



# Chopper Pilot's Delight

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Into the Paranormal World: When a helicopter pilot takes a contract to record activity at a cattle ranch, he learns far more than he bargained for.

While Enrique Walters thinks the request is weird, gas prices are high and work in the off-season is slow. He takes ex-mayor Sheldon's money to use his helicopter to surveil the ranch where the new acting mayor—Albert—is living. Even hearing the crazy family rumors about Albert, Enrique thinks Sheldon's infatuation is due to the fact that the ranch is not only the place where Albert lives but also where the sheriff's partner works. Sheldon's actions against the sheriff caused the guy to get fired, after all. Enrique figures Sheldon wants to get some sort of blackmail information on them all.

Still, money is money, and Enrique needs it.

When Enrique's trips during the day turn up nothing, Sheldon insists Enrique fly by at night. He spots something he can't explain right before something slams into his bird. Struggling to control his descent, he hits his head. As he slides into unconsciousness, he figures that's the end.

Enrique's surprised to wake up, safe and sound, in the arms of... something. He learns gargoyles are real, and he's the mate of one named Trynche. Enrique knows he can never allow the ex-mayor to find out the truth. Except, Sheldon learns a little something another way and demands Enrique's help in exposing the monsters. With the help of his new friends, can Enrique shut down Sheldon for good and keep their secrets safe?

**Total Pages (Source):** 12

# Page 1

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With gentle touches to his controls, Enrique Walters touched his helicopter's skids to the ground with nary a bump. He smiled as he looked at the passenger to his left. Then he peered over his shoulder and offered the pair in the back the same look.

"Thank you so much for joining me today, folks," Enrique began, spotting his coworker Parish Dowers striding toward the landing pad. "I hope you enjoyed the ride."

"Oh, it was amaaazing," the woman next to Enrique gushed. As she took off her headphones, revealing her flushed cheeks, she continued, "I can't believe how gorgeous everything looks from up there."

"Bird's eye view, just like you wanted," one of the men in the back stated with a nod. He reached forward and touched the woman's shoulder, a loving expression on his rather plain features. "Happy anniversary, baby."

Peering over her shoulder at him, the woman rested her hand over his. "Yep. Just like I wanted." She appeared so very happy as she stared back at him with clear affection. "Thanks, hon. Happy anniversary."

For an instant, Enrique had to look away from the dang-near glowing couple. Upon introductions at the beginning of the ride, he'd learned that the pair were celebrating their ten-year wedding anniversary. The wife had wanted to see the world from above, and the husband had fulfilled her wish by chartering a flight with the helicopter tours that Enrique owned and operated.

Enrique felt a niggles of jealousy churn in his gut, but he did his best to ignore it.

Watching happy couples often had that effect on him. After his third tour, Enrique had retired from the military and had looked for a permanent romantic partner. Nothing had panned out. He'd tried both males and females, having accepted his bisexuality in high school. Unfortunately, the hours Enrique had spent getting his helicopter tour business up and running had always gotten in the way.

Several years before, he'd sworn off relationships, but that didn't mean he didn't still want what he was missing.

What my parents had.

Forcing those sorts of thoughts away, Enrique focused on the present—and his paying customers. After all, he didn't have too many of them this time of year. The winter was his slowest season.

Can't wait for spring.

Everyone seemed to want to see the blossoming trees in the spring and the colorful leaves in the autumn.

Another month. My business can make it.

After nearly five years in the business, Enrique had learned to anticipate the highs and lows of the seasons. He planned ahead and budgeted carefully. That didn't mean there weren't bumps along the way, unanticipated problems and repairs. In this case, the economy tanked with the changing of the presidents, and gas prices had skyrocketed.

For that reason, when Enrique heard a certain chime come from his phone, he barely hid his wince. He'd set up a specific tone for the annoying person's number.

Wish I'd never accepted ex-mayor Sheldon Loreman's money.

Too late now.

Hindsight is always twenty-twenty, as they say.

"Thanks again for an amazing flight, man," the husband told him from the back seat of the chopper. "You've made my wife's day." As the guy held out a couple of folded bills to him, he wagged his brows and added, "Which will make my night."

Enrique felt the corners of his lips twitch as he took the tip. "Thank you, sir," he replied, knowing the only reason the customer would tease like that was because Parish had already helped said wife out of the helicopter. "May the rest of your anniversary be just as, uh, fantastic."

Mentally wincing, Enrique hoped that didn't offend.

To Enrique's relief, the guy barked a laugh. "You know it," he claimed, reaching forward and patting him on the shoulder.

The door beside the husband opened, and Parish was there, encouraging the man to exit. The customer directly behind Enrique leaned forward and offered a second tip. The man had been introduced as the husband's brother.

As Enrique took it, the guy stated, "Thanks again. It was great getting to tag along on the ride." With a scoff, he added, "Been too long since I've been up in one of these things."

Hearing the nostalgia in the man's voice, Enrique turned as much as he could in his seat. "Ex-military?" he guessed, checking out the man's expression—vacant eyes and a slight curving of his firm lips.

Yup. Definitely lost in a fond memory about something.

“Yeah.” The guy’s answer came out softly. He blinked once before refocusing on Enrique. “Although, flying in a civilian bird’s nothing like a chinook.”

With a laugh, Enrique shook his head. “No, it definitely isn’t.”

“You served, too?”

Enrique smiled and nodded. “Air force.” He didn’t expand on that. He really didn’t have time to chat about it, even though it would’ve been nice to catch up with a fellow serviceman.

“Reserves, I...” The man hesitated. Then he glanced around, and he must have realized that everyone was waiting on him. “Well, thanks again, and for your service.”

“You, too,” Enrique replied. Holding the man’s gaze for a few seconds longer, he added, “Everyone counts, no matter the branch.”

While each branch had their rivalries, they all understood the same basic tenant. They were all important, and everyone did their part. They were a team.

The guy nodded once, then exited the bird with ease, betraying that he had experience with flying.

Enrique hadn’t noticed it before. He’d been too focused on the pair celebrating their anniversary. As he watched the guy walk away, he couldn’t help noticing the way the guy filled out his jeans.

Nice ass.

“You need a fuel top-up before your next set of customers?”

Parish’s question snapped Enrique out of his admiration of the most-likely straight ex-serviceman. Switching his attention to the man who was both an employee and a friend, he noticed his smirk. After leveling a narrow-eyed look at his buddy, who grinned in response, telling Enrique he’d been caught looking, Enrique sighed deeply and rolled his eyes.

“Is this next couple the last for the day?” Enrique asked. As far as he’d known, the pair was, but something could have come in while he’d been in the air.

Parish nodded in confirmation. “Yep.”

“Then, no. We have plenty to make it through this last flight,” Enrique claimed. “We’ll refill on our final walkthrough.”

Giving him a thumbs up, Parish backed away from the chopper, ducking while under the still slowly rotating blades.

Enrique slipped the tips into his button-down’s front pocket and watched as Parish beckoned for his final customers of the day to come forward.

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Lifting his hands into the air, Enrique twined his fingers and arched his back. He stretched and twisted slowly, working out the kinks in his back. Enrique bent forward and touched his toes, allowing his head to hang and his neck to release the pressure built up from flying.

As much as Enrique loved flying, there was always a certain amount of tension that came with it. After all, he was flying through the air in a machine. It was exhilarating

and stress-inducing all at the same time—each and every time.

Enrique loved it.

Making a go of it in the private sector was damn difficult, though—hence the phone call he was gearing himself up to make.

Finally, Enrique settled on a bar stool in his kitchen and took a sip of his beer. He picked up his phone and reread the message from ex-mayor Sheldon Loreman.

Call me as soon as possible.

The demand was short and to the point. Enrique knew that he was going to get an earful, since he'd put the man off longer than he should. He'd finished his paperwork, done all his final checks, and headed home.

Enrique figured he should've just called Sheldon on the drive, but he hadn't wanted to deal with the infuriating, bigoted man. The ex-mayor didn't know that Enrique was bisexual. He didn't hide it, but he didn't flaunt it, either, since he hadn't dated anyone in several years.

That meant, every time Enrique talked to the guy, Sheldon managed to insert at least one slur or insult into the conversation about Sheriff Archer Montgomery and Acting-Mayor Albert Lindson. From what Enrique had heard through the grapevine—from Parish, who'd heard it from some woman he'd dated—Archer had needed to sweet talk Albert into taking over the mayoral duties. Originally, Archer had been handling them, but he hadn't enjoyed or wanted to do them after Sheldon had gotten canned.

Considering the men were both in prominent positions and in relationships with men, Sheldon just couldn't fathom how the people of their god-fearing community could condone such perversity, let alone allow them in positions of power, flaunting their

disgusting lifestyle.

All things Enrique had heard Sheldon rant about more than once.

In truth, Enrique wasn't certain if Sheldon was angrier about their homosexuality or the fact that his attempt to get Archer fired for it had backfired. After the sheriff had come out when he'd started dating Lludd, his current partner, Sheldon had been the one to lose his job. The fact that the city council had chosen to place another gay man in his stead to finish out his term before the next election must definitely have been the icing on Sheldon's bigotry and hatred cake.

But I took money from the man, so suck it up, buttercup, and call the douche.

With that thought in mind, Enrique did just that. The phone rang twice before Sheldon picked up.

"What the hell took you so long to get back to me?" Sheldon demanded in his usual rude style. "I texted you hours ago."

Even though Enrique didn't feel like it, he remained calm and took the high road. "I apologize, but I was at work. I just got home twenty minutes ago." It was the truth. He'd gotten home, showered, and now there he sat. Wanting to move the conversation along, Enrique stated, "I'm assuming you went through the footage I sent yesterday. I'm sorry, sir, but I'm just not seeing any sign of anything odd going on at the Lindson cattle ranch."

When Sheldon had approached Enrique a couple of weeks before about surveilling the property, he'd thought it an odd request. The ex-mayor had been adamant that the group was doing something illegal. While certain members of the Lindson family had recently been through a number of scandals and health problems, Enrique had never heard that they were doing anything against the law.



Archer surely wouldn't have convinced Albert to be the acting-mayor if that was the case.

Still, Sheldon had offered a nice-sized wad of cash to sweeten the deal—under the table, of course. The ex-mayor didn't want anything to possibly be traced back to him. While Enrique felt a little bad about hiding income from Uncle Sam—he was a patriot, after all—the padding to his bank account had been too good to pass up.

“That's probably because you're doing fly-bys during the day.” Sheldon's tone had a definite you're an idiot quality to it that caused Enrique to clench his jaw to keep from responding. The man continued, still sounding snide, as he ordered, “Do a pass at night. Tonight. I know there's something going on out there.” There was a definite growl in Sheldon's voice as he continued, “There's no way a faggot who's been living alone in the mountains for years could come back and end up mayor. Someone's greasing palms somewhere, and I intend to find out who and expose them.” Sheldon began sounding obsessed as he added, “This has to do with the gay agenda and sympathizers. Those vile deviants are trying to take over the country. Well, I'll stop them. Someone has to.”

“It's hard enough coming up with an excuse as to why I was flying over their ranch during the day,” Enrique stated, cutting into Sheldon's nonsensical mutterings. “The sheriff visited me, ya know. Everyone in the area knows that chopper's mine.”

Fortunately, Enrique had already thought up a cover story—just in case—and while Sheriff Archer hadn't looked completely convinced, he'd only warned him not to fly too low to the Lindson's herds. It wasn't as if the sheriff could order him not to fly over their ranch. It just had to be above a certain height.

“Don't you worry about that fag,” Sheldon countered. “He'll be out of his job as soon as I'm back in office.”

Enrique gave in and rolled his eyes. The dick was truly obsessed and delusional. Unfortunately, Enrique had taken a considerable amount of money from him.

Pushing the beer away, Enrique stated, “Very well. I’ll go do a night pass for you.” He rose to his feet, resigning himself to a long evening. “Check your cloud account in the morning.”

“Send it tonight,” Sheldon demanded. “I’ll be waiting.”

Without another word, the ex-mayor hung up on him.

Enrique blew out a long breath while rubbing his palms over his face. With a shake of his head, he returned to his bedroom. He changed into a pair of jeans, a t-shirt, a sweatshirt, thick socks, and boots.

Then Enrique grabbed his keys and wallet before making certain the go-pro device on his headband was charged. Heading to his garage, he vowed that this would be the last time he flew for Sheldon. Enough was enough.

While Enrique had no desire for it to get out that he took videos of a local rancher’s activities for payment, he supposed there were worse things to be accused of.

Not being true to myself is one of them. No more letting that asshole use me for his psychotic crusade.

With that thought in mind, Enrique returned to the private airfield where he housed his helicopters. He paused as he stared at the pair of birds in the hangar. What few knew was that he had more than just the helicopter that he used for his business.

Enrique had spotted the old Blackhawk for sale on an online auction and hadn’t been able to resist. Of course, it had been stripped of weapons, but he hadn’t cared. The

flight hours were surprisingly low, all things considered.

Buying it is probably what put me in the financial hole I ended up in, but it was so worth it. There's nothing like flying it.

Unable to resist, Enrique opened the hangar for the Blackhawk and started going through his preflight checklist. It didn't take long for him to confirm that everything was in order. As Enrique settled behind the controls, that familiar tingle of anticipation traveled up his spine.

With a smile, Enrique started the machine, and as soon as he could, he took to the air. His stomach somersaulted, as usual, and he relished the sensation. He checked his gauges, stated the necessary call signs and numbers into his microphone—not that he expected anyone else to be in the air at that time of night—and started making a roundabout flight toward the Lindson ranch.

Just as Enrique began creeping closer to the west edge of the sprawling cattle ranch, a large shadow crossed between him and the half-full moon to his left, catching his attention. He turned his head, but whatever had caused it was already gone. A second later, he spotted another glimpse near the tops of the trees.

“What the hell?” Enrique whispered, unable to think of a bird large enough to cause such a shape.

Before he could wonder further, something big slammed into his tail, sending his bird spinning.

Enrique fought with the controls, doing his best to slow his rotations as he began plummeting far too fast toward the forest below. A hard shudder rocked through his bird, slamming him against the safety straps. His body jerked, and his head snapped sideways. His helmeted head slammed hard into the side of the cockpit, causing spots

to dance across his vision and his ears to ring.

As Enrique struggled to stay conscious—needing to concentrate so he could land his bird—he wondered if flying this one last foolhardy mission would be his end, after all.

Just fucking great. Dyin' a stooge for that bigoted asshole.

Then... his consciousness fled.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

Trynche flapped his wings hard, chasing the intruder. Over the last several months, there'd been many such rogue gargoyles testing their borders. They would fly or creep as close as they could get, but as soon as they were spotted, they would flee.

All the gargoyle elders staying at the ranch agreed that the rogues—who were being led by a gargoyle elder who'd gone rogue himself, Laagstine—were trying to figure out their defensive capabilities, as well as just how many gargoyles were there at the ranch. That answer—a lot. Hell, the number of unmated gargoyles that roosted in the barn every evening was in the double digits.

Several months before, Trynche had arrived with Elder Claitno. Elder Gurrando had already been there, conferring with Elder Bodb, who lived on the ranch with his human mate, Nicholas. After the three elders discussed reports and experiences, they'd worked hard to locate and extricate other gargoyle elders.

The first pair had been Elder Proatai and his female human mate, Whitney. Then they'd approached and secreted away the non-mated Elder Rhodes. They'd sent several enforcers to Elder Lordoan and had managed to help him escape with his mate just before the rogues had arrived at their secluded castle compound.

For an instant, Trynche thought about Elder Rayzon. He'd been mated to a female lion shifter for centuries. The pair had been missing ever since he'd been visited by Elder Laagstine—the asshole who's gone rogue—and so had his mate. While a shifter was hardier than a human, if Laagstine had killed Rayzon, she would've passed with him.

What a shame.

There were two more elders out there... somewhere... in the wind. Both were mated, and both had seemingly gone underground. All the elders at the ranch were trying to figure out where they were and how to open contact with them... as well as to figure out if they were trustworthy or part of the chaos Laagstine was creating.

As an elder enforcer, Trynche would love to finally catch one of the rogue bastards so they would have someone to interrogate. To that end, focusing on the rogue he'd spotted, he put on a burst of speed. He drew closer to the dark-blue gargoyle.

Trynche had spotted the male climbing through the tree branches. Luckily, he'd been downwind of the other gargoyle, and he'd been able to draw quite close before being detected. As soon as the blue gargoyle had realized he'd been spotted, just as the rest, he'd fled. With how close Trynche had grown to him, he just knew that he could catch him.

So close now!

Just as that thought filled Trynche with the energy to speed up just a little more, the whomp, whomp sound of helicopter blades registered. He glanced around, using his peripheral to watch his prey ahead. A copter that looked suspiciously like military appeared to the west, the black paint reflecting the moonlight just a little.

Holy shit. What the hell?

Trynche's attention snapped back to the fleeing rogue when he spotted the male bank left, then dip down amidst the treetops. He followed, growling under his breath. Even as Trynche realized they were headed straight for the helicopter, he refused to give up.

This asshole is mine.

“Revealing us is a death sentence,” Trynche roared, hoping to distract the male. So close. “Don’t make your crimes worse.”

Instead of stopping, the guy smirked over his shoulder at him. Then he tilted his wings, flapped, and shot upward. He slammed into the rear of the helicopter, sending it spinning.

Trynche stared in shock as the big bird spun wildly, clearly out of control. Even hearing the laughter of the other guy and noticing him speeding away, he hesitated. He knew that having a team of military crash onto their property would be a very, very bad thing.

For a second, Trynche thought the pilot was regaining control as the bird began to slow its rotations. He started to turn away, but suddenly, the spinning began to speed up again. Whatever was going on in the cockpit, the pilot wasn’t getting it done.

“Well, shit,” Trynche muttered, abandoning his pursuit of the rogue. “Can’t let them crash here.”

It would cause an investigation that would seriously hamper the ability to hide the many gargoyles living at the Lindson’s cattle ranch.

Trynche swiftly dipped under the spinning bird and searched for a suitable place to grab it. Settling on the rear wheel supports, he stretched out his arms and grabbed them as close to the frame as possible. Once Trynche had a good hold, he calculated the windspeed and direction.

After taking a deep breath, Trynche snapped out his wings, billowing them at an angle, as if they were a drag on a fishing line. He used his hold and wings to begin slowing the rotation of the helicopter. Every once in a while, Trynche had to flap a few times to decrease their descent.

Even as Trynche managed to get the helicopter under some semblance of control, he couldn't help but notice that he was definitely doing all the work. The pilot didn't seem to be helping at all. Trynche hoped whoever was behind the stick wasn't seriously injured... or dead.

I wonder what kind of investigation that would cause.

“Come on, you beast,” Trynche growled through his teeth as he eyed the swiftly approaching ground. “Almost there.”

After a couple of more hard pumps from his wings, Trynche landed in a small clearing. He instantly bent, crouched, and twisted out of the way, releasing the wheel supports he'd been clutching. Trynche heard the loud thud, the screech of metal, and the crunch of glass as the bird hit the ground far harder than it was designed to.

Grimacing, Trynche swiftly rolled out from under the helicopter and sprinted toward the trees. He leaped at a trunk, sinking the claws of his hands and toes into the bark. Trynche scampered up the trunk with his wings tucked close to avoid branches. Once he'd reached twenty-plus feet, he settled on a limb and eyed the helicopter.

The rotors still spun, but they were slowing. The rough landing seemed to have stalled the motor, or someone inside had turned it off. The forest was still except for the soft whoosh of the slowing rotors.

Watching, waiting, Trynche expected a door to open, but all remained still.

Hearing a soft beep, Trynche glanced at the cell phone he had attached to one of the straps criss-crossing his chest. He knew he was supposed to check in. After spotting the rogue, he'd shot off a text to Bearsley—the gargoyle who'd been on duty in the security office that evening—letting him know that he was going to try to catch him.



Bearsley had responded back with a reminder to check in within fifteen minutes for safety reasons. That way, on the off-chance that the rogue tried to lead Trynche into a trap, he would get back-up sent ASAP.

While Trynche hadn't been led into a trap, he did have a situation to report.

Tugging his phone from the clip on his strap, Trynche looked at the screen and saw the expected message.

Report.

Trynche quickly typed out a message. A helicopter came into the territory. Looks military. Rogue attacked it as decoy to get away. I discreetly helped it land. Watching it now. No activity. Advice?

Then Trynche refocused on the helicopter. The rotors had finally come to a stop, but still, no one emerged. He tipped his head back and sniffed, searching for some scent. Other than the metal and exhaust mixed with the trees and soil, he didn't pick up anything else.

Getting uneasy, Trynche placed his phone on silent and returned it to the clip. He began carefully, silently, descending the tree. Just before dropping the last six feet to the ground, Trynche stilled and again searched for any movement.

When Trynche still didn't see anything, he hit the dirt, and keeping low to the ground, his dark-red wings tucked around him like a cloak, he rushed to the helicopter. He kept his face tipped down, using his thick pale-blue hair to hide his features. Tapping softly on the glass of the cockpit door, Trynche peered inside.

Trynche made out the form of a man slumped in the pilot seat, his body sagging against the harness. The man's helmet hid nothing of his masculine features, and

Trynche had the sudden urge to run his fingertips along his jaw to feel the slight stubble he could see growing there. As a gargoyle who had no hair other than what was on his head, Trynche often found himself entranced by the feel of a human's five o'clock shadow.

So sexy.

Shaking his head at his wayward thoughts, Trynche gripped the handle and eased the door open. He continued to listen for noise from the rear of the helicopter, but there was still nothing. Trynche even held his breath for an instant, wondering if there could be some kind of smoke or gas that had incapacitated everyone.

Then, realizing that he wouldn't be able to scent how many others could be in there without breathing, Trynche carefully took in a slow, shallow breath. Instantly, the most tantalizing aroma teased his senses. Unable to resist, Trynche opened his mouth and used the hundreds of extra sensory receptors on his tongue to get a much deeper read of the earthy masculine flavor.

Groaning low in his throat, Trynche felt a shudder work through his body. His blood fired in his veins and swiftly flowed south. His stomach clenched as his cock began to thicken behind his loincloth.

"Oh, gods," Trynche hissed, as he stared at the pilot before him, hanging in the harness. Eager anticipation filled with worry flooded him as he slowly reached for the unconscious human. "You're my mate."

Just saying the words out loud caused a rush of excitement within him.

At long last.

At nearly eight hundred years old, Trynche had been waiting a long time for Fate to

bestow the gift of his mate upon him. He knew during wartime wasn't the best time to get him, but he would never question her timing. Now that Trynche had found the man before him—whoever he was—he would never let him go.

As those thoughts flew through his mind, Trynche realized something else. Only his mate's scent came from within. While he was loath to do it, Trynche moved to the side of the helicopter and the sliding door. He opened it slowly and took a discreet peek inside.

Empty.

He's here alone.

Why?

Knowing he wouldn't get any answers from his mate while he was unconscious and wondering why he was unconscious to begin with, Trynche returned to his side. He gave in to his need to touch and reached into the cockpit. With one hand, Trynche cradled his human's jaw and used the hold to lift his face just a little. He crooked the fingers of his other hand and slid them down the side of his jaw, enjoying the feel of the prickly hair growing there.

I wonder what that'll feel like on other parts of my body.

Just as a shiver of anticipation trickled down his spine, Trynche spotted something disturbing—a dribble of red oozing from beneath the edge of his mate's helmet. Releasing the human's head carefully, letting it hang down once more, the edge of the helmet hid the red once more. Trynche gently unbuckled the helmet—noticing something that looked like a camera attached to the side caused him to frown—and eased it off his human's head, earning a moan from the man when some bloody hairs stuck to the inside of the headgear.

Wincing, Trynche whispered on instinct, “I’m so sorry, my mate.”

He set the helmet on the floor of the cockpit, making certain the camera was facing away from him. Lightly, he scraped his claws through the man’s short, thick, black hair, searching for the source of the blood. When he found a thin slice above the man’s temple, he wondered how on earth it had happened with his helmet on. Shaking his head, he realized it didn’t matter. His mate needed to be treated.

“Let’s get you to the ranch, my mate,” Trynche stated. After a quick perusal of the straps, he wrapped one arm around the human’s torso. He unbuckled and removed them, maneuvering them off his mate’s body. Then Trynche slid his second arm under his legs and pulled his mate from the cockpit.

Feeling the weight of his mate in his arms caused his blood to heat, his body reacting to the man’s nearness and scent. It didn’t matter that he was still unconscious. Just holding him felt right in a way he’d never before experienced.

With a smile, Trynche spread his wings and took to the sky. He angled his wings and flapped, sending them soaring in the direction of the ranch house. Several rooms of the large bunkhouse behind the house had been set up as infirmary suites, and Trynche knew Doc Glover would be able to help his human.

Trynche had made in nearly halfway there when he spotted several forms flying toward him from the ranch’s direction. He recognized the enforcers Ssimeas, Lludd, and Ruacin. Grinning, Trynche couldn’t wait to share his good fortune with his fellow enforcers.

“You didn’t respond to Bearsley’s last text, so he contacted us,” Lludd stated, glancing from the human Trynche carried to his face and back to his mate. “What happened? Who’s this?”

As Lludd was the younger brother of Elder Bodb, the gargoyle who was mated with the human who owned the ranch, it made sense that he would take the lead. As Lludd had been speaking, the three had pivoted and begun flying beside Trynche—Lludd and Ssimeas on his right and Ruacin on his left.

With a wide grin of satisfaction, Trynche declared, “I don’t know his name, but this human is my mate.” A burst of pleasure warmed his gut just upon saying the words.

The men looked surprised, but they still offered congratulations.

Trynche wouldn’t have been able to wipe the grin off his face even if he’d been inclined to try. Hearing the human in his arms moan and feeling him shift a little, he realized his mate was beginning to wake. Even as anticipation flooded him, worry did, too.

Flying through the air is definitely not how I thought I’d greet my mate for the first time.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

The tickle of what felt like wind caressing his cheek pulled Enrique from the darkness he'd fallen into. He smelled something alluring—masculine and deep—and began turning his head so he could get a better whiff of it. Moving sent a spike of pain through his temple, and Enrique couldn't help letting out a soft grunt.

“Don't move, my mate,” a deep bass voice crooned into his ear. “I'm getting you to a doctor to check your head. Just relax, keep your eyes closed, and let me take care of you.”

Enrique didn't recognize the voice, but he definitely enjoyed the way it caused his body to react. He felt his blood heat in his veins, moving south. The hairs on his arms stood on end within the confines of his sweatshirt.

Except, why does my head hurt? What happened?

Memories came rushing back. There'd been something large flying in the trees. Then, something had struck the tail of his helicopter.

Tension surged through him.

But I don't recall landing my bird.

“Easy, handsome,” the deep voice rolled over Enrique again. “We're almost there. Just relax. I've got you. You're safe.”

Safe from what?

“Uh, well. Your helicopter went down.” The man responded slowly, sounding uncertain. “I, uh, and you hit your head. It’s bleeding.”

Huh. Guess I said that out loud.

Enrique made certain to keep that thought to himself. He’d never been prone to talking out loud, but the guy said he’d hit his head, and his head sure was pulsing. That had to factor into it.

“You were flying close to the Lindson ranch,” another masculine voice commented, sounding a little farther away. “Can you tell us why?”

“Uhhh...” Enrique paused, not wanting to answer that to a faceless stranger. He began blinking open his eyelids, surprised to find them so heavy. “I—”

When his vision cleared, Enrique wasn’t surprised to see the night sky above him. What shocked him into letting out a gasp was the features of the male cradling him in his arms. His face was a pinkish-orange hue—coral-colored, his brain supplied, oh-so-helpfully. His features were obviously masculine with high, angular cheekbones and a strong jaw. White canines peeked over his full lips, and Enrique had the most inane thought.

How does he kiss around those?

To Enrique’s surprise, the man’s lips split into a wide grin, showing off a mouthful of sharp teeth. “I’ll be happy to show you... soon, my mate.”

“Shit, I said that out loud, too. What the hell’s wrong with me?”

“Head injuries can do funny things to a guy,” another male stated, drawing Enrique’s attention away from the grinning male holding him.

“You’re green,” Enrique blurted as he stared in shock at the lime-green-skinned... creature... with black wings. “And you’re flying.” The male started chuckling, and Enrique felt his cheeks flood with heat, telling him he was blushing. Shit. Snapping his attention back to the guy holding him—carrying him, it suddenly hit him—he noted the massive red-colored wings moving over the male’s shoulders. “What the hell are you?” Enrique started shaking his head, but the pain stopped him. “I’ve gotta be in a coma or something, but I can’t imagine my brain coming up with this.”

“I know it can be a lot to take in, my mate,” the male holding him told him. “But this isn’t a dream or coma. We’re real. We’re gargoyles.” With a smile, the guy continued, “My name’s Trynche, and I’m so very pleased to meet you.” Trynche winked and asked, “What’s your name, handsome?”

“Uh, Enrique,” he answered on instinct. “I’m Enrique Walters.” Furrowing his brows, he couldn’t help his confusion. “Did you just call me handsome?”

“Sure did,” Trynche replied without a hint of embarrassment. “And your body feels perfect in my arms. Can’t wait to explore it.”

Enrique gaped for several seconds before blurting, “But I’m a human.”

“And I’m not.” The way Trynche shrugged just a little, jostling him, told Enrique it wasn’t an issue to him. “Gargoyles rarely mate with their own kind, so it’s normal.”

Staring at Trynche’s inhuman features, Enrique couldn’t help the way his mind went blank. He had no response to that. The male holding him was complimenting him, holding him, and acting as if... they would be a couple?

What the hell?

“You may be jumping the gun a little there, Trynche,” stated the guy who’d asked



why Enrique was there. As he gaped once more, taking in the flying beast's—gargoyles, they called themselves—medium purple hide and dark-gray wings, the male continued, "I recognized your name. My man has questioned you before about why you've been flying around the ranch, and now, you're here again, but at night."

Enrique winced. Shit. This gargoyle knew about his flights?

Wait a sec.

"Your man?" It wasn't the fact that this male was claiming to be in a relationship with a man. Instead, he wondered, "Who's your man that he'd have talked to me?"

"Sheriff Archer Montgomery," the male replied with a pleased smile, his expression a little vacant. When he refocused on Enrique, he told him, "I'm Lludd, Archer's partner."

"What?" Enrique eyed the other male incredulously. "How is that possible? I've heard about Lludd being introduced around town. I'm pretty sure you in town would cause a stir." Glancing around at the flying creatures in disbelief, he mumbled, "No way this is real. I'm definitely concussed. It's just the head injury."

"It's not the head injury, baby," Trynche countered, tightening his hold as he started toward the ground. "Don't worry." He smiled at him, his expression appearing admiring. "After the doc checks you out, we'll have plenty of time to talk, and I'll explain everything."

Enrique couldn't imagine that anything could explain the rabbit hole he'd somehow managed to tumble into. While he had so many questions, he had no idea where to even start, so he kept his mouth shut. Nothing had made sense since he'd woken... flying... in the arms of a gargoyle.

This can't be happening.

That thought just kept repeating through his mind as Enrique stayed quiet and still in Trynche's arms while he landed. He glanced around, doing his best not to move his head too much in the process. Curiosity was getting the better of him, though, because Enrique had never flown too close to the farmhouse, feeling that would be too intrusive.

Enrique had known the Lindsons were rich cattle ranchers, but that reputation didn't do their spread justice. The main house was the typical two-story ranch home, but it was huge and appeared to have been added onto a time or two. There was a bunkhouse that had an obvious new addition. Not too far away, there was a foreman's cabin with a swing on the porch. A man clearly of Native American descent stood there watching them... and a light-gray-skinned gargoyle stood beside him... with his arm around the guy's waist.

Well, damn. Gargoyles really do have relationships with humans.

"I'll find the doc," the green gargoyle stated. As he walked backward toward the bunkhouse, he grinned at them. "Congrats, Trynche. I'm jealous, man." Turning, he added, "I'm Ruacin, by the way. Welcome to the rabbit hole."

"H-How did he know that's how I'm feeling?" Enrique mused softly. He didn't really expect an answer, but he received one anyway.

"Humans often react similarly to how you are when they first learn of us," Lludd told him. He glanced at him before returning his attention to his phone. Absently, he added, "But don't worry. The pull you feel to Trynche will help you adapt quickly enough." Lludd focused on Trynche. "Better take him in to see the doc. Archer says he'll be here in twenty minutes to talk to him."

Trynche nodded. “Got it.” With a smile, he started carrying Enrique toward the bunkhouse. “Let’s get you checked out, my mate.”

“You keep calling me that. What’s that mean?” Enrique muttered, unease seeping into him as Trynche climbed the two steps to the sprawling front porch. “I’m pretty sure I can walk now.”

“Not until you get the okay from Doc Glover,” Trynche countered as he reached for the doorknob, but the door opened before they reached it. The gargoyle smiled and nodded at the dark-haired guy who swung it wide, saying, “Thanks, Walsh. Much appreciated.”

“Sure, Trynche,” Walsh replied, stepping out of the way. “Doc said he’s setting up in room two.” The guy pointed over his shoulder with a thumb. Grinning at Enrique, Walsh wagged his brows. “Congrats, man. Heard bonding with a gargoyle is a helluva erotic act.” Resting his hand over his chest, Walsh heaved a fake put-upon sigh. “Alas, none that are here are my mate. Story of my life.”

Trynche moved past Walsh, chuckling as he went. “Heard that hasn’t stopped you from enjoying a few of theirs’ attentions,” he teased.

Walsh laughed. “True that.”

Enrique frowned, processing that, but there was only one way to interpret it. “He, uh, he has sex with some of you?”

“Sure do,” Walsh called, having obviously heard him. Laughter filled his words as he loudly added, “Most paranormals are hung. If you like to bottom, you’re in for a helluva treat, man.”

Feeling his cheeks once again burn, Enrique kept his mouth shut.

Just what the hell is going on around here?

Except, when Trynche walked into what must have been room two, Enrique's jaw sagged open once more. While the room was set up as the standard examination room found in any clinic, the doctor waiting by the counter setting up stuff was definitely not the norm. A gargoyle with pale-blue skin and golden-colored wings turned and smiled at him.

"Holy shit," Enrique whispered, his eyes going wide with his obvious surprise. "Y-You're a d-doctor?"

"I am," the blue male replied with a reassuring smile. "I'm Doctor Glover." He turned his attention to Trynche. "Lay him on the bed so I can take a look at him."

As Trynche obeyed, placing Enrique on the bed, he had the irrational desire to keep hold of the big, coral-colored gargoyle. He stayed the need and forced himself to relax on the bed. When Trynche sat on the side of the bed and took his hand, Enrique didn't protest, and he wasn't certain why.

Why do I find this gargoyle's presence comforting? Shouldn't I be shitting myself right now? Or at least trying to run away?

Enrique flinched when Glover reached for him, eyeing the male's sharp black claws.

Yeah, that's the reaction I should be having... to all of them.

"Try to relax, Enrique," Doc Glover urged, reaching for him again. "I won't hurt you."

"You're totally safe," Trynche assured, squeezing his hand to reassure him. When Enrique met the gargoyle's green eyes, he saw warmth within their depths as he

continued, “I would never put you in a situation that could harm you.” After Trynche uttered a soft scoff, his smile turned wry. “Well, not on purpose anyway.” He shrugged his broad shoulders. “Life happens, after all.”

“Yeah, it does,” Enrique whispered, knowing the truth in those words. “I still don’t understand—”

Feeling Glover’s fingers touch his jaw, Enrique snapped his mouth shut and tensed.

“Easy, Enrique,” Glover encouraged again. “I just want to see how bad this wound is.” As he softly spoke, he slid the claws of one hand lightly up Enrique’s face to his hairline, pushing strands out of the way. “Yeah, that doesn’t look too bad.”

“He’ll be okay?” Trynche asked, sounding worried.

“Doesn’t even need stitches,” Glover replied. “Just a couple of butterfly bandages after I clean it up.”

“You sure?” Trynche pressed. “It looked like a lot of blood, and even with a helmet on, I found Enrique unconscious.”

Glover smiled. “Try not to worry too much, Trynche. Head wounds bleed a lot.” Focusing on Enrique again, he told him, “I would get a new helmet, though. Sounds like something cracked or came loose in there when you hit your head.”

Enrique instinctively nodded. “I will.” Anytime a helmet took a hit, it was a good idea to inspect it or replace it.

Lying quietly, Enrique kept a firm grip on Trynche’s hand as Glover went through the process of cleaning and bandaging his head. He found the male’s movements gentle with a surprisingly kind and patient bedside manner. Every step of the way,

Glover explained what he was doing.

As Glover finished up, it occurred to Enrique that it wasn't actually for his benefit. Instead, Glover kept glancing at Trynche. Enrique realized that the gargoyle sitting next to him, still holding his hand, was watching the doctor like a hawk, as if ready to step in should he hurt or upset Enrique in some way.

Instead of finding the action overbearing, Enrique felt... cared for, cherished even. It was... nice, really nice.

Why?

"All set, guys," Glover stated, taking a few steps away from the bed. "How's the pain level, Enrique? Want an aspirin?"

Enrique began to ease into a sitting position, and Trynche quickly moved to help him, sliding an arm behind his shoulders. His head ached a little at the move. After a second of hesitation, Enrique slowly nodded.

"Yeah. An aspirin would be good."

Glover nodded and retrieved a bottle from a cabinet. After handing over a couple of small white pills along with a bottle of water, he told him, "If the ache doesn't ease in the next half hour, please let me know."

Once Enrique had taken the pills, enjoying the cool water flowing down his throat, he nodded. "Thanks, Doc."

A knock sounded at the door, drawing everyone's attention. "Come," Glover called.

When the door opened, Sheriff Archer Montgomery stood there, his expression

solemn as he eyed Enrique.

Time to face the music.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

Trynche remained seated at Enrique's side, keeping his human's hand in his own, as he listened to his mate explain why he'd been flying over areas of their ranch.

"So, Sheldon's still looking for ways to cause trouble," Archer murmured, his eyes narrowing. Rubbing his chin, he asked, "Did you get any of the gargoyles on camera this evening?"

Enrique's brows furrowed, and he started shaking his head. Pausing, he turned to look at Trynche. "Uh, I was unconscious when you found me, so... I guess I don't know."

Lludd, who'd been standing next to Archer with his arm slung possessively across his mate's shoulder's, pivoted toward the door. "I'll send someone out to retrieve it." He paused halfway through the doorway to look at Trynche. "Do you think it caught you? Did you see where it was?"

"Is the camera on your helmet the only one, my mate?" Trynche asked, squeezing his hand.

"You keep calling me that," Enrique mumbled, using his free hand to rub his temple. His gaze fell to where Trynche held his hand. "You're giving me the impression that you think we're already in a relationship, but we don't know each other, and you're not even human." Blinking and squinting, Enrique further revealed his confusion and disbelief when he stated, "I've gotta be in a coma. I'm gonna wake up, still in my helicopter, probably with a few injuries, and none of this will have happened."

"Then you may as well enjoy your weird dream while you can, man," Lludd teased with a snort. "Now, any other cameras?"



“Just the one on my helmet,” Enrique confirmed.

“This isn’t a dream, Enrique,” Archer told him, moving close to the bed as Lludd headed out of the room. “It’ll sink in. Give it time.” The sheriff offered him an encouraging smile. “I’ve been where you are, falling down this rabbit hole and trying to come to grips with my new reality.” Reaching out, Archer squeezed Enrique’s shoulder. “Try to trust me when I tell you that while this is a life-changing experience, it’s also a great one.” Pointing at Trynche, the sheriff continued, “Gargoyles are hardwired to please and care for their mates, so whatever your needs or problems are, you’ll have plenty of help now.” Then Archer’s eyes widened, and he asked, “Uh, do you have a problem with him because he’s a guy? Or are you in a relationship right now?” His voice lowered as he mumbled, “Damn, that could cause some bumps.”

Trynche had never seen the friendly and laid-back sheriff ramble before. He appreciated the guy trying to offer reassurances to Enrique. However, that last question piqued Trynche’s curiosity... and worry.

Does my mate have hangups or someone at home waiting for him?

When Trynche had been carrying Enrique to the ranch, he hadn’t scented anyone else on him, but there could be plenty of reasons for that.

“Oh, uh, no,” Enrique muttered. His brows furrowed as the scent of another wash of confusion wafted from him. “N-No one at home, and I’m, uh, bi, so...” Then Enrique frowned as he glanced from Trynche and back to Archer. “He’s not human. He’s a-a...” His voice trailed off, as if he were having trouble voicing the thought.

“Gargoyle,” Archer supplied. “They’re gargoyles. One of many paranormal species.” Scoffing, he explained, “Sorry for the mind-fuck, Enrique, but humans are not alone on this planet.” With his hand, palm up, Archer swept the room, indicating Trynche,

as well as Doc Glover. “The proof is right before your eyes. I know you don’t believe yet, but you will.”

Hope that doesn’t take too long.

“And like I said, you should take advantage of your continued coma belief and enjoy yourself,” Lludd stated, drawing attention to the fact that he’d already returned. “Ruacin knew the direction Trynche was flying from, so he’ll get the recording.”

Archer nodded.

“What does that even mean?” Enrique focused on Lludd, cocking his head and squinting at him. “Take advantage of my coma belief and enjoy myself? Enjoy myself, how?”

Lludd chuckled. “Well, a gargoyle enjoys pleasuring his mate.” He smirked as he winked at Enrique before cutting his attention to Trynche. “Ain’t that right, Trynche? You’d love to pleasure your mate, wouldn’t you?”

Trynche felt a wash of heat flood his body. His blood rushed south, a predictable reaction to thinking of pleasure and his mate at the same time. He shifted where he sat on the side of the bed, trying to get his hardening shaft into a more comfortable position.

The move drew Enrique’s attention. His mate looked down... then snapped his focus back to Trynche’s face. His brown eyes were wide as he stared at him, his shock evident.

Unable to help his reaction, Trynche shrugged. “The idea of pleasuring you”—he hesitated, searching for the right words, before finishing—“nothing would please me more than to please you.”

Enrique blinked once, twice, before his focus drifted to Trynche's left. Trynche would have been concerned, but he spotted the telltale flush darkening Enrique's neck, creeping up to his cheeks. The delicious fragrance of Enrique's masculine arousal also began lightly perfuming the space around them.

"He likes that idea," Lludd quipped. Continuing to smirk, he turned to Glover. "There a spare room in the bunkhouse they can use, Doc?"

Archer growled softly, grabbing Lludd's forearm in what appeared to be a strong grip. "Lludd." He murmured the name in a low way full of warning. "Stop teasing Enrique. He's not ready for your kind of humor."

Lludd's eyebrow ridges shot up, expressing his surprise. "I wasn't making a joke." He met Trynche's gaze for a second before he looked at Enrique. "I'm serious. You can enjoy yourself while you're coming to grips with the fact that you're not in a coma." Shrugging, Lludd added, "Besides, getting off releases endorphins that'll help relax you and combat your headache." He focused on Glover. "Right, Doc?"

Doc Glover smirked where he leaned against the room's counter, his arms crossed over his chest. "Yeeees," he replied, drawing the word out. "Sexual release does do that." Narrowing his eyes, Glover added, "But Enrique allowing Trynche to care for his needs doesn't mean he's ready to accept everything that's happening between him and Trynche." The doc pinned his gaze on Enrique. "I'd hate to hear that Enrique was leading Trynche on."

"You've seen enough matings to know he'll come around before too long." Lludd waved a hand dismissively. "What we really need to worry about is that damn Sheldon and his plans." A growl entered his voice as he spoke. "We don't need him fucking with us while we're dealing with the rogue gargoyle faction pestering us."

"Rogue gargoyles?" Enrique murmured, finally seeming to come out of whatever

reverie he'd been lost in.

My mate is clearly overwhelmed.

“What’s that mean?” Enrique frowned as he glanced around the room, his gaze landing on Trynche. “Rogue gargoyles?”

Trynche nodded as he squeezed Enrique’s hand. “That’s what hit the tail of your chopper this evening,” he admitted. Seeing his mate’s eyes widen, he winced as he explained, “The gargoyle species is ruled by a circle of twelve elders. They’re usually some of our oldest and most trusted men, those with reputations above reproach, known for their fair-headedness and wisdom.” Grimacing, Trynche admitted, “Well, one of those elders, a guy named Laagstine, has gotten it in his head that gargoyles are superior not just to humans, but to other paranormal species, as well.” After a glance at Lludd, who winced while nodding, Trynche refocused on Enrique and finished, “Laagstine somehow managed to have a number of dangerous, rogue gargoyles who’d been incarcerated, secretly whisked away instead of being put to death for their crimes.”

“Shit!” Enrique stared at him with wide eyes as his jaw sagged. After a quick shake of his head, he grumbled, “Sounds like someone with delusions of grandeur trying to become an evil dictatorship.” Scoffing, Enrique grumbled, “We have enough of those amongst humans without having them in a huge winged monster.”

Hearing Enrique’s mutterings, Trynche felt his gut clench.

Monster? Is that how my mate sees me?

“Hey,” Lludd growled, scowling at Enrique. “Watch it.”

Archer lifted his hand, obviously hoping to ease his big gargoyle mate’s annoyance.

“Gargoyles aren’t monsters, Enrique,” he corrected, casting a quick glance at all of them. “They’re just another species living here on Earth.” Offering a wry smile, Archer shrugged. “Hell, most of them just want the same things that most humans do. To find happiness, love, and acceptance. Maybe a family.”

“Sorry. Sorry. Didn’t mean it like that.” Enrique froze for a few seconds before gaping as he glanced around the room. “A, uh... a family?” His brows furrowed once more. “H-How’s that possible?” Then, with a roll of his eyes, Enrique snapped, “Guess that’s not really important right now.” He scoffed again. “After all, we’re both guys.”

Trynche exchanged looks with the other men in the room, knowing he would have some explaining to do. After all, gargoyles could get their fated male mates pregnant.

I’ll explain later.

Hearing Enrique start talking, Trynche refocused on his human.

“I mean, you’ve told me all sorts of fantastic shit tonight.” Enrique heaved a deep sigh as he rubbed his temple with his free hand. “I get why you keep your existence a secret. I imagine the general populace wouldn’t take knowledge of you well.” Scowling at the floor, Enrique muttered, “Many humans are great at persecuting our own kind for one reason or another. Race, religion, sexual orientation, man, woman, fat, skinny, tall, short. Humans use all kinds of reasons to be a bigoted asshole.” Enrique waved his hand absently, his eyes becoming a bit glazed. “Take Sheldon, for example. He sure as shit should never know about you guys. The ruckus he would cause.” After a few blinks and a shake of his head, he focused on Archer. “I won’t say anything to anyone about these guys, Sheriff. You have my word.”

“I appreciate that, Enrique,” Archer replied, a small smile curving his lips. “I know everyone here will appreciate it, too.”

“So, uh, yeah, of course.” Enrique glanced at Trynche, then down at where he still held his hand. Clearing his throat, he began to ease his fingers as if he were preparing to pull away. “Yeah,” he repeated. “Uh, guess I need to ask for a ride to town. I have work tomorrow, and I need to figure out how hard it’s going to be to transport my bird to the airport so I can work on it.” Frowning, Enrique shook his head. “Or maybe it’s not in too bad a shape, and I can fix it out in the field.”

My poor mate is thoroughly overwhelmed.

Trynche squeezed Enrique’s hand instead of releasing it. Hoping to help calm him, he rested his free hand on his mate’s back and rubbed up and down his spine. He felt his human tense beneath him for an instant before relaxing into his touch.

A small smile curved Trynche’s lips, and he wondered if Enrique even realized he’d done it. Plus, his mate had also stopped trying to release his hand.

“I would advise against taking him home, Sheriff,” Doc Glover stated, pushing away from where he’d been leaning and listening. When Enrique opened his mouth, probably to argue, the doc lifted his hand to stall him. “You hit your head, and while I didn’t see any signs of a concussion, I still think you should be monitored at least for the night.” He narrowed his deep amber eyes and continued, “You wouldn’t want to risk the chance of becoming disoriented tomorrow while out flying your tourists, would you?”

Enrique grimaced before nodding once. “Yeah, okay.” After a sigh, he murmured, “That makes sense.”

“The first room on the right upstairs is free, Trynche,” Lludd told him. “Why don’t you take him there.”

Trynche nodded. “Will do.”

As Trynche helped Enrique from the bed, he noticed his mate sway just a little. He took advantage of his mate's slight weakness and slipped his arm around his torso. Trynche enjoyed the feel of his human's solid body beneath his palm, even through the sweatshirt.

Can't wait to explore what's underneath.

"Come on, Enrique," Trynche encouraged, guiding him past the men toward the open door. "Time to get you comfortable and relaxed, my mate."

Enrique obeyed, allowing Trynche to guide him. Trynche turned him to the right and back toward the main room. Several men were sitting at a table playing cards, Walsh amongst them. The hand grinned widely at them while wagging his eyebrows.

Trynche didn't know if he was relieved or disappointed that Enrique missed it, not reacting at all. With the way his mate seemed so overwhelmed, it was probably a good thing. His human didn't need any more teasing.

Leading Enrique up the stairs, Trynche headed into the indicated room. The space was standard for a bunkhouse room with a bed, nightstand, and dresser. There was a boot box at the foot of the bed with a quilt folded on top.

"Come on, Enrique," Trynche encouraged, stopping him beside the dresser. "Let's find you something comfortable to wear." He opened the top drawer to find a selection of light gray t-shirts. "What size? Large?"

"I normally sleep in just jogging shorts," Enrique murmured, sounding absent.

"No underwear?" A rush of heat flooded Trynche as the image of a nearly nude Enrique sprawled in bed filled his mind. "Damn," he whispered. "Easy access."

Enrique seemed to shake himself out of his stupor. Taking a step away from Trynche, he cleared his throat as he looked from him to the bed and back again. Letting out a breath through pursed lips, Enrique rubbed the back of his neck.

The move drew Trynche's focus to Enrique's lips, and he recalled his mate's absent question about how Trynche kissed around his canines. He wished he could show his human right that second, but he didn't think the man was ready.

Too bad.

Instead, Trynche closed the drawer and opened a second one. "There's sweatpants in here." He pointed at the contents. "That'd be more comfortable than your jeans. Want a pair?"

"So, guess I'm staying the night. Uh, yeah, I'll take a pair of sweats. Large." Enrique glanced around again. "There a bathroom I can use?"

Trynche nodded as he fished out the desired size sweatpants. While holding them out, he used his chin to indicate a closed door. "Through there." When Enrique took them, Trynche made certain to tease his fingers along the back of his mate's hand. Trynche noticed the way his mate drew in a sharp breath, but instead of drawing attention to his human's reaction, he told him, "There should be spare toothbrushes in a drawer in there."

Nicholas Lindson always kept every bathroom in the bunkhouse well-stocked.

"Thanks," Enrique muttered before heading into the room.

Just before Enrique closed the bathroom door, he paused and stared at Trynche. His mate opened his mouth, then closed it again.



Trynche smiled and settled on the bed. “I’ll be here when you get out,” he promised. Unable to help himself, he allowed heat to enter his eyes as he admired his mate’s strong frame. His thoughts turned carnal as he thought of his mate, in a bed, in only a pair of sweatpants. “I look forward to spending more time with you.”

Enrique swallowed so hard his Adam’s apple bobbed, and Trynche wondered what the skin covering the little nub would taste like.

His mate’s cheeks took on a pinkish hue as he closed the door.

I hope I get to find out soon.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

The heat around his erection pulled a low, guttural groan from Enrique's throat. His blood burned in his veins, and his gut clenched with his pleasure. Tingles danced across the flesh of his groin, creating goose bumps.

As Trynche eased partway off Enrique's dick, he sucked strongly, providing the most delicious pressure. He used his longer-than-usual tongue to swipe over his crown. Then he pressed the tip into the wrinkled skin beneath Enrique's cap, sending a jolt of blissful fire straight to his balls.

The calloused hand cradling his balls offered a gentle massage, stimulating his sack further. His testicles began to tighten, and Enrique let out another long moan. He tried to hold on, reveling in the exquisite sensations cascading through him.

"F-Fuck, Trynche!" Enrique cried as a hard shudder rocked his body.

"We'll get there," Trynche claimed, his voice deep and gruff.

Trynche lifted his mouth and returned it to Enrique's cock so fast he barely felt the loss of stimulation. Another hard suck caused tingles to bloom at the base of his spine. They zipped up his back to his brain, sending his senses reeling. A second later, those same zings shot straight back to his groin.

Enrique's gut clenched, and his testicles pulled tight. His blood felt as if it was on fire as his orgasm bowled through him. His erection throbbed and pulsed as he emptied into Trynche's still-sucking mouth.

Moaning, Enrique arched, shudders racking him as he floated on the most blissful

ecstasy he'd ever before experienced. The gargoyle continued to scrape his claws along the sensitive skin of his sack—which should have freaked Enrique out, but it just felt so damn good. He also kept suckling on his crown while jacking his shaft, as if he needed to get Enrique to spill every last drop.

Finally, Trynche eased his mouth off of Enrique's prick and peered at him with a smug expression. He licked his lips obscenely and hummed.

"You taste delicious, my mate," Trynche rumbled gruffly. "So damn good." The gargoyle nuzzled his cheek against Enrique's slowly softening prick, making it twitch. "Can't get enough of you."

Enrique flopped his head back and sighed deeply, basking in the endorphins pinging through his system. It was probably the afterglow affecting him, but he whispered, "I've half a mind to take you up on that offer."

Trynche's husky rumbles reached his ears, and Enrique smiled as he relaxed.

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Slowly, the cooling of the semen on Enrique's stomach registered, mainly because it was beginning to itch. He groaned softly, lifted his head a little, then let it flop back onto the pillow. Slinging an arm over his eyes, Enrique tried to get his sluggish brain to come back online.

That was a frickin' wet dream.

The realization hit Enrique, and he groaned again.

What the hell? I haven't had one of them since I was a teenager.

Shoving from the bed, Enrique did his best to ignore the itch as he stumbled into the ensuite. He started the shower to warm before stopping in front of the toilet to relieve his bladder. Due to passing out after jacking off in bed the night before, he'd slept in the nude—not something he did on the regular.

That may change.

Enrique winced at his thoughts as he pulled out his toothbrush and paste. After finishing that, he stepped into the shower. He rested his forearms on the wall and bowed his head, allowing the hot, soothing spray to cascade down his body.

His mind spun.

When Enrique had accepted a blowjob from Trynche two nights before, he never imagined it would affect his dreams. The male had just been so... virile—masculine and earthy, dominant yet kind and caring. The way Trynche had helped him into bed, stroking his arms, torso, and face, had enflamed Enrique's arousal.

When Trynche had moaned and commented on how good Enrique's arousal smelled, he should have been embarrassed. Except, then the gargoyle had indicated his loincloth-covered groin, showing off his own large bulge. The male had been just as aroused, and he hadn't been shy at all about it.

With Trynche sprawling beside him, petting and talking to him, Enrique had given in to his desires and accepted the gargoyle's offer of pleasure. The attentive, expert blowjob had blown Enrique's mind. He would have been embarrassed at how fast he'd lost it, but he hadn't been awake long enough afterward to feel that. Enrique had passed right out.

In the morning, Trynche had been gone, and Enrique realized he had mixed feelings about that. At first, he'd been a little annoyed. After all, the gargoyle had made all

sorts of comments about how he wanted a relationship with him. Then Enrique had been relieved. A relationship with a gargoyle? How would that even work?

After getting cleaned up as best as he could, Enrique had eased down the bunkhouse stairs, relieved to find the place relatively quiet. He supposed what they said about ranchers being early risers was true. There were animals to feed and other chores that Enrique was sure he didn't know about.

Fortunately, there'd been a half-full, still-hot carafe of coffee in the bunkhouse's kitchen, so he'd helped himself to a cup. He'd stepped out onto the porch to enjoy the black brew, finding it deliciously strong—just the way he liked it. As Enrique had been finishing up his cup, a man Enrique hadn't recognized had approached him.

The guy had introduced himself to Jory Dartmore, a lawyer working out of the closest city almost forty-five minutes away. "I'll drive you into town on my way to the office," he'd told him. Then Jory had smirked and told him, "And I'd be happy to answer any questions about how having a gargoyle mate works. I'm bonded with Biscane." He'd waved his hand absently over his shoulder. "He's one of the enforcers here."

Enrique had nodded, but he hadn't really known what the guy was talking about. On the drive to town, that had changed. Jory had managed to pack in a hell of a lot of information on that fifteen-minute drive.

Unmated gargoyles turned to stone during the day. They called it roosting. It was the reason Trynche hadn't been with him when he'd woken. Once they completed their bond, the gargoyle would gain a human form, which was why Lludd could be seen in town without causing a stir. They would still need to roost a few hours a week, but they would be able to choose a convenient time for it.

Just before Jory had dropped Enrique off, he'd dropped a bombshell. Gargoyles could

get their male mates pregnant.

Holy shit.

That notion had nearly blown Enrique's mind. He'd thrown himself into work to try to keep his mind from dwelling on... well, everything he'd learned. Enrique had also ignored Sheldon's calls and texts, having zero desire to deal with the man.

Enrique had managed to get through the whole day, avoiding thinking about... everything and anything.

Then... that dream.

Never in his wildest imaginings would Enrique think he would dream about Trynche, and certainly not in such overwhelmingly stimulating detail. Just recalling not only the blowjob a couple of nights prior, but also his dream from that morning, Enrique felt his prick twitch. He groaned and reached for himself.

As soon as Enrique wrapped his fingers around his length, the image of Trynche's hot mouth engulfing him flashed into his mind. He closed his eyes and groaned, pressing his forehead against the tile as renewed heat filled his body. His balls suddenly felt heavy, even though he knew that he'd just gotten off.

What the hell is wrong with me?

Even while thinking that, Enrique began jacking his swelling erection. He was fully hard again in seconds, and he grabbed the conditioner. After squirting a healthy dollop onto his palm, he returned his attention to his jutting shaft, squeezing and stroking slowly.

Using his second hand, Enrique cupped his balls. He recalled the feel of Trynche's

palm cradling his sack, massaging lightly. At the same time, the male had used his tongue to tease over his crown, even as he'd sucked him. Enrique squeezed his dick while swiping his thumb over his knob, doing his best to emulate what the gargoyle had managed with his mouth.

It wasn't quite the same, and Enrique groaned. He sped up his fist and imagined Trynche on his knees before him. Recalling the hunger that had been in the gargoyle's deep green eyes as he'd blown him, Enrique felt a shiver work through him despite the hot water.

As Enrique recalled the way Trynche had touched him, pleased him, and appeared to be the happiest damn person on the planet while doing it, his ardor rose. His blood fired hot in his veins. Faster than he thought possible, his prick jerked in his grip, and pre-cum oozed from his crown. When Enrique recalled the way Trynche had growled his name, his balls pulled tight.

One more squeeze to his orbs, coupled with the memory of the gargoyle's wicked grin, sent Enrique sailing over the edge. His orgasm barreled through him, and he came hard, shudders racking through him. Enrique panted harshly as he floated for the second time that morning.

The water beginning to cool drew Enrique out of his relaxed state. A shiver for a new reason worked over his skin. With a sigh, he washed swiftly, cleaning up. Turning off the water, Enrique grabbed a towel and began drying himself off.

Once done, Enrique dressed in his standard nice but comfortable jeans and button-down before pulling on socks and boots. He poured himself a cup of coffee in the kitchen. As he sipped it, he toasted a blueberry bagel and pulled out plain cream cheese.

As Enrique ate his breakfast, his phone rang. Hearing the ringtone, he

groaned—Sheldon. Reaching over, he silenced the device.

While Enrique knew he wouldn't be able to put off the persistent asshole forever, he was definitely going to give it his best shot. The man just wanted the night footage, and he didn't have it anyway. Enrique also needed to make a time to get back to the ranch where his Blackhawk had landed so he could inspect the damages.

Enrique finished his breakfast and poured himself a second cup of coffee. Settling in his home office, he began going over his accounts. While it would leave him extremely tight, if Sheldon became a problem, Enrique could return every penny the man had given him. It would suck being out the money for the fuel he'd used, but he would deal with it.

Halfway through budgeting, Enrique heard his doorbell. He frowned as he stood. Not expecting anyone, he tucked his phone into his pocket and headed to the front door.

After peering through the peephole, Enrique let out a low groan.

Well, shit.

Enrique had known he wouldn't be able to avoid Sheldon forever, but never would he have thought the guy would show up at his home. He bowed his head and took a slow, deep breath. As the bell rang again—followed by hard knocking—Enrique let that breath out just as slowly.

Then... Enrique opened the door. "Sheldon," he muttered, frowning at the man. Deciding it was time to get the man out of his life, he asked bluntly, "What are you doing here?"

"If you'd picked up your phone, you'd know the answer to that," Sheldon snarled, shoving his way into the house. "Well? What do you think it is?"



Keeping his features impassive, Enrique hid his confusion. “What do I think what is?” he asked calmly as he closed the door and turned to face Sheldon.

“The big winged thing?” Sheldon stated with a duh expression on his face. The man must have spotted Enrique’s flash of surprise before he could hide it, for he scoffed, scowled, and sneered all at the same time. “The big winged thing on the video you sent me night before last.”

“Uh, I was in an accident with my bird night before last,” Enrique replied slowly, racking his brain for some kind of understanding of how Sheldon had gotten the video. “I haven’t even looked at it.” He almost said he hadn’t sent anything, either, but then the answer hit him. “Auto-upload,” Enrique whispered. “I totally forgot about that.”

When Enrique had done a software update on his video recording system, the system had set up an auto-upload function. Anything he videoed would be uploaded to his cloud storage at midnight. The video he made the night before last must be on there... and it seemed that he’d caught something questionable after all.

That begged another question. How the hell had Sheldon gotten access to it?

“How’d you see the video?” Enrique demanded. “I didn’t send it to you.”

Sheldon scoffed. “You know I’m not a patient man.”

That was an understatement.

Shrugging, Sheldon told him, “You have your username and password on a stickie note in your helicopter tour office.” With a derisive laugh, he pointed out, “Anyone can access it.”

Well, shit.

“So, let’s go to your office.” Sheldon started toward the hallway leading to his office as if he had every right to barge into Enrique’s home. “Pull it up. I want to know what else you saw out there.”

Enrique followed, knowing he wouldn’t be able to get rid of Sheldon unless he called the police.

So very tempting.

After Enrique reviewed the footage, he wished he’d gone with his gut and called Archer. Not only had he caught the shadow of a gargoyle’s wing swooping across the sky, when Trynche had removed his helmet, it appeared he’d gotten part of his face in the shot. While his hair mostly hid his angular features, his pointed ear had been on display, peeking through the strands.

This is all bad.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

Waking from roost, Trynche lifted his head and stared at the hay bales around him. He found the scent of the bales coupled with the aroma of horse and leather soothing. It wasn't his mate, but he would take any help he could get to stay calm and in control.

The prior evening, he'd nearly gone out of his mind waiting to hear news of Enrique. He'd hoped his mate would want to check out the damage to his helicopter, but according to the gargoyles keeping an eye on the bird, he hadn't. Trynche had heard from Biscane that Jory had driven him to the airstrip to pick up his truck, sharing information about gargoyles in the process.

Biscane had winced as he'd shared, "Uh, he also mentioned how gargoyles can get their male mates pregnant." With a shake of his head, he'd squeezed Trynche's shoulder and gave him a commiserating look. "I think that really, really freaked him out."

"It usually does when they first learn about it," Trynche conceded softly.

Even knowing his mate had needed a day to decompress and process hadn't made waiting for him any easier. Fortunately, his friends had kept him busy. There was also the fact that he had his own duties to perform. Every gargoyle enforcer on the place spent a few hours flying the perimeter, searching for encroaching rogues.

The vampire Spieron had a great head for rotating schedules and routes, so the rogues couldn't get a bead on any routine.

It made it interesting for them, too.

“Hey, Trynche. Get your ass movin’, man.”

Trynche recognized Gladstone’s voice. The dark-brown gargoyle was mated to a kind human named Dayvid, who handled the greenhouse. He was also another of Elder Bodb’s brothers, working as an enforcer for him.

“Coming,” Trynche replied, rising to his feet. He lunged, spreading his wings, and perched on the top of the four-bale-high wall that was used to hide the part of the loft that the unmated gargoyles roosted in. Seeing Gladstone standing below with a crooked smile curving his lips, Trynche paused. “Uh, what’s going on?”

From the expression on Gladstone’s face, Trynche couldn’t help the bloom of hope that filled his chest.

“Your mate came here this evening. Drove in following Archer.”

Excitement flooded Trynche, and he quickly dropped to the loft floor. “Really?” He heard the excitement filling his tone and saw the way Gladstone’s smile widened even as he lifted his hands. Ignoring the move, Trynche started toward the loft doors, intending to fly out. “Where is he?”

“Hold up.” Gladstone rested a hand on Trynche’s shoulder. “Calm down. You don’t want to go storming in there all gung-ho.” With a rueful smile, he told him, “I don’t think he’s ready for that quite yet, but at least he’s here looking out for our interests.”

Trynche forced himself to still. “What’s that mean?”

“Evidently, the video recording auto-uploaded to Enrique’s cloud account before Spieron could delete it.” Gladstone winced as he eyed him. “You knew there were a couple things on there that are a little hard to explain.”

Grimacing, Trynche nodded. “The rogue’s wings as he swooped in to hit Enrique’s bird, then a bit of me while I was checking my mate and removing the helmet.” As Gladstone nodded in confirmation, Trynche continued, “Did he delete it? He said he’d protect our secret.”

Trynche wasn’t certain what the problem was.

Gladstone heaved a sigh as he stared out at the night sky through the open loft doors. “It’s not that simple.” Shaking his head, he let a growl enter his voice. “Evidently, Enrique’s password to his cloud account wasn’t too secure.” Meeting Trynche’s gaze once more, Gladstone revealed, “Sheldon accessed his cloud account and watched the video. We have no idea if he downloaded it anywhere or what.”

“Well, shit,” Trynche whispered, his gut churning with unease. “What are the elders going to do?”

“Yeah, that about sums it up.” Gladstone’s crooked smirk reappeared. “And that’s what we need you there to talk about.” Patting him on the shoulder again, Gladstone pointed out, “He’s your mate, so you should at least be involved.” He pointed at the bunkhouse. “Go get cleaned up. Food’ll be ready when you get to the main house. We’re in the lounge.”

Nodding, Trynche did as Gladstone instructed. He flew to the bunkhouse and took the quickest shower of his life. After wrapping a fresh loincloth around his hips and brushing his teeth, Trynche paused and rested his palms on the sides of the sink. He stared at himself in the mirror, taking in his coral skin, green eyes, and pale-blue hair.

“Keep yourself in check, Trynche,” he ordered himself. “Your mate is a grown-ass man. He told you the other night that he’d been in the military.” Thinking of the other night, Trynche immediately thought of the feel of his mate moving beneath his touch, the taste of him on his tongue, and the sounds he made while in the throes of passion.

His cock instantly thickened, and he grunted as he frowned at himself. “Enrique isn’t here for sex. You need to support him in this problem, not try to tell him what to do or get him in the nearest bed.”

Although, his mate and a bed sure sounded fantastic.

Scoffing, Trynche rolled his eyes and straightened. He headed out of the bathroom and moved swiftly through the adjoining bedroom. The lingering scent of his mate still hung in the still air, since it was the same one he and Enrique had used the other night, and no one else had been in there.

With a sigh, Trynche hustled down the bunkhouse steps and out the front door. He jogged across the backyard and bounded up the steps and over the expansive back deck. Reaching the back door, Trynche took one more deep breath, hoping for calm and control, before heading inside.

“Grab food, Tryn,” Pauline encouraged from where she stood, placing a fresh stack of breakfast burritos on a warming tray. She smiled kindly at him as she pointed at the spread. “It’ll give you something to focus on other than the fact that you’re going to be sitting with your unclaimed mate.”

Offering the ranch’s cook a grateful smile, Trynche followed her advice and began filling up a plate. Pauline was a fox shifter mated to the gargoyle Lebone. Being a paranormal herself, she knew about their massive appetites and always put together an expansive spread.

Plus, Pauline was a kick-ass cook. Trynche couldn’t remember when he’d eaten so well on a regular basis. It was definitely before Elder Cliatno’s chef had decided to retire nearly two decades before. The elder hadn’t been happy with any replacements, and Trynche hadn’t blamed him. None of them had been as good as their resumes had claimed them to be.

Dismissing his random thoughts—Trynche felt so scattered with his mental confusions due to finding his mate—he grabbed several sausage, egg, and cheese burritos, a couple dollops of hash brown casserole, and half a dozen each of bacon strips and sausage links. He filled a cup of coffee, adding a dash of cream to it. Finally, he filled several small paper cups with spicy picante sauce for his burritos. At the last second, Trynche remembered to snag a couple of cinnamon rolls since the spice was a natural contraceptive to a gargoyle's sperm.

With everything in hand, Trynche smiled again at Pauline and started toward the hall that led to the massive lounge used for meetings and movie night.

“Good luck, sweetie,” Pauline called from behind him.

Trynche turned and smiled again. “Thanks.”

Then Pauline winked and reminded him, “Don't forget the importance of the mate-pull. Just you sitting near him will affect him, too.”

Nodding at that reminder, Trynche turned and resumed his trek to the lounge. He paused at the door and hesitated. Then he used his elbow to knock on the door.

The right one of the double doors instantly slid aside, and Lludd offered him a tight smile. “Hey, man. Welcome.” The purple gargoyle lowered his voice and muttered, “Enrique's pretty tense. Maybe you can help him relax.”

While Trynche was pretty darn sure Lludd didn't mean relax in that way, he couldn't help thinking about how he'd helped his mate relax the other night. Seeing the other gargoyle enforcer's smirk, he growled under his breath and scowled at the large male. Lludd lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug and turned away.

Trynche stepped into the room and quickly scanned it. He immediately spotted

Enrique sitting on a barstool in the corner. He almost looked as if he were using the fully-stocked bar to his right as a shield, separating himself from... well, all the gargoyles filling the room. Trynche assumed that because they all knew that Enrique was his mate and knew about their kind, they all felt comfortable staying in their true skin.

Or it could be the shock value.

It's also possible that they're doing their best to help—not so subtly—acclimate my mate to the presence of paranormals.

He supposed either option was possible.

Taking a deep breath, Trynche started toward Enrique. He noticed the exact second that his mate spotted him. His human's shoulders stiffened, his eyes widened, and he straightened just a little on his bar stool.

Trynche did his best to ignore the reaction and placed his plate before a barstool kitty-corner to his mate's. That put a little space between them so he didn't crowd his human. After taking a sip of his coffee, Trynche eased onto the barstool, keeping half his attention on Enrique.

To Trynche's pleasure, he spotted the second that his mate must have caught his scent. Even humans were affected by the smell of the other half of their souls. His eyes widened just a smidge, and his nostrils flared. Enrique even licked his lower lip before dipping his head and focusing on whatever drink rested before him.

Slow and steady.

"Hi, Enrique," Trynche greeted softly. Picking up his first burrito in one hand, he used his second to drizzle a little picante sauce onto it. "It's good to see you. I hear



Sheldon's going to be a pain in the ass."

"Yeah." Enrique rotated his glass on the bar, glancing from Trynche to the drink and back again. "Wish I'd never taken that damn job, but the money was good, and gas prices have skyrocketed." With a growl, he finished, "Damn economy."

Trynche caught a whiff of whiskey on Enrique's breath. Coupled with his short ramble, he figured the drink before him wasn't his first. He nearly smiled, thinking that meant he could keep his mate for the night under the guise of not allowing him to drink and drive.

Then the man's words registered.

"Well, I'm glad you took the job, Enrique," Trynche told him after swallowing his bite of food. He really was hungry after waking from roost. "Even though it brings a little trouble to us."

Enrique narrowed his eyes as he looked at him. "Why?"

Trynche chuckled around his mouthful of food. After swallowing, he told him, "Well, it brought you to me." Seeing that Enrique was still confused, he explained, "It allowed us to meet, Enrique. You're the other half of my soul, the single person on this earth that I can bond with, forge a lasting relationship with."

Setting down his food, Trynche took a chance and reached over to rest his hand over Enrique's. To his pleasure, his mate didn't pull away. Gently, Trynche used his thumb to rub his mate's pulse point, feeling it begin to speed up.

I love how he's affected by me.

Trynche knew it was Fate's way of helping the human accept his or her paranormal

mate. Learning there were other species living on the planet was normally pretty traumatic for the average human. While Trynche wouldn't trade his mate for anyone or anything, he definitely thought gargoyles who found their mate in another paranormal had it far easier.

That's okay. My mate will be worth any work I have to put in.

"I know you're still processing, Enrique." Trynche kept his voice a low, soothing rumble. "I look forward to learning everything about you and helping fulfill all your wishes and desires."

Trynche picked up his fork. Wanting to give his mate a minute to process his words, he took a bite of his hash brown casserole. He waited, trying to be patient, as he enjoyed his food.

Scoffing softly, Enrique peered at where Trynche held his wrist. "All my wishes and desires, huh?" he mumbled.

Nodding, Trynche silently confirmed his mate's words.

"Don't really have any of those anymore," Enrique mused, his voice quiet. His expression turned a little vacant as he took a sip of his drink. After setting it back on the bar, he stated, "For the longest time, getting my business up and running, keeping it solvent, was the only thing I thought about. Lived and breathed work." Scoffing, Enrique admitted, "Lost a few boyfriends and girlfriends to it. Said I didn't make time for 'em, and they were right." He peered at Trynche with a pained expression. "I'm really not relationship material, man."

Trynche felt his heart speed up when he saw that look. His mate wasn't denying him. No, instead, he was warning him. His mate worried that Trynche would be the one who ended up hurt.

Aww, my poor mate. I'll prove him wrong about that soon enough. He definitely needs a paranormal, someone who'll understand how to care for his needs and be devoted just to him, and I'm that man.

"I understand how your job can overshadow your time for a significant other," Trynche began slowly, mentally searching for the right words. "It happens with everyone. That's just life." When Enrique met his gaze with a disbelieving look, Trynche told him, "There'll be times that I must put my duty over spending time with you." He used his fork to wave behind him at the others clustered around the room, talking quietly. "One of those gargoyles is Elder Cliatno. Technically, he's my boss. I'm an enforcer for him. It's my job to keep him safe."

"Sorta like a bodyguard," Enrique offered, perhaps trying to fit Trynche's job title into a frame of reference he could understand.

Trynche nodded once. "Sorta. I work with a team to assess risk to his planned activities and make certain he's safe while doing them." Chuckling, he grinned. "Yeah, just like a bodyguard."

To Trynche's pleasure, Enrique smiled and even offered a soft chuckle. He sobered quickly, though, as he looked at those around them. His eyebrows furrowed, and he appeared troubled.

"That means you have a pretty dangerous job at times." Enrique cocked his head, his expression turning sharper as he eyed him. "You said you were chasing a rogue. That one of the elders went rogue."

Trynche nodded. "Yes, and yes." Rubbing over Enrique's pulse point again, he told him, "But try not to worry. I'm very well trained."

"It sounds like a civil war is brewing," Enrique stated. "The gargoyles who want to

subjugate others against the ones who want to keep your people in the shadows.”

Nodding again, Trynche murmured, “Yes, I guess you could call it that.”

“Good thing I’m former military then.” Enrique’s smile turned hard. “I’ll start carrying again. You’ll have to let me know what a gargoyle’s vulnerable points are so I can watch your back.”

Trynche’s heart felt as if it skipped a beat, and he smiled at his mate.

While Trynche had no desire to see Enrique in danger, the thought that he wanted to stand beside him still warmed him from the inside out.

Yep. My mate’s worried about me. Gods, my mate is perfect.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

Seeing the warm smile that curved Trynche's full lips, Enrique returned his attention to his drink. He lifted the whiskey to his mouth and swigged back the last mouthful. As it was his third drink—and some pretty high-end stuff—it didn't burn nearly as much as some others he'd enjoyed.

Enrique realized just how his words had sounded... as if he were planning to be at Trynche's side... to give him a chance.

Is that what I'm considering? Or was it just the whiskey talking?

Just that morning, Enrique would have thought the idea ludicrous. Except, his dream that morning had been hella hot. The memories of Trynche blowing him had been even hotter, and the male seemed convinced they could make a go of it together.

Wasn't it just a few days ago that I took that couple out on their anniversary flight and was jealous? Wishing for the same thing? If Trynche was human, would I be fighting this attraction?

Enrique knew the answer to that, and the realization sickened him. If Trynche had been human and had asked him on a date, or come onto him in a bar, he would have acted on his attraction without a second thought. Frowning at his empty tumbler, Enrique could only come to one conclusion—he was being bigoted because of the paranormal aspect.

Except, I can change that. I'm not too sure about the whole mate thing and being the other half of his soul—that just sounds too damn crazy—but I'd definitely like to see where this attraction leads.

“Can I get you another drink?” Trynche asked, squeezing his wrist once more before releasing him and rising.

Lifting his attention to Trynche, Enrique hesitated only a second before nodding. He watched the big male rise to his feet and make his way around the bar. With his decision in mind, Enrique allowed himself to truly take in the male’s features, and he had to admit, he sure liked what he saw.

Having served in the military, Enrique was no slouch at six feet with plenty of wiry muscles that he kept in shape with diet and exercise.

Trynche was on a whole other level, easy to see since his body was on clear display as he only wore a loincloth. The gargoyle stood at least six-foot-eight. His shoulders were extremely wide, and his torso tapered to a trim waist showcasing a fucking eight-pack. Trynche’s limbs sported thick muscles that bunched and moved beneath his coral-colored hide every time he moved.

Enrique found his attention focused on Trynche’s dark-red wings when the gargoyle turned his back to him to grab the liquor bottle. The gargoyle kept his wings tucked close, but Enrique recalled how they looked spread. They were massive, stretching perhaps eight or more feet in length. Enrique hadn’t had the confidence to touch them the other night—or pretty much any of Trynche, for that matter—but he desperately wanted to know what they felt like. His fingers almost twitched with the desire.

When Trynche turned back around and leaned forward to slide his tumbler onto the bar, Enrique watched his long, light-blue hair slide over his shoulder. It was such a unique color, and he lifted a hand to touch it. Without thought, Enrique slid a strand through his fingers, finding it smooth, if a little damp, telling him that Trynche had recently showered.

Maybe that’s why he smells so good—clean and masculine.

Realizing what he did, Enrique yanked his hand back. “Sorry,” he muttered, fighting the heat that threatened to creep up his neck.

“Never apologize for touching me, Enrique,” Trynche rumbled softly, his smile warm and heat filling his green eyes. “I’ll always welcome it... anytime you want.”

“Can I touch your wings?” Enrique blurted.

Yep, definitely the alcohol talking. Can’t believe I said that out loud.

Trynche’s smile widened to a grin. “Yes, my mate, you may.” Then he sobered and told him, “But not here.” He rounded the bar and returned to his seat, his focus remaining on Enrique the whole time. His smile could only be called... hungry. “A gargoyle’s wings are sensitive. Touching them is very personal.” Wagging his brows, Trynche winked. “And it turns us on.”

Enrique gaped at that realization. “T-Turns you on?” He looked at Trynche’s deep red wings, admiring the way they billowed along the gargoyle’s broad back. His fingers twitched with even more desire to touch, but he wrapped his hand around his new drink instead. “Really?”

“Unless we’re fighting, yeah.” Ruacin stopped next to them and waggled his black eyebrow ridges. “Then the endorphins released by someone touching them is fuel for something else... adrenaline to take out our asshole opponent.”

Trynche rolled his eyes as he swallowed his bite of burrito. “Oh, come on,” he griped, frowning at Ruacin. “When we spare, I’m not an asshole just because I always kick your ass.”

Ruacin scoffed, pointing the breakfast sandwich he held at Trynche. “Whatever, man. I kick your ass way more than you kick mine.”

“Bullshit,” Trynche stated with a snarl.

“Children, children.” Enrique snorted as he shook his head while glancing between them. “You sound like squabbling brothers.”

Enrique chuckled, realizing how true his statement was. It didn’t matter that these huge guys were gargoyles. They acted just like any other friends joshing each other. Smiling, Enrique recalled how he’d had that kind of camaraderie with a few of the guys he’d worked with in the motor pool.

I wonder what a couple of them are up to.

If Enrique was going to have to battle rogue gargoyles, he thought having someone he trusted at his back might be a good thing. Then he wondered if the gargoyles would allow outside help. After all, they were supposed to be a secret.

“Hey, is everything okay?” Trynche once again reached over and gripped Enrique’s wrist, startling him and dragging him out of his thoughts. The gargoyle appeared a little worried. “You were frowning into your drink. We were just joking with each other.” Trynche glanced at Ruacin, who’d settled on Trynche’s other side and also eyed him with concern. “We didn’t mean to upset you.”

Enrique scoffed and shook his head. “No, I’m not upset or anything.” Resting his free hand on Trynche’s wrist, he mirrored the gargoyle’s hold on him and squeezed lightly. “I’m an only child, so I don’t know what it’s like to joke with a sibling, but I was remembering how I’d act with a couple of military buddies. I thought maybe I’d look them up to see if they could help against the rogues.” Sighing, Enrique admitted, “Then I realized maybe I couldn’t ask for their help because you wouldn’t want me to tell them about, well”—he squeezed Trynche’s wrist again—”you guys.”

“Normally, no, we wouldn’t allow that,” Trynche replied, furrowing eyebrow ridges



that were a slightly deeper hue than his face, making them look more orange. The gargoyle exchanged a look with Ruacin, who arched his black eyebrow ridge before shoving a bite of sandwich in his mouth. When Trynche returned his focus to Enrique, he told him, “But as a gargoyle, we do like to please our mate, so maybe we could work something out.”

“But we’ll discuss that at another time.” Elder Bodb stopped next to them. The dark-purple-hided gargoyle offered Enrique a reassuring smile. “For now, Spieron has found something we all need to discuss.”

Enrique could only nod, his attention riveted to the myriad of colored, winged paranormals.

They came in so many different shades, from blues, blacks, greens, blues, and more. All of them seemed to share one common factor. They were all huge—big, broad, with billowy wings, and plenty of muscles.

“Geez,” Enrique whispered as his attention was pulled to a slender, auburn-haired man who appeared human—but he didn’t know if that was actually the case—and was carrying a laptop. As the man began connecting cables to the laptop, Enrique muttered, “Are you guys all huge?”

Trynche chuckled as he rubbed his thumb over Enrique’s pulse point. “No, actually. Gargoyles come in two basic designs. Large ones like us.” He swept his gaze over the room, obviously indicating the myriad of males in the large room. “But there’s also a smaller variety. They’re quite a bit smaller, normally a few inches under six feet.” Trynche motioned toward his sides even as he flicked out his large wings once before resettling them along his back. “Instead of large wings, they have folds of skin along their sides called wingskins. They stretch it out with special bone-spurs that extend from the back of their ribcage.”

“Don’t let their size fool you, though,” Ruacin cut in before taking a swig of his orange juice from a plastic bottle. “They can be just as tough as any of us big guys and twice as wily.” With a rueful chuckle, the large, lime-green gargoyle admitted, “I was stationed with one named Kratos while working with Elder Vermidian. I sparred with him once, and he took my ass down without any trouble.”

“All right, guys,” the man setting up the computer called. “I have some troubling news, and we’re gonna need to brainstorm ideas.”

“Who’s that?” Enrique asked quietly, leaning closer to Trynche.

“That’s Spieron Virche,” Trynche answered, keeping his voice equally low.

Recognizing the name, Enrique nodded. “Acting-mayor Albert’s partner.” Finally, he had a face to put to a name. “I’d never seen him before.”

In fact, until earlier that evening, Enrique had never met Albert face to face, either. There had been no reason for him to have. Until dealing with Sheldon, he’d steered clear of anything to do with those in politics.

“Right. Albert is Spieron’s beloved,” Trynche told him with a smile. Unfamiliar with that reference, Enrique furrowed his brows. Trynche must have realized that he wasn’t following, for he explained, “Spieron is a vampire. Beloved is their kind’s term for mate.”

“Vampire,” Enrique whispered, snapping his attention back to Spieron. When Jory had driven him to town, he’d touched base on the fact that there were vampires and shifters also in the world and living at the ranch. Looking him over, he never would have guessed him to be anything other than human. “Wow.”

“Hiding in plain sight, remember?” Trynche winked at him while rubbing the pulse

point on his wrist. “Anonymity and secrecy and all that.”

“Right.” Enrique spotted the two pictures that were up on the large screen that hung from the ceiling. “Shit.”

One was a slightly blurry picture of wide wings spread in flight. Due to the darkness and trees, while the huge wingspan was on display, the body couldn’t really be seen. Even the head was slightly obscured, but it could be made out enough that it was obviously not a bird’s head.

The second picture was of the side of Trynche’s head. His hair hid most of his face, but his pointed ear was on display. The hard angles of his jaw also made him seem not-quite-human.

“Sheldon has posted these pictures to a forum that tracks creature sightings this morning,” Spieron informed the room. Sitting at a table, he pressed a button on the laptop. “He’s already received dozens of responses. Some are heralding these as obvious fakes or screenshots from movies.”

Spieron put up a screen with a number of messages on it. He’d highlighted a few of them.

That’s the fakest cosplay mask I’ve ever seen.

Is that a LOTR wannabe?

That’s just a screengrab from Jeepers Creepers.

“I don’t look like that monster,” Trynche grumbled, scowling.

“No, you don’t,” Enrique quickly reassured. While he found his sudden need to

soothe the gargoyle unfamiliar, he couldn't help but act on it. "I love your pointed ears."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Enrique felt the heat starting to creep up his neck.

Time to lay off the booze.

"While most comments are similar to these naysayers, there's a few that are more supportive," Spieron continued, displaying a couple more comments.

A Jersey Devil sighting in Texas? It's a long way from home, if it's genuine.

Was it taken with a spectral camera? Looks like demon wings to me.

Spieron clicked the computer keyboard again, and another couple of comments popped up. "Then... there are these."

I can help you catch it. DM me.

Any labs out there? Maybe it's a secret government experiment that got loose.

Where there's one, there's more. You're going to need help exposing and eradicating that nest before they can take over. DM me.

Under the two messages that asked Sheldon to DM them, he'd responded with the words, message sent.

"Good grief," Lludd grumbled where he stood with his arm around Archer's shoulders. "Now we're going to have to deal with monster hunters, as well as rogues?"

A tick started in Spieron's jaw. "If only it was that simple." His green eyes flicked to red for an instant before returning to their normal color. "After all, monster hunters are easy to catch and send packing with a little tweak to their mind."

"What are you getting at, Spieron?" Bodb asked. He leaned against the wall behind him with his arms wrapped around Nicholas, who was leaning on him. "What did you find?"

"I hacked the system and discovered the identities of these User IDs." Spieron pointed at the two people who'd offered to help Sheldon. "This first one is from someone located in a government research facility." With a sneer, the vampire admitted, "It'll take me more than a few hours to hack into their systems."

"Government," another man muttered. "Never good to get on their radar."

"No, it's not, Vernon," Nicholas agreed with a sigh. "Any idea who the second person offering help is?"

Spieron turned in his chair and stared at Nicholas. "The account is registered to Grecian Doe."

"Grecian," Bodb snarled as low growls erupted from several people.

"Who's Grecian?" Enrique glanced around, the hairs on his nape rising as unease flooded him.

Trynche let out a deep breath, and he seemed to be trying to rein in the obvious ire his scowl betrayed. "He's one of the rogues."

"Why would he contact Sheldon?" Enrique understood their anger at the name of a rogue, but he couldn't seem to put it together.

“The rogues want to roust us from our secure position here at the ranch,” Bodb explained, meeting Enrique’s gaze for a second. “We can see them coming if they outright attack, and they know they’ll never win that way.” Then he focused on Spieron. “See if you can hack their accounts to access their direct messages. I want to know just how much trouble this is going to cause us.” Pushing off the wall, Bodb took Nicholas with him. “Everyone be careful out on patrol tonight,” the elder ordered. “We can’t have any more exposure if creature hunters start coming out of the woodwork.”

“Damn,” Enrique mumbled, shaking his head. “I’m so sorry about this.”

Bodb paused beside him and rested his hand on Enrique’s shoulder, squeezing lightly before releasing him. “Accidents happen, Enrique.” His smile appeared kind as he added, “Besides, that rogue is the one that attacked your bird. This is on them.”

As Enrique watched the men in the room begin conversing in hushed whispers, he couldn’t help that he still felt partly responsible.

Somehow, I’ll find a way to help fix this.

Meeting Trynche’s gaze, seeing the worry within their green depths, Enrique knew exactly how to start.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

“Everything okay?”

After asking the question, Trynche shoved the last of his second cinnamon roll into his mouth. He’d done his best to scarf his food while Spieron had shown everyone what Sheldon was up to. The fact that the rogues had touched base with the ex-mayor surprised him. After all, they thought they were superior to humans.

Or maybe that’s why they’re willing to use him. They see him as a tool to be exploited.

Either way, Trynche knew his elders and the rest of their people would figure out how to handle him. His focus right then was on his mate. Trynche knew everyone around him would understand if he didn’t stick around to help brainstorm.

“Yeah, I’m okay,” Enrique replied slowly.

To Trynche, his mate didn’t really sound too certain.

“Would you like to go somewhere and talk?” Trynche offered before draining the last of his coffee. “Somewhere quieter?”

And where we can be alone.

Enrique pushed his whiskey tumbler away even though it was still half full. “Yeah, uh, yeah, that would be great.” He nodded as he spoke, then glanced around the large lounge. “Um, is it okay, though? For us to leave?”

Trynche nodded, aiming a smile at his mate. “It’ll be fine.” Rising to his feet, he held out his hand. “Come on.”

After just a second of hesitation, Enrique reached out and slid his palm into Trynche’s own. A zing of heat traveled up his arm, and he felt certain that if he’d been human, the hairs on his arm would have stood on end. His gut clenched, and he felt his blood begin heating in his veins.

Think unsexy thoughts.

While Trynche knew that no one would give him shit about getting turned on by his mate—especially since they weren’t bonded, yet—his hard-on would be blatantly obvious behind the fabric of his loincloth. He was concerned about Enrique’s response. He didn’t want to make his mate uncomfortable.

“So, uh.” As Trynche led the way out of the lounge, receiving a few encouraging smiles and a thumbs up from Ruacin, he racked his brain for where to go. “Some place quiet.” Trynche smiled at Enrique, feeling a little uncertain. “Are you, uh, okay with being alone with me?” When Enrique appeared confused, Trynche cleared his throat awkwardly before explaining, “I didn’t want to presume.”

“Oh, yeah. Alone is fine.” Enrique paused in the dining room, his attention on the mini-fridges. Indicating them, he asked, “Is there water in one of them?”

“Yeah, absolutely.” Trynche quickly crossed to the one on the left and opened it. He grabbed a couple of bottles—water was a great idea—and handed one to Enrique. “Do you want anything else?”

Trynche opened a second fridge. “Are you hungry?” He indicated the pre-made sandwiches. “Or a snack?” Trynche pointed at the myriad of chip bags and fruit on another counter. “Feel free to take anything.”



“Uh.” Enrique hesitated, then grabbed a bag of lightly salted peanuts. “Maybe for later.”

Nodding and smiling, Trynche rested his free hand on Enrique’s lower back since his human’s hands were occupied. He applied a little pressure and guided him through the rear mud room and out the back door. Pausing on the expansive deck, Trynche thought about settling on one of the several hanging two-person chairs. They’d been customized by Gladstone to hold a gargoyle in his true form and his mate.

Would my mate cuddle on the swing with me?

“Would you—” Trynche began.

At the same time, Enrique started, “Can we—”

Both paused, and Trynche grinned at his mate. “After you.”

Enrique hesitated for a second, then asked, “Can we go back to that room we were in a couple of nights ago?” His neck began to darken, the pinkish hue creeping up his neck. “Is that bedroom in the bunkhouse still available?”

Surprise shooting through him, Trynche hesitated.

My mate wants to go into a bedroom with me?

Clearing his throat, Enrique tucked his pouch of peanuts under his right arm. He popped the cap on his water bottle and took a big swig. Once he’d twisted the cap back on, he gave Trynche a side-eyed look.

Realizing he was gaping like a slack-jawed yokel—one of the ranch hand’s, Virgil’s, favorite sayings—Trynche snapped his mouth shut. “Yeah,” he quickly stated. “Yes,

of course.” He urged Enrique down the stairs and toward the bunkhouse. Anticipation filled him, along with heat and desire, and he did his best to control himself.

With them heading into the bedroom where Trynche had enjoyed pleasuring Enrique, it was damn difficult though. His mouth watered as he thought of how delicious his mate’s cum had tasted. He swallowed quickly, trying to figure out why Enrique would ask to be alone with him in the bedroom.

Surely Enrique can’t be wanting a repeat of our activities. He’s a human and needs time, right?

Once they reached the bedroom, Trynche paused and stood in the middle of the room, feeling decidedly awkward. He didn’t know what to do or say, so he opened his water and took a drink. As Trynche swallowed, he watched Enrique shut the door... and lock it, and Trynche nearly choked.

Trynche managed to swallow the water before giving in to his urge to cough. Covering his mouth, he caught his breath. He knew he stared at Enrique with wide eyes, but he didn’t know what to say... or do.

The desire that filled Enrique’s brown eyes as he leaned back against the locked door and swept his gaze over Trynche sent a flash of heat through him.

“Uh, wh-what are we doing?” Trynche asked. Realizing just how inane that sounded, he quickly questioned, “Do you want me to pleasure you again?” Licking his lips, hope springing within him, Trynche offered, “I’m always happy to do that, you know.”

Easing his tongue out, Enrique slowly licked his lips.

The move caused a rush of lust to flair through Trynche’s body. He wanted to taste

his mate's lips so very badly. Easing a step closer, he tossed the bottle of water onto the bed, freeing his hands.

"Enrique?" Trynche rumbled softly. "Please talk to me." When his human continued to rove his gaze over him, he murmured, "Anything you want, you need, my mate, I'll do my best to give it to you."

"Do you want to bond with me?"

Trynche gaped at the unexpected question. Seeing Enrique's eyes narrow and jaw tighten, he quickly nodded. "Yes," he answered honestly. He would always try to be honest with the other half of his soul. "Yes, I want to bond us."

"Okay, then." Enrique eyed him as he pushed off the door and moved past him, heading toward the bed. "Think there's lube in here? Or can you get some?" After placing his water and peanuts on the nightstand, Enrique turned to face him with a smirk. "I remember how hung you are, and I'll need plenty to take you."

Arousal surged hot and fast through Trynche's veins, causing his prick to swell so fast he thought he would pass out from loss of blood to his big head. Still, confusion hit him just as swiftly. Trynche desperately wanted to do just as Enrique had requested—spend the evening fucking and being fucked, bonding them forever.

Except, I can't... not without understanding where his request is coming from.

"Enrique," Trynche began slowly, taking a step toward his mate. "I want to do that more than anything else in this world." With his fingers twitching, Trynche barely resisted grabbing his seemingly willing human and tossing him on the bed. "But I need to know why because your acceptance seems sudden." Seeing Enrique lick his lips again, Trynche found his attention slipping to his mate's mouth again. "Why?" he asked hoarsely, arousal firing through his veins. "This can't be undone, so I need..."

I need to understand.” After pausing a second, Trynche blurted out, “I’ll never let you go, my mate. You’re it for me. I need you to understand that.”

Blowing out a slow breath between pursed lips, Enrique appeared to be deciding the best way to respond. He slipped out of his flannel shirt and set it on a nearby chair before gripping the hem of his undershirt and pulling that off, too. Once Enrique had placed that on the chair, he settled on the bed.

Seeing his mate’s gorgeous, smooth skin over the defined muscles of his torso and arms distracted Trynche... until his human started talking.

“It kinda hit me earlier,” Enrique began slowly, his fingers clenching where they rested on his thighs. “If you were human and we’d met at a club, with the way we’re attracted to each other”—Enrique’s smile was small and a little uncertain as he met Trynche’s gaze—“we woulda fucked in the bathroom before heading to one of our places for a hot night between the sheets.”

“Think so?” Trynche certainly wouldn’t have been averse to that, not one bit. Easing onto the bed beside Enrique, he couldn’t resist reaching over and taking his hand. “You’re that attracted to me?”

Mentally, Trynche preened.

Scoffing, Enrique nodded as he smirked, giving him a side-eye. “Yeah, Trynche. I think you’re hot.” He continued to admire Trynche’s body, his gaze hot as he roved it over him. “I’ve always been attracted to men larger than myself, and your muscles are sexy. Your wings, skin, and hair are so unique.” Humming, Enrique licked his lips. “I want to explore every inch of you.”

As much as Trynche appreciated the hungry looks Enrique was giving him, he had to remind his human of the truth. “And the fact that I’m a gargoyle and believe we’re

soul mates?”

After a second of hesitation, Enrique met his gaze. “I warned you about sucking at relationships, and I’m hoping that, with me agreeing to bond with you, you’ll know that I’m serious about this, too.” His human’s voice came out so soft, yet earnest. “That way, when I screw up, which I’m sure I will, you’ll find it in your heart to forgive me.”

Grabbing his water off the nightstand, Enrique busied himself with taking a drink. Trynche guessed that he just needed to wet his throat because he could smell the nerves rolling off his mate. He remained quiet, waiting, pretty sure his mate had something else to say. His patience was rewarded a moment later.

“This is my way of saying that I accept what you’re claiming.” Enrique held Trynche’s gaze. “I understand how serious it is for you, even if I don’t completely understand it myself.” Furrowing his brows, his human claimed, “I do want a partner, have for years, but could never find someone who fit.” Enrique paused and rubbed the back of his neck. “Not sure where I was going with that.”

Trynche chuckled softly. “I do,” he claimed. Leaning closer, he wrapped his arm around Enrique’s shoulders and tugged him closer. “You couldn’t find someone who fit because none of them were me.” Staring deep into his mate’s wide dark eyes, Trynche claimed, “I’m your soul mate.”

Then Trynche did what he’d been aching to do since the second he’d scented Enrique and realized who he was to him. He lowered his head and sealed his mouth over his mate’s. Gently, Trynche used a canine to scrape along Enrique’s lower lip, drawing a gasp from the man.

The opening was exactly what Trynche had anticipated. He delved his tongue into the other man’s mouth, exploring his heat. His mate’s rich masculine flavor flowed

across Trynche's taste buds, and he groaned as he relished the man's deliciousness.

Trynche tightened his arm around Enrique, pulling him closer. Lifting his other hand, he cradled his mate's jaw. He tipped his head to the side a little, slotting their mouths together more fully, all the while licking along the other man's tongue, mapping and tasting him.

When breathing became a necessity, Trynche broke the kiss only to take in a swift, noisy breath. Then he dove back into the kiss. He couldn't get enough of his new and forever lover's exquisite taste.

Finally, needing more, Trynche lifted his head. He panted harshly, his lungs burning. As he caught his breath, he admired Enrique's flushed face and widely dilated eyes.

"So that's how you kiss around those canines," Enrique murmured, sounding breathless. "Didn't even really feel them. Wow."

Trynche grinned, a low chuckle escaping him.

Enrique winced, muttering, "Didn't mean to say that out loud."

"Gods, you're so fucking sexy," Trynche replied, rubbing his thumb over his human's cheekbone. "If you're sure, I'll take you up on your offer." His cock throbbed behind his loincloth. "I'll bond us and make you mine forever." After a second of hesitation, Trynche added, "Just as I'll be yours."

Enrique licked his lips before swallowing hard. "You're not going to try to take over my life, though, right?" he asked, suddenly seeming uncertain. "I have my business to run."

Shaking his head, Trynche assured, "I won't take over your life, my mate." After

pecking a kiss to his mate's lips, he added, "I just want to share in it."

Nodding, Enrique held Trynche's gaze steadily. "I'd really like that."

Heartened by those words, Trynche decided not to question Enrique further. He needed to have faith that his mate knew his own mind. Besides, there was nothing he wanted more than what Enrique was offering him.

Leaning over, Trynche opened the nightstand. He pulled out the lube he knew would be there. Paranormals were a horny lot, and lube was kept just about everywhere private. Trynche stood, and seeing no reason to be coy, he slipped the stays of his loincloth, allowing it to fall to the floor.

"Damn."

Hearing Enrique's softly whispered word, Trynche focused on his mate. He saw the hunger and appreciation filling his human's dark eyes and barely resisted preening. Being a gargoyle, Trynche felt attraction more through scent than sight, so aesthetic beauty was a little lost on him. The look in Enrique's eyes reassured him that his human liked what he was looking at—Trynche's gargoyle body.

And my big dick.

Enrique's focus appeared riveted to Trynche's long, hard cock, jutting ramrod straight from his groin. He felt himself twitch as he watched his mate reach a hand toward him. His stomach clenched in anticipation, and pre-cum oozed from his slit.

The last time, Trynche had done all the touching, and when Enrique's lightly calloused hands wrapped around his length, he nearly blew his load right then.

Groaning roughly, Trynche shuddered as his mate jacked him, shooting zings of

sensation through his entire body.

“Fuck, your touch.” Trynche couldn’t keep his appreciative growl from his voice, and he rocked his hips, pushing into his mate’s touch. “So fucking good.”

Trynche didn’t think anything could be better, but then Enrique gave him a wicked grin, leaned forward, and wrapped his lips around Trynche’s crown.

With a moan, Trynche nearly felt his eyes roll to the back of his head. He clenched his thighs as his balls tightened. With a whine of shock, Trynche realized he was about to come embarrassingly fast.

“Enrique!”

Trynche shouted his mate’s name—the only warning he could give—right before bliss bowled through his system, making him sway.



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

Enrique swallowed swiftly, doing his best to keep up with Trynche's pulses. The male's seed tasted slightly bitter on his tongue, and the quantity quickly caught up with him. Even as he swallowed, some oozed past the corners of his mouth and dribbled down his chin.

Needing to breathe, Enrique pulled off Trynche's dick and pointed it downward while continuing to jack him, allowing the last couple of spurts to splatter on the hardwood floor.

Damn, my poor gargoyle must have been really pent-up.

"Shit, Enrique," Trynche mumbled, his breath coming in rough pants. He threaded his fingers through Enrique's hair before sliding his fingers down to apply pressure under his chin. When Enrique met Trynche's gaze, the gargoyle smiled lazily at him. "Sorry I couldn't give you much of a warning." He used a thumb to wipe up the cum that had dripped down one side of his chin. "Your touch, your mouth felt so damn good. Better than I could have ever imagined." Sighing, his eyes heavy-lidded, he brought his digit to his mouth. Before popping it into his mouth to suck it clean, Trynche muttered, "Blew my mind." Barking a laugh, he added, "And my load."

Enrique chuckled, rising to his feet. "You ramble after getting off." Moving his hands to his fly, he began undoing his jeans. "Good to know." Eyeing the gargoyle's still-hard dick, he arched one brow. "And nice stamina, but you mind if I fuck you first?" Lowering his zipper, Enrique tucked his thumbs into the waistband of his jeans and briefs. "My cock is aching to sink into your tight ass."

Enrique should have blushed at the words tumbling out of his mouth. He couldn't

ever remember being so blunt with a lover. Except, the way Trynche grinned at him and eyed his groin hungrily when Enrique pushed down his clothes caused any self-consciousness to flee.

He found it incredibly freeing.

“Mmmm, hell, yeah,” Trynche replied gruffly. “Would love to feel you pounding my ass. But first.” He cupped Enrique’s chin and tipped his face up. Then Trynche stuck out his tongue and licked over his chin, clearing away the rest of his cum. “There ya go.” He winked as he straightened.

Enrique laughed as he pulled away from a grinning Trynche. “Right.” He grabbed his bottle of water, took a swig, and allowed some to dribble from his mouth. Then he grabbed his undershirt and used it to wipe and dry his face. Arching a brow as he tossed the shirt back to the chair, Enrique met Trynche’s gaze. “Now there.”

Trynche tipped his head back and laughed, obviously amused and not at all embarrassed.

Chuckling along with him, Enrique grabbed the lube and moved to the bed. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d laughed and had fun with a lover. Did he ever?

Enrique didn’t think so, and he sure liked it.

“Get your ass up here, big guy,” Enrique demanded, patting the bed. “I’m in the mood to fuck you into the mattress.”

“Yes, please,” Trynche responded, climbing up beside him. The bottle of water the gargoyle had tossed on the bedspread rolled between them, knocking against their knees as Trynche crawled into position. The male grabbed it and placed it next to Enrique’s on the nightstand. Then he rested on his forearms, his ass in the air, with

his tail lashing back and forth, offering enticing glimpses of his hole.

With his cock aching with need, Enrique moved between Trynche's legs. He quickly drizzled slick on his dick as well as his fingers, coating both liberally. Then Enrique grabbed the base of Trynche's tail, intending to ease it aside so he could hold it out of the way.

Trynche barked a cry and arched, a shudder working through his big body.

Enrique froze, fearing he'd hurt the male. "Are you okay?" He quickly released Trynche's tail and rubbed his hand over his ass cheek and flank. "Does grabbing your tail hurt you?"

A rough, guttural chuckle erupted from Trynche. His green eyes almost glowed with a feral light as he looked over his shoulder at him. His torso expanded and contracted a couple of times as if he were breathing deeply to catch his breath.

"Oh, quite the opposite, my mate," Trynche told him gruffly. "Tails are just as sensitive as wings."

Feeling his eyes widen with his surprise, Enrique held Trynche's gaze. "Damn." Relief quickly gave way to pleasure. "Really?"

Trynche's nostrils flared as he nodded. "Yeah."

"Well, well." That was an interesting surprise.

Holding Trynche's gaze, Enrique returned his grip to the base of his gargoyle's tail. He saw the way his lover's lips parted and heard him suck in a sharp breath. When Enrique slid his hand down his length a little way while squeezing gently, Trynche let that breath out on a low, sensual moan. The gargoyle's eyelids slid to half-mast, and

he seemed to lose focus, as if whatever sensations he was enjoying were the most blissful things in existence.

Just, damn.

Enrique repeated his actions, working the dock of Trynche's tail with rhythmic squeezes and strokes. The sights and sounds the gargoyle uttered while shaking in obvious ecstasy quickly went to Enrique's dick. He feared he would come before he even managed to get inside the gargoyle.

Inside. Definitely gotta get inside him.

With that thought in mind, Enrique slid one slick finger deep into the gargoyle's chute. He didn't even seem to notice, considering the way he was lost in the pleasure of Enrique working his tail. Even as Enrique eased a second finger in and began working Trynche open, he wondered if he could get the gargoyle off just by jacking his tail.

And maybe his wings.

Enrique still wanted to pet them.

Then Trynche muttered, "Fuck me. Please fuck me." He groaned and trembled for a few seconds before growling, "So fucking close again." Reaching back, Trynche gripped Enrique's wrist, forcing him to stop his movements to the gargoyle's tail. "And I want you in me when I do." The gargoyle's green eyes were narrowed as he pinned Enrique with a feral grin. "I wanna milk your release from you and feel your hot cum warm my insides."

Groaning, Enrique tried to control the hard shiver that shot straight to his groin. His erection throbbed, and he gritted his teeth against his need for release. Jerking a nod,

Enrique eased his fingers from Trynche's ass and gripped his base.

Enrique pressed his crown to Trynche's puckered entrance. That stimulation alone caused a tingle at the base of his spine. Squeezing the base of his cock barely stemmed his need, and he sucked in a deep breath, praying for control.

"Do it," Trynche encouraged, rocking backward as if trying to impale himself on Enrique's dick. "Need you, my mate."

Unable to resist the siren call of Trynche's willing body—not that he wanted to—Enrique obeyed. He thrust his hips, and his lover's ring of muscle opened to him. Enrique's crown was clamped in wet, sucking heat, and he moaned at the pleasure that shot through him.

Instinct took over, and Enrique pushed forward, sinking a bit deeper. He rocked back, reveling in the tug against his skin. Pinpricks of fiery bliss shot up his spine as a shiver worked through him.

Gritting his teeth, Enrique pushed forward again. In one long, smooth glide, he buried his prick balls deep inside the gargoyle's tight, exquisite heat. Enrique moaned loudly as he managed to still his hips.

"Trynche," Enrique whispered. He would forever deny any hint of whine in his voice. "Oh, gods." Bowing over Trynche's back, he rested his forehead against the middle of the gargoyle's back. Breathing deeply, Enrique tried not only to catch his breath, but also to get control of himself. "Feel so good."

Enrique had just enough presence of mind to keep from commenting about how he'd never barebacked before. There was nothing worse than talking about past fucks while with another. Instead, Enrique reveled in the knowledge that he would never have to bother with a rubber again.

I'll get to feel this any time I want.

"So fucking good," Enrique muttered once more.

Then, his body demanding it, Enrique began to move. The sucking drag of Trynche's inner muscles on the bare sensitive skin of his dick instantly went to his head. Straightening, he grabbed the gargoyle's thick hip in a tight grip. That, coupled with the hold he still had on Trynche's tail, allowed Enrique to hold the gargoyle steady as he began hammering into him over and over.

Trynche arched and moaned, hollering Enrique's name while shuddering in his grip. With his increased strength, the gargoyle still managed to rock into each of Enrique's thrusts. The slap of their bodies coming together combined with their grunts, groans, and hisses. The sting of Enrique's balls hitting Trynche's ass ramped up his desire to a level he'd never before experienced, and he found himself soaring over the edge, crying Trynche's name once more.

Slamming deep, Enrique shuddered hard as he came, soaking his lover's chute with his seed. Some odd instinct hit him, and he stretched forward. Grabbing the gargoyle's blue hair, Enrique yanked the male's head back and to the side, causing him to arch so he could reach the male's flushed red neck.

Enrique opened his mouth and wrapped his teeth around his tendon. He clenched hard, his jaw hurting in his effort to pierce the male's thick hide. Then the sweet, iron-rich flavor filled his mouth, and he grunted with pleasure at the exquisite taste.

Humming, Enrique sucked on the wound and swallowed some more blood. He smiled around the flesh against his lips when he heard Trynche moan his name. Then the male shuddered beneath him, his body trembling, and Enrique felt the man's channel flutter around his still-embedded erection, telling him that his gargoyle had just come, too.

Gaining some self-control, Enrique released his hold on Trynche's flesh, as well as his hair. He slid his tongue over the male's still-oozing wound once before Trynche flopped forward onto his stomach. With a groan, he stretched his arms out on either side of him.

Enrique followed him down, resting along the large male's back. Sighing deeply, he watched as Trynche turned his head and licked his finger. Then he swiped over the teeth marks Enrique had left in his hide. In awe, Enrique watched as the wound sealed right before his eyes, leaving behind a tooth-shaped scar.

While Enrique's instinct was to apologize, the look of delight on Trynche's face as he stared awkwardly at the mark caused him to keep his mouth shut.

With a sigh, Trynche relaxed his head on his fist as he peered over his shoulder at him. He reached back and gripped Enrique's hip, squeezing lightly. "Damn, my mate." A smile curving his lips, he murmured, "That was epic. Loved that you bit me."

"Really?" Enrique couldn't keep the surprise out of his voice. "Why?"

"Well, bonding includes the exchange of blood," Trynche reminded him. Shrugging one shoulder jostled Enrique a little before he admitted, "Normally, a gargoyle will have to cut himself so his human mate can sip from him." Smugness filled his tone as he told him, "Few gargoyles actually have a mating scar from their human. I'm truly blessed."

Accepting that, Enrique let any residual guilt he felt slip away. "Still can't believe you came from it."

"You'll come from mine, too," Trynche declared with a smirk. "Ready for round two?"

“Wouldn’t this be three for you?” Enrique teased with a chuckle. Then he quickly added, “Not that I’m keeping count or anything.”

Trynche grinned as he used his tail to pick up the lube from where Enrique had dropped it on the bed. “Don’t worry, my mate,” he rumbled, his voice dropping husky with promise. “I’ll definitely make it up to you.”

As Trynche spoke, he poured a generous dollop onto the last several inches of his tail before snapping it shut again. “Now, you just lie there enjoying my body.” He winked as he moved his tail down the bed. “I’m going to get you off again while I stretch you.” Narrowing his eyes, Trynche told him, “I want to be dripping with your cum before I mark you in the same most primitive of ways.”

Enrique felt a shiver of anticipation fill him as he watched Trynche’s tail with interest. He lost sight of it when it went too low, but a second later, he felt it. A tremble worked up Enrique’s spine when the tail teased along his trench, tickling the sensitive skin there.

Then Trynche’s tail reached his pucker, and Enrique instinctively spread his legs wider. The appendage delving into his body yanked a surprised gasp from him. Grunting when Trynche rubbed his tail over his prostate, Enrique was impressed with the amount of control the gargoyle had.

A moment later, Enrique wasn’t thinking at all as Trynche’s tail drove him out of his ever-loving mind.



*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

“Fuck! They weren’t kidding when they said this was the worst pain they’d ever experienced,” Trynche grumbled, panting and trying to catch his breath as the residual tendrils of agony slowly seeped from his body. “Thank you for being here.”

Sluggishly, his muscles exhausted as if he’d been fighting for three days straight, Trynche rubbed up and down Enrique’s back. His mate lay sprawled over his chest, his body and limbs touching as much of him as possible with his slighter frame. Still, his presence and touch had soothed Trynche so damn much during the molting process.

“You’re welcome.”

Trynche sort of liked how uncertain and concerned Enrique sounded, but at the same time, he didn’t like it either. His mate should never be upset.

“Um, so... does changing form always hurt that badly?”

Now Enrique sounded worried as he rubbed his palms up and down Trynche’s sides, causing pleasure to slowly beat out the vestiges of pain. Too bad Trynche knew that he didn’t have the energy to follow up on what his sluggish arousal was urging him to do. It still felt nice, but from Enrique’s question, he knew there were still a few more conversations to be had, since they hadn’t done much the prior evening.

After several rounds of sex, Enrique’s long day had caught up to him. He’d conked out in Trynche’s arms, and Trynche had been more than happy to relax beside him, even though he didn’t need sleep, and hold him all night long. Trynche had managed to doze off here and there, and he’d had a couple of whispered conversations with his

elder and Lludd.

Evidently, Nicholas had a skeleton key that opened all the doors everywhere... just in case... so Trynche hadn't needed to leave his sleeping Enrique's side except for the bathroom necessities.

Plus, with a paranormal's heightened hearing abilities, they'd been able to murmur through a crack in the door. That way, they didn't run the risk of waking Enrique.

"No," Trynche finally answered, doing his best to keep his fatigue from his voice. Molt was exhausting. "Only changing this first time hurts." Forcing open his eyes and tipping his chin down, he smiled at Enrique. "Thank you for lying with me. I know it seemed... scary." Trynche continued to rub over his gorgeous mate's strong bare back. "The touch of your skin against my own dulled the pain of molt."

"Molt?" Enrique slowly repeated. Then his eyes widened. "Wait. Jory mentioned that. It's the process you go through when you get your human form."

"Exactly." Trynche grinned at Enrique. "We bonded during the night, so it hits at first light." With a sigh, he relaxed on the bed, doing his best to ignore the sweat-dampened sheets. "I'm so grateful for your gift. I already care for you so damn much." Tracing his blunt-nailed fingertips along Enrique's jaw, Trynche held his mate's gaze as he murmured, "I know I'll love you soon, but don't worry. I know humans often take longer to return the feeling." Shrugging, he allowed his eyelids to slide closed once more as he whispered, "It's just the paranormal way. Please, don't be put off by it."

Enrique chuckled softly, rubbing his cheek against Trynche's pectoral, much like a cat would if he were marking him. It made Trynche's smile widen because he would bet that his mate didn't even realize he was doing it. Enrique's next words caused a flutter of pleasure to burn in his gut.

“I’m not put off by it, Trynche.” Enrique turned his head and pecked a kiss to the flesh beneath his cheek. “Not at all. In fact, it’s nice to be told that. Been a long time since I’ve heard words like that. Since my parents.” His voice took on a wistful tone.

“What happened to them?” Trynche asked, keeping his own voice quiet so as not to disrupt the intimacy they shared.

“Ironically, died in a plane crash.” Enrique scoffed. “You’d have thought that would put me off flying, right?”

“Hmmm,” Trynche hummed with a smile. “Glad you like flying. Holding you while flying us back to the ranch the other night was amazing.”

Enrique chuckled quietly. “Good. I’d like to do that again, Trynche.” He skimmed his palm over Trynche’s pectoral and down his side. “When I’m fully awake and aware next time, though.”

“Deal.” Trynche looked forward to it. Thinking back on Enrique’s other words, he asked, “Was it a commercial plane? Or private?”

“Private. My dad’s,” Enrique revealed. “He was a pilot in the military, too. Although he flew planes, not choppers.” After issuing a soft sound, his mate’s voice dropped to a murmur. “Got my love of flying from him.”

“Bet he was proud of you,” Trynche stated, hoping to bring some happiness into the conversation.

“Yeah, he was.”

With his eyes still closed, Trynche could hear Enrique’s smile. There was just something in his tone.

Much better.

“So, uh, I was wondering if you could take me out to my Blackhawk today?” Enrique lifted up a little, so Trynche cracked open his eyelids to meet his gaze. His mate sported a slightly uncertain expression as he admitted, “I don’t have any flights scheduled for today.”

Trynche understood the silent question.

Could we spend the day together?

Grinning, Trynche told him, “I would be happy to take you out there.” Sobering, he mused, “We’ll probably have to bring a couple of guards with us. It’s near the west edge of the ranch.” He furrowed his brow ridges as he considered the logistics. “Rogues have always attacked at night, so we’ve surmised that only unmated gargoyles are involved, but there’s always the chance that’s not the case.” Meeting Enrique’s questioning look, Trynche told him, “I never want to see you in danger.” Wincing as he thought of his mate’s profession as well as how his parents had died, he quickly added, “Any more than necessary, anyway.”

Enrique must have caught on to his thoughts, for he smirked at him. “Thanks.” He slid off Trynche’s torso, leaning his weight on his forearm. Wincing, he peered at the bedding. “Uh, you interested in a shower?”

Not a fan of the wet sheets under him either, and feeling quite a bit better, Trynche nodded. “Especially if it’s with you.”

“Showered with others in the military, obviously.” Enrique slid from the bed and rose to his feet. A slight blush tinged the base of his neck as he continued, “But I kinda don’t think that’s the sort of shower you have in mind.”

Trynche growled possessively as he slid to the side of the bed and paused to sit there. His muscles were still a little weak, and he wasn't certain he could stand just yet. Still, he reached for Enrique, wrapping his arms around his waist and pulling him between his knees.

Kissing Enrique's stomach, Trynche rumbled, "Definitely not."

Enrique threaded his fingers through Trynche's hair, gently massaging his scalp.

Trynche sighed and rested his forehead against Enrique's sternum, surprised at how much he enjoyed the innocent touch. It was soothing in a way he'd never before experienced. For several heartbeats, they rested that way—Enrique petting Trynche and accepting his weight. In a way, to Trynche, it felt even more intimate than all the sex they'd shared the prior evening.

"You know," Enrique began quietly, obviously catching on to the intimacy of the moment, too. "This white-blond hair is nice, but I miss the light-blue."

Upon hearing those words, Trynche tipped his chin up and peered up at his human.

Enrique grinned down at him while sliding his hands over Trynche's shoulders and down his spine to his shoulder blades. "And your wings." He chuckled ruefully, looking a little shy as he whispered, "Your wings are gorgeous, Trynche."

Without a thought, Trynche returned to his gargoyle form, allowing his wings to sprout from his shoulder blades and billow behind him. Satisfaction filled him when he saw Enrique's eyes widen, and his human sucked in a sharp breath. His mate hesitated just an instant before sliding his hands along Trynche's flesh.

Trynche shivered, pressing his forehead against Enrique's chest once more when he felt his mate's lightly calloused fingertips glide along where his wings extended from

his shoulder blades. His mate gently explored along the tops of his wing bones for a few inches. Then Enrique traced along the leathery folds of his wings.

“So soft.”

With the exquisite sensations prickling through Trynche’s system, he barely registered Enrique’s whispered words. He smiled to himself even as he struggled with the renewed arousal burning through his system. His cock thickened, not at all caring that his other muscles still trembled with fatigue from his molt.

As Enrique continued to explore, sliding his fingers along the bones of his wings and skimming his palms over their folds, Trynche began to pant. His erection throbbed and twitched. Trynche tightened his arms around Enrique’s waist and moaned quietly.

“Trynche?” Enrique murmured. Resting one hand on his shoulder and threading the other back into his hair, his mate urged him to tip his head back. “Are you okay?” Enrique asked worriedly. Then his attention slipped south, and his eyes widened. “Aaahhh, you weren’t kidding.”

“Definitely not kidding.” Trynche’s voice came out deep and gruff, but there wasn’t a damn thing he could do about it. “Love your touch, my mate.”

Enrique’s smile turned a little feral as his brown eyes took on a wicked gleam. “Come on, my gargoyle.” He took a slow step backward, and Trynche allowed him, easing his grip. Enrique held out his hand, palm up. “Let’s head to the shower, and I’ll help you with that.”

Willing to follow his mate anywhere, Trynche took Enrique’s hand.

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After the most relaxing shower of his life, Trynche slipped back into his human form. When he saw Enrique's arched brow, he explained, "I need to check in with Elder Bodb and let him know I've gone through molt." As Trynche spoke, he opened a couple of dresser drawers and located both of them a pair of sweatpants and t-shirts.

"Makes sense."

As Trynche handed them over, admiring Enrique's wiry, muscular physique, he heard his mate's stomach growl. When his own answered as if it were agreeing that it was time for food, Trynche laughed. He quickly donned his own clothes, then headed to the closet.

"We'll get something to eat, too," Trynche promised. Finding a pair of sandals, he slipped them on his feet. When he turned, he saw Enrique tugging his boots on his sock-clad feet and assumed he'd located the socks in the dresser. Just about everything else was in there except underwear. "Ready?"

Trynche held out his hand to Enrique, and pleasure filled him when his mate didn't hesitate to take it. He led the way out of the room and down the stairs. A couple of men remained in the bunkhouse's kitchenette.

Walsh leaned against the counter, a cup of coffee in hand. Upon him spotting them, his eyebrows shot up, and a wide grin creased his lips. Lifting his mug in salute, Walsh waggled his eyebrows.

"Congrats, guys," Walsh offered as he swept his gaze over Trynche. "Not a bad look for you, Trynche." Then he smirked. "It is Trynche, right?"

Trynche snorted. "Yep. It's me." Sliding his arm around Enrique's waist possessively, he growled, "As if I'd let anyone else touch my mate."

Keith snorted, tossing the cap of whatever coffee drink he was enjoying at Walsh. “Stop given’em shit, Walsh,” the older ranch hand ordered with a shake of his head. With a smile curving his lined face, Keith eyed Trynche and Enrique. “Congrats, guys. Findin’ your soul mate’s a fine thing.”

“Thanks, Keith.” Trynche nodded at them. “Walsh.” Tipping his head to the side, he asked, “What are you doing here so late?”

Trynche knew that he and Enrique weren’t getting an early start.

Walsh smirked. “I’m waiting on you guys.” After taking a sip of his coffee, he pointed at Keith. “And he’s taking it easy because he tweaked his ankle yesterday.”

That was when Trynche noticed that the aging human had his left foot propped up on a second chair. It was bandaged with an ace wrap, and a melting ice pack rested on the table next to the guy’s drink. Perhaps the human had just finished icing it.

“Why are you waiting on us?” Enrique asked what Trynche was wondering.

Walsh grinned as he headed toward the front door. “To remind Trynche to be in human form before leaving the bunkhouse.” Scoffing, he admitted, “I didn’t think he would need the reminder, but orders are orders.” Pausing before opening the door, Walsh added, “We have customers in the horse barn.”

Trynche nodded. “Thanks.”

With a wave, Walsh headed out the door.

“Come on,” Trynche urged, guiding Enrique after Walsh. “Hope you feel better, Keith.”



Keith lifted his bottle in salute before returning his attention to a paperback he appeared to be reading.

\*

After meeting with Elder Bodb and several others—and receiving many hearty congratulations—they settled at the table and ate a hearty breakfast. Then they were joined by the gargoyle enforcers Biscane and Gladstone. They all piled into one of the ranch Jeeps, and Trynche drove them along dirt roads and through pastures. The last couple of miles had to be done on foot.

Finally, Trynche spotted the Blackhawk in a clearing through the trees. “It’s so much easier to fly here,” he mumbled, shaking his head.

Biscane chuckled while nodding as Gladstone patted his shoulder and stated, “But you know why we can’t.”

Trynche nodded, even if he didn’t like it. He watched and followed as Enrique slowly rounded his bird. While Trynche had no idea what his mate was actually looking for, his expressions gave him away. A couple of times, Enrique winced, and once he blew out a breath of obvious relief.

Finally, Enrique turned and smiled at Trynche. “Thank you for your help landing her.” He glanced at his Blackhawk fondly. “She could have ended up a lot worse.” Wincing, Enrique admitted, “We both could have.”

Grimacing, Trynche shrugged. “To be honest, I thought you were a bunch of military guys.” He shook his head as he rubbed the back of his neck. “Guys like that getting hurt or dying near the ranch could cause real problems for us.”

Enrique’s brows furrowed, and confusion wafted from him.

Gladstone answered. “Can’t have a bunch of military stooges out here running investigations into what caused their chopper to crash.”

“Makes sense,” Enrique replied with a nod. “Well, there’s a few pieces I’ll need to remove and take back to my shop to fix, and I’ll need to come back with some new hoses and wires.” Smiling, Enrique crossed his arms over his chest and stared fondly at the helicopter. “But all in all, it won’t take me too much work to fix her, and it probably won’t cost too much, either.”

“Well, let’s get to work.” Biscane clapped his hands together and grinned. “How can we help?”

After rummaging through the tool bags that both Biscane and Trynche had carried through the forest, Enrique put them to work. They’d managed to remove over half the parts his mate needed to fix when the trill of a cell phone filled the air. Enrique groaned and knocked his head on the ground once, considering he was lying under the Blackhawk taking off... something.

With a growl, Enrique grabbed his phone from his pocket and answered the call. “I’m a little busy at the moment, Sheldon,” he stated by way of greeting and telling everyone who called. “I’m working on my bird. Can I call you back in a couple of hours?”

When Enrique’s face began to pale, Trynche exchanged looks with the other gargoyles. He stopped what he was doing and hurried toward his mate, hoping to be able to overhear the rest of his call.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

“I think I should do it,” Enrique insisted.

“No,” Trynche growled, the arm around his shoulders tightening just a little.  
“Absolutely not.”

Enrique scowled at Trynche. “This really isn’t your call, Trynche.”

He glanced around the large office. A number of gargoyles in human form as well as their mates—although he hadn’t gotten the names of most of them—were gathered there. After his phone call, they’d packed everything up and hurried to return to the ranch.

They’d needed to share Sheldon’s actions with the few elders that would be awake during the day—Bodb, Proatai, and Lordoan.

Elder Bodb cleared his throat. The male sat with his arm around Nicholas. After exchanging a glance with his lover, the elder sighed softly and winced before pinning a grim look on Trynche.

“I know you don’t want to hear this, Trynche, but Enrique’s right.” Elder Bodb lifted his free hand, palm out, in an obvious order for Enrique’s lover to hold his peace. “It’s Enrique’s right to choose if he wants to try to help us or not by meeting up with Sheldon”—pausing, Bodb winced—“and the rogues he’s been in contact with.” Before Trynche could say anything, Bodb leveled a serious look on Enrique. “That doesn’t mean we wouldn’t reiterate just how dangerous it would be for him. These are people who consider humans little more than cattle and tools, useful only so long as it helps their cause, which is the enslavement of all other races.”

Put like that, Enrique sort of wanted to retract his earlier statement that he would meet with them. He winced and stared at the floor.

“You should have seen some of the propaganda we found at Laagstine’s estate,” Biscane muttered from where he was leaning against the study wall, his arms crossed over his chest. A deep scowl marred his black features. “Their plans are creepy.”

“I’m not certain we should send a human into such a dangerous situation,” Elder Lordoan stated. His human features made him appear in his late fifties with silver streaks through his ponytail-length medium-brown hair. He pinned his gray eyed gaze on Enrique, his expression giving away that he wasn’t impressed with what he saw. “If they discover Enrique’s mated with one of our own, he could be used against us.”

“He is sitting right here,” Enrique snarled through clenched teeth.

Elder Lordoan gave him a disdainful look. “You are new to the paranormal world, human,” the arrogant male countered. “So you don’t understand what’s at stake.”

“So explain it to me,” Enrique insisted, scowling as he glanced around at everyone again. He didn’t like the worried, pensive faces of the guys filling the room. “How could I be used against you, and how could they even figure it out?”

“Your scent is the easiest way,” Biscane answered. Evidently, the gargoyle was a blunt straight-shooter, even when it wasn’t good news. “You’re mated with Trynche now, and even if they don’t recognize him directly”—Biscane pointed at Trynche as he spoke—“they’ll know you’ve been intimate with a gargoyle, so you know what we are.” Shrugging the shoulder not against the wall, he reminded, “No human form until we’re mated, so even if you weren’t mates, you would have been intimate with a gargoyle in his true form.”

“You would also need to be really careful what you say,” Nicholas cut in with a

wince. “Paranormals can scent lies, and a gargoyle’s sense of smell is even more developed than most.”

“Okay.” Enrique frowned, trying to figure out workarounds. “So, I can’t smell like Trynche.” He shrugged as he claimed, “I know how to shower pretty well. Been doing it for years. I can wash his smell off me.”

Even as Trynche growled from where he sat next to Enrique—he obviously didn’t like his comment—Elder Lordoan sniffed before stating, “It doesn’t work like that, hu—”

Enrique wasn’t the only one who glared, growled, or snarled at the haughty gargoyle, causing him to curb his tongue.

Lordoan’s eyes narrowed, but at least he amended his comment. “You’ve traded claiming bites. Trynche’s scent is entwined with yours on the most primitive of levels... Enrique.” Lifting his chin, he claimed, “You can’t just wash him off.”

Sighing deeply, Enrique clenched his jaw. The guy was an asshole, but considering a few others in the room winced and nodded, he was speaking the truth. A long, soapy shower was out.

Wait. Soap. Scent.

“What about cologne?” Enrique asked, turning his attention to Biscane, since he’d been the most straightforward. “Can I disguise my smell that way?”

Biscane narrowed his eyes and slowly bobbed his head back and forth as if he was thinking deeply, running that through his mind.

“Not a cologne, but yes.” Spieron strode into the room carrying his laptop. The

vampire never seemed to be too far from the device. Setting it on the coffee table, Spieron grabbed a chair and pulled it close before sitting. “There’s a spray that can hide your scent. You’ll smell like pine trees.” Wrinkling his nose, Spieron added, “And it’s a beast to get off you. At least three showers from what my contact tells me.”

“Your contact?” Bodb cocked his head. “Where are you getting this information from?”

“My coven in Sante Fe has ties to both the Falias clutch in Durango, Colorado, and the Stone Ridge wolf shifter pack in Stone Ridge, Colorado,” Spieron told them. Sporting a cool smile, he explained, “When the Stone Ridge wolves were fighting rogue scientists, they came across a formula the group used to hide their soldiers’ scents.” His attention lowered to his computer screen as he added, “They even used it once themselves so they could sneak into another wolf pack’s territory to rescue a kidnapped human.”

“Falias clutch,” Elder Proatai mused as he rubbed his chin. “That name rings a bell.”

“Chieftain Maelgwn leads it,” Bodb supplied.

“Ahhh, yes. Of course,” Proatai murmured, nodding. “He’s one of the chieftains we’ve discussed voting on offering an elder position.”

Bodb nodded. “That’s the one. I’ve met him. He’s good people.”

“So, the scent isn’t the problem then.” Enrique tried to get them back on track. “Can it cover lies?”

“No,” Spieron immediately replied, shaking his head.

Biscane shrugged. “So don’t lie. Tell versions of the truth.”

Versions of the truth. I can do that.

“That leaves the question of what’ll happen if they realize I’m connected to you,” Enrique mused, turning his attention to Trynche. He could see the tense way he clenched his jaw and knew his big lover was struggling not to declare that he not do as Sheldon requested. “What did that mean?”

Holding Enrique’s gaze, Trynche answered solemnly, “I would do anything to secure your safe return.” His voice came out rough and low. “Betray my elder, out gargoyles to the world, anything.” After a second of hesitation, Trynche told him, “I’m nothing without you. I wouldn’t want to live.”

Enrique realized the bond between them was even more serious than he’d originally thought. Holding Trynche’s gaze, he read the conviction in his gargoyle’s deep green eyes. Nodding slowly, Enrique squeezed his gargoyle’s thigh before returning his focus back to Spieron.

“Would that scent blocker thing of yours hide the fact that Trynche is a gargoyle?”

The vampire narrowed his eyes a little as he hummed. After a moment of silence, he replied, “Perhaps.” He arched a thin brow and asked, “What did you have in mind?”

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Six hours later, with the discreet help of Bodb’s gargoyles and the use of Nicholas’s large truck and flatbed used to haul hay, Enrique’s Blackhawk was back in its place in the hangar. He worked on it quickly with the help of a few others. Evidently, a couple of the gargoyles—Ssimeas and Gladstone—had become pretty good mechanics over the last couple of years they’d been living at the ranch. They were the

ones keeping the older ranch equipment up and running.

They followed Enrique's instructions to the letter, giving Enrique time to teach Trynche the basics of piloting the helicopter. While neither expected the gargoyle to have to actually do any flying, they had to be certain their words were close enough to the truth that the rogues wouldn't smell a lie.

Hearing the beep of his phone, Enrique pulled it out and checked it. "Thirty minutes, guys," he called, striding swiftly around his bird. "What's left?"

"This last wiring, and then a test of the systems," Ssimeas claimed from where Gladstone was holding a flashlight on the wires he was intricately putting together. "Give me five."

Enrique nodded. As they finished that, he began inspecting all the other work. There were still a few dents from where the gargoyle had hit the rear of his bird, but most of it had been bumped back out. He inspected the welding jobs on the new metal plating used to replace a couple of broken pieces. The bent landing gear strut had been replaced, too.

"Done," Ssimeas announced, lowering his tools and taking a step backward.

Hurrying over, Enrique took the light from Gladstone and checked all the connections. As far as he could tell, everything was back in order. The last thing to do was fire it up.

"Okay. I'm going to start her," Enrique told them as he headed toward the front. "I need you guys to tell me if you see anything sparking, smoking, or shorting as I go through my checks."

Extra sets of eyes on the exterior never hurt, just in case an alarm didn't sound swiftly



enough.

It didn't take long for Enrique to go through everything and deem his Blackhawk ready to fly. After he'd shut the bird back down, he exited the cockpit and crossed to the waiting gargoyles. With a tight smile, he nodded.

Ssimeas grinned and lifted his fist, so Enrique bumped it with his own.

Enrique's phone beeped again, giving him the ten-minute warning.

"Guess that's our cue to leave," Gladstone stated, his serious features drawing into a frown. "You sure you're up for this?"

Enrique nodded. "Yeah. I got this." Sliding his palm against Trynche's and twining their fingers, he smiled at his lover. "We got this." After Trynche smiled back, even obviously worried, Enrique refocused on Gladstone. "See you at the rendezvous point."

Gladstone and Ssimeas nodded, then fled out the side door of the hangar, leaving Enrique alone with Trynche. His gargoyle glanced around, then eased into his space. A frown marred his features.

"I know it's you, but you don't smell right," Trynche grumbled right before pecking Enrique's lips. "After this is over, we're spending an hour in the hot tub scrubbing this shit off of us."

Chuckling, Enrique grinned at Trynche. "It's a date."

The sound of a couple of vehicles approaching forced them apart. No way did they want Sheldon to realize they were a couple. The fag-hater would raise a hell of a ruckus, most likely causing the whole plan to backfire.

Enrique shoved his fists into the pockets of his bomber jacket while Trynche took a few steps backward to stand closer to the Blackhawk. Waiting, staring at the door, he spotted two large SUVs. They drove inside and parked off to the side.

When the engines turned off and the doors opened, Enrique felt a trickle of unease slither down his spine. He prayed to any god who cared to listen that this would go smoothly. Enrique knew Sheldon thought these guys were monster hunters, and he was supposed to fly them to where he'd recorded the creature.

Trynche's people would be waiting, and they would take them by surprise. Enrique would pretend to be forced down, and the rogues would be captured.

Easy-peasy, right?

The six large men dressed in black jackets and camo pants who'd gotten out of the vehicles with Sheldon made him question his decision.

"Everything here ready?" Sheldon asked, grinning widely. A malicious gleam filled his blue eyes. "You get your Blackhawk fixed?" With a scoff, the ex-mayor looked over his repaired helicopter. "Didn't realize you had one of these, but it sure ended up convenient."

"Yeah, she's fixed," Enrique replied, wondering what Sheldon was talking about. Wondering about something else, he asked, "I didn't tell you that it was my Blackhawk that was damaged. How'd you know I have it?"

Sheldon smirked as he waved toward the two large men who'd followed him. "Grecian told me." With a negligent shrug, he added, "Guess he'd planned to buy it, but you got to it first."

Enrique took in Grecian's dark features and cold eyes that gleamed black in the early

evening light. Knowing the guy was a gargoyle—mated, since the sun hadn't set quite yet—he kept his mouth shut and just nodded. He highly doubted the truth of that story anyway.

“So, you're monster hunters, huh?” Trynche commented from where he stood. He leaned against the side of the helicopter with his arms crossed over his chest. Trynche snorted as if he thought the whole thing was ridiculous. “You believe in that sort of shit?”

“Who are you?” Grecian asked belligerently. He scowled at Sheldon. “You never said anything about anyone other than Enrique.”

Sheldon scowled at Enrique. “Yes, who is that man?”

“Tryn's my co-pilot,” Enrique replied. Sticking as close to the truth as possible, he added, “When I'm in my Blackhawk, I like to have an extra pair of eyes and hands.” With a roll of his eyes and a depreciative laugh, Enrique stated, “That way, shit like what happened last time doesn't happen.”

Grecian eyed Trynche with a curled lip for a few seconds before saying. He even took a not-so-discreet sniff before wrinkling his nose. “Fine. Whatever.” He looked over his shoulder and shouted, “Get the net guns and get'em hooked up.”

When Enrique saw the massive, harpoon-like gun that a pair of men were carrying toward his bird, he lifted a hand. “Wait a second. I never agreed that you could put holes in my helicopter.” Pointing, he said, “Gear is one thing. Adding a weapon is something else.”

Snorting, Sheldon asked derisively, “How exactly did you think we were going to catch a flying monster?” He rolled his eyes. “Idiot.”

“No,” Enrique declared. “This wasn’t the deal.”

No way did he want there to be any way these guys could actually hurt any of his lover’s friends.

“Worried you’d feel like that.” Grecian’s smile turned creepy. “Cuzcone.”

One of the large men exited from the back of one of the SUVs. With him, he dragged a trussed and gagged Parish. His friend and employee stared at him with wide eyes, fear filling their depths.

Shoving down his own fright, Enrique glanced between a surprised-looking Sheldon and a clearly homicidal Grecian. “What the fuck?”

Oh, yeah. That was eloquent.

“Do your job, fly the chopper, Enrique,” Grecian ordered coldly. “Or your little buddy over there gets it.”

Knowing he had no choice, Enrique backed up a couple of steps and watched in silence as the rogues added a pair of net guns to his Blackhawk, utilizing the existing weapons mounts.

After everyone was loaded, Enrique lifted his bird into the air—Trynche pretending to help—and he wondered if there was any way to warn the guys.

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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 2:10 pm*

When Enrique exited the hangar and took them into the air, Trynche noticed he didn't utilize the call signs he'd told him about, which were used to notify the nearest traffic control of their location and heading. He was pretty damn sure it wasn't because his mate was nervous and forgot. Instead, Trynche believed it was because his mate hoped to give the elders and other associates a heads-up that there was a problem.

After all, they were listening in on their comms now that they had their headsets in place.

However, it's not as if either of us can announce that there are... hmmm... maybe I can.

Trynche peered over his shoulder at the six armed paranormals, the ex-mayor, and a scared, trussed human who must have been Enrique's friend.

"Just focus on flying," Grecian ordered, curling his lip. "That's your damn job, so do it."

Yup. Still an asshole.

While Trynche had never met Grecian, he'd read the ex-chieftain's dossier. The male had oppressed all the smaller gargoyles in his clutch. He'd called them wingless ones and had essentially used them as slaves.

His activities had been drawn to light when one of his enforcers, Kinsey, had found his mate in a human. The man had been challenged by Kinsey, who'd won. There'd been extenuating circumstances. But in the end, Grecian had broken the rules of the

challenge and had been taken into custody by Elder Vermidian.

That same elder had ended up finding his mate in a vampire at a nearby coven. He was still there, safe amidst the vampires. So far, as far as Trynche knew, none of the rogues had attempted to infiltrate or even contact Vermidian. The elder had promised to let them know if that changed.

Returning his focus to the problem at hand, Trynche cast a derisive smirk over his shoulder at Grecian... just to irk the asshole. “So, monster hunting, eh?” he repeated his words from the hangar. “Still can’t believe you guys believe in that shit.” Barking a laugh, Trynche asked, “Just how much did it cost to make those net guns, man? What’s the pound test weight?”

“Shut the fuck up,” Grecian snarled, scowling at him. “Just fly the damn chopper.”

“Sure, man. We’re flyin’ the chopper.” Trynche scoffed with a roll of his eyes. “Just can’t imagine payin’ for shit like that. Must be die-hards.” Then he pretended to think of something. “Hey.” Trynche even snapped his finger. “Is this a cosplay thing?” Smirking, he eyed Sheldon and pinned a look on the ex-mayor’s face that betrayed just what an idiot he thought he was. “Did you decide to dupe the ex-mayor so you can come out here and play in the dark and shoot your guns?”

“My pictures are legitimate,” Sheldon declared hotly. “Took ’em straight off Enrique’s feed.” As if he was worried that Grecian suddenly wouldn’t believe him, Sheldon focused on the rogue and told him, “Even Enrique didn’t know what he had. When I showed him, he was shocked.”

“I know they’re real, dumbass,” Grecian snarled, glaring at Sheldon. Then he focused on Trynche. “If you don’t stop talking”—the rogue pulled a gun from inside his jacket and pointed it at Enrique’s friend’s head—“I’m going to pop him.”

Enrique’s friend whimpered, fear dilating his eyes widely.

“Hey, Tryn.” Enrique reached over and touched Trynche’s forearm with the backs of his forefingers, gaining his attention as he spoke. “Stop, please.” He glanced over his shoulder before focusing forward again and saying, “There’s no need for that, Grecian. Please put the gun away. We’re flying you where you need to go.”

Focusing forward again, Trynche tried to figure out where they were. He quickly noticed a couple of landmarks and knew they were close. The clearing where the helicopter had taken a hard landing was only a short distance ahead.

Evidently, Enrique knew it, too, and he played his part well. “We’ll enter the vicinity in about three minutes,” he announced. “The trees on the left are the ones where the wings were.” After a second of hesitation, Enrique revealed, “Something hit the back of my bird, causing me to spin out of control and hit my head.” He glanced Trynche’s way and added, “Stay sharp in case we need to bank.”

Trynche nodded as if he was preparing to do just that. As they flew closer, his sharp paranormal hearing allowed him to make out Grecian’s softly spoken words.

“As soon as we’ve caught the first few, I’ll force the pilots to land,” the ex-chieftain told someone. “Then you do your thing and wipe the humans’ minds. I don’t want them recalling anything when they wake up except choosing to take a night flight.”

“Of course, my beloved,” a soft tenor replied, his tone full of adoration. “Leave it to me. I’ll take care of them.” Then he snorted and asked, “What about the bigot?”

Grecian chuckled nastily. “Make him think our hostage is the hottest thing he’s ever seen.”

At that, Trynche almost laughed and gave himself away. He’d heard the adage about making the punishment fit the crime, and that might just be a doozy. He thought it would be funny as hell, too.

Oh, well. I hope Spieron and Bodb are coming up with something else equally fitting.

Trynche heard one of the others comment on their nasty pine cologne, and he again almost smiled. Their passengers couldn't tell that he wasn't human. Too bad it affected his own sense of smell, too, but at least his eyes and ears still worked. Trynche feared that if he flicked his tongue out to use the extra sensory receptors on his tongue, they would notice.

“You two are faggots?” Sheldon suddenly screeched, damn near making Trynche's ears bleed.

Unable to help himself, Trynche snapped his attention behind him. Grecian was just pulling away from a kiss he'd been giving to the slender male sitting to his left. The guy he'd been kissing smirked at Sheldon, giving him a smug look as his eyes bled to red.

Yup. Vampire.

“Yeah, we're faggots, you worthless excuse for a human,” Grecian's mate purred, his voice taking on a hypnotic quality that Trynche recognized from when Spieron used mind control on someone. Trynche quickly whipped around to face forward as he heard the guy continue, “And you're so jealous that we're free and open about our affections. You want to be just like us... because you think your friend here is the most handsome man you've ever laid eyes on.”

“Parish,” Sheldon crooned huskily. “You're so handsome. Let me help you with that gag.”

Trynche heard a surprised squeak, and he assumed it came from Parish.

“I want to kiss you so badly,” Sheldon continued. “I—”



The snickers of those in the back as they watched Sheldon's antics were suddenly cut off by the screech of metal. The helicopter jolted harshly, and alarms began to blare. Hearing Enrique curse, Trynche glanced from his panicked-looking mate to his controls.

Except, Trynche couldn't remember a damn thing Enrique had taught him.

"Grab the sticks, Trynche," Enrique ordered loudly over the noise of the alarms.

Trynche did as he was told, doing his best to hold them steady while Enrique began pushing buttons and flipping switches.

"What the hell have you done?" Grecian roared right before another screech echoed through the cab. A whoosh of wind followed, buffeting them, and Trynche felt damn grateful for his seatbelt.

"Land the bird, guys," Lludd's deep voice called. "You're with me, rogue."

A second later, a myriad of deep roars and bellows rang in Trynche's ears. He felt a wing smack the back of his neck, but he easily shook it off. A glance behind him told him that the cabin was empty save for the two humans.

Sheldon seemed oblivious to the danger, still trying to fawn over Parish. Parish, on the other hand, appeared appalled by Sheldon's advances. Fortunately, both were still strapped in their seats, and Parish used his bound hands to keep distance between himself and the entranced ex-mayor.

"Comin' in hot," Enrique hollered through gritted teeth.

Trynche focused once more on his mate and the controls, doing whatever he could think of to help his mate land the machine.

I definitely prefer my own wings.

Just as another alarm blared, Enrique actually let out a sigh of relief. “There we go.” He flashed a grin Trynche’s way. “Love your paranormal strength, big guy. You holding the stick steady totally helped.”

“Oh, good.” Trynche smiled uncertainly at Enrique. “Because I had no idea what I was doing.”

Enrique chuckled. At the same time, the helicopter landed with a slight bump. Trynche looked out the window, surprised to see that they were safely on the ground.

“Damn,” Trynche muttered. “You’re good.”

With a wink, Enrique commented, “Not my first rough landing.”

“Well, I damn sure hope it’s your last,” Trynche declared. He began to lean over to kiss his mate, but the belt held him in place. Growling, he quickly released it, removing his helmet right after. “Need your lips, to taste you.” Trynche shoved out of the bird and hurried around it, being careful to duck below the slowing rotors. By the time he reached Enrique’s side, his mate had already opened the door and slid out, so Trynche wasted no time in grabbing his human. “Your scent is driving me nuts,” he admitted right before sealing his lips over Enrique’s. To his pleasure, as he delved his tongue into his mate’s mouth, the man’s familiar delicious flavor burst across his taste buds. Trynche broke the kiss just long enough to mutter, “So much better,” before diving back in.

When Trynche felt someone tapping his shoulder, once, twice, three times, he finally came up for air. His lungs were burning anyway. Panting harshly, he took in Enrique’s dazed expression and smiled.

“Yeah, that’s about the perfect look right there,” Trynche crooned before pecking a

kiss to Enrique's nose, which caused his human to snort and focus on him, blushing a little. Chuckling, Trynche told his mate, "You're amazing, you know."

"Soooo, you gonna stand around kissing and whispering sweet nothings to your mate all night?" Lludd's deep voice teased from Trynche's left, drawing his attention. The purple gargoyle smirked at him. "Or do you want to hear that all the rogues were taken care of?"

"All of them?" Trynche confirmed, looking around the area.

"Yup." Lludd punched Trynche on his upper arm as he continued, "Good work with giving us a heads-up. A little change of plans, and we avoided their net guns." The gargoyle enforcer turned and rested his hands on his hips. "The nets are gargoyle grade and would've dropped us out of the sky in seconds."

"What the fuck did you do to my bird!" Enrique cried. His dismay was clear in his voice as he lifted a hand to his head and squeaked, "Shit!"

Trynche kept his arms around Enrique's torso as he eyed the damage, too. Wincing, he took in the exposed net guns because the doors had been yanked off. He figured that had to have been at least one of the jolts they'd suffered while in the air. Smoke billowed from under a panel near the rear of the bird, and Trynche decided it was a good thing the engine was already shut off.

Returning his focus to Enrique, Trynche watched his mate rove his gaze over his helicopter. His mouth opened and closed as he slowly shook his head. Trynche's stomach flip-flopped upon seeing the aggrieved expression on his mate's face.

"We'll fix it," Trynche assured, rubbing up and down Enrique's back. "I promise, my mate. We'll make this right."

"Hell, yeah," Lludd cut in, reminding them both that they weren't alone. "You

allowed us to capture three rogues. You're part of the family." Crossing his arms over his broad chest, Lludd vowed, "Hell, we'll make it better than new."

Enrique looked unconvinced, but he still nodded. "Thanks," he muttered.

"Wait. Three?" Trynche focused back on Lludd. "There were six rogues in the back."

Lludd's grin turned feral. "Grecian decided to go down fighting, which made the vampire with them freak the fuck out. Biscane killed him in self-defense." With a negligent shrug, Lludd finished, "One was a lion shifter and shifted in Sindrid's arms while in the air. With the way the lion was trying to bite him, Sindrid couldn't hold onto him, and the drop killed him. Stupid fucker." Lludd rolled his eyes, obviously not at all sympathetic. "We have a gargoyle and two shifters in custody."

"Wonder what Laagstine is promising the shifters to gain their cooperation," Trynche mused.

"Oh, I imagine the usual. A place near the top of the hierarchy of the new regime he sets up," Enrique stated with a shrug. Lludd arched a brow in silent question, so his mate added dryly, "Isn't that what self-aggrandized assholes always promise people to get them to do their dirty work?"

"True enough," Lludd responded with a nod. Then he tipped his chin toward the chopper again. "That's Sheldon. What the hell is the ex-mayor doing?"

Trynche refocused on the damaged bird... or rather, the remaining two occupants. Parish was holding up his bound hands while Sheldon was cutting through the rope with a broken piece of glass. He still eyed Sheldon warily, who was crooning ridiculous reassurances to him.

"Uh, the vampire that went crazy was Grecian's mate," Trynche explained. "He tranced Sheldon. Made the guy think he thought Parish there was the greatest thing

since sliced bread.”

“Ah geez.” Lludd shook his head, grimacing. “Poor Parish.”

“Poor Parish?” Enrique gaped at him. “What about Sheldon?”

Lludd snickered. “He’s a homophobe, so it’s funny.” When Enrique stared askance at the big enforcer, the male rolled his eyes and muttered, “We won’t leave him like that. We’ll have Spieron or Darian straighten him out, well, sort of.”

Enrique nodded. “Fair enough.” Then he sighed as he looked over his helicopter again. “Well, guess this can wait until tomorrow.”

Trynche leaned down and pecked a kiss to Enrique’s lips. “Don’t worry about your bird, my mate. We’ll help fix it soon enough.” Then he wrinkled his nose at the heavy pine scent emanating from his lover. “What we need to fix right now is our scents.”

“That’s a damn good idea,” Lludd agreed, smirking. “You two stink.” As he spoke, a couple of other gargoyles landed, and he turned to face them. “Let’s get these guys to the ranch,” Lludd ordered with a clap of his hands. “They need to see our vampires. Sheldon especially.”

“You’re not going to hurt Parish, are you?” Enrique asked worriedly, grabbing Lludd’s forearm.

Trynche noticed Enrique’s friend had passed out at the sight of the newly arrived gargoyles approaching the bird. It was probably a combination of shock and stress, too. Sheldon was whimpering in fear, holding the broken glass before him as if to protect himself. He was quickly disarmed, and both men were carried away.

Lludd smiled down at Enrique. “Naw. We’ll take good care of your friend.” He patted Enrique’s hand before pulling away. “Don’t you worry.”

Enrique nodded, relaxing in Trynche's hold.

"Time to go," Trynche declared.

Stripping out of his jacket and shirt, Trynche kicked off his shoes. He then unbuckled his belt and unbuttoned the top button of his jeans. Finally, Trynche released his human form, allowing his wings to grow as his body grew larger, thicker. Stretching his wings wide behind him, he swept Enrique into his arms.

"Where are we going?" Enrique asked, wrapping his arms around Trynche's neck.

Grinning, Trynche bent his knees and jumped. He flapped his wings and took to the air. "We have a hot tub calling our names... and a scrub brush and plenty of soap."

Laughing, Enrique grinned at him. "Sounds like a plan, big guy. Sounds like a damn good plan."

Trynche had to agree. Heading back to the ranch, he ignored the activity below him—gargoyles securing the rogues and cleaning up remains. His duty right then was to his mate, and nothing could please him more.