoulder. "Enjoy your breakfast."

And with that, she turned and strutted out of the room like she'd just won something.

I sighed and sank back into my chair, dragging the coffee mug toward me and breathing in deeply before the first sip.

Cinnamon. Coffee. Warmth.

At least something made sense.

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It was well past noon when I finally slammed the last folder shut and dropped my pen.

My eyes burned. My back hurt.

And I was starving.

Between reviewing border maps, signing off on supply chains, and dealing with a ridiculous argument between two pack members over who had the rights to a hunting zone—we had designated areas, for Goddess' sake—I was done.

Completely done.

I leaned back in the chair and dragged both hands down my face. No more paperwork. No more mindlinks. No more diplomatic bullshit.

Just food. And peace.

I stood and rolled my shoulders, cracking the tension loose. And because I had absolutely no desire to see Margherite again—with her stripper wardrobe and delusions of grandeur—I made my way to the pack kitchen on my own.

The kitchen was blessedly empty when I walked in. Warm, clean, and smelling faintly of garlic and toasted bread. I opened the industrial fridge and found a miracle inside: a thick sandwich wrapped neatly in foil with a yellow sticky note that read, "Eat something before you bite someone. - Karen."

I huffed a laugh and shook my head. "You know me too well, old woman."

I unwrapped it and bit in. Roast beef, sharp cheddar, pickles, horseradish, and warm sourdough.

Heaven. Absolute heaven.

I leaned back against the counter, chewing slowly, letting myself enjoy five minutes of being a wolf, not an alpha. Just Kingsley. Just a guy eating a sandwich, in silence.

And of course, that peace lasted all of two minutes.

Voices drifted in from the hallway—low at first, then louder as they got closer. Warrior voices. Carlos and two of his buddies, by the sound of it. Probably coming to raid the fridge themselves.

I ignored them until I heard the words that made me freeze mid-chew.

"Man, the new Doctor! She's hot as f**k," Carlos was saying. "You should've seen her, man. Legs for days and the tightest little—"

My jaw clenched.

"She's got that nervous energy too, like she doesn't know what to do with a real man. But it's cool. I've got her opening up already. Give me a week, maybe two—she'll be begging for my cock."

I didn't even taste the rest of the bite.

Didn't hear the laugh that followed.

Didn't feel the sandwich fall from my hand.

All I knew was red.

And then motion.

Before I could think or stop myself, I was across the hall, grabbing Carlos by the throat and slamming him into the wall hard enough to rattle the light fixture above us.

His eyes bulged. The two warriors with him staggered back, shocked.

"What the f**k did you just say?" I growled, my voice low, shaking, dangerous.

Carlos's mouth opened and closed like a dying fish, and I felt his pulse thundering beneath my fingers. My wolf was howling, claws pushing against my skin, and my own rage surged so deep I wasn't even sure where it was coming from.

"She's a doctor," I spat. "She came here to help our Pack, not to be your f****g plaything."

"I—I was just kidding, Alpha," he choked out. "It was a joke—"

"Oh really? Sounded real serious to me." My grip tightened. "You think your little locker room talk makes you a man? Makes you strong?"

I heard footsteps coming fast—someone running down the corridor. Good. Let them see. Let them learn.

Carlos was turning red. His hands clawed weakly at my wrist.

And still, something inside me wanted to snap.

Because this wasn't just fury.

It was possessive.

Protective.

And I had no idea why.

My brothers had always called me the quiet one. The rational one. The one who'd rather fight in the ring than scream in the halls.

But this?

This felt like something else entirely.

"Kingsley!"

Keegan's voice. Then a strong hand gripped my shoulder and pulled me back.

"Kings, let go. You're choking him."

I hesitated—my wolf didn't want to—but finally, I let go.

Carlos crumpled to the floor, gasping, hands to his throat.

Keegan stepped between us, blocking my line of sight. "Breathe, bro," he muttered. "You need to breathe."

I sucked in a breath, nostrils flaring. Then another. Then another. My fists were still shaking.

"What the hell happened?" Kendrick's voice now. The rest of the hallway was filling up.

"I heard him talking about the new doctor like she was a damn conquest," I growled. "Like she was prey. I wasn't going to let it slide."

Keegan looked over his shoulder at Carlos, then back at me. "Okay. Fair. But next time, maybe not the throat?"

I didn't answer. My eyes were still locked on Carlos, who refused to meet my gaze.

Mom came rushing in from the back entrance. "What on earth is going on here?"

"Nothing," I said coldly, brushing past the crowd. "Just clearing up a misunderstanding."

Carlos had been so damn lucky she wasn't the one Who heard him spread bullshit or his ass would have been already on fire.