

## 1 - LEMON

“You guys, look!”

I glance at Shadow as she slips off her tall chair and undoes the ruffled coat tied around her trim waist. Beneath it she’s wearing nothing but emerald green lace that barely holds back her little boobies and round hips. Next to me, Furyon chokes on his whiskey but recovers quickly, lifting a glass in cheers.

“Very nice, Shadow. I’m taken, though, flattered as I may b—”

Shadow rolls her eyes, a smile ghosting her lips. “Har har, Furyon. This is the set Lemon and I bought back when I thought I’d have to show up here and surprise Dain ‘cause our schedules weren’t working out.”

My brows lift. “You never used it yet? That’s been what, two months?”

Shadow’s cheeks pinken and she lifts her thumb, nipping at the pad. “Erm, I usually don’t stay clothed long enough to put lingerie on so no, I haven’t used it.”

Who am I to judge, though? Vampires are horndogs on the best of days and I’m no better with my sexy mate by my side.

“He’s gonna have a heart attack,” Oz says, sliding onto the stool next to Furyon and fanning his face. “So I guess what we’re saying is there’s absolutely no chance with me and Dain. I’ve got to let it go?”

Shadow crumples a napkin and tosses it playfully at him from across the table. “Not a chance in hells, gargoyle. Although admittedly, the idea of your tails and wings rubbing all together sounds kinda hot. I might could watch that.”

Oz giggles like a schoolgirl and steals my drink, throwing it back in one fell swoop.

“I’m gonna ask him to claim me tonight,” Shadow says quietly as she does the tie back up, her smile going soft.

My mouth drops open. “Shadow, are you for real?”

She nods, a smile overtaking her beautiful, angular features. “Yeah. We’ve been going back and forth and all I know is nothing feels like home without him. Although admittedly, we’re preferring Pine Gulch these days.”

My heart skips a beat and I smile between her, Furyon, and Oz. “Bestie are you saying what I think you’re saying? Are you and Dain moving to PG?”

She tucks a dark strand of hair behind her ear. “Yeah, I think so. He loves it so much more than the city, and it sounds like there’s a lot of work for the right green witch to do. I’ve been putting some feelers out. Not to mention that Keeper’s mansion really needs the green touch, and I feel like you’ve made progress with her.”

Furyon squeezes my thigh beneath the table. I’m two thousand percent certain he had something to do with Shadow’s ideas. Pine Gulch’s beloved Keeper Sipan left quite a few unfinished projects that the Gulch herself seems ready to tackle. There’s nobody better to continue his work than Shadow. Plenty of green witches live in PG, but I know for a fact that Shadow’s experience trumps most of them.

Damn, this is all working out totally differently than I would have imagined. Who’d have thought I’d find the love of my life in this little country haven? Or that my best friend would too? Or that I’d make new besties here?!

Glad I didn’t bet anybody on it cuz I’d be out that money for sure. Although I’d be up a mate and a sense of belonging. In the end, that’s worth more than anything else in the entire haven system.

## 2 - FURYON

Our dinner with friends turns into drinks and karaoke until the early hours of the morning. When Whiskey Business finally starts throwing patrons out the doors into the street, I take her cue and gather up my mate. She's a might tipsy and cackling with Oz. Shadow and Dain disappeared an hour ago.

I'm happy for them, and it'll be nice for Lemon to have her best friend closer all the time. I doubt Lemon's lonely here in PG with me, but adding Shadow to the mix is a good thing for my woman. She grabs onto Oz as they stumble down the karaoke stage's steps, but her crimson eyes alight on me and narrow. Her delicate nostrils flare, and it's hard not to push into my larger form.

She loves hunting and taking me when I'm three times her size.

She and Oz rejoin me as I sip the last dregs of my whiskey.

He looks between us with a smile. "Time for you two to head home, I suppose. I'll just return to my sad little apartment by my lonesome, third wheel forever." He snorts. "What is it the humans say? Always a bridesmaid never a ride?"

I bark out a laugh. "Never a *bride*, Oz. Never a *bride*. Although I suppose ride works too, given what you're complainin' about."

He thrusts his hips against Lemon's side, letting out a series of ever-louder grunts. Above us, Whiskey Business creaks and groans. The floorboards shuffle and knock him off his feet, and then they ripple him all the way to the door. He laughs as the building tosses him through it and into the street.

Lemon loops her arm through mine. "Guess that's code for get the fuck out?"

The building lets out yet another irritated sound, and behind the bar, a minotaur bartender gives us the *look*. That look that shouts 'go home and fuck already'. Or at least, that's how I'm taking it 'cause that's exactly what I plan to do.

I smile as I sling an arm around Lemon, sliding it up the back of her short tee. It barely covers her luscious breasts, her entire midsection hangin' out. It's a tease because *she's* a tease. In the month we've been mated I've learned that everything she does is calculated to tantalize me. She loves dressing up, she loves showing just enough skin, and she knows what'll drive me wild.

Lovin' Lemon is as natural as breathin'. I'm sure it don't hurt that she's smart as a whip, funny, and kind to boot.

Speakin' of boots, tonight she's wearing a new brown pair Shadow brought from some "country" store she found in Rainbow. The leather's soft and pliant and imbued with a sort of iridescence. They're not exactly shiny, but they're not run of the mill either. New sparkle boots are practically Lemon's love language and I fully expect them to lead to casual fuckery against the side of the house.

Or in my truck.

Or on her potions table.

Anywhere. Anytime.

Outside, we walk with our hands around one another's waists. The stars twinkle above us, the nights growing crisp enough that our breath is visible. PG is busy this weekend and there are plenty of tourists in town. Music echoes out of every bar on Main Street.

Lemon sighs happily as we reach the end. I parked in front of Glimmer and jog ahead to open her door. She strokes my cock as she shimmies past me and into the front seat, crimson eyes flashing with desire. Through our bond, her need is as tangible as mine.

My woman's hot, and it's up to me to do something about that.

### 3 - LEMON

I'm so stinking happy for Shadow I could scream. Dain's already got a cute place downtown but I bet a dollar to a donut, as he says, that they'll relocate somewhere with more space for her plants. She's always wanted a greenhouse, and if I know anything about Dain, it's that what Shadow wants Shadow gets.

Which leads me to thinking about my handsome mate driving with just his left hand on the steering wheel. His right hand rubs soft circles inside my knee. He wears a perpetual smirk these days, and that suits me just fine because I'll never tire of that lopsided smile or the way it grows huge when I start pulling my clothes off.

I'm doing a lot of that, too. Seems like the vampire and dark elf combo really is one for the record books. I've never had a monster boyfriend who could keep up with me in the bedroom—vampires included. But Furyon keeps up and more. He's insatiable, and it makes me feel so treasured, so desired, I can hardly stand it.

The fact that I get to keep him for the rest of our lives is such a gift.

I haven't spoken to Father at all since he left PG, although Hunter sent Furyon and me a wedding present. I never did bother to reschedule my Introduction Ceremony. But honestly that suits me fine, too. New York doesn't feel like the right fit for me anymore.

"Whatcha thinkin' about, country girl?"

Furyon's deep voice never fails to tighten my core and pebble my nipples. I lean my head against his muscular shoulder and reach over to run my hand up the underside of his hard cock. He lets out a deep hiss, then clenches his jaw as one brow quirks mischievously upward.

"Just how much I love you." I stroke harder, gripping him as he rocks his hips up to meet my hand.

"You keep that up, baby, and we ain't gonna make it home."

"We hafta make it home," I say with a laugh. "Roger, Bebob and the horses will throw a shit fit if they don't get some snacks."

He groans. "Don't know why you insisted on getting them accustomed to late night snacks. Now they're worse than ever, hound doggin' me around the place." His hips stop moving. "And now I'm thinking about feeding the animals."

We share a laugh as I wrap my arms through his again and rest my head on his shoulder. “Just get us home, country boy.”

He kisses the top of my head and depresses the gas pedal until we’re flying down moonlit roads toward our place.

No sooner do we pull close to the house than Bebop and four or five other pit hells come flying off the porch. They surround the truck, yapping and barking incessantly. Roger joins them, clucking and fluttering as he lands on the truck hood. He cocks his head disjointedly from side to side as he stares through the window at us.

Furyon laughs. “Get inside, wife. I’m in the mood to take you and I want you waiting and ready.”

Heat floods me, slick soaking my panties as I slide off the bench seat. I toss my husband a final sexy look as I close the truck door and leave him to the animals.

#### 4 - FURYON

I've never regretted my animal family. They've been there for me the whole time I've lived in the Gulch. Hells, I like them better than most monsters. But as I toss hay for Zig and Zag and watch the pit hells slurping at kibbles, I consider how these responsibilities delay me from doting on my woman.

Still, the bond is stretched tight with longing. She's pushing a sexy tease through it.

I've never fed the animals faster. I lock Roger up with the other chickens in the coop. He prefers roosting up in the trees, but it's safer for him in with the hens. For a chicken he's pretty savvy about predators, but even so, I don't like to let him do that unless he refuses to come down.

My rooster tattoo tingles happily when I lock up the coop and head toward the front porch. Sending desire through my mating bond, I yank open the screen and cross the house to our bedroom. I'm tempted to pull my clothes off on the way, but I think I'd prefer to watch her watch me.

I halt in the doorway at the scene in front of me. Lemon lies naked on the bed, one hand on the headboard and the other between her thighs. Pretty pink nipples peak in the cool air, her breasts swaying slightly as her hand moves in soft circles over her clit.

"Furyon," she moans, her fingers moving slightly faster. "Tease me, country boy."

Letting out a satisfied laugh, I lift my hands to my shirt and pull the pearl snaps open. She moans when I toss the shirt aside, crimson eyes narrowing as she watches the movement of my hands. Next I shove my pants down and step out of them, fully nude before my mate.

She slips her hand further down, fingertips dipping inside her channel. Even from across the room the scent of her obvious need is like a homing beacon. The urge to fulfill her desires has my larger form aching to burst free and climb on top of her. She loves my weight in my large form, loves to be crushed beneath a giant, hot body.

Snarling, I call it forth, muscles popping and enlarging until my horns nearly scrape the roof. Lemon moves her fingers faster, rocking her hips to meet her touch. Just the sight of her luscious body quivering has me dripping precum in sticky strings onto the floor.

“Godsdamn, pretty girl,” I croon as I cross to the bed and sink onto it. It dips beneath my weight. But my woman’s soaking the sheets with need and I’m gonna lose my everlovin’ mind.

Leaning forward, I bring my face between her thighs and run my tongue over her fingers, licking her taste off ‘em. She pants, her movements growing jerky as she arches, closing her eyes as she loses herself to the bliss. I lick her fingers again, slipping my tongue between them just enough to taste her sweet pussy.

Divine. Lemon’s flavor bursts across my taste buds, as tart and sweet as the first time. I’ll never tire of this. Growling, I swat her hands aside and slide my tongue into her channel. She clamps around it, pussy fluttering in waves as her body begins to convulse. She screams, body locking up tight as slick floods her pussy, soaking my tongue.

## 5 - LEMON

Ecstasy flows through me like a raging river. It radiates out from my core as my pussy clenches rhythmically around my mate's tongue. His upper lip teases my clit, prolonging orgasm until I can't hear, can't see, can't focus on anything but the insane pleasure. When it subsides, I lie there panting. Furyon places featherlight kisses on my clit and down my pussy lips, back up the other side until I'm ready for round two.

Like this in his larger form, he dwarfs me in the best of ways. Big hands come to my knees and hold them wide. I shift upright onto my elbows and look at how stunning he is with those enormous horns and all that marvelous hair. He's a decadently dark vision, or maybe that's just the sentiment he's pushing up our bond but damn, it works on me.

I'm a vampire...you'd think I'd get tired of fucking the same person forever. But every time with Furyon seems better than the last. I don't even know how that's possible. But when his fingers tighten into my knees and he kisses my clit harder, I know he's nowhere near done with me.

He flattens his tongue over my clit and drags it downward, then back up. Over and over even though I'm so fucking sensitive it borders on pain. Little growls of need send reverberations through my body until my nipples are so fucking tight I can't stand it.

Within seconds I'm almost ready to come again. Furyon pulls away and flops onto his back. In a smooth move, he hauls me onto his chest and up, settling me down on top of his mouth. The hot, wet sensation of his mouth pulls a needy groan from my throat. He reaches up and places my hands on the bases of his horns.

He loves horn play in his larger form. It's my theory that all the extra surface area makes them all that much more sensitive. Moving his hands to my hips, he guides me over his mouth. I drag my nails up and down his horns until he starts panting and going crazy between my thighs.

When I dig my nails in and grip tight, he howls and attacks my pussy like a man unhinged. His mouth drags a second orgasm from my body and I curl over him as I scream into the headboard. I've got a death grip on his horns, but that doesn't deter him. If anything it seems to stoke his desire higher.

“Lemon,” he gasps between sucks. “More, baby. Give me another one.”  
When he asks so nicely, it’s hard to deny my mate something he wants.

## 6 - FURYON

After my mate comes a fourth time, I let her slump off my face onto the mattress. Her hair flares around her on the pillow, making her look like a predatory angel. I'm nowhere near done with her, though, not when she has me inflamed like this. Rolling onto my side, I slide my hands into the soft folds of her belly and rub them. I place gentle kisses along the underside of one heavy breast, then the next. Bringing my mouth up, I suck a taut nipple into my mouth, rolling my tongue over it as Lemon starts mewling again.

I never knew it would be this easy to please my pretty little mate. I never *realized* how naturally it would come to me. How perfectly suited we'd be.

There's nothing about her that isn't utterly tantalizing.

She fists her hands through my hair, holding it tight as I suck her nipple into a stiff peak before moving to the other. I pinch the first, pulling it until she hisses, protective layer flashing over her eyes. My girl likes a little bit of pain.

"Quiet, slut," I command. It's a degradation sort of night, something I've learned she loves. And there's nothing I can say that's too much for her. In fact the worse I degrade her, the more she seems to love it and the harder she comes.

"Hands on the headboard. Don't move them from there." I move to straddle her, tantalized as ever looking at how my giant thighs dwarf her luscious body.

She moves her hands to the headboard, curling her fingers around the wooden slats.

Gripping my cock at the base, I thwap it against her well-used pussy. She's swollen and tender and that's how I like her to be before I take her in my bigger form. I have to be more careful because I'm so much larger, I can't go to the hilt inside her. But I can tease myself and her, and the stretch of her pussy around my length is fucking fantastic.

"Greedy little slut, aren't you," I muse as I drag my huge cockhead through her folds, coating it in her sweet slick.

She mewls and rocks her hips, trying to get more friction.

I move backward enough to drape her left leg over my thigh then guide my cock to her pussy lips. Pressing just the tip inside her, I moan when her wet heat envelopes

me, wrapping my dickhead up tight. Lemon gasps and arches her back, and the move of her hips pulls me farther inside her. Moving my hands to her hips, I thrust slowly, intentionally until half my cock is inside her. In this form it's nearly as big around as a soda can, and she claws at the headboard, chest heaving as I slip deeper inside.

“I can't, mate,” she says on a tortured cry, black claws digging into wood. “I can't, oh gods, too big.”

“Shut the fuck up,” I growl, reaching up to cover her mouth with one hand.

Then I snap my hips.

## 7 - LEMON

“Fuckin’ take this cock,” Furyon demands, splitting me in half with his larger form’s length. He throbs inside me, tickling my inner walls as I struggle to breathe around how damn full he makes me.

And safe.

He might call me a whore or slut or something worse. And it’ll get me off hard as hells.

“This pussy’s such a good fucking girl,” he croons, “desperate for my seed, isn’t she?”

“Yes,” I whisper. “Give it to me, mate.”

“I said quiet,” he hisses, thrusting again.

The power in those muscular hips forces the breath from my lungs. Swear to gods if I look down, I half expect I’ll see his cock through my stomach muscles.

So hot.

“My little whore,” he purrs. “Tell me you missed me all day today.”

The way he combines praise with me praising him gets me hotter than any other way.

“I missed you,” I admit. “So much, Furyon. I thought about us doing this all day. I—”

“Aghhh,” he grunts out. “Fuck, Lemon, my little slut. Open those pretty thighs wider. Clench down on my cock until I come.”

I let my thighs fall wider open, focusing on tightening around him with every pass of that magical cock. How is it even possible that I’ve come so many times but this man is about to drag yet another orgasm from my well used body?

Don’t know. Don’t care. I just want it all day every day.

“Come for me,” I beg. “I wanna feel you, mate. Splash my womb with seed, please.”

“Lemon Zayle, you’re fuckin’—” his words trail off as his mouth drops open, upper lip curling back into a snarl.

The moment I see those gorgeous white fangs, I lose it. Hot seed splatters inside me, filling me as his movements grow jerky. He’s careful as ever not to go too deep

considering how much larger he is in this form. But fuck, watching him come throws me over the edge, and I clamp rhythmically around him as he drags yet another orgasm from my tired body.

## 8 - FURYON

Lemon lies with her arm and leg over my body, snoring softly. I've been awake for an hour, but I can't bring myself to move her when she looks so happy and peaceful. When a set of giant ears pop up next to my head, and Bebop's crimson eyes come into view, I know the peace won't last.

The animals are hungry and if I don't feed Roger on his schedule, I don't hear the end of it for days.

Slipping carefully out of Lemon's embrace, I slide my feet into a pair of spare boots and pull on the nearest article of clothing—Lemon's frilly black robe.

I pray to gods none of my neighbors happen by while I'm outside. But if I know my woman, seeing me in lace'll just turn her on.

Bebop trails me through the house and out the front door. Nearly a dozen pit hells crowd around today. Seems like more than usual, but as long as they know we're a safe spot I'm glad.

Roger crows at the door to the chicken coop. He don't like bein' locked up. When I open the door to the coop, he and all the others flutter out and start pecking at the ground. I throw corn for them first, then divvy kibbles into a big bowl for the pit hells. By the time I get them settled, Zig and Zag are neighing from the barn at the back of the house.

I round the corner to find my woman standing in the barn with her turquoise boots on and nothin' else, tossing hay into the stalls.

Holy fuckin' shit.

When she bends over to grab another flake, her entire pussy and ass are on display to me. I hook my thumbs into the robe's lace belt and watch as she finishes feeding the horses. She turns, rubbing her hands together to get the extra hay off 'em. My smile grows so big my damn face hurts.

That's all mine.

*She's* all mine.

"I'm lucky I get this all day every day."

She jerks upright, smiling when she sees me standing there. Then she barks out hoarse laughter, her voice throaty from last night's overuse.

“Are you wearing my robe, Ranger Zayle?”

I execute a little spin as I cross the backyard to her. Once I’m close enough, I slip my arms around her waist, tilting her head backward so I can brush my lips with hers.

“This robe was the first thing I could find.”

She waves down at her naked body. “You could always do this in the nude, ya know.”

“New weekend plan,” I demand. “Naked farm chores. If you get dirty I’ll hose you down behind the house.”

She laughs and slaps my chest, then slips out of my arms and saunters back toward the house. I have to reach down and adjust my aching hard on watching that peach sway in the early morning light.

“Oh yeah, country girl,” I say to myself. “You’re all mine.”

## 9 - LEMON

“Okay so you’re a not-Keeper Keeper?”

The young gargoyle seated across from us in a booth at Betty’s Burger Bar wears a skeptical expression, black brows bunched tightly above his eyes.

Furyon looks at me for help, then back at the kid.

“Yeah, something like that. You sure you don’t want to talk to Sheriff Rygold. He’s probably the better monster to answer your questions for your paper interview thing.”

The young male, Iggy, shakes his head. “I picked him ‘cause he’s my dad’s uncle so I thought he’d be cool. But then he turned out to be a real—” he glances up at the big handsome gargoyle sitting next to him in the booth, “a-hole, if you know what I mean.”

The youngling’s father, Alo, sighs and crosses his arms as he glances at his son. “I’d correct you, Ignatius, but you’re right.” He looks at us and chuckles. “Bishop’s literal response to being interviewed for Ig’s school paper was ‘hells no, go home.’”

I bark out a laugh as Furyon sighs.

“Guess I’m your stand in Keeper then, huh?”

Iggy lets out a matching sigh. “I guess we’ll do the best with what we’ve got. That’s what Dad said before we came.”

The big gargoyle slaps a hand over his face. “My gods, Ig. We’ve really got to talk about your bedside manner.”

Iggy whacks his father with his wing. “We’re not even *in* bed, dad. Chill out.”

I hold back a snicker as I thrum my fingers in the middle of the table to catch his attention. “Alright, so, should we get started?”

The youngling opens his notebook, revealing a page scrawled with what I assume are his questions. He sets the notebook upright like a wall, then places a second blank sheet of paper on the table in front of himself.

“Okay.” He glances at Furyon. “I’m supposed to ask you about doing the Keeper test at Headquarters but I guess maybe you didn’t do it since you’re not a real Keeper?”

Furyon shakes his head. “Nope, neither is your great Uncle Bishop. When Pine Gulch got started we had a very beloved Keeper named Sipan Varian. He died about seventy haven years ago and the town herself has literally chased away every Keeper since.”

Iggy scrunches his nose. “Okay, but Keepers have specific magic, so how do you do the stuff like calling humans here with your magical artifact, or glamouring downtown for holidays, or any of the other stuff?”

“Well that *is* interesting,” Furyon starts. “I mostly welcome new folks to town and deal with the Headquarters communications, although admittedly we prefer to keep to ourselves out here. For the duties that require magic, Bishop had to go to Headquarters to get a temporary spell allowing him to use our magical artifact and be able to do the glamour. Unfortunately, it doesn’t work suuuuper well and he has to go re-up the spells a lot.”

“That sucks,” Iggy says with a suspicious look.

“I think he’d agree with you,” Furyon states. “He doesn’t like having to do it but he knew Sipan, so he’s best suited for the job, according to Headquarters.”

The child looks at me next. “He doesn’t live in the Keeper’s mansion though, right?”

I shake my head. “When I came to town just a few short weeks ago, the mansion was basically abandoned. But I forced my friendship upon her and now she’s letting me fix her up.”

Iggy cocks his head to the side. “So how does that work? Does it think you’re a Keeper?”

“No, it knows I’m not.” I take a sip of my coffee. “But I’ve got a theory that she’s ready for a Keeper and so she’s allowing me to fix her up for when that time comes. Almost like the town knows someone’s coming and wants to be ready.”

Iggy lets out a suspicious sound. “Umm, how could the town even know that?”

“That we don’t know,” says Furyon. “PG is just a little different.” He points at the child’s paper where he hasn’t written anything. “You getting enough to answer your questions?”

Iggy glances from his blank sheet to the stood up notebook. “Ugh, no. I mean, the answers don’t exactly fit the questions. Like, I don’t know if this is going to count for my grade.”

“You’ll be fine, Ig,” Alo says in a reassuring tone. “Not every haven is the same and they’re not all like Ever. Even our Keeper has had his own challenges.”

“I guess that’s true,” Iggy says. “Talk to me about your favorite stuff.”

“Her,” Furyon says, waving his coffee mug at me. “She’s my favorite thing.”

I laugh as Iggy rolls his eyes. “Gross, you sound like my dad! I can’t put that in my report.”

“Animals are my next favorite thing,” Furyon says with a wink in my direction. “I don’t love monsters as much as animals. I take my coffee black. River otters are my favorite animal but I have tattoos of every type of critter we have in Pine Gulch. See?” He points to the silver tattoos covering his forearms.

“Ooooh.” I waggle my brows at Iggy. “That’s *my* favorite thing.”

For the next hour, Iggy grills us on literally every aspect of our lives. He digs way into how Lemon and I met despite that not really having pertinence to his school assignment.

*What's your favorite color. Oh but why?*

*What do you eat for breakfast? Why not pancakes?*

*Do you get to chase animals while you're in large form?*

That one got him a sideways look from his father.

*If you could become a real Keeper, would you?*

*Do you work closely with my weird great Uncle?*

*Why is your favorite animal what it is? Can you talk to them in animal language?*

His list is neverending and he barely writes any of it in his notebook. I sure hope he's got a great memory because I'm more than a little curious to see how this "interview" turns out.

When he confirms that he's asked the last question, I lay my arm over the back of the bench seat so I can twirl Lemon's hair around my finger.

"So listen, little man. We don't have a normal paper here but we do have a local gossip column. Why don't you find Merit and Bryony who run it? I bet they can give you a neat view into running a paper, if you're interested."

His face lights up and he flits into the air, clapping his hands. "Oh gods that would be cool! Are they nice or are they old like you guys?"

The father groans again as he mouths a sorry at us.

Lifting my comm watch, I direct it to call Merit, who answers on the first ring. She agrees to come meet us, so I thank her and click off. When Iggy smiles at me, I wink back at him.

"They're suuuuper old, like older than dirt."

He bursts into a hysterical cackle and Lemon slaps my thigh.

"Oh my gods, Furyon, don't say that!"

I lift both brows and shoot her a look. “You remember how those two slapped us on the cover of the Gulch Gossip every week for a whole month? Yeah, can’t say I feel too bad about calling ‘em old.”

“They’re coming to help,” Lemon says quietly, although she’s grinning as big as I am.

“You two seem cool,” Iggy says with a smile as he drops back into the seat and grabs his now-cold burger. Taking a huge bite, he chews without dropping the smile. After a huge gulp, he winks at me. “For oldies.”

Laughing, I lift my coffee cup to Lemon’s and clink it in a cheers.

“You’re my oldie,” I tease playfully.

“At least I’m hot,” she teases back, sticking her tongue out at me.

We spend another hour or two with Alo, Iggy, Merit and Bryony, but eventually manage to extricate ourselves and leave them to the rest of the interview. Iggy’s loudly grilling Merit on the advantages of her ancient printing press when we leave Betty’s.

Outside, a brisk chill drifts off the mountains, blowing up Main Street and rustling my mate’s luscious hair.

“I do like to chase some things in big form,” I whisper to her as I open the door to my truck. “Have I shown you what that looks like?”

Lemon feigns shock, throwing a hand over her heart. “My word, Ranger Zayle. Are you threatening me?”

I love how three weeks into Pine Gulch living and she can fake a western accent pretty good.

My perfect mate.

“Time for a chase,” I whisper as I lean into her body. “Be ready, my sweet.”

She winks as I close the door, thinking of all the ways I can take this night. And whatever I dream up, Lemon’ll be down for it. It’s a blessing, the gift of her love, and I intend to take *full* advantage of that.