

Ready & Willing
by Selena Blake

Part 17

Ava strode across the yard toward the barn, wishing she'd taken the time to put on shoes. The ground was rough and cold beneath her feet.

Why wasn't Wesley back yet? Hadn't he promised to return in two hours? She should have asked Kaden about that. She would have...if she'd been thinking clearly. If she hadn't had to stop a brawl between him and Alain. Hopefully one of the two wolves knew what was going on with the poachers. She didn't like that the head rancher hadn't checked in. At least...she hadn't heard the phone ring.

She didn't have her watch on, so she didn't know how many hours had passed since he'd been gone, but she could tell by the scent of the early morning dew and the way the horizon was just a tiny bit brighter to the East than to the West. Morning would be here soon and with it, the harsh light of day.

Maybe she should ask Kaden or Alain to go check on Wesley and the guys. No. They knew how to do their job. And Wesley, well, he was all wolf. He'd be okay. It was the poachers she should be worried about.

Ava got as far as the barn door before a steely hand tightened around her upper arm. As a trickle of alarm shot through her, she took a deep breath, scenting the air.

There was only one man who smelled like a heady combination of wolf, brute, hay, and man.

She should have guessed it was him. But in the back of her mind, she'd been scared that Alain had come after her. Or one of the ranch hands who'd been flirting with her. Neither of those options suited. She'd have to send Alain or a cowboy packing and didn't relish another confrontation.

And she wasn't ready for a conversation with Kaden.

Not when he had her so twisted up inside. Not when she felt like she was on fire from the inside out.

"Let me go Kaden."

"We're not finished yet."

"As soon as I know Chipper is okay, I'm calling Daddy for a helicopter."

His other hand closed around her other bicep and though he didn't pull her back against him, his warmth radiated around her.

"Why?" His voice was low, and dare she hope, colored with confusion.

“I shouldn’t have come here, Kaden.” It’d been a tactical error on her part, thinking that she could come out here and show what she was made of. Strong and capable. Team player and all that.

Thinking that she could remain impartial to Kaden had been her biggest mistake to date. There was no ignoring him. No ignoring the way his big body called to hers. How had she ever thought she could ignore those gorgeous lips or the way they curved upward in the most spine tingling of smiles?

What had possessed her to think that she could outsmart him? Put him off his game, sweep in and finally garner the accolades she’d been hunting for her whole life?

He didn’t say a word, but the careful restraint in his grip made her want to weep.

You’re not a crybaby, she told herself. But that didn’t change the riot of emotions and hormones pumping through her.

There’d been so many nights she’d dreamt of him, of them, meeting like this in the dark. Passion overcoming boundaries and even common sense. And somehow, somewhere in the last forty eight hours those lines had become so thoroughly blurred that she’d forgotten who they were. What they were. What they both wanted.

Out here in the wide open expanse, it was so easy to forget and just feel. Lose sight of the prize and fall for--

Why do you walk away from him? Why do you resist when this is what you both want? The wolf asked. *You know he’s the one.*

Ava was so tired of resisting. But she couldn’t take any more rejection. If only there was a way to make him lose control, lose that carefully built restraint. If he could see how good they’d be together...that’s all she’d wanted.

And he’d shattered that. *Twice.*

But he was here now.

Alive. Warm. Strong.

God help her if she were dreaming. *Again.*

“You’re not dreaming,” he murmured, turning her toward him.

Oh heavens, she must have spoken out loud.

Ava looked the long way up to meet his gaze and felt everything soft and feminine inside her melt. Gone was the wolf hell-bent on destruction. In his place was the handsome, charming man who side-stepped her defenses so easily. Who’d made her forget how he’d carelessly broken her young heart. Who’d wounded her in the wee hours this morning.

In that moment, she couldn’t think of a single reason to deny him, deny herself this pleasure. He was here and the look in his eye said he wasn’t going anywhere. The hand splayed against the small of her back said he was as tired of the carousel ride as she was. The hand cupping her cheek gave her hope.

“Thank God,” she whispered.

With lightning fast reflexes he jerked her against him. She didn’t have a second to react or examine the way her body fit so perfectly against his before his head descended.

Heat blazed down her neck and across her shoulders until her whole body was consumed. His lips met hers with a sense of urgency that matched her own.

Tasting. Exploring. Conquering.

Then, as if she wasn’t close enough, he slid his other arm around her waist, drawing her closer.

He held her prisoner against him, his naked chest rising and falling, rubbing against her hardened nipples. Tension radiated from him and she felt an answering tightness in her own body. Damn, how she wanted him. Right here. Right now.

All the fire and passion banked inside him rushed to the surface, demanding her complete submission. With one large hand pressed against the small of her back and the other splayed between her shoulder blades, he held her close, made her feel safe and cherished.

Arms around his neck, she kissed him back, realizing how inevitable this moment had been. Years of crushing on him. A few months of verbal jabs. Days of physical proximity and temptation, blotted out the past.

This was exactly what she'd been craving. Yearning for, for so very long. Like a rubber band snapping, they'd finally, furiously, come together. Found their way into each other's arms. Stopped resisting.

And now...now he held her like he'd never let her go. Kissed her like she was the only woman he'd ever wanted. She was sure that at any moment they would go up in flames.

What a way to go.

Her inner wolf let out a yelp of pleasure and he groaned low in his throat. What a delicious sound. It reached down inside of her, delighting everything that was feminine and aching to be touched. That single, deep rumble caused an ache between her legs, heavy and tight, that only he could ease.

His tongue teased the seam of her lips and she gasped. Predator that he was, he took immediate advantage, sweeping inside. Hot. Wet. Their breath mingled and her fingers flexed into his skin. Tongues dueling, he pressed the steely length of his erection against her stomach. Her thin tank and yoga pants did nothing to hide his desire. They were a flimsy barrier at best. A barrier she didn't want between them. She moaned as he trailed his lips down her jaw and nipped her ear. Impatient, she reached for the hem of her shirt and tugged it up as another sound joined the mix. The sound of pain.

Chipper.

"Kaden..." She sighed as his lips brushed over hers on the way to her other ear.

Duty called. It always did.

He groaned again, cupping her face between his hands.

“What the hell was that?” he whispered, tipping his forehead against hers. He wasn’t talking about the mournful sound and she knew it.

She stared at his lips, wanting to kiss him again. And never stop. Dragging a ragged breath into her lungs, she met his gaze. He was breathing just as hard as she was. And she could see he was equally dazed.

“I have no idea.” She’d been prepared for a dynamite kiss. Passion. Heat. But she’d never expected to feel like the last two people on earth, consumed by a fire she now feared would never be extinguished. No wonder she’d always followed his movements across the room, found him waiting for her in her dreams.

Their chemistry wouldn’t be denied, no matter how much she’d tried. No matter the history between them. She hadn’t thought of that day in a long time. But being with him now, wrapped in his arms, kissed into oblivion...she could almost forgive him for breaking her heart. His thumbs stroked over her jaws, gentle yet needy.

“Me either,” he mused. “But I want to do it again.”



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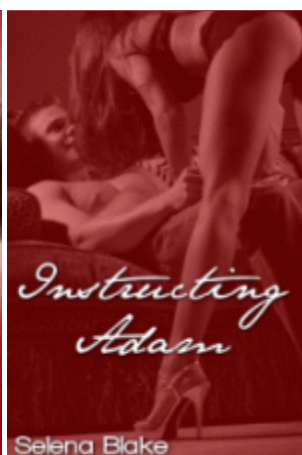
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An action movie buff with a penchant for all things supernatural and sexy, Selena Blake combines her love for adventure, travel and romance into steamy paranormal romance. Selena's books have been called "a steamy escape" and have appeared on bestseller 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>

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