

## Muldrich

It was time. Time for what I wasn't quite sure, but I knew that I needed to get out. I pressed against the walls I had known as my home as long as I could remember and strove to break through. I didn't have much room though and I needed to get out, if only it wasn't so hard!

I struggled again and still nothing. Tilting my head back as far as I could go, which wasn't far, I struck the curved wall surrounding me with my face. It really wasn't pleasant, but it got the job done. Light filtered through the crack I had made, and I croaked in triumph! This was my moment; I would now break free of this home that had become too small. Smashing my head into the fissure; I widened the seam until I was able to take my first breath of fresh air.

It was cold!

Pulling my head back, I retreated into my small home. But the cold air followed and surrounded me.

I shivered and wished that I had just stayed in my egg. I chirped in annoyance and smashed my face into the hole until I could stick my head out.

Once I had my head all the way out, my eyes squinted as they tried to take in everything around me. This happened to be more difficult because there was a bright light in the sky blinding my vision.

Frustrated that everything continued to be uncomfortable, I croaked and chirped loudly until I had my whole body out of my old home.

I grunted as my face smacked something hard when I fell from the opening. *What is this place? Bright light, hard ground, and cold air? Perhaps my little home wasn't so bad after all.*

Hopeful that I could go back in, I looked at my old home. My heart fell and I knew that there was no going back. My home was broken into so many pieces it would've been impossible to put it together. Grumbling, I stumbled around, chirping for help—something was rumbling inside of me, and I needed it to stop.

I glance around and found tall brown columns topped with green spears. *Why is everything so much bigger than I am?*

Something skittered close by, it's six little legs trying to carry it as fast as it could to...wherever it was going. Deciding to test it out, I nudged it and the thing froze. It wasn't big, but it looked at me and clicked its tiny pincers at me. Growling and acting on instinct, I snapped it up in my jaws before it could get away, its sappy juices gushing into my mouth as I bit it once and then swallowed it whole. Licking my chops I decided I didn't like the acrid tangy flavor of the bug and decided to keep looking for my next meal to stop the grumbling.

*Shouldn't there be someone to watch over me?* I wondered, continuing to call out into the open with a cry. *Someone who will feed me and take care of me?*

"Hello, where are you going?"

I turned to see a *giant* coming straight for me! Squeaking, I raced off in the opposite direction. I suddenly knew how that bug had felt when I ate it, and hoped I'd have better luck escaping than it did.

"Come here little fella," the giant called as it chased me, its limbs beckoning me closer.

I had no idea what it was saying, but there was no way I was going to get close enough to find out what it was roaring about.

I ran under bushes and between roots, but the giant's dumb limbs were too long for me to hide under them effectively for long.

*There! That's how I'm getting out of this.* A towering tree—at least that's what I had decided to call them anyway—stood before me. A hole at its base was just wide enough to let me in and hide from the giant.

Diving in, the giant's fingers grazed my sides as I slid through. The tunnel came to a dead end, leaving me with no other way out.

"Come here my spirited friend," the giant said, as he reached in with a long arm that, thankfully, couldn't reach me. "I swear I'm not going to hurt you."

One of the fingers got too close and I bit it, hoping to scare the giant away.

"Agh!" The giant pulled its arm out quickly and I hissed, hoping to scare him away. "I'm just trying to help you."

The arm came back, and the hand groped around for me. It wasn't close enough to touch me, but that was close enough to annoy me. Striking yet again, I bit into the giant's hand.

The giant reacted faster than last time and pulled his hand from the hole, dragging me along before I could get my teeth out of his skin. His blood tasted sour and moldy compared to the bug I ate, and I nearly gagged. With the bright light of day shining down on me, I got my teeth out and dropped to the ground, landing in a heap. Before I could get my bearings and run away again, the giant's other hand came down on my neck.

*This is it; I'm done for.* I cried and wailed for him to let me go.

“Those are some sharp teeth you have there, little one,” the giant said, sucking his finger as he kept me pinned with the other. “You’re lucky I’m not someone else. Otherwise that could have been the last thing you ever did.”

I howled in distress. *Can't he see that I want to get away?* My little talons dug grooves into the ground, and I flapped my wings in frustration.

“Don’t you worry, I’ll take good care of you,” he chuckled, picking me up and pinning my wings to my sides. “That must have been your mother they took last night. I saw them up the mountain, but I never thought that they would actually...”

The giant’s voice, sounding grave, startled me and I held still in his palm. The giant was gazing sorrowful into the distance and all I saw were more trees and something that appeared to be a huge rock in the distance. I croaked in annoyance and began to squirm again.

“Shh, shh,” the giant said, stroking my spine gently.

I froze at his touch, then melted as I lay on his palm. *I guess I can stay here for a little while longer if he keeps this up.* I wasn’t sure, but something about how he stroked my back felt soothing.

“Let me bring you home,” the giant said, beginning to walk as he held me with both hands. “I will take care of you until you are strong enough to be on your own.”

I chirped at him, and nibbled at his finger, wondering if he might have some food for me to eat.

“Hungry, are we?” the giant chuckled with a grin. “I think I might have a few pieces of meat that I can share with you.”

He carried me through the jumble of trees in our way and I tried to take it all in. The sights the sounds, the smells. They were all new to me and I wanted to have it all.

“Now, now little one,” the giant said, cupping his hand over me again as I tried to move closer to the edge of his palm. “We wouldn’t want you to get lost out here. I don’t think I could guarantee you’d make it on your own. Too many people want to see you dead.”

I had no idea what the noises coming out of him meant, but he didn’t seem threatening anymore, just concerned. I let him carry me, trying to take in everything that I could before I made my attempt to escape.

Eventually, an oddly shaped tree came into view. Instead of standing straight up and down like the others around us, it was laying on its side.

*Almost like a bunch of trees fell over on top of each other*, I thought, trying to figure out what it was. It also seemed like there were holes in them, but they weren’t holes exactly.

“Welcome to my home, Little one,” the giant said, pushing on the tree and making a hole that allowed us in. “It’s not much, but it should do for the both of us until you’re older.”

The giant set me down and I immediately scampered back to the holes entrance, but it was gone. I looked up to see the giant put down a log onto some hooks, barring the entrance and keeping me from getting out.

“Let me see, I know I’ve got something here for you to eat,” the giant said, stomping around in another room.

Something sweet filled my nostrils and I started chirping loudly.

“Don’t worry, I’m coming, I’m coming,” the giant said, coming over and holding a red square, he held it in the palm of his hand before me and I sniffed it, making sure it was the same smell that I had caught whiff of before, and then I gobbled it up in one bite.

“You’re a hungry one, aren’t ya?” the giant said with a smile. With his other hand he dropped down a few more cubes of meat on the ground beside me and I began taking bites out of those too. Chuckling, the giant stood up and sat down on a rock that crumpled beneath his weight. “You’re definitely hungry.”

I looked at the rock curiously. *I wonder how it’s soft?* It looked malleable with how it bent itself to the giant’s weight, but nothing stood out to tell me how it did that. Finishing off the food the giant had given me I licked my lips for the juices that were still there. The giant continued to watch me, but didn’t show any signs of getting back up, so I decided it wouldn’t hurt to take a look around.

Putting my nose to the floor, I sniffed for any scents that could tell me more about this new place.

The giant’s eyes followed me, a big grin on his face. *Why is he smiling? Shouldn’t he be trying to eat me or something, rather than feeding me?* Swishing my tail disapprovingly at him, I kept going from corner to corner, trying to catch any other scents like his or the food he had given me.

I found my way into another “room”—which is what the giant called it as he got up and followed me—and I smelled the same blood from the meat I had ate just moments before. Pressing my face to the hard ground, I followed the scent right to where the blood had stained the

floor. Lowering my head, I experimentally tried to take a bite out of the floor. When that didn't work I croaked in indignation, clawing at the ground in dismay.

“Ha, there's no food there, little one. You keep exploring the place, I'm going to begin making myself dinner, and when I'm done we will come up with a name for you,” the giant laughed.

Deciding the giant didn't possess an immediate threat, I continued to smell around the room, partially because I wanted to find more of that sweet tasting food. The other reason being that the giant had finally left me alone at last I was eager to look around the place without worrying about him. I soon found myself exploring other places besides where the giant was and found a whole ton of other smells to find what they belonged to. I greedily sought after anything that could fill my stomach but was disappointed with my results.

Walking back into the largest room with the giant, I noticed that there were weird tiny trees that didn't look connected to the ground but had four trunks that I could wrap my claws around if I wanted to. One of them came to a rather large canopy above with slightly larger trunks and I could smell the scent of something sweet—a different kind of sweet than the meat I had had—coming from on above. Gripping the sides of the bigger trunk, I tried to climb it to reach the smell, but my claws weren't sharp enough to dig into the tree to get me there.

“Perhaps another time, little one,” the giant chuckled over his shoulder, “I do not think bread is meant for a dragon whelp's stomach.”

I slashed my stubby talons on the tree, angry that I couldn't climb up to the canopy. I continued to catch whiffs of other giant smells around the room, but nothing recent. *Is it possible that this giant lives alone? Did he eat the other giants, or did they run away?*

Passing by a certain wall, however, I caught the smell of other giants better than I had before. Following the scent, I traced it to a small crack underneath a wall, very much like the one we used to come into this place. Looking back to the giant I saw that he was not interested in me at the moment. Eyeing the wall again, I noticed the crack from the floor seemed to go up the side and on top, too.

Shoving my head against the wood, I pressed into it until the crack widened enough for me to get in. Excitement surged through me, and I energetically hopped into the room before the giant saw me.

The room was smaller than the others, but it was more cluttered too. There were two more of those soft looking rocks on either side, and one of them was surrounded by thin tree trunks, and neither of them with a back side like the first. Putting my nose to the ground I could smell the scent of the giant in here, but...

My eyebrows scrunched together in confusion. *Little giants?* I wondered. *Could there be such a thing as little giants?*

It certainly smelled like there could be. I glance around the room in case the giant had smaller versions of himself running about that might try to step on me—or worse, eat me.

“Little one?”

I heard and felt the giant’s frantic footsteps coming, so I ran for cover under one of the unusual rocks.

The wall squeaked louder than I could as the giant stomped into the room. I chirped in surprise from his sudden appearance as I slid under the soft rock that was surrounded by trees.



“Wait!” the giant roared desperately, crashing to the ground as his face peered under the rock.

It was my turn to squeak as I dashed further back under the rock.

“Please come here,” the giant cried, his face twisted in anguish as he reached under and easily grabbed me, gripping me tightly with his fat fingers. I squawked in terror as he brought me to his flushed bearded face. “Don’t ever come in here—ever!”

He carried me out and slammed the wall shut behind him and I chirped in pain as he squeezed me roughly.

The giant’s stern face softened when he saw mine and he quickly set me down on top of the four trunked tree’s canopy. I took in a deep breath and whimpered as I felt the bruises forming along my wings and sides. Laying down I whined from the pain.

“I am *so* sorry, little one,” the giant said, tears filling his eyes as he covered them with his hands. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. I just... I just...”

I watched him curiously as his body shook, still unsure of the noises coming from him.

“I’m not ready to go in there. I can’t lose them. Not yet. I don’t know if you can breathe fire...but it doesn’t matter. You are not allowed in there. Understand?” He looked at me expectantly.

I blinked, wondering what all of this was about? First, he was growling and raging at me, and now he was pining and looking anguished. If anything I should have been the one pining, but it was so sad. Standing up, I walked over and brushed my head against him, trying to comfort him.

He sighed. “Look at me. I’m talking to a baby dragon. I must’ve lost my mind bringing you here. Then again, I think I lost it when...” His voice caught in his throat, and when he swallowed it looked painful. He looked back to me, a sad smile on his face. “I don’t suppose I could offer you a piece of my bread in penance for what I did?”

Reaching past me he picked up something that looked soft and spongy. Holding it with both hands, he tore a small piece from it and held it out to me. “Here, little one. This is *bread*,” the giant said, emphasizing the last noise he made.

Looking at the sponge curiously, I sniffed it, and—realizing it for the sweet smell from before—I tore it hastily from his hand, gobbling it down as fast as I could.

The giant laughed uproariously, making me jump in shock. “It appears that I have found a way to encourage you to listen to me.”.

Reaching over he placed a hand on top of me. At first, I flinched, thinking he was going to hurt me again. But when his fingers began to scratch my soft scales, I leaned into the gentle massage as a low purring came from within me.

The giant gave a soft chuckle at this and kept petting me. “I *am* sorry, little one. I promise I won’t ever hurt you again.” Eventually he stopped itching my neck, a sad smile on his face as he got up and put me back on the ground.

I chirped, upset he wasn’t still rubbing my head and wishing I had more of that soft spongy stuff to eat. Smiling sadly, the giant turned and walked off.

Looking around dejectedly, I decided I could keep doing what I had been before being rudely interrupted by the giant.

Working my way through the place, I found another room that was filled with all sorts of interesting smells. Unfortunately, they were all higher than I could reach, and when I loudly chirped, the giant just poked his head in and laughed, making more of his strange noises as he left.

Growling in disapproval, I searched the floor to see if I could find anything else.

Underneath a strange outcropping I discovered the scent of another animal in this place. My nose wrinkled from the new smell, but I crept forward, low to the ground. I followed it until I reached a hole in the wall. The smell went through the opening and, peering in, I found that it led straight to the room the giant had just carried me out of. I stayed with the scent, eager to find what its source was and wondering where it was going.

There was a soft scuffling noise, and I lifted my head up as I caught the sight of a long tail vanishing up above on the soft rock without the trees. The rock wasn't too high, and I was able to hop on top. I froze when I came face to face with a furry animal more than half my size that was chewing on a piece of the rock.

When it spotted me, it hissed, backing away slowly.

I hissed right back at it and got ready to pounce.

"Little one?" the giant called from the other room.

The noise from the giant distracted the creature as it looked at the wall. I jumped, landing on the rodent as I sunk my teeth into its head.

The thing screeched and squeaked loudly as we tumbled around the soft rock, eventually tumbling to the floor with a thud. We separated slightly, but I kept my teeth locked around its head.

The door burst open, and the animal went into a frenzy as the giant came it. Taking my chance, I ensnared the creature with my tail, legs, and wings until I had it completely covered. Biting down hard on its neck I held on until it finally stopped moving. Letting go and stepping aside, I inspected my handy work, pleased with my first kill.

The rodent's head had been nearly torn from its body and there was blood all over the floor. Unfortunately, there wasn't a lot of meat to eat, but I was still hungry, so I began ripping out chunks from the dead animal.

I heard a noise coming from the giant, and when I looked to see what he was doing I found tears falling down his face as he inspected the pieces the animal had been chewing on from the rock. Glancing down at my kill, I thought it would be a good gesture to share my kill with him. Picking up the animal with my mouth, I took it over and dropped it at the giant's feet and chirped proudly.

The giant wiped his eyes with the back of his hand as he looked down at me. Surprisingly, a smile came to his face. "You saved my son's blanket. Thank you, little one."

I chirped again, happy he seemed pleased with my kill. Jumping onto his knee I stepped onto the rock and realized just how soft the thing really was. Yawning, I found the highest and softest spot on the whole rock and snuggled into it.

The giant's voice boomed around the room as he laughed. "You definitely earned a rest my little friend." Looking down at the blanket, the giant's face fell once more. "But I don't know if—"

\*\*\*

Garm stopped talking, his eyes watching the baby dragon closely as its breathing became steady. Its little chest rising and falling gently. He smiled ruefully.

"Now that ain't fair," he whispered in a husky voice.

He was tempted to move the dragon from his son's pillow, but he couldn't find the strength to do it. Looking over he saw the empty bed for little...the thought trailed off, unwilling to even think of it. He stared at the little crib as he saw a speck of dust land on its already covered blanket and pillow. Tears came again to his eyes when he realized that it hadn't been touched by the rat and was grateful the dragon whelp had come to his rescue and saved his son's blanket from further destruction.

"I should have been more careful," he lamented, glancing back down to the blanket in his hands and the tear the rat had made. He knew that he had a rat problem, he just hadn't realized they could go into this room.

Sighing, he placed the blanket over the dragon whelp. It had been over two years since he had stepped in here. Two years of hoping it was all a nightmare and he would come home one day to see them smiling again. He had prayed and asked the Olodrix to bring them back, and when it was clear that he wouldn't, Garm asked Olodrix to take him as well. Always he prayed to be returned to his family in death, and yet he never stepped foot into this room, or the place in

the forest where they had been killed. And then, within the last hour, he had found himself in this room twice.

“Perhaps the Olodrix is sending me a message,” he muttered. “Perhaps it is time for me to move on. She...she would have wanted me too.”

Taking a shuddering breath, Garm stood up.

“I will make things right,” he whispered, his fists clenched to his sides. How he was going to go about that he wasn’t sure, but...

Glancing at the little one, he knew that he didn’t want to lose anyone else he loved ever again.

“You still need a name,” he said, before moving towards the door. “The only problem is, I don’t know what to call you still and yet you have saved me twice today. I don’t know if you have any family out there, or even if there are any dragons left in the world, but I will care for you as if you were my own,” Garm croaked, his voice thick with emotion. “Thank you, little one.”

Garm stood by the door, thinking for a moment until he decided he had a name picked for the dragon. “Sleep well, Muldrix.”

He smiled as he left the door to hang open a little. He would clean out the room tomorrow and make it fit for a dragon, for now he wanted to finish his meal and process everything that had happened so quickly.

As he got back to the kitchen, he patted himself mentally on the back for the name he had just picked. In the language of his ancestors, “mul” meant happy, and “drix” the last. And so

putting them together seemed fitting for the dragon whelp who would be his “happy last” child for him to raise.

Garm felt a gentle pressure on his shoulder, and he could have sworn that Kitia was there with him again.

Wiping the tears from his eyes, he got back to fixing his meal.