



## Ready & Willing

by Selena Blake

### Part Ten

After all the men had been fed, Ava excused herself and headed for the barn. What had she been thinking? Someone was bound to tell her father how she'd handled herself. While he wouldn't have handled himself any differently, he'd always demanded she keep her cool. Ironical, given her species.

After petting the horses she settled herself on a bale of hay just outside the barn door and looked out at the rolling hills. She'd thought the ocean was peaceful, but here, everything was still. The endless expanse begged her to shift and barrel across it as fast as her paws would carry her.

She was so tempted.

As she was taking off her apron, her cellphone buzzed in her pocket. She sighed. Please don't let it be her father.

Brianna's number flashed on the screen. "Bri? Why are you calling me from your honeymoon?"

This made it official. Her sister was a loon. And she meant that in the most loving way possible. What kind of crazy woman called home from her honeymoon?

"Don't worry, I made Bryan pass out--"

"Bri!"

"But I wanted to check on you," Brianna said without missing a beat. "You seemed a little...ruffled yesterday at the wedding and--"

"I'm fine. Honest."

"You're worried about the Alphaship, aren't you?"

"Of course I am. You know Daddy's announcement came as a surprise." She and her siblings had been shocked to put it mildly. Her father was too young to consider retirement.

A barn cat rubbed against her legs and she reached down to scratch beneath its chin.

"Whatever happens, happens, Ava. You're going to have to learn to be happy either way."

Learn to be happy? She'd been so focused on learning the business side of things, helping her father with the books, giving him any investment tips she came across that she hadn't for a moment considered that she wouldn't be the next Alpha.

Sweat dotted her forehead. "I--"

"You're really that sure of yourself?"

There was doubt in her sister's voice and damn did it hurt. The cat hopped up in her lap but she no longer had the energy to pet it.

"Do you know something I don't?" Had her father already made his choice? Had he chosen Kaden?

If Kaden became the Alpha of White Paw, where did that leave her? She'd gone straight from school to helping her mother with social functions and helping her father in anything he required. She didn't have a full time job like some of the other pack members. And despite her father's best efforts there was still a fairly strong gender divide within their species.

At the end of the day males were just stronger. And in a culture where strong won, the weak were submissive.

Like hell Ava would submit to anyone.

"No. I haven't heard anything. I just want you to be prepared. You're my sister and I love you."

"You're my little sister. I'm supposed to be worrying about you," Ava pointed out. The cat nudged her chin with its head.

"I have Bryan to worry about me now. Who else is going to worry about you?"

A twig snapped and the cat bolted. On alert, Ava paused and jerked her head to the right. Kaden lifted his hand in greeting.

"Bri, I've gotta go."

"Okay. Take care of yourself. Say hello to Kaden for me and Bryan."

Ava rolled her eyes and disconnected the call. How did Brianna know that Kaden was with her? Was she that obvious?

Instead of approaching he turned and looked out at the scenery. He didn't say a word. Rather he seemed to enjoy the silence. It was killing her.

He tucked his hands into his back pockets. The man had no right to look so

at ease, so lickable. It took all her willpower to stay seated rather than stalk over to him and pull him down for a kiss. The hay would be oh so soft and--

*He's the enemy. Until Friday night, he was the enemy. Remember that, Ava.*

*No one believes you'll make a good Alpha. Not even your family.*

Grinding her jaws together she turned back to the view. But who was she kidding. He was far better on the eyes.

“Just spit it out, Kaden. I screwed up and you’re going to run and tell my dad how I didn’t hold my tongue.” Though she thought she’d held on to her temper reasonably well. She’d give herself a pat on the back for that later.

“Down, *shewolf*. I’m not telling your father anything.”

Ava frowned.

“But I practically assaulted an employee. A human employee.” Humans were totally off limits. That’d always been the rule in the Garnier household.

At that, Kaden came over and sat down next to her, his back against the hay bale. “If that was assault, I’m Santa Claus.”

“You don’t have to be so flip.” Her temper started to run away with her again. It was just like a man to brush off her worries.

He reached around with his left hand and covered her hands. “I’m not being flip, Ava. I’m just saying that if you consider that assault then what I wanted to do to him would be classified as murder.”

He sounded deadly serious and possessive. His words sank in.

“Oh.”

She loved how warm and reassuring his hand felt around her own. Just like she’d loved the feel of his lips against her cheek yesterday.

Had that really been yesterday? Brianna's wedding already seemed ages ago. And yet, after months of planning, she could hardly believe the day had come and gone.

"For what it's worth, I thought you handled yourself very well."

Was he for real?

But as he squeezed her hand, she realized he was real. And he was here. All those years day dreaming about him, watching him from afar, she'd been a girl. Adolescent in a woman's body. Confused by warring hormones and a wolf's desire to find a mate.

Now she couldn't blame her feelings on youth. She was an adult. And she really wanted to kiss him.

He let her hands go and turned back to the landscape.

Ava took a shuddering breath and blinked back the sudden rush of tears. What the hell was wrong with her? Why was she so emotional?

Staring up at the sky she tried to imagine her life on Saturday if her father declared Kaden the new Alpha of White Paw pack. She'd get up just like any other day, but then what?

"This is going to cost me two dollars isn't it?" His rich chocolaty voice seduced her. So much so that she forgot to answer his question.

He pulled out his wallet and handed over two dollar bills. She stared at them for a long moment.

"What?"

"What are you thinking about so hard?"

"Oh."

He dropped the bills in her lap and put his wallet away, his shoulder grazing her bare leg. Did he have to smell so good? Even after a day's work, handing out a dozen bowls of chili, his scent made her insides clench.

She picked them up and studied them. “Have you ever wanted something so much that you can’t imagine your life without it?”

He glanced over his shoulder and stared up at her for a good half minute. His gaze took in every detail of her face and her heart started to pound. She held her breath as she waited for his answer. “Yes.”

What was it that he wanted so badly? The Alphaship? If that was...what were they going to do? She liked Kaden enough to want him to get whatever he wanted, but she’d been preparing for this position her whole adult life.

“Brianna asked me what I’d do if Father doesn’t name me Alpha. I’d never asked myself that question.” She pursed her lips together feeling more shaken than ever. She never let herself focus on failure. In fact, she rarely had a backup plan.

“You’re sure of yourself, I’ll give you that,” Kaden said, looking back over the rolling hills.

“I have to be. No one else is.” Again her eyes smarted. She was not going to be a weepy female, she was not. She’d reserve her tears for babies and sad movies and love stories that took her breath away. But not self-pity.

She sat up a little straighter and folded the bills into fourths. Kaden watched her tuck them into her bra. This time he didn’t groan; he ground his teeth together and looked away.

Propping his arms on his knees, he fiddled with a piece of yellow straw. “I know where you’re coming from.”

She knew that Kaden had been orphaned when he was young. At least, that’s what her father had called it. But Ava understood that his parents had split and left him all alone. And from there, he hadn’t had it easy.

“You must think I’m a spoiled brat.” She would if she were in his shoes. Her parents had given her everything she’d ever wanted or needed. She’d had a full childhood. Vacations. A new car at sixteen. Endless trips to the wilderness to stay connected to her roots.

“The thought has crossed my mind a time or two.”

She huffed out a rueful sigh. “Don’t sugar coat it on my account,” she teased.

“That was years ago. Even at seventeen you thought you knew best.”

Ava crossed her arms over her chest. “Excuse me?”

“You’re still trying to please him.” The straw spun between his fingers like a helicopter blade.

“Of course I am.”

“But you never take any pleasure for yourself.”

“Kicking your beta butt at your own game will be pleasure enough in my book.”

Flustered more than ever before, she stood and headed for the trees in the distance. Of course she wanted to please her father. She’d been trying her whole life to make him happy. To hear more than a ‘Thanks, Ava.’

She wanted a “great job, Ava. I couldn’t have done it without you.” She wanted his respect and admiration. She wanted his trust that she could lead the pack well into the future.

“So you’ve been thinking about my butt...”

Kaden rushed to keep up with her. He’d known his comments were going to touch a nerve but some things needed to be said. And he might as well get them out of the way.

A blush crept into her cheeks but she didn’t so much as pause. She simply glared over at him and kept stalking toward the horizon.

“Where are we going?” he asked.

“I’m,” she stressed the word, “going for a run.”

“I’m right behind you,” he said, loving the way her brown eyes flashed at him. Her chestnut locks turned gold in the fading light.

“Thanks, but no thanks.”

“Your father--“

She cut him off. “Let me guess. He told you to take care of me. I’m not a baby and I don’t need a baby sitter.”

He pulled her to a stop. “If something happens to you he’ll have my ass and be both know it looks good right where it is.”

“You can handle yourself.” She jerked out of his grasp and stormed away.

*Frustrating woman.* Her hips swayed seductively. *Sexy, frustrating woman.*

“You know, despite what everyone thinks about me, I can take care of myself.”

“Prove it.”

She turned abruptly, her mouth slightly agape as she lowered her head and glared at him. A challenge if he’d ever seen one. Her nostrils even flared but she didn’t stop moving backwards.

Damn she was beautiful. Spirited. Her angry march made her hair shimmer like fire.

Then, without breaking her stride, she turned and took off at a dead run. Her muscles contorted, her nails grew, her fingers withdrew and a glossy coat of fur sprouted from her creamy skin. She leapt forward, soaring through the air gracefully, shedding the short shorts and skimpy top. By the time she landed she was all wolf.

One gorgeous *shewolf* running hell dead for the horizon.

Kaden glanced back to make sure no one was around before shifting himself. He raced after her, his paws tearing over the ground. Tail up,



tongue out he chased her.

*Faster.*

Her body stretched endlessly, each movement graceful and strong. Head down, neck long, tail pointed, she darted to the bottom of the hill and then started the next climb.

His muscles tensed for a burst of speed.

*Catch.*

Damn it felt good to run. Flat out. Wind in his fur. Dirt between his toes. He let out a happy yip. Up and down she ran. Farther and farther from the house. She kept going. Staying just ahead of him. Just out of his reach.

*Take.*

As they zipped by another grove of Oak trees, she glanced back at him. He could swear she was smiling. He yipped again and she gave a bark of her own.

*Want.*

When he came to the top of the next hill he saw the river in the valley below. He didn't know where her next burst of speed came from but she gathered her haunches beneath her and galloped down the hill.

Where had a city girl learned to run like that? He knew at this point, she shouldn't surprise him.

At the bottom she raced over the earth, tail winding around like a propeller. Then, without hesitation she jumped into the water. Droplets sparkled in the fading light. As he neared she stalked back and forth, muscles coiled.

He stopped along the shore and watched her march back and forth, her gaze locked on something in the water. She lifted her front left paw, held it just above the water line. Her tail pointed straight back, providing balance.

What on earth?

She leaned forward, slipped her paw gently into the water and then -- she pounced.

Her muzzle disappeared beneath the water for an instant at most. Then she pulled back, a fish wiggling between her teeth.

Kaden sat down, his tongue dangling from his mouth. He was impressed by her stamina. And the predator that lurked beneath the surface...a predator she'd never let him see before.

She placed the fish at his feet and walked away.

He looked down at the silver scaled creature feeling something akin to awe sweep through him. There wasn't a spec of blood on the fish. He looked over to see her lapping at the water's edge.

A full out run for twenty minutes and she had enough energy left to catch a fish and not injure it? He was going to have to eat his words. She'd definitely proved her point.

Taking pity on the writhing creature, he gently picked it up and carried it back to the water. That had to earn him a few Karma points.

With cold water rushing over his feet he looked back at the beautiful silver haired *shewolf* laying beneath a tree. She stared right back.

Not for the first time he wanted to know what she was thinking. Her lean body shook as she panted. Why was he so mesmerized? He'd seen *shewolves* in true form before.

But he hadn't chased them across a hundred acres. Hadn't watched the way their bodies ate up the earth, stretching to perfection.

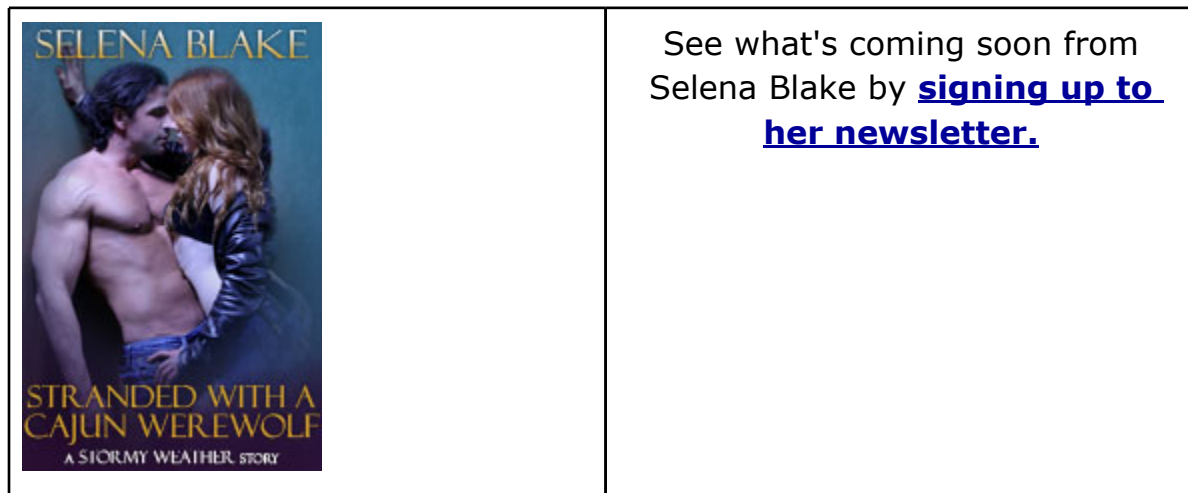
She tipped her head back, flattened her ears and let out a soulful howl. Startled, he cocked his head to the right. She looked at him, her tongue hanging out. The way her jowls tugged back, he was certain she was smiling.

She howled again.

*Mate.*

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Also By Selena Blake



### About Selena

An action movie buff with a penchant for all things supernatural and sexy, Selena Blake combines her love for adventure, travel and romance into steamy paranormal romance. Selena's books have been called "a steamy escape" and have appeared on bestseller lists, been nominated for awards, and won contests. When she's not writing you can find her by the pool soaking up some sun, day dreaming about new characters, and watching the cabana boy (aka her muse), Derek. Fan mail keeps her going when the diet soda wears off so write to her at [selenablake@gmail.com](mailto:selenablake@gmail.com). Visit her online at <http://selena->

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