

Molly Can't Communicate

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The big engines were excited. The Fat Controller had promised them another engine to help out during the busy summer season. One morning as the engines were being readied for work, an unfamiliar whistle cut through the morning air.

"That must be the new engine" Edward observed. Around the bend came a smart looking yellow engine, she had the same number of wheels as Edward, and a bright yellow coat of paint. She came cautiously to a stop on the turntable, as the Fat Controller stepped down from her cab.

"This is Molly" he announced grandly "She will be helping out over the holidays, and if she does well, she will join the railway!". The engines eyed the newcomer with curiosity.

"Good morning Molly, pleasure to have you here" Gordon smiled warmly "yes indeed, it'll be good to have another pair of buffers helping out" agreed Henry. Molly didn't respond, she just shyly looked away and weeshed steam, much to the other engines' surprise. Edward however took notice of Molly's lack of eye contact, and nervous expression. The Fat Controller smiled, and patted Molly's running board gently.

"She's quite the quiet sort, so please give her time to settle in" he said, he then climbed back into Molly's cab, as she was turned around and she puffed quickly away to return the Fat Controller to his office. The other engines conversed.

"How rude!" James snorted, "you two give her a big welcome, and she doesn't even have the decency to say thanks!"

"Steady on James" Edward reprimanded "you heard the Fat Controller, she's shy. She just needs time to adjust is all. I'm sure she'll be chatting up a storm when she's more comfortable"

James wasn't convinced, but Henry and Gordon were prepared to give her the benefit of the doubt.

James later saw her at the big station, being readied for her first train, Duck came bustling in with her coaches and quickly uncoupled to tidy the yard, giving Molly a friendly 'peep peep', Molly didn't respond and quickly backed down onto her train. James was about to comment, but he then noticed Molly trembling, as passengers gathered around to see the new engine. A boy commented on her beautiful yellow coat, a woman complimented her on her shiny fittings, yet Molly still didn't respond and just stood there looking flustered, and shaking in fear. When the guard blew his whistle, James heard a faint sound of shock, before the Yellow Engine quickly pulled away, shrouded in a cloud of steam.

James later saw Edward shunting at his station, and told him all about what he had seen. "It's as I feared" the old engine frowned, "she's not just shy, she may have an anxiety disorder"

"What does that mean?" James queried, Edward paused, considering his words "when a person... or, engine has extreme social anxiety, they struggle to communicate with others... I think that Molly would like to talk to us, she did come to the sheds with Sir Topham after all. But she may not know how... may be related to a past event, or trauma, who knows."

James went quiet, remembering his own issues with talking to the other engines after his crash on his first day, and how Edward had helped him open up to the others. He felt awful for what he had said about Molly earlier, and wanted to put things right. Edward noticed him deep in thought and smiled

"It may be time for you to help out poor Molly, the same way I helped you all those years ago..."

James then heard the guards whistle blow and he puffed away, smiling towards the old blue engine as several plans rattled through his smokebox, he was going to try and get through to Molly. That night he returned to the sheds to find Molly not there, he saw the others chatting away as usual, then glanced towards the carriage sheds, there he spotted a hint of yellow. He decided to put his plans into action.

The red engine sidled alongside Molly as her driver was wiping down her brass, all was quiet for a moment, until James spoke up

"So, how are you enjoying our island?" He ventured, Molly darted her gaze away, and James heard a slight fearful tremor, he paused, considering what he would say next...

"You're a rescue engine, aren't you." He said. Molly went silent, her driver answered the question "she is, how'd you know?"

"Experience. I was very much in the same situation as her back in the day.... I was an experiment, you see. My old railway wanted to see if adding a front set of pilot wheels would

help improve my class, but I failed, and was sold here for cheap, with wooden brake blocks. It wasn't worth giving me proper brakes, they said."

James paused, and saw Molly looking on entranced, he continued. "On my first day here, I crashed into a field, my brake blocks had caught fire. I thought for sure I was for the scrap heap, but the Fat Controller gave me a chance, repaired me, gave me a new bright coat of paint to stand out and make me feel better... for a few weeks after I struggled talking to the others, I was unsure of what they'd say to me after my accident, I thought they'd make fun of me, belittle me... but my friend, Edward helped me through it, he got me to open up, and well... I can see a lot of myself in you..."

Molly was no longer averting her gaze, her eyes were wide, James looked her all over, "the bright new coat, timid and scared... yes very much like me... but I assume you've been through worse..."

Molly was silent, then slowly, James heard a faint "yes". Molly went quiet again, looking at her buffers once more, she then slowly began to speak "o- on the mainland... I was... sent for... scrap. I was too o- old... they said... I was there... for years, before I was... saved by a... heritage railway"

"Is that where you got your yellow then?" James asked, Molly didn't respond for a moment, "y- yes... after all those years, in the scrapyards... I just... I... I couldn't..."

"It's okay old girl, take your time" her driver soothed, the timid Yellow Engine took a deep breath. "They gave me... my yellow... to make me feel better. The other engines, they said... I looked silly... I, I was already quiet before.. but after that... I just... stopped talking... only to my driver and fireman" Molly finished. James stayed silent, then spoke again

"There's... no need to be afraid here, Molly. We Sodor engines... we're not like those on the mainland, especially when it comes to livery, red, green, brown and blue. We're all really useful. And most of our recent additions also have had experiences like you. You don't have to speak if you don't want to, but just know. You'll always have a spot in the sheds, instead of this old shack."

Molly cracked a small smile, her driver smiled too, then looked to his engine, sensing what Molly was thinking, "I wish I hadn't put out your fire old girl, we could've stabled you there instead." Molly gave a quiet but defeated "yes" as her response.

"That's not an issue" James smirked. The other engines were still enthralled in their conversation when they saw James, pushing Molly into his berth and backing alongside her on the nearby siding.

"What's all this then James?" Gordon questioned "everyone, this is Molly" James announced grandly "she's a quiet sort, but give her time, she's really quite lovely once you get to know her"

Henry and Gordon looked to each other in surprise, remembering the red engines earlier comments and then looked back to the now timid Molly and smiled, "glad to have you Molly, please. Don't be frightened."

"Yes" agreed Henry "we're happy to have you in our shed" Molly smiled, and slowly responded "t- thank you..." Edward looked over to James and grinned broadly, as Gordon and Henry began bombarding Molly with questions, Molly looked frazzled for a moment, but took a deep breath and slowly, but surely began a slow chat with the big engines. James could only smile. Happy to have helped a new friend.