



# Ready & Willing

by Selena Blake

Part Three

Kaden's self assurance grated on her nerves. So cocky. So freaking confident. So-- He was pushing her over the edge, on purpose. Right before he closed the door behind him, he gave her a knowing smile.

Her arm pulled back like a baseball pitcher on a mound and then she let the vase fly. So the major leagues wouldn't be calling but the glass shattered with satisfying noise. There was no '*making it believable*.'

"Go to hell, Kaden Black." Then she dropped to the floor and gave a sigh of frustration and waited for her sister to find her.

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Kaden knew when a woman wanted him. There was a subtle shift in her scent...almost as if she were a ripening berry. Her heart beat faster, her breath caught in the back of her throat, and often, her eyes went wide and expressive.

Thus was the case with the petite redhead in front of him now. She held a flute of champagne close to her breasts and gazed up at him with big blue eyes. Eyes that hadn't strayed from his in the last five minutes.

He, however, was on the lookout for a certain werewolf. He'd left Ava standing in the little side room at the church, wide eyed over thirty minutes ago...but his thoughts hadn't drifted away from her since then. Her heartbeat had picked up when he'd trapped her against the door. She might be a predator, but the way she'd wiggled against him reminded him of a bunny in a trap.

The crash of the vase against the door and her shout of anger had been unmistakable. Believable. Maybe too believable.

Her sister had rushed in, full length wedding gown, and all.

Kaden was almost sure Ava had no idea how much she turned him on. Not that he liked his women defenseless and scared. Ava was never defenseless. He'd been on the wounded end of her rapier tongue more than once in the past few weeks.

And he couldn't remember ever seeing her scared. Quite the opposite in fact. She'd always been brave and ballsy. She'd step right into the middle of a fight.

No, her wiggling had excited him because he could hear her breath catch, could see the pulse dancing at the base of her neck. And he'd known exactly what those little signals meant. She'd been uncomfortable...not because she was scared or hurting, but because she'd been defenseless to deny her desire for him.

And *she* knew that *he* knew it. He couldn't wait to see what she'd do next. Too bad Ava wasn't the one staring up at him right now with lust in her eyes.

"They make such a lovely couple," the redhead gushed. He followed her gaze to Brianne and Bryan and murmured his agreement. The bridal couple made the rounds at their elaborate reception, looking happy and effortless. The ocean breeze blew softly through the crowd and the pounding of the waves against the cliffs provided a nice background for the orchestra. Kaden hadn't felt this relaxed in a long while. For a moment he was able to forget work, turf wars, and Pack politics.

But at the same time, unease clawed at the nape of his neck. He was *sure* he had the Alpha spot in the Pack. He sure as hell wanted it. Had worked for it. So why did he feel like he was stealing candy from a baby?

“There he is. Kaden, I'd like you to meet Walter Andersen,” Phillip's voice cut into his thoughts. Kaden extended his hand to Phillip and then other man he recognized as the Alpha of one of the Oregon packs. “Kaden is my right hand man. Smart as a whip and cagey as a lion.”

“Thanks for the endorsement.” Kaden smiled. Man it felt great to hear those words. To feel appreciated and respected...after where he'd come from, nowhere, and done to get here. Some days, like today, he could just howl at the moon.

The petite woman at his side gently squeezed his arm and he remembered his manners. Now was not the time to make a bad impression. Especially in front of his Alpha. He searched his memory for her name. Shirley. “This is Shirley,” he said making the introduction.

“Phillip's told me lots of great things about you.” Walter said with an appraising look. With any luck, he'd would be using his caginess and smarts to lead the pack for the foreseeable future, he wanted to say but thought better of it.

“That's always good to hear,” he said as music drifted across the yard.

“Well, we won't keep you. I think they're about to start the dancing.” Phillip still had that extatic father of the bride look about him. Kaden couldn't imagine having Phillip as a father-in-law. It was enough that the older man was leader of the Pack, but marrying into the family? Not that it mattered, Kaden had plenty on his plate without thinking about gaining in-laws.

"Have a good evening," he said politely.

"Dancing sounds good," Shirley said as soon as Phillip and Walter were out of earshot.

"Yes, it does." He let his gaze roam over the assembled crowd as Brianne and Brian took center stage. High above the party sat the Ganier house. The sprawling estate overlooked acres of lush gardens and a long strip of beautiful coastline. Kaden had purchased his property farther down the beach, and while it too had a great view, it was nothing like this.

He remembered the first time he'd seen the rolling estate. Phillip had led him to the back patio and Kaden had surveyed the land, the glistening pool, heard the roar of the ocean. He'd coveted it in the same instant. Wanted a big beautiful property of his own. A place to relax and recoup. A place to raise a family of his own when the time came.

That had been years ago. Over time he'd spent more time here on the compound...often bumping into Ava. Why had it taken him so damn long to open his eyes and see her? Really see her?

Ava smiled as Bryan swept Brianna into his arms. They made a beautiful couple. So at ease with each other, so comfortable in each others arms, and so much in love. She was wondering what their children would look like when a waiter stopped in front of her. He held a gleaming silver tray of crystal flutes.

She murmured her thanks and took a long sip of champagne. The bubbles tap danced across her tongue and gave her brain a little jolt. As she lowered the glass from her lips, she caught sight of Kaden.

Her heartbeat, which had just returned to normal ten minutes ago, stopped and then jump started like an old car on a winter morning. She knew better than to let her feelings get out of control. Not to mention, she was old enough know that messing with a man right now would ruin her chances of becoming Alpha. She had to make her father see her as a leader.

Kaden, on the other hand, didn't seem to feel that way. The redhead at his side stared up at him dreamily and he returned her smile.

Ava felt a quick jab of jealousy and had a brief, but intense, mental image of ripping the other woman's hair out. And *him*...he'd been pressed up against *her* not half an hour ago. Obviously she was just a conquest to him. Or worse, he was just trying to confuse her so she wouldn't be at her best at the Pack meeting next week.

She fumed silently as she finished off her drink. Needing more of a buzz, she reached for another flute as another waiter walked by.

"Friend of the bride or the groom?"

She turned to see a handsome, black haired man at her elbow. He smiled down at her and her mood lightened just a little.

"Sister of the bride."

He took a sip from his own flute and then gave her a slow once-over. Ava was actually surprised that her blood didn't start to boil right then and there. She did a quick survey of her own. He was supermodel gorgeous, the tuxedo clung to his tall frame. And the lust filled looks he was shooting her way...suddenly she believed in spontaneous combustion.

Quickly she reminded herself about the no men policy. At least until she was Alpha. But a girl could look right? And hey, if it was good enough for Kaden...

"Cousin of the groom," he said and then after a brief pause, continued, "distant...distant cousin of the groom."

She couldn't help but laugh as she stuck out her hand.

"Ava Garnier."

"Alain Harper."

"Nice to meet you Alain." Her gaze flickered over to Kaden as the music died. Carrottop was still glued to his side. Didn't she know what a player he was? Ava tried to justify her feelings to herself, tried to tell herself he was just a jerk but history and a healthy dose of lust made her want to snarl at the other woman. A new song came on, slow and soothing, but the wolf inside of her wanted a fight.

Even as she tried to tell herself that Kaden was not worth competing over.

"Would you care to dance?" Alain asked, his deep voice shocking her from her murderous thoughts. She glanced out over the dance floor to see several other couples joining her sister and brother-in-law. Which meant she'd missed their first dance. She'd been too busy fuming over an idiot male and she'd missed their first dance.

Annoyed with herself, she nodded to Alain. They set down their glasses and stepped onto the polished black and white checkered floor. Alain pulled her

closer, one hand at her waist, the other dwarfing her hand. He was warm and smelled of cologne.

She closed her eyes briefly and imagined that she was dancing with Kaden... That his scent filled her lungs, his hands held her close.

But that was just crazy.

Alain was good looking. Seemed nice enough. Charming too. She should try to make more of an effort. If she was going to be Alpha, she needed to stop letting her emotions rule her.

Over his shoulder she saw her parents. Her father was an incredible leader. Strong, proud, protective of the pack. And her mother was always there at his side to keep things running smoothly, to smooth ruffled feathers or fur, as the case would be. Years together and they were still blissfully happy. It was rare. It was impressive to see a couple who fit so flawlessly together, who needed each other equally.

She and her siblings were blessed to know that kind of love, to have such an example set for them. And for the most part, her sisters...three of the four, anyway, had found their own match made in tail-twitching heaven.

Alain's hand at her back made her wonder if she'd ever find her own match. Did she want a match? Part of her did. She'd always longed to have what her parents had. That closeness. Someone to depend on. But the men she met weren't terribly dependable. And the human men...she'd never met one strong enough to interest her. Maybe she was old fashioned, but breeding was important. Especially to continue the Pack.

A faster song with a stronger beat came on and she saw her parents step to the side of the floor. Alain didn't give her a chance to excuse herself. Instead,



he expertly spun her. His movements were strong and sure and she found it easy to follow his lead.

“You're a great dancer,” she said when she was once again in his arms.

“I was just thinking the same thing about you.”

She tried to keep up the small talk. Honestly she did. And Alain made it easy on her. He had a ready answer and plenty of questions. But she got the feeling that he really didn't want to talk.

Over his shoulder she saw Kaden swirling his dance partner around and around. She couldn't help but admire his graceful movements, the way he was completely focused on the woman in his arms, his quick steps. Somewhere in the recesses of her mind she wondered where he'd learned to dance like that. What it would feel like to be that woman, to be at his complete command.

When music shifted to a tango Alain pulled her solidly against his chest, his hand high and firm against her back. And the small talk died. She was happy because she couldn't seem to summon anything more than polite interest in the conversation. And he deserved better than that. More than a silent partner to lead around the floor.

But he didn't seem to mind her silence as he moved her across the floor with an effortless grace all his own. His muscles were coiled as if he were ready to fight, rippling beneath her fingers. As he dipped her she saw Kaden again. Carrotopp slithered down his front in an almost indecent way. Then he hooked his hands under her arms and pulled her back up and spun her around. *Show off.*

Alain must have noticed the scandalous moves himself because he pulled her hips close and slid a rock hard thigh between hers. Pivot after pivot proved that Alain had studied with a master. It was hard to keep up when her inner thighs were protesting every step. But the reminder that Kaden seemed to have no such impairment forced her on.

She mentally snarled at herself for even thinking of him. If she had half a brain she'd stop thinking about him and concentrate on keeping up with her own partner. And then securing her place as the leader of the Pack. Her father had never been one to hand out freebies.

Alain dipped her again and her spine folded back as she neared the floor. His hands were big, strong, and the wide lunge of his legs held her immobile precious inches from the ground. The look on his face was utter concentration.

Out of the corner of her eye, Ava saw a blur of white. She craned her neck to see where Brianna was running off to. Her sister didn't look happy as she disappeared behind the screened off area that was acting as a kitchen for the caterers.

“Would you excuse me?” she asked as Alain pulled her upright again. “I need to check in with the bride,” she explained quickly and turned away.

But his hand at her wrist, so gentle and yet firm, stopped her. “Only if you'll save me another dance.” He gave her a cocky half smile and let her go.

Why couldn't there be a spark between them? She smiled up at him and gave him a brief nod before she turned again and headed after her sister.

“It's ruined,” her sister's tearful voice met Ava's ears. She turned the corner about found Brianna, hands pressed against her cheeks, staring in horror.

Then she saw the cake. The bottom layer of the dreamy white confection looked as though someone had dropped a baseball in it. Or through it.

The cake had been the one thing Brianna had asked for. Not millions of flowers or an elaborate setting. Just an out-of-this-world cake. Their parents had been happy to order the five towering layers of frosting coated perfection. Each pure white layer was separated by a thick layer of roses. And Ava had to admit that it was stunning. And if the hole exposing the deliciousness beneath was any indication, it would be delicious too.

But right now Brianna was crying and Ava didn't really care how the bottom of the cake had been destroyed. No one was doing anything to fix the problem. And where was the wedding planner? Ava went straight into crisis mode and wrapped her arms around her sobbing sister.

“What happened?” The rich chocolaty voice Ava knew so well asked from just over her shoulder. Her insides melted just a tiny bit.

“It's ruined,” Brianna said between sobs.

“No, not ruined. Just not fit for pictures. You,” Ava said to the waiter hovering on the far side of the cake, watching Brianna as if she were a train wreck. “Help remove the bottom two layers.” She turned to Kaden. “Help him and don't let them screw it up again. We'll be out of layers soon,” she said hoping to lighten the mood.

“But--” Brianna blubbered.

Kaden handed Ava a crisp handkerchief and wordlessly stepped toward the cake. He studied it closely and then started issuing orders to the waiter. Her stomach did a little flip flop. Admiration and pleasure swirled inside her and she knew he'd fix the problem.

“Kaden's going to take care of it,” she told Brianna as she blotted away her tears. “We'll have a four layer cake and it will look beautiful. I promise.”

She led her sister away from the cake. “Let's rejoin the party and find that handsome husband of yours.” That made Brianna smile just a little and Ava sighed with relief. Crisis averted.

The doting groom was looking for his bride and Ava gladly passed her sister off into his care. The rest of the party seemed to be going smoothly. Guests were dancing, talking, laughing. She snagged herself an hors d'oeuvre and popped it into her mouth.

Minus the cake incident everything seemed to be going great. So why did she feel so rotten? She didn't particularly feel like making small talk with anyone and though she knew she should say hello to all the family friends, she just couldn't get her feet to move. As it was, they were protesting the four inch heels that had looked so sexy in the box.

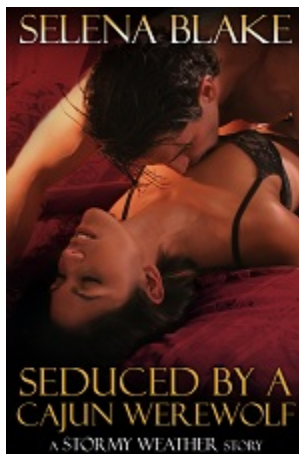
A few more hors d'oeuvres and a glass of champagne later she decided that if she hadn't been the maid of honor, she would've snuck off somewhere to be alone. Alain was dancing with Carrotop and Ava's sisters were all dancing with their beaus. She knew she could have asked any of the eligible males...but she didn't want to give them the wrong idea. And there was the whole aching ankles thing.

For the first time in a long time she felt like an outsider and it was a wholly uncomfortable feeling. Not only was she standing on the edge of the terrace looking in, she was considering making her get away. And that seemed frighteningly like licking her wounds.

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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](mailto:selenablake@gmail.com).

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