

Chapter 2

Lost

Garm smiled as Muldrix hopped around from tree to tree, his sharp little claws allowing him to climb nimbly about. It had been only a month since he had brought the dragon whelp home, and already the piece of his life that he had felt missing was now filled with something else. Based on how many times Muldrix ran up beside him and hopped around, he knew the little dragon felt the same way.

Garm swelled with pride. He hadn't felt like this since...

Gloom settled within, and he tried not to think about his late wife and children.

He jumped with the sudden pressure that touched his leg. Looking down, he smiled as Muldrix chirped at him, probably annoyed at him for stopping so suddenly in the woods.

"Don't worry, we'll keep going now," he said, laughing as Muldrix became distracted by a butterfly.

Now that he was the size of a cat, Garm's mind told him he should be worried of this development, but he pushed it to the back of his mind instead. Muldrix helped push back the shadows of his mind, and they lived in the forest. What else could they need or want?

Muldrix growled at him in hunger as he nipped at the animal skins Garm was carrying. "Getting greedy, aren't we?" he chuckled. Reaching into his pouch he pulled out a piece of dried meat that he flung into the air and laughed when Muldrix missed the catch and landed on his side instead.

Ignoring him, Muldrix grabbed the jerky with his sharp teeth and promptly began to shred and tear at it. Garm waited until the little dragon had finished off most of its meal before

setting off on his walk again. Muldrix caught up once he was finished, running ahead and glancing back with a wide toothy grin, his tongue hanging out slightly.

Garm couldn't help but smile as they continued down the path to the main road.

With the extra mouth to feed, Garm had not realized how low his supplies were until he opened his cupboard the other morning to see that most of his supplies were gone. Luckily the end of Summer Harvest was here, and he was hoping to purchase some chickens too, since he had eaten all the ones, he had owned to spare any from starving when he had decided to—

Don't think about that, he thought, mentally turning away from the painful memories. Muldrix jumped in front, nearly making him trip. The darkness waiting to smother him was pushed away, and he thanked Olodrix for the little whelp to have been sent his way.

Coming up to the main road, Garm didn't have to think long about which way he needed to take to get him to the village. The closest village to his home was Waymond and it was there he usually gathered his supplies before the winter. Going North instead would've taken him instead to Trollox City, the main capital of Trollox. When people had come to drive out the dragons in the mountains near his home it had been people and soldiers from Trollox City. He had been able to tell from the banners they had carried, and because Waymond village was too small to go slay dragons.

"No, I definitely don't want to go that way," he muttered, glancing back North along the road. "We'll go South."

Keeping up a brisk pace, he watched to make sure that Muldrix followed him down the road. The little dragon huffed and puffed, but never whined about the travel and it even seemed excited to see more of the world. By about lunchtime Garm could see smoke rising above the

trees and knew he was close. Readjusting the load of skins to keep from falling, he hoped it was enough to buy everything he needed.

As they came closer, a huge sigh of relief escaped his lips.

The sound of haggling rang through the air, and he could catch the accents of the Valibu mixing with the Trollox farmers. Garm kept an eye on Muldrix as the dragon paid more attention to where they were going now that their destination was within sight and sound. The little creature stopped beside him and raised his snout and sniffed. The smells must have been strong enough from this distance because he began to jump and prance around Garm, making him laugh.

“You smell the good stuff, huh?” Garm said once he could draw breath again. “Don’t you worry, we’ll buy enough for what we need.”

He knelt, and Muldrix came right up to his side, giving him his wide toothy grin.

“I need you to stay out here and wait for me, little one,” he said softly, placing the last of his dried meat before the dragon. “I don’t expect to be long, but I don’t want to cause a fuss over anyone seeing you. It’s still dangerous.”

He doubted anyone in the village would care overly much if he brought the little dragon into town, it was too small to cause any real harm, but he had no way of knowing if Lord Trellin, the Lord of Trollox, had ordered the death of Muldrix’s family a month ago, or if it had been some greedy underling of Trellin’s coming for more money. Watching the whelp eat, he wasn’t entirely sure the merchants could be trusted either. Most were just as greedy, and while it was outlawed, both in Valibu and Trollox, he didn’t doubt there were a few of them who would sell a family relative into the slave trade if it meant being a few extra scales richer.

Satisfied that Muldrix wasn't going to follow him, he hefted his skins once more and marched back onto the road.

The sounds of haggling and children laughing were the first things to assail him before he cleared the trees, and times of years past washed over him as he walked into the clearing. Tents of various shapes and sizes were set up in the field just to the east of town, and Garm thought he could pick out a particular jade colored tent not too far away. He headed for a green tent, weaving through the sea of tents and people until he reached it. The trader of this post, Zelu, already had his animal skins out and was negotiating with a customer on one of his fur coats. Although Zelu was native to the neighboring country and kingdom of Valibumn, he made it a point to travel to all three kingdoms on Andolin to bring back the very finest that each had to offer. Garm loved this fact about his friend and found Zelu's views to be refreshing.

"Fifteen? That's theft! I can pay you ten," the villager Zelu was haggling with said, countering an offer that Garm must have missed seconds before.

"I assure you; this is handmade all the way from Valibumn, and is hair from the rare white tiger," the merchant Zelu said in his thick Valibu accent, "Can you not feel that rich texture of the fur! Thirteen scales and its yours."

Garm had no doubt that the fur was real, but anything more exotic than Trollox City and the villagers here became skeptical of authenticity. Especially when the asking price was for so many scales. Garm had heard there had been a time when metal was used as currency rather than a dragon's scales. Why bother with a small metal disk, when a dragon could shed their scales, which were often just as hard as iron and more beautiful. Dragons could regrow new scales, but rather than wait some would hunt them down for a large payday. Garm assumed this was why the dragons in the mountains had been slain the night before he found Muldrix. *I*

wonder if they were running low on scales at Lord Trellin's house, he wondered. It wasn't uncommon to find a group of dragon slayers going about searching for more scales to collect. This was also why he had decided to keep Muldrix in the forest on the off chance that someone might try to skin him for his scales. Even though a dragon could regrow scales, most found it easier to simply kill the creature rather than work for the extra money. Hopefully nothing would happen to Muldrix so long as Garm was careful and didn't let anyone else see the little creature.

The idea of Muldrix being out in the woods made Garm a little on edge and hoped he could be on his way back soon.

The Zelu had finally made his final offer and the villager rubbed his neck while chewing his bottom lip for a minute before throwing his hands up in the air. "Bah, it's not worth my time or scales to find out if the furs real or not."

Zelu frowned as the villager walked away. "Pleasure doing business with you," he called after him, then adding in an undertone, "may the birds feast on your carcass."

"That doesn't seem to be the way to get someone's scales," Garm teased Zelu as he walked up to the booth.

Zelu's face brightened as Garm laid his items on the table.

"Garm, my friend! How are you?"

"I've been better," Garm answered truthfully. "But it's been an interesting year."

"Here, leave these here and we will talk in the back with a drink," Zelu said, waving him to follow.

"I can't right now," he said, apologetically.

Zelu raised an eyebrow in reply. "Oh, why not?"

"I have... someone is waiting for me," he said reluctantly. Even though he trusted Zelu more than the other Valibu merchants, it did not mean he wanted him to know everything.

"Is there a lady in waiting?" Zelu teased, giving Garm a wink.

"No...not a lady," Garm admitted, again wishing his friend would drop the subject. "But here, I have these skins here I'd like to trade for scales."

Zelu's face knitted in confusion as he stepped back to the counter. "You sure you're alright, my friend?"

Garm resisted the urge to look over his shoulder to the forest where he hoped Muldrix would stay put. "I'm sure. I'm just tired and ready to head home." He could see his words didn't convince Zelu, but he wasn't ready to share Muldrix. Not here at least, but perhaps somewhere else? "How about you come out to my cabin, and I can explain what is going on there?"

Zelu's posture relaxed a little as he nodded in acceptance. "I can do that. It has been too long since we've gotten together, but not long enough that I haven't forgotten where you live. Now, let's see what you have brought me."

He thumbed through the few skins that Garm had brought, clucking his tongue in displeasure.

"Why is there so few, and..." Zelu froze as he came to the bottom of the stack. Lifting a shirt small enough for a child, he looked solemnly toward Garm. "I can't take these. They mean so much to you."

"And that's why I need to sell them," Garm said, gently pushing the clothing in Zelu's hand toward him. "I can't keep holding onto the past. Not when I've got something to live for."

Zelu's eyes narrowed. "Are you sure there isn't a wo—"

"Dragon!"

Garm spun around so fast he nearly ran into someone. "I'm so sorry," he said, as he moved around the person and ran off in the direction the cry had come. There was a crowd gathering near a large red and gold tent. The closer he got the more he could hear the little growls and squeaks of Muldrix trying to get away from those trying to corner him. Pushing through the crowd, he came out into a makeshift circle of men and women with nets, each trying, and failing, to get close enough to catch the fearful little creature. Garm's heart squeezed as one of the men shot out and lunged for Muldrix.

Muldrix jumped out of the way, but only just barely as another made a grab for him.

"Muldrix, this way!" Garm called, holding out his hands.

The little dragon had just dodged another net when he saw Garm and made a mad dash to him. Weaving between a few more attempts to grab him, Muldrix flung himself into Garm's outstretched arms, nuzzling himself into the crook of his arm.

"Did you bring that beast here? He tried to eat my chickens," one of the catchers called to Garm, pointing to a booth where the fluffy birds sat in their cages. Feathers ruffled and still sounding rather annoyed at the intruder.

"I doubt he would have been able to take so much as a bite out of the wood, let alone your chickens," Garm said, backing up as the crowd of people parted around him.

"I thought they had killed all the dragons in the area," a woman called out. "If I had known those beasts were still around, I wouldn't have come!"

There was roar of approval and Garm spun around, his stomach sinking with each angry face pointed his way.

I need to get out of here.

Clutching the still shivering Muldrix, Garm bolted through the angry crowd before they roused themselves into an angry mob. He dodged between tents and people who were here to trade and buy from the merchants for the harvest as he worked his way back to Zelu's booth. Two men, dressed in Trollox soldier uniforms and carrying spears, casually turned from around a corner and blocked off his path to Zelu.

They exchanged glances with him, clearly seeing his disheveled and panting form as their eyes moved from him to the shaking creature in his arms. Lowering their spears, they pointed them at him with shaking hands.

No, not me. Muldrix, Garm realized, drawing the creature closer to him.

The men looked younger than he did by at least ten years, but he could still see the uncertainty about their faces. "What can I do for you?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

"Put down the dragon, sir," the young man on the left said, shifting from foot to foot, the spear in his hands shaking horribly. "We'll take care of the beast."

"Take care of it?" Garm repeated, looking down at Muldrix huddled in his arms. It suddenly dawned on him what they were talking about. *They haven't heard of the mess with the chickens yet, he surmised. They were probably heading that way because of the commotion, not because they knew Muldrix is here. But now they think I'm in trouble and need saving.* "It's alright, I've got it," he said, hoping to look more confident than how he sounded. His arm tightened around Muldrix's little form, and it yelped at its tight confines.

The soldiers glanced at each other and kept their spears held out. “I’m sorry, but we’re going to have to ask you to let us handle it,” the other young man on the right said, his sandy hair nearly reaching his eyes. “Lord Trellin of Trollox has commanded that if any dragon whelps are to be found within his realm, they should be brought to him immediately.”

Garm felt his skin crawl and he tried not to let it show how he felt about that. “Well, in that case, I suppose I can bring the poor creature to his lordship.”

“I’m afraid that duty falls to us,” the one on the left spoke again, pointing his shaking spear tip towards Garm instead of the dragon.

Why? What did it matter who brought Muldrix to Lord Trellin if the beast was going to be killed? Were they wanting to collect the scales already for themselves? *No, that doesn’t make any sense. The scales are too small and haven’t developed their proper color yet.* Dragons didn’t mature into their colors until they were much older, usually in a year or two. But what could they gain by turning in the creature themselves?

The soldiers shifted restlessly as he tried to think things through. “Please, sir. I’m only going to ask you this one more time. Hand over the creature and we’ll make sure it’s handed over to Lord Trellin,” the one on the right said.

Garm opened his mouth to reply, when someone suddenly fell into the soldiers, their arms piled with enough skins and furs to cover their head and more. “Excuse me officers, here let me help you,” the person said, and Garm recognized it as Zelu.

He watched in amazement as Zelu untangled himself and began throwing his own merchandise *back* onto the soldiers, making sure they were well buried. He paused for a moment to spare a glance at Garm and wave him away. Taking the hint, he ran back to Zelu’s booth.

Making sure to tread more carefully as he made his way through the maze of tents and booths until he was able to come to Zelu's spot. Finding that the coast was clear, he slid into the tent. Muldrix squeaked in annoyance, wriggling to come free and explore the dark confines of the tent. "Shh, Muldrix, shh," he hissed, stroking Muldrix behind the ears to soothe him. The familiar motion helped to calm his own nerves as the dragon settled into a low purring that reverberated against his side.

Soon Garm could hear Zelu's voice talking to someone just outside. Fearful of being spotted, he hunkered behind a crate, still petting Muldrix to help keep him quiet. The tent's flaps were pulled aside as Zelu stepped in, letting the tent close behind him.

Garm could see that he was waiting for his eyes to adjust, but even still, he thought it best to keep hidden until he was certain that Zelu was alone.

The merchant stepped more into his tent, his eyes peering into its dark interior as he searched for Garm.

"Garm? Are you here, man?"

"I'm here," Garm said, moving out of the shadows.

Zelu jumped nearly a foot into the air. "Babishk! Don't scare me like that," he cursed, placing his hand over his heart.

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to be sure that you were alone."

Zelu frowned, and asked, "What do you think you are doing with that whelp?"

Garm looked down at the little creature in his arms and sighed. "I don't honestly know, except that he saved me."

Zelu gave the dragon whelp a look between curiosity and disgust. It was no secret that merchants had no love of dragons—except for their scales—but neither did they hate them outright. The merchants themselves viewed their relationships with dragons as a mutual distrust and rivalry. Merchants relied on the animals of the wild for food, and so did dragons, thus they often were in competition together whenever the merchants travelled. Of course, the occasional attack would happen on companies from time to time, becoming food themselves for the beasts, but so was the way of the merchant. If it wasn't the elements that they had to be careful of then it was the animals who would want them for their next meal. The mercantile business was a dangerous game, one you had to survive long enough to be good at. Zelu considered himself one of the best, having one of his rules of business that he stay away from dragons if possible.

“I would love to hear the tale,” Zelu said, turning Garm’s attention back to him, “but you are in danger so long as you refuse to give up the creature.”

“What would you suggest?” He held Muldrix closer, hoping that his friend would have a plan. Garm could see Zelu biting his lip through his beard as he thought about the question.

“You were planning on buying food from the money I would have given you?” Zelu asked.

He nodded. “But I don’t think I can do that now, not after having faced the other merchants and the soldiers of Trollox with Muldrix.”

“Muldrix?”

“That’s what I’ve named him,” Garm explained, placing a hand on the dragon’s head.

“Then truly I will have to hear your tale at your cabin. I believe I’ve got a plan, but it involves him,” Zelu said pointing at Muldrix.

“In what way?” Garm asked, fear starting to well up inside of him.

“I will take him and have him cause a distraction closer to the edge of town. While we are doing that, I want you to get out of the market. I will chase your pet into the woods where you can recover him there and the two of you can escape.”

The fear inside Garm’s chest clenched him tighter with nervousness and his mind tried to think of another way he could escape. “Couldn’t you make another scene like you did when you helped me get away from the guards?”

Zelu barked a laugh. “I could, but it wouldn’t draw as much attention that whelp could cause. I can see that the little creature means much to you. Because of that you have my word that I will keep him safe.”

Garm frowned. He wanted to trust Zelu, but Muldrix was his last link to the land of the living, and he wasn’t ready to lose that yet.

“But what about my supplies—”

“I will buy them, and bring them out to your house,” Zelu said, waving away his question. “You just admitted that you were going to buy those things, and I see no reason why I cannot come and bring it to you. My caravan is not leaving till the end of the week, until then I can help you in what ways that I can.”

“You remember where I live?” Garm asked.

“Pfft, I am offended! Would I not be a good skin trader if I did not make it my job to memorize trails and locations?” Zelu answered, giving him a small smile behind his beard.

“Besides, I told you earlier that I remember the way. You are my friend, Garm, and any friend of

yours is a friend of mine. Trust me, I will get you and your dragon out of the village safely and deliver you your supplies soon.”

Garm tried to smile, but it faded faster than he wished and the tightness in his chest became worse. *It is a good plan*, he thought. *But can I live with the consequences if it doesn't work?*

“Garwk,” Muldrix cried, and Garm looked down at him. The little dragon was playfully rubbing its snout against his chest as he purred. The tension building up inside lessened, and Garm smiled at the creature who was more than a pet to him.

I haven't heard that noise before, he mused, his mind relaxing with his body. *I may not like going through with this plan, but the alternative of losing Muldrix altogether is more than I could handle.* He rubbed and scratched all over the dragon's head, and Muldrix began purring so loudly that even Zelu could hear it. He looked concerned and about to say something when Muldrix hiccupped, causing a puff of smoke to float up from his mouth and into Garm's face.

It stank like rotten eggs and Garm made a face as he gagged. Zelu barked a laugh and then teasingly warned, “Don't go spitting your bile here. That is fine carpet you're standing on all the way from Baradin in Marbrenth, and I won't have you ruin it with your vomit.”

The smell still lingered in his nostrils, but Garm tried to smile at his friend. “Yes of course, and you are right. I will trust your plan.”

Zelu's face beamed. “Perfect. Now, here's what I need you to do.”

Why am I in a cage?

My noise wrinkled and I sniffed the hard metal that surrounded me. I knew I wasn't supposed to be here. Just moments before I had been in Garm's hands, being petted and wishing I had food. Now I was cold, tired, *and* in a cage without any food.

"You're sure this will work?" Garm asked the stranger. I could understand some of their language—Garm liked to talk a lot to himself while we were out in the woods, so I learned a lot—but it was hard to keep up with my stomach rumbling loudly. I still couldn't produce the sounds just right to get his attention with his name. Instead, it always came out as a weird croak.

"Absolutely," the stranger replied, leaning over me. He wasn't unfriendly, but I held it as a rule not to like anyone until I got to know them. Not that I had really gotten the chance to know anyone since I was hatched, but I figured it was a safe way to go. Which seemed a good thing after nearly escaping those humans who were protecting those tasty birds in their cages.

"Garwk?" I tried to say Garm's name, but again it came out more like a bird choking on its dinner than anything else. If only those mmm words weren't so difficult to say.

"Don't worry, little one. Zelu will take care of you," Garm said, reaching through the bars with his fingers and petting me just where I liked it.

My body thrummed and I wished I could help ease his worries, whatever they were. Maybe he was worried because I tried to eat those fat birds? I tried to tell him that I was sorry as he ran with me, but of course it came out all wrong, and sounded more like gibberish than actual words.

"Garwk!" I tried again, leaning heavily into his fingers.

"Shh, quiet, Muldrix, it'll be okay. We'll be home safe soon. He will be safe, won't he?" Garm said, his face crinkled with worry.

“Of course, of course,” the man said, waiving away his concern. “As long as you are at the edge of the village, I will make certain he reaches you safely. I have already paid the guards travelling with us to watch over my things until I return.”

I squirmed in my cage, wondering what I could do to quiet my hunger. I hiccupped a small puff of smoke and yowled, hoping that Garm would take the signal and get me out and get me some food.

“Wouldn’t it be better to wait until nightfall?” Garm asked again.

The stranger shook his head. “No, it must be now. I will not be able to travel to your home if we went tonight, there have been rumors the forests are not as safe as they used to be.”

Garm nodded but still didn’t seem happy. I thought that was odd. If he wasn’t happy, why didn’t he just find something to make him happy? I did it all the time with his shoes. Something about their rough, leathery texture left me wanting to eat some meat.

Garm shook hands with the man and then left the tent. I had only understood half of their plan, but I had thought I’d be going with Garm.

“Garwk,” I called, flapping my wings, and scrapping my talons against the bars.

“Now, now, small one,” the stranger said, trying to sound soothing like Garm would.

I continued to call for Garm, not happy until I could—*Hey is that food?* I thought.

The stranger had just shoved in a small pile of sweet-smelling meat through the bars and my stomach rumbled loudly in my ears.

“Ah ha!” the man laughed. “I see that all we needed was some food to grab your attention, eh?”

Reluctantly I accepted the offering, gulping down the juicy treats as a blanket was thrown over me. I didn't care to protest at the sudden darkness since I was able to fill my belly with the savory meats. I did, however, wish that I could see what the creatures, or other giants like Garm, were doing on the other side of the sheet, but the food did its job and kept me happy. For now.

Thoughts of what those birds might taste like came to mind and I imagined they tasted like the meat I was eating now. *I'll have to try it again sometime*, I thought, slurping up a chunk.

I lapped up the final bits as they slid down my throat and I savored the flavor, wishing I could bloat my belly on more. I sniffed the floor of my cage but found I devoured everything except for the lingering smells of the meat. Deciding to make the best of it, I continued to smell the rest of my cage for anything interesting.

The cage jolted to the side, hitting me, and making me tumble around. I squawked in surprise and anger, hoping to get the strangers' attention of my discomfort.

Noises from outside the curtain started to rain down over me, but I couldn't recognize any of them. "Garmk!" *I'm getting a little closer*, I thought, proud of myself for almost saying Garm's name. The voices grew silent with my squawk, and I heard Garm's stranger friend talk some more as the cage began to sway once more.

Where is Garm? I wondered once more, squawking my indignation and concern at his lack of presence.

Suddenly, I'm thrown back as the cage begins to jostle up and down, back and forth, and from side to side. I cry out even louder, until a bar slams into my nose. A tangy bitterness slipped into my mouth, and I wailed against the injustice being done to me. Why did the stranger throw me around like this? Wasn't this supposed to be safe? That's what Garm had said...wasn't it?

Gravity threw me down again, except this time harder. My jaw clamped so tightly that I couldn't make a sound, and my insides felt pulled down to the cage floor. Soon the cage began to tip, and I was no longer stuck to the bottom, but my stomach—and its contents—felt ready to come up my throat. *Is this what flying feels like?* I thought, unsure what was happening.

The thought and feeling didn't last long.

The cage hit something hard and exploded into a myriad of pieces and then...

...then it was dark.

What just happened? I wondered.

I opened my eyes to find darkness all around me. I knew that I was lying on something big and hard and round, but my body ached terribly for some horrible reason. *Perhaps because of the fall?* I shifted a little to get comfortable and I started to slide. When I thought my feet should have touched the ground they continued to dangle about in the air and I panicked, kicking and squirming to try to get back where I would be secure. But I fell anyway, my stomach landing on the cold leaf strewn ground, and feeling like that time I had jumped off Garm's table, only worse. I shakily got to my feet and saw something up ahead. Soft silver light flittered around me in shiny little fragments on the ground. The remnants of my cage glittered and sparkled from the light falling through the trees, and I was not sorry to see it go. Looking up, I found that night had fallen, and the light silvery blue moon shone at its peak.

My stomach grumbled, telling me how long it had been since Garm's stranger gave me food. I yowled into the night, hopeful that Garm would hear and come get me.

He never responded, but I heard voices out in the distance.

Moving slowly, partly to stay quiet and mostly because I was in too much pain, I headed toward those voices to see who they belonged to. We dragons don't have the best of vision at night when there are other lights about, but I could just make out the shapes of the tents I had seen in the daytime. Some of them had shadows dancing on their surfaces, their occupants moving around and laughing raucously.

Thoughts of giants coming after me filled my head, and I grimaced at the memory, and I began to move around the clearing. Hoping to find some indication of where Garm had gone. Limping slowly along, I searched for the path that Garm had brought me on. The moon shone brightly in the sky with the lesser stars above and I wasn't sure if I would be able to find the path again.

Suddenly, Garm's smell hung faintly in the air. Following it, it led me toward the sea of tents. I wanted to follow it, but something inside of me said that it wasn't a good idea, and I shouldn't do it.

I whined softly, anger welling inside at the predicament I had been placed in. My stomach grumbled, and I decided to follow Garm's smell, despite the warnings I felt inside.

Slithering out carefully, I made sure not to snap any twigs or to trip in the dirt. No sense in making myself known when these giants obviously didn't want me. I sniffed madly about, keeping tabs of Garm's scent, and for anything else that might tell me where Garm had gone. A few times I found a scrap or two of food that had been left and it helped to calm my rumbling storm within, but my body burned through the food and my belly continued to growl so loud I thought for sure that someone in a tent would have heard it.

Walking past a tent that was brighter than some of the others, my nostrils flared as Garm's scent reached me stronger. *I can follow him home!* I thought wonderfully. Yipping with

joy, I followed the scent out of the clearing of tents and out to the road he had brought us to. “Garmk, Garmk, Garmk!” I cried as I raced along the path, happy to be heading home at last.

The road took me further away from the tent lights and I had to rely ever more on my own sight and memory of where I was going rather than light from those tents behind me. This worked well, and I discovered that while I had horrible sight with lights around at night, I could see even better in the dark, with the lights taken away.

Soon the moon came out once again from behind the trees and clouds, and I could see my way along it’s pale silvery-blue sheen. I raced for as long as I could, overjoyed at my progress until Garm’s scent met up with a new smell I hadn’t smelled before.

Stopping in my tracks, I worried about what it could mean to have something new in the area. This new scent seemed to follow Garm’s, and by the time I came to the small trail we had taken together to get to this main road, the smell still followed as if something was close by. It was familiar though, as if I had smelled it before, and quite recently too.

I frowned, a low rumble escaping my mouth. What was I to do? Garm was down that trail, but if I followed would I be in danger? Would I be chased as I had been before and driven off? Or maybe Garm is in danger? Those humans hadn’t looked too happy to see him with me. Maybe they were still angry, and now he’s in danger too? But could the smell not be dangerous too? Perhaps it belonged to Garm’s stranger friend, and he had followed him to the house?

I pinned into the night, angry at the headache I was starting to have, and angry at Garm for leaving me behind.

I paced back and forth for another few more minutes before finally making up my mind. Cautiously, I treaded carefully into the shadows of the forest where even the moonlight did not

touch, making sure to not alert anything bigger than myself that I was there. A few times I lost the scent, but every time I did, I was able to find it again.

While passing beneath a giant tree, my front foot caught on one of its roots and I tripped, landing face first into a pile of leaves. Thrashing wildly about, I cleared myself of the leaves and I scampered over to the tree I had tripped on, snuggling into a little alcove in the roots to wait and listen if anything would stir from the noise I had just made.

I couldn't see anything that would let me know the passage of time, so instead I relied on my own beating heart. Once my pulse lessened to where I could no longer hear it so loudly, I ventured a peak.

Nothing stirred, and I couldn't see any sign of any other animal in the area. There was a soft thump, and I quickly ran back into my shelter, my eyes flittering back and forth to find what had made the noise. My heart pounded in my chest as the thump came again, but louder this time. I breathed silently, drawing my wings and tail closer.

A creature, taller than Garm and shaped like him, walked into view. The creature stood dark in an already black forest. I wasn't sure how, but I could see the outline of its body. Its arms were long and thin, but it didn't seem to have a body, rather it trailed smoke behind like a slug dragging itself across the ground. Its head turned, and my body froze as its eyeless head gazed at me. I didn't know what to do. Fear shook my being, and I wanted nothing more than to get back to Garm.

The creature tilted its head slightly, as if considering what to do with a whelp like me. After a time, it turned around and left. Its thumping footsteps signifying when it was finally gone from where I was on the trail.

I breathed hard, shivering in the early morning chill as I tried to understand what had happened with my young brain.

At some point, I began to notice a change about me. The forest seemed brighter, as if a soft glow of morning light was beginning to shine through the darkness. Stepping carefully, I could see my own feet. Relieved with this new revelation I rushed from my hiding place. Picking up Garm's scent once more I raced home. As the light of the rising sun grew, I began to recognize the landmarks that lay around our home and soon I spotted it.

I paused a moment as I heard yelling and screaming coming from inside. *Garm's home! He must be so happy that I'm back!* I squawked his name and began running to the house again, the yells softening as I screeched thrice more. On my third time Garm opened the door.

"Muldrix!" he cried as I jumped into his arms. "I have been so worried for you. I can't believe you made it home!"

He crushed me in his grip, and I squawked indignantly but still rested my head on his shoulder. Peeking at who he was with, I saw Garm's friend and his surprised look in the doorway.

"I'm sorry, little one, I just... I thought you were dead. I thought you were gone forever," Garm said, releasing his tight grip and allowing me to lick his face with my rough tongue.

"Garm," I finally said, making sure to look him in the eyes to know I was speaking to him. "Garm," I said again, nuzzling him with my bloodily snout. Satisfied with my achievement at saying his name correctly I licked his stunned face yet as he stood frozen on the spot.