

## GENTLE PLAYMATE

*Today I've played with a baby octopus. They like to be caressed between their eyes,* Helena told me one evening in our taverna, beaming with happiness. I thought of kraken only as dangerous sea monsters or at best as a delicious dinner. I was still quite new on the island, could hardly dive and knew very little about the sea. Her story sounded like a myth for tourists to me.

A few years later on a snorkel trip I spotted the sparkle of an empty abalone shell on a small ledge below. Breathe in and dive down, and when I came close it moved a bit together with some surrounding pebbles. From behind I discovered two expressive eyes, golden brown – my first little octopus live! I remembered Helena's story and felt an urgent need for air.



Carefully I removed shell and stone, and a solid water jet was pumped at me - without ink. That means he wasn't really scared. My dare: What will happen if I touch him? Will his strong tentacles hold on to me and keep me down to drown? Draw breath again.

As my finger came slowly towards him he retreated a bit more in his tiny cave. Very gently I touched the spot between his eyes, it felt nice and soft and the water jet weakened. No hard tentacle grip at all, I was completely euphoric! As I went up again, the little head peeped out watching me, descending it hid again. We played this up and down and in and out a few times. His skin was brown and grey like the rock.

Suddenly an arm came out, a second and a third, and then he left his shelter and swam leisurely towards a stone that was covered with sturdy green plants. There he settled and immediately he grew long warts all over his body that turned flat and leaf green within seconds right before my very eyes. His head grew long and longer until he looked like one of the plump plants. He danced with them in the same rhythm of the current and blended perfectly into the environment. I couldn't spot him any more although I knew he was there straight in front of me.



After my next breath I headed for the place again in a sort of blind flight seeing nothing but swaying plants. When I came near one of them doubled volume like a rapidly rising yeast dough. The leaves shrank and vanished, the plant took off and swam as an octopus unto the next white stone. There the warty green skin smoothed and turned almost white with a few darker dots like the shadowy marks in the small rock dimples...



He spread his arms like flower petals and looked at me. I was fascinated by these alert and intelligent eyes. When I fondled him again a play of colours started: Blue, green, turquoise, pink and almost white seemed to glow from within and turned him into a slowly rotating rainbow. As if he'd reflected the waves above. He even touched my fingers very gently with one arm and walked up and down my hand with his suckers, curious and docile. I was flabbergasted! Ages later I learned that this play of colours comes along with courtship behavior of all calamars.

I felt like being in seventh heaven with completely derailed grinning features when I walked to the taverna in the evening where I told the story of my extra ordinary encounter. *And – chwere is? Chwy didn't you bring chim for dinner?* asked Leonidas, the young waiter. - - - *It was so sweet*

*and small, and I didn't have a knife with me! - - - Yochána, you don't need knife!  
You put finger into chis chole and turn over chis chead, then you bite chim  
between the eyes until che's dead. - - - Leonida, do you think, I could do this? He  
gave me a long serious look and then he shook his head and smiled: No,  
Yochána, I don't believe you can!*

Octopuses are amazing. I'm convinced they feel your attitude, whether you want to take them home for dinner or not. If accidentally you approach them too fast they spit and speed - out a cloud of dark ink and away like a rocket. When there's eye contact and you move slowly, they wait cautiously and observant, always open for a new playful experience.

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