



Ready & Willing

by Selena Blake

Part Four

“Penny for your thoughts.”

An unexpected, but not all together unwelcome, shiver of excitement washed over Ava’s shoulders and down her spine. She turned from the ocean and found Kaden watching her closely. She feared those dark eyes of his saw too much.

“Just a penny?” she asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Your thoughts are worth more? They must be deep.” He looked so relaxed, so sure of himself. Was he really as confident as he acted?

“At least a dollar,” she quipped, suddenly feeling the need to keep her guard up around him. It was far too easy to fall under his spell. It had happened before, not that he'd noticed, and she'd vowed not to let it happen again.

The arrogant wolf pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and tugged a crisp dollar bill from the shiny silver money-clip. He held it out to her, a dark eyebrow raised in challenge.

She snatched the dollar from his hand, folded it neatly into fourths and then tucked it into her cleavage. She felt very *take-that* for a whole half a second before he groaned. Then a strong hand gripped her elbow and he led her down the stone stairs to the garden below.

“You're going to get into trouble showing off like that.” He kept walking, leading her further away from the reception.

“When I show off Kaden, you'll know it,” she assured him in the same low tone.

He stopped and looked down at her. “Is that a promise, beautiful?”

She narrowed her eyes and jerked her arm from his grasp. "Stop trying to butter me up."

"Is that what I'm doing?" He faced her then and she felt her cheeks heat under his gaze. The man was too potent for his own good.

"Did you save the cake?"

He nodded. "Disaster averted."

She studied him closely and noticed a fleck of white frosting at the corner of his mouth. "Couldn't keep your fingers out of it, huh?" She reached up and wiped the icing away with her thumb.

At the same moment they both realized what she'd done and for three heartbeats neither of them moved. Her palm rested against his cheek. His skin was hot, with the tiniest hint of stubble scraping her skin.

Then his hand closed over hers, holding her hostage.

"Kaden..." she said in warning. This wasn't a good idea.

He seemed to read her mind as he cocked his head and studied her. "Why not?" he whispered.

"You know why not. We both want the same thing."

"Do we? I hope so. I want you flat on your back with your legs wrapped around my waist."

Her heart stuttered at his words. His gaze raked over her from the tips of her toes to the crown of her head. The slow perusal along with the lustful look in his eyes was almost her undoing.

Barely able to breathe around the tightness in her chest she managed a

shake of her head. “That’s not what I mean. We both want the Alpha spot when my father retires.”

“Are we back to that?” he murmured, then set his mouth in a grim line.

“I just think we should keep our eye on the prize.”

“I have my eye on the prize.” His words hung in the air and for a moment, something in his eyes maybe, made her wonder if he was still talking about the Alpha position. Her heart fluttered.

She pulled her hand back and held it to her chest as a lusty heat suffused her skin. He—no. She wouldn’t think it. Wouldn’t explore it. Not now. No matter how much she wanted to.

Ava started to step around him but he snaked a hand around her waist and pulled her back to him. “Let’s forget about being Alpha. Just for today.” Something in the quiet words pleaded with her. Her gaze swerved to his.

He looked sincere. But could she trust him? Did she dare let her guard down around him? He was smart enough to know that an off balance opponent was easier to subvert. It could all be a trick.

On the other hand, there was nothing to say that she couldn’t enjoy the rest of her afternoon with him *and* keep her guard firmly in place. As the Alpha of WhitePaw she’d have to endure a variety of situations without giving away her true thoughts. She could look at this as good practice.

He bent his knees to look her in the eye, obviously awaiting her answer.

She nibbled the inside of her lip and nodded once.

She couldn’t be sure, but he seemed to sigh with relief.

“You still haven’t told me what you were thinking about earlier. I didn’t get

my dollar worth,” he said with a smile.

Back to his charming self. How did he expect her to think, to form a coherent sentence, when his arms was draped so intimately around her middle? And why did she enjoy it so much?

Only...she knew why. But she’d reflect on that later.

“I was just thinking how everything is changing. Three out of four sisters are married. Dad’s talking retirement. I expect nieces and nephews any day now.”

Kaden smiled. Did he have to be so gorgeous? She dropped her gaze to his chest and studied a pearlescent button.

“The nature of life. Things change. The question is, how will you handle those changes?”

She looked bewildered again. Kaden wished he could erase the shadows from her eyes. He liked it when she smiled and was at ease. Obviously she wasn’t as happy as she wanted everyone to believe. But he didn’t want to dwell on that right now.

“Let’s get back to the party. I’m craving,” he looked at her lips, “something sweet.” He kept his hand at the small of her back as he turned toward the house. She smiled up at him as if she found him amusing. He didn’t find anything amusing about how badly he wanted her.

Her smile widened into a grin when they reached the edge of the dancefloor.

“Not a moment too soon,” he murmured in her ear.

On the other side of the floor Brianna and Bryan stood next to the cake, posing for pictures, knife in hand.

“Cut the cake, already,” Kaden called and the crowd laughed. Bryan grinned at him and then kissed Brianna’s shoulder.

“You’re incorrigible,” Ava said, but her words held no heat.

“I’m hungry.”

Their gazes locked for a hot moment before she turned back to the festivities. He sighed. Maybe it hadn’t been such a good idea to spend time with her. Every second he touched her, looked at her, hell...even thought about Ava Garnier was a losing battle. Each second made him want another one. And another. Pretty soon those seconds would turn into minutes then hours and if he wasn’t careful days.

But he couldn’t extract his hand from where it touched her back. The connection pleased the animal inside him too much.

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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.

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