



# The Cowboy and the Demon (Midnight Rodeo #18)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Demon businessman Phillip Darque and his mate, vampire cowboy Cody Knight, have been estranged for decades. Phillip stayed at the corporate offices, while Cody ran the day to day business of the Midnight Rodeo. But when Cody is kidnapped as part of a family coup in the Darque demon clan, Phillip decides hes had enough of them being apart. No one is allowed to hurt his mate, especially not his worthless, politically motivated uncle.

When Cody is kidnapped, he knows hes going to die, and he regrets the stubbornness that has kept him apart from Phillip all these years. Phillip has something his uncle wants, and Cody knows hes just means to an end. But then Phillip comes to his rescue, saving him from final death.

Can Darque and Knight become a team once more and conquer not only their enemies but their personal demons as well?

**Total Pages (Source):** 14

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

One

“Cody’s gone, Phil.”

“What?” Phillip Darque had answered the phone on a whim. He usually didn’t pick up when it rang in the middle of the night. But then again, it usually wasn’t Thack, the arena manager of the rodeo company Phillip co-owned.

And it definitely usually wasn’t Thack telling him his business partner, Cody Knight, had disappeared.

“He’s gone. Just... zip.” Thack’s tone held an urgency he couldn’t ignore.

Phillip blinked. “Well, he does go walkabout on occasion. Check with January. He should know where Cody is.”

January was Thack’s assistant, and he knew everything that happened at the Midnight Rodeo. Hell, he probably had a magical chart showing everyone’s movements throughout the day stashed somewhere.

“No. His trailer is here, Phil. His earth is here.”

Now his hearts began to race in counterpoint to each other. “His horses?”

“Both in the trailer.”

Fuck. Oh, fuck. Phillip rolled out of bed and pulled on yesterday’s pants. “When was

the last time anyone saw him?” he demanded.

“During the show last night. He rode out to wave at the crowd. Anniversary year and all.” The irony was heavy in Thack’s voice.

“I’m aware,” Phillip said, his own voice as dry as Cody’s crypt dust. “Who was looking for him at three a.m.?”

“Kyler Dean. He showed up to ride last week. He was going to Cody’s trailer to have a drink. Found it deserted.”

“So that’s a?—”

“Three-hour window.”

“Fuck.” He tugged on a shirt, then grabbed his phone charger and his laptop to stuff in his go bag.

“That is one way to put it, Boss.” Thack now sounded calm and cool as cucumber. Phillip could feel the lie of it in the core of his belly.

The truth was this terrible, deep panic that Thack was swallowing. Phillip hadn’t felt anything like that from his old demon buddy since Thack’s mate, Uri, had taken off.

Thack cleared his throat. “I’m going to start sending out feelers everywhere from here, and see what we can find. I’ve got a couple of wolves who can sniff around, a few vamps, but I need to know what you what me to do. Should I send out the ghost riders?”

“Don’t touch anything. Leave Cody’s trailer alone. I’ll be there in twenty minutes.”

“From Florida?”

“I’ll take the demon express.” He could pop in and out of dimensions if he tried hard enough. This warranted it.

“I’d tease you about being absent so long if it’s that easy, but it’s really not appropriate.”

Not appropriate at all, but Thack was too vitally important to be sent back to Hell.

“Stop it with the projected rage, Phillip. You don’t have time to fuck with me. See if you can make it in ten. Call in favors if you have to, but the boss needs to come home.”

“I hear you. Twenty minutes.” He shoved the phone in his back pocket once he rang off.

He needed half of those minutes to pack that go bag and to get his shit together. He collected his bag, shoving things in, willy-nilly, before walking over to the little golden birdcage hanging over his bed and unlocking the door. “Come on, my dear.”

Flaming red eyes opened, an infernal light in a pure black face crowned with horns, and her tiny little hands rubbed together, her wings unfurling.

Selena didn’t speak; she couldn’t, but her eagerness was obvious. She loved to play.

Phillip thought he might need her and her unique abilities if someone had dared to actually do Cody any harm. “That’s right. Somebody’s messed with what’s mine, and you know how I feel about that.”

Her smile was the only flash of white in her entire countenance, and those teeth,

though tiny, were malicious, sharp as needles. There was only one thing in heaven, hell, and earth that he loved more than this little imp.

And Cody was now missing.

Cody sure as fuck had no idea where he was or what the sam hell was going on, but he did know that everything burned. His entire goddamn world was like lightning slamming into him over and over again.

It wasn't sunlight—that he couldn't survive—but it was something bright and awful and endless. And it hurt.

Cody wasn't sure what the fuck had happened. A knock had sounded at his trailer door, interrupting his nightly review of the accounts, and then?

Nothing.

He knew he'd fought. He could still taste demon blood on his fangs, which was handy because it could keep him going for a week, maybe more. He had no doubt they were going to starve him, whoever they were.

They always went for starvation. Demons were predictable, after all, and vampires needed blood to survive, but they could linger for a long time with tiny sips.

Low-hanging fruit.

Starving wasn't what Cody was worried about. What he was worried about was that he wasn't home, he was surrounded by light, and he wasn't going to be able to sleep. Not even for a second.

Not without the earth of his homeland nearby. He kept it under his bed in a carved

wooden box, carefully hidden where it didn't become a conversation piece or a temptation to steal.

Starvation was hard, but not being able to sleep? That could make a guy crazy.

“What are we supposed to do with him now?”

Cody stilled, trying to catch more snatches of conversation, trying to recognize who the threat was, because then he could know how to kill it.

“We're supposed to take him to Jean-Luc.”

He tilted his head. Jean-Luc? Interesting.

The only Jean-Luc he knew, who would have demon blood attached, was Phillip Darque's uncle.

Figured this would have to do with Phillip's people, and Jean-Luc was the worst.

Stupid son of a bitch didn't bother to research that he and Phillip had been broken up for what? Decades, give or take a few years.

Darque and Knight had been around when people called them traveling bands. Minstrels sometimes.

Wild West shows.

That was when it had really gotten started.

Minstrel shows had been fun, sure. The food had been decent, the crowd interesting and well-soaked, but Wild West shows were where Cody had tied on and where he'd

truly flourished. Cowboys crawling out of the dark, hungry for excitement late at night when the sun had left the land.

Looking for something special. Something risqué and perverse and not quite mundane.

Oh, Phillip had been fun then—the demon had loved watching the men feed their desires, pour their hard-earned money into one temptation after another.

The sex had been phenomenal. Phillip knew just how to turn him inside out, leave him blood-glutted and boneless and ready to go again the next night.

He had absolutely gotten over it.

Still. Cody was going to have to have a talk with Jean-Luc the idiot, because it didn't matter if they had kidnapped him, if they were going to kill him, what have you.

Phillip didn't care.

Phillip had other things to do.

Phillip was busy.

Phillip was a giant gangrenous dick, and Cody would rip his head off just as soon as see him.

Fuck that ice-cold prick who could just walk away from all their years together and sit in an icy, air-conditioned penthouse in the land of the happy mouse.

Still, there was a very quiet part inside of him that hoped that, if he didn't survive this whole going to see the uncle, head of the demonic family of assholes thing?

Somewhere. Phillip would know.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Two

Phillip studied Cody's trailer.

"He fought them."

"Of course he did. He's Cody Fucking Knight." Thack sounded worried but also proud. Phillip understood. Cody never went down without a hell of a fight.

His back to Thack, who stood just outside the door, he closed his eyes and breathed in the scent of Cody. His body clenched, and his hands tightened into fists. Gods, he missed that smell, missed the vampire who carried it, with every fiber of his being.

He'd chosen his demon family over Cody one time, and it had been the worst mistake of his long life. Cody had never forgiven him, and he was still paying for it by always having to see Cody's name, to hear it on other people's lips, without getting to have the man himself.

He took a deep breath. Okay, he was here to find Cody, not to play woe is me, reminiscing, and recrimination.

"Anything?" Thack asked.

"Mmm." He scanned the trailer, noting the overturned knickknacks, the pillows and bedding strewn about, the desk, which he knew Cody preferred psychotically neat, disarranged. Then he went to lift the mattress on the box bed, relief flooding him when he saw that Cody's earth was still there.

“You’re right. They didn’t know about his dirt. Or they didn’t care. I want someone on this trailer twenty-four seven, guarding it until he comes back.”

“Yessir. I’ll put January on it.”

He closed his eyes again, this time trying to pick out any scent that wasn’t Cody. There was a big cat, but that was probably the security person who worked for the rodeo. There was a deep, earthy scent that was no doubt Kyler Dean, who had come by for a drink. That wicked fae man had an affinity for the dirt that kept him on the backs of bulls and horses like no one except maybe Raven Walkingman.

No one rode like that bastard. No one ever?—

What was that?

There was a drop of blood on the mattress.

He leaned down, sniffing.

Demons.

Not just demons. Demons from his own goddamn clan.

Phillip stood, whirling to stride to the door of the trailer. “I have some calls to make,” he told Thack. “Get someone on guarding his earth.”

“What is it?”

His jaw went tight as frozen rope. “My family.”

“Aw shit.” Thack shook his head. “This is gonna bite you in the ass.”

“It already has.” He was going to rip heads from bodies. He was going to kill anything that had touched his mate.

But first he would try the diplomatic approach and see what the hell they wanted.

It wouldn’t work.

It never worked, but he had to?—

Selena screamed, and Thack blinked at her, staring but carefully not touching. “What is it?”

She ignored Thack altogether and screamed for him again, zooming back into the trailer, hovering over the floor on the far side of the desk.

There was a ring there—simple and solid, a gold band, a big cabochon ruby set in the center. That was the ring he’d given Cody, years ago.

Rage filled him, and he picked it up, grasping it as if he could feel Cody through it. “Someone left a message, I think.”

“Definitely. He still wears that, man.”

Phillip glared at Thack, advancing on him. “What did you say?”

Thack didn’t back down. “Every motherfucking day.”

“Then did he leave it for me?” Was it supposed to be a clue? Or was Cody just hiding it from Phillip’s family?

“I wasn’t here. I just know I’ve never seen him without it.”

He squeezed the ring, and he heard Cody's agonized yell ringing through him.

"I will kill every one of them, Thack. I swear it."

Selena screamed again, shrill, witnessing his promise. She understood. She felt what he felt.

"How you gonna find him?"

"I'm going to start by calling my fucking uncle."

"Well, you let me know where we're going, and I'll rally the troops. Cody's ours. We're not letting him go."

He nodded. That had always been the way. Cody was a cowboy. The rodeo people had chosen him, and Phillip had been relegated to the cold corporate offices. He understood. If anyone was accustomed to it, it was him. He'd always favored a suit to boots and hats. But he was sick to death of being banished.

It was time to get back into the bloody game.

Thack grinned at him, as if he heard. "We're not letting you go either, you know. We never have."

"Yeah, yeah." He wasn't sure he bought it. Just because Cody hadn't let him sell out of Darque and Knight didn't mean he was part of anything but paying the bills.

"This is Darque and Knight Rodeo Company, you son of a bitch," Cody had told him. "Kind of stupid without the Darque."

Thack just stared him down again, completely unafraid. Phillip loved that about the

stubborn asshole.

He just didn't care.

"I need a place to set up an office, Thack. Not here. I need to be without the distraction of— of feeling him."

"Not a problem. I can put you in one of the storage trailers. Unless you want to sit with the bulls. Those assholes are searching for a reason."

"Nah. Selena would just terrorize them." And he needed her focused. He handed her Cody's ring. "We need to find him, sweet. But you must be careful. They can't know about you."

She purred, chirruping softly, and wrapped around the ring. She adored Cody, even if she didn't know why.

"That's right, sweet. Go. Find him for me. And then bring me to him. And we will rain terror down on them."

She spun, pure joy emanating from her. Terror and chaos were her favorite things.

She zipped off in a puff of black soot, leaving the ring in his palm.

Thack looked at him. "I almost feel sorry for whoever took the boss. Almost." Then Thack smiled, and there was row after row of those sharp teeth, like a sentient shark. "But not quite."

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Three

Cody couldn't see anymore. The light had burned straight through everything that he had. Being bound the way that he was, he couldn't even cover his eyes.

So he didn't try.

He stayed still.

Perfectly still.

He told himself stories. He recounted hundreds and hundreds of tales. He spoke to Thack. He spoke to Raven. He spoke to Denver at length.

Most of all, he talked to Phillip.

He knew without question that Phillip hadn't been behind this.

It never even was an option.

Phillip didn't hate him. The demon didn't care enough about him to hate him. Basically, the best Cody had made Phillip was tired.

He wanted passion and heat and excitement.

And love.

There were those who would say that demons were incapable of love, but he knew better. Even if he hadn't experienced it himself, he knew better.

Thack loved Uri. Loved him enough to sacrifice everything, in fact, but more than that—or in addition to that perhaps?—Thack loved the rodeo. He loved Denver. He loved January. And in his own weird way, he loved every rider that came through.

So he knew that demons could love.

Phillip had loved him once.

But time had passed, and Phillip had decided that it was more important to be the demon than it was to be Cody's mate.

"I can't play cowboy forever," Phillip had said.

Cody had rolled his eyes. "I've been a cowboy forever."

"We have business dealings. We have status. Come home with me, and we can run the important part of the business together."

"Phillip, Darque and Knight is our business."

"Yes, well, I meant a demon business. One that spans dimensions. Eons. Darque and Knight will fizzle someday, love."

And that was why they had broken up.

When it came right back to brass tacks, which it always did, the rodeo wasn't real to Phillip. And in one of those vast demon-held halls that Phillip did business in, Cody would be nothing but a plaything.

Just a silly little toy to be left behind in some room while demons did their work.

He'd be well-fed, well-clothed, and trotted out to be shown off. To be the ornament and the oddity. An embarrassment, maybe.

But he would never be an equal. He'd been human once, before he was turned.

So he would never be a partner.

Phillip would never be his.

And didn't that fact hurt his soul?

And all that nonsense about how vampires didn't have souls was smoke and mirrors bullshit from books written by repressed little men and from television shows that had more charm than substance.

He had his soul. It was just a really old one.

He'd been saving his strength to make an attack when they released him, but he was beginning to understand that they had no intention of letting him go. That wasn't the real end game here. And if they did let him leave, what did it matter?

He had lost time and space. He'd even stopped being hungry.

The last words he'd ever spoken to Phillip were, "I'll take care of it."

Those words were the last thing he said to Phillip on the phone every time they spoke.

Because they only spoke about business. Phillip only called when he wanted



something.

Lower food costs.

Replace the tires on the semi that carries the bulls.

It's time to renew the bullfighters' contracts.

The wards are slipping. I keep seeing stuff on the dark web.

There was always something, ticked off of someone's list, that somehow couldn't be dealt with by e-mail.

Cody would listen. He would record everything Phillip wanted done in memory. Then he would say, "I'll take care of it."

Then, once he hung up the phone, he decided whether not he'd actually do it. It was kind of a fifty-fifty thing. Sometimes, he didn't do stuff just to piss Phillip off and see what he could get away with.

"I still love you," he told Imaginary Phillip. "Even though I've been waiting for you for years, and you'll never come. Even though your family are the ones who came between us, and they're going to actually kill me. I still love you. That's probably crazy. I know it's stupid, but I still love you. I hope you miss me, son of a bitch. I hope it burns, and I hope when I come back to this existence, I'm gorgeous and stunning and absolutely uninterested in your happy ass so that when you ask me if I wanna knock boots, I say no."

That last thought would have made him smile, if he could smile. But he couldn't.

Not anymore.

Anything he had left was cracked and dried, and his face didn't want to move at all.

But man, if he could, he so would.

"I am disappointed in my nephew, I must say."

Okay, that was new. Cody tried to blink, but nothing happened. He made a gurgling sort of noise, because that was what he had, but he figured it sounded like a big old question mark, just as he meant it.

"My nephew, you see, has something I want. So I took something of his."

Suddenly he could smell blood. Pig maybe, but blood, nonetheless. And it was coming close. The man who was talking pushed a bag of the stuff up to his mouth.

Cody wanted to refuse it, but he tore into it with fangs that felt loose and sore, the rush of it in his mouth almost making him spit it right back up.

It wasn't enough. But it was a start, and his lips started to work again. So did his tongue.

"Jean-Luc, huh?"

"Yes. Yes, and I am waiting for Phillip to contact me, but perhaps he's not as intelligent as I think he is." The dickhead paced back and forth in front of him, his slick shoes ringing on... what? Boards set on metal?

"Maybe he just don't care, asshole."

"Oh, my dear. He cares. I know this. And I imagine he's trying to figure out how to come get you without having to deal with me. But you see, I need what he stole from

me.”

“You just here to monologue? ’Cause I’m having trouble focusing.”

“Mmm. Do you need more blood, little toy?”

“Fuck you.” His body strained, trying to get out of the bonds that held him.

“No, thank you. I prefer females, frankly, and I like my partners quite submissive.”

“I just bet you do. Like dead submissive.”

“Tell me how to get him to call. Should I send a pinky finger?” The growl told him he’d annoyed the guy.

He tried to move his fingers. Did he still have them? “Knock yourself out. He doesn’t give a shit.”

“Oh, my dear Mr. Knight. Phillip has lived on the mortal plane for a very long time so he can maintain a connection to you. He could have severed the business contract decades ago if he just didn’t care. No, I will use you to get him here, and then I will destroy you both.”

“Well, you be careful what you wish for, motherfucker.” But a cold chill went through him. This demon knew Phillip as well as anyone ever had, he reckoned.

What if Jean-Luc was right?

As much as Cody wanted to punch Phillip in his smug damn face, the last thing he wanted the man to do was die. For him. For coming to get him.

Fuck a goddamn duck.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Four

Phillip took a deep breath.

Okay, it was time to make the call. He had a command center set up at the rodeo, which was staying put for as long as it took to get Cody back. Thankfully, they were somewhere in Oklahoma, and they could play sold-out shows for weeks, if need be.

He had Selena out looking for Cody. He had the backing of every soul who worked for Darque and Knight. And he had run every scenario he could think of three or four times.

He was as ready as he was going to be.

So he pulled out his phone and called the number he knew would get him to who he needed to talk to.

“Darque Industries.”

“I need Jean-Luc Darque.”

“I’m sorry, he’s?—”

“This is Phillip Darque.”

“One moment, Sir.”

That was what he had thought.

He waited silently, not fidgeting. Not pacing. Just sitting. The way to get around this entire ridiculous situation was to remain calm. Quiet.

Patient.

His uncle didn't do patient, so the way to outwit him was to sit and outwait him.

"Well. Hello there, nephew. Obviously, you're not as stupid as I thought you were."

"What do you want?" He didn't waste time on pleasantries. He really didn't care. He knew what Jean-Luc wanted. Someone wanted the same thing he'd always wanted.

The Seren Ddu.

The Black Star jewel had been stolen from one of the kings of Hell, and it had been the reason that their family had been so successful over the years. Using blackmail and whatever they needed to protect it from retrieval, they had kept it safe from all comers.

Phillip had won it from his uncle in a poker game, and Jean-Luc had been foolish enough to believe that Phillip wouldn't keep it.

But he had.

For a very long time.

"You know full well what I want, and I expect it to be sent to me, or we'll start delivering pieces of your beloved vampire." Jean-Luc chuckled, the sound bubbling with a vicious mirth. "I don't think he's quite sane anymore. I could start with one of

his eyes. I mean, I'm not sure they work at all now. He would hardly miss it. I could scoop it out with a spoon."

"Are you quite finished, or shall I let you ramble on and leave you on speaker. I have things to do." Phillip was raging, boiling inside, but he didn't even let a squeak of it out. Pure control. "As I'm sure Knight's told you, I don't care. We're not in item."

"Don't lie to me."

He allowed one corner of his mouth to curl, knowing that Jean-Luc would be able to hear it in his voice. "Now, Uncle. Would I lie to you?"

Selena was moving, sliding through the night unseen and furious. He could feel it. Once she found Cody, she would raise the alarm.

"I'm serious. I'm tired of playing. I want the stone back. I have something of yours. You have something of mine. Simple."

"It wasn't yours anymore. You wagered on it, and you lost. Then it became mine."

"Regardless, the family needs it. You are still a Darque. If you know what's good for you, you will give it back."

He shrugged. "I made my own way in the universe. The name does amuse me though. It goes so well on the rodeo tents."

A long snarl slid through the phone line. "I'll take one of your precious rodeo people a day, until it's returned to me."

"That's not possible."

“What?”

“It’s no longer in my possession.” He let the truth of that ring out, knowing Jean-Luc would hear it.

“You lost it?”

“I gave it away.”

“You... you gave it away?”

“I did.” And it had been one of the best trades of his entire life, if he were honest, which he tended to be.

When it amused him.

“No.” Jean-Luc’s voice hardened. “No you did not. How could you? You’re still one of the richest men in the human world.”

“What can I say?” He shrugged one shoulder. Jean-Luc couldn’t see him, but Phillip knew gestures came through in his voice, allowing him to sound as insouciant as he needed to. “I’m good at making money.”

“We’re talking about war in a demon dimension, you little fuck. That could spill over into your realm.”

“There’s always war in some demon dimension, Uncle.” Come on. I need a hint. Where is he?

“Yes, but there hasn’t been one in my holding in three centuries, and I don’t intend to start now.”



“So Cody is with you?”

Jean-Luc sneered. “I would not sully my holding with his flesh.”

That meant Cody was on the mortal plane. That made it much easier.

“Heavens forfend,” he drawled.

“Watch your mouth!”

“It’s hard to do, Uncle. My eyes don’t look that direction. Look, I can’t give you what you want, but I’m willing to meet and talk about it.” There. He’d worked in what he really wanted. Tell me where you are, you bastard.

“You’ll bring me that stone, or I’ll cut your vampire into bits!”

“I’ll let you know where it is.” Find him, Serena. I need him back with me. He’s in this world. And he would make Cody whole again if it killed him.

That was the least he could do.

“I thought you didn’t have it.”

“I don’t. But I know where it is.”

Suddenly his mind was flooded by the image of a semi-truck in an abandoned parking lot in the middle of nowhere.

He could work with that. Show me anything that stands out, lovely. Road signs. The horizon.

She could do it. He knew she could.

“Are you listening to me?”

“No. You’re getting shrill.” Shit, what had he missed? “And I’m bored.”

“BORED!”

“Uh-huh.”

He got Route 66 and a flash of an old Oklahoma flag, a worn-down truck stop. Perfect.

He cleared his throat. “I’m done now, old demon. Oh, and by the way, trust me—I’m a great big fuck.”

Then he hung up, going to the door. “Someone get me Kelly. Now.”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Five

Cody heard the tiniest little chitter nearby.

Bigger than a spider, bigger than a bird. Smaller than a raccoon, and it smelled right.

Smelled familiar. It smelled like Phillip and brimstone.

“Serena,” he whispered. At least he heard the name in his head.

Phillip was looking for him. Either that or he was so close to death that he was hallucinating. And no matter how what way, he didn’t care.

Other beings got angels. He got an imp.

“My wrists, the cuffs please. Please. We have to do that. We have to turn off?—”

He realized he couldn’t see the light anymore. There was just emptiness there; at least he assumed there was. There was just nothing.

It was all right.

No one had to know. He just needed to get out. He could get free, and he could at least take one with him.

He felt her wings brush against his hand, loosening the cuffs that surrounded him. Christ.

So strong, so beautiful. She was wicked smart, that little beast. And she really was there.

“That’s right, don’t stop. If I can get free...” Then maybe he could get out. He realized he didn’t know if it was daytime or nighttime, how many days he’d been in here.

He didn’t remember anything.

That wasn’t true.

He knew Selena was here, and, in the end, that Phillip cared enough to send someone for him.

She chirped again, and his hand sprang free. Okay. Yeah. That was good. Until his other wrist popped out of the cuff and he hit the floor. Bang.

The floor. Which was rough planking over metal? Not stone then. Not some demon prison.

“Is it daylight?”

He wasn’t sure. If he went out in the sun, he was done for, he knew.

Somehow, though, he trusted it was nighttime. He could feel the cool comfort of night, and he knew that Selena was offering it to him, the darkness.

“I can’t see. So we’re going to get out, and we’re going to run. We’re going to run, and we’re going to hide, and then I’ll figure out what to do next.”

He crawled, moving slowly, trying not to make a sound. The planks were crude, but

his skin was too leathered to let the splinters pass. They just broke under his nail and skittered away.

He was so focused on his endless trip that it startled him when he ran into a body lying on the floor close by.

He ran his hand over the form, and then he smelled the blood. Hurt then, maybe dying. Good.

He kept touching—Belt, shirts, buttons, buttons, buttons. Oh, yes!

His fingers sank into the newly opened maw of the demon's throat, the blood, sticky and ichorous.

“Good job, Serena. Good job.”

That was one guard. He knew there was at least another one.

But where one died, the other would have too.

He found the latch to the door, and he opened it quickly, knowing that, no matter what, there was going to be noise. The only advantage he had was the element of surprise.

The real surprise happened when he stepped out, and he tripped—tripped over the other dead demon and went crashing to the dirt and asphalt.

It sucked and he wasn't sure he still had a nose, but it was a surprise.

“We have to run,” he ground out, fumbling to his leaden feet.

He felt little claws in his hair, holding on tight, and she twisted his head, pointing him.

He got it immediately. “Right. You steer, I run.”

Somehow. Some way. They were going to manage this.

“Here.” Kelly pointed to the map. “Go get him.”

“Good man.” It was maybe half an hour away, this truck stop. They could make it well before dawn. “The truck is ready?”

“Yes. It’s prepared for him.” That was January. “The sunlight won’t bother him, should it come to that.”

“Thank you.” He headed out to the vehicle. He was going in light. Just him. Selena was already there. He would bet his uncle was at a hotel somewhere waiting. The closest swanky one. So he would just have to take out guards.

That he could do. Fuck, he could do anything if it got Cody back to him. Even if Cody never forgave him, he needed his damn mate safe, happy, and back at the rodeo where he belonged.

Selena was being very quiet, concentrating on who knew what, but that meant her mental communication with him was muted. Barely there.

He hoped she was creating chaos and havoc, no matter what it was she was doing, and he hoped it involved a lot of blood.

Possibly a little bit of pain.

Of course she could save the pain part for him. He would love to inflict a little pain.

He kept moving, Kelly in an earpiece in case something else occurred to the psychic.

He drove like the hounds of hell themselves were on his heels. So fast and so sure that not even the state troopers dared to flash their lights at him.

Sometimes, it was good to be a demon.

He made the truck stop just as the very hints of dawn were beginning to lighten the sky. He had to get Cody safe before dawn really broke.

Phillip found what he had hoped for when he sprang out of the vehicle, which was still rocking on its springs. Death and destruction—but also what he hadn't expected, which was no Cody and no Selena inside the tractor trailer.

Okay, this was going to be a problem.

He stood in the center of all the bloody mess and closed his eyes, concentrating hard.

Where are you, Cody? Where? Serena? I'm here. I need my mate.

Surely Cody could hear him. Once upon a time, they had connected this way. And he knew Selena could hear him. She always did.

A slash of pure darkness came hurtling toward him, Serena's fiery eyes flashing, beckoning him in a pure fury.

"There you are, you gorgeous imp. Where is he?"

She grabbed his sleeve, singeing it, and pulled hard.

He didn't bother to answer; he simply ran, trusting in Selena to guide him.

She led him right to Cody's body, making a beeline for her favorite bloodsucker. He was face down in the dirt, looking like a husk of himself, like a discarded Halloween costume.

Part of Phillip's soul was absolutely screaming. It was having a fit knowing that his lover was dead or near to it.

But that cold, calculating part of himself simply grabbed Cody up, heedless of injury. Phillip ran because the sun was coming, and the sun was the worst enemy at this point.

His uncle could wait.

He had the earth from Cody's original home, and he had blackout blankets in the back of the vehicle.

As soon as they could get somewhere safe, he would let Cody feed, and then they would figure this whole thing out.

Possibly assassinate his uncle.

Selena seemed to understand, her little body flying around him like a tiny tornado or a dust devil, helping to guide him back to the vehicle and keep a cloud of dirt shielding them from the dawn.

That made him chuckle, even in his sheer panic.

Dust Devil.



Phillip tried to remind himself to be aware of his uncle's minions, but he realized that—even though they could handle the sun—they weren't used to it and they didn't like it, so they would be disoriented at best.

So he ran.

He got Cody into the truck and got him covered, ignoring the weird angles of bones and scent of pain. It was horrifying, but it was repairable. Cody wasn't gone yet.

This could be fixed. Vampires were fucking resilient.

It had to get fixed.

“Watch him, Serena. Make sure he stays covered up. I've got to get us somewhere safe.” Serena's wings fluttered in agreement, and they headed off, leaving the blood-soaked trailer behind them.

“Well, this is more fun than color TV. Call Thackery.”

It didn't take long at all for Thack to snarl, “What?”

“You sound just about as excited to hear from me as always.”

“Yeah. You got him?”

“Got him. Bringing him in bad shape.” So bad that if he thought about it too hard, bile rose in his throat.

“You need medical?”

“I'll let you know.”

“We’ll be ready, one way or the other.” Thack was nothing if not prepared. And his assistant January was preternaturally efficient.

“Thanks, old man.”

“That’s ripe from you, calling me old,” Thack grumbled. “Bring him home.”

“I will. You can clean up his trailer now. I don’t need the evidence anymore.” He would take Cody to the rodeo trailer, then take said trailer back to Cody’s ranch.

But the rodeo grounds first.

“January is on it.”

“We’ll be there soon.”

He gunned it, flying through the dawn, racing the sunrise.

He didn’t beat it. The red and orange fingers of light streaked the sky, but there was no telltale smell of burning. No sizzle.

Cody was well-hidden.

He slid into the empty space in front of Cody’s trailer thirty-five minutes later, the tires sliding on dirt and gravel.

An entire army of rodeo folks surrounded them, keeping Cody covered as Phillip carried him to the trailer.

“You’ll need blood?” Denver asked, the big werewolf right there to offer help, a cowboy hero through and through. “The pack can donate. Doc can set it up.”

The question was asked as they walked Cody in, and Phillip unbent enough to smile at the bullfighter. “You’re not just gonna let him take it from the source?”

Denver chuckled softly and met his eyes. “No, sir. Not unless it’s an emergency. The mate bond is kind of growly.”

“Understood. If the pack is willing, it would be welcomed.”

“We’re on it.”

A ring of shining dragons began to form around the trailer. The barrel racers stood firm, creating a circle of protection and magic in a show of strength.

“Thank you, ladies.”

One of them bowed her head. “It is our honor, boss.”

That defense meant he could go in with Thack and trust that no one else was coming in. “Close and lock the door.”

“It’s bad.” That wasn’t asking a question, was just a statement of fact.

“I know. We need to get him cleaned, and we need to get him fed. We’re going to have to hold him down though, because he’ll be feral. He’s starving, and no one knows how much other damage has been done.”

“Are we going to war?” That was a question. It was serious.

“Yes.” Phillip would love to deny it, but this was going too far. And if his uncle was that desperate for the relic, he wouldn’t stop coming at them somehow, some way.

“My uncle wants something I have.”

He laid Cody out on the big bed at one end of the trailer, checking the shuttered windows before he pulled back the blankets.

“Fuck a duck,” Thack snarled. “Let’s feed your uncle to Uri. It would be fun to watch.”

“It would be.” That fallen angel could really do some damage. “Though really I just want to destroy him and then salt the ground.”

“Good one. You need me to hold him down, you said?”

“Yes. I need to clean him up and examine him. Then I’ll feed him.”

“Got it.” Thack rolled up his sleeves. “Son-of—bitch, he looks like shit.”

“Yeah.” That didn’t matter. Cody was his. He hurt for his mate, and rage boiled in him at his uncle, but he didn’t care what Cody looked like as long as a spark of consciousness was in there. “Let me get towels and water and all.”

“I’ll follow your lead,” Thack said.

“Good man.” Phillip nodded, then moved to pull out first aid stuff and cloths and run hot water. If he had to, he would immerse Cody in the little tub, but he had a feeling the stillness they saw right now would explode into survival rage in an instant. Cody had made it quite a way blindly following Serena. He knew it was blindly because those poor eyes looked burned, dark stains surrounding them, blisters formed on the skin.

Thack moved to Cody’s side, and as soon as Phillip nodded at him, he put his hands on Cody, holding him down.

Cody exploded into movement, but it only lasted seconds before it became sluggish, weak. It broke Phillip's black hearts.

"I'm right here, love," he told Cody. "I promise, soon you'll be well enough to hate me all over again."

Thack chuckled softly but never said a word, just holding Cody down, even when he stopped fighting.

Phillip kept at it, gently cleaning his lover until he could cover Cody with sheets and not worry about the skin peeling off when they came away.

"Okay, Thack. I'm going to feed him. When Denver has blood ready, have someone bring it to me. We'll need all the donors we can get, the more magical the better."

"I'll help, so will Uri. I'll rope the dragons into helping too. Assuming they've got blood. They may not. Who knows with big lizards? Maybe they could just lick him all over."

He glanced up at Thack. "You are a weird son of a bitch."

"I'm a demon who captures other demons and is mated to an angel, so yeah."

He guessed Thack had a point.

Thack nodded. "You'll go a long way toward helping. Mates are the best, or so the other vamps tell me." Thack tilted his head. "Oh, we have a unicorn. Unicorns are pretty magical. We'll see if he won't give a bag. That's gotta be better than dragon spit."

"Go away. Thack, I trust you to organize this whole thing and get it running. I'm

gonna work on keeping him alive.”

Thack winked at him and then headed out, locking the door markedly behind him.

Phillip took off his boots and his jeans, then his shirt. “This is a shitty reason to get back into bed with you, you know that, right? For fuck’s sake, I would have just come if you’d asked.”

Cody didn’t respond, but he knew somewhere the vampire heard him. He had no doubt of it.

He pulled the covers over them, then yanked Cody against him. “You’re going to feed now. I want you to take what you need. I can handle it.” He guided Cody’s mouth to his neck.

Nothing happened.

Fuck. He’d hoped Cody was in there enough to sink in fangs.

Phillip pulled back to look at Cody’s slack face. This might get challenging.

“Come on, you son of a bitch. Feed.” He cut a small, shallow divot in his own skin with his nails, waiting for the blood to run.

That was when Cody struck like a fucking snake, so fast it left him dizzy. Those fangs sank into his skin, and the pain tore into him. There was nothing sexual here, not like it always had been between him and Cody.

This was about survival.

Phillip arched up, his heels drumming on the mattress as Cody pushed him down on

his back. He reached up, his instinct to ward Cody off, but instead he pulled his mate closer, urging him to drink deeply, to nourish himself. It was unlikely to kill Phillip no matter how much Cody took.

Though it wasn't impossible.

His fingers and his toes started to tingle, his body on fire. It hurt so damn bad, but this was just a tiny bit of the penance he owed Cody for everything that had happened.

Cody drank and drank. He snarled when Phillip tried to push him away, fangs sinking deeper.

Screaming, Phillip gave into it, letting Cody have him. As long as Cody survived, it would be worth it.

Then he heard a roar, and there was a terrible flash of light before Cody was torn away from him and he was sent flying off the bed.

"Have you lost your goddamn mind?" Thack shouted at him. "He could have killed you."

Cody crouched on the bed, those burned eyes starting to heal themselves, but he wasn't in there yet. Not really. He was ready to spring, to attack him and Thack in a heartbeat.

Maybe faster than that, since Phillip's hearts had slowed down to a thud that made his head ache.

"He needed it." His voice sounded thin to his own ears.

Cody growled, his body vibrating, but then an angel in riding leathers stepped

forward, holding up a hand and... singing.

Uri.

Thack's mate just... glowed.

After just a few seconds, Phillip's hearts started to beat more regularly, and Cody slumped down on the bed, a moan coming from deep in his chest.

"We brought blood," Uri said. "We'll start with the unicorn."

"Thanks." His lips felt stiff.

"You're welcome." Thack hauled him up and handed him a bag of blood. "Uri will help keep him calm while you administer it. No more straight from the source until he's better."

"Sure." He looked at his fingers as they closed around the bag. He could see them move, but not really feel it. Whoa.

He stumbled to Cody's side, letting Uri keep Cody down while he held the bag up to pierce it on those fangs.

After a moment, Cody grabbed the bag and demolished it, licking and sucking at the blood like a rabid animal.

Three bags later, Cody sat back on his heels, blinking at them, his eyes still cloudy but possibly working now.

"You with us, boss? You hearing us?" Thack sounded worried to him.



“Hear.” Cody creaked, the sound like doors opening. “Hear.”

“Good deal. That’s great.” Thack beamed, his horns glinting as they grew a little.

“Have more, love.” He could tell from the fiery sparks in this bag that it was phoenix blood. They had one of those on the crew too.

Cody struck, but it wasn’t desperate, just hungry now, and the firelight flickered in his eyes.

That was it. Phillip felt satisfaction fill him. Cody was back with them. Thank fuck.

A soft knock sounded, and Thack answered it, his assistant January bringing in a covered tray. “Food for you, Phillip. To help you get your strength built back up.”

“Rare meat?”

“Yes, among other things.”

“Thanks, January.”

“Good to see you, Boss.” January ducked back out.

Cody’s eyes rolled, searching him out, and when they landed, they tried to focus. Phillip .

“Hello, love.”

You came for me?

Of course I did, you ass.

Fuck you.

Was that a smile? He thought it was a smile.

You going to make it? Phillip asked.

We'll see. Do I still have a dick?

Horror filled him at the thought of his uncle cutting it off.

Made you look , Cody taunted.

I might kill you myself.

You worked hard to bring me back. Go eat. I'm tired.

Sleep now, love. I'll be right here. He could eat here in the trailer. His other option was the makeshift office, and that sucked. He wanted to be with Cody. Near him.

Stay .

Cody's fingers wrapped around his wrist, holding on tight.

"I'll be right here." He let Thack put the food tray down next to him, and he sat by Cody, ready to guard his sleep. "The dragons are keeping watch."

"And we're going to be turning demons away," Thack muttered. "Until we get this whole thing buttoned down."

"Yes. No one who's not pack, one of us, or Brax." He settled in, tearing at his almost raw steak.

“You got it. No one I don’t approve. You have my word.”

“Thank you, Thack. I want to rest with him now.” They could pick up the war later. He was exhausted. And relieved.

“You got it.” Thack absconded without another word, leaving them together, alone, in the dark.

He pushed the tray aside, done with eating, and wrapped himself around Cody. To his surprise, there was no fighting him. Cody relaxed right into him.

They progressed, more than they had in decades.

Too damn bad Cody had to be mostly dead for this to work.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Six

Cody did nothing but eat and sleep for days. He felt the trailer move underneath him, knew that things were moving, going in and out around them.

And he could smell it when the terrain changed. West Texas had a feeling in the air, a scent to it. Phillip was taking him to the ranch.

We're going home? Are you bringing everyone? They need to be safe.

The whole kit and caboodle. Some of the day workers opted to move on, but the rodeo is coming to the ranch.

He relaxed, knowing that both he and Phillip, as well as his people, would be safe at the ranch. His wards were great, his ranch remote, and he would just dare that demon uncle of Phillip's to try to set foot on his land.

The bastard would fry.

Phillip's chuckle stroked his ear. "Will he now?"

Yes.

"I like that idea, love."

That low, growly voice sent a shiver down his newly sensitive spine.

Love? He wanted to know that was true.

You have always been that, Cody. I've never stopped loving you. Never. He felt Phillip's hands on him.

He wanted to scream, to cry, to hold on tight. The thing he did was hold on, because his voice was blown still, and tear production was nil.

It was too much. It wasn't enough. And he was too damn sick to deal with it.

"Rest, Cody. I'll be here when you wake up."

He closed his eyes, which were mostly working, and went right back to sleep.

When he woke much later, the world was still again, and he felt the difference in the bed. They were home.

They were home, and Phillip was here. With him.

He opened his eyes, but they weren't right. Not yet. They felt covered in a film. So he closed them and used his hands to explore the bed. He found Phillip right away, sitting up against the headboard.

You okay?

"I like your house."

Thanks .

"I was just reading. How are you feeling? Need a snack?"

I'm tired, but it feels good to be here.

"It's damn good for you to be with me, Cody. That whole situation terrified me."  
Phillip put his book aside.

I don't intend to do it again, no. What did he want?

"He wants something I have. A family relic that has been around for a long time."

Serena. He knew that Selena was a live representation of that relic, and that there was no going back from that. It was ingenious on Phillip's part to give Selena a physical form and keep the family's good-luck charm, but give her a will of her own.

"Yes."

Damn. Why?

There's a demon war coming, love. He needs her to keep the wolves at bay, so to speak. Not our pack of course. He won't give up.

Then we destroy him. He can't have Serena. She's special.

She is. And I will protect both of you with my life. Phillip's mental voice went hard. Growly. Which was so damn hot.

And if Cody could think that, he must be feeling better.

I want to help.

You need to rest and heal. That's how you help. Lord Phillip was bossy.

I could use more blood, Cody admitted.

“Werewolf or kitty?” Phillip chuckled. “I would offer, but you sucked me pretty dry. Give me another day.”

Sorry, I wasn’t quite myself.

“No apologies.” Phillip’s fingers trailed along his cheek. “I have Brax... He donated.”

You give me that, and I might start craving catnip. The energy of it though? That was going to heal so many things. Brax’s blood was so damn sparkly and downright... well... healing, like everything else about the guy.

“It was freely given. Everyone’s been very generous. They worry about you. They love you.”

He wasn’t sure if the tone in Phillip’s voice was confusion or fondness. It was hard to tell.

They’re my people. And Phillip was his demon.

“I am yours. Now eat.” The bag was pushed to his mouth, and he struck, still too hungry to deny the urge.

He expected the energy that hit him to be electrified, but instead, it was remarkably mellow.

Like getting drunk—or better.

His entire body relaxed, and he stretched, a low rumble coming out of his throat.

“Oh, isn’t that pretty?” Phillip chuckled. “I think I’m going to have to make sure you get one of these every now and again. It’s the mixture to make you a much better person.”

Cody would argue, but it was true. This was neither bright nor hot, not a bit fiery. This was like being wrapped in a warm snuggly blanket of joy.

Brax was like that. He was the earth daddy kitty of the rodeo cavalcade, feeding everyone and giving a deep sort of comfort. So that was what his blood did as well.

“Don’t go away while I sleep,” he warned. “I might track you down this time.” Listen to that. His voice was working. And he’d managed to put both humor and a deadly seriousness in it.

“Oh, love. I’m here.” Phillip’s tone switched to... somehow wistful. Not at all like his razor-sharp mate. Something had truly changed in Phillip this time, he thought.

“Okay. I’m believing in you. I love you, and nothing’s been right in years.”

“No. Nothing has. It’s been a very dry, lonely existence.” Phillip stroked his hair, fingers so gentle. “And I’ve decided I’m done with that shit. There will be no more of us being apart.”

“I’d have thrown myself off a building earlier if I’d thought it would bring you back...” That wasn’t true. He wasn’t the leaping type. But the sentiment was real.

“Bah.” Phillip chuckled. “But this threat was entirely true. I could have lost you forever. A few decades are nothing compared to that. You scared me half to death.”

Your uncle’s a skank-assed motherfucker. What does he want? With Serena, I mean? His voice was still raw enough that it was easier to talk mentally.



“He wants to use her. Supposedly, there’s some sort of demon war coming. You know what? I give no shits.”

I understand. Well, we’ve all acknowledged that him getting her is not going to be a thing. I don’t know about you, but that puts my back up. And I will get all western on his ass. He caught me by surprise once. The chances of that happening again were slim to none. Cody was going with none.

Especially now that Denny and Thack had their eyes open. And honestly? His money was on Phillip against anyone, demon or human.

Even when they were fighting and hating on each other, his money had been on Phillip.

“You know how I feel about Serena,” Phillip said.

Yeah, but you did choose your uncle once.

The long fingers combing through his hair paused. “No. No, I chose a traditional Darque family business interest over one of our shared ones for a short time.” Phillip sighed. “And it was a mistake. Have I done enough time to make up for it now?”

He forced his eyes open, trying to see Phillip. “Yes. Come home.”

“Good.” Phillip nodded sharply, which he saw in kind of three fuzzy silhouettes. “Thank you, love. And when you’re all healed, I will tear you up again. In fact, I am looking forward to it with some excitement.”

So formal. “I can’t wait to make you try.” They had been fun, once upon a time. They could be again. “You’ll have to grovel a little. It cut deep, feeling like you were ashamed of me.” He closed his mouth. It was getting harder to talk every second.

“Never. I have never been ashamed of you. But I admit, I was not at all certain how to be what you needed.” Phillip chuckled. “I’ve lived in your world long enough now to give it another shot. So we’ll discuss this when you’re all feisty again.”

“Mmm.” He melted against Phillip when his lover slid down in the bed with him and held him tight.

“I love you, Cody. Never forget that.” Phillip kissed his forehead, the contact warm, tender, and amazing.

He sure never would get tired of hearing it.

And it was the best ever thought to send him back into sleep.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Seven

“ R eport, January.”

Brax was sitting with Cody, who was strong enough now to sit up and play checkers, so he and Phillip were in the office he'd commandeered at the ranch. Phillip wanted to know the status of the security, the rodeo crew, and the sightings of anyone who wasn't supposed to be there, if there were any.

One could take the demon out of his business world, but they couldn't take the business out of the demon, he supposed. The work of running Darque and Knight never stopped, not even for catastrophic emergencies and life-changing epiphanies.

January sat in the chair opposite his desk, the dapper little brownie scrolling through a tablet.

“The rodeo is settled in, and everyone has agreed to half pay and room and board while we sort this out. The mages have been busy shoring up Cody's wards, but the land itself proves to be a natural impediment, and the pack has relations who have lived here for generations, so they're on guard as well.”

“And what do you hear of my uncle?” He steeped his fingers, staring over them at January. If anyone could ferret out information, it was Thack's assistant.

January's nose wrinkled. “No offense meant, of course.” His lips pursed. “But your uncle is in some very unsavory business dealings. Apparently, he has taken quite a large, shall we say, loan from someone who wishes to be repaid immediately, if not

sooner. I believe ripping limbs off was part of the e-mail discussion.” January closed his eyes, drew his shoulders in, and stuck his pert little nose up in the air. “Not that I would ever snoop in someone’s personal correspondence.”

Of course he wouldn’t. Ha. He did it all damned day every day. “You aren’t the kind.”

“So basically, we gotta wait him out.” Cody’s voice was so raspy, so low, and those eyes just burned still, Phillip could tell from the way Cody blinked more often than a vamp should. “You’re not liable for his debt, are you?”

“Technically, no. Practically, who knows depending on how the family entailments are structured. I’m just going to have to see. These things can be tricky.”

“You’re a demon lawyer. It’s your job to be tricky,” Cody pointed out, beginning to frown.

Brax leaned over and blew a soft line of air into Cody’s face. “Peace, Boss. Peace. It’ll all be okay.”

He was going to have to invest in a line of marijuana plants, he could tell. The way Cody relaxed was amazing. Or perhaps he’d just invest in Brax. “It will be fine. I’ll figure it out.”

“ We’ll figure it out,” Cody noted, moving a piece across the board. “Check.”

“We’re not playing chess, Cody. Silly vampire.”

“Chess, checkers. I still won.” Cody blinked, appearing kind of dazed all of a sudden. “You smell good, Kitty.”

Phillip rolled his eyes. “No biting, Cody.”

“He’s so mean.” Cody ended up laying on the sofa with Brax petting his head.

Selena watched them from her little perch, assuring herself, he had no doubt, that no one touched her Cody without her permission. She adored him, and she had already made Phillip aware that she approved of him and Cody being back in the same place.

It was so much easier to watch over them both this way. Her little wings fluttered, and it was somehow a happy noise.

“Keep an eye on the situation, January,” he murmured. “It will get worse before it gets better.” These things tended to work that way in the human world. In the magical world, it came threefold.

“Naturally. I have many sources in that arena.” He glanced sideways at Thack. “Family ones.”

Phillip snorted. “Okay, now give me the quarterly report.”

“Booooooring,” Cody sang.

“Necessssaaaaaary,” he chanted back.

“You number-cruncher.” Cody’s chuckles had Brax’s eyes going wide.

“I am. What can I say?” It all made sense to him. Tally sheets and quarterly statements were as much in his blood as brimstone. And he’d had to find a way to apply it here in this dimension. His Cody would never want for anything.

And it was how everything kept moving, wasn’t it?

Possibly. Although that could be the wheels on the trailers ... Cody's mental voice broke in.

"Did you get him high again?" Phillip asked Brax.

"Perhaps." Brax was incorrigible.

"Hmmm." He stared at Cody. Are you stoned?

Maybe I'm just giddy that you're staying. The tone was joking, but there was an underlying seriousness to the words.

Say that again the first time you get pissed at me.

I will. You have my word. Cody stared into him.

Damn. His scalp tightened, his cock hardening. Cody wasn't ready for that, though, so he ruthlessly ignored it and worked with January for half an hour.

January was his single favorite employee. He had no sense of humor that anyone was aware of; he was efficient, practical, and inhumanly direct.

"Well, I have a great deal to do." January stood the moment their allotted time was up. "If there's anything else, feel free to e-mail or text." The little guy grabbed his leather folio and departed with a poof.

"Goddess, I still love when he does that." Brax grinned at him over Cody. "So, you and I both know they'll come for us. I won't allow that to happen."

"I'm glad to hear that, Brax." He'd been informed about Brax's escalation in protective skills. Brax taking a mate had been a very good thing for the rodeo.

“Suffice to say, we have something they want. Badly. So yes, they’re coming. They just have to figure out how.” Phillip found he was flexing his fingers.

“They’ll find that we’re not the rodeo trash they believe we are. Together, we’re used to protecting our family.” Brax began to glow, and the power there stole his breath.

Phillip blinked hard, his body trying to go into fight-or-flight mode. He controlled that, too. Obviously, he’d been in his ivory, or stainless steel, tower for too long. He needed to get out more.

He supposed he was achieving that now, hmm?

“I appreciate it. You’re important to Darque and Knight. I know that, and so does Cody.”

Brax stroked Cody’s forehead. “He does. Have you met my mate? He’s as fierce as Dmitri.”

“I haven’t.” He’d heard tales from Thack, of course. “I’m looking forward to the big cookout you have planned. I’ll meet everyone newish then.”

“It’ll happen next weekend. That will ensure that the boss is happy.”

“Perfect.” He glanced at Cody, who was dozing. He was less worried about his lover every day. His body was filling back out, his hair glossy again. But he still lacked stamina.

Maybe it was time to start working on that by giving Cody some physical activity. Maybe he was being too cautious.

Brax smiled at him. “You’ve made him so happy. He burned for you.”

“I missed him. But it just never seemed to come together. I have terrible guilt, Brax.” That wasn’t at all why he was staying, but it was there. He’d been so prideful, so hurt by what he’d thought of as Cody’s rejection.

“We all do, for something. It’s not enough to build a life on, though. Not at all.” Brax’s eyes glowed with truth. “You have to build with love.”

“Yes. And not competition.” Which was what he and Cody had done before. He’d been willing to make Cody live in his demon dimension just so he could get ahead, not ever thinking what that would mean for his stubborn cowboy. That he would be treated like no more than a body slave.

He just hadn’t been firing on all cylinders.

Maybe he was getting soft, but he understood it now, and he wanted to meet Cody on equal ground.

“No. I’m glad you understand. You and Cody are meant for one another, and we need you here.”

“We are. There might be times when I have to go back to the coast to do a little business, but from now on, I go where he goes.” Phillip had loved to travel once upon a time, so he was happy at the idea of being back on the road. And close to his mate.

Brax nodded. “He’s sound asleep.” He moved the checkerboard. “And you’re done with business. Shall I go so you can curl up with him?”

“Yes. I’ll take him back to bed. I can finish my book.” When had he last just taken time to read?

“Finish your book. Hold your mate. We’re all safe as houses and talking about having



a cookout.”

Phillip winked over. “Save me something good.”

“Of course. Always.” Brax slinked away, closing the door behind him.

Cody curled into him as soon as he carried Cody back to the bed and laid down.

“Phil.”

“Shh. Sleeping.”

His vampire needed to rest, and so he did.

This thing with his uncle wasn’t over. Not by a long shot.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Eight

There was a storm coming.

Not like a spiritual one or anything. This was more the simple lightning and thunder, clouds, rain, wind type thing.

But it was gonna be a big one, and Cody fully intended to go outside and enjoy every second of it. The house was basically shut tight against the rain. Everyone in the camps on the grounds was either getting ready to rejoice in the wildness of the weather or they were in with the kitties curled up and smoking and eating and staying dry.

Cody wandered out onto the porch, intending to soak in all the electricity that was going to be flaring around the place. He could resist a lot of things, but he did love himself a good storm.

His sight wasn't back, not one hundred percent, and he had to use a cane for long walks and stairs, but, given the amount of damage that had been inflicted on him, he was coming back to form. Now he had to figure out what the deal was with Phillip.

Was it guilt? Was it regret? Was the man there with him out of pity? Did he care?

Then there was the whole "we'll see if we're going to get laid again" part of this whole situation. Because really? Well, it was not the total of their relationship, but it was important. They did sex in an amazing way.

Except that Phillip had yet to touch him that way, treating him like a precious piece of antique glass.

“What are you doing?”

He looked over at Phillip, smiling. “Fixin’ to watch the storm. It’s calling to me. You gonna come?”

“Of course.” Phillip actually sounded excited at the prospect, and Cody thought he got that. This was something they had done together, testing the weather, soaking in the elements.

Phillip was no elemental demon, but there wasn’t a demon alive who didn’t love thunder and lightning and the smell of brimstone...

It was one of Cody’s favorite things about Phillip, in fact.

His favorite part was the smell. Phillip’s scent was an addiction and had been from the moment he’d sensed it.

“You look hungry,” Phillip purred.

And Cody fluttered his eyelashes playfully. “I’ve been reliably informed by my chute boss that I am not allowed to feed on you. Apparently, I was naughty.” He found a tiny pout. “And I didn’t even get to remember it.”

“Poor, poor bloodsucker. I know. I’m perfectly fine, though, despite what Thack says. Not that I want you to do quite that much feeding on me again soon.”

“I swear to God, you are an ass.” He was going to bite Phillip anyway.

“I’m pretty sure we’re not allowed to do that yet, love,” Phillip whispered against his ear, a smile curling, and he could feel that. He could feel every motion of Phillip’s lips.

Even better, he could sense that wickedness. There was something to be said for that particular sort of energy.

“Come on. Come sit with me. You can even take a different chair so that you don’t have to worry about me accidentally biting you.”

“Now that’s just mean.”

“That’s me,” Cody admitted. “I’m the big boss. And I’m a bitch.”

They went to sit, Phillip helping him down because he still had a little hitch in his get along, like he’d been thrown one too many times. Still, it was getting better.

“You know they love you. I’ve never seen anything like it. They were going to beat heaven and earth to get you home. And they’re going to keep you now.”

Cody nodded. “I’m a lucky son of a bitch.”

The clouds were rolling in, and there was lightning dancing inside of them as they moved.

He smiled, wondering if the ghost riders—if Max and his fellow damned—felt the pull of their kin. The song really had a decent grasp on that shit.

He wondered whether they wanted to just get up and ride and go. Cody wouldn’t blame them if they did. They were a lonely trio caught in their own personal purgatory.

To be honest, everybody but Denver avoided them, was scared of them. Denny just—his heart was so big that it opened to anyone.

And those that didn't rate his kindness, well, they paid.

"You're thinking awfully hard for someone sitting out to watch a storm, love." Phillip squeezed his hand. Lord, that felt fine, if a little weird. It had been so long since they had these kinds of incidental touches. These little shared glances.

It was like Phillip was courting him again.

"So the dragons. Playing in the wind or hiding with the kitties?"

Cody chuckled. "Storms. No question." He loved this game. "What about Thack?"

Phillip snorted. "Thack is in doing unspeakable things with that angel of his. No question at all, you know that. He's incorrigible. What about the wolf pack?"

"Denny's in with the kitties, and that means Blaine is too, which means the others probably are as well. Blaine has a jealous bone about a mile wide. And Denny absolutely can't resist the chance to snuggle and relax with the kitties. Sometimes, I think that there's feline somewhere deep in that line. They're an amazing, motley bunch, you know?"

Phillip nodded. "So I've seen. They're much more interesting in person than on paper."

"All this time and you've never come out? You've never even snuck in to watch?" Cody couldn't believe that.

Phillip shrugged. "How could I? You would have known I was there. You always

know whenever I'm there."

"True that." Still, it was a long time to stay away.

"It was eons." Phillip kissed the top of his head. "And it was stupid. Both of us were stupid."

He could accept that as an answer. Longevity didn't eradicate stupidity.

Cody grinned at the sky, just thinking how many years they'd wasted. Then again, maybe they'd needed the time apart to grow up and fucking appreciate each other.

Or some shit.

"So deep, love."

"Bah. That's the problem. You're deep as a fucking well in West Texas. I've got the depth of a teaspoon. I want things to be right. I want people to be honest. And I want to matter."

Where had that last come from? Bad tongue.

"You matter. You always have. Why do you think I stayed in the fucking Florida swamp instead of sinking back into the demon primordial ooze?"

"Because you wanted me to know what and how bad I fucked up."

"Nope." Phillip leaned back. "Because I knew what I had, and as hard as it is to think about, I couldn't let you go. I had to stay somewhere where you were."

Cody sighed. They were idiots. Both of them. "What can we do about your uncle?"

“Well, we have two choices. We can play offense, or we can play defense.” Phillip shook his head and chewed on his bottom lip. “I don’t think we have what it takes to play offense with my uncle. I really don’t. But I hate the thought of just waiting for him to come after us.”

“Well, I’m not giving her up. So. He’s gonna have to come up with another plan.” Cody wouldn’t say Serena’s name out loud. He wasn’t going to make an association with the artifact, just in case the wind was listening.

But it was true, he wasn’t going to let anyone else have her. Selena was an entity, was alive, had a will and a heart. He wasn’t ever going to give for her.

“No, I hear you. I’m with you there.” Phillip blew out a hard breath, and if he’d been a dragon, he would have shot out pure fire. “There’s got to be a strategy here that I’m missing. I guess we could make a Cody-shaped mannequin, fill it with explosives, and hope that he kidnaps it again.”

“Fuck off.” Cody stopped, stilling the sway of his favorite rocking chair.

The storm was fixing to break open. He could feel it.

It gave him a tingle that started in the base of his spine, the small of his back, and began to grow along with an idea.

A quiet little idea.

A spark of how they could do this.

They could do this.

And it would be fucking fabulous.

Cody put a lid, mentally, over that thought.

Shh.

Shh.

Quiet. Quiet. Easy.

Everything in him stilled, protecting that tiny hope, that little bitty thought, circling it in the cotton of his will.

Then he rolled his head on his neck, and he met Phillip's eyes.

Phillip's slit pupils widened, and then went back to the tiny little black lines in the mass of green as he caught the tight thrust of Cody's thoughts. Of his awful, wonderful idea. "Oh. I do love your wicked little mind."

Cody let one corner of his lip raise up in a grin. He let himself settle into his hips, and let his legs spread. Yeah. "Yeah. I got this."

The skies opened up, and the rain, when it splashed down, was pure ice. The difference in temperature almost causing steam.

Almost.



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Nine

P hillip took a sheaf of papers to Thack's mobile office to hand over to January, because business still went on even when one was planning a demon coup on the down low.

"Morning, Boss," January said, a faint smile on his face. "How are you this fine morning?"

"Good storm last night, hmm?"

"It was exceptional." January took the papers.

"Where's the horned one?"

"I believe Thack is still in his trailer this morning."

"Ah. Well, then. I'll take him doughnuts." It had been far too long since he'd needled Thack and Uri a little. Hell, Uri had disappeared for years, and they'd gotten back together, so there was definitely a lot to study there about reunions and redemption.

January chuckled. "Better you than me."

"Yes, well—he's not my boss."

"No, sir. Best of luck. Do you need me to fetch breakfast pastries for you?"

“Do you mind?” He just didn’t have time for the kitty cavalcade right now. They would latch on and want him to stay and chat, and while he fully intended to do that soon, he couldn’t right now.

“Not a problem. Give me two.” January poofed out of sight, and then popped back in, a box of doughnuts in hand. “Here you are.”

“You’re a marvel.” Phillip nodded and headed off, humming under his breath. He was in a fab mood, thinking of his dear uncle and trying not to let their plan out into the universe.

There were dragons out doing yoga, and a number of little ones playing hide and seek in the grass along with January’s unicorn.

It was charming as hell.

He could see why Cody had stayed on at the rodeo. This was a family, and while Phillip had friends there, he still wasn’t really part of it. Hell, maybe he wasn’t capable of it. Who knew? But he intended to stay, so they ought to get used to him and vice versa.

Something small and gold came flashing at him. It hit him smack in the chest with an incredibly solid little thunk. He grabbed it with one hand, keeping hold of the pastries with the other. What the hell?

“Less hell, more plane of air. Sorry.” One of the dragons came sweeping up, gold eyes flashing. “She’s only very newly hatched. And she hasn’t quite gotten a hold of where her wings are. Or, well, she knows where her wings are. She doesn’t know for certain where they’re taking her.”

Phillip glanced down into his hand, and sure enough, there was a tiny little gold

dragon. Fitting right into his palm, feeling about as solid as a gold ingot. “Well, hello there.”

She blinked at him, her eyes black for a moment and then gold, and then black, and then gold. “Hi, ho,” her little voice peeped.

Okay. That was freaking adorable. “I’m Phillip. Phillip Darque.”

“Lisity. I Lisity.”

Her mom, or at least Phillip assumed it was her mom, bobbed her head. “Felicity. Sorry, Boss. I didn’t realize you were out and about.”

He shook his head. “No, no, no, we’re fine. Hello, Miss Felicity, it’s very nice to meet you.”

“Meet you too.”

“Tell Mister Phillip that you’re sorry that you ran into him. You’re very heavy.”

“Sowwy. Heavy.”

“I’m not worried. It was lovely to meet you. I hope that you have a very good day.”

She nodded and kind of floated up her little butt, which was so much bigger than her wings, since she hadn’t quite gotten them in fully yet.

Mama grabbed her in one clawed hand. “Sorry, boss. I hope she didn’t bruise you.”

“We’re fine, the both of us. Seriously. All is well.”

They left, and he found himself smiling all the way to Thack's trailer for a very different reason than before. Wee dragons were amazing. He'd never seen one that small.

He knocked on the door to the trailer, wondering why Thack and Uri didn't just stay at the house. Then again, maybe they were as loud as they'd been when they first met.

Thack answered the door wearing a violently purple bathrobe, his horns very nicely polished and glowing. "What?"

He let one eyebrow lift up, threateningly.

"Oh, fuck off. Did you bring coffee?"

"No, but I did bring a box of various pastries."

"Then we can use the Keurig. Come on." Thack stomped back inside.

Uri stood there, wrapped in a sheet, sort of... glowing.

It was unnatural, honestly.

"Phillip. It's so good to see you, friend."

"And you, angel. How have you been?" He'd heard about Uri's bout of magical amnesia, keeping tabs on the devastated Thack for years until Uri showed back up at the rodeo.

"Much better, since I made my way back to my mate."

“I understand.”

“I bet you do.” Uri’s smile was wicked as hell. “I bet you get me, balls deep.”

“Mmm. Not quite that deep yet,” he retorted.

“Ah, well, he’s recovering quickly.”

“He is.” And he was trying to be patient. He was being patient.

“Come sit,” Uri said. “Thack just wants to be lazy today.”

“He can be. I just need to get something in the pipeline.” Phillip sat and opened the box of pastries while Thack made coffee.

“Something. What sort of something?” Thack brought him a cup of coffee, before handing one to Uri and sitting down.

“I need a new bull.”

Thack frowned. “Why? What’s wrong with the ones we have?”

“They all have demons in them already.” He deadpanned it, waiting to see what Thack would make of that.

Thack tilted his head, then smoke began to trickle from the demon, his lips curling in a truly evil grin. “Well, I do believe you’re right.”

“My mate’s idea. Nonetheless, a brilliant one.”

Uri began to laugh, the sound soft and bell-like. “Oh, yes. Don’t think it too loud.”

“No. No, and absolutely don’t speak it. Understand?”

Uri nodded, expression so satisfied. “We understand.”

“Good. Good. So. Pastry?” He felt a little like celebrating.

“Please. How is Cody healing? It’s going well?”

“He’s almost there.” And he was ready. His urge to claim Cody was riding him like one of the ghost rider’s horses.

“Excellent. It feels like it’s been forever since we’ve seen him.” Uri ate an éclair, the act inherently sexual the way his lips and tongue moved.

He stared. He couldn’t help it.

Thack growled at him, and Phillip grinned. “Angels. And yes, we need to have a cookout where everyone can see that he’s all right.”

“Oh, that would be fun! Do you want me to talk to Brax?” Uri knew exactly what he was doing to Thack.

“I do. I’ll let you and January handle it.” He winked, having a bite of his pastry.

“Will do.”

“Phil. I love you. Take some of the croissants and doughnuts and go. I’ll get your bull.”

“You wound me.” Phillip put two pastries in the little baggie Uri handed him, laughing at the smile on his friend’s face.

“Enjoy Cody, boss.” Uri’s lips brushed along Thack’s shoulder.

“You two have a good day off.” That was stunning, really. Those two. Phillip wasn’t above admitting hot demon-angel action turned him on in a voyeur-type way.

“Mmhmm. Bye, boss. Go play.” Thack moaned as Uri stroked one of his horns.

He chuckled. Maybe he would see how Cody felt when he woke this evening. He detoured, deciding to go see Denny and Blaine and the kitties and see if he could get something with some meat. He wanted to feed his mate again.

Denny was sitting outside his trailer, kittens climbing all over him like he was a jungle gym.

“Hey, old man,” Denny said. “How’s the chief?”

“Good. He’s better every night. You enjoying the time off?”

“I am! I’m kittysitting while some moms do yoga. So much fun.” Denny winced as someone’s claws dug into him.

“It looks like it.” That looked like... snow leopard?

“It is.”

One of the little ones toddled over to him, totally unafraid, her eyes focused on him, arms held aloft. “Up?”

“Hello, wee one.” He lifted her, smiling as she squealed. He’d forgotten what it was like to have anyone around him besides his assistant, who was no doubt glad he was long-distance now.

She purred hard, snuggling right in.

“That’s Miss Katie. She’s a lover girl. We were telling the kits all about you.”

“Were you?” He raised an eyebrow. “None of them appear to be crying.”

“No kai, fren. No kai.” She patted his cheeks.

He laughed, because she was so earnest and wonderful. “None of us will cry, little one.”

She beamed and hugged him, as if he wasn’t one of the most powerful infernal family around.

This could be his life. He’d avoided it for so long, and for what?

Power? Money? Pride. It was stupid pride.

Denver smiled at him, expression knowing. “You get it. I can tell. You really get it now.”

“I do.” He patted the little one’s back. “I wasted a great deal of time.”

“We all do dumb sh-tuff.” Denny shook his head. “Look at my brother. He was...”

“Difficult.” Phillip tried to be diplomatic. Denny’s brother had always been so stubborn, and had fought one bull too many. Demon bulls. He chuckled. Denny wouldn’t be fighting their newest one. He would just be locked in a pen at the ranch.

Oh, that thought did make him incredibly happy.



His bloodsucker was the smartest.

He smiled at Denny, knowing that he couldn't tell the bullfighter what his plan was. Not because he thought that Denver would tell anyone, but Blaine... Well, he would talk. And because Denny had a strangely involved set of morals.

And he might just disapprove of the idea of putting family members into their place. One never knew.

He chuckled, and the little kit that he was holding squealed with happiness.

"Hims got teeth!"

"Ah, little love? You have no idea." He winked at her. "I have big teeth."

"And his mate has bigger teeth. You remember Mr. Cody."

She nodded. "Him has candies. Him be the boss."

Denver nodded to her. "Yes, ma'am. So is Mr. Phillip here. He's Cody's mate."

"Oh." She smiled and hugged him again, like that was the most charming thing ever.

He supposed it was. He could fall in love with someone decades ago, have a terrible, vicious, violent fight with them. They could be apart for dozens of years. And somehow these people just accepted him like he belonged here.

Phillip strongly suspected that had absolutely nothing to do with him as a demon. More was credited to Cody. He knew it had to be Cody who made sure that there was going to be a place for him, even if he never wanted it.

He kissed the top of her head. “Well, I will see you about, wee one. I was just checking in with Mr. Denny.”

“Okies.” She dutifully got down and ran off to join the other kits where they played.

“You got you a good reputation, Mr. Darque,” Denny teased.

“I know. I am quite appalled.”

“I live to serve, boss.” Denny winked at him, utterly unrepentant.

Little fuck.

“You live because no one has figured out how to end a stubborn bastard like you.” Phillip winked back. “Carry on.”

Denny saluted at him and winked. “Have a good one, boss.”

“I intend to.” He put his hands in his pockets, whistling as he wandered. Time to get that meat, so he headed to the kitty cavalcade. They always had something very rare on offer.

Hopefully, Cody would be feeling better this evening.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Ten

Cody was feeling awake, and he waited until the sun was down to slip up, searching for his family and, mostly, his lover.

He could hear Phillip at the back of his mind, which was a novel thing, and he nodded at the tiger shifter who was his guard tonight as he left the house. “Where is he?”

White teeth gleamed. “With Brax.”

“Is he high yet?”

That grin widened. “Wouldn’t you be?”

“Well...” He winked. He might have had a sip of Brax a time or two after a bout of green. It was relaxing as all get-out. He loved it.

He headed out, sniffing for the scent of feline and gorgeous demon.

They were easy to find among the food trucks, which were still set up just like for the rodeo. The crew had to eat. He met them at Brax’s trailer.

“Hey, lover,” Phillip said, looking him over. “You feeling better?”

“I am. I came to show my face to my people.” He rubbed cheeks with Brax.

“Look at you, walking about in the early dark,” Brax said. “I love it. Someone has been munching red meat.”

“It’s good for him. Makes him strong.” Cody winked at Phillip, smiled. “Do you feel strong?”

“I do. I feel like feeding you.” That glint made him stare, his body quickening.

He knew Phillip noticed, too, because those nostrils flared. Yes, his love had always been sensitive to the littlest change in his blood.

“We’re going to have a dance later, some music, games. You’re both welcome to stay.”

“Mmm. No, I think I want to take Cody back to the house and love on him.” Phillip just laid it out there, which shocked him some.

“Of course. We’ll have another one tomorrow. No question.” Brax chuckled, the sound knowing.

“And we’ll stop by.” Phillip stood, hand held out to him.

“We will. I have business to take care of.” Cody took Phillip’s hand, and lightning buzzed up his arm.

“I thought that was pleasure!” Brax called.

“Oh, he is a bad kitty,” Phillip told him.

“He’s rotten. I adore him.”

Phillip held his hand, making a leisurely walk of the trip back to the house. “So, you’re looking very well, my love.”

“Am I? I’m feeling better. Solid. And I’m going to want you to touch me.” As soon as they were in the house, in fact.

“I want that too, baby.” Phillip sounded as if he wanted to do bad things to Cody. Good bad things.

“It’s been so long. I ached for you.”

“I did too, baby. I’m aching now.” Phillip moved closer, and Cody smelled brimstone.

“Good. That means you’ll make me crazy.”

“I will. If you’re ready for that kind of acrobatics.” Phillip looked him over with a critical eye for a moment, which made him snort.

“I am sick to death of being on bed rest and recovery, Mister.” There. Cody thought that was pretty plain.

Phillip nodded. “Perfect.”

Look at that, Phillip trusting him to know his own body and mind...

“So you want to get naked and fuck like rabid bunnies?”

“I want to love you, Cody. Whatever that means.” They got inside, closing the door behind them, and Phillip pressed him against the door.

“Oh, don’t get all sweet on me now, demon.” Because that made him feel... vulnerable.

Phillip laughed, the sound dark and happy. “No? Very well, but remember you asked for it.” And Phillip took his mouth as if there was no tomorrow.

He melted into Phillip with a deep, wild moan, and he couldn’t stop shaking, the need riding him like a champ. It had been so damn long, and he’d come so fucking close to losing this forever.

Wrapping his arms around Phillip’s neck, he humped up and bit at Phillip’s lower lip.

“Uhn. Oh, damn.” Phillip lifted him, hands under his ass, really giving him that flat, hard belly to rub against.

“Want you,” he growled, hips moving, bucking against his own demon.

“Uh-huh. Now.” Phillip staggered, turning to carry him to his bedroom. Someone had magically changed the sheets. Thank the lord for January. They could collapse down and get unclothed damn quick.

Phillip hummed softly, a tingle of pure magick flashing along Cody’s spine, burying in the base of his brain as his clothes just exploded.

“Show off.”

“I try.”

“Good thing you didn’t set them on fire...”

“No infernal flames for you, you fragile vamp.” Phillip took his mouth again,

winning that little volley.

He let himself get toothy, let himself bite, just a little.

A tiny bit of blood welled up under his nip, and the magic in it made him dizzy. Phillip was ready to feed him again.

Mine. I need you more than blood. More than life.

I'm here with you, love. Right here. I'm going to make you feel so good.

He nodded, because he needed it. He needed to remember how to fly. So he grabbed Phillip's ass and rolled his lover on top of him, spreading wide, ignoring Phillip's clothes between them.

Phillip groaned, that sweet cock heavy and full against him. He loved it, loved how hard that amazing thing got. Phillip gave demons a really, really good name.

He nodded, his eyes rolling back in his head. "More."

"Let me..." Phillip's clothes went the same way his had, and they were rocking together, cock to cock, the air around them getting heavy as if time were stopping for everyone but them.

Maybe it was.

He didn't care. The world could cease because he finally had what he craved, what he needed. And when Phillip slid two slick fingers into him, he shouted, his body struggling to make room.

"Been so long. Going to make you come so hard." Phillip's eyes began to glow.

“I’m going to squeeze you and make you crazy.”

“You always make me crazy, love.”

That was part of the trouble between them, wasn’t it? Good or bad, they pushed each other to extremes.

“Shh... we push, but I’m never letting you go again.”

He clutched at Phillip, needing to believe that. “Promise me.”

“I vow it.” Sigils formed in the air around them, the demon realm witnessing the vow.

“I’ll keep you, then.” He offered Phillip his throat, trusting his lover totally.

Phillip bit at it, making it sting, claiming him all over again. And he moaned, knowing he was right where he belonged.

Which was when Phillip pulled his fingers free and slid his burning cock deep inside Cody, stretching him almost unbearably. There was no hesitation, only a deep, perfect wild burn.

He grunted, baring his teeth, and when Phillip pulled back to look at him, he grinned madly. “Not gonna last.”

“Me either, baby.” Phillip laughed, the sound bouncing off the walls and causing the scent of smoke to waft through the room. He was a polite lover, though. No open flames around the vamp. “When we’re right there...”

“I’ll bite.”



“Yes,” Phillip moaned. “And you’ll feed.”

“I will.” He nodded hard, his hips rocking, his body cradling Phillip. So damn good.

Because Phillip was his, and his alone. “Demon...”

“Mine.” Phillip stared into him, hips flexing, cock filling him. “Mine.”

“Yes.” Hellfire warmed him, and he was hypnotized, caught in the fires.

The most dangerous things were always the ones he loved the best.

Cody arched, his cock ready to go, his balls pulling up, which always amused the fuck out of him. “Soon. Gonna. Soon.”

“Come on, baby. Come on my cock.” Phillip nipped his bottom lip.

“Fuck!” He let loose, and he felt it as Phillip started to fill him with hot seed. Which was when Cody struck, fangs sinking into Phillip’s neck, jolting him all the way from his hair to his toes.

This was his mate, feeding him, energy pouring through him like a live wire.

His mate had saved his damn life, even if it had been Phillip’s family who took him. That was how it was with demon families.

They sucked more than him.

Now that was funny.

Focus, you asshole. Phillip’s thought snapped against his brain.

Cody focused, drawing hard, and that had Phillip roaring, another great burst of seed filling Cody's ass.

He flew, assuring he didn't take too much from his demon, but taking all his pleasure at the same time.

Phillip finally slumped down over him, and he let his fangs slide free, his blood full of demon magic. His hair felt alive.

He petted Phillip's hair, humming deep in his chest. This was all he needed.

Well, not all. He needed revenge and to get his rodeo back on the road, but this was good.

He was going to just go with it for right now.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Eleven

“ I think you’re getting restless.” Phillip stroked Cody’s hair, lying naked in bed and letting his mate drape over his chest.

“Hmm? Nah.”

“Oh, bullshit. You’re itching to be back on the road.”

Cody pinched his nipple. “I’m right here with you.”

“You are.” He dropped a kiss on Cody’s mouth. “But we do need to make a plan.”

“The new bull comes in tomorrow. Thack had to find a strong one.”

“Mmm.” The whole idea still amused the snot out of him.

“Once he’s delivered, we’ll make a plan. Fair enough?”

“Sounds perfect.” Phillip could wallow in Cody a bit longer...

“You’re coming on the road with us, aren’t you? We can set the world on fire.”

“I am. I’m sick of sitting in an office in Florida.” He shuddered. “Too many demons there, even for me.”

Cody nodded, fingers teasing his skin. “I hear you. We’ll have adventures.”

“We will. I look forward to exploring the world with you again.” It had been decades. Everything would look new.

“I do too. I think you’ll be surprised at how much fun it is.”

Phillip stroked Cody’s cheek. “Nothing about you surprises me. Now, don’t get all angry if I start making new deals all over.”

“You do you, demon. I’m happy to share the load.”

Phillip knew that. Cody was territorial, yes, but not jealous of the work. Cody loved Darque and Knight.

“I want you to be able to do the parts you love.” Electronics had made many things easier over the years, but some stuff still needed to be done physically. So Phillip would take on that work in addition to his stuff at the office, which could go mobile.

“Ah, terrorizing folks. I’m so in.” Cody’s smile was utterly toothy.

“You’re good at it. Though I hear Thack does a lot of that.”

“He does anything related to the arena. I handle the rest.” Cody winked at him. “Though Thack does love to stick his horns in.”

“They’re nice and shiny.”

Cody’s smile widened. “A lot more now that Uri’s polishing them.”

“I noticed that.” Phillip lowered his voice. “Kinda hot.”

“Just a little, yeah. You should see them go at it. Fuckers.”

“Mmm.” He palmed Cody’s ass. “I would rather see you.”

“You can see me do whatever you want, demon.”

“Oh-ho!” Nibbling a line down Cody’s neck, Phillip laughed. “Good. So tasty.”

“Nom nom nom. I can’t believe you’re real. Not really.”

“Believe it.” He let a spark escape to land on Cody’s skin.

“Hey, now.”

“See? Real.”

“Don’t burn my arm hairs.” Cody pinched his ass.

“Why not? They just grow right back.” He winked, though. “I’ll be good, baby.”

“You’re so much better when you’re bad...”

“Why thank you.” If he were standing, he would take a bow. “So, what do we do while we wait for that bull?”

“I think we explore the house, naked. You haven’t been everywhere, have you?”

“Nowhere but the front room, this bedroom, and the kitchen and bathroom.” There was a huge, sprawling mass he had yet to view.

“Well, this is our place. It’s defensible throughout.” Cody waved his arm. “No sun. No magic. You have to be invited in.”

“It’s a stronghold.” That was fantastic. Cody had taken the old place and made it amazing.

“Yes. And the grounds are warded to protect my people.” Cody’s eyes burned for a moment. “I’ll defend them forever.”

“I’m with you, love. I’ve always protected you all from afar, but we’ll be a force of nature. Or unnatural force...”

“Mmhmm... An amazing force, right?” Cody stood, the hard body beautiful, unashamed.

“Fuck yes.” He followed, because he had to, his hands itching. That ass was absolutely perfect. Deliciously so, and it made his eyes cross.

“Wanna get clean, or wait until?—”

Phillip grabbed that ass. “We need to christen the rooms.”

“Mmm... want to lean me over in the tack room?”

“Oh, love, I want to bend you over on every surface.” He squeezed, and Cody went up on tiptoe.

The house was decorated in different themes—there was a saloon, a Roman bath. A Regency ballroom.

He loved it. “Did you do a Renaissance room for me?” he teased.

“The attic. There are windows up there.”

“Ah. I love that. But I will have covers made for them. Just in case.”

“It’s like a reverse O. Henry story...”

“We can stargaze together, love. This is no weird short story.” He kissed the nape of Cody’s neck.

“Mmm... You don’t love anything less than two centuries old.”

“I love you.” That was the truth, no matter how he sliced it.

“We’ve been a couple for much longer than two hundred years, and I intend to keep you forever.” Cody made him shiver.

“Love.” He grabbed Cody in his arms, holding on tight. He felt the same way, but to hear it aloud made him shake.

Cody didn’t try to calm him; he just held on and allowed Phillip to feel. Which was a rarity in his world. This offer to allow him to just experience his emotions as they came by and not try to hide them. His family would hate that.

The only emotions they wanted others to experience were fear and awe.

Cody chuckled softly. “Well, I know I’m not scary, but my mouth is awesome.”

“It takes a lot of trust to let those things get near my dick.” He grinned, though, his tension dissipating.

“Now, now, now,” Cody teased. “I can think of many, many, many, many times when you were more than willing to let my fangs be near your dick. In fact, if I recall correctly...” Cody tapped one of his fangs thoughtfully. “I think there was begging.”

“Nonsense. I don’t beg.” He totally begged.

“No, I remember it wasn’t all that long ago. A hundred years maybe. Maybe one-fifty, but not too long. You wanted me to bite it. You begged.”

“It wasn’t me; it must have been one of your other demon lovers.”

At that, Cody simply lost his shit, laughing so hard that Phillip worried for a second that the vampire would pass out. “As if you would ever... Ever! Allow even the thought of another demon to cross my mind. You fill me up to the top.”

“I do. And that is both my pleasure and my vocation.” He could worship Cody for hours. “Shower. You do realize that if we go on the road together, there will be the periodic hotel break wherein we have a luxury shower. The one in your trailer is far too small.”

“Is it now?” Cody wiggled. “It’s just right for me.”

“You’re a pocket vamp.”

“A pocket vamp? Oh, you’re in so much trouble.” Cody chuckled. “I do see your point though. The shower is tight with two. It is a comfortable trailer, you have to admit.”

“No arguments. I think that it’s amazing and totally you and even sunproof. It’s just that bathroom...”

“My poor bathroom is being maligned.” Cody slapped one hand over his forehead, dramatically, before glancing over at him. “Are you buying this?”

Phillip shook his head. “Nope, not even a little bit. You’ve really gotta work on your



drama.” He did love playful Cody.

Hell, he loved Cody, full stop.

And he got to play all day before they had to hunker down and get to family business.

In a very combative way.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Twelve

“That’s a good-looking bull.” Cody stood with his arms up on the top rail of the pen, his foot on the bottom one. Thack ranged next to him, arms crossed, horns almost glowing as he studied the big bovine.

“Yep. And he’s pissed off that he’s about to retire, so this will give him the life he wants. Bucking.”

“And you’ve explained everything to him. He understands the situation.” Contrary to popular belief, they didn’t take animals unwilling.

Most bulls were more than happy to retire to a pasture and a life of grazing and fucking. But some lived for the eight-second ride. And the more they could buck the better.

Those were the ones who were willing to sell their souls. Or at least share their bodies.

“Yes, Boss. He came willing and eager.”

He glanced back, thoughts growing just a little heavy. “They all do, don’t they?”

“You would know,” Thack pointed out drily.

He detected no lies. He’d offered himself to Phillip, body and soul, ages ago. And while he couldn’t say he’d never regretted it, he’d also take the deal every time.

Serena, who was sitting on his shoulder, tail wrapped around his neck, chattered softly, her little horns rubbing at his temple.

“I hear you, sweetheart.”

It would all be over soon. Phillip was doing his best to aggravate his uncle by buying properties, pulling them from underneath him at the last minute. Phillip was also selling things that, from the outside, looked like important family heirlooms. There was no way his uncle was going to be able to let the situation stand for any length of time.

There was no question that he would come for the rodeo. The difference was, this time, the rodeo was ready for him.

All of the children were under Brax’s protection. And he would dare any demon to even look upon Brax when he was in his golden protector mode. Not only that, but Brax’s mate was fierce at best. And they’d all seen the big tiger of the pride, Dimitri, take off more than one head.

So all of the little ones were safe. That left them to deal with everything else. The pack was on high alert. As were the dragons.

Hell, he’d even seen the ghost riders a couple of times, making the rounds about the outside of his land, just assuring that their presence was known.

Cody figured there was going to be an army coming. Or just a big-ass mad party of one. That would mean less bloodshed. But it wasn’t going to change a thing. He wasn’t gonna lose his rodeo, and he wasn’t gonna get taken. That he knew.

Thack chuckled. “I can see you circling the wagons in your head, cowboy.”

“I am. Running the numbers.”

“Well, I’m ready. So is Uri. So is January, come to that. You just need to get that bastard in range of old Magic Missile, here.”

“You got it. As soon as we know he’s coming, you’ll hear it.”

“Good deal. I’m ready to get the show back on the road.”

The bulls loved their job, but not near as much as Thack did. The big demon was a machine, working that arena like a king with a bunch of lowly knights.

“As soon as I know we’re safe, we’re gone. I just want business dealt with, hmm?”

“Hell, yes.”

Denny wandered up like some kind of werewolf tumbleweed, and the bull started snorting and pawing. “New bull?” he asked, eyebrows rising.

“Uh-huh.”

“Spiffy. Can’t wait to play with him. He’ll love this new life.” Denny’s voice was cold as ice.

“Yessir.” Oh, good. That was the best way it could go. One never knew with Denny. He was all about fair play, but the rodeo was his family.

And Denny never ever let the bulls believe he wasn’t in complete control of their existence.

Never.

“Good deal.” Denny chuckled. “We’re gonna dance, you and me,” Denny told the bull. “Get ready.” Denny winked at Cody. “I’m going to make rounds. I’m itchy.”

“Fleas?” Thack drawled.

“I will kick your ass, horny.”

“You’ll try.” Thack’s horns grew some, glowing with golden sigils.

“Mmm. Nah. That kind of ass kicking I’ll leave to your mate.”

Lord, Denny could make almost anything sound sexual.

“Keep me posted,” Cody said. “Blaine?”

“He ran some with Rocket today. He’s napping.”

“Ah. With the kitties?”

“With Raven and Rocket. He’ll be fine.”

Cody nodded. He liked the buddy system right now. All the way.

“Don’t worry. Kelly will sound the alarm. We know now.” Denny growled. “No outsiders.”

“You got it.” He loved a tight ship. “All right, go forth and prowl.”

“Your mate doing business?”

“Fast and furious.”

“Tell him thumbs-up.” Denny jogged off, leaving a furious bull watching him go. Denny had that effect on the beasts, demon or not. Made him so good at his job as head bullfighter. The crowds loved the show.

Thack nodded abruptly. “Well, now that you’re up and about, I’m headed to bed. Night, Boss.”

“Night.” He had some rounds to make of his own, which included talking to Kelly, their resident security psychic. He might have news.

So Cody grinned at the bull. “You just wait. He’ll be here.” Then he headed off to Kelly’s wing of the house. Man’s family had owned the damn show once upon a time.

Kelly was sitting outside when he arrived, leaning against a porch rail. “Knight.”

“Howdy.” Cody chuckled. “New bull is in place.”

“Good deal. We got about...” Kelly checked his watch. “Sixteen hours. Give or take.”

“Is that a betting pool average or a clairvoyant moment?”

“Which one do I bet on?”

“You bet on your man, of course. I’ll let the dragons know, for sure.”

“Thanks.”

“No, thank you.” He liked Kelly. He was a cowboy, really, and that Cody could trust.

“We protect our own.” Kelly’s words echoed Denver’s.

“We do that. And y’all are my family.” That was that.

“We know—all of us.” Kelly winked at him.

“Good deal.” He clasped hands with Kelly, then moved on. Mobilizing his people.

It was time to get their collective shit together.

Phillip grinned as he read his emails.

His assistant in Florida was reporting great news. His uncle was traveling.

He’d left the demon realms with only two guards and an assistant to handle travel once he hit the human realm... One of those guards was loyal to Phillip.

Cody said the psychics all agreed that his uncle would arrive around two a.m., but he personally thought it would be midnight.

The old bastard was always in a hurry.

“Serena, my love, I want you to go stay with Brax.”

She frowned at him, making grabby hands, but he shook his head.

“No, love. Brax will keep you safe. I will not have you harmed, and neither will Cody.”

She clacked her teeth, her way of chittering, of making noise.

“He wants you. You must stay out of sight. I will call upon you if I need your skills, I promise.”

She frowned deeper, but she nodded, wings fluttering.

“That’s my girl.” Her power in his uncle’s hands could be devastating. That was why he’d made her flesh and given her will. “You are dear to us. Our family.”

She nuzzled his cheek.

“Yes, exactly. Now, would you like some ice cream?” He took time every day to savor a treat with her.

“Are you spoiling the imp again, demon?” Cody asked, strolling in to lean a hip on his desk.

“I am. We’re celebrating.”

“Are you? What are we celebrating today?”

“My uncle is in the human realm.” Phillip bared his teeth. “I finally pissed him off enough.”

“Well, go you, lover.” Cody grinned, fangs showing just a tiny bit. Selena leaped at him, her tail curled with joy.

“Mmm... hello, beautiful. Have you been causing delicious trouble?”

She chittered her teeth and clicked her claws, the little noises so happy somehow. She could always let them know how she felt.



“Excellent. Soon we’ll all go together, spread our own joy over the earth.” Cody always sounded so wicked.

She perched on Cody’s shoulder, and Phillip chuckled. “May the gods help me.”

Cody’s smile widened. “Oh, wicked lover, you’re lost there. You’ll have to settle for me and the rodeo.”

“Always.” He rose. “I feel like pizza. How do you feel about garlic tonight?”

“You know, contrary to popular belief, I love it. Especially in your hot blood.”

“Mmm. True.”

“Make sure you get enough to have energy. Tonight’s going to be fun.”

“I think so.” Phillip was ready for anything Cody threw his way. Or his uncle, for that matter.

There was a tension around Cody’s lips, and he knew that his vampire wasn’t as blase as he liked to pretend.

“Also, I promised Selena ice cream, I think.” He rose and came around to take Cody’s arm.

“Oh, that is her favorite? Let’s indulge her.” Cody offered her his finger, and she nipped, drawing blood, which she lapped up.

Phillip wrapped an arm around his mate. “And me.”

“And you,” Cody agreed, and they headed to the kitchen. They were gearing up for

war. This might be their last chance to relax for a while.

A few days, at least.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:30 am*

Thirteen

They were sitting outside having a glass of wine at midnight when a long, black Cadillac pulled up.

Cody rolled his eyes and grinned at Phillip. “That’s a little ostentatious, isn’t it?”

“He likes to think he’s intimidating.” Phillip flicked his fingers in a dismissive motion. “So 1980s.”

“I know. I mean... maybe a hearse, but there’s nothing like a duallie to make a statement.”

“Such a cowboy.” Phillip rose, the movement deceptively languid. He knew better.

“I am, I admit it.” Cody was armed, and the world was much less silent than it appeared.

“Well, boy. How dare you force me to come to you,” Phillip’s uncle snarled as he stepped out of the car. He would never pass for completely human, not like Phillip. And he was wrong. There was a foulness about him.

Cody let Phillip take the lead here. It was his family, after all. But he did want to rip off the demon’s head and shit down his neck.

“Because I have no reason to come to you, Uncle.” Phillip sneered, and oh, didn’t he know how good the damn demon was at that. “What do you want?”

“You know what I want.”

A quiet rustle sounded, and a demon bodyguard who stood next to the car disappeared.

That had the distinct feel of a hunting kitty taking its prey. These dicks had no idea what they were in for. He grinned, thinking of it.

“What are you smiling at, you trashy half-breed?”

“I was thinking about sucking your nephew’s cock, that was all.”

“You smarmy little fuck. I should have just had them kill you. He would have come to me then.”

“I would have killed you.” Phillip shrugged. “I still might.”

“Can you see, you bag of pus?”

The demon’s words affected him not at all.

Especially not when another demon disappeared with a flash of gold scales.

His grin widened. Dragon for the win.

That just left the assistant. “Um, sir?”

“Shut up, Asmodin. I’m busy,” Uncle Asshole snapped.

The little demon bowed his head, waiting.

“You’re not going to get any satisfaction, Uncle. Shoo.” Phillip’s hand brushed over his back.

“You slimy, ungrateful little bastard.” The uncle, whose name he’d honestly forgotten, spat on the ground.

Phillip drew himself up, and that hand moved away from him as the smell of brimstone filled the air. Right, no singeing the vampire.

“I am no bastard, Uncle.” Phillip’s voice rang crazily, echoing as if they were in a small space, not outside in West Texas. “I am Phenex Dentalian Darque, aka Phillip, aka the demon who is going to kick your sorry ass.” Phillip advanced down the stairs, smoke starting to rise from his skin, horns and wings appearing on his head and body respectively.

Oh, you are so pretty.

Shut up, love. I’m busy.

There was the softest peep as Denver’s boys took Asmodin, and he laughed to cover it. “You’re in trouble,” he sing-songed.

Uncle Dickweed looked around, then frowned, and Cody could actually see the realization hit him. “What have you done with my men?”

Phillip’s laugh boomed out. “We took them out of the equation, old man. Now we can face each other fairly.”

The temptation to stick his tongue out was huge.

“I have the power of the entire family behind me.” Jean-Luc growled, and the ground

began to shake.

“Do you, indeed? I highly doubt that. I know that Prixappa married out, for instance, and Ignatius left to form his own clan.” Phillip radiated pride. “Just as I am doing.”

“This trash is not your clan!”

“Ooh... I haven’t been called rodeo trash in minutes.” Thack’s voice behind his shoulder made him chuckle.

“I have,” Cody stated. “Like just moments ago.”

“Lucky duck.”

“I’ll tear you into pieces for speaking!”

Thack’s horns started growing. “I’d love to see you try.”

Phillip stomped one foot, and a growl rang out. “Make your move or stop wasting my time.”

“I want the relic, boy. It’s mine as the head of the family.”

“It was given to me. I did with it what I pleased. It is out of your reach.”

“I want it!”

“No.” Phillip didn’t even try to sound worried.

Magic built in the air, and he heard Thack chuckle. Yes, they’d made up a special treat for Uncle Jean Luc if he tried to hurt them with magic.

“I will burn you all!” Jean Luc stared at Cody. “And I will starve you, endlessly. I will chain and starve you until the end of time!”

“Tried that already,” Cody scoffed.

“You will not.” Phillip’s voice was getting softer and softer.

Easy, love. He stroked Phillip’s spine, nice and easy.

Phillip vibrated, but he waited, which was good. They had to choose their moment carefully.

“I was offering a trade,” Jean Luc sneered. “Show him, Asmodin.”

Obviously Uncle missed something, eh, love?

Apparently, yes. “Show me what?”

“Asmodin!” Jean Luc looked about, then scowled. “You took him too. Well, rah fucking rah. I had jewels for you. Gold. Now I’ll just take what I want.” He raised his hands, lightning arcing between them.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Uncle? There are repercussions.” Phillip was honor bound to ask.

“I will strike you down.” Energy built, the old demon trying to scare them, he could tell.

Cody blew out a long breath, then slowly, and deliberately, flipped the motherfucker off.

Jean Luc roared, and magic flew out of his fingers in an attack, which was just what they needed.

“Now!” Thack thundered, and Phillip moved like a lightning bolt on his own, sprinting down the steps toward the pen where the bull stood waiting.

Then Uri appeared behind Jean Luc and the demon lord began to scream as those white wings wrapped around him.

“No! No! What are you doing?” Sparks flew, thunder slammed across the clouds, and a blinding glow had him shielding his eyes. The bull was bellowing, and Phillip’s laughter made Cody want to do bad things to him.

When the laughter faded, there was a wild bucking from the bull, and cowboys started coming from everywhere to see, to bet who drew that beast first.

“He’s gonna be a winner. Got all that rage and the built-in urge to buck,” Denny drawled. “I like it.”

“Mmm. You weirdo,” Blaine murmured at his mate.

“Mmhmm... he hurt the boss. We’re going to keep an eye on him until he settles in.” Denver grinned slowly. “We caught the guards, boss, and they’re... with the dragons. What should we do with his right-hand man?”

“Bring him to me. I’ll be in the office.” Phillip looked at him. “Want to come with?”

“I can’t wait. Do we get to fuck after?”



Fourteen

“That’s fine, Azzy. Just file it with Cara, my assistant in Florida. She’ll know what to do.”

“Yes, sir.”

Phillip watched his snazzy new road assistant pop a file in the little caddy he carried to meetings. “Are you lunching with January today?”

“I am.”

“Good, good. Take him the payroll statements.”

“Yes, sir.” Azzy bowed, beaming, then scurried away. He liked being Phillip’s assistant far more than the old man’s. It was absolutely obvious.

“Afternoon, boss.” Denny popped in. “Everything’s golden. Thack’s setting up the roster, and I was heading this way. Brax says he’s ready for the crowds.”

“I can smell the cooking.” And God, he wanted pizza tonight. “How’s the team?”

“Healthy and full of piss and vinegar. Nothing like a new bull to do it.”

“True enough.” He turned in his chair. “Glad to be back on the road?”

“Love it. We are nomads, after all. Always looking for something new to see.” Denny

winked at him. “It just took you a minute to figure it.”

“Go on, you. I’m going to visit Cody. I’ll be there when we open.”

“Yes, boss. We’ll see you then. We’re ready to show off.”

“Perfect.” He put away his pen and closed his desk before closing up the office and parting ways with Denny. His family greeted him, and he was glad to be back with them. He’d craved this.

He’d craved Cody.

He moved into the back of the trailer where the sun never shone.

Cody’s mind touched his. Lover.

Yes, my own. All is well.

Good. Those hypnotizing eyes opened, stared into him. “Come to bed, Mr. Darque. We have to rest up. Tonight, we’re putting on a show.”

“Why, Mr. Knight, it would be my honor.”

Darque and Knight was in town, and tickets were on sale.

The End

Thank you for reading the Midnight Rodeo books.