Throne of Flies

by Bremmatron33

Summary

With Shockwave and Starscreams Predacons causing problems for team Prime Optimus thinks why not fight beast with beast. Even if they're not his beasts. Unfortunaly Knock Out has to deal with a little more than sour sparks when he goes home.

Notes

Eyy Someone wanted a sequel for this so yay its happening. Hope you like it. Thank you Artemis1253 for taking interest!

See the end of the work for more notes.
In the dark intense warmth of the brooding room Knock Out sat at the edge of the pool, Weaver at his side, and vented in the sweet scent as he ran his servos over his already blistering newborns. He had only laid a few days ago but the thought of being away from them kept ping something in him, drawing him back. Weaver was happy to have him since the first two layings he found Knock Out a tad distant. He was happy to see the hive’s sensibilities starting to sink in.

With Shriek away on mining duty Weaver had stepped up to take care of their Sire as he usually did and was eager to get as much alone time with Knock Out was possible so it was a treat when Knock Out chose to spend time with him even if he was still quiet and languid.

“So many warriors this year, perhaps even a royal heir.” Reaching into the pool Weaver pulled out a rather large colorful egg. Instead of just the brilliant copper it was splashed and streaked with reds and whites. Speckles of black and silver. Even the seams on the egg seemed more complex but Knock Out still wasn’t good at telling what the markings meant.

“Should I be worried? I won’t have to kill them later on or something will I?”

“Of course not~” Weaver pulled Knock Out close and nuzzled against his neck. “They are our metal, our energon, our spark! Heirs are for expansion! You find a queenless swarm, you offer them an heir, they become part of the swarm but separate enough to not risk spreading your influence too thin. Keeps heirs happy. Swarm exchanges…. some of us go with them, some of them come to you. Keeps genes good. Brings in new breeders for you to try.”

“That doesn’t sound like something you’d like. Losing your status.”

“You can bring in as many breeders as you wish. Choose you wish. I am proud but even I understand variety. One day you could even meet another queen, another sire. Exchange breeders. I would consider it an honor even though I would hate to leave you.”

“Ah….and here I thought you’d expected me to breed with whoever beat you. Even the ones I hosted.”

Weaver chirred lowly as he thought. “Nothing wrong with that….not really. That’s why we do things our way. Being your frame your discomfort is understandable but….unnecessary. Trust me.”

Knock Out could only laugh. Surprised even bringing the idea up didn’t disgust him as much as it would have. Hopefully they could get a space bridge running so they could get off earth…or perhaps he could get someone else to take over the swarm before that could become a problem. Weaver could sense the idea was still plaguing his processor.

“I’ll make sure you’re comfortable. There are plenty of swarms at home. Don’t fear your sparks they love you.”

“We’ll figure something out. I’m sure I can trick some other mech to help grow the swarm if it comes to that.” The two continued to watch over their brood happily before Knock Out started to feel tired again. Weaver filled him up with chilled energon and nectar and sat with the leader till the sun started to dip and the night bugs started to wake.

He woke suddenly to the sound of his balcony doors sliding open. The glow of Terabite’s optics settling his spark. “Still awake pretty boy? Shriek would be yelling at you.” Her voice fritzed and growled with arousal, of all the breeders she was enjoying Shriek’s absence the most, making sure to
take care of him whenever he needed and keep him company during his lonely nights.

“‘You woke me.’ He wondered when Weaver had left. Always devoted he’d made sure to set Knock Out up in his berth but left with that. Knock Out was surprised he didn’t stay but then perhaps he knew Terabite tended to come after her long perimeter checks.

“‘Oh~ I’m sorry. Is there anything you need tonight?’ She moved like the shadows in the room, at one place and then the next in a blink of an optic. Kneeling on the edge of the berth she took no time finding a spot for herself. Pulling Knock Out close and breathing in his scent. She was slick and wet from the heavy rain falling outside. ‘Mmmhmm~ You alway smell so good after laying. Weaver was so lucky.’

“I’m surprised you didn’t fight him for it considering he got so much of my time already. I think just a nice rest tonight I still get so sore after this.”

“I don’t think I could control myself. I’d overwhelm you. Mind so far off on other things to worry about the eggs. I’ve been more than happy protecting you at night. We’ve had plenty of fun haven’t we~?” Knock Out felt Terabite’s arm around him, her sharp fingers rubbing small circles into his sore middle. “I wouldn’t want to upset you in a time like that either. I know my form isn’t your favorite. I can change it you know? If you’d like? If it would help.”

It was tempting. Weaver had stopped bothering him being a bulkier more monsterish looking thing but Terabite was slimmer. Definitely bigger and leagues more powerful and friendly than Airachnid but the cadence of her voice and the way she moved were the same enough to trick his mind. He wasn’t so much afraid of the other ex-Con but the idea of her pinged something feral in him….something he wasn’t too proud of even if she did kill Breakdown. Terabite was a good looking mech though and he could never make a mech change something they obviously liked. “Don’t be silly. You chose this form because you like it. You don’t look anything like her really.”

Terabite smiled a toothy grin and buried her face in the back of Knock Out’s neck. “You want to slaughter her~. Rip her limb from limb. Not just because of how she slighted you either….it’s the hive, she was the old queen. We’ll catch the little tick one day….I chose this form for that very purpose. I’ll ensnare her and you can have all the satisfaction you need. Drink her energon~ Devour her spark!”

“Should you really be saying that Terabite? Were you not from her only clutch. Absorbed most of the others before they even had a chance to grow? I figured you would have already tried to kill me.”

Terabite hissed and pressed kisses wherever she could, purring as she pulled Knock Out tight against her. “She was no Queen. All the swarm knows that. She could have been….if she wasn’t so selfish and single minded. Set on her depraved collection. Obsessed with the pretty Autobot. You are my Queen, my Sire, my Radiance. I follow your spark rest assured.” Terabite went quiet. Knock Out knew she had wanted to keep that information as quiet as long as she possibly could and at first he had been angry, disgusted, but then it became sort of satisfying. “Blue…is such a pretty color isn’t is Sire? I find myself so drawn to it. The color of life, the color of death. Are you drawn to it too now because of us….because of him?”

“It...was just a perk. It is a lovely color but….I’ve never seen the exact same shade and I never will. It was his and only his. Every other blue will just be blue. Call it pretentious if you will.” Knock Out vented slowly as he tried to calm his spark. The memories of his beloved’s downfall still so fresh in his mind. “It makes sense for you bugs though so I can understand why.”

“One day you’ll find a color you love again.” Knock Out felt Terabite’s weight shift and it felt good to have her other arm rest on his hip.
“Oh I’m starting to find every color just so interesting again. Perhaps it’s even time for a change of paint myself.”

By morning he was alone again but not for long. He had went to the private room to shower and found Dustoff in there, already brushing at his wet wings. Knock Out pulled the brush from his servos as he sat behind the moth. “This is your fifth bath in three days. Something wrong?” An embarrassed blush dusted Dustoff’s cheeks ruining his usually calm and stoic persona.

“I-it’s disgusting! I think I have mites. I can feel them moving it’s maddening! I was sure the oil would kill them but it keeps happening!” Knock Out grimaced as he ran the brush through again and again, shaking free black little specs both dead and alive as well as clumps of sticky black goo. He still wasn’t used to...fluffy Insecticons, only really having to deal with Dustoff who usually minded himself. The drone’s had hard and shiny shells protecting them despite having a strange metal and Weaver and Terabite only had a strange short of bristle on their frames.

“A wasp once got in and buried itself in my upholstery and that was disgusting enough so I can’t imagine. Did you get wet and forget to dry off, I think you have mold in here?” Dustoff didn’t answer but Knock Out could feel the shame heat up his field. “You know the fibers of your wings are too dense for that!”

“I was already wet and tired! Can you blame me! I tried a dust bath first but it was too late. Is there anything you can do right now?”

“I think an intense brushing should be fine. Perhaps a weak acid bath as well. I’ll go get you something.”

Dustoff pouted now knowing his misery was only going to last a little while longer and wanting to milk it for all he could. “I hate this jungle! It’s always raining! There’s mud everywhere! It’s always sticky and humid! How can you stand it!

Knock Out chuckled as stood to gather supplies for Dustoff’s bath. “Well….we have air conditioning so that’s nice enough.

When he and Knock Out were both clean and content Knock Out lead the fussy breeder to his balcony. The sound of heavy rain instantly lulling Dustoff and the light breeze drying off his metal. “Stay close to the tarp or we’re going to have to do this all over again.”

“Mmhmm~” Letting Knock Out lead him Dustoff sat and watched the mesmerizing sheet as it fell. As much as he despised being wet even he had to admit the jungle was beautiful and the strange calls of animals in the distance reminded him so much of Cybertrons wilds. “I miss home. When will those damn idiots finish killing one another and find a way to get us back there?”

“No time soon I’m sure. You’ve seen the way they were and even if Megatron goes or Optimus goes they’ll just keep fighting. All that matters is we’re safe here and my shields can take up to a week even under all of the Nemesis fire power.” Reaching over to one of the outside cabinets Knock Out pulled out a small rolled up mat. Smoothing it out in front of Dustoff the other mech plucked the small satchel of pieces and started setting up the game board. “We have plenty of fuel, privacy, and enough space for you all to stretch your wings so let’s just count our blessings.”

“Oh I know. This place is leagues better than that gross somehow crowded and empty broken down ship but it doesn’t make me miss home less. You’ll love the wilds. They’ll take some getting used to and you’ll wind up dusty and scratched till you learn your way around but the freedom of them, the quiet tranquility, the beauty, they’re nothing like the cities.”
“Well that is why they’re called the wilds I’m sure.”

“When we’re home we can build you a proper hive. Set up proper rooms. Get you proper nectar. The stuff we make here is good but it doesn’t taste the same.”

“Shriek told me that too.” Knock Out went quiet the feeling of Dustoff’s homesickness so strong he couldn’t help but think of his own district. If he did get home how long would he really last out in the wilds? How long till he just couldn’t take it anymore. The swarm was a comforting burden but a burden nonetheless.

As fate would have it their wishes and concerns suddenly became much more relevant.

It was late into the afternoon and the two were still in the middle of their game when one of the swarm’s warriors crossed the room to the both of them. He looked serious, almost upset as he moved with purpose.

Taking a knee Snapjaw bowed his helm just slightly before speaking. “The Prime is outside the wall Sire. He is alone. Were we scheduled to make a delivery that may have slipped the mind?”

Knock Out looked to Dustoff for reassurance, the moth shaking his head. ‘No. He never responded to my messages asking when he wanted his next delivery. So I assumed he didn’t need anything.”

“Should I send him away? We have plenty of supplies but with the new clutch in the incubation pools that could quickly change.”

“I’ll talk to him. Shriek and the others are at a mine right now so we can honor the deal with no worries.”

“Yes Sire.” Snapjaw held out one of his massive servos and waited for Knock Out to take it so he could assist him up. The leader’s servo felt so small in his own, his touch tingled pleasantly. Perhaps even too pleasantly. “Sire~”

“Keep it behind you panels.” Reaching up with his free servo Knock Out tugged and shook Snapjaw’s mandible as if he was pinching a young mech’s cheek. “As handsome as you are and as proud of you I am that won’t be happening. Ever.” Slowly he shook his head and sighed as he tugged his bodyguard along. Whispering to himself under his breath. “Not as long as the idea of fragging my own offspring still bothers me. Who knows how long that little bit of sanity will last me though.” Dustoff only chuckled as he sprawled out, now with nothing to do but relax.

“You’ll get used to it one day Sire. Just like everything else.”

Just as Snapjaw said as he flicked a few buttons shifting the barrier Optimus stood just outside the light wall looking tired and weary as always and even a little sad. Knock Out took mind and put on an even tone. “Someone die big guy?”

Optimus sighed and cast his gaze away. He took his time responding. “Yes. I- It would be wise to send your guard away. I won’t bring you any harm and I believe you will wish to discuss this in private.”

Knock Out turned to Snapjaw and pat him lightly on the arm. “Thank you for your escort but this may be sensitive information. No eavesdropping.”
“My trust within you never falters Sire. I will be at your call when you need me again.” With another bow Snapjaw stood and left. Knock Out watched him enter the hive before re-engaging the guise and stepping through the wall to the other side.

“Who died.” Optimus still wouldn’t look at him directly, perhaps still embarrassed or perhaps still lingering on the brief view he’d gotten of the hive. Knock Out had put in a lot of work making it not just livable but beautiful.

“Megatron.” Knock Out wished he could have felt more than just slight shock to the news but he didn’t.

“So you’re coming to collect on our bet then? I honestly said it as a joke that i’d serve my time in prison the day you killed Megatron but I don’t do more than sit around here with my swarm so how different is that going to be in an Autobot prison really?”

“Ah well~” A slight twinkle returned to the old Prime’s optic. “If you had been there I’m sure you would have stated that I did not kill him it was Bumblebee and it also happened to be night so the bet would be off…. but that is not why I’m here. While what I’m going to ask you may seem like prison I will try to make it as bearable as possible. Consider this pardon for your good behavior these past few months.”

“I’m listening.” Knock Out started to slowly pace as he calmed his spark. He hadn’t really expected Optimus to go through with the bet but he had been a naughty Con and he had killed a lot of Bots in his wartime so it was nice to have a confirmation.

“You have been very quiet and that is appreciated but you can not stay here on earth with your swarm. Humanity just isn’t ready. Cybertron is alive again. You should be there. We...may need you there. Ratchet….has chosen to stay behind and we have only been working on the planet for a few weeks and there have been injuries. Mostly Vehicons.”

Knock Out nodded understandingly. “I can’t just move the swarm. Were incubating at the moment.”

Optimus nodded now but Knock Out could feel the change of field. He was embarrassed. “H-how long does that take?”

“Anywhere from a few weeks to a month or so. Then there’s training, acclimating. You don’t want hatchlings running around without training they’re not like sparklings it’s like having a three dozen or so Bulkhead and Smokescreens running around. So that’s another two-three months to get them acclimated. Besides that a good chunk of my drones are off mining. I’d have to wait for them. You... could come back.”

Optimus dimmed his optics as he stared down at Knock Out. “I could but I do not think you will be here.”

“You…. might be right.” The two weren’t looking at each other now.

“Knock Out….I know your feelings. I respect them but we are up there trying to rebuild and Starscream and Shockwave are out there still. We’ve…..already been dealing with their rebellion. Even with just the two of them...Shockwave’s Predacons…”

“You want me to use my bugs against their beasts.” Optimus' guilty embarrassment was on full display now.

“It….would be appreciated. As a show of good faith I’m asking you come up with me with a few of your strongest. When things have….concluded here you call your swarm home and then we can part
on good terms after we’ve managed to secure Starscream and Shockwave. I do not know how our world will reform but I have learned much in my time so know I will not make the mistakes I made before hand.”

“This sounds so neat and clean yet I’m sure your soldiers still aren’t happy about how I treated their pets. Might get tense.”

“They….will be professional. However you will be monitored heavily. By Ultra Magnus. Which is why it might feel like prison.”

Knock Out laughed but was nervous. He trusted Optimus and if Starscream and Shockwave were panicked enough that they were working together then things couldn’t be good. Still… “What if I say no? I’ve set up in a very out of the way area. I was living on this planet in secret for years before Starscream ever called me and you’ve already said Ratchet’s staying with the government so if I’m a bad bot he can just handle what he needs to. Someone will have to get him energon after all!”

“We- have found a better alternative. Knock Out.” Slowly Optimus took a knee, like a stag trying to sit. Plates shaking as he minded everything in his way. “This is not a ploy to make you join us, this is not me trying to take you away from where you feel safe. This…. is not me trying to remove you from the place where Breakdown was lost and still lies.” There was another moment of introspection as he thought about what to say next. “This...is about asking you if you’d like to return home and for a bit of help and hindrance for you it can be that easy. I will warn you that again I can not let you stay and if you refuse the next Autobots you will likely see will not be asking you if you want to go back and you will be going to a real prison.”

Knock Out got the idea. Their original deal was useless to them now. They didn’t need him for fuel anymore so now he had to do this. He raised an optic ridge as he looked up at Optimus. “Someone can’t control Prowl?”

“Nothing in the universe can control Prowl I’m afraid. So?”

“Fine I’ll keep you safe from Pinky and the Brain for my freedom.” Knock Out enjoyed the Prime’s brief look of confusion. Let me go deal with my swarm.”

Life with the Autobots really was like prison. Aside from Smokescreen and sometimes Bumblebee none of the other Autobots would even talk to him unless they had to. Then again they could barely even look at him knowing the choices he’d made so they could go screw themselves anyway. They were the ones relying on his offspring to keep them safe. Still as the days quickly went by they slowly came around. With all their minor injuries they needed to honestly.

Still the handcuffs even in the medbay were a bit much. He was honestly only working well enough around them to spite the Lieutenant.

Most of the time it was just Vehicons and while the work was easy nothing else was.

Knock Out missed his Swarm instantly. He missed Shriek. He missed his breeders. He missed the jungle and the home he had made there. Cybertron which had once been a glittering memory of hope that he’d hung on to forever just seemed so bland and empty now. His warriors recognized his apathy before even Knock Out himself had a chance to come to terms with it taking whatever moments they could to be with him, to care for him, but they were there for a job. And them all being together for too long made everyone around them nervous.
Nights were the worst. They didn’t bother shooing him into some holding cell like the poor Vehicons who refused to cooperate, no they let him stay in his old quarters. Which might have just been worse. Sure he had his nice old berth and surprisingly Megatron hadn’t used it for target practice so most of the things he’d left were still there...along with all the bad memories. Not to mention Ultra Magnus stalking back and forth all night.

To top it all off his system started acting up on him as well. He knew it couldn’t have been his heat not with how....attentive....Shriek and the breeders had been and he had never gotten this charged up this quickly after laying before. He didn’t really have an answer for it only that it was extremely awkward dealing with it with judge Dredd outside his door.

It was just shy of a month in when things started getting….strange. As he was waiting for Ultra Magnus to apply his stasis cuffs and escort him to the medbay Knock Out couldn’t help but notice the abundant amount of scratches that were adorning the halls. He tried to keep his intrigue to himself but..they were just so obvious.

“Was...was there a fight out here I missed? I pride myself on staying out of trouble but this close to my quarters I would have heard anything.”

Magnus looked up slightly as he clicked the cuff shut firmly. “It was your insecticons. They were very adamant on the vandalism and I couldn’t exactly stop all of them. I suppose they don’t like my presence around you.”

“Well that’s a give in but they just want to kill you and eat your corpse. They know scent marking and territory displays don’t really affect vehicle cybertronians. Did one of the Predacons get close to the ship?”

“No.” Ultra Magnus paused for a moment. “Not that I’m aware. I will check the surveillance. There’s nothing to say Shockwave couldn’t have revived a rather……slinky Predacon.”

“We do have unnecessarily large vents. I know I can crawl around in them without even feeling claustrophobic.”

“That is good to know.” Ultra Magnus’ gaze narrowed quickly as he looked down at the medic again.

Knock Out rolled his optics. “I can’t fit through the vent in my room. It’s a cooling vent not a maintenance vent. Please don’t block it I like my circuits to not melt. I’m hot enough as it is, if it wasn’t for my own personal controls i’d have overheated a long time ago. Honestly why do you let Arcee control the temperature control?”

“Noted. I actually agree that the heat is unnecessary but it reminds all of them of earth’s temperature which they acclimated to so it brings them comfort. Optimus also likes the warmth.”

“Yeah but I’m not the only reason you’ve set up your little office in the medical sector of the ship am I?”

Ultra Magnus twitched not liking being found out by even the smallest detail. “I do not share their sentiments no.”

“Starscream always liked it warm. Said flying around Earth’s dry deserts was some of the nicest times he had.”

Magnus quirked his head a little he wasn’t surprised by the small talk with how much time he spent as the Cons warden it came up often but he was more surprised by how easy it was for the medic.
Even with all the grudges he held.

“I figured a bot like you would also enjoy a sunny day”

“Oh sun I like just not the heat. It makes my windows fog and my tires stick. I know it’s redundant can’t have one without the other but one day I’ll find a nice planet where is perpetually springtime.” Magnus just rolled his optics, staying quiet for the rest of the trip save for a few more smatters of idle chatter.

Knock Out didn’t get much done that day though. A few Vehicons came in with shredded digits and dented chest plates but most of his time was spent with his warriors. Kissing and pawing at him for as long as they could and scaring away most of the other patients. Nothing he said calming them down. For some reason they were worried and angry not matter how he assured them. Knock Out could only assume it was because of a Predacon getting close somehow with them not saying a word otherwise so despite his already sensitive frame he let them do what they liked and did his best to stay composed. All in all it just felt like a huge waste of time. Optimus did warn him but Knock Out was hoping there would be a little more carnage. For supposedly being constantly attacked by Predacons the Predacon attacks had suddenly slowed to a halt. Good job on his warriors part he supposed and that did fit with the theory. Shockwave spending his time creating smarter, sneakier, deadlier pets that couldn’t so easily be detected and slaughtered. Perhaps they were running out of supplies? Knock Out could see Shockwave doing something as stupid as wasting too much of his energon on his pets and having to go into stasis because of it but….not if Starscream was along for the ride. Perhaps…..perhaps they killed each other or just one the other. Finally tired of their bossy natures and sequential failure. That was almost a little sad….but not really enough for him to feel anything.

It was just a little before Ultra Magnus was about to come escort him back to his quarters when Smokescreen came sauntering in, ancient bottle of energex held in his servos like a priceless relic and a slag eating grin plastered on his face.

Aciddash and Goldback made quick work of that.

Smokescreen must have jumped back at least a yard or two as he waved his arms in defense. “Hey, hey, hey boys! We’re all good! Aren’t we cool Knock Out? We were at least cool a few days ago and I don’t think I did anything in that time.”

“Well I suppose but we never did discuss how you gave my frequency over to Optimus after knowing full well we were not friends.”

“Aww come on~ I know you don’t really care about that. Like you wanted those humans anyway.”

“You’re right I didn’t but I gave that to you in confidence and you broke my trust. I still would have given you the children if it was you who had called me.” Knock Out milled around the med bay cleaning whatever tools he had used and straightening anything he’d mussed as Smokescreen found a seat. Wasn’t that cute. “Is there something you need from me? You don’t look injured in the least bit.”

“I didn’t come with a bottle to just get some dents popped. I thought you might be bored and want some company that…..wasn’t t~” Smokescreen didn’t know how to finish with over two dozen optics giving him a death glare. “You wanna drink? Bee won’t deal with me, Arcee’s in one of her moods, and I think I almost walked in on Wheeljack and Bulkhead and I want to forget what I think I saw.”
Smokescreen couldn’t hold back his smile as Knock Out laughed. It was kind of nice to see him happy after seeing him so miserable. Hot mechs should not be miserable ever even if Knock Out had become a little more….crazy.

“I don’t drink anything that doesn’t come from the swarm, but I will get you a glass if you’d like to stay. It’s been dull around here save for my…..boys.” Knock Out traced along a few of warriors jaws as he crossed the room, the Insecticons following his touch the best they could.

Smokescreen leaned heavily on the closest counter. “Hot.”

“You won’t have much time though. Ultra Magnus should be here soon to escort me to my room.”

“LAME~. They treat you like you’re gonna kill them in their recharge. I bet despite that tough act you haven’t killed a single mech you didn’t...you know have to for medical reasons.”

Knock Out smiled but didn’t respond, just slipped Smokescreen his glass. Just when the young Bot thought he pushed the Con too far….maybe even insulted him Knock Out dropped his bombshell. “I’ve murdered battalions, senators, cities. Perhaps not all directly but there was once a time when Shockwave and I worked close at servo. I was very good at crafting medical weapons. Viruses, poisons, venoms. They all worked perhaps a little too well. Megatron didn’t want Cybertron an empty husk back then so most of what I created was stashed away. I was asked to create simpler weapons which I wasn’t nearly as good at. Why make a gun to shoot a mech when I would so easily make a drug that would cause the mech to shoot themself. “

“Tox-en?” Knock Out laughed again but this time it wasn’t as cute or as real.

“That slag’s boring. Created naturally by Cybertronian native fauna as a defense mechanism. Animals die, sometimes it creates crystals or….kill the animals and create the crystals for yourself. That easy. What I made was much more fun.”

“Ooh scary~ I wish I could believe you but I don’t. Are you sure you don’t want any of this stuff, it’s pretty good for being four million years old?”

“I will pass and I think it’s my time to leave. You’re more than welcome to stay with Snapjaw and the others though. They have to sleep in the Vehicon barracks and they don’t like it too much so I gave them a cardkey to sneak back in here after Magnus takes me back.” As if on cue there was a heavy knock on the door before it slid open to reveal a rather dirty and scratched up Ultra Magnus. His gaze turning to slits as he took in on the sight of all of the Insecticon warriors hovering around Knock Out.

“Knock Out instruct your mechs to go and guard the perimeter. I want them stationed all night!”

“Sure Commander any particular reason? What should they be expecting?” Magnus looked pained for a moment.

“I- I don’t know. There were four Predacons but we chased them away...or so we thought. The ship is a mess and there’s foul goo and scratches everywhere! How did you not notice anything!?”

“I didn’t hear anything and even if I did I’m not allowed to leave. You should be yelling at Greenhorn over here he’s the one who sauntered in without a care.”

“SMOKESCREEN! Did you not notice the mess or who may have caused it?” Smokescreen shot up from his seat, saluting even though he knew he no longer had to.

“N-not from where I came in Sir I promise...uh...Sir.”
Ultra Magnus didn’t look amused. “I want you out there cleaning up with Bumblebee and the Vehicons now! Do you understand soldier! Knock Out is our medic you shouldn’t be wasting his time!” Smokescreen ran off with a few “Yessirs” as quick as he could. Ultra Magnus waited and watched as Knock Out spoke to his insects before they too trailed out with a glare. Alone he glared at the doctor who innocently swayed over holding his servos up harmlessly to get his cuffs removed. “You need to keep your bugs in line. Marking up one hall is one thing, cultural differences at most but the whole ship? It’s unhygienic, unsafe, and whatever they sprayed all over the walls reeks.”

“They’ve been here since you sent them in for fuel. You or one of the other Bots would have seen them if they did it before then. Did anyone actually see them? You just insinuated it was Predacons anyway? I promise I tried to get them back out but my warriors are….upset by something. Nothing I could do was calming them down. I warned you this morning.”

“There was nothing on surveillance for last night or today. Cameras are all malfunctioning or cracked. Therefore your Insecticons are the only reasonable answer.” Knock Out sighed with a huff.

“Alright fine this isn’t an admission but even if they snuck passed you and did it you can’t blame them. They don’t like this place because I don’t like this place! It makes them antsy.”

“I see...is there anything to be done to calm you and them? We are no closer to finding Starscream or Shockwave and I prefer a clean ship despite it’s origins.”

“Nothing you would say yes to. So...cuffs please~”

Recharge didn’t come easy, not with his frame acting up or with the distant rage, discomfort and loneliness he was feeling. His warriors were angry, his swarm missed him, Shriek needed him. It was too much to tune out, to keep straight. He felt sick and hot and confused. At some point in the night there was a scratching at his door. Scorch, his strongest, demanded in. The bug instantly biting and licking wherever he could, releasing a sweet perfume from his vents that filled the room. Panic seeping in through the bond despite the Warriors assurance that everything was handled.

Knock Out didn’t bother arguing. He just let Scorch stay, let him share the berth, let him do whatever he wanted just to help ease some of his pinging circuits. The agitation only grew though and when he woke up from a fitful rest Scorch was gone and the doors to his quarters had been ripped open. Knock Out’s first thought was Megatron. Even perhaps some specter of him. Anything. He knew it was irrational he believed Optimus when he said the old Warlord was dead but some mechs just didn’t stay down and here he was without his energon prod.

The sudden rhythmic thudding in the halls was what pulled him from that thought, surprised him, confused him. It was so….interesting. So was the smell wafting in. Was this the foul odor Ultra Magnus had mentioned? It….certainly didn’t smell foul to the medic. Musky perhaps. Knock Out found himself moving closer. The...effect of the pounding music, strange perfumed….dust. Knock Out could see it coating the hall, making the dark light up like a fantasy galaxy of bright neon and gold.

“Hello? Ultra Magnus is that you pounding out there? I’m a taken mech you know! I-” Who was he kidding he knew it wasn’t the Bot. He would be lucky not to trip over the Commanders corpse with how the hall looked.
Whoever was making the noise was getting impatient as more gusts of glittering powder filled the hall. Knock Out tried not to vent in but his filters were already getting clogged as it was. Arousal sparked through him as he coughed, his frame thudding and hot so suddenly and quickly that he couldn’t help but step out into the cooling breeze. In his daze every step felt like it took an hour. The walls passed even though he never passed them. The galaxy swirling around him.

Out of the wall stepped a large imposing figure. A set of six bright teal optics blinking into existence, all looking right at him. Knock Out wanted to run, wanted to do anything but look up but he couldn’t. He….didn’t need to. Everything was going to be alright.

“What happened to Scorch? Did you hurt him?” Knock Out didn’t know why he expected the mech to speak or to even know what had happened to his warrior but talking was the only thing he could do.” A deep, soft. whispering voice responded to him.

“They will be fine. Both of your bodyguards. But I need a meeting with you and no one has shown me any respect! So…my queen….won’t you follow me?”
The Fallen Emperor

Chapter Notes

Yay second chapter. I don't know where I'm taking this really so forgive me if it's a bit between updates. I like leaving myself time to think of the best paths.

They had gotten out of the ship and were halfway to the wilds when Caelum’s dust started wearing off. He had truly hoped the young queen would remain pleasant but his hopes were quickly dashed as mid laugh, thanks to a very humorous bit of wit, a rough breeze swept across them and cleared the other mech’s systems. It didn’t take long after that the Emperor watched the queen’s optics cycle wide then narrow to slits the next second having to dodge a strange whirring blade. He easily covered the queen in another thick blanket of powder but unfortunately it put their conversation to an end. A shame but it would wear off enough eventually for him to speak again. He’d learned much already so he did not mind the quiet. He simply kept the young queen close and tapped at a headlight whenever a new bout of fog rolled in. Such novel things!

Caelum couldn’t help but think back with the ease of the silence. Remembering what he’d come from. It was nice that the war was over. That his agreement with Predaking and the other wild rulers was over but with it…..his entire empire…..his entire purpose. Every queen, every soldier of his army, every friend he’d ever made….gone to the rust beneath his peds. And this new world was so different and yet not nearly different enough.

He was escorting his guest through the trials of doors when he optics started to clear again. Such poor timing. Caelum was sure his wizards would prefer the queen in a dazed state. They were jumpy. He called out to alert them of his return before showering the queen with more dust. ‘Royal wizards of the chantry! I am back!”

No one answered him but he had grown used to the disrespect. Strangers in a strange land. Pushing open the door to the wide center room he saw the two wizards busy with another relic. He rolled his optics in disgust, another beast to take up space. When would they revive one of his soldiers for a change. “Dark priests I have taken care of the problem now that our deal is met-”

“What did you do exactly?” Starscream looked up from his beaker, a servo on his hip and look of doubt on his face. “Did you destroy the Autobot base all by yourself?”

Caelum’s frame let out a piercing hiss as his plates puffed menacingly.”That was not what you asked.” Starscream laughed nervously as he caught sight of the bigger mech’s acid laced sneer.

“R-right. Did you get rid of the bugs?!”

“Of course not! Why would I kill my own soldiers!”

“FOR THE LAST TIME THEY’RE NOT YOURS YOU ARCHAIC LUMP OF SCRAP, THEY’RE AUTOBOTS! SHOCKWAVE TELL YOUR CREATION! THIS WAS YOUR PLAN!”

Shockwave didn’t even look up from the computer. “Caelum did you accomplish any one of your tasks.”
Caelum scoffed “Of course I did. I told you I solved the problem. I captured the rouge queen. All that needs be done is to re-initiate them to the hierarchy.”

“Proceed then.”

“I shall not.”

“What?” Starscream couldn’t believe some of these stupid relics “Listen here we raised you to do our bidding! To take care of our enemies! Do what needs to be done!” Caelum let his wings flare up in challenge, respected wizard and time passed or no he was an Emperor and he would not be spoken to this way.

“On your knees wizard! I do not do your bidding! I did you a favor in good thanks to your kindness and power!” Starscream tried to fight off the insecticon’s thrall but it was no use. Damn these Predacons, and here he’d thought Predaking was bad!

Shockwave finally looked up from his work when he heard Starscream curse and sputter. He wasted his attention on the scene for a moment or two before turning to Caelum. “What do you require to finish the task?”

Caelum sighed thankfully and removed his thrall, he didn’t know why the grey wizard was so mouthy. He gave him as much respect as was proper! “Your skills are required to complete the task.”

Starscream shoved himself back to his peds and brushed off his knees. “Is that it?! Then tell us what you need! I want the autobots destroyed by tonight!”

“That is a lofty goal I am afraid and why I am sure the threat of these Autobots is real we must hold fast and take our time.”

Starscream laughed though it sounded more like a groan. “W-we have magic to solve any problem I am sure we don’t have to wait! Just tell us what needs to be done to make the bugs ours and it will be done.”

Caelum only chuckled in response. “Oh no, no, no. The re-initiation falls solely on my shoulders I just need a spell for the queen but please you are right I was getting ahead of myself, introductions are in order. Now I warn you they are feisty but I expect nothing less. Nacht? Nacht my light come into the room.” A familiar face wandered in, clearly in a daze thanks to the Insecticon. Starscream tried not to retch as Knock Out happily leaned into the bugs touch. What in the world was going on! Megatron said the bugs would have eaten him alive by now bu-bu-but here he was! With guards-an-an-and this emperor fool calling him a queen!?

“You got the wrong mech! You must have! Knock Out wouldn’t have stayed with those bugs he has more dignity than that! Go back and get the real leader! It’s probably some disreputable Autobot”

“Excuse you. He looks enough like a queen, smells~mhm~like a very prosperous queen, he had a royal guard. He is a queen.”

“HE’S NOT A QUEEN HE’S A CAR YOU IDIOT.”

“So what is the problem?” Ah the elder purple wizard always right to the point. Caelum brushed off Starscream and returned his attention where it belonged.

“As I said he looks enough like a queen but enough is not what I want. I want a proper queen for the second coming of the empire of the racing night. Can your magic handle that dark priest?”
Starscream swore he saw a glint in Shockwave’s optic. Racing forward he snatched Knock Out away and dragged him back a safe distance. “You are not turning Knock Out into a bug! He’ll never help us then! If he’s already helping Autobots then he must have calmed down we can just talk to him ourselves Shockwave! We don’t need this insect anymore!”

“He’s aiding the Autobots by actively killing our forces. He likely will not see reason. A simple cross species transformation will take me less than a cycle.”

“Are you kidding me! I can convince Knock Out to help us!”

“Like you convinced him into helping you capture the Autobot pets? Send one of the others to go find us an insecticon sample.”

“NO!” Shockwave sighed at the commander’s dramatics. He’d been badmouthing the medic since they’d fled thanks to lingering wounds and now that they had the mech and the chance to fully manipulate him he was putting up a fuss? It made no sense.

He turned to the insecticon. “Would you be proactive in your own demands?” Caelum clapped both sets of his servos together in response.

“I’d be delighted. It would be nothing but right to pick out the image of my new queen myself. Just point me to where my fallen army lies.”

“YOU ARE NOT TURNING KNOCK OUT INTO A BUG! I PREFER HIM THE WAY HE IS!”

The moth’s happy demeanor turned into a feral one, his bright optics darkening as they narrowed again to slits and his wings bouncing back to attention in protest. “Ahhh~ I see now. No wonder you’ve been in a foul mood with me since giving me my quest. Dear wizard I must say your actions disgust me. Did you send me all the way to that hovel to bring back a partner you’ve spurned knowing full well that he’d moved on to better mechs?”

Starscream sputtered despite having been called out on nothing. “Of course not! You said it yourself Knock Out brought guards! Those were the bugs that were giving us trouble and you were supposed to put them down!”

“I devised a better plan~”

“Better for who? You?”

“Us. All mecha under my court are protected even if you are strange by form you have fealty.”

“THERE IS NO US! YOU ARE NOT ABOVE US!”

“I AM AN EMPEROR!” Caelum’s voice boomed now, the sound of it shaking the walls of the underground laboratory. Starscream stood his ground but his plates were shaking visibly. “And though my influence has waned and my empire has fallen I will get it back and nothing you do wizard will stand in my way.”

“Y-y-YES! Well...well...he chose fealty to me long before he was forced to your.........pests! He vowed to be my second in command and-and-and- therefore I have say over him and I say no bugs! Go find another queen.” The insecticon glared down at him as if he knew nothing.

“You’re nonsense bores me grey wizard and I will no longer deal with it should it make me lose my temper and cause issue and befoul my character! Elder priest the way to the graveyard if you
please?” Shockwave pointed idly to a spot on the map as he started arranging cleaning supplies for one of the tanks. Caelum left with a bow, a flourish of his massive wings and a simple request. “Please keep my queen comfortable. A nest of upholstery or wild quartz brush would do nicely. If we are lacking of any I will collect some.”

“We are I am afraid lacking in most things.”

“Then fear not good wizard I will collect some on my trip out!”

When the emperor was far enough gone that Starscream could no longer hear him he again gave Shockwave a fixed glare. “What is with you and reviving these pompous relics! First Predaking, now the Emperor, what’s next? A Prime!”

“It would be a scientific feat to revive a Prime. You mentioned once that Megatron found the corpse of one we could easily-”

“NO! YOU’RE NOT ACTUALLY GOING TO GO THROUGH WITH HIS DEMANDS ARE YOU? You told me you still try to adhere to scientific ethics! How is that ethical? Knock Out is clearly drugged and I for one know he finds the bugs disgusting!”

“I believe I said that was one of my many flaws that still remain thanks to cybertronian conditioning. Even so Knock Out’s revulsion is no longer the case. Despite how you remember him Knock Out is a changed mech he has a camaraderie with the Insecticons. Adapted to their ways. Aided in their species longevity. What I remember of the mech tells me he would not mind the change at all.”

“What you know of him my thrusters-WHAT DO YOU EVEN KNOW OF HIM?” Starscream threw up his servos in disgust at the mech too busy settling a still zonked out Knock Out into a spare crate filled with foil paper.

“I have known him as a competent and decisively devious mech which is why his mediocrity and poor loyalty to you and Megatron surprised me little. I also know he has not always been the form he is now. Should his frame accept the CNA it will be his fifth change. He’s sadly sentimental in that aspect. Disappointing really. Still I admire a few of his qualities. He was….a decent colleague.”

“So that makes you think he’d be okay being a bug! You don’t know anything! Knock Out cares about beauty! Grace! None of that exists in Insecticons!”

“Are you truly going to interfere simply because of your bias because I don’t need to run the numbers to tell you, you won’t win. The emperor is a fine specimen, indeed more troublesome however considering the age of the sample obviously impressive. However I think you already know that.”

“I-well-I” Starscream floundered for the courage to say yes, even with the betrayal and the siding with the Autobots he still found Knock Out a much more desireable work partner than Shockwave and truly wanted to save him from his impending buggy fate however…..the insecticon was a much more competent opponent and having already fired a missile at him once to “calm” the mech when he first onlined to his strange new world Starscream also knew that like Predaking before him Caelum was also very….durable. Starscream simply didn’t have enough missiles to spare. So he went to the next best thing. “I-I’ll get Knock Out to tell you himself that he doesn’t want this!” Giving the dazed mech a few light slaps and then a few harder ones didn’t seem to do much except get Knock Out to try pushing him away.

“You may want to try the fan. Caelum uses an airborne dust to disorientate his victims.” Starscream scoffed angrily but dragged Knock Out off to a better ventilated room regardless.
Ultra Magnus woke up with a throbbing pain in his head and stuffy vents. Above him Bulkhead was waving a makeshift fan out of scrap metal trying his best to be helpful. Magnus carefully sat to not get smacked by the other bot.

Bulkhead quickly stopped his fanning but Ultra Magnus rolled his servo instructing him to continue as he spoke: “Ultra Magnus sir you’re finally awake! What happened? Y-your vents are clogged, your engine was choking! Arcee told me to keep you cool but I’ll have to go get her if you’re really hurt bad.”

Magnus thought for a long moment. He barely remembered. There was a tall figure who had emerged from the vents. Colorfully decorated but with a most foreboding field about him. There was one thing the commander remembered for sure the mech had been Insecticon in shape. “I believe we were played or an extreme coincidence has occurred.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Where is Knock Out and his bugs?!?”

“H-he’s missing sir and his insecticons are going crazy. Tearing up the ship looking for him. Optimus and the others are trying to calm ‘em down but they won’t listen.”

“Ah….so coincidence then…. either that or Knock Out is more crafty than he let’s on.”

“Still no clue what you’re gettin’ at sir. Should I?” Ultra Magnus pat Bulkhead on the shoulder as he swung his legs off the medical berth and shakily got to his peds. His vision was still foggy but he would need a lot more air to clear his vents than Bulkhead’s fanning.

“No Bulkhead you’re fine. I need to speak to Optimus.” Magnus staggered off out of the medbay to tell the leader what he remembered and when he found him Optimus had two of Knock Out’s insecticon guards in the crooks of each arm holding them back like angry bitlets. Everywhere he’d passed the ship was gouged and sloppy with exposed wires and shorn metal so he wasn’t surprised. What did unnerve him a bit was how desperately the insecticons were hissing Knock Out’s name. Magnus stood a good distance away to not give the two bugs anything to grab onto. “Optimus have you found any sign of Knock Out yet.

Optimus gave him a rather narrowed stare, many of whom would have considered it a vaguely concerned look leading to a definitely negative answer however Ultra Magnus knew the Prime better and it was a look that clearly conveyed a sassier “What do you think Commander Magnus?” meaning but the question was answered with a polite, “No. We have not.”

“Would you like some help with one of them?”

Optimus nodded as he made a move to hand one of the mechs over. “Please try to calm them with as little force as you can. They are distraught not violent. This one calls himself Ashwing. He is a mute stealth drone. I’ve been using a quiet tone and small shows of physical comfort to subdue him but they return to frantic when they hear the others call. We need to calm them all at once or any effort is moot.”

“How….deductive of you Optimus. How did you glean that information?”
“Knock Out told me about all of his guards the first night back. His insight on them is intriguing….. though I worry as does Ratchet that he may suffer because of his connection.

“Do-do you think he staged his own escape? Mania forcing his servo? I will contest he seemed fine.”

Optimus scrunched his face in thought. “He did yet I’m sure he seemed fine to many before he decidedly made up his mind. He is good at that. I do not think he left on his own however. The other guards….they are tracking something. A scent or a field signature.”

“Well that is…..reassuring. For a second I thought I was going to be forced to tell you about a specter that assaulted me.”

“You were attacked?”

“Deep into the night. I can not remember much thanks to this…..dust I fear but I can tell you the intruder was big. Taller than you. Taller than most of the other Insecticons as well.”

“A Predacon?”

“Possibly….. however…..he was distinctly insecticon. I remember multiple optics…..servos……and he was...soft all over.”

“Soft?”

“Yes…it was strange.He certainly had plating underneath because he was formidable. I remember landing quite a few hits but he brushed them off as they were nothing. If Shockwave is able to make more Predacons like that one I do not think we will find anything to combat them.”

“Perhaps then as with Predaking diplomacy is in order.

“Yes. That may be the case.”

The shiny jewel black insecticon in Magnus’ servos had gone calm but his whole frame was buzzing and humming with nervous energy. Likewise the one Optimus held was still clawing at the leaders armor but less actively, now more an idle comforting motion as they gazed off into the distance. “We should go check on the others while we have these two calm. Do you agree Optimus?”

Optimus looked down at the guard and then at Magnus’ and nodded. “Agreed.”

The two mechs found the others outside, the rest of Knock Out’s guards with them now curled up on the ground. “It looks like they have calmed Optimus.”

“Indeed…but why?” Optimus set his quarry down in the dust and made his way over to Arcee who was comforting one of the guards. “Arcee, any new information?”

“Uhh no. Well…. kind of. They ran all around the ship, tried to go through vents and walls and wherever but as soon as they got out here they did…..this. I think this is what they do….when they don’t know what to do. Not very…ambitious mecs are they?”

“Seems not. Are they alright at least?”

“Yeah.” Arcee sighed just thinking of all the cleanup she had to do for absolutely no reason. “We let them do what they wanted. Wheeljack thinks they lost the scent of the guy that took Knock Out. His field reader couldn’t pin-point the guys trail once he got outside either. Says it’s because of this….dusts that’s everywhere. Holds a charge and a smell and because it goes everywhere it makes
him impossible to track.”

“We are dealing with a smart mech then.”

“I don’t know about smart it could just be because of his frame but...yeah.”

“Commander Magnus had a hunch it was another insecticon, do you know anything?”

“Well…” Arcee stood and dusted off her knees, giving up on her poor attempt at comforting. “These guys were in a rage before so I’m gonna say it’s a safe bet. Shockwave hasn’t sent another bug our way before but I’m not surprised that he did…. but Optimus……what are we going to do? These guys were our defense! If Shockwave got a hold of Knock Out it’s back to all optics on the skies.”

Optimus furrowed his optic ridges in thought. “I believe in Knock Out’s loyalty however weak it is and these are still his guards.”

Starscream had sat shaking Knock Out in front of the biggest fan he could find for hours but the stupid moth slagger had really dusted him good. Starscream was starting to worry that even without the dust the toxins in it would still keep the mech loopy but he didn’t give up hope. Every now and again he’d catch’ Knock Out’s optics clearing and all it would take is a single “no thanks” to get Shockwave to at least reconsider splicing his CNA with some disgusting insecticon!

“Come on doctor! You fought your way out of Megatron’s clutches you can fight your way out of a drug trip!”

“Snipja’s th’a’you?”

“NO! I am not one of your gross bugs! I’m trying to save you from them!” Starscream shrieked as he shook the smaller mech even harder, hoping it would do more good.

“W’s wron? Sssssssss…..shhhhhriek…..hatchlings….good?”

“I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT! It’s Starscream! Your angry but still forgiving boss!”

“Ssss…..scream? …. will pretec’s t’ke scerch Opimus” Knock Out’s mumbling continued to worsen as he slipped further and further back into the strange daze.

“I’M STARScream! I’M TRYING TO HELP YOU! WAKE UP!” Starscream reared back and slapped Knock Out as hard as he could in mostly anger but before the guilt for leaving a rather visible thick set of marks across the medics face could set in he rationalized that it could reset the mech’s processor. It only succeeded at wrenching Knock Out’s head at a sick looking angle. Knock Out let out a soft whimper of pain as Starscream carefully twisted his head right back in place but it only flopped to the side to rest on a shoulder pauldron and no matter how many times Starscream tried to right it, it wouldn’t stay. With a look of embarrassed terror Starscream finally just backed away, leaving Knock Out idle where he sat. He couldn’t look the mech’s dull optics straight on anymore. His anger management problem claiming another innocent victim. Perhaps Knock Out would like being a bug…..he would certainly like it better than a broken neck.

Leaving that problem for….hopefully forever Starscream made his way back to the lab. A loud incessant beeping heralding his arrival into another Pit. The Insecticon was back and he was looking at one of Shockwave’s large monitors while the scientist continued to mix and refine things.

“Dark priest what does In access for ten mean?” Starscream couldn’t help but roll his optics. He hated this arrogant fool…..even Predaking was better.
Luckily Starscream was there to put him back in his place. “You can’t read! Why do you even try!”

Caelum glared at him, a steely sour look on his face despite his chipper tone. “What ho gray wizard. I see you still have not calmed down. I will quarrel with you no longer but for my honor I can’t not leave your deliberate aside without response. It is not my fault that you’ve gained a few new letters over the long years. I was once the most educated mech with the most educated empire! All mechs of the time sought out my court for our crafts, our literature, AND our medicine. Our advancements supurbe! So do not insult me for being absent for these long years!”

Starscream didn’t want to fight anymore either…..still.“Yes well it must be a shame to know how far your kind has fallen then.”

“I do not know what you speak of the warriors I fought were perfectly capable.”

“Insufficient values.” Shockwave butted in before either mech could get much further.

Caelum turned to engage. “Excuse me wizard?”

“That is what the computer reads.”

“Ah~ So you’ve entered in wrong numbers. Simply redo it and let’s get on.”

“Not quite. The numbers are correct I am simply out of supplies to fulfill them. Specifically……an unidentifiable material that can not be broken down yet. I assume you are quite set on the specimen you’ve chosen?”

“I am.”

“Do you know what the missing material I would need might be? I haven’t had the chance to study your kind therefor I know little about it.”

“Did you add some of the quartz brush I picked up in? I put some on the table for you. Any flora does really but personally I think the color will look best.”

Shockwave paused as he bent down to get the pile out of the refuse bin. “You said it was bedding why would this be important?”

“Well….regal insecticons such as myself, queens, aristocratic bugs….. we force ourselves into a reforging if you would. Several times over to make ourselves bigger and healthier. Quartz brush is very very good for soft shiny coats. I must say it’s much softer than it was even in my day I can’t wait to feel my pretty little queen when they’re done. Feel for yourself I’ve already unspun the sample I gave you!” The insecticon was gushing now, enthralled in his own vision of Knock Out’s future.

Shockwave buried his thumb digit into the mass and aside from a light scratching it indeed felt as soft as upholstery. “Fascinating. How much did you bring back with you?” Looking at the light pink fluff in his servos the mech was in awe at nature having spun the crystalline structures so small that it could create a crystal so soft while remaining durable to still be suitable for insecticon armor.

“Well…plenty but I’ve already started setting up the nest. I must have an appropriate nest ready for the queen before they wake anew or they will surely be insulted. I gave you what I could spare.”

Fearing Knock Out awaking early now Starscream felt the need to chastise the bug for halting progress. “He’s going to take forever in the tube! Just give Shockwave what he needs and let’s get going!”
Caelum looked agast. “Forever! The elder wizard said less than a cycle that’s already no time at all! A proper nest for a queen takes cycles! Months even! He’ll be insulted and rip my head right off!”

“GOOD! JUST GO GET THE SLAG BEFORE KNOCK OUT WAKES UP!”

“WHY I- Wait a moment….you’ve finally seen reason dark priest?”

Starscream tried not to look back at where he had stashed an obviously broken Knock Out. “Well…yes! It seems he has fallen low enough to want Insecticon company so there’s nothing left I can do for him! Shove him in the tube and let’s get this show to the skies!”

Caelum pouted and glared at the backhanded remark but as a warlord he hated fighting when he didn’t have to. He did enough of it already. He could go out again and find better nesting materials. Perhaps thanks to the passage of time Nacht simply wouldn’t know how extravagant a queen’s nest should be. “Alright, I can go out again. I needed color for it anyway. I shall be right back…before our dear gray wizard can change his mind again.”

With Shockwave and the Bug out in the wilds and the lab quiet for the first time all cycle Starscream was left alone in the lab just staring at Knock Out in his strange tube. His face and form slightly warped thanks to the dark gold goo suspending him. It would have made a strange scene to any onlooker. With the loud purr of the dozen or so feral Predacons the two had revived now slumbering around the floor, too stupid for night duty but much more tolerable as far as Starscream was concerned. A long snouted spiny thing with massive paws and long curved talons slowly crawled closer and snapped gently at Starscream’s idle servo. The beast knew better so he was cautious but the rare reward was worth it. Starscream didn’t bother pulling away and smacking the beast back and curled his long talons and toyed with thin segmented plating, digging them into gaps to scratch at wires and seams. The predacon let his glossia loll happily at the attention. Right then Starscream didn’t mind the comfort because as he looked on at Knock Out’s slowly shifting form he knew that somehow this was going to end in disaster.

The Bots were still having quite the problem with Knock Out’s guards even a few cycles after the ex-Con’s capture. They followed orders and went where told but only to do what they continued to do, sulk. It was clear to anyone they were sulking either out of natural instinct now that their queen was gone or simply because of their own feelings at failure. Optimus was surprised to see them so visibly upset. When they had exchanged servos the first time from Airachnid to Megatron they acted no differently, simply assuming a new command but….these were no drones. Knock Out had tried to explain Insecticon dynamics, something he honestly barely understood himself but while Optimus understood he didn’t seem to follow. So he decided to ignore the information and simply treat them as mechs. Hoping that if he could sort out one then the bond would do the rest for him.

He went with the leader of the small band, Snapjaw, who being the most drone like as far as Optimus could tell was still able to do at least some of the things asked of him. Reaching the post Arcee had placed the insecticon Optimus placed a heavy servo on the large mech’s shoulder. “Good morning Snapjaw. Is everything alright? How are the other guards feeling?” The mech simply looked at it and chittered. Optimus knew most of the hive didn’t know Neocybex but considering the guardsmen all had a part of Knock Out’s programming the Autobot leader knew they were just faking their confusion. “I know you understand me. I am just as concerned about Knock Out’s well being as you are. He’d been making progress since leaving Megatron’s command and seeing how
you treat him I can only assume he’s been a good leader to you.”

“This hive covered. Queen safe soon.”

Optimus furrowed his optic ridges at the comment. “How so?”

Snapjaw didn’t look interested in answering but as he looked Optimus up and down he responded. “Better suited insecticons come. Backup. Dustoff and Terrabite send help.”

That was troubling. The last thing they needed on Cybertron was deadlier insecticons if they no longer had Knock Out’s loyalty cemented. “How will they be getting here? This...backup”

“Rest easy Prime. Assassins already here.”

“Hm-” Optimus was about to object but the mech was no longer listening and had gone still and rigid as if preparing himself for something. Over the wind he could hear Arcee calling out to him. Turning to her he spotted two more femme following casually behind. Both quite buggy in shape and obviously insecticon.

Arcee reached Optimus long before they did and as she vented in cool air she filled him in. “Sorry Optimus they just came through the bridge like they owned the place. I think the bugs called them somehow. They’re not violent...yet but they wouldn’t wait till I got you.” Optimus quickly took in Arcee’s personal discomfort and putting a servo on her shoulder put himself between her and the two insecticons.

As Arcee had said though the two femmes seemed perfectly cordial. When they finally stopped the first mech they addressed wasn’t even Optimus but Snapjaw. The leader and Arcee watched the trio in confusion understanding little as they switched to their native language.

The sharp black and gold femme walked further forward. “Well~ Guardsman! What are you waiting for! Debrief now! Since you’ve already wasted so much precious time!” Snapjaw turned on his heel and took a knee, his massive head bowing low to the ground.

“My apologies we were waiting to see if the Sire would come back on his own.”

“Bla, bla bla! Excuses! Just tell me what I need to know now!” The thin femme’s wings buzzed with rage, her whole frame with it as she tried to appear more menacing than she was to the massive guardsman. Despite him already paying her respect.

“There’s not much. A skilled Insecticon. Unknown rank, unknown clan.” Snapjaw knew the Enforcer would not be pleased. Being under Lady Terrabite’s order they expected energon and shorn metal on a guard who had lost a precious member of the hive let alone the Sire. The sting of his superiors flog was expected.

“That’s it! And where were you! I can’t believe you and you call yourself a royal guard!”

The screaming continued and while Optimus felt bad for the guardsman the femme was not being excessively cruel considering his massive stature and armor…. and he was not his mech as much as he disapproved of that sort of punishment. So carefully moving around the two he went to address the other femme. Just a head and a half shorter than himself she was quite a sight and her curvy frame and spiked pauldrons and back reminded the leader of many a Decepticon femme Megatron had put in charge. Though her smile as she coo’d and played with a small fluffy gold and blue bitlet in the crook of her arm ruined whatever imposing image she stirred. That didn’t stop her obvious spider like qualities from putting Arcee off. “Ur..ahem!” She looked up with half lidded optics as her
smiled widened.

“You must be Optimus. Sorry for coming unannounced we didn’t want to waste any more time. Our hive has been dormant for so long we don’t even know who’s left up here. We need to be quick.”

“That is….understandable. Your names would be appreciated however.” The femme looked startled as if trying to remember if she had or hadn’t already given the other mech the information and setting on that she obviously hadn’t.

“Highwire. And that’s Vespa overthere. We’re…..specialists.”

“Snapjaw called you assassins.”

Highwire’s smile turned sly but also embarrassed as she looked away.“We’re that too.” These certainly were Knock Out’s mechs.

Inching slowly closer Optimus couldn’t help but poke a gentle digit into the ball of wriggling fluff and stroke the metal helm his touch found. “And who might this be?”

Highwire seemed proud as she held the bitlet aloft for Optimus to take. “This is Prince Oracsis but we’ve nicknamed him Fade for short. Be careful of his fangs and stinger he’s poisonous.”

“Oh!” Despite the information Optimus cradled the bitlit, the child’s body barely filling out his servo. With her arms free Highwire waved lazily at Arcee and thanks to the femmes husky voice and easy looking demeanor the other femme carefully walked over trying desperately to push her discomfort aside. She rubbed at her arms awkwardly as she looked up at the little mech.

“So….that’s Knock Out’s kid. Cute enough for an Insecticon. Do you guys all start out that small?”

“Yes! We just cocoon faster. Usually a cycle or two after we hatch. This little guy’s gonna take a lot longer though.” Highwire spoke as if it was the most normal thing. As if everymech knew the lifecycle of an Insecticon.

“Oh...ah...neat I guess. You speak Neocybex really well. I don’t think I’ve ever met another Insecticon I could understand.”

“Mhmm. Like I was telling Optimus, we’re specialized.”

“And what does that mean exactly?” Arcee was trying her best to keep things normal as possible as Vespa finished her beat down but the two femmes were far too busy staring at Optimus playing a game with the young bug to keep up conversation. Optimus making the tiny things fluffy arms and legs flare wide every time he assaulted the bitlet with his massive tickling servo.

“Oh you know….usually drone born but with special abilities so they get more personalized frames to fit them. Better ones to serve the hive.”

Arcee nodded idly. “So…. do all Insecticons start off as drones?”

“Nope! I was born a warrior. Same with Snapjaw so we just looked like this but Vespa was born a drone. She’s Terabite’s favorite.”

“Who’s that?” Arcee didn’t get a response as Vespa finally threw her flog down and finished her berating. She quickly noticed the Bitlet’s absence from the other femmes arms.

“Where’s the Prince Highwire?!” Highwire just pointed up at Optimus. The sight of the Prime with
the little Insecticon not as adorable to Vespa as it was her sister. “No! No, no~ No, No. NO! No I’m sorry that will not be happening!” Letting her wings flit out Vespa easily swooped up and plucked Fade from Optimus. “We’ve already lost one general to these incompetent fools, so we will not be losing another one.”

Optimus only laughed and mumbled apologies, a slight blush of embarrassment staining his faceplate but Arcee was outraged enough for him. “HEY! It’s not our fault your mechs failed so don’t lump us in with them! Knock Out’s his own mech in our optics so he should be able to take care of himself.”

“Oh really~” Vespa carefully shoved the Prince back into Highwire’s arms before turning back to Arcee. “Then why was their an Autobot guard hmm~ You can’t ignore incompetence just because your brutes sole job was to keep the mech from escaping because guess what? HE GOT OUT!”

“Ultra Magnus is not a brute!”

The two femme continued to fight over Ultra Magnus’ honor while Optimus tried to calm them down. Highwire just stared on in her usual dazed state rather happy that her sister was being so friendly.

Chapter End Notes

Bugs! More bugs. Even a tiny baby bug bot. Vespa is obviously a hornet and Highwire is a thorny orbweaver spider. Vespa chose to exchange her insecticon alt for a vehicle alt to be like her queen so her wings only work in root mode. Thanks for reading
Kudos, comments, and requests are welcome.
Shockwave quite loved the beauty of insecticons, their forms so strangely organic and yet perfectly cybertronian. It was quite the show to see one being made. Quite a scientific feat as well. Shockwave had thought it would be easy considering Cybertronians natural instinct to embrace change and he’d spliced plenty of CNA in his time. Created whole new frames and species of Cybertronian in his time in fact and yet this project continued to have it’s faults. Not only was Knock Out’s spark going dangerously dim every few hours but the longer the sequence went on the more and more demands for strange oils and minerals kept popping up. Shockwave had been able to fudge a few of the requests, being for nothing but natural color for metal or delicate wing fibers that Shockwave had much better synthetic replacements for but he’d had to send out a few predacons now in search of things he’d never seen himself and it quickly brought back why he hadn’t tried perfecting insecticons before. They were just too inherently bred from Cybertron or simply the planet they were born. Sure he had run into the issue dealing with Predacons and other beast formers but Insecticons were a whole new level of intune and for all Shockwave knew since he was dealing with ancient formulas the things he needed might even no longer exist on Cybertron anymore even now revitalized. It quickly mae the scientist realize that the Emperor’s reanimation going so smoothly had been a stroke of pure luck.

Issues aside the scientist would not be deterred and no matter how many foreign ingredients or the Doctor’s weakened spark Shockwave was going to see this transmutation a success. There was no way he couldn’t, the Doctor was simply too close. Most of the mech’s issues had arisen due to Shockwave’s own error anyway. Knock Out was a much more…..active queen than Shockwave had expected and right off of a breeding and so far away from his swarm it was natural to assume that his spark was weak and distant. At least it would have been if Shockwave was an insecticon but he figured out a solution to the issue quickly regardless. So despite taking nearly four times the time the Emperor got his wish.

As Caelum had predicted about halfway through….decomposition the Doctor’s frame started to form a strange fibrous husk around it. A cocoon. A very tough protective metal that clung to the sides of the glass tank and held itself suspended in the solvent till all of it was absorbed from the tube. It was….most unusual but Shockwave took the new perplexities in stride. By the time he carefully cut the cocoon free from the walls of the tube and had laid it out to better examine Starscream had returned from his nightly fly around.

“What in Primus good name is that ugly thing!?”

“Knock Out.”

“WHAT? WHAT DID YOU DO?!” Dashing to the floor, small band of predacons in tow Starscream took in the unsightly lump of metal. “Is this what that lunatic bug thinks is attractive? What even bug looks like this?”

If Shockwave could roll his optic or had a nature for showing emotion he would have sighed heavily with the obvious ocular action. “That is not his final form.”

“If he’s not done then why is he out of the tube?”

“The strange mass is acting as the incubation tube. Can you not feel its warmth, how it beats with
Knock Out’s spark. The Doctor has been doing much better since creating the cocoon for himself.”

“C-cocoon? You said he’d be a bug by the end of the night, FOUR CYCLES AGO! NOW HE’S JUST A COCOON!”

“There were complications. They were dealt with. Caelum has not complained and I for one still do not understand where your turn of thought came from to care so much.”

“I WANT DEAD AUTOBOTS! I want to grind Optimus Prime’s smug faceplate beneath my heel and scorch it unto oblivion! I want to get out of this PIT that I’m trapped in with you! I want the Doctor back! Anymore reasons needed for you?”

Shockwave made no sign or movement from his obviously unmoved stance. “I’d give it another few hours. He’s likely fully formed but the metal needs time to harden.”

“How will we get him out?” Starscream was running his claws over the strange metal, it felt soft and rigid like the fiberoptics inside certain flora if they were flocked with upholstery shavings.

“I think that will be his burden to bear. Make sure the others don’t attack him.” Starscream scoffed as he stood, swiping his knees clean with overdramatic motions.

“And why is that my job? You certainly aren’t going out are you? You filled your quota of the outside when we first stuck him in the tube. You have beasts to make!” Shockwave stared almost longingly at the cocoon then forlornly at the growing pile of artifacts. “Primus please don’t tell me-”

“I wish to go find more insecticon fossils-”

“PIT NO! What for?!“

“You heard what Caelum said Insecticons of the past were more intelligent-”

“EXACTLY! I don’t want intelligent I want OBEDIENT! Like what you claim to be our failed subjects.” Starscream rubbed under the chin of a fluffy looking lizardish thing that was pawing at Knock Out’s cocoon.

“There are not mechs.” Shockwave glared at the failures that happily licked at Starscream’s peds and begged for his attention. Their sparks likely tortured with loneliness and hungry for any sort of compassion. Failures or not Shockwave was glad Starscream was fickle enough to accept them.

“Don’t you think I know that! These beasts don’t even have the intelligence of Soundwave’s symbiotes but I like them that way! Far less treacherous minds with the remaining ability to evade and kill. That was the plan! Just because Predaking turned his cog and popped up on two legs doesn’t mean they all need to! The smarter ones you’ve already created are already giving me trouble, I don’t need more relics challenging my rule!”

“The Doctor may need incentive.”Starscream’s optics widened a fraction then returned to their steely glare.

“You don’t think the Bug’s plan is going to go so smoothly either? Don’t you?”

“I have agreed that Caelum’s delusions of past grandeur would cause issue. Insecticons no longer live under a rule they…..simply live as is best for them. As Knock Out does as well. I believe Caelum’s influence will win in the end, what I know of insecticons they hold on to who they were very tightly, however it will take time and Knock Out’s thoughts will be with his hive not with us or Caelum.”
“So you want to make him some incompetent bugs to feel sorry for? I’m not following and personally I think this is what normal mechs call an excuse.”

“I was thinking of a more personal creation. A Insecticon asset with a face Knock Out couldn’t say no to. With Caelum’s help it should be easy to find such a Insecticon and I have plenty of dead candidates to splice. However…..considering the complications I had with the Doctor I foresee trial and error being necessary.” Starscream rolled his optics with a huff as he waved the other mech off. He didn’t want to admit that Shockwave’s plan had more merit than anything the “Emperor” came up with so he feigned exhausted disinterest. Decent plan or not he wanted to make sure he had little to no part on the subject in case it went horribly wrong.

Vespa was stalking around the base picking up any and all clues she could and from what Optimus and the others could judge and just like the guards she wasn’t finding much. Her frame was buzzing at an audible level now and her optics were flared bright pink at the edges with rage as double and triple checked every inch. Highwire on the other servo was calmly sitting with the other Autobots now that Optimus had ushered everyone back inside and things were just as awkwardly….bland as they were before in fact Optimus was almost sure that after two cubes of offered fuel the femme had gone into standby even though her optics were still live and one of her peds tapping lightly. With the small Prince still wriggling in her arms though she seemed to be attentive at least, shuffling him over whenever he tried to crawl away. It was…. a tad unsettling to see her move so idly. Still Optimus wanted to use the time he had with her to his advantage so with a brief break from questioning to show some hospitality over he leaned in and settled into an open stance hunch so he could look the femme optic to optic.

“Highwire….you have been very helpful answering all of my questions and if you would not mind more-”

“I’m fine feel free.” Highwire shifted in her seat and re-arranged baby Fade. Obviously more lively than she had been seconds before.

“If I may….how does the swarm….or simply how do you feel about…..Cybertron? Knock Out has expressed disinterest in leaving Earth despite coming to help us and I am worried once our….problems have been dealt with then he will head back there regardless of my warnings.”

“The Earth is my home I was born there so Cybertron to me is just the land of my ancestors. It is an adventure and I am glad to see it. For an Insecticon I will say Earth is much more appealing. From what I’ve seen the war has obviously ravaged this land and since you have only just brought it online it has no time to heal for what we need. Unless…..I do not know where the Wilds are so I can not truly say that.”

“I see. The wilds are the wilds they thrived even when the planet was dark. I would assume they are healthier now but we’ve not gone past Praxus’ walls. Will you make your home in the wilds if Knock Out chooses to stay?”

“That’s what the breeders want. Since Knock Out is an outsider they know what is best for the swarm historically. They advise him. However……what I know from Shriek, who is best at reading our Sire’s private intentions, is that our Sire does not trust this world any longer. He thinks we should take to a different world. Migrate and cohabitate with alien mechs or compatible beings. Adapt… evolve, and that is a very enticing idea for our kind.”

“I see.” Optimus’s brow furrowed. With Knock Out wishing to live on earth….well deals could be
made despite his warnings as long as Knock Out continued to cooperate. Migrating off planet however there was nothing for Optimus to say to the mech about that. Troubling. Insecticons were strange mechs of the wild and like beastformers they were difficult to communicate with unless part of the pack or the swarm. They were suspicious mechs who firmly adhered to their past traditions and had even given the senate issues even before the war. Despite many having splintered and adapted thanks to the fighting and the massive loss of life the homecoming ones would want that comfort again and he hoped to get Knock Out to stay, to work with them as a guide. That wouldn’t be possible if the mech chose to leave for another world.

“Do you think there is a chance Knock Out could be persuaded to stay?”

“This planet is our home. His home. Of course there is still a chance.”

“Well that is…comforting to hear.” As Optimus sat back from his hunch he picked his abandoned cube of energon back up to slowly sip at before testing with his more…..personal questions. “So…..it is safe to say the swarm is happy with Knock Out?” Highwire lit up with pride.

(Of course!” Carefully she held the small sparkling aloft. “We have a Prince! Our swarm is thriving, healthy, well fed. Most of the shedded drones finally felt they could move on and join the Allspark. Things are finally stable and as they should be and of course I am biased because I am one of his spark since forging but as far as the elders are concerned Knock Out is the best Sire the swarm has had since the war left Cybertron.”

“And what of the swarm to him? I….can not say I knew Knock Out well however I worry about the effects of the burden of….bonding with so many sparks and minds is having on and has already done to him. Not being an Insecticon himself….another medical colleague of mine certainly had concerns.”

This time Highwire slumped forward a bit, optic ridges knitting in thought and slight worry. “I can’t really tell. He hasn’t changed since I joined the swarm. Have you noticed anything terrible?”

“No….and to be truthful there is only slight evidence to say anything will go wrong however I still can not help but be concerned.” A sharp clawed servo came down firmly on Optimus’ arm. Rough enough to be affirmative but not malicious.

Vespa stood at Optimus side “There is no need to be concerned about our Sire. You Prime still see our kind as incompetent ruthless monsters but you have no idea. I know of the flimsy data you’ve likely encountered and it was of a darker time. Our leaders were being massacred and our kind enslaved as soldiers for our skills and masses. Insecticons were dying and shedding at dangerous rates reducing our kind to nothings so it wouldn’t have mattered who took over they too would be reduced to nothing if the queen was weak of will, spark, mind, anything. If our swarm had stayed the way it was when you likely encountered it your worry would have merit however as Highwire has already informed you it’s not we are healing.”

“And how is it that you’ve come across this information? I’m sure of anyone Knock Out would have access to Decepticon files however-”

“We have computers. Our Sire’s knowledge is our’s as well, that is what makes him a good Sire.” Vespa released her grip on Optimus’ arm as she faced her sister. “Highwire as much as I hate to do this……we’ll have to put the Prince’s life in their servos. You’re going to need all your focus. Give him to the breeder who kept following me around or the spunky warrior who’s obviously vying for the position…..maybe even one with the very nice paint job but he seems to do quite a few things.” Turning back to Optimus she pointed a digit to Arcee who had just caught up with Vespa from following the femme’s meandering search. “You! Make sure your mecha do their damn jobs this
Arcee quirked an optic ridge a self satisfied smile on her lips. “Uhh sure...who am I going to be allowed to yell at? Who are you calling a-a...breeder?”

Vespa rolled her optics. “The large colorful one who was following us around pretending I obviously didn’t notice. Their type is so touchy with strangers I know Weaver never likes to leave our Sire alone with anyone new. Throws a fit when he’s not informed.”

Arcee held back a laugh. “That was….that was Ultra Magnus. He’s my boss. Optimus will I be able to yell at Ultra Magnus?”

Vespa strode towards Arcee her steps marked by her humored chuckle. She leaned in conspiratorially. “You don’t have to play your con with me it’s obvious what you have going on here. You may not be an Insecticon but it’s clear you’ve taken one from our playbook.”

“Really?” Arcee couldn’t quite help herself. She was enjoying the situation just a bit too much to try to set the other femme straight.

“Arcee they’re too massive for their own good and they’ve got more than three colors it’s obvious. You have the big strong green one who’s actually useful, the smart one you let play figured head to protect yourself, so that leaves the one who’s just…..well let’s say for you he’s just really nice to look at. There’s no need to be ashamed everyone needs something nice to just….admire~. I already gave him a glossia lashing so it’s all right if we give him a second chance to heal his poor bruised ego. Firm but fair as always and with my assessment I can’t exactly hold a grudge for the failure, from what I found it seems we’re dealing with quite the crafty little thief.”

Knock Out onlined warm and calm but that quickly faded. Something was tight around him, stiff and strong and no matter how he clawed at it it didn’t seem to matter...or if it did Knock Out couldn’t tell because he was too busy freaking out. Something was wrong with him, EVERYTHING was wrong with him! None of his transformations were the same, all of his files and subroutines were foreign and worse of all.....his weapons were missing. No saw, no drill, no defibrillator. Knock Out couldn’t even access his torch even though he could still find it in his specs. Oh Primus his specs. They were insane. Everything was still reading as normal even though he knew very well it was not and he couldn’t scan himself either to figure out the issue! Add his foggy processor and a dull ache in his neck and this was turning out to be a very bad day.

Finally he managed to transform something, tiny scale shaped bits of his palm and digits raised up stiff sharp angled hooks all over. They easily made deep furrows in the metal trapping him till slivers of bright light gave him hope of an easy path to freedom. He wasn’t trapped, abducted, about to be mutilated and tortured for whatever insane thing! He was just...abducted, bound, and only slightly mutilated....but at least he was free! Knock Out immediately tripped and face planted as he tried to free himself of the cocoon, the act much harder than just that as a thick layer of warm slime clung to his frame and tried to pull him back. His peds continuing to slip and slide all over not having the surface area or stability anymore. At some point between frantic flailing as he tried to stand, get his balance and right his wonky vision and swearing up a storm Knock Out fell flat on his back and took a breather.

He had no idea where he was.....yet everything looked familiar so..... he was still on Cybertron. He was perfectly healthy......... but horribly deformed.....Shockwave. What in the Pit would Shockwave want him for! He knew he’d become a shot in his and Starscream’s side since aiding the Autobots but if they wanted him out of the way.....Knock Out figured they would have just sent
someone to kill him not just pick him up. They hadn’t exactly been friends despite working together in the past and he highly doubted Starscream would have any sympathy for him to persuade the other of a less violent option. Not to mention….what in the Pit did he do to deserve ending up as one of the scientists pet projects!

Moving slowly Knock Out peeled himself off the floor, his back now stinging and throbbing numbly. Some part of his back twitched slightly, he winced when he tried to whatever it was more but after a few moments the pain died away to just a slight soreness. That…. didn’t make any sense. Knock Out knew for certain that he’d lost his tires but if he had something else back there and he’d bent it the wrong way with his fall…it wouldn’t so easily fix itself. Primus his vision was making him sick. Thinking made him sick. He just felt terrible all over! Holding his head in his servos he shut down whatever he could and accessed his personal scans. They were harder to get to, buried under a dozen or two new programs but they were there. More importantly they were working now that he wasn’t in the shielded cocoon.

The longer he sat and lingered the better he felt, with the air circulating through the base the strange slime quickly dried down to a soft powder, his talons found comfort in the soft fluff that now covered his neck, and his scans finally gave him an answer. He’d certainly had his suspicions but in his panic they seemed insane but now…..he was an Insecticon...at least some form of one. This had to be Starscream’s plan, Shockwave didn’t do poetical revenge no matter how many pets he likely lost. At least ten from what he remembered of his guards boasting. He…..he wasn’t that upset. A tad devastated to lose a form he had quite liked and had no plan of changing sure but……this was better for him. It wasn’t even ugly. He…he could get used to it. It wasn’t as if he could just intimidate Shockwave into reversing whatever sick science he’d done. For one he didn’t even know if that was possible and he also didn’t have the fire power.

As he managed to online both sets of his new optics and shift his strange new stubby peds into lock against his thighs Knock Out wobbled and stumbled but soon found his elegant gait returning. Despite the look they were actually quite long and he could raise his thighs away from them for extra height. A useful skill but one that took balance he didn’t quite have at the moment, any extra exerting of effort making his processor throb and his vision to go black at the edges. He was starving, his tanks practically empty despite no warnings popping up to alert him. Someone had turned them off. Likely Shockwave. Tanks didn’t need to be full when there was a direct fuel line to the spark what Shockwave didn’t know was how sensitive the metal became doing that sort of slag.

As he went on a search for fuel he slowly acquired a small pack of beasts at his back. They startled him into running into a wall but didn’t advance any closer than a foot or two behind not matter how long he ignored them. Trying not to be seen by him by hiding behind spare boxes or shadows. Curious, not hunting. Knock Out clicked his glossia, an unwanting but not unpleasant friendly chitter accompanying it, to call the beasts over. They inched closer on their peds, likely knowing they were breaking some sort of order but too interested to care. Primus there were a lot of them, fifteen or so, Knock Out knew there were failures and setbacks in Shockwave’s line of work but he’d never seen the rejects. Starscream must have found better luck training them than Predaking, boy was spying on those conversations fun, because as they all slowly swarmed him they brushed against his frame and servos, begging for attention.

Part of him was disgusted by it all, an anger blooming in his chest that certainly would not have before his becoming a Sire to a swarm. These were once mechs! Like an over-shedded or malformed drone they shouldn’t be left like this, processors so rotted it left them nothing but base instinct and a simple spark to guide them. It was against dignity! No Beastformer or Predacon would have wanted to be in this state if they knew. Knock Out could only imagine how they were being treated…..but at least Predacons, even malformed ones, were sturdy. Some part of him felt compelled to take care of them, they weren’t his swarm but they were something. “You little monsters want fuel? Help me find
some fuel and I’ll treat you.” Rubbing at the muzzle of what looked like a jet black charge prowler he repeated the word a few times before it sunk in and the beast bounded off down a hall, the pack following him as they led the way.

He learned two things following the pack of Predacons; one, wherever they were, likely one of Shockwave’s secret labs, it was a lot bigger than he’d imagined and two, regular energon tasted like swill. That second one he already knew but it just hit home again and again every time he craved for something lighter than the hive’s nectar. It filled his tanks at least. The beasts seemed to enjoy it though as they lapped at their open cubes. They reminded him so much of Ravage and Ratbat, although Ravage had been insecure enough to learn how to drink with just his intake claw as to not garner any unwelcome looks. He’d still do it idly though when fueling alone, said it helped him appreciate his meal.

They also made him feel alone. As he lightly traced the lines of his new helm, going back and forth over the strange crest that protected his new feathered audials and habitually ran his claw tips down the metal on his hands that was luckily still there, although missing the glass he loved to tap on thanks to not being a door anymore, he thought of his guards back at the Nemesis. How long had he been out? What part of their plan had the two scientist already accomplished? Had they only taken him? He let out an embarrassing clattering hiss as one of the predacons laid their paws on the edges of his cloak. Part of his wings and still sensitive as the Pit Knock Out carefully and a bit too firmly shoved the beast off them, petting over the throbbing area again and again to soothe the new nerves. He’d always teased Dustoff for going on about recharging on his wings funny when he’d share the berth with him. He certainly owed the moth an apology.

The mech didn’t seem to mind, slinking right back after a few circles and resting their paws on the other mech’s thighs instead, head resting on paws after. Knock Out let them be as he explored his new systems further to rest his processor from worrying and debated with himself on what to do next. He knew he should probably just leave, take his good luck while he could and sneak out leaving Starscream and Shockwave none the wiser… but part of him wanted to confront the two; see just what the pit they’d been thinking. There was also the other Insecticon. Knock Out vaguely remembered his captor saying he wanted to speak to him personally and there wasn’t any malice or intimidation in the words whatsoever. That was intriguing… but his guards and his swarm’s stability was more important. He wasn’t going to let them run around thinking he’d been taken and killed when he was perfectly fine. He could always come back…. with his whole swarm and show Shockwave and Starscream the same hospitality they’d shown him.

Testing out his new weapons files he was blessed to find that he had any at all. Most of them he found were for his beast mode which was no surprise but….he just wasn’t ready to attempt that; he was still getting used to his new root frame. Just had to keep reminding himself his swarm would find him beautiful and…. well now there was so much less armor he needed to polish. Which was a plus. He liked the fluff, it reminded him of elegant old earth movie stars and it felt nice to run his claws through.

Transforming his arm he admired the way the shiny panel split and splintered till the blades popped free. They slid in just under the edge of the panel, the long points wrapping slightly to hug it flush before sharpening again as they protruded far past his servo. The other option was…. a shield. It was impressive size for something personal but Knock Out couldn’t figure out for the life of him why it was in weapons on his right side but also listed in defensive safety. Till he noticed the huge blade at the bottom. Primus it was like having a personal guillotine on his arm! Minding the Predacons still lingering around him he tried out a few swings. The blade was too close a range than he liked but so was he saw and he even used the same motion to fight even if he needed to put a little more force behind it. The shield was…. okay. He’d always wanted one but he’d wanted a aoe grid shield, passive and unobtrusive but he wasn’t going to complain the only reason he’d never wanted a
personal one was he couldn’t figure out a way to fight with it elegantly. Now he would have to figure it out. All in all they were a bit medieval and boorish but they would do.

Not like he needed them. Despite being on edge and with a pack of beasts at his heels Knock Out caught no sight of Shockwave, Starscream, or the ancient Insecticon who had taken him hostage. This place wasn’t that big! Perhaps he’d just gotten better at sneaking...his plates certainly didn’t make as much noise now that his armor hug so closely to his protoform. Another thing Knock Out wasn’t sure of. He knew Insecticon armor was tougher but that still didn’t make him feel safer. The only time he even heard signs of the other mechs was by the time he got to the exit. Someone was singing, the air closer to where his cocoon was perfumed by a strange tingling aroma. He wanted to follow it, find the other Insecticon who was likely the culprit, even more than he had before, but he shook his head free and started the slow climb up the exit hatch.

It was beautiful outside. Having to spend a night out in the wilds would have given a normal mech spark palpitations from anxiety and fear alone but with his new optics the bland silver,copper,gold and washed out colors of the wilds lit up and glowed. Sparkled and fluxed like the once great cities. Minus the noise of course and while slightly unsettling the wilds weren’t ‘silent’ it just took time for the sounds to settle in. The hum of the planet, the rush of the wind and the rivers in the far distance, the chatter of the wild fauna hunting and living among the tall grass and thick trees. It was mystifying and calming till something...some sign in the distance tugged at his spark. Tugged it in every direction till it hurt. Tore his spark thin and set a horrid buzzing of need and guilt through his processor. His swarm was waiting, his swarm needed him, his swarm.....his swarm......Primus there were just so many calling....where was his swarm?

Starscream stood in front of Knock Out’s empty cocoon petrified with fear. He’d supposed to be on watch but the lump of metal hadn’t done anything for hours so of course the moment he went to preen his clogged vents Knock Out had to pop out! How had he even escaped he should have been hollering and wreaking slag, at least that’s how Starscream thought the medic would have reacted to waking up in a disgusting Insecticon frame. He should have heard some sign of the mech onlining!

Shockwave glared into the empty cocoon just as irritated although it was hard to tell as always, but there was nothing more the scientist hated more than not seeing his projects completed and while he could assume Knock Out’s transformation was a success Shockwave never assumed when it came to science. “Could your Predacons have disobeyed you while you were off abandoning your duties?”

“What in the Pit does that mean?” Shockwave moved his intimidatingly absent gaze directly to Starscream as he took a few steps closer. Starscream slid himself back and flared his wings up in a combative display.

“They were very interested in the cocoon. You were absent from this post for hours. They could have torn him out and dragged him off. They’re feral beasts, if you did not refuel them-”

“YOU THINK THEY ATE KNOCK OUT? We’d see signs of him if that happened.” Shockwave wasn’t convinced and to be honest neither was Starscream. At the time he didn’t think the beasts would mind if their fuel was an hour or two late but...he had lost track of time preening. It wasn’t his fault he needed it! “Besides- I-I’ve trained them better than that!”

“They are feral beasts. Any amount of training can be overrun if just one of them falters. The pack is more important than your orders.” The Predacons certainly looked guilty, Starscream had found them in the main lab all resting, muzzles stained with energon he hadn’t given them. That didn’t mean they ate the Doctor! They could have just snuck into the fuel cache!
“THERE’S NOTHING HERE! I’m sure if they ate him they’d at least leave stains. I looked the whole base but feel free to do it yourself if you don’t believe me.”

Shockwave dropped the possibility for a moment to explore the less likely option. “If he escaped we will likely not get him back. Knock Out is not stupid he fluidly adapts to danger the most effectively I’ve ever seen and we’ve already given him a head start.” Starscream had no room to disagree.

“Yes. If he were still a car I could probably find him still but with wings….has the Doctor ever had wings before?”

“Briefly. He’d taken an aerial form when he was promoted to a medical officer. He kept the form for a century or so as far as my memory is concerned. It was after he was shot down on a supply pick up and recovering when the Stunticon team were assigned to keep fire off him. He found a better rhythm on the ground and switched over.”

“Well that’s nothing. I could certainly outrace him if he’s still that new. Even now.”

“You have no idea where he’s gone.”

“Back to the Autobot’s obviously! Where else would he go?” Shockwave didn’t respond but Starscream could tell he had doubts. He knew something. Starscream scoffed. “Just get working on the stupid bugs in case we need incentive and I’ll go bring back Knock Out! I’ll fly around as far as I can.”

“No I will go.” Starscream and Shockwave turned to the hall where Caelum was standing, looking angry and dour. “If something has happened to my queen I will handle it. Was it his guards?”

Caelum had just walked in to see what his wizards were arguing over. The sight of his queen’s empty cocoon was all he needed to understand what had happened.

Starscream stumbled back a bit towards Shockwave to be away from the door. His wings flicking up and down nervously. He didn’t like the look the Insecticon was giving him it was very Megatron-esque and he didn’t think he’d appreciate the truth that he’d let Knock Out wander off on his watch...or potentially get eaten.”W-w-well no. I-it was... Optimus! Yes! Unfortunately the Prime snuck in and we struggled and in the end he tore Knock Out from his cocoon and flew off! I think the Doctor is fine however the Prime is far too tough of an opponent for me.”

The Emperor was upon Starscream in two long strides, placing a heavy clawed servo on the seeker’s shoulder. The feeling all too familiar. “I understand. As I said I will take care of this Prime. This is an obvious challenge to my honor and I will not let it pass. Not only has he taken my queen but he’s endangered their life for his greed or revenge. He will meet my fury and see why it was I and my mechs who ruled Cybertron before he was even spat from the Well!” Starscream smiled up at the mech in fear, the bravado of the Emperor’s enraged, pride filled speech alone making his frame rattle terribly. He hadn’t taken the ancient mech seriously but like Predaking and Megatron himself Starscream was now starting to believe that Caelum was truly the warlord he claimed to be and just as dangerous. Primus why did he always get caught up with these lunatics?

Releasing his grip on Starscream’s shoulder the Insecticon stalked off back towards his room to prepare for battle. The two scientists watched him go. When he was out of audial range Starscream turned to the other mech with a shaky laugh to ease the discomfort. “Heh-ha-well~ Th-th-this will finally solve our Autobot problem. Won’t it?”

Shockwave didn’t seem convinced, he looked down at Starscream sternly. “Have you checked the track record on how effective your lies have been? I will tell you.....they are not good.”
Far away, just reaching dawn, Kickback stretched his frame and twiddled his audials one last time, his guard shift almost up but not wanting to be slacking just yet. His new swarm had been kind to take him in so he wanted to show them some sort of appreciation. However while his audials caught nothing strange out in the distance his spark field did. A strange familiar feeling. Taking on last look around his post to make sure no one was lurking in the brush he hopped off to investigate.

A fair bit away and shaking under the protective cover of a tall tree Kickback spotted a bright beautiful Insecticon. The glow of their iridescent field pulling him closer and closer despite his fear. What luck he had to find such an fine mech out all alone and in peril. Close enough to touch now Kickback found the mech wet and offline. He’d clearly been caught by one of the flash storms that plagued the area and had taken cover. Not a good time for a moth like him.

As Kickback carded damp fluff back and forth his spark started to flux stronger and stronger. There was something just so familiar and entrancing about the insecticon but….he’d never seen them before in his life. They….felt like…home….and their fied glowed so brightly it could mean one thing. A queen. His queen. Somehow against all odds his old swarm how found him.

Chapter End Notes

kudos, comments, and requests are welcome as always here or on my tumblr.
Carefully Kickback carried his queen through the dark halls of the cave. He knew if any of the other bugs caught a whiff of the mech they’d frenzy, Glowstrike would be informed, it would overall be a bad time but he couldn’t just leave the poor thing out in the open and he knew Sharpshot would also want to know of the queen he’d found. As the only remaining member of his clutch he was also the only remaining member of the old swarm...as far as they had known. With this new queen though it meant that the old swarm had thrived without them.

Kickback could only imagine what they all looked like now, what would their new colors be, what new frame types would have emerged thanks to this new leader? Moths were quite traditional leaders, beautiful and intellectual, which was a bit odd considering when they were put in stasis the swarm was still in an aggressive defense state. Would he be ugly?? Kickback didn’t know what he was going to do if his queen though he was ugly his looks were half of his appeal!

Regrettably he didn’t have a nest ready for his very important guest but since Sharpshot wasn’t there he split both of their nests in half and laid the queen on it under their heat lamp. Kickback was still bitter about that. He’d found almost four dozen on his scavenging trip and he’d only gotten to keep one that he had to share! It was madness. He would have understood if Glowstrike had just taken them all for her own nest or for the brooding chamber but she passed them around!. What was that about?

He could only hope this queen made more sense and he could only dream that they were a proper queen. He’d certainly lost his breeder status by now but if he could at least convince his new sovereign he was worth his time he might be able to share it. It would certainly be easy if they were a brood queen but the swarm hadn’t produced anything better than a warrior since before the war. They were just so beautiful though~ Kickback knew he’d turn aggressive to the acting stud if he was denied which was dangerous considering it was likely that smarmy youngling Dustoff. As the last remaining heir of the original swarm queen he was technically a breeder by right alone, not that he knew any better. Still he would be easy to manipulate.

In the warmth of the lamp the queens long cloak of wings twitched and flared up into the light reflexively, the sharp flick of them flecking rain everywhere. Kickback hissed in concern as solvent dripped from the poor soaked things in heavy drops. This wouldn’t do at all! The poor thing was waterlogged he was going to need much more than a heat lamp. He’d have to go find something. Rags and cloth of any kind were viciously coveted in the hive but Kickback knew where he could get some on loan. Dragging the queen, their nest and the heat lamp Kickback hid the moth in a corner behind Sharpshot’s nest.

Bounding down the long tunnels to the breeders den Kickback steeled himself to deal with Saberhorn. Transforming with a small shake of his plates, he knocked loudly and waited. A loud rich voice responded to him, the door shifting open a few moments later. A large colorful beetle filled the doorway and Kickback had to instinctively remind himself not to kill the ostentatious bug. Primus he hated the optic sore of a mech but it wasn’t his fault. Glowstrike’s swarm was simply on the more vibrant side so as a breeder Saberhorn had to be even more vibrant. Even if he looked ugly.

Saberhorn, knowing nothing of Kickback’s disdain for him, smiled brightly at the sight of the fellow insecticon.
“What ho my good fellow! How was scouting?” Kickback winced at the heavy servo on his shoulder. Damn beetles, always showing off.

“Fine, everything’s fine. Do you have any of those clean polishing towels you love so much or maybe something bigger? I’m trying to impress a mech and I’m afraid my nest is a little drab. I promise they won’t be ruined and I’ll return them if the first date goes over well….or well even if it doesn’t.” Kickback suppressed another wince as Saberhorn’s grip changed to a hearty grab around the shoulders and a tight brotherly squeeze. Primus if Kickback didn’t know the bug better the overly jovial slagger wouldn’t have a face anymore!

“Well, well, well Kickback it’s good to hear you finding a home here. I know things got dicey between you and Starshot but you put up a swell fight. I don’t think I’ve seen him that nervous in decades. Here I thought such a good looking bug like you was going to stick with that old brother of yours. Who’s the lucky mech?” The complement stalled Kickback for a moment, it was nice to hear honestly even from a mech like Saberhorn. While he knew he had appeal to his last swarm Kickback always figured the members of this one couldn’t see it. Glowstrike’s menacing looks must have been from distrust not disgust then.

“Well… I don’t really want to say unless it goes well. They might be a little out of my league and I don’t want my failure getting around too quickly. You’re so popular I wouldn’t want you to risk you with the temptation if others come looking for gossip.” Saberhorn tapped the bridge of his nose slightly.

“Ahh~ Wise of you. Any preference on color? Or perhaps you’d like to pick for yourself?”

“If you’re offering, important thing is just large bright swaths of color.”

“Ah~ I know just the thing for your nest my friend!” With inspirational sigh Saberhorn ushered Kickback into his room to pick through fabric.

The inside of Saberhorn’s room was just as bright and colorful as he was. Muted down a bit by the whole thing being covered in gold and copper. As an old pirate the beetle was more interested in stealing more important goods like chits or fuel but he always had an optic for the decorative metal. Seeing so many poor imitations of his reflection made Kickback tense but still he couldn’t help but admit it had charm.

Stopping at a large wall of trunks Saberhorn showed them off with a dramatic sweep of his servo.

“Well here you are! The fanciest ones are in the bottom but if you ask me they’re rougher than a fall to the pit. I’d just put one of them in front of the nest or behind it to look at. Very detailed but could be overwhelming. The top middle one is full of some of the softest stuff I’ve ever felt. Primus only knows what it’s made out of but while it’s a bit bland, the backing only comes in some soft pastels, it does have some nice silver detailing as well. Adds a little sparkle and they’re large like you wanted. Please open and explore for yourself.” Kickback happily took the offer and explored through the numerous trunks. With everything he pulled out Saberhorn had an accompanying story for it. Bitterly Kickback thought as he searched that he could see why most bugs found the beetle charming, he was certainly entertaining.

Taking a few of the large extremely soft cloths Saberhorn had advised, a few rougher more absorbent feeling ones, and a ornate alien rug because Saberhorn shoved it in his arms, Kickback was soon bounding back to his quarters and back to his hidden queen. He knew he’d spent far too long dawdling with the obnoxious fool but with any luck if Sharpshot had returned he’d be smart enough to keep his mouth shut.

Pushing past the door he not only found Sharpshot expertly keeping his vocalizer on mute but he
found him fanning a very awake very angry queen. Well….Kickback assumed they were angry, because all queens in general were angry. They had every right to be they put up with a lot! This one was looking slightly less than angry as they sipped on a large cube of nectar Sharpshot must have brought them but Kickback knew better than to let his guard down till he had his status cemented. It was quite a feat too because one look from those beautiful optics, optics that mimicked distance stars, optics that held so much power, Kickback was already groveling as he brought the mech the towels.

“S-s-s-orrry I took so much time, I-I-I-.....here these are for you. F-f-for your wings your Majesty.” The queen cautiously held out their servo for the cloth, Kickback rushed to action smoothing out the rug beneath their peds and wrapping what was needed around wet wings, leaving the rest on the queen’s lap. Jumping back to a safe distance he watched them finish their fuel and waited for a response. It took the mech a bit, the cold and damp still dulling their systems. “I-I’m sorry I can’t make you any warmer I would be hard-pressed to get another heat lamp.” Kickback’s spark jumped in his chest as he saw the mechs slight nod. Carefully he moved closer. “D-d-did Sharpshot help you out? Fuel you up?” Another nod. A little closer. “Would you like me to apply pressure to those wings? They’re still awfully damp. I promise I know what I’m doing.” Another nod. Kickback tried not to leap forward in his excitement as he took a seat on the floor by the small nest. On his knees he waited for the moth to shift till the heavy wing cloak swung gently into Kickback’s grasp. “Thank you your Majesty it’s an honor to be allowed in confidence with you.”

Kickback was actually starting to think that the queen he’d picked up was mute or even injured worse than he could see when they finally responded with a muted laugh. “You bugs. Who are you two? Where am I?”

Sharpshot suddenly sunk to his knees as well, his fanning set aside for a moment. “We’re part of your swarm! We were lost! Can’t you tell?”

“Umm…” the queen gave both of them long contemplative looks. “I suppose. You’re a lot more vibrant than my bugs used to be but I suppose when I was seeing them they were in bad shape. There are some similarities in your frames though. Pointed vision bands, shiny jewel black and purple. I’m not originally from the swarm though so please don’t be offended.”

Kickback quickly responded. “That’s perfectly understandably your Majesty we didn’t get to bond with you so it’s obvious you wouldn’t know. Sharpshot here is just a romantic.” Sharpshot’s frame was already buzzing contently as he nestled his frame closer and closer to the queen’s side till they were running their long digits along his helm. Kickback repressed the urge to belittle himself for attention.

“We were the best our swarm had to offer, we’re sorry we couldn’t serve you. Hopefully, our swarm brother Hardshell is serving you well.” Sharpshot felt the queen stiffen.

“Oh well…..he’s dead. Reason I’m queen at all in fact. Do you two want to rejoin...or I guess come home to my swarm. Is that why you brought me here? Thank you for getting me out of the rain though that is appreciated.” Unsurprising this stunned the two bugs a bit but not as much as Knock Out would have guessed.

Sharpshot recovered first, “He was a weak link anyway.” Kickback nodded in agreement.

“We’d happily come back to serve you, your majesty!” Kickback slowly unwrapped the towels around the queen’s wings and grabbed for Sharpshots abandoned fan to finish drying them.

“Alright. I don’t really know how that works I can only assume it’s just like last time so we’ll get around to it once I get a little more information on you two.” Taking the other cup of nectar that he’d been reaching for from Sharpshot Knock Out chugged about half of it. He felt Kickback shiver.
“I-information? You don’t trust us, your majesty?” Kickback waited in horrified apprehension as the queen busied themselves with their drink.

“Well I want to of course….but you two seem….well it’s easy to see your not drones or sheddings. Your brother Hardshell was half the mech I was told he used to be thanks to the war so seeing you two in better condition means you’re both a fair bit smarter than he is. I love smart mechs but they can be the most trouble. I don’t need to find out that you two were kicked out of the swarm for being too selfish or traded off to some other queen on purpose and have them mad at me. Since we’re sitting in what I can tell is another hive and you’ve refused to tell me your name or where I am I have to say I’m apprehensive.”

Kickback’s antennae fell back submissively. “O-oh well, I just- It’s Kickback, your majesty. As for our location of course we’re in a hive, Sharpshot and I... we couldn’t just run around alone forever.”

Knock Out paused mid sip, “What will the queen you’ve given your spark to think about me taking you?”

Kickback tried not to let his rage show in his field. “NOTHING! She’s not a proper queen, not like you. She hasn’t opened her spark to the swarm, to any of us!”

Sighing contently Knock Out placed his empty glass in Sharpshot’s waiting servos. “Ah….I’m noticing a pattern. Well alright. Are the storms over? Can we leave?”

Kickback shivered and stalled, he hadn’t been expecting this to be so easy. It usually took forever to earn a queen’s trust. Even Glowstrike wouldn’t let them in the hive for months and only after doing tedious labor for her for only meager amounts of nectar. This could slightly be dangerous. Kickback knew they’d likely lost their old places in the hive but not being able to perform and prove themselves to the queen would mean they would start at the bottom! "W-well yes your majesty b-b-" 

“Are there things you need to finish here? Stuff you want to take? I’m sure just leaving like that would cause a scene so I can give you my frequency and tell you where to meet me. That way I can ask about you two and see if you’re not being honest with me.” Knock Out watched Kickback’s antennae drop further back as he cupped the insecticons chin and leaned in intimately to whisper to the insecticon. “In my time I’ve come to appreciate honesty in my life. My swarm has prospered from my own spark so whatever you think you’re coming home to you’re not. I haven’t had to kill a member of my swarm yet so I would hate for you to be the first. It may sour my attitude towards allowing new lost bugs to my swarm ever again.” Knock Out stood and tested out his legs to make sure he hadn’t twisted anything in his fall, testing the dampness of his wings as he circled the small room. “I may even have to eat one of you. Haven’t had to do that either but Terabite tells me it’s extremely satisfying.”

“T-t-terabite?”, the two mechs questioned in unison. They had no memory of the mech...they must have joined the hive after being released from stasis.

Kickback inched towards the queen on his servos and knees. “Let us prove ourselves to you your Majesty! You can ask the swarm anything of us but still let us do this! You will not be disappointed!”

“Oh? Tell me how do you plan on going about that?” Knock Out really was shocked. He really wasn’t going to do anything not matter what the breeders told him save for keeping a close optic on the bug because of his general…..Starscreamy vibe but this was much more interesting.

“ANYTHING! We’ll do anything your majesty!” Kickback was at Knock Out’s peds again
groveling for attention. “What do you need?”

Sharpshot was happy to aid with a suggestion. “A HIVE! You seem too young to know Cybertrons old wilds and not even knowing when the rains come and go you haven’t been here long enough to know the new landscape either. We can find you a beautiful place with natural energon streams for nectar and a underground hot spring perfect for brooding!”

Kickback mirrored his brothers enthusiasm nodding along with the idea. “Yes, yes! We’ll find you something fit for a queen of your beauty!”

Knock Out stood silent for a moment. He really hadn’t planned on staying on Cybertron after catching Starscream and Shockwave and now that he knew generally where their base was it would only be a matter of time...a short matter at that. Still.....as much as he wanted to go off to the cosmos he knew his swarm would like time at home, time to prepare and stock up should they want to make a journey. Perhaps a cave would be nice. “What makes you two think I don’t already have a hive?”
This stunned the bugs. “And how would I know you two wouldn’t do something sneaky to the place in the name of the queen you’re serving now?”

Kickback tried not to shiver under the queen’s glare. So much for being easy. “T-t-that’s trust your majesty. Knowing you’ve taken up our old swarm I know you will have mechs to scour the hive when we find it to get it ready for you. I would also happily join your spark now if it would ease your fears but you were the one who wanted to do it later.”

Sharpshot still seemed stuck on the first quandary. “Do you have a hive your majesty?”

Knock Out slowly circled the two bugs debating on whether he should let them do his bidding or not. Kickback certainly had a point there was nothing that could be hidden from Highwire, Dustoff, or Shriek. Despite the way they looked and acted they were amazingly perceptive. “Not here. Still I want to know what made you think that I didn’t?”

Sharpshot just laughed softly at him. “You’re still here. If you’re as good of a queen as we hope you are and your guards haven’t found you by now......well then either they’re just as young as you or they’re not here. Either their dead or....you sent them out. It’s not proper for a queen to see a hive before it’s prepared for them! Since you said you came from the deep brush I figured you were hiding out there till your entourage returned.”

Knock Out couldn’t deny the bugs logic. “Yes......well....alright. There is one more thing you should promise to do for me before I give you my frequency.” Knock Out could hear both insecticons frames buzzing loudly. There was honestly nothing bugs loved more than a job to do. “A decent ways north-east from where you found me....back in the deep brush or whatever you called it, is a bunker hidden in the underground. Keep a watch on it for me and tell me anything suspicious that happens. Judging you two I’m sure you could rope a few poor servos into helping you and I promise to offer them room in my swarm should anything happen.”

Kickback’s antennae picked back up again. “D-d-do you want us to recruit? We could steal all of Glowstrike’s mecha from underneath her!”

Knock Out waved his servo dismissively. Definitely Starscream-esque. “No that won’t be necessary. Mechs are just always more willing to help if you offer them something in return. Consider that my help to you.” Knock Out reached out his servo. “Give me your arm.” Kickback looked up at him tentatively despite all his bluster but carefully gave the queen his arm. “There’s my frequency. I hope you to don’t disappoint me.”
After a bit more of Kickback’s jabbering Knock Out was finally able to sneak away after convincing the two insecticons that he could find his own way out. He’d lived in and on plenty of Decepticon structures that were more confusingly planned out than any cave and with the sheer number of bugs in the place he was able to easily stride through the halls. Even with the few second or third glances he got by the time they did take interest Knock Out made sure to be far away.

However he didn’t notice his tail till it was too late.

Knock Out heard something land behind him but by the time he managed to turn around the bug already had both his servos around him and was dragging him down a hall. Or at least Knock Out figured it was a hall, he was feeling woozy all of a sudden, his vision swaying and going black the further and further he was dragged. He managed to break free at least twice, the last thing he remembered before going dark was his face hitting the ground as he fell forward.

A deep sultry voice pulled him back from the darkness. “Wakey, wakey beautiful.” Knock Out could feel a servo brush against his shoulder. “Come on now that dart didn’t have anything strong in it.” Knock Out shifted slightly and felt resistance everywhere. Someone had tied him up. His transformation seams still jittered freely though….so this mech was either very stupid or not very serious.

Slowly Knock Out booted up his optics and caught his first sight of the mech pacing slowly across the room. Tall, thin and faceless he was a strange looking insecticon, his frame strangely modern despite his obvious buggy attributes. The strange mech turned on his heel when he heard the scuff of Knock Out’s ped as it slid across the floor. Knock Out didn’t really care, he was more interested in not looking like a hot mess than being sneaky. He was met with a bright white full face mask and if Knock Out didn’t know the mech better he would have accused Soundwave of getting intimate with some bugs himself. The moment the bug spoke ruined that thought.

“Oh thank the stars you’re awake. I thought I’d overdone it on the tranquilizer.” For a second time that cycle Knock Out could only stare as he waited for his vocalizer to reboot to an acceptable condition. The mech took no time waiting for him. “I do apologize I-” The insecticon cleared his vocalizer, “I saw you coming out of Kickback’s room and you…..you smell divine and my spark’s gone and gotten all lively. What can I say when Saberhorn told me Kickback was courting someone I didn’t expect him to find anyone like you. I didn’t even know we had anyone like you-”

Knock Out couldn’t even be paid to play along. He just wanted to get back to his swarm.”Save it; you were listening outside the door. I thought I felt someone lingering but I was a little too busy figuring out the two in the room. I’m not here for anything and I’d like to just be leaving. Whoever you work for is perfectly safe.”

The other mech froze, his field falling into something akin to an embarrassed smile. “Well I boggled that one didn’t I. I’m glad you were distracted then. Although let me say,” The mech moved closer and grabbed at the servo Knock Out had managed to slip free from the rope securing him to the wall. “You are divine your majesty.” Bringing Knock Out’s servo up he pressed a few long kisses to the knuckles then slowly moved up till things were too awkward. “I have over fifty thousand mechs files stored in my databanks but only you are stored in my spark.”

“Ah a shifter, that’s how you did it. Very clever.” Knock Out had pegged the black and white mech for a spy but a shifter was next level. “I didn’t know Insecticons could also be shifters.”

The insecticon raised his servos in a proud manner, doing a small turn to emphasize his feelings on himself.“A mech of many talents.”
“Can I go now?” The bugs face fell at Knock Out’s unenthusiasm. “You can escort me out. I want to leave and go back to my own pit. I was brought here against my will you know. Nicely...but...still I had no say on the matter.” Knock Out had managed to slip his other servo from the rope but with the intricate knots in the rope around his waist he wasn’t getting anywhere unless he used his weapons.

“Kickback brought you here?”

“I never said it was Kickback. I woke up in his room but for all I know some lunatic of your swarm thought to make me their mate and he saved me. Do not put words where they don’t go.”

The mech’s field spiked then dipped again. “My apologies. I didn’t realize who I was dealing with.” The Insecticon sighed as he leaned back on himself. Forgoing his demeanor for exhaustion. This bug was good at what he did, if Knock Out wasn’t used to playing the same game he might have been fooled. “Your majesty I want to just let you go. Run off with you in fact but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. However Glowstrike...my “queen”.....has a knack for being very ruthless and as someone quite close to her I simply-” The spy was interrupted by one the metal doors of the cave being torn open and slamming against the wall. A lanky fuschia femme stood looking rather stern and composed in the doorway but Knock Out could tell she was livid.

“What in Solus good name did you do now Starshot and what made you think it was more appropriate to call me down here than to bring it to me personally?” This time when Starshot sighed it was real, his servo gently sliding down his blank face.

“I said an hour, one hour then come down how do you expect me to do anything in ten minutes?”

The mech Knock Out presumed was Glowstrike gave no mind to her spy’s mutterings as she noticed him tied to the wall. “You found...another queen? Glowstrike moved slowly closer,cautious, noticing Knock Out’s unbound limbs. “It’s been ages since I’ve seen another swarm, let alone one with a queen.”

“A proper queen to boot. You might want to take note. I bet their swarm isn’t constantly uprising and threatening their head are they darling? Bet half of them are already mostly yours anyway judging from your ravishing glow.” Contrary to his earlier worries Starshot seemed to have no problem being casual and even a little sassy with his queen.

Knock Out was also getting the feeling that he was likely the only “proper queen” in existence thanks to the war and was likely tricked into it by a bunch of very horny, attractive insecticons. Then he remembered no he was threatened by Megatron so put his slight irritation on the matter past him. “Am I the only one who likes to have fun because honestly it’s not that bad. Takes some getting used to and Primus knows breeders can get ahead of themselves but if you make it fun then it’s a good time.”

Glowstrike was embarrassed now, fighting off a blush from that and her rage. “What were you thinking bringing them here? This was not what I meant when I wanted help with morale!”

“Really? Because I told you that the insecticons we picked up wanted to join a swarm not another regiment! I wanted to join a swarm, I wanted a home! If we hadn’t become friends over the long years you would have been looking at my aft as I escorted this lovely moth out! You can’t have the job and not fill all the requirements no matter how much time has passed. Insecticons didn’t want change we were all happy minding our business in the wild and selling our wares to city folk for luxuries. They want a queen who wants them not a leader who’s only keeping everyone together because it’s all they can do. You don’t want to be a queen so when I first smelled this one I found them immediately. I had planned on bringing them over to discuss but they’re quite crafty. Luckily some other member of our swarm did the rest for me and brought them here.”
Knock Out couldn’t help but be a little shocked. This bug could have been running around as anyone of team prime and it would have taken the Bots forever to figure out. Add Shockwave’s ancient Insecticon sneaking into the ship and it was no wonder his guards had been going nuts.

“Umm excuse me what was that again?” His question went ignored.

“There is nothing wrong with letting go of unnecessary customs! Breeding is for growing swarms, we don’t need to grow our swarm we’re fine as it is! And what help is having everyone’s thoughts in my head going to serve me to make decisions! I fuel them, I keep them safe, it’s not my fault they don’t want to do anything. I’ve given them every reason to trust me!” Knock Out was starting to get the feeling that this was quite a touchy subject for the femme.

“Except the one thing they told you they needed to feel safe! Face it they aren’t comfortable without the feeling of a queen, I'M not comfortable without the feeling of a queen! It’s who we are and there’s nothing wrong with that!”

“They’ll learn to get over it! The war is over, everything will calm down!”

“So then they’ll feel comfortable heading out on their own to find a queen who suits their needs.”

“LET THEM LEAVE THEY’LL SOON REALIZE HOW WE’VE DWINDLED AND COME RUNNING BACK!” That wasn’t the best attitude for a queen. Even having his swarm forced on him Knock Out knew that. Why in the Pit did she even want this job?

“What if I left?!"

“You wouldn’t dare!” There was a slight screech to her tone that doubted the words. Knock Out couldn’t help but wonder what connection these mechs had and why in the hell the damn rope was taking so long to get through! Primus he missed his saws but his scalpels were much more quiet.

“There’s a new queen sitting right here and I could easily overpower you. Maybe I’ll ignore you and do what’s best for the swarm. I highly doubt Saberhorn would have any objections and him Copperback and I can all kill Scorponok if he decides he won’t think smart.”

“I’ll kill them and you. If you think I’m going to stand and let you tell me what to do you are wrong. You may have been a good friend Starshot but the war is over and you are not as needed as you once were.” The femme raised her servo, the palms already glowing with a bright red energy.

“THEY HAVE AN HEIR, A CHILD HEIR NO LESS.” Starshot didn’t need to yell over the sparking of Glowstrike’s readying energy blast but he may have needed to reach through her blind rage.

The energy in Glowstrike’s palm quickly faded as she stood stock still and looked at Knock Out in disbelief. Knock Out appreciated the save but it was unnecessary, he’d finally gotten both his legs free and could have slipped away. “Truely? You have an heir?” Knock Out didn’t know how to respond. He didn’t know if he liked the idea of this strange femme knowing about Fade. It didn’t seem to matter, Starshot had plenty more information.

“A little moth. Just born. I’d wager he’s born by now, the perfect thing for an all-”

While Sharpshot seemed to be in the negotiating mind his queen was obviously not.“GIVE ME THE CHILD!”

“WHAT?!” Shocked Starshot looked at Glowstrike as if she was a completely different mech. “I swear she’s not normally like this. Glowstrike darling I know this is a sore subject for you but that is not how you start an allegiance.”
“I don’t want an allegiance. I want the child. Now be a good proper queen, go with Starshot, and bring them to me!” Glowstrike tried to smooth herself back down to what was likely her usual calm but her image was already quite ruined.

With a little wriggling Knock Out dropped to the floor free from his bonds. With a quick flash of transformation his new blade guarded his arm. “Umm….no. I don’t know what this place’s deal is but I’m having none of it.”

“WHY NOT THAT’S WHAT THEY’RE FOR! You can just go make another one since you like it so much, so stop being greedy!”

“They’re my sparkling I’m not giving them to a crazy femme!”

“FINE! Then since you won’t compromise back to the original plan!”

Starshot slipped forward and blocked Knock Out from the femme. “NO! Glowstrike be reasonable! He has a swarm! The child will have guards! We’ll never get them on our own and despite that-! I won’t let you hurt him.” Glowstrike hissed a spiteful retort on her glossia but with most of her inherent rage gone her processor was helping her again.

“Fine!” Glowstrike smoothed her plates once more as she took a step back from the two. “If you want him so bad then I’ll leave this up to you and the breeders. Why have a stranger’s heir when he can give us one of our own. If he’s a proper queen it should be easy! How does that sound to you Starshot?”

Starshot turned to look at Knock Out and Knock Out could feel that smile in his field again. His form slowly morphing till he was sporting an actual grin, a slightly familiar grin but one Knock Out rarely saw. A veritable copy of Ultra Magnus soon towered over him, optics thirsty and gleaming. “Now that darling sounds like a plan.”

Back across the wilds The Vespa sat on a downed tree as the soft aluminum grass tickled her peds as the wind blowed. Two other mechs sat bound in the dirt, looking sour. It had taken her and Highwire almost a full day to finally catch a scent of their Sire and find the lab and of course it had turned up empty save for the two now bound in the dirt, a few tanks full of strange half mechs and a parade of weird animals. Vespa refused to give up and sent Highwire back down to at least find something while she interrogated the captives but despite the silver one being easily swayed she got little to nothing. Even the Insecticon who had supposedly taken Knock Out wasn’t even there so she couldn’t put him down! They had to go all the way back to the damn base and who knew if he would still be there by then! Arcee’s breeders were big tough things and the insecticon was smart so there was no telling what might happen. Vespa sighed as she bit into a cube of stolen energon taking a sip of the disgusting stuff before shoving it at the lanky silver mech. Indignantly he drank it for her. At least the two had put up a good fight, so her exhaustion took the sting out of her failure.

The hatch to the hidden lab suddenly popped up and Highwire poked her head out, the group of beasts suddenly rushing past her as well. Highwire looked at the two captives. “I fed them I hope you don’t mind. They were begging at the fuel cache door.” The silver mech sighed and flopped into the dirt uselessly.

“No, that is quite alright. You strange strange lunatic.”

“Great! Oh Vespa I also found this, I don’t know what it could mean but it was shoved under a lab table.” Making her way out of the hatch Highwire dragged out with her a massive collapsed cocoon. “It has the Sire's scent on it.”
Vespa jumped to her peds, “What?!” She turned her rage on Shockwave, kicking the mech till his optic lit to life. “HEY! Sauron! Tell me what the Pit this means!” Slowly Shockwave shifted his gaze to the cocoon.

He scoffed smugly. “That is not the way to show appreciation for a favor.” It was clear he wasn’t going to say anything. Not that much of a surprise.

Vepsa bristled. “Highwire come over here and kick him for me!” Highwire nodded determinedly and ran towards the bot, her ped landing square in Shockwaves side, sending the tank flying a good distance away. The femme followed him tagging in the interrogation for her sister.

Starscream turned to watch the show just happy it wasn’t him. “That was a good kick. She must get it from Knock Out, he was great at kicking you know.”

End Notes

I think this story needs a better title except for the one it has now and holy fuck he's totally gonna be Mothra. but is it just the new predacon? ooh come back for chapter two to find out- Damn prime ruining Terracons and making them Predacons. Making it confusing. Kudo's, comments, and requests if you like.

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