



Ready & Willing

by Selena Blake

Part One

Kaden Black glanced out at the crowd filling the pews on both sides of the church aisle. The big day was finally here. The tie around his neck seemed tighter than necessary and he resisted the urge to tug on it. The first notes of Canon in D filled the expansive space distracting him from the silken fabric that reminded him too much of a trap set to ensnare an unsuspecting wolf.

A heavy floral scent tickled his nose as the rear doors opened and a tiny girl dressed in a fluffy pink gown marched forward with a look of concentration on her little cherub face. Golden blonde hair peeked out from beneath a wreath of flowers. She tossed fists full of flowers along the aisle as she weaved her way toward the alter. Behind her, a parade of bridesmaids in a sea of black and white filed down the petal strewn path.

Though he noticed each of them, his gaze locked on the last woman in the line. Ava Garnier. Big sister to the bride, Brianna, Ava didn't even spare him a glance. On the outside she looked happy enough but Kaden could read the look in those warm brown eyes.

Ava was the middle child to the Alpha's of the WhitePaw pack. He knew it wasn't easy on her to be in the middle of the chaos, much less the daughter of the Pack Leader. Standards were set higher on her and the pressure was on. The last time they'd talked she'd made no bones about letting him know she intended to be the next Alpha. It seemed like she did everything in her life to get her father's attention, win his approval.

Kaden's style was more take charge and make people listen.

As she took her place across from him, her eyes surveyed the room and her smile kicked up a notch. Next to him, Bryan sucked in a breath and five hundred pairs of eyes turned to the bride. She had Ava's warm eyes and chestnut hair. But she was shorter, her beauty more subdued. Her dress was long, white and simple. And though she was smiling in his direction, Kaden knew she only had eyes for her groom.

Kaden got the sudden yearning to have a woman smile at him like that. Like he was her whole world and she couldn't wait to spend every moment, asleep or awake, by his side.

As Brianna made her way to Bryan's side, Kaden saw the look of supreme pride on her father's face. Phillip Garnier was a smart man. Strong and fair. And it was obvious he was pleased with the match being made as he placed his daughter's hand in that of the man who would legally become her husband. The wolf who was already her mate.

Ava took the bouquet from Brianna and passed it, along with her own, to the next maid in the line. Then she crouched down to adjust her sister's gown. As her gaze shifted upward toward the veil she caught Kaden staring at her. Her lip started to curl upward in a snarl but she quickly pinned a happy smile on her face. This was no time to show her discontent.

Just because he was the Beta of the pack didn't mean he was going to become the Alpha in a week's time. Her father had been murmuring about stepping down, passing over the reigns of the Pack for months now. Ava was more than ready to take his place.

With her eldest sisters married off, and now her younger sister, Ava was the perfect choice. She'd proven that she was smart, driven, determined and detail oriented. She'd need to be all those things to keep the WhitePaw Pack going strong. She was strong when she needed to be and never showed her weakness.

Sighing, she took her place next to the bride once again. Kaden Black had always been a weakness. Her biggest weakness actually. Tall, broad, and uber gorgeous – he was a major distraction. Not to mention arrogant and irritatingly charming when he wanted to be. Not her type...she liked her men straight talking.

And gorgeous, a little voice whispered. Looks incredible in a tuxedo...

Over the years she'd stolen glances, but told herself she was just curious about the Beta of her pack. It was natural to wonder. If she were honest with herself, she'd admit that her interest had gone past curiosity a while ago.

Until he'd started vying for the top slot. Now the only emotion she felt toward him was annoyance.

Kaden watched Bryan pull his bride into his arms. No one in the crowd seemed surprised at the long passionate kiss. But nevertheless, the organ started up a minute later and the couple separated just long enough to be announced as husband and wife.

He let his eyes shift past them toward the maid of honor. Her gaze met his briefly before she looked away. What was she thinking about right now? Did she wish this was her wedding? He followed her gaze.

No. Probably not. She was looking at her father. Once again, seeking his approval. The urge to shake her, to make her see *him* instead, gripped him. But he brushed the thought away and concentrated on the bride and groom.

They seemed to float down the aisle, arm in arm, laughing and waving. Kaden felt a twinge of loss. His friendship with Bryan would be forever changed. He had a mate to take care of now. And though Kaden had told himself that everything would be fine, would continue on as normal, heck Kaden himself had introduced Bryan and Brianna, he realized now that nothing would be the same again.

He supposed he'd always have a confidant in Bryan, but he'd lost his drinking buddy.

When Ava stepped forward and gave him a sharp glance he stepped down onto the aisle and offered her his arm. Now was no time to get sappy. He had to be on the top of his game. It was rare that he had competition from anyone. Not in brute strength, or cunning, or position within the Pack. That Ava seemed determined to pass him for the Head Honcho's job was...new. Surprising. But not the least bit disturbing. In fact he thought he might enjoy pushing her buttons since he was positive that the position was safely his.

He hadn't been subtle about his expectations. Full Moon was coming up and Phillip had called a Pack meeting. That could only mean one thing...he was going to pass the reigns to Kaden.

Ava carefully tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, just as they'd practiced the evening before. Only this time she had a smile on her face that made his gut tighten.

It was a show, he was certain of it. His sixth sense could feel the tension radiating through her. She grinned at her parents, made eye contact with a few of the people in the crowd, but she held herself rigid. And her hand barely touched his arm.

Was she still upset because he was determined to take her father's place? He'd thought her anger would have diminished by now, but this was just a new facet of her that he needed to learn. It also meant he had to keep his cool...while making her lose hers.

Kaden was ready to be Alpha. He'd been doing battle all his life to become beta of the pack. He'd proven that he was strong, smart, capable, ready and willing to defend the pack. He knew all the pack laws and all the pack members. Yes, his resume was looking stellar.

"You're not going to be Alpha," the woman at his side said through her faux smile.

It was almost like she could read his mind. He wished for a moment that he could read hers.

Instead, he ducked his head closer, catching her subtle honey-vanilla fragrance. "I'd say it's a done deal, sweetheart."

Those warm brown eyes flashed up at him with flecks of golden fire. Why had he never noticed their exquisite color before? They were like cinnamon and amber. "The deal is hardly done. Why would my father hand over the leadership of the pack to an outsider?"

The last word hung in the air between them. Kaden didn't feel like an outsider. He hadn't for a long time. WhitePaw was his home. He had friends, a nice house, and a good job in the city. And he was Beta of the pack, a position he took seriously.

"Especially since he has offspring rearing and willing to do the job."

With the processional gathering in the lobby of the church, the photographer began organizing people for the photos. Kaden quickly steered Ava into a nearby room.

"What—"

He cut off her words. "Ready and willing, huh?"

Ava stared up at the insanely handsome werewolf as her stomach fluttered like a wounded butterfly. Her reaction to him was nothing new. But the intensity of it was.

How did he manage to make three little words sound so naughty? And why couldn't she seem to remember that he was the enemy?

She couldn't, wouldn't, tell him just how ready and willing she was when it came to him. How she'd fantasized about kissing him more often than was decent. Or how she daydreamed of running her fingers through his sexy almost-shoulder-length-but-not-quite golden, brown hair.

No. She could never tell him those things...at least not until she'd secured her spot as Alpha.

"I come from a long line of WhitePaw leaders—"

"What about your brother?"

"Gregory? What about him?"

"You don't think he'd be interested in the top spot? He is male, after all."

“That’s irrelevant,” she said as her temper spiked. “I need to get back to the wedding.” Flustered, she ducked around him. Two steps away from the door, he caught her by the arm and turned her back toward him. Why did those warm, strong fingers on her arm have to feel so good? Inside she whimpered at the delicious touch, brief as it was. And why couldn’t she stop herself from thinking about those same warm, strong fingers sliding up her arm to cup her head and run through her hair, knocking the bobby pins aside...

“I think it’s entirely relevant,” he murmured.

“Gregory doesn’t want to lead. Besides, I’m older. And I have more experience.”

“You really think Phillip is going to name someone Alpha who’s experience is organizing parties and Pack meetings?”

Her hand arced through the air before the last word had left his lips. Pride bruised and anger simmering, she saw red. Wanted blood. His blood. But his reflexes were faster and he caught her hand before it connected with his cheek.

Before she could react, he’d backed her up until her back was flat against the door. His big body crowded her, pinned her there as he stared down at her like a wolf who’d just spotted his dinner. With his hand tight around her wrist, holding it beside her head against the polished wood, a mild panic crept through her. She brought her other hand up to push against the solid wall of his chest, needing to get away from him, but he easily caught that one too.

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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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