

Waves that rhythmically lapped at the warm sandy shore were easily hushed by the sound of delighted laughter and the excited squeals of swimlings that rose high above the ambient sound. Swim day meant every swimling in the bask, often under the watchful eyes of Fade, Shane, Inspy, and occasionally Hyperion himself, got to take to the ocean in one large pack to practice both their swimming and hunting skills. Swimlings dove to and fro, jumping bravely into the oncoming waves and chomped at anything that got within biting range; be it fish, seaweed, or toes. While the likes of Austa and the others had an easier go of things, Zaca meanwhile found herself washing up onto the beach after a particularly large wave had caught her by surprise, sweeping her feet from under her body.

For a moment, she just lay there, allowing the waves to gently lap at her tiny, downy covered body as she processed what'd even just happened. One minute she'd been standing in the water, the next she was being tumbled all around like a ragdoll. Slowly getting back to her feet, from the corner of her eye, something caught her attention as it darted across the sand. The young suchos head was quick to snap in the direction of movement, tilting her narrow head to the side as the crab that'd been in such a hurry not two seconds before now stood completely still. It was hard to miss really, its brilliantly red shell stood out against golden sand like a sore thumb— especially when it darted half the speed of light right in front of you. As the crab began to scuttle again, Zaca jumped a little at the sudden movement, before her curiosity got the better of her and she began to trot after it.

A few bubbles leaked from Fade's nostrils as he swam beneath the surface of the waves. From time to time, he glanced about to make sure that there weren't any dangers in the bay-- and that the swimlings were safe. Surfacing not far from the gaggle of swimlings, the tired male scanned the shoreline, at first it seemed as though all swimlings were present... except for one. When it became clear it was the youngest, and smallest, member unaccounted for, panic quickly set in.

"Has anybody seen Zaca?" Fade worriedly questioned, pale purple eyes frantically scanning the shore again and again as fear gripped his hammering heart.

'Raaa!!' The sound of a sudden war cry rang out across the beach, catching everyone's attention as Fade quickly whipped his head in the direction of the sound. Just in time it seemed to witness Zaca pounce a crab. With a sigh of relief that she'd been found, Fade began to make his way toward the momentarily missing swimling.

For a moment she just sat there, bewildered that she'd actually managed to catch the thing, before a large and excited grin spread across her muzzle. Noticing Fade beginning to walk up to her, the little sucho couldn't help but wiggle in excitement as their gaze met.

"Daddy look I did it! I caught something!!"

"My little hunter," he rumbled approvingly, his eyes warm as he gazed upon Zaca with her crab. "You handled your hunt very well, avoiding the sharp bits."

Looking up at Fade, Zaca smiled excitedly at first. Though hearing his stomach give a slight rumble told her he still hadn't eaten yet. The scuffle at breakfast with Linettes pack was hours ago, surely by then he would've found something to eat... Right? Zaca's smile faded as she turned back to the crab still in her clutches. She struggled with it for a moment, but did manage to pick it up.

"You need to eat daddy..." Zaca carried the crab closer to Fade, holding it up with a small worried whine of her own. She couldn't stand the thought of going hungry, of having to go through that pain all over again... Nevermind somebody she loved WILLINGLY putting themselves through such torture.

Fade's eyes crinkled when he smiled at Zaca. She was too observant for her own good, sometimes. He hoped that it wouldn't get her into any trouble in the future.

"You're right, little huntress," he rumbled quietly. "But the crab is *your* prize, you should eat it if you're still hungry. You've got a lot of growing to do."

The thin male touched the tip of his snout to the top of her head with a soft sigh of resignation, his warm breath effortlessly seeping into her feathers. "I'll tell you what. You can be my guide. What should I be hunting for breakfast?"

While the feel of her father's warm breath brought feelings of safety, reassurance and love, Zaca still gave a soft whine despite the gesture.

"Mmh!" The swimling gave a defiant stomp of her foot, kicking up a small puff of sand in the process as she did so. Once more she thrust the crab toward her father again, pale blue eyes shut tight and her muzzle scrunched. She meant business, and wasn't going to have any say otherwise.

The tall male gave a quiet chuckle when Zaca *insisted* that he eat the crab that she'd caught. He hummed good-naturedly and snapped up the crab, swallowing it down with a quick toss of his head. It was hardly even a snack, but it was *something* anyway.

"Thank you, Zaca," he smiled kindly. Fade raised a brow, glancing around the shore. "Would you like to find some more with me?"

Only once she felt the crab leave her grip, did Zaca open her eyes and look up. Her expression softened watching as her father finally got something into his belly, just happy she was able to stave off his hunger... Or worse... Hearing Fade's following question, she couldn't help but give a small joyous trill.

Fade hummed quietly, filled with affection for his youngest daughter. For a moment, Fade glanced over his shoulder, searching for the other swimlings and their guardians to make sure

they weren't in need of any assistance. Though it seemed that with Inspirational nearby, all was likely well.

"Okay daddy" Zaca chirped in response, starting to walk around the beach in search of more crabs. They shouldn't be that hard to find, right? Fade meanwhile followed Zaca as she wandered around the shore, appreciating the warmth of the sun on his dark feathers as the sea water dripped off of him.

The longer they searched the beach, the more frustrated Zaca started to become. Crabs stood out so obviously against the sand, why now was she having so much trouble finding one!? Audibly groaning, the small sucho kicked at a pile of seaweed that'd collected on the shore, managing to expose an admittedly cool and funky looking stick that'd been buried under the vegetation. She struggled with the stick a little, unable to pick it up with her little hands at first. Though she managed to get a hold of it after managing to pry it free from its spot half lodged in the wet sand under all the seaweed with leverage from her mouth.

"Zaca? Are you..." Fade trailed off, unable to help but chuckle as Zaca came trotting along, new prize in tow. At this point quickly becoming apparent her 'cool stick' was more of a small branch more than anything. The swimmer wobbled around a little as she attempted to walk with it, having fallen down onto all fours for the moment being. More than half the large stick stuck out from one side of her mouth, causing her to lean that direction a little bit and drag the stick along as she walked, leaving a trail of scuff marks in her wake as she trotted along wobbly but proudly in their continued search for food.

"Some of the crabs like to live in little dens in the sand," he rumbled. "You could try to use your stick to push them out."

Hearing her dad's words a little while later, she looked up at him. "Rwelly?" Zaca wiggled a little in excitement, words muffled by the stick on her mouth. Not long after she began to use the part that'd been dragging in the sand to clumsily attack at the sandy shore as she hopped around. Though her methods weren't the most useful, she did her best to follow her dad's instructions.

"Take dat! And dat!"

Fade chuckled quietly, a rough and somewhat grating sound but not unpleasant. "Really," he assured her. He kept an eye on his youngest daughter as she wobbled around with the stick in her jaws. Some part of his heart ached. She'd been so small when she was brought to the bask, only a few weeks old from what he could gather. She'd grown, and was getting stronger, but she was still so little.

"Just like that," Fade rumbled. He walked on a little more while she attacked the shore with her stick before dropping down to rest his weight on his knuckles. He'd found his own crab hole, and set to work delicately carving away the sand more and more until he had opened the mouth

wide enough that he could stick his snout into it. More than enough space for someone much smaller than him to retrieve whatever lay inside.

"Zaca," he called quietly, glancing over his shoulder. "I think there's one in here. Might be too small for me to get to, but just the right size for you if you want to find it."

Zaca paused her assault on the beach and looked up hearing her name called. She'd left her temporarily beloved stick behind as she quickly scampered to his side, curiously tilting her head as they observed the hole. Listening to Fade speak, Zaca nodded her head in both excitement and agreement. Crouching down onto her knuckles, her tongue stuck out a little in focus as she shook her butt like a cat ready to pounce before diving in. Zaca's small and narrow body disappeared down the hole with ease, leaving only her long tail to stick out of the entrance. Didn't take long for said tail to start moving around and twitching a little as Fade could hear a startled yelp from within the burrow, before Zaca came scrambling out backwards in a puff of sand, one angry king crab in pursuit.

Zaca shook her snout a little, having gotten pinched but that didn't seem to stop her for long. A hiss emitted from her still open maw, full of razor sharp baby teeth before she lunged forward. Her surprise quickly melted away in the face of the challenge as she latched onto one of the crab's arms and began to kick rapidly at the crab as she fell over sideways into the sand, all the while emitting muffled growls through a mouth full of crab arm. Honestly it looked more like she was imitating how she'd seen Mal hunt more than anything, mimicking how the raptor would use his feet in combat.

Fade felt his heart lurch in his chest when he saw the crab following Zaca out of the hole. Admittedly, he hadn't expected it to be quite as large as it was. She was just...so *small*. He'd step in if he needed to. He had to make himself stand to the side so that she could fight with it herself. She wasn't going to learn if he didn't give her the opportunity... As it turned out, Zaca had it wholly under control. It was truly a ferocious display, if only on a much smaller scale. He let her fight with the crab and took the time to glance around their surroundings, ever keeping watch that nothing might catch them off-guard again.

Following one particularly hard kick to the crab's body came a loud crack. The crab itself was kicked away by a more reflexive kick this time around, Zaca having been a little spooked by the sound. At least until she put together what'd happened, laying there with the severed crab arm lodged firmly within her jaws. As the crab staggered, stunned itself by what just happened, Zaca managed to get to her feet and pounce onto it once again. Grabbing the crab's other arm and putting her weight into the front half of the crab, she managed to flip it onto its back.

Unsure what to do from that point, Zaca just kinda stood there growling softly with the crabs remaining arm still clutched in her jaws as the crab lay on its back. It was still alive but unable to do much of anything at this point. *What would Austa do?* Zaca thought momentarily to herself. As the idea struck her, the swimmer began to thrash around wildly, doing her best to 'fight' the already downed crab.

Fade chuckled quietly to himself, watching Zaca tear the crab to pieces. She *would* be a truly fearsome huntress one day. He couldn't be any more proud of her..