



5 Times Zach Was Hugged (+ 1 Time He Hugged Someone Else)

Wild Kratts · Not Rated · 4535 words

by Arukir

Contents

5 Times Zach Was Hugged (+ 1 Time He Hugged Someone Else)..... 3

Chapter 1: 1) Worth It 3

Chapter 2: 2) Love (To Hate) 6

Chapter 3: 3) Hurry Up 8

Chapter 4: 4) Call For Help 10

Chapter 5: 5) Ground Crew 12

Chapter 6: +1) Congratulations 15

5 Times Zach Was Hugged (+ 1 Time He Hugged Someone Else)

Fandom: Wild Kratts Rating: Not Rated Category: Multi

Warnings: Creator chose not to add warnings

Relationships: Dabio/Donita Donata (Wild Kratts), Chris Kratt/Zach Varmitech, Aviva Corcovado/Zach Varmitech, Implied/past Aviva/Zach

Characters: Donita Donata, Dabio (Wild Kratts), Zach Varmitech, Zachbot (Wild Kratts), Chris Kratt, Gaston Gourmand, Aviva Corcovado, Jimmy Z (Wild Kratts), Martin Kratt, Koki (Wild Kratts), Tortuga Crew (Wild Kratts)

Tags: 5+1 Things, Hugs, Unplanned Pregnancy, Panic Attacks, Because apparently all of my Zach Fics include panic attacks, Pets, Nicknames, Redemption, Pre-Relationship, Pre-Canon, Post-Canon, Phobias, Implied/Referenced Abuse, Hurt/Comfort, Fluff and Angst, Villains to Heroes, sorta - Freeform, Team Bonding, Team Dynamics, Team as Family, Those last three apply to the villains, My 149th fic overall :), Touch-Starved, Touchy-Feely, Haphephobia, aka fear of being touched, Zach Varmitech Needs a Hug, he just really doesn't want one, but gets several anyways, Non-Consensual Touching

Words: 4535 Chapters: 6 chapters Status: Complete Published: 2024-10-07

Zach throughout the years, dealing with both touchphobia and touch starvation, and how he learns to trust again.

As of 24 June, 2025, this is my 10th fic to reach 100 kudos! ☐

Chapter 1: 1) Worth It

Hate: NO! Nonono!

It's been a while since I watched the show, so if Zach is a hugger with No Sense Of Personal Space in canon... Uh, just go along with this anyways, please?

Throughout Zach Varmitech's life, touch never meant anything good. He was small, weak, and annoying — basically, he had a very large target on his back, and the whole world just loved to take aim.

Then he built his Zachbots, and the world couldn't get to him anymore. The only touch he felt after that was cold, comforting metal; exactly as he liked it.

And if he woke up in the middle of certain nights and wished there was someone else there? If sometimes during fights he considered letting his enemy get to him just to feel their skin on his? If every once in a while he thought about making a softer, warmer version of his Zachbots?

Well, no one ever had to know about that, did they? His mind was stronger than his body, and the logical knowledge that touch wasn't actually desirable beat his body's animalistic desire for, ugh, other people.

Several blissful years passed where he successfully managed to avoid people altogether, except for a texting war he kept up with Aviva. They talked more as enemies than they ever had as... friends, much to his delight amusement frustration.

Then he was hired by a crazy fashion designer who wanted him to build something morally corrupt, legally dubious, and completely against common sense.

It was the best job he'd ever had. The Pose Beam was so delightfully bizarre and unique, a challenge he wanted more of. He just *had* to see the woman who hired him in person, so he insisted that they meet up for the first live test.

She was a... very forceful woman. He'd barely stepped foot in her jet before she stuffed him into a closet with a black turtleneck and the order to change out of his 'tacky suit' *immediately*. Professional was apparently cliché in Donita Donata's book.

After being held hostage in front of a mirror to 'fix that ridiculous hairstyle, Zachary darling' for *half an hour*, Zach was regretting both the decision to leave his Zachbots outside *and* the decision to come in the first place.

Seeing thin, horned, savannah horse-thingies waltzing up a runway in a pink glow honestly made it worth it. Actually, the big check Ms Donata wrote made it worth it, but the hilariously bizarre sight was a good bonus.

"Zachary—"

"It's Zach." He corrected for the *thousandth* time.

"—you are a *genius*!" Ms Donata finished as if he never spoke, as she had the last thousand times. He preened at the praise, having forgotten how nice it felt to hear words like that in person. "This will revolutionize my shows. Dabio, celebrate."

"Yes, Donita." Dabio grinned. "Yay!"

The big idiot was almost adorable, twirling around with his arms up, and Zach soon found himself giggling maniacally in joint celebration. Then Dabio did something that completely ruined the moment; he picked Zach up in a bearhug.

Zach froze in panic, mouth open in a silent scream he couldn't quite force out, mind stuttering at the first human touch he'd felt in years. A too-tight squeeze rebooted his brain enough to start uselessly flailing against the larger man's hold, kicking and screeching. "No! Nonono *put me down! Put me down! PUT ME DOWN RIGHT NOW!*"

"Dabio, release him." Ms Donata ordered sharply, eyes wide. Zach fell to the floor, scrambling away until his back hit a desk. "Darling, are you-? Dabio, get something for him to breath into."

They didn't mention it after he left, but Dabio never tried to hug him again. Zach never thanked Donita for calming him down, never even acknowledged it.

But he still came back when she needed the Pose Beam repaired.

Chapter 2: 2) Love (To Hate)

Tolerate: ugh, fine.

Zach and Aviva being exes is one of my favorite theories. I do think they're better as rivals/enemies/frenemies than as a couple, though.

Aviva owed him *big time*.

Yes, his Zachbots were malfunctioning and threatening her precious Wild Rats (who would've thought he'd ever meet Chris and whoever Kratt again? Especially like *this?*).

Yes, he'd have to reprogram them anyways.

Yes, he very much wanted to avoid a murder charge (especially with those two, enemies or otherwise, not that he was admitting that).

But none of that changed the fact that Aviva *called him for help*. She couldn't hack his systems in time to save her team, she *needed him*, and he was never going to let her live it down.

He sat on the cleanest rock he could find, hunched over his laptop, fingers clacking quickly enough to almost distract him from the fact that he was outside without his Zachbots.

"Can't you go any faster, Varmitech?" Aviva complained, pacing.

Zach smirked. "Real genius takes time, Corcovado."

"You better not be stalling purpose, Zach!" Aviva growled, her professionalism lasting longer than he thought it would but still snapping under her temper.

"Believe it or not, my programs are complicated and delicate." Zach growled back. Oh, how he'd missed hated arguing with her in person. Texting wasn't nearly as *aggravating* or as much fun. "It's going to take me a while, but don't worry — I'll save your *pwecious wittle* teammates for you, since you *can't~*"

"Move over and let me see it." Aviva demanded, grabbing his shoulder to push him to the side and gain access to his laptop.

Zach yelped, torn between jumping away and not leaving her alone with his laptop. "Stop, you're going to mess up the program!"

Two hours of tug-of-war and reluctantly taking turns clacking away at keys later, the Zachbots were finally back to normal and the annoying no-longer-kids he used to know were perfectly safe.

"We did it!" Aviva cheered, laughing.

"You don't have to sound so surprised." He sniffed, gesturing between himself and her. "Between the world's greatest and second greatest inventors, it was *hardly* a challenge."

"Aw, thanks for calling me the greatest, Zach." Aviva winked, pulling him into a side hug.

Zach tensed up, rolling his eyes, but didn't pull away. He never did, with her. "You know what I meant, you arrogant bitch!"

Aviva just laughed harder.

Chapter 3: 3) Hurry Up

Unnoticed: Huh?

This is a very loose definition of hug, but I really wanted to write this scene, so...

Gourmand is mean and might be schizophrenic, but he's loyal to his teammates (at least in this fic).

"Hurry it up, Zach!" Gourmand growled, looking behind his shoulder.

"I am hurrying!" Zach yelled, though he was too out of breath to manage anything above a sorta-raised voice. He knew he was falling behind, but it was hardly his fault! He hadn't run like this in *years*, not since he made his Zachbots. Now he was sweaty, and hot, and thirsty, and dirty — these were hardly ideal running conditions.

(The fact that his EMP generator was the reason he was running without his Zachbots still didn't make it his fault. The Wild Rats were the ones who broke it, after all!)

"Zach, I swear I will leave you behind if you don't *hurry up*!" Gourmand threatened, making Zach squeak and go just a little bit faster. "You can't possibly be this slow."

"Well, excuse me for not being built like a, um..." Zach paused, trying to remember the word. "Those muscley unicorn-thingies?"

"You mean Rhinos?" Gourmand asked, unimpressed. He got a faraway, distracted look on his eyes, but didn't slow down. "You know, Rhinoceros Flambe is really good..."

"I'll take your word for it." Zach panted. At this point, he probably would've just collapsed and waited to be caught, if it had been the Rats chasing him. Hell, if one of the other Villains were chasing him he'd probably still surrender, wrath be damned.

But the actual cops just had to get involved this time, didn't they? Oh well, at least the Wild Rats were too busy *lying through their teeth* to help with the chase. That's the part people always forget about the Heroes — they don't care about the law any more than the Villains do.

"I've got an old hunter's hut at the top." Gourmand finally, finally, *finally* stopped at the base of a small cliff. "They won't be able to find us in there, trust me."

He expected Zach to climb? Zach would've pointed out just how utterly ridiculous that idea was, if the world hadn't decided to tilt sideways at that exact moment. Zach really wasn't used to running this long...

"Would you quit being overdramatic and just- Zach?" Gourmand crouched over him, the realization that Zach actually couldn't move and wasn't pretending clear on his face. "You really are a wimp, aren't you?"

Zach groaned in response, trying to stand up and just rolling over instead. He idly wondered if he could convince the cops that Gourmand had forced him into this and left him for dead. Maybe the Rats would vouch for him if he agreed not to tattle about their unlicensed weaponry (Creature Power Suits definitely counted, he knew the laws of the area well enough to know that).

Gourmand stood, looking between Zach and the cliff a few times, biting his lip. What exactly was the big lug waiting for? The cops wouldn't be too far behind them, he needed to go before they both got arrested.

(Not that Zach was worried for him, of course. If they both got arrested, it would be harder for Zach to play the victim and use him as a scapegoat. Nothing more to it, really!)

Gourmand sighed, running a hand down his face. "You are more trouble than you're worth, you pathetic son of a..." He continued to grumble under his breath, picking Zach up and turning toward the cliff.

Before Zach could do more than let out a questioning hum, Gourmand was climbing up the cliff one-handed, the other arm busy holding Zach against his chest.

They barely managed to get to the top in time, the door to the hidden hut closing just as the authorities reached the bottom of the cliff. It was a close call, but it wouldn't have been if Gourmand had just been smart and abandoned him.

"Why?" Zach managed to ask after a few minutes resting against a wall, eyes half-lidded as he studied his fellow villain.

"Shut up." Gourmand answered.

(Later, Zach would agree to giving him a year's worth of free vehicle repairs. With a fair bit of loud complaining, of course).

Chapter 4: 4) Call For Help

Accepted: When did I become okay with this?

I learned about this ship recently and I love it.

Am I the only one who thinks that Zach looks and sounds like a pigeon when he's startled?

Zach Varmitech was not a Good Guy. He wasn't! He just maybe, sorta, kinda... felt a little sorry for certain animals, sometimes.

It wasn't his fault pigeons were a lot cuter than he'd thought they'd be, okay?!

"So, let me get this straight." Chris grinned, leaning back against a tree. Zach got the feeling he was going to regret this. "You. Want me. To help you. On a Creature Rescue?"

Oh, Zach was definitely going to regret this. "Are you in or not? It's a simple question, Green Guy, you don't need to be so *smug* about it."

"Oh, I definitely need to be this smug about it." Chris retorted, moving to follow the Zachbots back towards the Varmijet, which Zach took as a 'yes'. "But if you really want help, Zach, we should get the whole team on the case."

"If you try to tell Aviva and the others about this," Zach growled from his perch on top of a Zachbot, "I'm locking you in a cell and saving Quincy myself!"

"Quincy?" Chris asked. Oops. "You named one? You named one!"

"Shut up!" Zach squawked, blushing enough for his pale skin to almost appear red-dish. Chris's excited staring made him break down much too quickly. He groaned loudly, making sure that his displeasure at admitting this was clear. "Okay, yes, I named a city birdy thingy. You rubbed off on me more than I thought, you happy now?"

Months ago, secretly meeting up to point out a technological flaw in exchange for a favor had seemed like a good idea. The following meetings had just seemed like good business and an excuse to see Chris. Now, Zach was halfway convinced that Aviva had cooked up a brainwashing device and given it to the cute Wild Rat.

Chris reached up and grabbed Zach by the shirt, pulling him off the Zachbot and into a hug. Zach yelped in surprise, making the Zachbots beep in concern, but they were used enough to the green Kratt to not immediately react without a clear order.

"Yes, for your information, I'm very happy." Chris chuckled. Zach rolled his eyes. "Come on, Zach; you're growing! Be proud of it."

"You be proud of it, I'm sticking with ashamed." Zach responded, tucking his head under Chris's chin but not hugging back. After a moment, he pulled away, somewhat surprised when he was instantly let go. "Now, if you're done stalling, we still need to save Quincy!"

It was much later, after Chris had taken many 'blackmail photos' of Quincy sitting on Zach's head (Zach was 80% sure he was kidding about the blackmail), that the inventor remembered the hug.

Sitting in his jet, surrounded by Zachbots, watching Quincy eat, Zach wondered if any of the Wild Rats had ever even *heard* of any level of personal space whatsoever.

A deeper part of him that he did a decent job of ignoring wondered how he could get Chris to do it again.

Chapter 5: 5) Ground Crew

Used To It: Alright, bring it in...

This chapter is the last one I finished, as I wrote the next chapter before this one.

This chapter honestly isn't my favorite, but I hoped it showed how Zach has gotten to the point where hugs aren't uncomfortable for him anymore. Or at least he's willing to accept hugs to make someone he cares about happy.

Zach wasn't entirely sure when the Wild Kratts had decided they could call him up whenever they wanted a bit of extra help.

He was even less sure of when it had become true.

"No no no, you big blue idiot!" Zach hissed into his computer, sitting crosslegged in the Tortuga. The person he used to be would be scouring the room for parts, instead he was stuck babysitting. "Blue Boy, get out of the way of the laser before I fire it *anyways!*"

"It's a little hard to keep track of where I'm going with all these Zachbots flying around!" Martin complained, his voice having an odd chirping quality from his current Cheetah form. "Give me a second and I'll get out of the wa- oops."

"Oops'?" Zach repeated, watching an alert pop up on his laptop screen. "HOW DID YOU ALREADY DAMAGE THE LASER?!"

"Well, this is going better than I expected." Koki smirked, sharing a pizza with Jimmy across the room. "Better than the time we tested the gravity bombs, anyways."

Zach's eye started twitching at the reminder of that particular incident. "How much longer until Aviva's back, again?"

"Her niece's birthday is tomorrow, she should be back the day after." Jimmy responded around a bite of cheese. "I can pilot us closer to her after the test, if you want, to speed things along."

Zach scoffed. "I do not need things sped along, Gamer Guy, I'm perfectly capable—How the Hell did they even get that stuck there?!" He yelled at his computer screen, growling as he frantically typed commands to his Zachbots.

"Hey, Zach?" Koki started, once the typing had slowed back down to normal crazy inventor levels.

"Yeah, Orange Lady?" He'd tried to call her 'Phone Lady' at first, but a wrench much too close to his face quickly changed his mind.

"Is Aviva the only person you don't have a nickname for?"

Zach looked up from his laptop screen, blinking at the unexpected question. No-one ever really asked about his nicknames beyond telling him to stop calling them something. After a minute, he slowly answered. "...I don't have one for Gourmand."

"Why not?" Koki asked cheerfully, boredom and curiosity fueling her as usual.

Because when he tried to give him one, Zach found himself proof-reading cook-books and learning waaay more about a stripey-horsey's internal organs than he ever wanted know, in exchange for his freedom. "He didn't like it." Zach shrugged, returning to his laptop.

With Martin finally out of the way and the remote repairs finished, Zach fired the Tortuga's new laser, taking out several Zachbots while leaving the area around them unharmed.

The laser's secondary affect of boosting the Creature Power Suits went off without a hitch, and the Bros were soon zooming their way through the remaining Zachbots. Now all he needed to do was get the charge time down on the laser...

Actually, this was a free job, Aviva could deal with the charging issue herself.

"It worked!" Jimmy laughed, clapping.

"Good job, Zach." Koki walked over, lightly punching Zach's arm.

Zach flinched, more out of habit than pain, and grinned. "I told you it would."

"Yes, yes, you were right." Koki rolled her eyes. "I can't believe it really worked, though. If we can get the beam smaller, we'll have a mostly-safe way to send the Bros emergency assistance or power. This is genius, City Rat."

"City Rat'?" Zach repeated, tilting his head.

"Cause you're not quite a Wild Kratt." Jimmy guessed, bringing the pizza over. "I like it."

Zach humphed, not admitting that he kinda liked it too. He stared at the pizza that was put in front of him. The last few successful weapons tests had ended in the Crew hugging and jumping excitedly at their success, with Zach watching in bemusement, not semi-calm snacking.

Zach noticed the other two staring at him and realized they were trying to include him in the celebration because it was his design. Well, his design after Aviva had triple-checked and modified it, but still...

It was the first one of these things he'd run without her looking over his shoulder, and they were being nice to him about it. Koki had even kept the mocking down to a minimum during the process. He sighed and nimbly jumped off the weird table-thing he'd been sitting on.

"Yay, we did it." He deadpanned, making jazz hands. "Don't you guys normally get all touchy-feely about these things? Or is that just when it's Aviva's inventions?"

He internally winced, not having meant that to come out like that. Sarcastic was just the headspace he lived in, he guessed.

"Well, we thought you'd..." Jimmy trailed off, but 'freak out' was easy to guess.

"I'm in the turtle-ship-thingy, not stealing anything, helping you Wild Rats." Zach growled. "My comfort zone was breached a while ago."

Not that anyone had ever actually cared much about his comfort zone. They usually just cared about how unproductive panic attacks made him. Avoiding hugging *each other* so as to not exclude him was... New. And not unappreciated, if he was being honest.

When Koki and Jimmy still seemed unsure, he just raised an expectant eyebrow at them, trying to make his expression stop being a scowl. He must have at least partially succeeded, as the next thing he knew he was being pulled into a group hug by the grinning ground Crew.

Zach was not a Good Guy. But maybe he could admit, to himself, that being friends with the good guys wasn't too bad.

Chapter 6: +1) Congratulations

Love: Do you want a hug?

TW: mentions of periods. Not graphic mentions, pretty much just the word is said, but still...

Donita having bad periods is a personal headcanon of mine. She just looks like someone who would have hard periods.

Donita having a baby (or twins) and cutting down on the more dangerous side of her business is my favorite way to 'redeem' her, so that'll probably appear in more of my fics in the future.

I hope you all enjoyed this 5+1! It's the longest fic I've written in a while, and I'm moderately proud of it. :)

Zach sat in Donita's jet, happily eating tiny sandwiches. Koki was in a cell in the cargo hold, and he was trying to keep the two women from attacking each other without taking sides. As it turned out, his Zachbots were really good at guarding people from harm without hampering other activities, such as sabotage or escape.

Zach hummed happily, proud of the balance he'd struck between still-a-thieving-lying-cheating-criminal-with-Villain-friends and genius-inventor-with-empathy-towards-animals-and-goody-two-shoes-friends. It wasn't easy, after all, but he was managing.

He popped another sandwich into his mouth while he waited for Donita to get out of the bathroom. He loved Dabio's sandwiches, and he hoped the brute escaped his ground-bound battle with the Bros so he could make more. Did that count as rooting for a side? Ah well, it wasn't like anyone was going to know.

Unless Aviva actually managed to build a mind reading device like she threatened to do, but that was an issue for future Zach. Current Zach was too busy deciding whether to risk Donita's wrath by eating all the sandwiches or save some for her to care.

Well, she *had* been very understanding about his sorta-anti-hero thing, so maybe he could save her a few sandwiches. He'd organized the sandwiches by type, size, and shape practically the moment after he sat down — now he just needed to figure out what combination to save for her.

He was in the middle of deciding whether two round cucumber sandwiches were worth a triangle of grilled cheese when he realized just how long the diva had been in the bathroom. It was long enough that he'd assume it was that time of the month with any other woman, but he'd know if that was the case with Donita.

(He'd had the misfortune of conducting emergency repairs on her jet during her period once. The poor woman was unable to get out of bed, much less pull off plots, it was so bad. The experience shook him enough to start providing chocolate at every Legion Of Villainous Villainhood meeting he hosted, for lack of anything else to do to help).

Curious (and a little worried), Zach got up to check on her. Even a top villainess like her could fall victim to something as ridiculously simple as a slip on wet tile, after all.

"Nita, ya done yet?" He scowled, knocking on the locked door. Receiving no response, he pressed his ear to the pink metal, hearing a soft noise that almost sounded like... Crying?! Donita Donata did not cry. "Donita, are you alright?"

Still no response. Cursing under his breath, Zack pushed a button on his watch to summon a Zachbot, then got out his lockpicks. "Listen, I'm coming in, do not hit me when I do."

The Zachbot arrived before he finished picking the lock, so he ordered it to rip the door off the hinges and hoped that Donita wasn't hurt. A part of him that wasn't panicking as badly as the rest hoped she was decent, fearing both hers and Dabio's reactions if he saw her when she wasn't.

She was indeed decent, sitting on the toilet lid, staring at a little stick he only recognized from TV. Mascara ran in tear trails down her face, but her expression gave zero clues whether it was happy crying or sad crying.

"Uh, does that mean what I think it does?" Zach blinked, walking slowly closer. Donita apparently could hear him, as she slowly nodded. "Well... Shit."

Donita choked out a strangled laugh, tilting her head up at him, looking more lost than he'd thought the confident diva could be. She opened her mouth to speak, but closed it a second later, looking back to the pregnancy test.

Zach wasn't sure what to do, but he did know that a bathroom probably wasn't the best place for her to think. He tried to help her up, failed even though she wasn't resisting in the slightest, then waved his Zachbot over to do it for him.

The Zachbot sat her down on one of the couches that riddled her jet. Zach ordered it to get her some blankets and a warm drink, trying to remember what normal humans found comforting instead of dark metal and too much coffee, letting it zoom off to find what he wanted.

He stood awkwardly next to the couch, wondering what he was supposed to do. Was she overcome with joy? Having a panic attack? Was she wondering if Dabio would make a good father? Was it... Not Dabio's? He supposed it didn't matter, he was equally out of his depth in every scenario.

The crying continued until he honestly couldn't take it anymore. He cleared his throat loudly, already second-guessing himself. "Hey, Nita?" He waited for her to make a sound of acknowledgement. "If Dabio hits me for this, I'm sending you my medical bill."

"Hits you for wha—" Donita cut herself off as Zach sank onto the couch and hesitantly wrapped his arms around her. She froze and he almost pulled back, but then she leaned her head against his shoulder and let out a sob. "Oh, Zachary!"

"Is this a good thing or a bad thing?" He asked after a second, patting her head gently. She wasn't yelling at him, so he assumed he wasn't messing this up too badly.

"...I don't know." She admitted quietly. "Darling, I can't be a mother! I'm—"

"Too old?" Zach guessed snarkily, wincing at a scowl that was much too close to his face. "Sorry, it's hard to turn it off."

"I'm a villain." She corrected with a hiss. "What kind of life would this be for a child? Wild animals, constant fights, parents that were always busy with other things... I don't know the first thing about raising a kid."

"Well, if you need help, the Zachbots are surprisingly good at changing diapers — don't ask." He shuddered playfully, squeezing her a little tighter when she pressed into him. "And I bet Gaston knows a bunch of stuff about formula, so you could give him a call if you're too busy to nurse."

"You would really help out, Darling?" Donita asked, smiling.

"Well, duh." He rolled his eyes. "You got a name yet? 'Cause I think Gaston would be pretty honored if you went with Gus."

"Not Zachary?"

"That name belongs to *me*." He huffed. "And it's Zach!"

"Whatever you say, Darling." She chuckled. She paused when the Zachbot returned to drape a blanket over her and hand her a cup of tea. "Thank you, Silver dear."

"Please stop naming my Zachbots."

"Hmm... No." She smirked, sipping at her tea. After a moment, she asked "Zachary, do you think I'd make a good mother?"

"No clue." He shrugged. "I mean, probably not, you get angry *really easily*."

"Zachary!"

"But, hey, that doesn't mean you can't *learn*." He added quickly. "And Dabio will love the little brat, at least. It is Dabio's, right?"

"Dabio's going to be a father." Donita's face fell in horror that was only partially faked. "We can't handle this."

"You have to." Zach countered, making her fall silent. He hesitated, then slowly continued. "I'll help if you need, you know that, right? I can build toys for it, at least."

"Do not call my child an 'it'."

"Hey, you already got the mama bear thing going!"

"You've been hanging around the Rats too much, Zachary." She mock-scolded. "You didn't even try to call them 'big dog things'."

"Yes, well, apparently I *can* be taught." He grinned. The jet fell silent for a few minutes, but it was more peaceful than before. Zach felt Donita's arm move to squeeze his waist, so he squeezed back. "Hey, Nita?"

"Yeah?"

"Congratulations."

"...thanks."

— end of "5 Times Zach Was Hugged (+ 1 Time He Hugged Someone Else)" —