



Ready & Willing

by Selena Blake

Part Eight

Kaden was the first of the men to enter the kitchen that night. Even with her back to the door she knew it was him by the way the room suddenly filled with heat and tension. His scent had a new facet she wasn't used to: sweat and hay. Something inside her quivered but she kept slicing thick hunks of bread.

“Smells good.”

If she could just stay focused on the task at hand...

“You should let me take all this over to the bunk house,” he said, the words soft and sure. He'd moved closer. The tiny hairs at the nape of her neck stood on end, ready and alert.

“So you can take credit for all my hard work,” she quipped. “I don't think

so.”

With the last of the bread sliced, she tossed the pieces into a large basket and covered it with a dish towel.

She’d be lying if she said his nearness didn’t affect her. Being so close, so alone together in the quiet of the kitchen...it was almost...domestic. And she was wolf enough to admit that she liked domestic...

“I don’t care who gets credit for making dinner, I just don’t want you struttin’ around all those men in those short shorts.”

Hours ago, she’d felt his gaze on her legs the moment after she’d opened her door. It seemed like a week since they’d left her place. She’d felt his disapproval then, could still feel it now.

It was just like Kaden to go all protective on her. With her father as the Alpha, ever-vigilant-alpha-tendencies were nothing new.

But where Kaden was concerned, the protective growl was almost charming. Not that she’d ever tell him that. Plus, she was fairly sure he wasn’t feeling protective so much as he didn’t want anything to happen that he’d have to answer to her father about.

“Jealous?” She turned then, the basket in her arms.

Oh my. His dark eyes glittered dangerously and his stance was both predatory and frustrated. Dusty hands hooked over lean hips and a sprig of straw stuck out of his hair.

Shifting the basket to one hip, she reached up and plucked out the hay. His hand wrapped around her wrist and held tight. She wasn’t scared of him or the harsh line of his lips. If anything she wanted to kiss that firm mouth until he smiled.

And that was exactly the reason that she twisted away from his grasp, letting the hay fall to the floor before she shoved the basket of bread into his hands. No men. Absolutely no men until she was Alpha. Four more days. She could last.

Right?

“Take that to the bunk house.”

“You didn’t say please,” he replied, mischief softening his handsome face.

She raised an eyebrow and put a hand on her hip. “Do you want dinner or not, cowboy?”

He chuckled as he left the spacious kitchen.

Men. Wolves.

She turned back to the stove and reached for the lid to the large chili pot. She’d made a hearty chili, equal parts veggie and meat. The other pot held chicken noodle soup. That’d been an adventure. She’d never made it from scratch before. But cooking always soothed her. And she definitely liked to nibble as she cooked.

“Wow, Ava. That smells great.” She glanced over her shoulder to see Wes hang his hat on a hook by the back door.

“That’s what Kaden said.”

“That man’s got a thorn in his paw the size of Kansas.”

“Oh really?” Why did that news make her want to sooth him? She should be finding a way to use it as an advantage. As Alpha, she’d finally have respect among the pack and be more than a pretty face. She’d be more than Phillip Garnier’s daughter.

“I understand why even if he doesn’t.”

While she was trying to figure out what he meant by that, he lifted the lid to the chili pot and inhaled deeply, then gave a masculine sigh of appreciation.

“Need any help?” he asked without missing a beat.

What did Wesley understand that Kaden didn’t? She frowned.

“I take it I shouldn’t have said anything,” Wesley said.

“I have no earthly idea what you mean. But yes, you can help. Will you take the chili over to the bunk house? I’ll bring the soup.”

“Soup and chili? Woo-wee. The fellas are gonna be too fat and spoiled to go back to work once they get better. They’ll be hell to live with.”

Wesley’s light-hearted banter pulled her from her thoughts and she grinned. “Put the lid back and go. I’m sure they’re hungry.” Men always were, in her experience. At least the male of her species.

She shoved her hands into oven mitts and lifted the large pot of chicken soup. She sensed Wesley wanted to say something, or offer to help but he dutifully headed for the back door, chili pot in hand.

Outside, the beauty of the ranch wrapped around her like a warm blanket. So different from the coast and such a slower pace. She lifted her face to the sun, enjoying the momentary reprieve from pack life.

But she shouldn’t want a reprieve. She wanted to be the leader. She wanted to lead them forward into the next century. In her opinion, more packs needed a woman’s touch.

“Let me help you with that.” She didn’t immediately recognize the masculine voice, but a second later Alain fell into step beside her. What was he doing here?

“Wes, have you met--“

“We have,” he cut in, nodding at Alain.

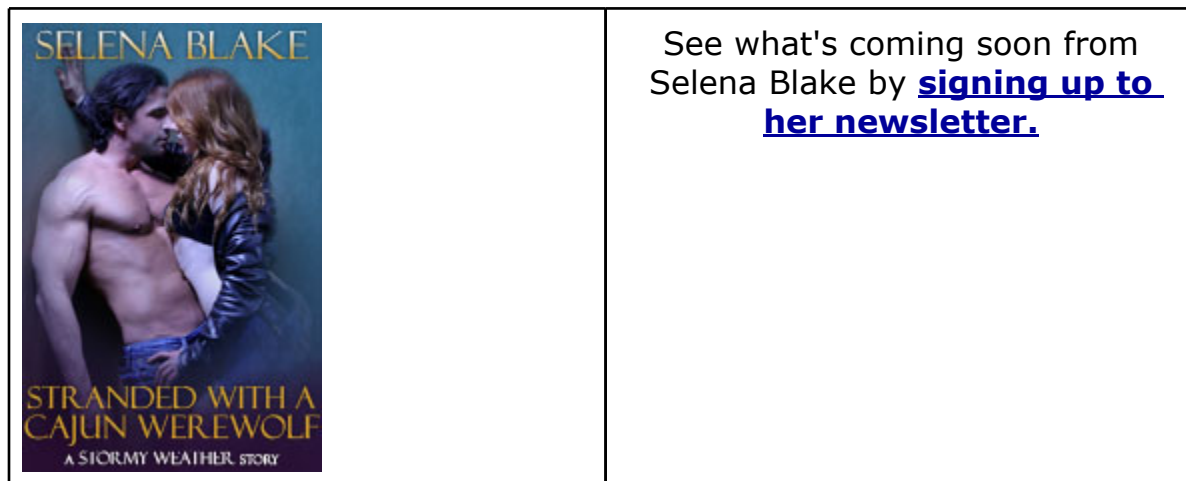
Yesterday she’d thought the man to her right supermodel gorgeous, today he looked like an actor straight off the set of a western. Completely at ease with his surroundings and playing the part of a cowboy. His tall lean body did wonders for the work shirt and tight jeans. Dust covered him in a fine powder. So he could get his hands dirty too...

“It’s hot,” she told him, not breaking her stride toward the adjacent bunk house.

As-easy-as-you-please he plucked a pair of leather gloves from his back pocket, donned them, and took the pot from her. A girl could get used to that.

★ ★ ★

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. Visit her online at <http://selenablake.com> or become a friend at <http://www.facebook.com/authorSelenaBlake>

Copyright 2011 Selena Blake