

Saturday at the C Bar W (part two)

By Cody Denton with Fluffypup

Dylan was resting at home on the sofa, reading a book to relax after doing some fairly tedious yard work, when the phone rang. "Hello? Oh, hi Cody. What's up?"

"Hi Dyl, well, I know it's kind of short notice and all... but thanks to that neat belt you loaned me, I got my chores done in record time today. I've decided to have a cookout tonight at the ranch, and you're invited."

Dylan stretched and yawned. "Really? Heh, you know your timing was perfect. I kind of accidentally overcooked the pork chops I was gonna have tonight. Works out perfectly."

"Hey, that sounds great, Dylan!" Cody laughed a bit. "Sorry about the burnt pig, but I think you'll like what we're having. Do you enjoy a good steak?"

"Actually I do, now that you mention it." Dylan paused for a moment. "Is there anything you'd like me to bring along for anyone else?"

"Nah, thanks for offering, but remember what I do for a living. If the steaks were any fresher, they'd still be walking around in my pasture, and I've got plenty of veggies from the garden out back. If you drink alcohol, you might want to bring your own, because all I have left is some wine. Otherwise, just bring yourself."

"Okay then. About what time should I be there?" Dylan glanced nervously at the clock, realizing that he still had a healthy amount of garden soil and yard clippings in his fur.

"Dinner will be served at about 6 o'clock, but you're welcome to show up any time you like." Cody thought for a moment, and then added a little challenge. "If you get here significantly earlier than that, I'll let you try your paw at a little horseback riding. The cows are all at the highcountry pastures, so there's nothing to get in the way of a good ride."

"6 sounds good to me. I'll try to get there beforehand to help with any setup." Hanging up the phone with a smile, Dyl went off to get himself cleaned up and get clothes laid out for later. Cookout or not, he wanted to look a bit more presentable than his usual.

Cody hung up the phone and began a flurry of activity. Despite being a bachelor, and a cowboy at that, Cody displayed a notable tendency to want everything "just so." The comfort of his guests was foremost to Cody, and he raced about the house, making sure everything was cleaned to perfection, the bathroom was well stocked, the porch was swept, and that a table and chairs were set up in the gazebo. Were it just Turner who would be coming to dinner, Cody might be a bit more relaxed... but Dylan would be a true guest, and Cody wanted everything to be just about perfect.

"I wonder if Dyl will take me up on the offer of getting here early to go riding? Oh well, no matter, he'll get here when he gets here." Cody set up the grill, filled the tiki torches with mosquito-repellent citronella oil, and put the finishing touches on

everything. "Oh, bother, I hope he didn't lose the map to the ranch that I left with him the other night. Well, surely he'll call me if he needs directions..."

After a brisk shower, Dyl went about choosing his attire for the cookout. Searching through his clothes, he decided on a nice brown t-shirt, a black leather vest, some black dress slacks, a brown belt with a silver square buckle, and of course a nice pair of blackish-brown riding boots. After combing his hair to finish things off, he sat down to give his boots and his buckle a quick polish, then got his jacket from the closet and headed out the door.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Cody was still bustling around like a housewife before Christmas dinner, trying to make sure everything was perfect. Off in the distance he heard a car enter the gate, but he could not see from this distance who it was. Cody checked in the mirror to make sure he looked OK. He had chosen his American flag shirt, dress jeans, one of his favorite pairs of dress cowboy boots, and a large gold/silver wolf belt buckle. As he was looking himself over, he heard a light tap on a car horn out front. "Hmm? Who is that? Must be Dyl, Turner would have just barged on in." Cody stepped out on to the front porch, waving his friend to park anywhere and come on inside. Dyl waved back and, putting the car back into drive, he nudged the car over to an open area nearby before getting out to walk up on the porch.

"Hey, Dyl, glad you could make it, pard. You're here early, that's great! Mighty fine clothes for a simple cookout on a cattle ranch though." Cody grinned at his friend. "Were you trying to impress the horses, or do you always dress so nice?"

Dyl chuckled. "I just figure I should look good for people. Don't wanna look half-assed and filthy, I guess."

Cody winked slyly at his friend. "Well, I'm sure the ol' mare would be impressed... but you want to borrow some jeans before we go ridin'? We look to be about the same size."

"Sure, that'd be fine."

Inviting his friend to follow him upstairs to his bedroom, Cody laid out a few pairs of jeans in slightly different waist sizes, offering for his friend to try them on. He forgot to close the closet door, though, and as he started to head down the stairs, Dylan called out. "Jeez, Cody, I know you said you had a lot of boots, but your closet's absolutely full of them!"

Chuckling at his friend's reaction, Cody called back over his shoulder. "Yeah, Dyl, and that's just the ones I wear regularly. There's more down in the basement. Still laughing, he reached the bottom of the stairs and took out a piece of note paper, hastily scribbling a note. "Turner, we're riding horses in the lower pasture. Bring your sorry tail down there when you get here." As he hung the note on a nail by the front door, Dylan came out and looked at him quizzically.

"You'd have to know Turner to understand. He'd think I was mad at him if I didn't say something sarcastic." Motioning for his friend to follow, Cody walked out to a dilapidated old yellow farm pickup. "Get in, it's a long walk to the lower pasture." Dylan nodded, hopping into the passenger side and buckling up. The seat belt made a clinking sound as it hit his large belt buckle.

Cody, hearing the seat belt being fastened, grinned wolfishly at his guest. "Heh, don't trust my driving, eh?" Cody started laughing. "Don't worry, neither do I. I'd have mine on too, but it's busted on this side. No matter, this truck isn't street-legal anymore anyway, but it keeps me going around the ranch. So, have you ridden horses before?"

"I think only once, really. It was on a trail weekend I went on that I saw in the papers." Dylan stopped for a moment, thinking back on his one previous ride. "Wasn't too bad, but it was kinda short."

"Aww, heck, Dyl... those trail horses are so broke to their routine that it almost isn't like riding a horse. I think you're in for a few surprises. Don't worry, the old mare I'm putting you on isn't *too* spirited with new riders." Pulling up at the lower pasture, Cody climbed out and motioned for his friend to follow. He walked up to the gate and whistled a shrill note. From far in the distance, the friends heard a few answering whinnies, and a group of four horses came running up to the gate. "Dyl, these are my horses. I'm going to mount you on that big white mare over there. I'll ride the roan stallion. The other two can just go back to playing." Cody opened the gate, and motioned for Dylan to come in, closing the gate behind them. He whistled for the white mare to come up. She sniffed Dylan from head to toe and snorted, but did not appear to be particularly alarmed. Sensing Dylan's reaction to the mare's sniffing, Cody chuckled.

"Don't worry, she's used to us anthro-fur types now. You still smell like a dog to her, just like I still smell like a wolf. Instinctively she should be afraid, but she's learned to overcome it." Cody led his friend to the mare's left side, and motioned for him to put

his left boot up in the stirrup. "Put your foot in there, then sort of jump up and swing your right leg over her rump and sit down in the saddle."

Dyl nodded and put his left boot into the stirrup, then swung his other leg up and over, getting seated well onto the saddle. "Well I got that part at least." He lightly laughed.

Cody smiled. "Yep, now just learn how to ride, rope, mend fence, cook on a campfire, shoe horses, and brand cows, and we'll make you a working cowboy." With that, Cody jumped up on the back of his waiting stallion, and goaded him into a light walk. The mare followed. Looking back over his shoulder, he called back to Dylan. "Nudge her gently until she gets up beside me."

Dylan nodded in response and gave a small twitch with his boot heels. The mare did not react, however, so he goaded her a little more firmly, this time causing the mare to bound up next to Cody's stallion. Cody nodded in approval. "So Dyl, do you mind if I ask you something kinda personal?"

"Sure, go right ahead."

"Well, I guess you've noticed that there aren't *that* many of us around. Anthro-furs I mean. I've always been this way, at least as far back as I can remember. But my mom was a "regular" wolf, and I didn't know my dad." Cody smiled nervously. "Were both of your parents anthros? Do you know anything about how we came to be this way?"

Dylan thought for a moment. "Both of my folks were anthros, actually, so it seemed normal to me. Seems a lot of people have rumors about how we are the way we are, but they're so varied that I can't really see any that hold enough truth to them."

Cody considered it. "Hmm. Interesting. I wonder how it was that I am an anthro, since my mother was a regular wolf. I guess there's a lot more to this than I imagined. I went to some seminar on it with Turner one time, but the old windbag at the university almost put me to sleep." Speaking more sharply now, Cody added, "Watch that stream ahead... hold on to the saddle horn. Your mare knows how to cross it, but it might be a bit bumpy." As the two rode in silence, Cody's mind continued to twist and turn, unsure of how to phrase the questions he wanted to ask. Responding to Cody's advice, Dylan held on the best he could, though not so tightly as to look nervous.

Finally Cody's inquisitive nature won out over his reluctance. "Hey, uhm, Dyl? Not that it matters even one bit to me, but just out of curiosity, can you tell me a little bit about your heritage?"

"Hm? Oh, sure." Dyl smiled. "As you probably guessed from my fur markings, I'm nothing purebred and all that. My father's a Doberman, my mother a German shepherd and golden retriever crossbreed. Grew up most of my life up in New York, really. My folks ran a restaurant near Central Park, so that's where I picked up my cooking habits."

Cody smiled. "At least you know your heritage. Like I said before, my dad's a mystery to me. I guess the advantage of my mom being a "regular" wolf is that I did learn at an early age how to speak Wolfish, and that's been handy since it has allowed me to

tell the nearby packs to stay away from my herd. But I don't think bloodlines are all that important anyway, it's what we are inside that matters. I do guess I sort of envy you for knowing. Well, envy is an ugly word. I guess I just mean...." Cody trailed off, not able to find the right words.

From a distance behind, the two riders heard a galloping horse approaching. "Oh, great, here comes Turner." Cody paused, then added in a half-whisper, "Brace yourself, Dylan. He's a good guy underneath it all, but he can be kind of hard on your nerves right at first."

From behind the two riders came a deeply masculine yet somewhat irritating voice. "Hey, up ahead! What are you guys doing? I thought we were having a cookout? I'm damn well starved!" Speeding along at a ground-eating gallop, the third rider quickly caught up to the two friends.

Dyl blinked a few times and smiled at Turner, but Cody groaned. "Turner, I've told you a hundred times, stop screaming around the horses. It spooks them. This is my friend Dylan, and we decided to go riding for a while." Staring at his friend a little harder, Cody added, "You look a complete fright, Turner. Did you stretch your nose ring hole *again*?"

"Yeah Cody, I stretched it up again, hurt like a bitch, too. I'm glad I did it though. Doesn't it look hot with this 4 gauge through my septum?" Turner was, as usual, dressed in ratty blue jeans with the knees ripped out, black knee-high motorcycle boots, and a black leather vest that was open to reveal the extensive tribal tattoos on his chest and arms. His face and ears were extensively pierced with shockingly large jewelry. He rode

up beside Dylan and extended his hand. "Turner Craig. Nice to meet you, Dylan. Don't pay any attention to my bitchy cowboy friend over there. He's just jealous because he doesn't have the balls to shove bits of metal through his face."

Cody smacked his head into his palm. "See what I mean about him being a little hard on your nerves, Dyl? All right guys, let's head back to the house." Cody led the party up a path through the woods back into an open clearing. The old yellow farm truck was visible in the distance.

Turner started grinning at Cody. "I'll race you to the truck, sweet cheeks!" Laughing wildly, Turner took off at a gallop.

Noting the stunned expression on Dylan's face, Cody paused. "Uhm, Dyl? I guess I should have warned you. Turner can be a little, umm, overly affectionate.. If he hits on you, just punch the crap out of him and he'll lay off." Not getting a response, he called out to his friend again. "Dyl? You OK over there? Tell me my bud Turner didn't spook you *that* badly?"

Dyl shook his head. "No, I'm perfectly fine, Cody. Was just kind of a sudden thing, really. Are those motorcycle boots he's wearing, though?"

"Yeah, the dumbass." Cody shook his head. "I've told him a hundred times not to do it. If his horse spooks and throws him, those chunky, thick-treaded rubber soles are going to hang up in the stirrup and he's going to get dragged. I've tried to tell him that biker boots are for the highway, but he won't listen." Pausing to think for a moment, Cody added, "He looks a little freaky, and he is completely overbearing, but he's actually

a really nice guy. Heck, the piercings and tattoos don't really bother me, but I like giving him grief about them."

Up ahead, Turner was leaning out the door of the truck, waving impatiently and yelling. "Are you slack-jawed bitches coming or what? I'm starved!!!"

Dylan, a bit stunned but trying his best to act the part of the gentleman, called over to Cody. "Heh, guess we should get back now, huh? He seems pretty eager to eat."

Cody groaned. "Dang it all, Turner, I've told you to watch your mouth. You keep talkin' like that around our guest and I'm gonna redecorate your face. How do you think that great big new nose ring is gonna feel with my fist in it?"

Turner laughed almost coquettishly. "Yeah, yeah, you big brute. Come on up here and try it. I didn't get all my scars from nothing, you know. I've been in a few good fights."

Cody sighed deeply. "Uhm, Dylan? You know anyone who wants to adopt a husky? I don't think he has papers, but he's mostly housebroken." Cody stared helplessly ahead at his friend Turner, shaking his head in disbelief as he had done so many times before.

As they rode closer to the gate, Dylan just chuckled a bit. "I'm sure there's someone looking for a rebel in their life. C'mon, he's getting impatient." Cody sighed again and dismounted, then helped Dylan down off of his mare.

Turner was waiting on the middle of the pickup's bench seat when the two friends climbed in. "I thought you invited us over for a cookout, cowboy. Where's the beef?"

Cody turned to Turner with a low snarl. "I'll start cooking it as soon as we get up top. Mind your manners, furball."

Turner just laughed and planted his arms around Cody's neck. "You're such a brute, Cody. Please tell me why I'm in love with you. And my God, but your friend here is cute." Irritated once more by his friend's offhand remark, Cody elbowed Turner in the ribs forcefully, sending his breath out in a deep "whoosh".

Starting the truck, Cody revved the cantankerous engine and headed back for the house. "So, um, Dylan -- what line of work did you say you were in?"

Dyl blushed a bit, shifting his feet slightly. "Oh uh... janitorial services, mostly."

Cody smiled. "Relax, bud, there's nothing wrong with that. I spend my days mucking cow manure out of stalls, among other things. Not that different, really."

Still blushing, Dylan replied, "Well, I suppose so. Pays the bills so it's something."

"I wish you would convince our rebel friend here to find steady work. He's been drifting from job to job for years now." Cody gave his old friend a very meaningful look as he spoke.

Turner flared at Cody. "I make enough to keep a roof over my head, and it doesn't leak THAT badly. At least my bedroom doesn't smell like cow shit when I open my windows at night."

"Nope, yours just smells like diesel fumes. Whatever possessed you to rent a place next to a truck stop, anyway?" Cody sighed quietly. "We're here. Let's get the food

going. Turner, how about getting out the tossed salad and potato salad I made earlier? They're in the fridge. We'll eat in the gazebo since it's screened in."

In a flurry of activity, Cody grabbed his butane lighter, igniting first the gas grill and then the ring of citronella-oil tiki torches. It was a beautiful night, and he really hoped to keep the mosquitoes and biting flies away so they could enjoy it. He then ran inside himself, getting a pot of baked beans, some fresh steaks, and a tall pitcher of cold iced tea. Realizing he had not even asked his friend his preference, he yelled back out the door. "Hey Dyl, is iced tea OK?"

"Tea sounds fine, Cody, thanks." Dyl stretched a bit. "Need any assistance?"

"Naw, just relax. Turner will set up the table. Hey Turner, don't forget the condiments."

Turner bowed fligidly, smirking. "I've done this before, Cody. Quit telling me what to do." Grinning at Dylan, he added, "Honestly, Dylan, he thinks I'm helpless. Look at me. Do I look helpless to you?" Hearing this, Cody just grunted and went back to cooking the steaks and heating up the beans.

Ever alert to the chance to pick at his old friend, Turner continued. "So Dylan, what's a nice young dog like you hanging around with a grumpy old wolf like Cody?"

Dyl blushed slightly. "Well uh... he's a nice guy, and we have things in common. Just seems to work pretty nicely as a friendship." Dylan was obviously caught off guard by the husky's abrupt and sometimes even vulgar manner.

"Oh? That's cool. You could do worse for a friend, I guess. Cody's so noble it makes me sick. Smells like a horse's back side, though. He ought to, considering he

spends more time with his horses than he does with me.” Though this last retort was delivered with a sneer, Dylan could not help but notice that Turner had a somewhat pained look in his eyes. Changing the subject, Turner added, “Dang, I got a pebble in my boot. I hate that...” Reaching down, Turner pulled his tall boot off his right foot, and shook it out. He noticed Dylan watching him.

Smiling, Dylan asked him, "Manage to get it out?"

“Yeah, sure did, thanks. I love my boots. Probably not as much as Cody loves his, but to each their own. You don't seem to be that familiar with this style. Here, you can grab it and look it over, it's fine with me.”

Cody called out from behind the grill. “Hey wait just a minute, Turner. You're asking him to handle toxic waste before dinner, you know.”

“Your feet don't smell like roses either, cowboy,” Turner retorted. “Hey Dyl, what kinda boots are those that you are wearing? Looks like something I saw in a horse show.”

Caught off guard by the question, Dylan glanced down at his booted feet. “Hm? Oh, these.” Dyl wiggled his feet a little. “Just one of my pairs of riding boots. They're pretty comfortable.”

“Heh, I'm surprised Cody hasn't tried to get you into a pair of his cowboy clodhoppers yet. Now if you want comfy, bad-ass boots, *these* are the way to go. You can borrow mine any time you want, bud. I've got several different pairs, and one's the same as another to me.” He gawked at Dylan. “You'd look really hot in a pair of these, actually.”

Cody, fearing that Turner might be about to put the moves on his friend, moved to change the subject. "Steaks will be ready in a few minutes, guys. Turner, you want yours still mooing, right? Dyl, how do you like yours cooked?"

Dylan, blushing a bit at Turner's intense stare, gratefully answered. "Medium's fine for me, thanks, Cody."

"Just carve a slab of meat off the cow's ass and wave it over the fire, that's what I want," Turner laughed.

Cody rolled his eyes for a moment, then stared at his friend. "Honestly, Turner, can you say a single sentence without being vulgar?"

"Probably, but it's more fun getting a reaction out of you." He laughed somewhat mockingly at Cody before looking at the other guest. "I'm sorry, Dylan, I'll behave myself while you're here." As an afterthought, he turned back to the cowboy. "Hey Cody, I brought a broccoli casserole too. It's in the oven. I thought Dyl might want something more than baked beans, potato salad, and tossed greens with his steak. You know, you dumbass cowboys sometimes tend to forget that you can actually serve vegetables hot." Leaning in towards Dylan with a low whisper, he added, "If you don't like broccoli, I'll understand of course..."

"Oh, I like broccoli just fine, really." Dyl turned a bit to Turner. "My mother used to make a good broccoli au gratin."

"Really? That's one of my favorites. Believe it or not, I kind of love to cook." Turner rolled his eyes. "Dylan, I guess you should know something. Normally when I'm out in public, I don't act like this at all. Hell, man, I'm so deeply closeted that I have to

import daylight. But when I'm around Cody, I just let myself be myself. I *am* gay, for what that's worth, and I like flirting with that cowboy over there, mainly because it sends him up the wall. I'm harmless though, I promise." Glancing back to the cowboy, he added with a lascivious sneer, "Well, *mostly* harmless, anyway."

Dyl nodded a bit. "Understood. Not a big deal though."

"I'm glad you understand. Cody acts like he's ashamed of me most of the time. I promise, though, I won't hit on you. I think you're a nice guy and all, but another man already owns my heart."

Red-faced with newfound irritation, Cody slammed down his fist on the table. "Dang it, Turner, I'm not ashamed of you. I'm just not that way, OK? I haven't found the right girl for me, and by now I'm just used to being a forever bachelor."

Turner leaned a bit closer to Dylan. "See what I mean?" he whispered.

Trying to salvage some tiny portion of his dignity, Cody barked out, "Steaks are ready, guys!" As he looked at Turner, however, his eyes softened ever so slightly, as if he were not quite so ashamed of this big clumsy brute after all. "All right, guys, tonight we're doing this buffet style. I'll slap your steak on your plate so you get the right one... but you get everything else yourself. Help yourself to as much as you want."

Twilight had fallen, and the quiet of the night was punctuated by the chirps of a lonely cricket. As the guys settled down to eat, Cody looked at Dylan and spoke softly. "You know, Dyl, we were talking earlier about our origins. We actually both have it pretty good, bud."

Swallowing a mouthful of steak, Dyl replied. "I suppose we do, in different ways."

Turner met Cody's gaze, not saying a word, but he looked deeply into the wolf's golden-green eyes for what passed for an eternity. Finally breaking the silence, he spoke. "What Cody is trying to say, Dyl, is that I'm an orphan. I don't remember anything about my parents. I don't even know where I come from. I spent most of my teen and young adult years bumming around, trying to just find odd jobs. Cody actually sort of took me in when I was a stray. He let me work on the ranch one year. I was a walking disaster area as a cowboy, let me tell you. But we got to be friends, and that's meant a lot to me. Now I live in town, work odd jobs, and take night classes at the university. It's a hard life, but it's worth it when you've got good friends."

"Oh.." Dyl bit his lip a little, feeling slightly ashamed and uneasy. In some ways he'd had it better than some, in other ways worse. "Sorry, I guess I didn't exactly understand the point at first."

"Sorry, pal, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable." Turner laughed easily. "I don't particularly feel any regrets for the way my life turned out. Yeah, it's been rough at times. But it's made me stronger, and that's what counts. It looks like you've had your share of rough spots too, Dyl. Relax, you're among friends now, bud. I guess the only reason I told you all that, is because I think you'll better understand me now. I'm a loud-mouthed punk on the surface, yeah. But there is more to me than that."

Cody had a very soft look on his face as his friend spoke. Though he said nothing, his expression spoke volumes. The friends continued their steak dinner without any

further deep thoughts to dampen their spirits, and as they laughed and joked with one another, Dylan realized that he had stumbled upon one of those rare occasions where people truly could take off their masks and be themselves. He couldn't help but notice, however, that Turner and Cody continued to meet each other's gazes throughout the evening, and that in those moments, there was an expression of such undisguised yearning that it filled his heart with anguish. As he contemplated the fate of these two friends and their difficult predicament, a solitary coyote lifted its head in mournful song beneath a moonlit sky.