**The Spark She Holds**

**Summary**

Unbeknownst to the Autobots the Decepticons made quick work of Earth when they arrive. Destroying cities and causing humankind to flee to wherever they thought were safe. But Charlie Watson isn't a background character to be hidden underground. When she is given both a blessing and a curse she finds herself in the forefront of the Cybertronian War. But she finds comfort during the most dangerous time in history, comfort in the form of a mute yellow Autobot who starts to look like more than a friend.
The body was sprawled out among the rubble of destroyed buildings, smashed cars, and cracked road. It, of course, was larger than her, but didn’t look as massive as…the others. The metal body had been torn and beaten, shot and dented, what looked like the insides of her dad’s corvette pooled out of its abdomen like organs.

But she could still make out it’s face, red and metal plating that too closely resembled the face of a human. Something like claws had dragged across its face. It had something akin to horns atop its head, one had been broken, the sight had her smile bitterly.

Horns…At least they aren’t subtle over the fact they were sent from Hell.

She knelt before its face and stared into its dead, blank eyes and tried to hold back a shudder of unease. Dead or alive she didn’t want to be anywhere near these…things. But this could be her only chance to see if these robots’ bodies could be of any use to her.

The thought had come to her as she knelt in her makeshift home, hiding under her bed as she heard the sounds of a fight. There had been voices, metallic and rough that left an oily tang in her mouth as she tried to figure out what the words had been saying. But these creatures spoke a mankind had never heard before. And even if they had spoken in perfect English she wouldn’t have been able to make anything out over the sound of thunderous gunfire, over the vibrations every time the mammoth metal bodies slammed against the ground of nearby building, over the scream that had cut short far too quickly.

She didn’t know how long she had stayed under the bed, trying to control her shaking, straining her ears against the eerie quiet of San Francisco.

But she had shaken off her fear the next morning, or at least, shaken enough off to come down to the wreckage of the brawl and see what she could scavenge.

Stepping closer to the robotic corpse her eyes instinctively went to the sky, it was gray and clear. For now.

Often she wondered how long they had flown overhead, spying on humans, learning their weaknesses while disguised as jets and helicopters. And tried as humans might to defend their planet, it had been too late.

She had reluctantly taken her brother’s dog to the vet for a checkup, thinking about things that weren’t important anymore, like boys and work. On the way back home she had noticed an increased number of police patrolling the streets, a couple people glancing nervously up at the sky.
A crowd had formed in front of the TV shop, watching whatever was on the dozens of television sets that sat on display.

She had slipped through the throng of bumping arms and confused faces until she was in front, her eyes widening when she saw what everyone was staring at.

A robot. A giant robot that looked to be made out of a jet, shooting at the tall buildings of New York, fire surrounding it as people-so small compared to the creature-running for their lives.

She was pushed out of the way as army tanks showed up on the screen, this time she stayed back, clutching her brother’s dog tightly in her arms.

“Is it some kind of movie?”

“It must be. A crazy trailer to get people’s attention.”

“It looks…really real.”

“It can’t be real.”

As the crowd continued to voice their theories she turned on her heel, planning to head back home. She agreed that…whatever was on that screen, must be for some kind of movie or event. There wasn’t any giant robot in New York, there’s no way.

A sudden explosion had sent her to her knees as people cried out around her. She looked around and saw a thin trail of smoke-no, it wasn’t thin, it was far away…in San Francisco.

Before she could try to rationalize the sight a jet flew overhead, far too close, its engines nearly bursting her ears. And for half a second, she got the sense that a pair of malicious eyes had landed on her. But just as quick the feeling vanished along with the jet.

The rest she would never forget, of the army arriving into town and telling people they needed to evacuate, that there was a bunker that would keep them safe until this attack was handled. Who exactly was attacking they wouldn’t say, or didn’t know.

By then masses were pouring out into the streets and she had slipped away into an old forest path, she didn’t have time to swim through the crowds to fetch her bike, but she knew a short cut through the trees. She could get home, the fear lodging itself into her throat…it would go away once she got home and got her mother and brother to safety (and her step father too, she guessed).

There was a whirl of engines before the sound of rapid bullets fired through the air. Only halfway down the path she immediately jumped off the small path and ducked under bushes, thorn scraping her skin as she wrapped herself around the frantically barking dog in her arms.
She heard the screams of the people from town and tried not to think about how she knew those people, they were neighbors and classmates and with every explosion she knew there was one less of them in the world.

It was hours before she moved again, her body aching, the dog reduced to tired and frightened whimpers, the explosions had stopped, and so did the screams.

She forced her stiff legs up and continued down the path, keeping her ears open for the sound of engines.

Her home had become nothing but a pile of rubble. She had dug through the debris until her hands bled, she hadn’t cried that hard since her father’s funeral. But all she had found was broken pictures and memorabilia she should’ve appreciated more. But there was no bodies and she took hope from that, her mother and brother could still be alive, she would find them.

The months after that led her to what was left of San Francisco, it wasn’t overly safe, but it was the only place where she could find supplies and a decent place to hide. And over those months she had met other survivors, some citizens, some soldiers who had been separated from his group, telling her of what they had learned. These robots were aliens, and that had successfully attack the entire planet. While some still believed there were armies figuring out how to stop the extraterrestrial enemies, most survivors had the eyes of people who had given up hope.

She wasn’t one of them. She had built and secured a new home in the debris of the city and was working on building a radio and contacting new survivors, ones who were fighting, who hadn’t given up hope, ones who knew where her family was. And that’s why she was now going over the body of this dead robot, they were blood-thirsty, living machines, but they were still machines, and surely it had something for her radio.

But as she tried to make sense of what looked like a scene from a science fiction horror film, she lost focus on her surroundings…until the awful, awful, thrum of engines filled her ears and sent dread down her spine. It was close, too close!

She spun around in hysterical panic, her foot hitting a shard of broken cement that jutted out of the ground and sent her flying. She let out a hiss of pain as she stopped the fall with her hands, her skin scraping against the cement and the metal bits of the dead robots. The bits-its flesh-digging into her skin. She lifted her hands, bloody and now full of shards of the robot’s alien metal.

The engine was getting closer.

Ignoring the stinging and throbbing of her hands and arms she jumped back to her feet and took off. A shadow fell over her and she tried to swallow the bile of fear that rose up her throat. Her home was too far, and even if it wasn’t she couldn’t let the robot see where she lived.

As if her prayers had finally been answered she turned the corner and saw a massive pile of
wreckage, what was left of collapsed buildings piled on top of...did they tear open a hole in the
road?

She didn’t stop to ponder, instead dropping to her hands and knees and crawled through a human-
sized opening of the debris, biting back a cry as her wounded, metal riddled hands pressed against
the cracked concrete. The insides of the mess as dark and hot, nothing surprising. What was
peculiar was how large it felt. She had expected to crawl into a small hole and hide there until the
sound of engines left. But as her hands cautiously stretched out to feel for a shard of brick or
anything similar, she felt nothing but air. She didn’t move any farther than a few feet away from
the shaft of light that was the hole she had crawled through. A sickened, shivering part of her was
fearful that there could be bodies in here, killed from the collateral damage of the robot fight. Or
killed by the robots themselves.

As if the thought had summoned it the ground suddenly vibrated as something large landed
outside, and the shaft of light vanished, leaving her in total darkness. For a moment her heart
stopped and she tried to breathe, to suck in air for her lungs and courage for her heart. She slowly,
oh so slowly, turned around and crouched, careful not to put pressure on her hands again. She
peered through the hole, expecting to be bathed in the evil red light of a glaring, hungry eye. But
instead she saw the edge of a large metal foot that could easily crush her bones into pudding.

The ground shook underneath her stomach once again, another robot, and she swallowed her
breath, as if the second one had a better chance of sensing she was there.

The two robots were having a conversation, still in that strange language she had no hope of
deciphering. But she could figure out the tone of their voices, she imagined they would sound
highly amused if they knew she was there, ready to play like a cat with a mouse. But instead she
cought the sounds of confusion and frustration, they couldn’t figure something out. Or maybe they
were looking for something. Just not her.

But what could they be looking for? The dead robot was in clear sight only a yard or so away. She
recalled how one soldier she had come across had said they were looking for something,
something that could completely destroy any hope of humans taking Earth back. But the man’s
eyes had been wild and broken, and he stumbled away when she offered him a place for the night.
She hadn’t taken his words at face value. Yet it wasn’t out of the question, even if the soldier had
just made it up in what was left of his mind. These robots hadn’t been taking over any resources,
they didn’t seem to need to eat or drink. Maybe they wanted oil? Maybe they wanted the land?
Maybe they just wanted to destroy?

...Or maybe there's something on Earth that shouldn't be here.

Dusk and minuscule chunks of brick and concrete showered down on on her as the wreckage above
creaked. One of the robots was trying to move it. She curled herself into a ball, expecting to be
buried alive or crushed. But a quick shout from outside brought the creaking to a halt. The other
one was talking in annoyance, sounding like the angry rev of a the jet it could transform into.
They were looking for something. Maybe her but she had her doubts, whatever it was they didn’t want to risk the chance of it being destroyed as they tried to get to it.

Despite her fear she was filled with a ravenous sense of curiosity. What if they were looking for a weapon?

Fantasies of finding something strong enough to kill these monsters filled her mind with a vengeful-tasting euphoria. If she find it and get it to someone who would know what to do, if she found a soldier or a hide out of survivors… The thoughts distracted her as she moved to push herself up into a sitting position. The metallic bits of the slain robot dug even deeper into her skin as she pressed her palms against the ground. The sharp pain caught her by surprise and she sucked in an agonized breath.

Then a red glow fell over her skin.

She looked up to see a crimson eye staring at her from the hole, she didn’t have to imagine the primal glee that shone from the socket.

But then it spoke…in a voice she could understand perfectly: “Hello there.”

The voice was as slick as oil but dug into her ears like rusted nails and she turned and bolted into the darkness just as claw-like fingers reached through the gap, grasping for her.

She hadn’t run far when the ground below her gave way and she was falling, tumbling down the hole they had built, that had been covered by the destruction yesterday’s battle caused. But all she could do was curl herself into a ball and endure the bumps and scraps that were caused by her dangerous tumble.

When she finally came to a stop at the bottom she counted her lucky stars and thanked whoever was listening that she was only sore, no broken bones and nothing as bad as her injured hands that she really needed to tend to. But she couldn’t even see the bloody appendages even if she held them right in front of her face. She strained to listen for any sounds, there was nothing but her shallow breathing that was becoming more and more quick as she tried to remain calm.

She needed to get out of here, get back to her home and tend to her wounds. Her life was more important that the off chance there was a weapon down here. Especially since these robots made this hole, if a weapon was down here they would’ve taken it long ago.

She lifted her head up, thinking she could see bits of light filtering through the cracks of the pile of demolition up above. She felt a sick twist in her gut, how could she climb up there with her hands like this, she was having trouble even moving her fingers. Standing up she pressed her shoulder against the wall of the hole, slowly, carefully, moving forward, trying to find an entrance. Trying to keep her mind off the thought that she was trapped.
The bottom of the hole wasn’t very large, it only took maybe thirty minutes to make her way around it three times. Each time she didn’t feel anything that could mean a way out. Maybe a foothold that wouldn’t require using her hands, another tunnel, anything! She couldn’t starve to death down here, she still needed to find her family, she still needed to win her home back.

On the fifth walk around she stopped at a spot she had noticed earlier. An opening in the hall, just by her feet, she had thought she had imagined it. Crouching she warily reached an uninjured knuckle out, expecting it to meet a hard surface, instead it met space. A tunnel?

Measuring the size she saw it was small, it would be a tight squeeze, and it could lead to a dead end. But it wasn’t like she had any other options.

Minding her hands she used her elbows to crawl into the tunnel. Almost immediately she felt an almost overwhelming sense of claustrophobia. The ground grazed her hips and head, it would just have to become only slightly smaller and it would trap her. But she had to bite down on that fear and keep forward, it was the only thing she could do.

She spent the new few, agonizing long minutes trying to keep her mind off how tight the space was, how it felt as if she was running out of air.

So she thought of her dad. If he were here, it wouldn’t be so bad. He would’ve found her so quickly and stayed with her, protecting her, making her laugh, giving her hope that it would get better. That she would feel happiness and safety again after such a long time feeling nothing but grief and fear.

But he had died long before the earth turned into rubble.

The tunnel opened up suddenly and she let out a breath of relief and stood up on shaking legs. It was still pitch black, how deep into the earth was she?

And what was that noise?

It was like a thrum of energy, deep, powerful, but not a threat. It felt important and she couldn’t stop her feet from stepping forward, in response the noise grew louder, as if whatever it was knew of her presence.

Despite the state her hands were in she couldn’t help lifting her arms up as she kept walking. She had the sense that whatever was in here, it wasn’t a robot…but maybe it was what they were looking for. So she needed to get it first.

Her hands made contact with something that wasn’t concrete or dirt, it was cool to the touch, impossibly smooth and flat to the touch, and thrummed in anticipation as if it had been waiting for her. Even though her fingers were stiff, she stretched them out and pressed her palms flat against
Immediately there was a burst of light, illuminating the small cavern and the object she was touching: a cube, a massive cube, even larger than the robots. The color lighting it up was beautiful shade of blue, electric and alive, making strange markings-like a language-across the cube’s surface. But she could barely pay attention because the moment her hands were splayed out against the cube a white hot burning sparked down her hands and arms and she let out a desperate and raw scream, but it was as if her hands were glued to the cube’s surface.

Through her pain she was somehow able to see the flecks of metal that had been stuck in her hand start to melt into her skin, the burning silver liquid slipping into the open cuts and her veins felt like lighting, felt like they would burst. It was as if their was an energy, a power source, that was too great for a human to withstand and any second it would destroy her…

But that didn’t happen.

Instead the cube dimmed until it left her in pitch blackness once again, her hands were released and she dropped to the ground with a shaking sob.

All was quiet, the cube had stopped thrumming. Scared she touched the palm of her hand with shaking fingers. She could feel the drying blood, but the wounds were closed up…the robot’s flesh inside her, running through her veins. The thought made bile rise in her throat but she forced it back.

Now was not the time to get sick. Her hands were healed, she could climb out of the hole and back to safety.

She hesitated at the small tunnel, wondering what to do with the cube. It was far too large to take it with her, and even if it wasn’t…she was terrified to touch it again. So with a small shake of her head she crawled back through the little tunnel and started her climb up the hole.

She didn’t get far when the broken buildings and totaled cars started falling around her.

*Can’t I catch one break?* Was her angry and terrified thought as she pressed her body against the wall as much as she could, feeling the wind of debris falling past her, some coming so close to graze her back.

Light fell across her and she dared to look up, just in time to see a truck heading straight toward her face.

She just accepted her death when she was yanked skyward, the truck just a hair away from her face as it fell down into the darkness of the hole. Whatever had grabbed Charlie had lifted her up so fast she had gotten whiplash and it took her a moment to register what was holding her.
It was one of the jets, crouched next to what was left of the debris, its glowing red eyes scanning her as a small group of other robots moved the debris out of the way, one making its way down the hole.

“And what were you doing down there?” the one holding her asked, tightening its grip around her waist. It’s voice was the same one from earlier and it was so eerie and frightening to know and hear that they could speak her language.

The pressure on her ribs caused her to cry out and she pressed her hands against the robot’s knuckle, rubbing drying blood across its finger. It let out a noise akin to disgust and abruptly dropped her. She landed on, thankfully, a softer patch of ground and forced herself to jump up and start running, only glancing back once. She met the jet’s furious red eyes for just one moment and then she was turning into an alleyway, deeper into the city. Nothing gave chase.

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She must have checked that she wasn’t being followed at least ten times before she finally made it to the place she now called home.

It was a skeleton of an apartment complex, she had an inkling it wasn’t already like this before the attacks. And while the doorways on the first floor had been blocked by rubble, a fire escape offered her a way to the second floor and to the room she called her own, the wall torn open so she had gotten a few tarps to make a makeshift wall. She moved the tarp away and was greeted by frantic barking.

“Hey, Conan.” She knelt down and gave the small dog a scratch behind her ears. Relief nearly made her bones melt, she used to not be able to stand her little brother’s dog. But after everything… she grew to appreciate the canine’s companionship. And she could just imagine the look on Otis’s face when they found him.

_When_…

Conan was looking at her expectantly and she let out a guilty sigh. “I forgot to find some food, looks like its baked beans again.” She walked over to the apartment’s small kitchen where she had collected things over the time she had lived here, a fork, a spoon, a can opener, and a few cans of beans.

Swearing to go scavenging for food tomorrow Charlie opened a can and poured half into the cracked bowl she had found for Conan.

While the dog ate Charlie sat down next to her radio, she had found it and managed to fix it up, yet
it still hadn’t worked. She lifted her hand to fiddle with it but halted, glancing at her hand for the first time since she had touched the cube. Her skin had splotches of red as if she had grabbed a handful of poison ivy, but her skin wasn’t aggravated in anyway and she was sure the red would fade soon. Running her fingers over her palm again she wondered if she could fill the bits of the robot’s metal inside her. But her skin felt fine, a little sore but not like she had touched something that burned like fire.

For the first time she finally let herself ponder over the day’s happenings. One of the biggest things was that these robots could speak English, and probably other languages as well. How did they learn that so easily? And what else did they know about humans? Enough to wipe them out incredibly easily…

Then there was the cube. It clearly wasn’t of this world. And it wasn’t far-fetched to believe the robots were looking for it, though she couldn’t imagine what it was for. She hoped that if they found it it would hurt them like it had hurt her.

Finally she reached out and, out of habit, turned on the radio. Her fingers buzzed when she touched the device and there was static…it was on! She let out a cry of delight that made Conan jump. She started to turn the knob frantically: “Hello! Hello! Is anyone there this is—”

Conan started barking frantically and with a drop of terror she heard the all too familiar sound of jets. They could hear her…they had access to radio towers…Of course they did!

Panicked and not knowing what else to do she lifted the radio and slamming it into the ground, shattering it to pieces. Holding back a cry of grief she grabbed Conan and crawled under her bed, pressing the dog against her chest and trying to silence him.

She heard the jets fly over her head, she wondered if it was the one who had grabbed her.

After a few horrifying minutes of hearing engines circle above her head they finally faded away…silence…the robot was gone. And so was any attempt in radioing for help.

Her grip relaxed on Conan and the dog licked her on the cheek before scuttling out from under the bed to finish his meal.

She laid there, limp, feeling tears crawl down her face. She took in a shuddering breath and closed her eyes, pretending her radio wasn’t destroyed, that she could still find her family, that the world wasn’t completely ruined: “My name is Charlie Watson…and I need help.”
Chapter 2

“Be careful. This could be dangerous.”

B-127 felt a twisting in his circuitry at the words. He was currently in the small escape pod he had been occupying for what felt like a million solar cycles. His limbs were cramped, his brain module near fried with boredom, and his spark hurt with worry for Cliffjumper, his fellow scout, his friend.

The Autobot and Decepticon war had been raging for so long it had confusing and worrying when the Decepticons had just…left Cybertron.

Optimus had believed they were up to something, and it was the Autobots’ job to find out what. Not many complained when they had abandoned Cybertron, it was their home…but it was dying, and without the AllSpark…

B-127 shook his head of the thoughts, right now they needed to find Cliffjumper. He comm had gone off line awhile ago, far too long for anyone’s liking.

Wheeljack had suggested that his comm link had simply glitched and while B-127 wanted to believe that…he couldn’t shake off this dreadful feeling that his friend was in trouble. And he needed to find him.

The last comm link he sent was that he was getting incredibly close to the atmosphere of a planet the pod’s computer called Earth. Everyone guessed he had been pulled into the planet’s orbit and landed there. And with B-127 being the closest, he quickly volunteered to go find him. None of the other Autobots tried to stop him, they knew that Cliffjumper needed to be found and B-127 was a capable bot.

Still… There was worry edged in all their voices as they wished him luck right before he entered Earth’s orbit.

During the fall he let his pod’s computer send him information on the planet, on its geology and climates, and creatures. He focused mainly on the creatures, the ones called humans. Not everything he saw he liked, he took in information about their violence, their wars. These humans, as small as they were, were capable of great cruelty. But…he saw they were also capable of great kindness, helping each other, helping creatures less than them… They were more like Cybertronians than he thought—or cared—to realize.

So it was a fifty/fifty chance over how humans would react if he ran into any of them. Best stay in disguise, to be safe. He wondered if Cliffjumper had done the same.
He was a smart scout, B-127’s senior who had always been willing to teach the younger bot everything he knew. The only Autobot he held in even higher esteem was Optimus, and it was natural for everyone to hold a Prime in the highest esteem. Optimus had been the one to bring B-127 to the Academy, seeing a potential in the young stary-eyed bot who wished for adventure and heroic deeds while others scoffed, stating he couldn’t do such things when he was so small.

But Optimus had believed him, and so did Cliffjumper, immediately starting up a friendship when the two had met at the Academy. They had graduated and became scouts under Optimus, positive that together they would help bring this war to an end, find the AllSpark, and fix their home.

And despite…everything that came with a war, B-127 still held onto that hope. After all, the Decepticons were gone, sure Optimus still believed they were out there but if they, they’d fight them again. It’s what Autobots did.

But first he had to find Cliffjumper.

The landing on the Earth’s surface was less than graceful, and B-127 was sure he’d have to work out some dents after he found his friend. But first things first.

Sliding the hatch open he stepped out onto…rubble.

B-127’s faceplate shifted as he looked around. From what the computer told me Earth had plenty of cities, especially on this specific continent. But none of them had been completely demolished, everything leveled down, vehicles crushed, the roads torn to pieces as if something large had been digging for something.

He took a step forward, ready to investigate, when a sharp cry of shock had him whirl around—and B-127 saw his very first human.
Chapter 3

The universe must have known today was Charlie’s birthday. (Keeping track of the days helped her feel better. When the world got back to normal people needed to know what day it was).

After leaving a disappointed Conan at her apartment she started on her trip to find some food, going the opposite way of where she found the dead robot and cube. And while all the nearby stores were ransacked ages ago by herself and traveling strangers, she came across a half buried basement.

Not expecting much she walked down and, to her delight, found bags of chips, canned beef stew, and even a 2 liter of soda. Her stomach gurgled in anticipation but she instead placed her findings in the shoulder bag she had brought along. Both her and Conan would celebrate her birthday together.

My 18th birthday... The thought swam through her head as she crawled out of the basement and idly walked through the silent streets. Back before the world went to hell she had hoped to get the parts she needed for her Dad’s corvette as a birthday present. But that car had been destroyed along with her house, along with a lot of things, really. But Charlie could still daydream. Could picture herself fixing up her Dad’s car and driving it around town, even catching the eye of Tripp Summers. He would’ve been so impressed that she had fixed it up all by herself, and it would’ve driven Tina Lark and her cronies insane.

Maybe Tripp would’ve even given Charlie her first kiss that day.

She was so lost in thought, hiding herself in her fantasies, that she hadn’t watched the skies-and nearly walked right into the path of a meteor.

The impact send her on her back, knocking her breath out of her lungs. She stayed completely still, praying she hadn’t injured her back like she had injured her hands, and watched the dust settle.

It revealed what she had thought had been a meteor, but actually looked like a circular space ship, something out of the old sci-fi films Otis had been obsessed with. But this one was damaged and... opening...

Dread, thick and as hard and as cold as a ball of ice lodged into her throat and Charlie could scarcely breathe.

A body of yellow metal that glistened like the sun stood up in the remains of the pod. This robot was smaller than the others, it looked like he had metal antennas were poking out of its head as it looked around the wasteland that was once San Francisco.
And then it turned around and saw her.

Blue eyes. That was the first thing that caught her attention, two blue orbs that were nothing like the red glares of the others, large and innocent looking. A trick she was sure. And if she didn’t know any better the robot looked more curious than threatening.

It took a step forward, reaching out a hand toward her. Charlie felt the bruises the jet had left across her ribs and she let out a scream, the robot jerking back several feet as if she was the terrifying one.

Then, as if her cry had been an alarm, she heard the familiar engines…

The human suddenly jumped to its feet and bolted underneath a vehicle that was in horrid shape. B-127 made to call out, to apologize for frightening it (though that shriek had been pretty startling for him). But before he could make a sound a shadow fell over him.

He lifted his chin up and saw a familiar pair of red and white wings before the jet transformed and landed in one smooth motion on a toppled roof a few yards away.

He couldn’t believe his optics. “…Blitzwing.” A Decepticon…on this planet.

“B-127,” the harsh, baritone voice sliced against his audio receptors.

“Did you do this?” the Autobot indicated to the city that had basically become a graveyard, keenly aware of the human still hiding a few feet away. He held back a shudder at the thought—no, the fact—that skeletons of her kind lay scattered around them buried.

Blitzwing slowly blinked, his optics dim with apathy, “It’s not like they wouldn’t have done it to themselves, eventually. These are a violent species B-127, it would be impressive if they weren’t so pathetic.”

He wasn’t surprised by the Decepticon’s words, he seen this con tear apart other Cybertronians, he wouldn’t think twice in murdering innocent organics.

“What are you doing here? What could the Decepticons gain from destroying this planet. What would Starscream have to gain?”

Blitzwing’s face twisted into a sneer, he was one of many Decepticons who didn’t hold any love for Megatron’s replacement. But they were loyal and let Starscream decide their course of action. First the bot had abandoned Cybertron even thought he cared more about reviving and ruling their home planet than Megatron, and now he came to Earth, a planet covered in water and dirt, nothing
like Cybertron… This didn’t sound like the arrogant but dangerous Decepticon B-127 had been warned of.

“That’s none of your concern, Autobot,” Blitzwing spoke up. “What is your concern is that you aren’t the first Autobot to arrive on Earth.”

B-127’s antennae lifted in astonishment. Cliffjumper! “Where is he?”

To his surprise Blitzwing lifted an arm and pointed to his left, “He’s over there.” He moved his hand a little more to the right, “And over there.” He moved his hand to the far left, “And maybe a little over there.”

He looked back to B-127, his red glare glittering with humored malice. “He put up a fight, I’ll give him that. And I do appreciate the entertainment he provided, the fun of slowly tearing his limbs off.”

B-127 dropped his head plate into place, his blasters thrumming with the promise of avenging Cliffjumper. Just what Blitzwing was hoping for he got his own weapons ready, his face lighting up with excitement.

*Keep the fight away from the human.* He hoped it had left by now.

B-127 charged at him, but with Blitzwing’s jets he was faster. Tackling into B-127 the two rolled across the destroyed cement. The con grabbed his neck in a vice-like grip, dragging him across the ground, the scrape of his plating, B-127 quickly slamming his blaster into Blitzwing side. The shot sent him flying, but with his hand still wrapped firmly around B-127’s neck and the bot went right after him. But Blitzwing lost his grip as they hit the ground and jumped back, kicking the Con in the face for good measure.

Blitzwing’s metallic chuckle rang out as he struggled to his feet, not seeming to mind the smoking black hole on his side. “That felt very personal, Autobot. Are you upset?”

“Try to have fun, Blitzwing,” B-127 growled, “That’ll distract you long enough for me to rip the spark out of your chest.”

*Run, run, run!*

The words chanted in Charlie’s head like a mantra as she laid huddled under the van, eyes glued to
the two battling robots. Her heart beat so hard against her chest she was sure it would leave a bruise, her palms damp with sweat.

But despite the fear tuning her blood icy, and the adrenaline that was about to burst her chest open, she didn’t move.

The robots were talking with each other, the strange language heavy with something Charlie understood all too well: Hatred. And it was clear they were fighting to the death, not that she had originally thought they were capable of playfully roughhousing. But still... She figured they were like a pack, that they killed the weakest members which is what had happened to the red robot from yesterday. Right?

But this yellow one, despite its size, was far from weak. It was holding its own fairly well. It would’ve been useful in making sure mankind stayed down. So why…

There was a loud thump as the jet pinned its yellow bot down, its hand pressing against the other one’s throat. Charlie wondered if they could feel pain. The jet had a canon on its arm and didn’t waste time point it right at its enemy’s head.

She covered her mouth to muffle a gasp. She didn’t know if she was ready to see such brutal carnage. But at the last second the smaller robot whipped out a blade from its wrist and stabbed the hand that was crushing its throat, at the same time it used its other hand to push the canon away a second before it fired.

The blast went straight to Charlie’s van and sent it flying, she covered her head with her hands and couldn’t help a cry of terror as she felt hot air burn against her skin. She was afraid the heat would boil the skin off her bones but after a horrifying second the air cooled again.

And then she heard the silence.

Removing her hands and lifting her head her eyes widened when she saw both bots were now staring at her, the jet still pinning the small one down. She took notice of their expressions immediately, blue eyes staring at her with dismay, red eyes glaring at her with the look of a hungry jungle cat. Charlie didn’t have to wonder what that meant.

The jet muttered something to the other bot and then lunged for her. Charlie made to move, even though she knew it was futile, but just as claws reached out to her the red and white robot was slammed into the ground. The yellow robot’s wrapped its legs around the jet’s torso as it immediately stuck up and tried to tear it off its back. Charlie scrambled back, away from the stomping feet, her eyes on the yellow bot as it lifted the blade on its wrist and with one impossibly quick motion-stabbed the jet directly into its chest.

Charlie didn’t fully process the fact these things were alive until she heard it scream. I mean, they were obviously sentient, but she imagined they were still soulless machines, programmed to
destroy, maybe sent by an evil version of E.T.

But that scream, filled with agony and the desperate fear that one must feel when life is slipping out of your fingers. Only something living, something with a soul, could make that sound. And this jet wasn’t going out quietly.

Charlie watched, practically transfixed, as the jet used the last of its strength to grab the yellow robot’s arm and throw him into the ground. With a small, sharp weapon that reminded her of a dentist office from her nightmares, it plunged the spear into the yellow robot’s throat. There was a gargled noise as something was ripped out of the robot’s neck, Charlie fought back a wave of nausea.

For one moment the jet stood, swaying, crushing whatever it had pulled out in its hand, a hole sliced through its chest. Charlie thought she saw the faintest blue light glowing from the dark depth. Then the jet collapsed to the ground, and its eyes went dark. Breathing harder than was probably healthy Charlie looked toward the yellow bot as it tried to rise to its legs. It looked to be shaking with exhaustion, its body beat up from the vicious fight. It looked at Charlie again, it seemed to do that every chance it got…and every time there was no sort of malice in those blue eyes.

The shared contact was short-lived, the robot falling forward apparently having fainted.

One was dead and the other was passed out. This was her chance to escape!

RUN!

And Charlie really meant to, she turned on her heel, envisioned her root back to Conan where the two could hole up and eat chips until it felt safe to go outside again.

But it would never feel safe again. Not like this, not with giant metal predators that could somehow hide around every corner. It wasn’t safe until they were all gone, and from what she just witnessed the only ones who stood a chance against these were their fellow kind.

She slowly turned to look at the small one again, she could have been hallucinating but…she was sure this one had saved her. She would’ve been snatched if it hadn’t been for it.

She glanced at the jet’s body. She hadn’t imagined the animosity between the two. If humans fought other humans, then odds were these robots fought other robots. And maybe this small-but dangerous-yellow robot could become an ally, or at least give her some information on what to do about this giant robot apocalypse no one had been prepared for.

Charlie sucked in a breath and took a step toward the robot, “I must be out of my mind.”
Chapter Notes

I just had to manually put spaces in this chapter's paragraphs and will have to keep doing it if I can't figure out why AO3 didn't save the spaces from the original draft—please be grateful.

B-127’s brain module was dark with exhaustion, his limbs thick with pain. He needed to move, he needed to stand up and get back to his pod and tell Optimus and the other Autobots what he had found out.

The Decepticons.

They had done something horrible, because the Autobots had failed to track them down and stop them.

It was then he felt something small and soft brush against his head—a moment before a jolt of strange but unfamiliar energy ripped through his wires, bursting the inside of his head with blue light. The unexpected explosion of adrenaline had B-127’s head shoot up, optics wide.

The human jumped back, its hand pulling back to its chest, expression fearful. B-127 blinked several times, clearing his fuzzy vision. His limbs shook from the after effects of…whatever that was. He narrowed his optics at the human who looked ready to bolt. Did it do that?

No, that was crazy.

“Hey,” the human suddenly spoke, voice cracking.

He tilted his head to the side, its voice was soft, and along with its curves he was reminded of femmebots like Arcee. This human must be female.

And its trying to be nice say something you slaghead!

B-127 made to return the greeting and introduce himself, he’d make it very clear he was a friend—not foe. But only a faint buzz came out of his throat. His throat that felt alarmingly empty.

Oh… That’s right. In Blitzwing’s last throes of life he had tore out B-127’s vocal cord. He glanced over at the dead Con, what was left of the cord lay crushed in his palm. There was no salvaging that, until he could find a new one he was mute.

The girl followed his gaze, swallowing before she spoke, “I-uh-I take it that wasn’t your friend?” She laughed nervously.

He shook his head, hatred burning in his spark. He killed Cliffjumper. He needed to find his friend, he needed to figure out all that had happened. But he needed help to do it.
He stood up on wobbling legs, the human taking several steps back. He gave her a look he imagined as pathetic, he didn’t know how to explain that he would never hurt her. But that puzzle would have to wait, he needed to contact Optimus Prime.

He turned and headed to the pod, checking his comm link as he went. He felt a wave of dread when all he heard was static, even if he hadn’t lost his voice his comm had been damaged in the fight. So instead he knelt in front of the pod, finally getting a chance to see how it handle the crash landing. All the while he was acutely aware of the girl behind him, very cautiously stepping closer.

“You’re-” she hesitated, as if it was hard to get the words out. “You’re not leaving, are you?”

The unexpected question had him turning to look at her over his shoulder. She was looking at the ground, he found it fascinating that her optics were brown, an unseen color in any Cybertronian’s eyes. She was clutching her hands together, running her thumbs together as she rocked back on her heels. Everything about her was the definition of nervousness. She was still scared of him.

When she looked up at him he knew it took an effort. “It’s just-you’re not like those, right?” She indicated to where Blitzwing laid, empty eyes staring up at the sky. “And you saved me on purpose, right?”

He nodded, remembering the spike of fear he had felt when Blitzwing had spotted the human.

“Soundwave would be grateful if I brought Ravage a new toy,” he had said.

“There are more of these robots, you know,” she went on, her voice growing with confidence as she continued. “All over the world, and they need to be stopped… Will you stop them?”

B-127’s spark went out to the human, she was looking at him so beseechingly, like he was her only hope. But how could he explain he needed to go and get the other Autobots first? If he couldn’t speak how could he promise here that he would be back.

In his hesitation the girl’s eyes darkened, “It’s a yes or no question.”

She hadn’t realized yet that he couldn’t talk. He touched his neck, then pointed to Blitzwing’s hand where his vocal cord laid scattered. She looked to his throat then to Blitzwing, her gaze calculating.

“Can…you not talk?” He shook his heat, feeling a twinge of shame. He wasn’t the hero she needed, he wished Optimus had come in his place. He would’ve taken Blitzwing out with no problem, and he would’ve kept his voice when he did so. He would’ve been able to assure this poor girl.

The air suddenly thrummed and the two looked up to the sky in unison. It was clear, for now, but the noise was getting louder and he knew exactly what it was.

So did she, “There’s more coming.”

B-127 looked at his pod. He didn’t have time to hide it, and if he tried to fly it back up into space…the seekers loved a little target practice. Besides, he needed to get this girl to safety.

Quickly he transformed into his Cybertronian vehicle. In a better situation he would’ve scanned an Earth vehicle, but all the vehicles around them were ruined and its not like the humans didn’t know giant robots from space were a very real thing.

He opened his door, expecting the girl to jump in. But instead she simply said, “No thanks.” And bolted.
Are you crazy?! B-127 screamed in his head as he followed her, glad he was small enough to drive through the cramped streets she was taking. B-127 was considered one of the fastest Autobots on Cybertron, and having to go slow enough to not leave the girl behind hurt more than his fight with Blitzwing.

She didn’t trust him, obviously. But he had thought—or maybe hoped—that saving her and their ‘conversation’ would’ve helped warm her up to him. But at least she knew the best routes, the sound of whoever had been flying toward them could no longer be heard. Wherever they were going, no Decepticon was following.

But eventually the girl came to a halt in an empty street and B-127 parked next to her. She had her hands on her knees and was taking gulping breathes. Clearly humans didn’t have the kind of endurance he did. The thought reminded him of how he had laid practically immobile after his fight with Blitzwing before he felt that rush of energy. He would’ve liked to have asked the human about it if he could speak.

When she straightened he opened his door again, hoping that this time she’d accept the ride.

“I’m fine, we’re almost there,” she replied, walking onward.

Almost where? He wondered as he slowly followed. For a second he wondered if this was a trap, if she didn’t believe he was good and had a pack of humans ready to ambush him. But he pushed the thought away. The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

After a few minutes of silent, awkward, walking he found out that ‘there’ was what was left of a building. “This is where I live. Well, where I started to live after everything went to hell,” she explained as she took a set of black metal stairs up to the second floor. B-127 transformed back to his bot form, at his full height his head could just reach the room she vanished into, covered by tarps.

He pulled the tarp back, curious to see what a human room looked like, only to be welcomed by a furious, high-pitched barking. B-127 took a step back when he saw something small brown and hairy yapping madly at him.

“Conan! Don’t!” The girl picked up the creature known as Conan and held it to her chest. “You just startled him that’s all.”

B-127 took in her frightened expression and realized she was worried for the creature that was screaming at him. She thought he was going to hurt it.

This is a chance to show her you’re a good bot! With slow, deliberate steps he walked forward. The girl looked nervous but she didn’t move from where she stood, the Conan growling in her arms. He had to remind themselves that neither of them had seen the good his kind could do. They weren’t just villains or conquerors. An image of Optimus Prime flashed in his mind—they were heroes. A vision of Cliffjumper followed—they were friends. B-127 could think of hundreds of other Autobots who would do a better job at being the protector of Earth, of this girl. But until he could reach Optimus and the others, he would have to do.

The Conan’s small head was soft to the touch and it stiffened when B-127’s finger rested lightly on top of it. The girl had stiffened too, both silent. Not knowing what else to do B-127 stayed still and quiet too. And after an agonizing long second of not moving or speaking, the girl’s shoulders sagged in relief. Encouraged by her relaxation B-127 flexed his finger, trying to scratch the little Conan’s head, he had seen from the pod that many creatures on Earth were covered in something
called hair. It looked itchy.

The Conan wagged its tail at the scratch and the human pulled her lips up in a small smile.

*Oh.* Human smiles were as nice as Autobot smiles.

She placed the Conan down and it trotted off to lie on the girl’s bed. Then she looked up at him, she still had a look of weariness to her, but she looked more open then before.

“We, uh, never introduced ourselves.” She offered her arm, then her cheeks turned read, her eyes sparkling with embarrassment. “Sorry you probably don’t even know what handshakes are and even if you did my hand’s too small.”

B-127 reached out and tucked his fingers under her palm. She was smooth and soft and much warmer than he thought she would be. She stared at his hand, her expression unreadable and a strange sense of anxiety plucked at his spark and he wished he could ask her what she thought of his hand.

Finally she cleared her throat, “I’m Charlie. Charlie Watson. I just turned eighteen and uh…I guess I’m an expert survivor since I’m not dead yet.” She nodded to the now sleeping the Conan. “You already met Conan. He’s a dog. He was my…brother’s dog.”

A sadness darkened her eyes but just as quickly as it appeared it was gone. “Is there anyway you can tell me your name?”

His optics narrowed. He had no idea. He could try to find a way to spell it for here but he highly doubted she would understand his alphabet. He let out a hum of frustration and the girl-Charlie’s-brows lifted.

“You sound like a bumblebee.”

He had no idea what that was but it sounded like a compliment. He hummed again and that brought her smile back.

“If its okay with you. I think I’ll call you Bumblebee.”

Starscream stood over Blitzwing’s body, his expression nothing but apathy. He never personally cared for Blitzwing anymore than Blitzwing cared for anyone.

But despite how absolutely infuriating he could be, he knew it wasn’t a Decepticon that had snuffed out his spark. And he knew it wasn’t a Decepticon’s pod that Soundwave and Thundercracker were now observing.

Another Autobot. And here he had hoped Cliffjumper had been a fluke. If this new Autobot had already commed its friends…

He glanced over at Soundwave. If it wasn’t for that irritating con he’d be convincing the others its time to go. There was nothing this dirty wet planet could offer him. But until they found what they were looking for Soundwave and the others wouldn’t leave this planet.
Starscream turned on his heel, “Destroy the pod. We’ve got some hunting to do.”
Chapter 5

Before her dad died Charlie had imagined what her future would look like. She’d be buried in diving trophies, maybe compete in the Olympics, and when she was ready to retire she’d meet the perfect guy, buy a house then have a couple of kids. Through that entire life plan her family was always nearby.

Then her father was gone and she didn’t think about the future that much anymore. When she did it felt like a gray fog covered her mind, telling her that no matter where she took her life, she’d never be really happy. And then the world turned to ruin and her mother and brother were no where to be found. She’d figure this would want to make her think of the future even less, but she was wrong.

This was how ordinary people like herself went down in history books. She had actually humored the possibility of being a hero, of being someone who stood out as a beacon of hope for the survivors. Charlie hadn’t thought of what she would do, maybe figure out the invaders weakness since she was seeing them so often.

Maybe she could have found some pieces of paper and start writing those new history books, she had kept up with the date this far.

But now she could see the name Charlie Watson up there with Benedict Arnold, Brutus, and maybe even Judas depending on how mad future scholars would be.

*Traitor.* That’s what she will be known for.

She held the hand of one of those creatures, even if he hadn’t been the one to set her home ablaze that’s not how the rest of the world would see it. If other people found out they wouldn’t see a girl trying to fight back, they’d see a girl who’d rather beg at their enemy’s feet then die a noble death.

*Even though I don’t think he’d lay a finger on me. At least not violently.*

It had felt so foreign when he had pressed his fingers against her flesh, they had felt smooth, cool yet burning with an inner heat like an engine that hadn’t cooled completely down yet. And for a moment Charlie had wondered what he had thought of how her skin felt, but she wouldn’t have asked him.

She was calling the robot a him now… The word had entered her train of thought not long after she had dubbed him Bumblebee.

She could almost laugh at how absurd the entire scenario had been. She had watched him take down a robot much larger than him, that had a wickedly sharp blade that could slice her to ribbons— and she had let him to her hide out. Not only that she had also let him pet Conan, touch her, and then had given him an absolutely ridiculous name.

Her life was only getting weirder and weirder.

Charlie turned onto her side, the mattress creaking underneath her. Conan shuffled a bit from where he lay at her feet but a few seconds later and he was back to snoring.

Bumblebee-the robot-was down below. As a car he was resting underneath her room. Or maybe he
was keeping watch? She didn’t know if these things needed sleep. They apparently didn’t need food or water.

As nice as he seemed Charlie couldn’t relax enough to sleep. He was too similar to the bad ones, her bones still buzzed with caution. But she still wanted to put her trust in him, to believe he could help her. But he was so small. That helped her not be less intimated, but how could he possibly get rid of the others that were larger than him were spread across the world?

She covered her head with her pillow and tried to push her raging thoughts away, if just for a few hours of sleep.

When the first rays of dawn warmed his hood Bumblebee (the more he repeated the name in his head the more he liked it) transformed. Careful to be quiet he glanced into Charlie’s apartment, she was asleep. The Conan lifted his head to glance at the robot before laying his head back down and going back to sleep.

He felt an unexpected warm glow at the sight, these two were innocent, good creatures. They weren’t like the Cybertronians, or even other humans of history. They didn’t deserve what had happened to them.

*I got to get a comm to Optimus.*

He slipped away from the building and retraced his steps back to where they had to leave his pod, keeping his optics and audio receptors open for any luring decepticons. But thankfully the world was quiet.

Not so thankfully he didn’t see much of his pod when he reached his landing spots, only bits of it scattered across the clearing, the bigger pieces charred black. He wasn’t surprised the Decepticons had left nothing salvageable but he still felt a crushing sense of dread. How was he going to get in contact with any of the Autobots now?

*Lack of communication was why Cliffjumper was dead.*

A fresh wave of grief made his joints stiffen. He needed to find his friend, or what was left of him. Cliffjumper deserved more than rusting away in a foreign planet.

And he’d expect Bumblebee to not follow his lead.

With one last look around he transformed into vehicle mode and made his way back to Charlie and Conan. The two were awake and he could have sworn he saw a hint of relief when she saw him arrive.

“Luh-” she began awkwardly. “I didn’t know if you were coming back.”

His optics crinkled as he tried to smile without a mouth. Leaned forward to take another look around her room. It was nearly as bare as his old bunk back on Cybertron.

Bumblebee couldn’t remember the last time he had laid in that room for a stasis nap.

He kept his gaze moving, Charlie momentarily turn around to fetch a can for the Conan. It was when her back was turned that he noticed something near her bed. It was a flimsy
piece of material with a picture of two humans on it. One looked like a smaller Charlie, smiling, the other was a taller human—maybe a male?

He carefully reached his hand out, wanting a closer look at the picture (it reminded him of holographs back at home), but Charlie suddenly let out a yelp, startling him. He drew back as she rushed forward and snatched the picture up, hugging it tightly to her chest.

“Don’t touch this!” she snapped, voice loud and burning with anger.

He took a step back, confusion and guilt making him tense. But to his relief a moment later Charlie’s shoulders relaxed and her expression lost its snarl.

“Sorry,” the mumbled quietly, sounding as if the word was hard to get out of her throat. “This picture…it’s important to me.”

Why? He wanted to ask. But instead he leaned forward again, head lowered but optics wide with interest, hoping that would help convey his curiosity.

However Charlie’s eyes were all for the picture in her hands, her brown optics glistening wetly. Wait…wetly? Was she leaking? Did humans leak?!

She wiped at her face and took a deep breath, “This is my dad. And it’s…it’s the only picture I have left—” She cut herself off and gave her head a slight shake. “Nevermind. Not important.”

She put the picture away and turned on her heel, clapping her hands together as she looked up at Bumblebee. “So, do you have any plan on how we’re gonna turn the tide in this war?”

Bumblebee’s sigh was a depressed-sounding hum. Without his pod he wasn’t sure how to get in contact with Optimus. Until he could figure out how to do that there were two other things he needed to do: Find Cliffjumper and figure out why the Decepticons were here.

He stretched his hand out to Charlie, palm up. After a few moments of the girl just staring at it he flexed his fingers, silently asking her to come forward.

Almost immediately the Conan trotted over and jumped onto his palm. Bumblebee felt a warm affection to the little creature. Charlie—much more wary than her pet-caught on and carefully stepped onto his palm, resting on her knees and holding Conan to her chest.

“So where are we going?” she asked.

He looked around, trying to decide where he would go if he had landed here and hadn’t met Charlie. Finally he decided on the least cluttered road, Charlie followed where he pointed and let out a tired sigh.

“Yeah, sure. Why not?”

Chapter End Notes

Not much to this chapter since I wanted to go ahead and get it done before my trip and I felt it was too early for a Cliffjumper scene. You’ll get one at chapter 6.
Chapter 6

It took Charlie longer than she wanted to admit to realize that Bumblebee was looking for something. But in her defense she had been busy trying to get used to the position she found herself in. With his hand too small to carry her Charlie was sitting in the crook of the robot’s arm, pressed against his chest in a grip that while made sure she didn’t fall-still felt awkward. Conan sat in her own arms, by his wagging tail he clearly was having a better time than she or Bumblebee.

His blue eyes were scanning the horizon, and despite him not being human Charlie could see worry in his expression. “What are you looking for?”

He glanced down at her, looking as if he was deep in thought. He looking around their surroundings before noticing a patch of dirt surrounded by a wrecked motorcycle and cracked bits of asphalt. Bumblebee placed her and Conan down before kneeling in front of the dirt. With one finger he reached out and started to sketch out a rough picture in the earth.

Setting Conan down to entertain himself Charlie walked over to stand next to Bumblebee, examining the picture she was making.

It was a less than perfect circle, but her eyes widened when he drew what looked like horns on top of the circle, Bumblebee finished the picture with a lopsided smile in the middle of the circle.

“Do…do you know who that is?”

Bumblebee whipped his head around to stare at her with wide eyes, he clearly caught the note of familiarity in her voice.

*Do you know who that is? His face seemed to ask.*

“I know where that-*he*-is,” Charlie informed. “Is he bad?”

Bumblebee quickly shook his head and Charlie felt a sick twist in her gut. Just the other day she had found that body and had felt glee that it was dead…only to realize that maybe it-*he*-would’ve wanted to help her.

“Let me take you to him then.”

Bumblebee knew what he would find as he followed Charlie down a cramped alley. But it didn’t lessen the pain when they stepped out onto a road, and saw Cliffjumper’s body.
His friend had been torn to pieces, his legs and arms ripped until only a few wires kept them contact to his body. His face had been brutally scratched and one of his iconic horns snapped off his head. But it was his dead eyes that burned themselves into Bumblebee’s spark.

With Charlie standing quietly to the side, the Conan in her arms, Bumblebee carefully knelt down in front of his friend. It felt like the weight of this planet was lying on his shoulders. He couldn’t imagine Cliffjumper’s fear when he arrived on this planet, when he was found by the Decepticons and they…and they treated him like a toy, making him suffer, telling him to beg. But Cliffjumper never would. He would’ve never given the Cons the satisfaction, he would’ve fought with everything he had no matter how hopeless the battle was. He’d never let them see how scared he was as he died hurt and alone, wishing he could have said goodbye to his friends…

_He shouldn’t have been alone_, Bumblebee reached his hands out to his friend, he realized he was shaking. It reminded him of a memory from back at the Academy. Some of the students had gone for a training hike when a stray Decepticon had found them. They had been lucky, the inexperienced students had only gotten a few injuries before the teacher with them had put the Con down. But it had come so close to killing Bumblebee, he had looked into the optics of pure malice and hatred and it had shaken him up, he had lost his steady aim. Many of the Bots there muttered that he had been a lost cause.

Optimus had never lost hope in him, but he was busy leading the war and it was Cliffjumper who stood next to Bumblebee during training. He offered encouragement and humor and compassion, he wouldn’t let Bumblebee rest until he had overcome his fear and excelled, both of them graduating with flying colors.

Cliffjumper had done so much for his fellow scout.

_And I couldn’t be there when you needed me most._

He curled over the fallen Autobot, resting his forehead against his friend’s cold chest. He was shivering with grief but he didn’t care, he couldn’t hold back the agony that his friend was gone, the Decepticons were here, and he was all alone.

A small warm hand touched Bumblebee’s arm. He lifted his head like it weighed tons as he looked down at Charlie. She was looking up at him with an expression that was both unsure yet understanding, her palm still pressed against his arm.

“I’m sorry,” she breathed, her voice soft with sympathy.

Hungry for physical contact he reached his other hand out to her, only to pull back when Charlie flinched and stepped away from him. The fear in her optics quickly switching to guilt. “I’m sorry…”

Spark sinking further in his chest Bumblebee turned back to Cliffjumper, standing guard over him. Wishing he knew of a place where he could leave his friend’s body in peace.
A few minutes of heavy silence and Charlie spoke again, “Are you going to bury him?”

Bumblebee blinked at her, confused.

“When humans die we usually bury them underground. It keeps them safe, and it’s a place where you can come back and visit them.”

Bumblebee liked the idea, he stood up, feeling a little less heavy now that he had something he could accomplish and walked over to what was left of the road. He moved and dug out a hole in the middle of the lane, this wasn’t the ideal place to bury his friend but it was better than just leaving him where he fell in battle. He reached the dirt and started to dig with his hands, the substance crunchy and stuck between his fingers, he was unsure how much he cared for that.

But he was positive Cons like Starscream would hate this. He had been told how the Decepticon was obsessed with being clean and pristine. So why a planet nothing like Cybertron?

Maybe Cliffjumper had known? Maybe that was the reason he had come to check this planet out.

With a hole large enough for his friend Bumblebee picked up Cliffjumper, he felt so alarmingly light, like his spark had been the only thing weighing him down.

He placed the Autobot in the hole, gazed down at his friend’s war-torn face once more time, and then started to cover him with dirt. It was a slow and numbing process and when Cliffjumper was completely buried, protected by the remains of this planet, Bumblebee couldn’t muster the energy to stand. What little motivation he had felt when he had started to bury Cliffjumper was gone along with his friend. He didn’t know how to get back up when he had no idea what he would do next-

“What do you want me to say a few words?”

Charlie had returned to his side and knelt beside the grave. She was holding something in her hands, Bumblebee recognized it as Cliffjumper’s missing horn.

She placed it atop of the earth that covered the fallen Autobot and began to speak, “I’m sorry this happened to you. I think if I had got a chance to meet you…you would’ve been very nice. And I’m sure if you and Bumblebee had found each other, you would’ve stopped these other robots. But I guess it’s up to me and Bumblebee now, for my planet, and for you.”

She laid her hand on the earth, “Rest in peace.”

She stood up and walked back to the Conan, leaving Bumblebee alone with his friend. Did she really believe they could stop the Decepticons all on their own? Cliffjumper couldn’t and he was more of a scout, more of a soldier, than Bumblebee would ever be.
But he had been alone.

Bumblebee looked over to the girl, Cliffjumper hadn’t had Charlie. And while she was clearly scared of him, they were the only allies the other had, and together they might just have a possibility to do something…

He turned back around and laid his hand on Cliffjumper’s grave.

Rest dear friend, you can count on us to stop the Decepticons…and thank you for everything you ever did for me.
Chapter 7

Bumblebee’s footsteps were heavy as he carried Charlie and the Conan away from Cliffjumper’s grave. He was so lost in sweet memories and bitter thoughts that he might not have even realized how close danger was, not until he saw Charlie look up to the sky with fear evident in her face. Led my instinct Bumblebee dove to the side, pressing the two organics tight against his chest as he hid in the shadows of a tight alleyway.

His mind now clear he caught the thrum of engines and he shot his head up just to catch a jet transform into a familiar shape: Starscream.

While he had never seen the Decepticon leader in real life he recognized him from the holographs that the other Autobots showed him. And when they spoke of the Con they said he was clever, crafty, deadly, and beyond arrogant. There were some Autobots who didn’t take him seriously even if he did lead an army of enemies, but Optimus always told him to never underestimate a foe.

And it was about time he found out what the Cons were up to.

Bumblebee stepped out of the shadows and headed to the corner Starscream had vanished, (he was incredibly impressed that humans’ ruined architecture could hide Cybertronians from sight), when Charlie grabbed his arm. “What are you doing?”

He quickly placed a finger to his mouth plate, they needed to be as quiet as possible. The gesture didn’t stop the look of terror and suspicion from crossing Charlie’s face.

Why can’t she trust me? He bit back the frustration, that was a problem to solve at another time.

He held her closer as they reached the corner and glanced to the other side. To his relief there was a piles of rubble that hid the Cons he could hear chattering. He could use that to get closer.

Taking one last glance around he bolted to the graveyard of scrap, his spark glowed with relief when they were safely hidden from any scarlet eyes. He could recongnize a few voices, the Decepticon Seeker Thundercracker…that crazy Con Skywarp…the metallic voice of Soundwave that filled him with dread. But he couldn’t make out their words. He needed to get closer.

Checking over the debris that was around him he spotted a white square with a hole in it, it looked like Charlie could fit in it if she squeezed. He placed her down and tried to lead her to the box but she dug her feet into the ground. “What are you doing?” she hissed, voice low.

Even with her voice quiet he felt a spike of panic. With Soundwave came Ravage and he could all
too easily see that beast lurking in the corners, Charlie and the Conan would be nothing but chew toys to it.

So with frantic movement he pointed to her then to the box all the while giving her a beseeching look. After a second Charlie slowly crawled into the box, the softly growling Conan in her arms. She still looked wary, but hiding there would be safer than what he was about to do.

Bringing all his stealth training to the front of his memory core Bumblebee stalked up the hill of destroyed car parts, scattered bits of cement and glass, and smaller things that he guessed were other human appliances. And then he peeked his head over the top, and his spark gave a painful jolt of horror.

There were six Decepticons (how could he possibly fight six?!), and a few he recognized from battle, and even fewer he had met face to face.

The closest was Starscream, standing away from the group, hands behind his back, spine straight, he looked to be trying to ooze authority. And from the scowl on his face he wasn’t happy. Which probably meant Bumblebee had been right on the mark when he guessed Starscream wanted nothing to do with this dirty planet.

His eyes went past the jet and to the most massive hole Bumblebee had ever seen, he saw Thundercracker and Skywarp dive into the blackness. What was down there?

A red and blue pair of Cons were on the other side of the hole: Shatter and Dropkick, he had met them both in battle before, and while alone they were beatable, together they were deadly.

Shatter had her eyes on the hole Thundercracker and Skywarp had gone into, her expression looked...eager. Dropkick had his back on the whole group, eyes roving the land around them, Bumblebee had to keep his eye on him in case he started to look around his way.

Lastly there was Soundwave, and Bumblebee could admit he was a little surprised to see the stoic Con here, under Starscream’s command. He was known as Megatron’s most loyal follower, but after the Decepticon leader had vanished many Autobots had thought he’d refuse anyone else as his leader, especially a bot like Starscream. But now that he thought about it Bumblebee could remember a conversation he overheard between Ratchet and Ironhide, they had shared the possibility that Soundwave would keep fighting in the name of Megatron, that for all they knew Megatron had given Soundwave final orders before he was gone.

But what Bumblebee definitely knew was that he didn’t want to face Soundwave, he didn’t want to face any of these Cons, not alone.
Starscream suddenly let out a noise of disgust, “This is a waste of time.” The mutter was too quiet for everyone but Bumblebee to hear.

_Then why are you here, Starscream?_ Bumblebee nearly wanted to beg. _What could the Decepticons gain from all of this?_

There was a holler of delight and Skywarp flew out of the hole and into the sky, Bumblebee quickly ducked before could be spotted, audio receptors opened to catch what the Con said next: “Guess what we found!”

There were a chorus of gasps and gleeful muttering and Bumblebee couldn’t resist lifting his head back up to see what they had found.

For a moment he was sure his optics were malfuncting.

_It’s the AllSpark…_

He had only seen the cube, now between Thundercracker’s hands, in holograms. Optimus and the other Autobots, they were all sure it had been gone for good, disappeared for millenia. But it was here, on this unsuspecting Earth, the entire time.

This is what the Decepticons had been looking for. But… Something wasn’t right.

Shatter shared his sentiment, her optics darkening when she stepped over to the cube, “What’s wrong with it?”

In all the pictures he had seen the cube had been a thing of beauty, pulsing blue lines, shaped like their ancient Cybertronian language, ran across its surface, even through a hologram Bumblebee had sensed its power—the thing that could bring both life and death—the most omnipotent thing Cybertron had to offer. And he had to hold himself back from screaming at Thundercracker and Skywarp: WHAT DID YOU DO TO IT!?

“See, this is why we don’t let these two do things,” Dropkick snarled as he walked over to stand by Shatter’s side. “Leave it to Cons like Skywarp to break the AllSpark!”

“No one broke it,” Thundercracker snapped, “It was like that when we found it.”

Starscream and Soundwave stepped forward. “It’s been rusting away on this Primus-forsaken planet for eons,” the former pointed out. “Maybe this place just has a bad effect on things from Cybertron.”
“No,” Soundwave spoke up, and all optics turned to him. “The AllSpark would not lose its power over time. It’s power was stolen.”

Bumblebee wished he could appreciate seeing the Cons looks so confused and even scared, but the feelings were mutual. What could possibly take the power of the AllSpark? What creature was walking on this planet with the power Cybertronians had killed for?

It was Skywarp who broke the silence, “Well, with the AllSpark useless I guess our second find is kinda pointless now.”

“OH SCRAP!” Thundercracker yelped, optics widening. “I forgot!”

Starscream’s gaze narrowed, “Forgot what-”

A shape arose from the gaping hole, hulking and think and purple: Shockwave.

_Fantastic, three of the most dangerous Decepticons known and all not a hundred feet away from me._

But any other thoughts Bumblebee had of Shockwave vanished when eh saw what the Con was carrying: a body, one that-like the AllSpark-he had only seen in holograms and the sight sent a crack of terror across his spark.

_Megatron._

Charlie was living in a post apocalyptic world and was trying to fight giant alien robots with a smaller but still giant alien robot, and because of those two things of course she would find herself in peculiar situations. But Bumblebee making her hide in an oven was not one of the things she had imagined.

And while she understood that Bumblebee was trying to keep her safe, she wasn’t going to stay hidden when there was a chance she could find out what the hell was going on. Bumblebee couldn’t tell her what he was currently witnessing and she needed to know why these robots were on her planet and how to get them to leave.

“Stay,” she breathed to Conan, leaving him inside the oven. “Stay,” she repeated firmly when the dog let out a small whimper. But he stayed put as she stepped away and headed toward Bumblebee, Otis had trained his dog well.
As she made her way up to Bumblebee she could hear the voices of the other robots, but they were using their own language so she had no idea what they were saying. Bumblebee didn’t even move when she reached his side, his eyes on the group below. Charlie looked down and had to bite her tongue to keep from making any noise. The cube that she had found, it was laying at the feet of Bumblebee’s enemies, no longer as beautiful as she remembered. The sight of it made her arms tingle and once again she wondered what it had done to her, and once again she became very aware that bits of Bumblebee’s friend was in her blood.

But her attention quickly shifted to what the yellow robot was staring at: the body next to the cube.

It was larger than the rest, and even though its dead eyes stared up at the sky she couldn’t help a shudder of terror, as if it was still a threat. And by the way Bumblebee was tensed up, he felt the same.

*We can’t be here.* Every instinct screamed at her that they needed to get away from this dead robot, and she was very willing to listen.

She reached out to grab Bumblebee’s arm but the bot must not have noticed her because he started in surprise as soon as she touched him, his arm banging against the metal trash underneath him. Charlie froze in panic but lucky for her Bumblebee moved immediately, grabbing her and yanking them both down, out of sight of the others.

*Did they see us did they see us did they see us?!* Her mind cried in fear as she tried to listen for the sound of approaching footsteps or engines. Her face was pressed against Bumblebee’s chest who was tensed, ready to run, she caught the scent of oil and something otherworldly and she was almost comforted by it.

After a few agonizing seconds of the two clutching each other, waiting to see if they were about to be shot at, Bumblebee slightly relaxed.

Charlie let him carry her down to ground, fetching Conan before heading away from the hole and the cube and the body. But no matter the distance they put between them and it, the fear still hung over her like a cloud about to send thunder and lightning crashing down.

Starscream turned his head sharply, looking over his shoulder at the disgusting piles of garbage that surrounded him. He could’ve sworn he had heard something.

It was probably just one of the planet’s filthy little organics, still…
He looked down at the body of Megatron as Soundwave checked for any vitals. He didn’t think he’d ever see the face of his former leader again and with the AllSpark right next to him, that was more stress to his circuits than Starscream needed right now, no matter if the AllSpark had power or not.

_I don’t need any more enemies right now._

“Dropkick, come here,” Starscream ordered, stepping away from the group as they crowded around their fallen, former leader.

The blue Con casually walked over, “What’s up, Screamer?”

An optic twitched, “It is Lord Starscream.”

“Yeah sure. What’s up, Screamer?”

_You will deal with him later, Starscream you will deal with him later._

“I need you to do some hunting, I think we have a little spy.”

Immediately Dropkick’s optics glowed with excitement, “Is it a fleshy? I haven’t got to play with one in so long.”

“It could be.” Starscream’s voice lowered, “Or it could be the Autobot who killed Blitzwing. I want you to go scout and find out.”

“Without Shatter?” Dropkick looked over at the femme bot, the two loved to play as each other’s shadows.

Starscream frowned, “If you don’t believe you can handle the Autobot on your own then just find out where he’s hiding and then report it back to me. I don’t want any more living Autobots on this planet.”

With a swift nod Dropkick transformed and flew off, Starscream watched him go before joining the others.

“Where’s he going?” Shatter asked, looking ready to follow her comrade.

Starscream waved his hand, “Just on a small errand, it won’t take long.” _Primus, those two could_
learn some independence.

He stood over Megatron’s body, faking a reserved grief, “What would you like us to do with him?”

The question was directed to all the Cons present but only Soundwave had an answer, “Take him and the AllSpark back to base.”

Another twitch. “I really don’t believe there’s any saving Lord Megatron.”

Shockwave faced him, “Crazier things have happened Starscream, besides, I’d like to study both of them. Find out what exactly happened to our leader and the AllSpark.”

Starscream had to fight to keep his face passive, “Very well. Be it so.” And it’s Lord Starscream.
Bumblebee paced in front of Charlie’s home, the girl and her pet watching the Autobot as he tried to keep himself from having a meltdown.

Way too many things had happened today for him to process. He just wanted to have the day to grief for Cliffjumper but no Bumblebee couldn’t have that. He had to find out the AllSpark and Megatron had been buried on this planet for who knows how long. Not only that the AllSpark’s power was now… Bumblebee had no idea where it could be but he could bet that the Decepticons who could fly were going to search the entire planet for that power-and kill any humans they find along the way. And then they’d probably revive Megatron and the most dangerous Decepticon of the galaxy would be alive and ready to do…Primus knew what.

*And I won’t be able to stop them. I’m just one bot I can’t do this on my own!*

“Hey, Bumblebee?”

He looked over to Charlie whose expression was one of pity. He laughed bitterly in his head. What a fine hero he was proving to be for this little human.

“I don’t know exactly what happened back there, but…” She let out a breath and lifted her chin, “But it’ll be okay. We’ll figure something out. I have absolutely no idea what but my teachers always told me I was really smart, I’ll think of something.”

*She’s trying to cheer me up even though she doesn't like me.*

Bumblebee tried to smile for her, her words offering a bit of comfort and reminded him to think logically. Optimus and the others would know his radio silence meant something bad, they wouldn’t just abandon him. As long as he could still move and think he could find out a way to get in contact with them. Who knows maybe there’s a place here on Earth that could help him comm the Autobots.

*And it would give us a reason to get as far away from Megatron’s former grave as possible.*

Charlie lay in bed, the world dark around here and the only thing she could hear was Conan’s
snoring and the heavy thuds of Bumblebee’s steps outside. He hadn’t stopped pacing since they returned, but she had a feeling her words of encouragement comforted him, if just a little.

*Great, that means I haven’t lost my lying skills.*

She felt so hopeless, hopeless and torn.

Lifting her hand up she tried to make out the outline of it in the darkness. She had tried to not think about the fact her veins now ran with the DNA of an alien robot, but the fact it had been Bumblebee’s friend—a friend he clearly missed—was something she couldn’t just throw into the back burner.

One part of her brain, the hopeful part that could see an end to all this, told her she should tell Bumblebee what had happened when she touched that cube (she wondered if she was the reason it no longer looked the same), and see if he knew what it all meant.

*But that’s just it—you don't know,* the other part of her brain hissed. It was the louder part that told her that Bumblebee wasn’t safe to be around even if he acted friendly. She didn’t know him and she didn’t know what he would do to her if she told him what had happened. Besides, he was mute its not like he could tell her what that cube was even if she did tell him.

Doing her best to ignore the guilt and fear pulsing in her chest she turned on her side and closed her eyes. Eventually the sound of Conan’s snores and Bumblebee’s pacing lulled her to asleep, blissfully unaware of the leering red orbs glaring down at the three.

The land the Decepticons chose as their base was bare, hot and dry, with open skies. It was the closest thing to tolerable this planet would get in Starscream’s opinion.

He stood at the railing of the base the first few seekers had built in the few mega-cycles before the full on invasion had begun.

He had just agreed to it to pander to Soundwave and Shockwave, the two Cons who had been most vocal about their distaste in his leadership. When Shockwave had suggested that they abandon Cybertron he had agreed despite how it felt like it was tearing at his Spark. He wanted to have the Con’s gratitude, it would come in handy, plus Shockwave had spoke of finding the AllSpark and Starscream had liked that idea. They could revive their home with the AllSpark.

But he didn’t expect to catch a signal from it on this filthy excuse of a planet, and he definitely
hadn’t expected Soundwave to catch the signal of Megatron, an incredibly faint signal, but it was enough that Starscream had no choice but to call for an attack on the planet.

That had been the easy (and fun) part, but Starscream’s perfect start into leadership went downhill when they dug up his former leader’s body and a useless AllSpark.

Both things were now in the base, being looked over to figure out if there was any saving either of them.

Starscream recalled what Soundwave had said, that the AllSpark’s power had been stolen. But how? And who?

His optics glanced down, in the shadows of the base was what the Con’s liked to call the Organic Farm. A rundown and formerly abandoned town that now had two guards soaring over it in lazy circles.

Starscream really had pandered to Shockwave, the scientist had taken an interest in the humans of this planet, found it curious how such emotional and primitive creatures had lived this long without eating each other. So with the Cons help he had grabbed a couple of humans from around the world and dropped them in the ‘farm’ where Shockwave would study-and dissect-when he had the time. Starscream had found it pointless, after all what could these creatures offer Cybertronians? But he knew Soundwave wouldn’t leave until they had searched this entire planet for their fallen leader, so as long as it kept him entertained.

But now the search is over, and now Starscream had to decide what was more important: finding the AllSpark’s power and reviving both Megatron and Cybertron, or let them both perish and he find a new home for the Decepticons.

*I have waited an eternity to become leader,* he looked around the hot barren landscape, nothing like his home. *But do I want to rule over a planet such as this?*

He was spared from answering the internal question by the sudden appearance of Skywarp, the irksome Con flaunting his unique ability to teleport and landing on the railing.

“Was wondering where you flew off to, Screamer,” Skywarp grinned, sitting on the railing with his back to the landscape.

“It is Lord Starscream, Skywarp,” the jet corrected, “We’ve been over this.”

The growl of a jet and then Thundercracker was standing beside Starscream, “He has selective memory, you know that.”

“He teleports so much his processor must be scrambled,” Starscream told his commander, “Tragic,
really.”

Skywarp scowled at the two, “Can you at least acknowledge my presence when you mock me?”

Thundercracker ignored him and turned his optics to Starscream, “So, I just talked to Soundwave.”

Starscream’s circuits tensed, “And?”

“There’s a bit of spark left in Megatron, not much, barely a flicker. But if they find the AllSpark…” Thundercracker’s grave voice trailed off. He and Skywarp were two of Starscream’s more loyal followers, they were perfectly fine with him as leader and wouldn’t tell another Con that he was less than pleased with Megatron’s return.

“So then,” Skywarp spoke up, “He’s scrap metal? I mean, the AllSpark lost its power.”

“Soundwave won’t leave this planet until we find a way revive him,” Starscream growled darkly. “Or if what’s left of Megatron’s spark snuffs out.”

“Are you still ignoring me?” Skywarp asked.

“When I left he and Shockwave were talking about sending Ravage out to start the hunt for the power source,” Thundercracker informed.

Starscream’s optics blazed, “They should be discussing it with me! As long as Megatron is on his deactivation bed I’m the leader of the Decepticons!”

“You’re ignoring me,” Skywarp huffed, sounding like a rejected sparkling.

Thundercracker frowned, “I know that, and so do they. But they don’t believe you could lead like Megatron and if they can get him back they’ll do whatever it takes.”

Thundercracker looked out over the Organic Farm, his face twitching in discomfort at the town. Thundercracker was one of the few Cons who hadn’t taken much pleasure in taking down the humans, he saw them as too helpless to be any sort of entertainment or challenge. That soft spark would be the ruin of him someday, especially if the AllSpark power was with a hu-

Don’t even finish such a ridiculous thought, Starscream growled to himself. The AllSpark’s power was too great for one of these pathetic humans to wield.

He grabbed Thundercracker’s arm and pulled him closer, his voice barely above a whisper, “Then
we make sure they can’t bring him back. Whatever it takes.”

Thundercracker gave a solemn nod, optics darkening.

“STOP IGNORING ME!”

Skywarp’s shout made them both jump before Starscream smacked the Con, sending him sprawled across the floor. “Do not yell at your leader, Skywarp.”

“If there’s any bots left on Cybertron, they just heard you,” Thundercracker moaned, rubbing one of his audio receptors.

Skywarp pushed his face off the metal of the floor, “Then let me in on your secrets now and then! With Dropkick gone no one else will talk to me.”

“Ah, yes, my errand Con,” Starscream looked up to the sky as if he expected to see the blue robot arriving. “I wonder how his little mission is going.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah that Spark thing I don't know how accurate to canon that is but I gotta pretend that that this is accurate or this story will not work.
Bumblebee sat under the shadows of Charlie’s room, his audio receptors catching the soft sounds of the human’s breathing. It was a surprisingly soothing sound and with his legs sore from countless minutes of pacing he was more than happy to relax, calming down from his earlier meltdown.

But while his circuits took a rest, his mind was trying to figure out where they could go next. He needed to convince her to leave first, he wasn’t sure how much she would care for that idea. She wasn’t like him, she wasn’t used to constantly moving, she wasn’t used to not having a home to return to.

His thoughts came to a halt when a new sound broke the silence, it was a crunching type of noise, like someone heavily stepping on glass. A moment later he heard growling above his head, the Conan had heard the noise too.

As he slowly stood up he heard Charlie groan groggily, being awakened by her pet’s growling.

“Bumblebee?” she mumbled as she saw him staring out into the darkness around them. “What’s wrong?”

He didn’t glance at her, his optics scanning their surroundings looking for any sign of movement, the Conan snarling behind him. Something-someone-was out there, and it left a thick tension in the air. Bumblebee flicked his wrist and his blade slid out, glinting in the moonlight. After a few unbearable seconds, waiting for whatever was out there in the shadows, he turned his other hand to Charlie, ready to grab her and get them as far away from here as possible.

But just as he moved there was a flash of blue and Bumblebee lunged forward, stopping Dropkick from barreling into Charlie’s home.

The taller Decepticon clutched Bumblee’s hands, putting an agonizing amount of pressure to them as he tried to push Bumblebee to his knees. Behind him he heard the Conan barking wildly and he prayed to Primus that Charlie would grab him and they would run.

Dropkick didn’t seem to notice the two organics, his scarlet eyes glaring down at Bumblebee in malicious glee. It reminded Bumblebee how Dropkick was just a more energon-thirsty Blitzwing.

The Con smirked at him, “B-127. So you’re the one who slagged Blitzwing and ruined my good time. Ah, well, I’ll just have to find a new way to entertain myself.”

Bumblebee noticed in the corner of his optic Dropkick lifting his leg, ready to kick Bumblebee’s knee and send him to the ground, and the bot knew if he fell to the ground it was all over. And since Bumblebee tended to do crazy things when backed into a corner, he decided knocking himself into the Decepticon was the best plan.
And in his plan’s defense Dropkick did not see the sudden attack coming, that combined with one leg in the air and the two fell in a thrashing tangle of metal. Bumblebee tried to stab the Con like he did with Blitzwing but Dropkick was fast and slippery and it was only a few moments before he escaped from underneath Bumblebee. The yellow bot quickly jumped to his feet and managed to dodge a blast aimed at his head, the heat grazing his shoulder before he started a rapid fire at Dropkick. He kept Charlie’s home in the corner of his optic, he couldn’t see her or the Conan and hoped that meant they left. But he couldn’t be confident and had to make sure the building wasn’t caught in the crossfire. Maybe if he could get Dropkick to follow him-

Dropkick was a blur as he raced forward and landed a punch on Bumblebee’s jaw, the Autobot kicking him in the chest to put distance between them before he had a blaster pressed into his torso.

“You’re awful quiet, Autobot,” Dropkick sneered. “I figured you’d have lots to say.” He smirked at Bumblebee, “I know you were spying on us little bot. You saw our treasure.”

Yes, but I also saw that Megatron is dead and something…something bad happened with the AllSpark.

But he couldn’t say any of that to Dropkick so he settled on his optics narrowing.

Dropkick snorted, “Fine. Be that way.” In a split second he jumped to the right, moving at an incredible speed and slamming into Bumblebee, the smaller bot grabbing the wrist that wielded the Con’s own blade. Bumblebee pulled his head back, just barely missing the serrated weapon as it slid by his head. He twisted Dropkick’s wrist and sent him flying over his shoulder, crashing into the deserted skeleton of concrete.

Bumblebee turned on his heel and was ready to get some more blows in before the dust settled, but then he heard barking.

The Conan was in the shadow of Charlie’s home, the girl no where to be found as the small creature yapped furiously at Dropkick who slowly rose to his legs.

Run away, Bumblebee willed his small but brave friend as Dropkick rushed back at him, the two once again grappling. The two Cybertronians kept to their fists and blades as they knocked into the buildings that caged them, Bumblebee making sure none of those buildings were Charlie’s. But with the Conan barking near his feet he couldn’t keep his entire focus on Dropkick and he couldn’t risk using his blaster so near the little organic.

Dropkick suddenly let out an aggravated snarl, managing to grab Bumblebee’s shoulders and spun around, slamming the Autobot’s back into a building that was much stronger than expected. But that didn’t stop Bumblebee from crashing through the wall, landing in a pile of pain as Dropkick whirled around and narrowed his optics at the Conan who still barked wildly.

“Shut UP you annoying little parasite,” he hissed, stomping over to stand far too close to Charlie’s
Where is she?

Bumblebee’s spark jumped in panic when Dropkick lifted his foot, its shadow falling over the Conan who glared and snarled at him with defiance. “This outta get rid of my headache.”

NO!

Dropkick’s foot dropped down-and met the metal of Bumblebee’s back.

The Autobot was curled on top of the Conan who went silent as if he finally understood the danger they were in.

Bumblebee glared up at Dropkick whose face was stretched in surprise. But his astonishment quickly twisted into cruelty. “So that’s what you’re doing here, huh B-127?” He slammed his heel into Bumblee’s spine, the metal shrieking in agony. Bumblebee tried to stand up but a kick to his neck send his face into the gravel, it was all he could do to not squash the Conan that was now shivering underneath him.

“You went and got yourself some organic pets,” Dropkick jeered, “How Autobot of you.” Another kick, this one making his processor cry out to go. But each time Bumblebee tried to stand back up there was another kick, he had made the fatal mistake of falling under Dropkick’s shadow-the con wouldn’t let him back up.

And he was still jabbering away, “It’s like you all have a death wish. Wanting to care for all the pathetic, defenseless little creatures in the galaxy, it’ll only get you all killed. It’s what your buddy Cliffjumper would do.”

Bumblebee tensed and tried to lift his head but Dropkick pushed his whole weight on his head, keeping his face pressed against the gravel.

“That fellow scout of yours was a better spy than you, he found out that we were digging up Megatron and it was ages before we found him. He put up a much better fight than you too. nearly completely buried that hole with all the debris he tricked us into knocking down during the fight.” There was something akin to respect, even admiration, in Dropkick’s voice, but it was replaced with contempt when he continued: “But just like you will soon be, he had his circuitry ripped out.”

There was a moment of silence as if Dropkick was waiting for Bumblebee to reply, if he hadn’t had his voice box ripped out he would’ve gladly given Dropkick many choice words.

Dropkick grunted, “This is boring. You’re boring me.”
Bumblebee lifted his optics up to see the barrel of Dropkick’s blaster aimed at his face.

“I think it’d make Starscream happy if I take your head back to base, be a nice little paper weight.”

Bumblebee braced himself for the fatal blast, preparing himself to see Cliffjumper way sooner than plan-

“HEY!”

It felt like everything suddenly moved in slow motion.

He saw Charlie, appearing from her room. She was brandishing a long, black metal pole that he realized was a piece from the stairs that were connected to her room. Even from the ground he could see her eyes were glowing with rage.

And then, to Bumblebee’s shock and awe, Charlie shoved the rod into Dropkick’s optic, the orb shattering as more than half of the pole was forced into the Con’s head. Dropkick let out a howl of agony and knocked Charlie off the building, Bumblebee managing to catch her just in time. But he didn’t have the time to check the damage Dropkick had done, instead he snatched up the Conan and bolted, pressing the two tightly against his aching chest. He transformed mid air, Charlie laid sprawled on his back seat with the Conan at her feet.

Behind them Charlie watched as Dropkick shot his blaster at her home, sending the already wrecked building into flames. Did he not realize that she was no longer there? He still snarled with pain, one hand held protectively over his eye, he didn’t give chase.

As Bumblebee got farther and farther away Charlie covered her mouth, holding back her wretched sob.

Her safe haven, and the only photo she had of her dad, disappeared behind the flames before the distance made even the fire vanish all together.
Chapter 10

Starscream sat in what he liked to call his throne room, leaning forward in his seat with his hand resting on his chin. On either side of him stood Thundercracker and Shatter, the former looking like he would pass out on his feet.

Before Starscream stood three Decepticons: Thrust, Ramjet, and Dirge, and apparently they wanted a new mission.

“IT’s just a waste of Con power, Lord Starscream,” Thrust replied in his oily voice. “Having us do patrols on a small, empty island when there’s an Autobot slinking around.”

Starscream’s optics narrowed, “How do you know there’s an Autobot?”

“News travels fast,” Ramjet piped up. “You wanted everyone to hear how you defeated Cliffjumper, Lord Starscream. And not a meta-cycle passes when we get the news of Blitzwing’s death.”

Starscream let out a huff, “There is no need to send out a hunting party. I already sent out Dropkick.”

“Dropkick?” Thrust echoed in dismay. “A thousand apologies my lord. But Dropkick is…”

“He’s what?” Shatter hissed, defensive of her partner.

Dirge wisely took several steps back away from the femme bot while Thrust and Ramjet exchanged nervous glances.

“He’s uh-just one Decepticon,” Thrust decided on, making Starscream smirk. “And Blitzwing was a formidable warrior, yet an Autobot still killed him.”

“And you think you have a better chance?” Thundercracker spoke up, by his expression he found the prospect absolutely laughable.

Thrust moved his mouth to respond but Starscream held up a hand, and he did admit the way Thrust instantly snapped his mouth shut filled the jet with more than a small amount of glee.

“Whether these three can bring down the Autobot doesn’t matter, I already sent Dropkick to do just that and I don’t need to waste more Decepticons on one small problem.”

Optics looked around one another and Starscream knew the entire room was sharing the same thought: If that Autobot had already radioed for help, this one problem was about to multiply.
If any of the Cons had planned on voicing the thought they didn’t get a chance. There was suddenly the sound of a screaming engine getting closer and closer, followed by a familiar, pained and furious voice: “SHATTER! STARScream!”

Starscream jumped to his feet as Dropkick burst into the room, transforming mid air to collapse on his knees on the floor. Sparks and energon leaking from his empty right socket.

“It’s B-127!” He snarled, his remaining optic burning with an unbridled rage. “B-127 is on this planet!”

“The scout?” Thundercracker asked as Shatter hurried to the blue Con’s side, examining the damage. “I fought him once. He’s small but he knows how to take a bot down.”

Starscream narrowed his optics, “I’m surprised he didn’t take half your face when he took your optic.”

If he hadn’t been paying attention he wouldn’t have caught the shame shining bright in his optic, mixing with the fury that looked like it could set something on fire. “No,” Dropkick growled. “When I was fighting B-127 this…fragging human stabbed me with some sort of rod.”

There was a moment of quiet that was quickly broken by the snickering of Thrust’s trio and even Thundercracker smirked.

“How embarrassing,” Thrust tittered, still grinning. “Lord Starscream was just telling us about how you’re such a capable warrior. But you came back half-blind because a human got the best of you.”

Dropkick pulled away from Shatter and took a threatening step toward Thrust, “A human that was completely blind could get the best of your scrappy aft you slagging son of a glitch-”

“QUIET!”

Dropkick released a low growl but didn’t say more, glaring at Thrust. And while the Con kept his head up Starscream noticed the shaking of his servos.

“Did you see any other Autobots?” he demanded of Dropkick.

“No,” was the reply, his remaining optic still burning into Thrust’s plating. “It was just B-127. He didn’t put up much of a fight either, too preoccupied with protecting his brand new pets.”
So he’s grown attached to the organics of this planet. Starscream couldn’t help being mildly surprised, yes the Autobots were a pack of bleeding sparks but what use did they have of protecting what was left of this planet. They weren’t like Shockwave, they wouldn’t slice them up for studying.

Speaking of Shockwave…

“Good news, Thrust,” Starscream turned to the quaking con. “I have a new assignment for you, Ramjet, and Dirge.”

Thrust’s and Ramjet’s optics lit up in excitement, though Dirge didn’t look overly eager.

“Shockwave requested more subjects to study, go and collect a handful of humans and bring them back here. It doesn’t matter where you get them.”

Thrust’s shoulders drooped in disappointment, “That’s it?”

Starscream let out a snarl, “Are you not pleased with your leader’s direct orders?”

“That-that’s not it at all!” Thrust quickly assured, glancing over at Thundercracker who had taken a step forward. “Its just…with such a dangerous Autobot out there I thought maybe we could-”

“Have any of you actually met B-127 in battle?” Thundercracker demanded. “I’ve seen Cons go offline because they underestimate him. He’s killed Decepticons much stronger and more experienced than you.”

“Dropkick almost killed him,” Dirge pointed out.

“Yeah,” Ramjet added, “He would’ve snuffed out his spark if that human hadn’t beat him.”

Shatter quickly grabbed Dropkick’s arm before he could lunge at the Seekers. “It did not beat me!”

“That’s enough,” Shatter said firmly, having been quiet this entire time. Starscream could only guess what she was thinking at.

“Besides, Blitzwing and those other Cons no doubt faced the Autobot alone,” Thrust pointed out. “But we three could attack him as a team, and since he can’t fly we can make quick work of him and bring Shockwave his pet human. I bet he would adore tearing open something that belongs to an Autobot.”

“Your first order is to collect humans for Shockwave,” Starscream reminded them. “…However,
“if you truly think you can succeed where Dropkick failed, then you have my permission to do so.”

“Just don’t say you weren’t warned,” Thundercracker added as delight spread across Thrust’s face.

“You will not regret this, my Lord Starscream.” After a dramatic bow Thrust led his two companions out of the throne room.

Once they were out of sight Starscream turned to Shatter, “Go send for a medic, see if there’s any spare optics lying around for Dropkick.”

Shatter nodded and turned to lead her partner away, but Dropkick looked at Starscream with an intensity he had never seen from the blue Con.

“If they get B-127’s human I want it,” he growled, voice heavy with hate and fury. “Shockwave can have what’s left after I rip it apart limb from limb. Slowly.”

“We’ll see,” Starscream replied before turning his back on the two. If he outright refused Dropkick’s demand the blue Con wouldn’t leave him a moment’s peace, and Starscream felt so exhausted after dealing with Thrust.

Thundercracker watched Starscream as he resettled himself on his seat. “Do you think those three could kill B-127?”

“You clearly don’t.”

Thundercracker smirked, “I can’t say I’ll miss them if that scout puts them off line.”

“Neither will I,” Starscream replied. “But I will miss how they grovelled, it was the only thing they were good at.”

There was a few minutes of silence before Thundercracker spoke again, his voice low with worry. “Do you think B-127 commed any…other Autobots?” He didn’t speak the name that hung in the air, silent but threatening: Optimus Prime.

“If he did they’re clearly not here yet,” Starscream said. “They wouldn’t have let Dropkick come back. And if they are here, we can just inform them about our Organic Farm, they won’t try anything if we threaten Shockwave’s ‘playthings’.”

“If there’s one thing all Autobots have in common,” Thundercracker spoke up, “It’s that they never put themselves as priority one.”
“And that’s why they’ll lose.” Starscream lifted his hand, palm up, and flexed his fingers.

Thundercracker looked down at his leader. “Do you think it’s the same one?”

“What?”

“The female human we found when we were digging for the AllSpark, she was the only living human we’d seen around those parts.”

Oh Starscream remembered her. She was the closest he had been to a human, after all he didn’t need to be up close to shoot something. He didn’t like the human being so close to something that belonged to him. He had grabbed her, enjoying her fear and trying to decide if he wanted to take her back to the farm or just kill her there and leave her corpse as a warning. But then he had seen the red liquid on her hands, disgusting liquid that stained his fingers. He had dropped her, snarling with revulsion as the human disappeared into the pounds of rubble like the parasite she was.

He had returned in a foul mood, the scarlet liquid staining his hand. Shockwave had cleaned the disgusting substance up, but decided to keep it as a sample, despite the fact he had plenty of samples already. Starscream hadn’t thought more of it, just grateful to be clean. But now that it was possible the same human had wounded Dropkick…

“Perhaps,” Starscream finally replied, still looking down at his hand. “If she was stupid enough to get near the AllSpark she would be stupid enough to get herself involved with Cybertronians.”

Thundercracker frowned, “You don’t think…that that human is the reason the AllSpark is…”

“I don’t see how,” Starscream didn’t let the jet finish. “The AllSpark is mean to affect, and work, for Cybertronians, not organics.”

.

Charlie lay on a shaggy couch, dusty with lack of use. She was wrapped around Conan who liked at her wet cheek but she barely felt it, too wrapped up in grief.

She had lost her father’s photo, she should’ve grabbed it before she had attack that blue robot. Now the picture and what she had called home was gone. She clutched Conan tighter and the dog whimpered slightly in discomfort. He was all Charlie had left. She had lost two homes, her mother and brother, and anything to remember her dad by. She thought of all her memories with him, terrified at the thought of one day she’d wake up and not remember what he looked like.

If she even lived that long.
Charlie wasn’t sure where Bumblebee was, after driving for what felt like hours they had come across a damaged but still standing cul-de-sac and he had led her inside. After Charlie had collapsed on the couch he had transformed and drove off.

She wasn’t sure what he was doing, or if he was even coming back, and she couldn’t summon the strength to care. She hadn’t felt this hopeless since day one of the robot apocalypse. It didn’t help that Bumblebee had been struggling with the blue robot, it hadn’t been like the red and white one, it was a better fighter, and it probably wasn’t the only one.

_They’ll kill us both. Or I’ll live out the rest of my days in the shambles of my planet and forget what my father even looks like._

She buried her face into Conan’s fur and lost track of time, it could’ve been minutes, or it could’ve been hours as she lay there, heart-broken and despairing. But then she caught the sound of a car driving by. Bumblebee had come back.

Charlie sat up, wiping the tears from her eyes. She headed for the door of the practically empty house, Conan trotting after her. But as she opened the door the small dog suddenly halted, one paw in the air. A growl came from his throat and his hackles rose.

“What’s wrong?” Charlie’s brow furrowed as she followed Conan out into the cold morning air. “You like Bumble-”

Charlie stopped dead in her tracks. A few feet away was a banged up corvette with the roof gone, and sitting in the corvette were two bulky guys and one skinny woman. There eyes gleamed meanly, reminding her of the robot she had just stabbed in the eye.

“You’re not something I expected to see today,” the girl replied in a voice that reminded Charlie of a snake.

“A real surprise,” the driver added.

“A _cute_ surprise, the second man growled and Charlie felt a shudder of fear.

She had been so used to giant alien robots as the threat she had forgotten something very important: Disasters turned people into monsters.

Without a word she picked up Conan, bristling and snarling, just as the second man opened his car door. He didn’t step out, merely waved his arm toward her. “You all alone, sweetheart? Wanna hop in for a ride.”
“Bet its been a while since you saw a working car,” the driver smirked, patting the steering wheel.

Charlie didn’t reply, keeping her eyes on the three as she took one step back, then a second, then a third.

The second man jumped out of the car.

Charlie immediately turned on her heel and bolted inside, slamming the door shut and hurrying up the creaking stairs.

Just as she heard a heavy body slam into the door the step under her gave way and she stumbled, Conan falling out of her arms to land clumsily on the step. He caught himself and barked madly at the door as another heavy thud filled Charlie with dread.

She picked up the dog and continued to run up the stairs, reaching the second floor as she heard the feeble door break and fall to the floor.

“Come on, sweetie!” It was the woman’s voice, her tone sickly sweet. “Let my boys have some fun and we won’t cook your dog for breakfast.”

Charlie reached the end of the hallway and hid herself in the last room, a practically bare bedroom with no lock. The woman’s words, and the heavy stomp of approaching steps nearly made Charlie vomit. She placed Conan on the ground, wishing he would stop barking. But instead the furious little dog scratched furiously on the door. Looking around Charlie was relieved to see a desk and a chair. Grabbing the chair she hurriedly placed it under the door knob just as it started to turn, the chair kept the door closed but Charlie knew it wouldn’t be long before they managed to break into this room too, then she would be trapped.

Unless…

“Come on,” one of the man whined like he was a child. “You’re so beautiful we just wanna talk!”

Charlie picked up Conan and ran across the room to the open window. Without thinking too hard on it she threw her legs out and pressed her feet against the frame of the window directly below her, only using one arm to hold herself in place with Conan now squirming frantically.

_BAD IDEA THIS IS SUCH A BAD IDEA CHARLIE WATSON YOU ARE THE BIGGEST IDIOT IN THE WORLD THIS IS THE WORST IDEA!!!_

Suddenly a familiar buzz reached her ears. Charlie turned her head to see Bumblebee a few yards away, heading toward them. He halted in shock when he saw Charlie hanging out of a window.
The robot let out a noise akin to a frantic scream and raced toward her.

A rough hand grabbed her arm and one of the men was suddenly leering over her, trying to drag her back into the room.

“Let me go!” she shrieked in terror. “Let me go, please!”

He had pulled her halfway in, his friends watching with heinous glee. But right before her legs came through the window frame Conan reached out and bit the man’s arm, drawing blood. He let out a howl of pain and released Charlie, she pulled back and gravity snatched her, sending and her and Conan falling toward the cement below.

But then Bumblebee was there, catching them and holding the shaking girl and dog close to his chest.

The man, clutching the bleeding dog bite, stared at Bumblebee with eyes so wide it looked like they’d fall out of his head, his two companions behind him and looking just as horrified.

Bumblebee glared up at the humans and made a noise that reminded Charlie of Conan’s growling. He stood up to his full height and that was enough for the three to run, vanishing back into the house. A few seconds later and Charlie heard the back door open and the frantic cries of the three as they ran away in terror.

Bumblebee held Charlie for several minutes, waiting until Charlie’s shaking had stopped before he gently placed her back on the ground.

“Thank you,” she breathed, placing Conan on the ground, the dog looked just as shaky as she felt.

Bumblebee was looking at her with obvious worry and Charlie felt guilt that she had considered the thought he had abandoned her.

“Not-not all humans are good,” she explained, not wanting to go into detail about what would happen if those three had caught her. But Bumblebee nodded solemnly with understanding in his blue eyes. Charlie sat down, placing Conan on her lap to give him a well-deserved scratch behind the ears. “Thank you too, Conan. You’re both heroes.” She looked up to the robot, “Where were you, by the way?”

His eyes widened as if he just remembered something. Bumblebee opened his chest, Charlie hadn’t even known he could do that, and pulled out cans of food, bags of chips, and bottled water, even a
“You went and got supplies!” Charlie was touched. “Thank you.”

But Bumblebee wasn’t done, he hand was searching through his chest cavity, looking for something. Charlie’s eyes widened and her jaw dropped when Bumblebee offered her a photo that was charred around the edges.

It was her dad, smiling up at her, still intact, still safe.

She reached shaking hands out and took it, hardly believing her eyes. “You…you went back and got this? For me?” She hadn’t even said anything about it.

Bumblebee nodded, even without a mouth it was obvious he was smiling.

“But-but that blue robot could’ve still been there. You could have gotten hurt.”

He shrugged, as if it was no big deal.

Charlie was in awe. He had remembered her father’s photo, had been able to tell how much it meant to her even when she had said it wasn’t important. And he had risked running into a robot that had nearly killed him, just for her.

Through her watery gaze she saw Bumblebee’s eyes widen, now concerned to see her crying. Charlie tried to wipe at the tears but it was no use. With a relieved laugh she reached out and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Bumblebee went rigid under her touch, but only for a moment, and then he relaxed into her embrace, pressing his cheek against her hair. He felt as warm as the sun, his metal comfortable against her skin. And when he wrapped his arms around her she had felt a sense of security she had never felt before. With a smile that was hurting her lips she buried her face against his neck, “Thank you, Bumblebee. For everything.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he was a kid Jack Burns had always wanted to be one thing: a hero.

There hadn’t been many heroes in his life, with his father and his endless drinking, and his mother with her depression, Jack had been a lonely child. But he never let that get to him and got himself, kicking and spitting blood, into the army. It was one of the few times he had ever felt like he was where he was suppose to be.

And then it happened.

He had been one on a practice mission, seeing it as a mini vacation and looking forward to train with his friends. At first Burns hadn’t thought much of the low flying jets, probably just pilots testing their rides and showing off.

But then came the attack. Rapid fire bullets of energy gunned his men down and Burns had barely managed to save himself. He had made his way back to base as it was under attack by...he still didn’t know what they were.

They looked like robots, but watching them set fire to the base, to the nearby towns, to his home… robots didn’t take such delight in causing such destruction. These things were sentient, alive, and evil.

The attack had come so suddenly, and with no idea where these robots are or why they were attacking—they only lasted a few weeks. At last, Burns squad did.
He, and two very lucky rookies, were the only surviving soldier left in California. At least that’s what it felt like, he hadn’t been able to contact any other squads in a long time, and he knew the robots were keeping control of the radio towers.

Standing on the roof of an office building that hadn’t been knocked down, Burns saw the tall shape of a radio tower miles away, and every few moments he saw a jet or a helicopter slowly pass it, obviously keeping watch.

If he could just get to it...he had to believe they weren’t the only ones left. He had to believe that he could collect enough fighters, that they had a chance to take back their home.

He had to for Sanctuary’s sake.

Burns looked over his shoulder as he heard a pair of footsteps heading toward him.
William Lennox, one of the rookies, was walking toward him casting a wary glance over at the tower.

“Did you find anyone?” Burns asked. He had sent a few men to check over the building while he immediately took to the stairs, wanting to see what vantage point the building gave us.

“Just one,” Lennox’s eyes were dark. “Some poor guy who decided he’d try his luck in the next life instead.”

Burns released a regretful sigh. If the man had just waited a few more days they would’ve found him, they could have gotten him somewhere safe. But now he was another life lost.

Burns sent a hate-filled glare over to the radio tower where a helicopter was circling it. All because of them.

“But other than that,” Lennox continued, “I think this is the only stable building close to tower. Not to mention we’ll get spotted if we try to set up any closer.”

“Yeah, this will do,” Burns nodded, heading back downstairs with Lennox at his heel. He was young but Burns appreciated both him and his friend, Robert Epps were skilled and brave, and they too had seen first hand what these things could do. They were on a plane to visit home when one of the robots had appeared out of nowhere, sending their plan hurtling to the ground. Lennox and Epps had been the only survivors and that in itself was a miracle. The three had found each other by chance and it had been easier carrying the world on his shoulders with the two to take some of the weight.

Together the three had found other survivors, mainly helpless citizens who needed to be looked after, but they started raising their own little army who were willing to fight back, if only they could figure out how to kill these things without tanks or larger weapons. Or better yet, find tanks or larger weapons that could still be used.

But until then Burns and his ragtag squad would have to do their best in keeping the survivors alive, and finding a way to get control of that radio tower.

“Okay, we’ll have to figure out how to do this without a can opener.”

Bumblebee sat a few feet away, watching Charlie try to open one of the cans he had brought for her. The Conan stood by her, wagging his tail and looking incredibly excited. It made Bumblebee happy, he had picked the can mainly because there was a similar looking creature on the can. He assumed it was another type of dog, he had no idea how many shapes and sizes they came in.
As Charlie tried to knock the can open by knocking its side against the concrete, Bumblebee couldn’t hold back a burst of joy in his spark. He could still feel her arms around his neck. She had hugged him! That was a good sign! That’s what friends did!

And all he had done was do what he thought had been obvious. He had seen how sad and scared Charlie had been when they escaped Dropkick and he wanted to cheer her up, and he remembered that picture she had been so protective of. The picture of her dad, he wasn’t completely sure what that word meant, but the way her eyes looked when she looked at that picture, it was an expression of great affection and grief. It reminded him of how he felt now that he was separated from Optimus. He had been lucky to find it still intact among the rubble Dropkick had left behind. The Decepticon had been nowhere to be found but Bumblebee wasn’t complaining. He could still hear his primal, raging scream as Charlie slammed that pole into his optic.

Bumblebee smiled to himself, Charlie had just been talking about it. Saying how cool she had been to attack the Con like that, he had nodded with enthusiasm. That had been…something extraordinary. But Bumblebee made a mental note to never, ever, let Charlie and Dropkick meet again.

“Think you’d have better luck?” Charlie’s words brought him back to the present. She was holding out the can with a beseeching look on her face. Bumblebee took the small item, holding it between two fingers, and decided to give it a test squeeze to see how durable it was.

The slight pinch made the can explode, bits of brown substance splattering across the ground, his hand, and Charlie.

She had opened her mouth in a gasp of surprise at the sudden explosion, but seconds later burst into laughter when the Conan started lapping the brown stuff up with obvious glee. Bumblebee thought his wagging tail would lift him off the ground.

The Conan didn’t even finish its meal on the ground before it jumped at Bumblebee’s hand, happily licking up the thick, partly liquid stuff that got on his fingers. Its tongue tickled and he let out a hum of humor.

“You wanna clean me up to, Conan?” Charlie whistled for the dog’s attention and the small bundle of joy happily complied, jumping into Charlie’s lap and knocking her onto her back with force as he licked her face.

Charlie’s laughter suddenly cut into a hiss of pain and Bumblebee stood up, worry widening his optics. He walked over and knelt before Charlie who had sat back up. It didn’t look like she had fallen on anything sharp, and surely it hadn’t been the Conan’s jump that had hurt her.

“I’ll be okay, Bee,” she winced but smiled up at him. “It’s just my back.”
Dropkick had slammed his fist into her back when he knocked her to the ground, he had forgotten how fragile humans were. He could’ve killed her with a hit like that.

He grabbed the edge of the cloth that covered her torso (he vaguely recalled the pod’s computer telling him it was a type of clothing called a shirt), wanting to lift it up so he could get a look at her back, but as soon as he moved his hand up Charlie let out a yelp that had nothing to do with pain and jumped away from his hand.

She stared up at him, her optics wide and her face red. Was she okay? He felt a twinge of hurt at his next thought: Did she still want me to touch her? Was the hug a one time thing because she had felt grateful?

“What were you trying to do?” she asked, her face still red and eyes wary.

He pointed to her back and hummed with concern. He wanted to assess the damage, and it wasn’t like she had a mirror around for her to do it herself.

Charlie understood what he was getting at and she muttered that she was fine, really, but she turned her back on him and pulled the shirt up to reveal her back.

That didn’t look fine.

A majority of her back was a deep shade of purple and Bumblebee really wished he knew more about the human body. But if she wasn’t crying out in pain and it only hurt when she laid on it, it surely wasn’t as bad as it could have been.

As it should have been.

Charlie reached her hand over her shoulder to trace the edge of the plum skin, she hissed at the contact but quickly collected herself. “It’s only a bruise. I mean, it’s the biggest bruise I’ve ever gotten but it’ll go away eventually. Considering I got slapped by a giant robot it should have been much worse.”

It should have broken your spine. Bumblebee thought to himself as his hand reached out, his fingertips hovering a fraction away from her skin. Charlie couldn’t take hits like an Autobot could, and even he had been reeling from Dropkick’s hits. An organic getting hit with that kind of force, it should’ve killed her. Bumblebee was incredibly grateful it didn’t but it still made him wonder what made Charlie so different from other humans. I mean, I don’t think I’d meet a human with a spark like her’s anyway. She’s one of a kind, I can tell. But there’s something else…something not human.
Was that the right way to describe it? He knew he hadn’t met any other humans but if all of them could take hits like Charlie then they’d still be fighting the Decepticons.

Charlie cleared her throat, her face still warm with a scarlet color. “Can-can I put my shirt down now?” Her voice was shaky, though it didn’t sound like it was from fear or pain.

Bumblebee looked down at her bare skin where his hand still lingered, barely a flex of a finger and he would be touching her. And Bumblebee had a sense that, for whatever reason, this was more intimidating than Charlie cared for.

*You too,* he told himself with a shake of his head as he leaned away from her. Charlie covered her back and cleared her throat again, returning her attention to the Conan while Bumblebee kept his distance. His metal felt hot for some reason, and he couldn’t figure out why.

He shook his head again, he had enough problems and questions at the moment. He didn’t need anymore, especially if it could damage his new found friendship with Charlie.

Chapter End Notes

The next couple of chapters are just gonna be nothing but romantic fluff <3
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Charlie heard the thunk of clashing metal, saw blurs of red and silver and blue. She heard a voice-voices-murmuring unintelligible whispers into her ear. She felt several emotions all at once and they didn’t fully believe they belonged to…her. Who did they belong to?

Then another whisper breathed in her ear, a whisper filled with a millions of voices she had never heard before: “They need you, Charlie.”

Her eyes popped open.

Charlie was curled inside Bumblebee’s vehicle mode, Conan sticking his head out the window as the robot drove along at a comfortable speed. She tried to collect the remaining wisps of her dream, but they faded away too quickly and she couldn’t recall a thing.

Letting it go she stood up and tried to stretch inside of the small car. She reached over her back and touched her bruise, to her delight it didn’t sting like it had yesterday. But despite herself Charlie frowned, she had always been quick to pick herself up when she was hurt, but this very large bruise was going away incredibly fast. She wondered if it had something to do with that cube…

She wondered if Bumblebee knew something was off.

She blushed at the memory. She knew it was ridiculous to get embarrassed for partly taking her shirt off in front of Bumblebee, the robot didn’t know about human’s bashfulness for showing a lot of skin, and it was just to check the bruise.

She pulled her head out the window, letting the wind blow her hair back. It was a nice feeling, getting to ride in a car again.

Although…she did find Bumblebee’s car mode a little obvious.

“Hey, Bee,” she spoke up, settling back inside the car. “A while back, when the evil robots first attacked, I remember seeing one follow a fighter jet. It did something when it got closer, it looked like it was…scanning it? I guess? I just know that the next moment it transformed into that fighter jet. Can you do that, too? Because I’ve had a thought: say one of those jets is flying around and there’s nowhere to hide. We can just sit still in your vehicle mode but since you don’t look like any of the other cars on earth…maybe if you could look more like an earth car it would be easier to stay under the radar?”
After a moment Bumblebee made a noise of agreement (Charlie was so used to the hums she was starting to pick up his different tones) and came to a stop. After she stepped out he transformed to stand over her and look around.

The three were surrounded by abandoned houses and cars that were in less than ideal condition. Bumblebee was looking over the vehicles with deep concentration and at last shook his head.

“We should find one that’s closer to your color,” Charlie decided, looking beyond the robot and breaking into a smile. “And that’s exactly where we should look.” Several yards away was a walled junkyard for cars and it brought forth a bittersweet memory of her uncle. He loved junk of all kinds.

Bumblebee and Conan followed her, stepping inside to see tons of cars of all models and colors, and most of them in decent shape, as if the evil robots hadn’t bothered to come near here.

“Oh, yes,” Charlie clapped her hands together. “Let’s start looking.”

Bumblebee couldn’t decide which car to pick. He didn’t know what made one stand out over the other besides their size or color. And if color was what he was looking for, he wanted yellow. He liked yellow, all of the Autobots told him how the color was so lively and just the sight of it cheered them up. Plus being small and yellow put Decepticons off their guard which had proved incredibly helpful.

But as he walked down a row, examining the different, clustered vehicles, he was disappointed to not see one yellow one.

Just as he was deciding that green was an okay color he heard Charlie call his name: “I think I found a winner!”

He walked over to join her and Conan, she was standing next to a small, rounder car and to his delight it was yellow.

“These type of cars are called Volkswagen Beetles. Do you like it?”

He nodded to her before turning his optics to the car and gave it a quick scan. A second later and he transformed into the Volkswagen, hoping he still looked okay, still looked like him.

To his surprise Charlie let out a low whistle, running her hands over his door and hood. “I’ve
always liked Beetles. This one is beautiful.”

Bumblebee felt his engine turn hot before he quickly reminded himself she was talking about the Volkswagen, not himself. Still flustered he almost didn’t notice Charlie turning away to open the other Beetle’s door, it creaked as she did so.

He watched as she crawled inside, her legs hanging out the door. “I wanted to see if there was anything use—OH MY GOD!”

Bumblebee transformed back onto his feet, ready to yank Charlie out of the car, away from whatever made her scream.

But she crawled out herself, holding a handful of small black rectangles and wearing a smile that nearly blinded him. “Bumblebee! It’s cassettes!”

_Cassettes?_

“They play music! Oh my gosh if your radio works I am going to freak out! I haven’t heard a song in so long!”

Oh, so humans had music too. He was interested in hearing what kind of music they made.

“Also, I found this.” With her free hand Charlie reached back into the beetle and picked up some weird charm and held it up for him to see.

It was a round, cartoon-y creature, yellow with black stripes and a dopey grin on its face. He looked to Charlie, hoping for some clarification and saw her smile had turned teasing. “It’s your namesake,” she said. “It’s a Bumblebee.”

_What?_ Bumblebee knelt down and took the small charm, looking it over with a critical eye. _I look nothing like this!

He glanced at Charlie, feeling a trickle of humiliation. _Is that really what I look like to her? Like a harmless, silly little creature?_

But Bumblebee couldn’t keep up his annoyance and slight offense for long, Charlie still had that playful smile on her lips and he decided he liked it and wanted to keep it there. If these ‘bumblebees’ made her so happy, he’d take being named after them as a compliment.

The sound of far off growl broke the pleasant atmosphere, making Charlie flinch and Bumblebee lift his optics to the sky. It was clear but he knew the sound of a Decepticon when he heard one.
“Come on,” Charlie spoke up. “Let’s test out your new wheels and find a quiet place where I can try out these cassettes.”

Chapter End Notes

I know its a short chapter and I planned on releasing it after I got at least one more done but since I wanna take my time with the next one I decided to give you guys this to tide you over until then.

Also shout out to my HenshuFangirl for helping me pick out fluff ideas (bee meeting his namesake)
The trio had driven in silence for what felt like hours, at least to Charlie.

In her lap was the cassettes she had found in the beetle. Elvis, the Smiths, even some of her dad’s favorite musicians. She was so excited at the prospect of listening to music again, she had been starting to forget the words to some of her favorite songs.

The sun was starting to go down when she saw it in the distance, a familiar outline that she hadn’t been near since before the attacks.

“Bumblebee, can we stop for the night over there?” she spoke up, pointing out to the shimmering outline. “It’s the beach.”

He let out a soft hum, sounding mildly confused, before turning and heading toward the water. Charlie guessed if he came from a planet full of giant robots, things like large bodies of water wouldn’t be needed. Or appreciated.

Bumblebee found a place where the higher ground met the sand, once there they found a shaded area where the rock of the hill would cover them from anything flying overhead. But once they came to a stop Charlie couldn’t resist jumping out of the Volkswagen and kicking off her worn out tennis shoes, running barefooted across the cool sand to run ankle deep into the water. She let out a breath of exasperation as she watched the remaining sunlight dancing on the soft waves. Memories flooded her mind, of her dad taking them all to the beach, of burning sun and sandcastles, melting ice cream and sunscreen. Of the first time she ever tried diving, the first time she felt that rush of excitement and suspense and freedom before she hit the water.

Behind her Conan was jumping and barking around, he had only been to the beach once back when he was a puppy but he had enjoyed running across the sand and clearly still did.

Charlie turned around, not leaving the water, to smile up at Bumblebee. The robot had followed the two but was keeping a safe distance from the lapping waves. Charlie couldn’t blame him but still, she wanted him to have fun too.

“Let’s try one of the cassettes,” she told him. “Pick one, any one you want.”

Bumblebee pulled the cassettes out of his chest cavity (clearly his version of a backpack) and examined them. But it was clear to her he had no idea what made the cassette different from each other.

Nevertheless he picked one at random and placed it in his new radio located just underneath his chest. Charlie could have started crying as the sounds of the King filled the salty air, bringing back
better, happier times. And while she had never liked to dance with an audience she couldn’t help moving her arms and legs to the music, the water around her feet sloshing against her legs.

Bumblebee was watching her with interest but didn’t try to dance. She ran out of the water to reach his side, the music causing a swell of joy that nearly exploded from her chest. “Can you dance?”

He made a so-so motion with his hand and she laughed at the thought of giant robots having dances like proms. “Why don’t you try it? I wanna see your moves.”

And in Bumblebee’s defense he definitely tried, trying to copy Charlie’s movement as she did her own dance at a safe distance. But it was clear he was even more self-conscious about his dancing skills than she was, that and he probably wasn’t used to how human music sounded.

She laughed again and patted his leg, “Don’t worry. We’ll keep practicing.”

Before the sun had completely set Charlie and Conan had splashed around in the water some more while they finished up the Elvis cassette and even got through the Smiths one. Though she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t offended by the look on Bumblebee’s face as they listened to the Smiths. “Their music is a work of art, thank you very much,” she had said haughtily but in good humor.

When the sun set she and Bumblebee sat side by side on the sand, watching the star-dusted waves lap at the beach. Behind them Conan was snoring on his back, one leg kicking the air as he dozed.

But Charlie wasn’t ready to sleep, this was the closest to happiness she had felt in a long time, even before those robots had come and ruined everything. She hadn’t felt this kind of happiness since her dad died.

She glanced up at Bumblebee whose eyes were on the starry sky, she guessed he was looking out for any unwanted company but the night was blissfully quiet.

“So,” she started up a random conversation, wanting to keep the good mood going for as long as possible. “I take it you weren’t the best dancer back at home, huh?”

Bumblebee looked down at her and shrugged, but she could catch the edge of embarrassment as he looked away.

She smirked and rested her cheek in her hand, “Did that keep you from getting any dates?”
He blinked at her, tilting his head to the side as if he didn’t understand the question.

“Surely some of you went on dates and got married,” she insisted. “Yeah you’re robots but, you have a soul. The more I spend time with you the more human I realize you are.” She wouldn’t say his enemies had any humanity, but then again, neither did certain humans. “There’s gotta be couples on your home planet. Two robots who are always together and acting romantic?”

She tried to imagine Bumblebee holding another robot’s hand and couldn’t quite manage it. Or maybe I don’t want to… I mean, I’d hate to think he has a family waiting for him at home and I’m the one keeping him from them.

Bumblebee’s eyes widen with recognition. With a finger he drew two squiggly stick figures in the sand, and then he drew a crooked circle above them where Charlie would have drawn a heart. He added two lines, connecting the stick figures to the circle.

“That’s close enough I think,” she replied. “So, you do have a romantic partner?”

Bumblebee shook his head, a little too quickly, and he looked a little too flustered by the question.

But Charlie smiled teasingly. “So your dancing skills are that bad everyone keeps a safe distance from you so you don’t step on their feet or knock them upside the head?”

He glared at her but there was no real annoyance in his blue gaze as Charlie laughed. She really never thought she could have a conversation like this with a giant robot, but whatever wariness and fear she had felt toward him was crumbling away, if not already gone all together.

I should tell him about my encounter with the cube.

But as soon as the thought entered her mind she pushed it back. She had a feeling that bringing that up now would break the warm, light-hearted spell the two were currently under. Not yet.

“If it makes you feel any better,” she smiled wryly at him. “My dancing has scared away people too.”

The antennae-like stubs on top of his head lifted, as if he wanted to hear more.

“Well, it’s not like I really put any energy or time into trying to get boys’ attention. I had a few short crushes here and there, but when I hit the age where I would be interested I had started diving practice. Me and my dad were so focused on that and fixing up his corvette I thought I could go look for a boyfriend after…” Her voice dwindled away as she remembered the gray facts. “But then my dad died…and that corvette is destroyed and…I don’t even know how many people are left alive.” She felt her throat tighten as Bumblebee looked at her open concern. She hadn’t wanted
to bring the mood down but did it without even trying.

Frustrated with herself she forced to speak through the knot in her throat. “Can I chose the next cassette?”

Bumblebee obliged and Charlie wasn’t sure if her pick was a good idea. But she missed her dad and if all she had was his picture and his favorite music, she’d hold tight to them and never let them go.

“This was one of my dad’s favorites,” she breathed as *Unchained Melody* drifted up into the starry sky.

Bumblebee’s eyelids lowered as he listed, his blue eyes looking softer than she had ever seen them.

With the song like a blanket of comfort and bittersweet memories Charlie got a wild idea to bring the mood back up, or at least to get the sadness out of her throat.

She stood up and stretched, knowing this idea was absolutely crazy. “Bee, I don’t know if I’ll ever run into a nice guy, and I don’t know if you’ll get back home to sweep some robot off their feet. But I think we need to practice just in case.”

She walked to the middle of the beach and he followed, looking confused but interested. She smiled up at him, trying to ignore how her heart was now pounding in her ears. With the song and the ocean as their music and the stars as their light she reached her hands out to him, “I’m gonna teach you how to slow dance. I’m a little rusty so it’ll be good practice for both of us.”

Bumblebee looked from her hands to her face then back again. She let out a huff of air, “Take my hands, Bee. It’s fine.”

He blinked, looking a little startled before he obeyed, reached out and cupping her hands that disappeared within his. His hands were still warm, smooth, and for a moment she worried if her hands were clammy.

“Okay, follow my lead-carefully.”

She took the simple steps, the slow dances she had seen at school dances where the couples looked too embarrassed to enjoy themselves. They hadn’t looked like fun at all to Charlie who had played wallflower.

But this…this wasn’t bad. Maybe because she didn’t have her classmates as an audience, maybe because it was on beach, maybe it was because it was her dad’s song playing.
Maybe it was because her partner was Bumblebee.

But either way any awkwardness left oddly quickly and the robot proved this slow dance with its basic steps was much more its speed. She smiled up at him as they moved in a circle, “You tricked me! You’re a natural dancer.”

An unreadable hum was her answer as his face-plate shifted into his version of a smile. All the while he didn’t break eye contact with her and Charlie was trying to figure out if there was anything on Earth that was such a stunning, beautiful blue as his eyes.

She was so focused on staring at him that she misjudged her next step and tripped on the thick sand, but instead of keeping her upright, Bumblebee caught her and lifted her into his arms. She was shocked as she was suddenly looking over his shoulder, his arms wrapped around her body with her chest pressed over where his heart should be. She looked at him and his eyes were closed, he looked completely enveloped in the music, she didn’t even know if he realized that he was holding her.

Charlie’s smile was soft, for the few days she had known him she hadn’t seen him look so peaceful, she remembered she wasn’t the only one who had suffered. And she admitted that she was flattered that she, along with a song from her home, put him at such ease.

With a warm sleepiness settling over her brain after the day of running and dancing, Charlie didn’t think anything of resting her head against his shoulder, and even nuzzling into her friend’s neck.

But Bumblebee did.

The music stopped abruptly and he moved her away from his chest, holding her out in his hands with a look of embarrassment and something akin to apologetic.

Charlie felt her cheeks warm as he gently placed her on the ground. What she did hadn’t been a very...platonic thing to do. And she had no idea what robots considered acts of affection. What she did could have seemed very rude to him.

“That’s enough practicing for one night,” she finally burst out after a few awkward moments of not looking at each. “I think I should get some sleep. We need to figure out where we’re going tomorrow.”

Bumblebee nodded, looking as relieved as she felt as the two returned to Conan who hadn’t budged the entire time.

Grabbing her blanket Charlie wrapped herself around the dog so she could use him as her personal heater and used her elbow as a pillow.
“Goodnight, Bee.” she called to the robot.

Bumblebee had returned to the spot he had originally been sitting in to keep watch, but he glanced over at Charlie and offered a quiet hum at her words.

Charlie buried her face into Conan’s fur, glad her tiredness won out against her embarrassment as she drifted off into sleep.

Bumblebee purposefully kept his mind blank as he kept look out for any Decepticons. He didn’t want to get distracted trying to figure out why the dance had bothered him. After all it had been fun at first, but then he had held her and and pressed her face against her neck and he couldn’t figure out why that made his circuits twitch and his spark flare. But he could guess if he brought these problems up to his friends, say Ironhide or even Ratchet they would have both told done the same thing: Say with no itch on empathy that he was a solo Autobot on a world overrun by Decepticons and he needed to get his priorities in check. And while Bumblebee liked to tease them now and again he decided it was best to listen to their advice.

But even with his attention focused on keeping look out, his audio receptors caught the sound of chattering behind him. He looked over to Charlie who was shivering, clutching Conan who was whining in his sleep. Humans weren’t built like Cybertronians, they didn’t have the means of withstanding any intense kinds of weather without help. Being as quiet as possible as to not wake her Bumblebee moved to sit next to her. Reaching his hand out he placed it against her side, hoping his warm temperature would help with the cold. To his delight Charlie’s shivering stopped after a few minutes, still asleep she moved closer to his knee before relaxing again.

Bumblebee nodded to himself as if keeping his friend warm had been a mission and looked back up at the empty sky. It felt so peaceful here, and he knew he would hate to leave a place that made Charlie happy.

*I’ll find her a new place*, he decided. *A place on this planet where all the humans can be happy.* He thought of the dance again, of how much he enjoyed holding her hands while the starlight on the ocean illuminated her silhouette. He had especially liked how, before he had nearly tossed her into the sand, she had looked at him with pure, open, friendliness and affection. There hadn’t been a trace of the fear and wariness that had been there when they first met. Two completely different species, but they could dance and laugh and smile at each other.

*Maybe there’s a place on this planet where Autobots can be happy too.*
Bumblebee had never seen a sunrise until that day on the beach.

With the air warming he felt comfortable with leaving Charlie’s side to pace besides the water as light slowly lit up the world. He stopped suddenly as he saw the ocean turn orange. He stared in awe as the sun slowly rose into the sky, looking as if it was rising from the depths of the ocean.

He felt the sun’s rays, warm, on his body and it lifted his spark in encouragement. This planet had its own unique beauty, and seeing it with his own optics he was determined to protect it.

The sun was completely visible, an yellow orb rising into the now blue sky, when he heard Charlie singing behind him. He turned away from the sun to see she was sitting up, rummaging through her decreasing pile of supplies to find the Conan something to eat.

She was singing to herself, her voice soft. After a moment he recognized the song as one of the many he had played last night.

“Wise men say only fools rush in.” After finding a bag that had these strange brown strips she opened it and offered a piece to the Conan who happily took it. She rubbed his back as he ate, her whole body relaxed and her eyes soft. “But I can’t help falling in love with you.”

She noticed Bumblebee watching her and she offered him a good morning smile as she finished her song, “But I can’t help falling in love with you.”

Bumblebee walked over to join them, kneeling beside the Conan and giving him a very gentle pat on the head with one finger. He looked over at Charlie and wished he could compliment her singing, instead he watched her stand and stretch looking around the beach before turning back to him.

“So, it might be a good idea to figure out where we’re going instead of driving aimlessly.” She glanced at their supplies and he didn’t miss the flash of worry in her optics. “We also need to go on a supply run.”

It was going to take Bumblebee a bit more time to get used to having traveling companions that needed to consume so many things to keep just a fraction of a Cybertronians’ energy.

After packing up Charlie, with the Conan in her arms, let Bumblebee pick her up and headed off the beach and back up to the road. He wondered if she was trying not to remember last night, too.
As he walked up the hill, too focused on making sure Charlie was comfortable in his arms, that she was the only one paying attention to their surroundings. He jolted to a stop when she let out a triumphant gasp.

“Bee, look!” She pointed out to the distance where more wrecked city was cluttered together. “I see a radio tower!”

It took him a moment before he saw what she was looking at. It was a tall structure, that almost looked like an incredibly thin triangle. Charlie grabbed his arm, looking at him with exhilaration, “We can use it to contact people! I could try and contact other people, and maybe—maybe even you—”

I could contact the Autobots. Bumblebee looked back at the tower with new found delight and hope. He looked down at Charlie, optics shining. It felt like they had just taken their first step in stopping this war and saving the Earth.

During the hours-long drive toward the city that surrounded the radio tower Charlie filled the time with endless chatter, and while Bumblebee didn’t understand half the words she was saying he listened attentively.

“I mean me and Tina were never really friends but after that camping trip for the Girl Scouts she really had it out for me. We were out hiking by ourselves and we can across a hive of bees—bees have these painful stingers by the way.”

Do they? Bumblebee’s interest piqued.

“Even though bees die after one sting they still really hurt so, of course, two nine year olds were terrified of them.”

And they’re ruined again. Bumblebee really couldn’t get why he reminded her of these fat creatures that died after one attack.

“Anyway they were mostly swarming Tina cause she was panicking and waving her arms around. That made me panic and when I saw the mud patch behind her I…I thought the bees wouldn’t bother her if she was covered in wet mud. In my defense they didn’t but Tina definitely wasn’t grateful after I pulled her out of the mud. Ever since that day she had been determined to make every single day of my life hell. And rub Tripp Summers in my face after they started dating. Tripp was another one of my classmates, and even though he was really obnoxious, he was one of the few guys who didn’t seem bothered that I would rather spend time in a garage than a mall. He was pretty nice too, even when I accidentally threw food on him that one time.” She let out a self-
deprecating laugh before going quiet.

Bumblebee, sensing her sudden sadness, started playing one of the cassettes, keeping the volume low in case she wanted to talk some more.

She let out a soft sigh. “They weren’t my friends, but I didn’t want all of this to happen to them.” She indicated outside to a house that had a truck thrown into it, like a Con had wanted to have some fun while it ruined homes.

Bumblebee hummed comfortingly, wishing he could speak so he could tell her about his life and his home. He wanted to tell her about his times at the Academy because great Primus if she thought her stories were embarrassing. She hadn’t been there when he and Cliffjumper nearly set the dorm on fire thanks to betting they could hit a target with their eyes closed. Or when he had trash-talked one of their teachers, the oh so pleasant Sentinel Prime, while he had leaned against a comm button that had broadcast his entire colorful speech to the whole of the Academy. Or the time Cliffjumper had dragged him along to a party to help him impress a couple of femme bots, that mortifying night wouldn’t have been so bad if one of those femme bots, Arcee, hadn’t been a part of their team when they graduated. And she had been very clear that she had a fantastic memory.

But most importantly Bumblebee wanted to tell Charlie about all the good times he had had with the Autobots, all the friends he had made that he would lay down his life for. It had become very important to him that Charlie knew and liked the Autobots.

His ideal thoughts came to a halt when a familiar and awful sound reached his audio receptors. Surveying the area he turned sharply, Charlie bumping her shoulder against his window as he drove toward the closest building that wasn’t completely in shambles. A simple two story house not unlike the one he had left Charlie in before he had hunted down supplies and her father’s picture. But unlike that one there was no sign of any humans, dangerous or not.

But there was something deadly coming toward them, the pale sky roaring with its approach.

Bumblebee transformed and pushed Charlie and the Conan into the house before he half transformed his body so he could slide inside, grateful for his small stature.

Charlie remaining quiet, peeked through one of the windows, Bumblebee crouched behind her as they saw not one but three jets zooming across the sky, circling around the area five times before moving on. Bumblebee could still hear the jets not too far off. They were looking for something. He saw Dropkick, still clearly alive as the Autobot and his friends escaped.

Those Cons were looking for him.

Charlie guessed the same thing, looking up at him with her mouth a thin line of worry. “Maybe we should stay here, it’s only a few more hours until its night anyway. This looks like a safe space to
Bumblebee narrowed his optics, he had wanted to cover much more ground before they needed to rest again. But he knew it would best to wait out until those Cons were done searching the area. Remembering his fight with Dropkick he nearly growled in self-anger, he couldn’t fight just him off, he couldn’t fight three Decepticons on his own.

Charlie moved away from the window to examine the house. Bits of the floor had been pulled away, revealing the dirt underneath the house. The stairs were broken and cracked, unsafe to climb. There was also a hole in the ceiling that Bumblebee hadn’t noticed before. But it was relatively small, as long as they didn’t stand under it their cover wouldn’t be blown.

But Charlie, after placing the Conan down so he could sniff around, was heading right toward the patch of sunlight that shone down the hole. Bumblebee hurried over to stop her but came to a halt when he saw her knelt down in front of…he didn’t know what they were.

There was three of them, clearly something organic, green stalks that held up a circle circle encased by white bits that looked soft and fragile.

He knelt down beside her and Charlie turned to him, “These are called daises. They’re a type of flower. I used to see flowers all the time but now… I hadn’t expected to see another one again.”

*Daisies*…he liked the name, and the ‘flowers’ were pretty but…what were they used for? Lucky for him Charlie seemed eager to talk more about Earth and its traditions. “People used to buy all kinds of flowers from flower shops, my mom told me about this time that dad bought a bouquet for her that was this big.” She held her arms out wide, eyes warm with the memory. “I told her I can’t wait until someone gave me that many flowers.”

Bumblebee looked down at the daisies and reached out for one, but before he could pluck it Charlie hurriedly wrapped her arms around his servo. “No, don’t. Flowers die when you take them out of the ground. Let’s leave them alone for now.”

*Flowers die too?* First bees and now flowers, the Earth was full of vulnerable living things. It made him nervous. With his free hand he reached out and stroked the arms that were still wrapped around him. He remembered the bruise on Charlie’s back and was grateful she was more sturdy than a flower or a bee.

“And that’s the big dipper.”
With the trio of daisies between them Charlie and Bumblebee laid on their backs, stargazing through the hole in the roof.

Conan laid curled on Bumblebee’s chest and Charlie tried not to be hurt. Conan had spent so many nights sleeping next to her, she was glad the dog had warmed up to the giant yellow robot.

She was pointing out constellations she recognized, wishing she had studied astrology more. She wanted to impress Bumblebee with all her Earth knowledge. And from the way his eyes stared up at the stars, he was absolutely wonder struck by it all.

“My family used to stargaze every time we went camping,” Charlie said casually. “My brother and me would always race to see who could spot the most constellations. I always won.” She turned her head to look at the robot, “You’re from space, you must have seen all sorts of constellations and planets.”

Bumblebee waved his hand in a so-so wave and Charlie frowned. She wondered how long he had been fighting the evil robots, maybe he didn’t ever have the chance to do things like star gaze or visit other places. She felt a twinge of sympathy, she at least had care-free memories to keep her going.

“Can you see your planet from here?” she asked out of curiosity, wondering how far away his home was.

Bumblebee wrapped his hand around Conan to keep him in place as he sat up to get a better look at the stars, his eyes narrowing. After a few moments he shook his head but Charlie wasn’t that surprised, she hadn’t expected a planet full of giant conquering robots would be close enough to see with the naked eye.

“Maybe once we get in contact with your friends one of them will have a picture,” Charlie offered before sitting up herself. “You will be able to get in contact with them, right? When we get to the radio tower.”

Bumblebee nodded, reaching his hand out to stroke her arm again, his expression comforting.

Charlie smiled up at him, “Then we should get some rest. We got a big day tomorrow.”

_We’re about to turn the tables in this war._
Chapter 15

The voices were back in her head, several, thousands, millions, she couldn’t possibly understand what they were trying to tell her.

She tried to reach out into the blackness and immediately her body screamed in agony, it felt like her bones were an inch from shattering into pieces.

*Wake up, Charlie,* she begged herself. *This is a dream. Wake up!*

She squeezed her eyes tight, the pain shredding at her muscles, feeling like it would tear open her skin from the inside out. And when she opened her eyes again it was no longer dark.

But she wasn’t in the house with the hole. She was on a cracked road, surrounded by familiar husks of broken buildings, the sky a pale gray above her. She was back in the part of the city where she had found the cube.

And Bumblebee was nowhere to be seen.

For a moment Charlie thought she was alone, but with her pain slowly fading she managed to turn her head to the left—and saw a familiar red shape.

It was that robot—Bumblebee’s friend—but he was alive. Granted he looked close to death, dents and claw marks scarring his crimson body, his blue eyes flashing with pain as he was trying to lift himself to his feet. Charlie tried to wave to him, to call out to him but her fingers only twitched and her voice was a croak.

Suddenly the ground shook below her and large shapes loomed over her.

Her heart stopped when she saw the jet that had grabbed her from what felt like ages ago. He was flanked by the blue robot she had stabbed in the eye, and the red and white one Bumblebee had killed. But despite the fact they were practically on top her, none of them batted an eye at the human girl. Their gazes, red with hunger and hatred, were on Bumblebee’s friend who had turned his head to glare sapphire daggers at them.

*Oh no…* Charlie’s blood turned to ice when she realized what was about to happen. *Run, RUN!*

The first robot stepped forward, and when he opened his mouth Charlie could understand him: “I suppose you think you’re clever, trying to bury our little dig site.”

Charlie hadn’t noticed at first but all three looked worse for wear, the red bot had got in some good
blows before they had taken him down.

He grinned smugly at the jet, something akin to blue blood dripping down his mouth. “Course not, Starscream. You did the burying all on your own.” His voice was rough but young, and the name of the jet sent a shiver down her spine. *Starscream.*

The blue robot let out a growl and stepped forward only for Starscream to lift his arm, bringing his comrade to the stop.

“Don’t be too hasty, Dropkick,” Starscream hissed. He slowly stalked toward his enemy. “Cliffjumper here needs to learn a lesson. An Autobot can’t go wherever he pleases, especially not on a planet the Decepticons have already conquered.”

Bumblebee’s friend-Cliffjumper-snarled viciously, “This planet isn’t your home anymore than Cybertron was!”

Starscream’s hand struck Cliffjumper with enough force to send him sprawling across the ground. Charlie felt pain lacerate her head and neck and with a deep sense of nausea she realized she was sharing Cliffjumper’s torment.

On shaking limbs he tried to push himself back up, but Starscream stepped forward and wrapped a hand around the smaller robot’s throat, forcing him up by his neck. “We’ll see who controls Cybertron now, *Autobot*. Megatron is gone and I am the Decepticon leader now, I will not leave our planet to rust or to be ruled over by the likes of you.” He pulled his lips into a malicious grin and Charlie’s heart beat painfully. “And as leader I am going to give my Cons detailed orders to keep you online for as long as possible, to have you feel as they tear your circuits apart, slowly, painfully. And they’ll leave your body to rust on this disgusting planet, alone and a loss. I hope your comrades remember you, Cliffjumper, because I won’t.”

Starscream lifted his free hand, ready to give his enemy another blow, but he suddenly froze mid-attack. Charlie looked around but the whole world seemed to have froze, the two robots standing near her didn’t move an inch.

Charlie looked back to Cliffjumper, her eyes widening as he slowly turned his head to look directly at her. His blue eyes glowed with an infathomable light and when he opened his mouth the millions of voices joined his own: *Brace yourself, Charlie Watson, the Decepticons will come for you.*

Before she had a chance to even process his words Cliffjumper blinked and the world went dark.
Charlie jolted awake, gasping for breath and shivering. Her body was sore and covered in sweat. It took her a moment to realize Bumblebee was holding her arms as if to keep her still, looming over her with his eyes wide and fearful.

She looked around, seeing she had kicked her blanket off. Had she been kicking and moving in her sleep? Had she cried out?

“I’m okay.” She reached her arms out and held Bumblebee’s face between her hands, she saw her arms were shaking. “It was just— it was just a nightmare.” She tried to remember what had riled her up so, but her memories of her nightmare were fading from her mind, all she could recall was flashes of red and blue.

Bumblebee covered her hands with his own, still looking concerned, his face hovering inches from her.

“It’s fine, I’m fine,” she assured him, willing her heart to stop its racing.

Bumblebee didn’t move, their foreheads nearly touching as he waited for her to catch her breath, never taking his eyes off her. As the effects of the nightmare finally started to wear off she was beginning to notice how close he was and how tightly he held her hands that were still warm against his face.

She pulled away with one last shaky gasp, ignoring the way Bumblebee almost looked hurt when she yanked her arms away. “Are the jets gone? I think I’ll feel better once we get moving.” She picked up Conan who had been loyally sitting beside her as she collected herself. Burying her face in the dog’s fur she followed Bumblebee outside, ignoring when the robot would glance over his shoulder to check on her.

Bumblebee played one of the softer songs on one of their cassettes. He was glad Charlie had calmed down, relaxing in his front seat while she stroked the Conan’s fur. But he couldn’t get that morning out of his head.

He had been watching gray clouds starting to cover the dawn sky when Charlie had started to move in her sleep, kicking and flailing her arms while she cried out in pain and fear, murmuring words he didn’t catch. Bumblebee had knelt beside her, fear flaring in his spark as he carefully grabbed her arms, trying to rouse her. He hadn’t known what to do, he hadn’t known if this was common among humans. He hadn’t known if she was dying.

And while she was fine now that fear was going to take a while to shake off.
The three had only been traveling around thirsty minutes when something wet hit Bumblebee’s hood, followed by another and another, Drops of liquid started coming down in sheets and Charlie let out a delighted sound.

“Rain! I haven’t seen rain in forever!”

Bumblebee wanted to be happy that she was happy but it took all his self-control to not let out a scream of frustration. He had thought the worst the planet got was being mostly covered in water. But the planet had liquid falling down from the sky! He couldn’t drive in this! Not without rusting something awful.

He found a short but long building with one wall torn down to show the empty space inside. He could keep dry in there until this ‘rain’ stopped. If it stopped.

Parking to let Charlie and the Conan out he was surprised to see her run out into the downpour, spreading her arms out and pulling her head back, mouth open. Bumblebee transformed and quickly followed the Conan who had made a mad dash inside. He clearly wasn’t eager to get wet anymore than the robot was.

Once inside the Conan gave a violent shake, scattering droplets on Bumblebee who shed away, keeping his eyes on Charlie as she spun around in the rain.

“I haven’t felt this clean in ages!” she called out to him. “Man, I’d kill for a bath right now.” She smiled at the sight of him huddling in his new shelter, “Don’t like the rain, huh?”

He shook his head and with a shrug Charlie went on to enjoy herself. After a few minutes of watching her Bumblebee glanced up at the sky, he didn’t have much fear of any Cons seeing her. They would want to stay out of the rain even more than the Autobot.

Leaving the Conan to watch her he stepped further into the dim hallways of the building, hoping to find any sort of supplies for Charlie and the Conan. Something to help dry her off when she was done would be helpful.

Walking through the brick hallways Bumblebee noticed it was different from the other buildings he had occupied, the walls were covered in colorful billboards with drawings and posters with words he couldn’t read. There were several rooms but they were filled with nothing but chairs and desks.

*This is a school*, he realized, remembering the academy.

It wasn’t until he got to the end of the hallway that he saw a room he could walk inside, the wall having been torn open similarly to the door. He stepped inside and his spark gave a painful lurch.
The desks and chairs in her were so small, even Charlie wouldn’t have been able to sit in one. The floor was decorated with colorful carpets and knick-knacks. He turned to one of the walls and saw cut out pictures of different cartoony creatures, he even spotted a bumblebee.

But it was the photos that snatched his attention, images of humans that looked so much younger than Charlie. Their eyes big and their smiles bright, they looked so happy. He could imagine them coming into this room, having fun and learning whatever it was that small humans learned before going home to their families, families that loved and cherished them.

And then the Decepticons came and took it all away from them.

Bumblebee felt a wave of nausea and he knelt down, trying to calm himself down. He could imagine all too vividly the chaos and panic as the Decepticons attacked these defenseless organics, he had seen first hand what destruction the Cybertronian war could wrought.

But this wasn’t Cybertron. Earth and its inhabitants had had nothing to do with any of this but they too lost everything. These small defenseless humans who had deserved to laugh and smile lost everything. Charlie lost everything.

How dare the Decepticons drag them into this war. How dare the Autobots had not done what they should have and searched harder for their enemies, they should have been here to do something. To get these humans somewhere safe, to protect them.

Bumblebee had never felt more like a failure than in that moment as he gazed into the faces of young humans who hadn’t even known they had depended on him.

So wrapped up in his misery he hadn’t realized Charlie had walked in until her damp hand was placed on his shoulder. He looked down at the human and could have almost laughed at her appearance. She was sopping wet, her hair splayed over her shoulders and her shirt clinging tightly to her frame. She looked confused for a moment before she glanced at the pictures and understanding and grief dimmed her eyes.

“It’s not your fault,” she breathed. “I know you would’ve come sooner had you known. That’s the kind of bot you are.”

Did she really think so? How far her opinion of him had come. It felt like ages since they first met but he knew it had only been a couple of cycles. And despite the fact she was wet Bumblebee suddenly couldn’t keep his head up anymore, instead leaning forward to rest his head against her chest. The breath Charlie released was hitched and for a terrifying second he thought she would pull away, but instead she wrapped her arms around his head in a comforting embrace, her cold skin quickly becoming warm thanks to his body temperature.

“I know it hurts,” she whispered against him. “I know its easy to blame yourself and think you should’ve done things differently. But we can’t change the past, we can only try to make the future
better. And as much as I told myself that would happen, that I would live to see the history books rewritten, I didn’t believe it, not for one moment. And then I met you Bumblebee and...you gave me hope, even when I was absolutely terrified of you I finally had real hope. And thanks to you I was able to laugh and smile again, I thought I had forgotten how... We can do this Bumblebee, I’m not saying it will be easy or that it won’t hurt, but we can make it so that all these kids, your friend, my family, that they didn’t die in vain. We can stop this war, we just have to stay together.”

Her words and tone were soothing to his audio receptors, but as she talked he heard a soft thumping noise against his cheek, the sound coming from Charlie’s chest.

_Is that her spark?_ His thoughts sounded sleepy and relaxed. _It’s so different from mine... I like it._
Chapter 16

By the time the rain had stopped Bumblebee had managed to calm down. Following Charlie (who kept glancing at him with obvious worry in her optics) and the Conan outside, the ground was wet beneath his feet but the sky was clearing and he could make out no signs of the Cons that had been looking for him.

“Do you think we could go on a quick supply run?” Charlie asked, looking up at the robot. “I’m fine but Conan needs to eat more often than I do.”

Bumblebee nodded, his earlier impatience gone. He couldn’t be impatient with Charlie after she had comforted him, after what she had said to him. Even now her hand held the edge of his palm, he wasn’t sure if she had realized she had held his hand on the way out of the school. But he did know he felt a twinge of disappointment when she pulled her hand away, walking a few steps away to get a better look at what lay before them.

“Keep going down this road and we’ll hit that cluster of buildings,” she pointed. “That’s probably our best bet, they might have a couple of stores that haven’t been picked clean.” She ran her fingers through her damp hair, “And maybe a towel wouldn’t be the worst thing to find.”

Bumblebee hummed for a chuckle before transforming, opening the door for her.

The Conan jumped in right away but Charlie hesitated beside his hood. “You sure you don’t want to wait until I find a way to dry off? I don’t want to get your seat wet…”

In answer Bumblebee drove forward, closer to her. He wasn’t particularly fond of water but it was Charlie, he’d get over it.

Once she was inside the trio made their way forward, Bumblebee keeping a look out toward the sky just in case those Cons did return. But the drive to their destination was quiet and uneventful.

“Let’s stop here,” Charlie say as they passed a small building. He couldn’t read what the sign atop it said but the glass windows revealed empty aisles with random objects strewn around the floor. He also noticed the door was too small for him to go through.

He gave Charlie a worried look as she, with the Conan in her arms, headed for the door. She noticed and gave him a reassuring smile, “The store’s empty don’t worry. And if anything goes wrong, well it’s not like you couldn’t punch the window open.”

That’s true. He could.
Standing outside Bumblebee watched as Charlie moved through the store, looking through the remains of the store. The Conan snuffling around a few paces away.

Bumblebee was taking in the curve of Charlie’s back as she knelt down when he heard a sound that didn’t fit. His antenna flicked as he turned around. On the other side of the street was a red brick building that looked similar to the one Charlie had lived in when they first met. Its windows were shattered and pieces of the wall had been knocked off but other than that it was in better shape than Charlie’s.

But it could be hiding something useful-or something dangerous.

With one last glance at Charlie as she examined a bottle of liquid, Bumblebee carefully stepped toward the building. It once had two doors that looked to have been ripped from their hinges.

Deciding that there was no Decepticons (at least none he had personally met) that could fit inside this building to plan a sneak attack, Bumblebee knelt down and poked his head through the entrance.

First thing he noticed was the scattered array of furniture, a desk, a couch, a couple of chairs. There was also a set of rundown stairs at the back of the large front room. But he didn’t seen anything alive.

Then he turned his head to the right and saw the human.

The human looked male, not much taller or younger than Charlie, with dark skin and bushy hair. He stared at Bumblebee with open fear, looking ready to bolt. The Autobot remembered the other humans…the one who had attacked Charlie, and wondered how he could gauge if this one was a threat or not. He didn’t look like a threat, he was smaller than the ones that had tried to harm his friend. But looks could be deceiving, Bumblebee was living proof of that.

He let out a cautious growl just in case. But the moment he did the human’s optics rolled to the back of a head and he collapsed to the ground, limbs sprawled.

*OH PRIMUS I KILLED HIM!!!*

He pulled his head out the door and rushed back to the store that Charlie was now walking out of, a few supplies in her arms. Her smile immediately dropped when she saw his expression. “Is it a jet?”

Bumblebee quickly grabbed her, making her drop her supplies as he carried her to the building and pushed her inside. “Bumblebee what is-” she stopped when she saw the boy, lying on the floor.
“Did you kill him?” she gaped, hurrying to kneel beside him.

Bumblebee quickly shook his head, at least he hadn’t tried to! He had just wanted to be cautious!

Charlie pressed her fingers against the boy’s neck and after a moment let out a sigh of relief. “He’s alive, thank God. He’s just fainted.” She looked over at Bumblebee and he could have sworn he saw a trace of humor in her relieved grin. “He’s fine, you just scared the hell out of him.”

*He scared the hell out of me!* Bumblebee wanted to shout. *Whatever hell is!*

Charlie moved to lift the boy up by his arms when another sound reached his audio receptors. He looked around the empty room as Charlie’s jaw dropped and he half expected her optics to fall to the floor.

*What is it?* He begged to ask, he hadn’t heard a sound like that in Cybertron but it sounded like whatever was making that noise was small, small and incredibly helpless.

Charlie gently placed the boy back down and followed the noise that Bumblebee realized was coming from behind the toppled desk. She walked behind it and let out a near strangled gasp.

“I don’t believe it…” she breathed, disappearing behind the desk only to stand up a few moments later, this time carrying something in her arms.

Bumblebee realized it was a human, an incredibly tiny one, even smaller than the ones in the picture. It had a tuft of blond hair atop its head and was looking around with big brown optics. Immediately Bumblebee felt a strong surge of protectiveness at the sight of his friend carrying the little human.

“It’s a baby, Bee,” she breathed to her friend, voice thick with emotion. “I didn’t—I didn’t think I’d ever see one again.”

Since they weren’t far from the house Bumblebee and Charlie had spent the night in they decided it would be best to go back until the unconscious boy woke up.

Once they got there Charlie was adamant to tell Bumblebee about babies. He was quite surprised to hear that all humans started out that small, even smaller when they were first born.

“Even I was this small once,” Charlie explained, the baby making humorous noises in her lap. “If you can believe it.”
Bumblebee narrowed his optics but gave up after a moment, he couldn’t imagine Charlie so small and honestly… The thought of Charlie being so defenseless without him to take care of him gave him a sense of anxiety he’d rather not have.

“Do you wanna hold him?” Charlie asked suddenly.

Bumblebee stiffened, looking down at his hands that suddenly looked too big, and he was horribly aware of how easily these hands could crush an organic.

Charlie, sensing his nervousness, smiled, “You’ll be fine. You’ve held Conan before and he’s just as small.”

That’s true.

Still terrified Bumblebee slowly reached his hands out, Charlie carefully positioning the baby in his palms that made the human look even smaller. The child glanced around the room at the new advantage before he finally gazed up at Bumblebee’s face. The robot tensed, scared that he would be frightening to the baby.

But not a moment later and the small human smiled, reaching his pudgy hands up to the Autobot’s face, giggling happily.

Bumblebee never expected for his spark to melt but melt it did, intense affection and protectiveness came over him and he was positive he could’ve have taken Megatron in his prime if the Con threatened this baby.

“Aw, he likes you,” Charlie gushed, her hands clapping together in delight.

Bumblebee smiled over at her, a new appreciation for Earth and its inhabitants filled him with determination. He couldn’t wait to comm the other Autobots so they could come here and see how amazing and cute humans were.

Charlie was so enamored with watching Bumblebee fond over the baby that she almost didn’t hear the groan beside her.

She quickly turned to the boy Bumblebee had found, she was surprised they had found another person her age, and was relived to see him moving.
“Sam,” he groaned before he had even fully sat up, “Sam?”

“You’re okay,” Charlie was at his side, helping him into a sitting position. “You’re safe, don’t worry.”

The boy blinked at her before his eyes widened, he was as surprised to see her as she had seen him. “H-Hi. What are you-?” Panic twisted his features and he looked frantically around the room. “Where’s Sam-?”

His eyes found Bumblebee, now holding the baby up to his face so the infant could harmlessly smack his face plating. The boy beside Charlie turned pale.

She quickly spoke, “Before you faint please let me tell you that I’m Charlie, that’s Bumblebee and he’s a really good friend and that baby is very safe with him and yes I know he’s a giant robot but he’s a good one I swear!”

There was a beat of silence. Bumblebee had looked down when Charlie had started babbling, his worried eyes on the boy whose expression was still horrified.

But finally he let out a forced chuckle, “Th-that’s nice.” His voice was a strangled and slightly high-pitched. “I’m Memo.”
Chapter 17

“So, let me get this straight.”

The boy-Memo—was sitting with his legs crossed across from Charlie, Bumblebee, and Conan. The baby, named Sam, was held in a protective grip in Memo’s arms, busy with a nap.

“You found this robot—”

“His name is Bumblebee,” Charlie quickly cut in. Her friend was more than just this robot.

“Okay…you found Bumblebee and watched him fight this other…Can I call the bad ones robots?”

“You can call ‘em bastards for all I care,” she muttered bitterly only to shrug apologetically when Memo covered Sam’s ears.

“He killed one of the bad robots and you decided he’d help us fight them.”

“Which he will,” Charlie smiled up at him, “Won’t you, Bee?”

He nodded immediately, his blue eyes shining down at her.

“Cool. And because he decided to help you you’re gonna use a nearby radio tower to call even more robots here so they could fight it out in the hopes Bee’s friends will win.”

Charlie really wished he wouldn’t talk like the plan was completely insane. It may be a little out there but it was better than just hiding in the shadows until the robots found you. “You haven’t seen Bumblebee in action,” she responded, lifting her chin a bit. “Or me, for that matter. I stabbed one of those ba-robots, in the eye.”

Memo looked at her with a mixture of surprise, admiration, and horror. He jerked his thumb toward the door, “You—” he looked to the door as if he expected that blue bot to be there, before jerking his head back her. “You stabbed one of those things in the eye?”

“Yep.” Charlie’s smile widened when Bumblebee let out a laughing buzz.

Even Memo let out a laugh but it was another one that was more of a choke than an actual laugh. But Charlie didn’t blame him for being nervous, it took her a while to get used to Bumblebee too.
“What’s your story?” Charlie asked, nodding toward the baby. “Is he yours?”

Memo quickly shook his head, “No, no. I met Sam and his parents after…after the first attacks. I was at the library when it happened and decided to hide in the cellar…” His voice trailed off, his eyes clouding over with a look Charlie knew all too well. “When it got quiet I started my way home but, everything was destroyed. I couldn’t find my mom or sister anywhere. I’m hoping they got evacuated but…but who knows?”

“I know how you feel,” Charlie breathed, her chest constricting. “I couldn’t find my mom and little brother.”

“I’m sorry,” Memo replied, voice soft with sympathy.

There was a heavy moment of silence, before Charlie went on, “What happened to Sam’s parents?”

Memo glanced down at the infant, “Let’s just say we could have really used Bumblebee a couple of weeks ago. Now it’s just me and this little guy. We’re looking for the Sanctuary.”

Charlie’s brow furrowed, “The Sanctuary?”

“I don’t know if its real,” Memo quickly said in a way that sounded like he didn’t want Charlie to think he believed in fairy tales. “Sam’s parents told me about it, a bunch of survivors are hiding there, collecting food, medical supplies, and the robots never go near it.”

“That sounds too good to be true,” Charlie said, dubious. “Where is this Sanctuary?”

He looked away from her, “…Alcatraz island.”

Charlie would have laughed if Memo hadn’t looked so serious. “The prison…the Sanctuary is the Alcatraz…prison?”

“Well there’s no prisoners there anymore,” Memo insisted. “I heard it got hit once and any prisoners that didn’t die just…jumped into the water and either swam or drowned. But according to what Sam’s parents were told the robots haven’t been near there since. And since I don’t have a Bumblebee bodyguard that’s where I’m going.”

“And if this Sanctuary isn’t a thing?”

“I don’t think about that.”

Charlie sat back and looked up to Bumblebee, who looked as if he had no idea what the two were
talking about.

She had no idea if this Sanctuary was real, it honestly sounded like it was a trick to lead the weak and desperate right to the dangerous people left on this planet. But she could understand Memo wanting to find survivors, she wanted the same thing. And traveling with Bumblebee could be just as dangerous as going without him… But if a bot found Memo he would stand a better chance with Bumblebee and her.

With Conan walking over to Memo to get a scratch behind the ears, Charlie walked over to Bumblebee and whispered to him. “Can we take them there before we go to the radio tower? Alcatraz isn’t far away and I don’t want to leave them in case this Sanctuary isn’t real.”

Bumblebee was already nodding in agreement and Charlie wasn’t surprised, it was clear he was already head over heels for baby Sam. They’d be safe with Bumblebee. Yet as she thought this she couldn’t help but remember the three jets they had seen not too long ago, wondering if they were still nearby.

Waiting.

“We’ll take you there, Memo,” she spoke to the boy.

Memo’s eyes widened, he looked both hopeful and worried. “You will?”

“You’ll be safer with a Bumblebee bodyguard then without one. And if this Sanctuary is real I definitely want to see it.”

Memo blinked, “Okay. Cool. But first I need to go back to the hotel apartment you guys found me at. I have baby stuff there.”

Bumblebee drove across the quiet, empty city, following Memo’s directions to where this Alcatraz Island was.

He and Charlie sat in the front seat, the Conan lying in the back seat while Sam the baby was put between Charlie and Memo. He was in a type of baby carrier that Memo had used to carry Sam around on his back.

Charlie and Memo were immersed in topics that Bumblebee couldn’t really follow. They were talking about Earth things, like what they’re plans had been before the Decepticons attacked.
Charlie mentioned diving, how she would have liked to tried for the Olympics and then open up a mechanics shop like her dad wanted to. While Memo talked about how he had wanted to go to college for engineering.

Bumblebee was happy the two could talk to each other so easily, but he did feel a twinge of loneliness that he tried to shake off. He should be happy Charlie found a human who could be her friend, he might even be one of those nice guys that she had mentioned on the beach.

But Bumblebee couldn’t focus too much on their conversations as he kept an optic out for any Cons. Maybe it was because he had two new humans to watch over but his circuits were buzzing with paranoia and dread. It was as if he could feel something malicious watching him and his mind flashed back to Dropkick.

The worry made him wonder if the humans at this Sanctuary could defend themselves against at least one Decepticon. If they had weapons he imagined they at least stood a chance against one of the Con’s less intelligent soldiers. But Bumblebee hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

And he hoped that—since the world was so quiet—that he was only imagining that something or someone was watching him.

Burns was going over the ammo in the bag he had brought along while he, Epps, and Lennox scouted. He was running worryedly low and he the frustrating part was he knew an old base that might just have some ammo left—but these robots were careful about keeping guard over bases as well as towers. And he couldn’t risk his ammo or any of the people he was protecting for a mission that might not even be fruitful.

He, Lennox, and Epps had returned to the roof to keep a look out for any survivors. And it was Epps who spoke up, “That car is moving.”

Burns sat up and following the younger man’s point. Sure enough, a rather well-looking Volkswagen Beetle was heading for an interstate bridge.

“Survivors,” Lennox breathed, eyes lighting up.

“Hold on,” Burns grabbed Lennox’s arm before he could move

The Volkswagen had come to a stop and he saw shapes step out of the car. Epps narrowed his eyes, “It’s kids.”
The two were hurrying over to a large black and white bus, one of the disappearing inside.

“Must be scavenging-” Epps began but all three were shocked into silence when the Volkswagen the kids were just in suddenly started to move…transforming…into one of those robots!


.Thrust felt a delicious gleam of pleasure when he saw the familiar yellow shape yards ahead of him.

*B-127.*

The Autobot was standing next to two small organics, he wasn’t sure why he would bother with such disgusting, useless life forms, and he didn’t care. All he cared about was bringing B-127’s head to Starscream. Dirge could grab those humans for Shockwave.

But it was Thrust who would get in the good graces of Lord Starscream. He knew B-127 was heading toward that radio tower, no doubt planning to call his allies. Which means he was the only Autobot here…

And Thrust would be respected by all the Decepticons when he saved them from an Autobot invasion.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“See anything?”

Charlie and Memo were searching through the greyhound bus that had been left in the middle of an interstate bridge. Since it was the only car besides Bumblebee that was in decent shape and with the door open, the two decided to give a look for any supplies. There was now four of their five member squad that needed nourishment.

“Nothing,” Charlie answered, dropping to her hands and knees to look under the seat that Conan had claimed as his own. “Oh, wait!”

She reached her hand out and picked up a car freshener that still smelled of pine. She let out a huff of air and showed it off to Memo, “Want a bite?”

Memo snorted in amusement, glancing at Sam who sat in the baby carrier strapped to the boy’s back. The baby blinked, looking around the bus with his big eyes.

Charlie stood up and headed toward the bus door, stepping out to too Bumblebee standing there, waiting for them. She smiled up at him and lifted up the air freshener, “For you.”

Charlie had gotten to where she could tell when he was smiling. Bumblebee hummed before reaching out and carefully taking the pine-shaped charm from her palm. “It’s to help cars smell nice,” she explained before adding quickly, “Not that you smell bad or anything.”

Did the robot even have a sense of smell?

She was ready to tell Memo it was time to call it quits when a familiar sound filled her ears and her heart dropped. But before she or Bumblebee could react a gray shape shot out of the sky, slamming into Bumblebee and knocking him across the bridge.

“BUMBLEBEE!” Charlie shrieked and moved forward only for Memo to grab her arm and dragged her into the bus, pushing the door shut.

Through the windows they saw another jet appear, transforming mid-air to lunge for Bumblebee who had been holding his own against his first attacker. But the second body-slammed into Bumblebee and he rolled around the bridge, grappling with the two.

“We have to help him,” Charlie insisted, pressing her hands against the window as she tried to keep
her struggling friend in sight.

“Yeah, but how?” Memo demanded. He had taken Sam’s carrier off and was holding the now crying baby to his chest. Conan barking madly and scratching at the windows as if he could break through and make the fight fair.

Charlie looked around the bare bus, wishing she had some sort of weapon. “Maybe we-” she looked at Sam- “I could be a distraction.”

“What do you want to do, outrun it?” Memo replied, his voice shrill with panic. “He’ll just have to protect you and fight those two things!”

Just as those words left his mouth a shadow fell over the two and Conan started barking wildly.

Charlie looked out the window to see a thick metal leg right before the robot bent down and red eyes stared at them through the glass, the scarlet glow painting their skin.

“Can-can he see us if we don’t move?” Memo breathed.

Charlie didn’t respond, her body stock still as the robot moved his eyes across the four. She took a moment to see he didn’t look like the other jets, his head was shaped like a cone and his eyes didn’t hold the intelligence of the others. But it was still large, her enemy, and very much a threat.

And the robot proved it when he grabbed the bottom of the bus and effortlessly knocked the bus onto its side. Charlie and Memo letting out yelps when they fell with the bus, landing on the windows. Charlie’s back ached but she forced herself to sit up. “Memo!”

“I’m alright,” he hissed through his teeth. He was on his side, curled around Sam who was screaming his head off. Conan had landed beside them, still barking angrily at the robot who now looked down at them from the bus’s upturned windows.

Charlie panicked when the robot slammed its fist into one of the windows and she threw herself on top of Conan and Memo as glass shattered and rained down on them. The hole it made was only big enough for it to slip its fingers through, stretching to try and reach them. Charlie kicked at the reaching fingers, “Stay away from us!”

A blast of energy suddenly hit the robot right in its head, its hand ripping out of the bus as it fell onto its back. Charlie jumped up and tried to get a look at Bumblebee, he had just managed to fire that shot before the two others grabbed at his arm and forced him back into the fight. Charlie only got one good look at her friend and felt sick. The fight had barely gone on for sixty seconds but he already looked awful, claw marks ripped across his face and body.
He looks like his friend, Charlie’s mind flashed at the image of the dead red robot, practically ripped to pieces.

Memo grabbed her arm and she snapped her head around to look at him. “We have to help him!”

Memo’s face was torn. “I wanna help him but Charlie there’s nothing we can do! We need to go and get Sam somewhere safe!”

She knew he was right but she felt like she was trying to swallow a rock as she let Memo lead her toward the back of the bus where the emergency exit waiting for them.

But just before they reached it the jet’s foot slammed into the back of the bus, crushing the exit under its weight. Charlie and Memo screamed and jumped back as the robot, now with a smoking head, reached claw-like hands toward them. Charlie pushed Memo behind her, “Get to the front!”

The boy didn’t argue, grabbing Conan under her arm as he headed for the driver’s seat, Charlie just behind him, thankful this robot wasn’t as smart as the others. He would’ve picked up the bus and shook them out by then if he was.

Charlie came this close to getting snatched by the long metallic fingers she heard a new noise through the wails of Sam and the fight between Bumblebee and the two jets.

Gunshots…

The robot trying to grab Charlie suddenly flinched and pulled away, turning around and Charlie and Memo’s jaws dropped simultaneously at the sight.

It was an army jeep and three soldiers were inside, one of them on the wheel while the other two fired multiple shots as they charged toward the robot. Said robot flicked his wrist and a thin canon appeared, Charlie’s heart lurched and she tried to call to them, “Watch out-”

Another blast from Bumblebee hit the robot in the back, the force sending him off the edge of the bridge before he transformed into a jet and soared back into the sky.

As the jet arced over them the jeep came to a halt beside them. Charlie couldn’t help a twinge of disappointment that two of the three soldiers only looked a year or two older than herself.

“Are you okay?” the young one with the messy brown hair jumped out to stand in front of Charlie, he looked her over and Charlie finally noticed the cuts on her arms from the window glass. But… the cuts were smaller than she expected and weren’t even bleeding.
The other young soldier rushed over to Memo, looking shocked to see Sam. “Come on,” he grabbed Memo’s arm and started to pull them out of the bus, “We need to get outta here!”

*Bumblebee*

Charlie whirled around and looked over to the fight where she saw in horror that the third jet had joined his friend. Bumblebee was doing his best, kicking and cutting and blasting but the ruthless jets had him outnumbered and every time Bee focused on one the other two slammed their fists into his heads and slid blades across his back. Charlie saw splatters of blue across the yellow metal and she wondered if these sentient robots could bleed.

The soldier grabbed her hand and tried to pull her to the jeep, “Come on, let’s go!”

Charlie looked to the jeep to see the older man who looked around his thirties, aiming his gun at the robots. But they were moving too fast, there was no way he could possibly hit the jets without hurting Bumblebee.

“No, wait!”

Charlie ripped her hand away from the soldier and tried to snatch the man’s gun, the soldier jolting in surprise as she fruitlessly tried to pull the gun away. “You’ll hit him!”

“Hit who!?”

Dirge slammed a fist into Bumblebee’s face, energeron flying across the sky before he dropped onto his knees. Pain lacerated across his limbs and he felt like his circuits were one kick away from falling out onto the floor.

The three Decepticons surrounded him, smug glee glowing in their optics. Irritation seethed in his spark, these three wouldn’t be so high and mighty if it had been a fair fight. But fair wasn’t in a Con’s dictionary.

“Honestly, B-127,” Thrust’s oily voice scraped against his audio receptors. “I thought you’d put up more of a fight.”

*Come closer, Thrust, I’ll put up a fight for you.*
“But don’t worry I’ll tell Lord Starscream you went out with…” he chuckled to himself, “Honor. Just like Cliffjumper.”

Something cold seeped through him.

“T-Thrust,” Dirge was looking toward the bus, “There’s more humans over there.”

Bumblebee shot his head around to see Charlie and Memo with three knew humans that held weapons in their hands. He couldn’t hear from this distant but it looked like Charlie was arguing with one of them.

“Then that’s just more subjects for Shockwave,” Ramjet replied causally.

“Is that your little pets over there, B-127?” Thrust asked condescendingly. “How sad you’d have to fill that hole in your spark with disgusting little flesh bags.” He knelt in front of the Autobot, his smile as oily as his voice. “I think Shockwave would enjoy dissecting your little-”

Before Thrust could finish his sentence Bumblebee slammed his fist directly into Thrust’s face, sending the Con to the ground. Bumblebee felt a dry sense of glee when he saw that Thrust’s face plate was dented.

Dirge and Ramjet aimed their canons at the Autobot’s head but before either could fire Thrust let out a furious bark, “No!” He stood up on shaking legs and glared down at Bumblebee with hatred. “I’m the one who will be putting him offline.”

He slammed his heel into Bumblebee’s face, the impact knocking him onto his side. Through the pain and his fading vision he saw Dirge and Ramjet return to the sky.

Thrust’s shadow loomed over him. “I will bring your head to Lord Starscream. It’ll hang on a stake for all the Decepticons to see.” His hand flew across Bumblebee’s face with biting force, knocking the Autobot’s head to the side.

“You’ll never see Optimus Prime again.” Another hit.

“You’ll be left to rust like your pathetic friend!” Another hit.

“And then I’ll be sure Shockwave will take great pleasure in ripping those disgusting organics of yours into pieces!”

The next hit was harder than the others, snapping Bumblebee’s head back and he saw in his blurry vision the humans now watching the fight. His gaze focused on Charlie who watched with a
“Is that all you got, Autobot?”

The cold in his circuits was replaced with something akin to burning flames.

“Is that all?”

He slowly turned away from the humans, lifted a shaking servo up before curling his fingers into fists. He lifted his aching head up to stare into Thrust’s smug and triumphant face.

“Is that ALL!?”

In a blink Bumblebee’s blade pierced the Decepticon, buried in Thrust’s face.

The Con’s red optics were wide in denial and shock as his arms slowly lifted to grab Bumblebee’s shoulders in a weak grip.

Yes… That is all.

With the last of his strength he pushed forward, sending both him and the Decepticon over the bridge to fall onto the cement and rubble below.

“BUMBLEBEE!”

Charlie charged forward, ignoring the calls of the confused soldiers as she ran across the bridge. Above her the two jets took off, disappearing into the gray sky.

Charlie wasn’t chased as she ran off the bridge and started to make her way down to where Bumblebee and that awful jet had fallen.

She was relieved to see her friend was still moving, ripping his blade out of the dead robot’s head before collapsing a few feet away from him.

“Bumblebee!” she called out, rushing toward him.

He looked up at her and her heart ached at the sight of him. His body was covered in thick scratches and dents, the blue blood-like substance pouring around him.
“No! No, no, no, no,” she started to sob, kneeling beside him as Bumblebee forced himself up onto his back. “It’s gonna be okay, Bee! We’ll figure this out! We’ll fix you up! I’m a mechanic! Maybe I can…”

Her voice trailed off. What could she do for him, she couldn’t even stop crying. He looked so tired as he gazed at her, his eye lids lowering as if he was about to fall asleep.

“Don’t go to sleep, Bee,” she begged. “You—you might not wake up again!” And I can’t lose a friend! I can’t lose someone else I care about! The tower or Sanctuary be damned.

But Bumblebee’s eyes did close and Charlie lurched forward, leaning over his chest and cupping his hands between her hands, “Bumblebee, keep your eyes open! We’re gonna fix you up I swear-”

A familiar blue light emitting from where her hands met Bumblebee’s face plate. It was the blue of the cube…

Bumblebee’s eyes flew open and the two stared wide-eyed at each other as blue light throbbed like a heart beat against his body, filling out the dents and erasing the scratches until the robot looked brand new.

When the light vanished Charlie carefully lifted her hands away just before Bumblebee sat up and pulled away from her, Charlie falling onto her tail bone.

She looked up, speechless as Bumblebee looked at her with an expression she didn’t want to read. Confusion, fear, mistrust…the guilt she had tried to bury along with this secret came back up, threatening to drown her.

With the sound of Memo and the soldiers hurrying toward them Charlie sat up and looked at her friend beseechingly.

“There’s something I need to tell you.”

Chapter End Notes

Me: *Kills off Thrust*

Also me: This is for Armada!Starscream you squid headed son of a bitch!
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait. I haven't been in the transformers mode that much as of late. Hopefully the next chapter won't take as long.

Burns led Lennox and Epps across the bridge to scramble down to where the two robots fell, and to where that girl ran after them.

_That stupid girl is going to get herself killed._

The first thing Burns took note of was the robot that had gotten stabbed through the face. And while these machines didn’t breathe, he could see from the blankness in their eyes was that they _could_ die.

“Watch out!” Lennox ran past Burns.

The girl stood in front of the yellow robot, she looked up at it with an expression of heartache, but before Burns could figure out why she had whirled around to face Lennox. “Don’t touch him!” she snapped, throwing her arms out as if to shield the robot from the three. The yellow machine’s blue eyes (Burns had never seen one with blue eyes before) never left the girl. This girl who didn’t bother with even one glance over her shoulder, exposing her back to something that could slice her in half or put a hole through her chest. Just like the rest of the them did to all the innocent people who once crossed this bridge every day.

“He’s not like the others,” the girl said, voice hard as Lennox looked at her as if she lost her mind. Burns was fairly sure she had. “He fought the other robots to protect us, doesn’t that prove it?”

Epps glanced at Burns, “Just because it didn’t like those jets doesn’t mean it likes humans.”

“Well _he_ likes _me_ just fine.” There was a shadow of doubt in her eyes as if she didn’t believe the words she was saying. “His name is Bumblebee. And we were taking Memo and Sam to the Sanctuary.”

Lennox and Epps turned to Burns, surprise in their eyes.

“How do you,” Burns addressed the girl and robot, “Know about the Sanctuary?”
The humans made camp a few miles away from the bridge and Thrust’s body. Camp being the vehicle the soldiers had rode in on, Memo sat between the two younger soldiers. The one called Lennox held Sam, making silly faces at the baby while the one called Epps rubbed the Conan’s belly.

Charlie and the older soldier, Burns, the one who looked at Bumblebee with a Decepticon-like glare. The two sat in the front of the vehicle, talking quietly to each other. Bumblebee expected he was telling her about Sanctuary, or at least whatever he was willing to tell her, he clearly didn’t trust her. And Bumblebee expected she was telling him her plan to call the Autobots.

*Maybe she’ll happily tell him about the AllSpark*, the bitter thought slithered through his head before he could stop it.

Bumblebee had…no idea how to react to what happened. He may not have any experience with the AllSpark but he knew, he *knew*, it was the power of the AllSpark that had burned through his body when Charlie had touched him. She had healed him, she wielded the most powerful energy in Cybertron.

*And she didn’t tell me.*

They hadn’t had a chance to talk like she had promised when Burns and the others came after them. They had led them back up to the bridge and Bumblebee pushed all his thoughts and feelings away so he could focus on getting the humans away before Ramjet and Dirge returned.

He now stood several feet away, keeping an eye on the bridge that was small with distance. No Decepticon had arrived to pick up Thrust’s body. Bumblebee wasn’t that surprised, he couldn’t imagine Thrust was well-liked even by his friends, but best to keep a look out to be safe.

Bumblebee kept his optics up on the darkening sky, with nothing else to do but stand watch those thoughts and feelings came rushing back. It was a strange mixture of things, some positive, most negative.

He was happy he knew where the AllSpark was, he was even happier that the Decepticons didn’t. He was also grateful for Charlie healing him and he was curious to see what other abilities it had given her. But why did it give her these abilities? How in Primus’ name did an organic bond with something purely Cybertronian? And why didn’t she tell him? They were friends…

*Doesn’t she trust me?* Even in his head his thoughts sounded pathetic. *What did she think I’d do if she told me?* His heavy thoughts weighed in his mind for several minutes as he gave many answers to that question, none of them good.
A small caress against his hand made Bumblebee start. He looked down to see Charlie looking up at him, her expression he could only describe as fragile.

He looked over his shoulder to the other humans. Memo and Sam were asleep, the two young soldiers were talking lowly while Burns looked deep in thought. When his optics met Bumblebee’s he turned his head away.

“Can we talk now?” she breathed, almost too quietly for him to hear.

Bumblebee thought of all the times when they could have already talked. The day she fully accepted him as a friend after saving her from those dangerous humans. The night at the beach when he held her and music played. The rainy day she held him. But it was only after his spark had almost went out did she decide it was time to talk.
But he nodded, nonetheless. He wanted to hear what she had to say.

Charlie took in a breath and sat down, her legs crossed. Bumblebee followed her lead and sat in silence, waiting for her to begin.

“I’m sorry,” she started and he felt some of the pressure in his chest lift. “I really am. I should have told you about…” she examined one of her hands that looked so normal, so unassuming.

“Whatever it is that happened to me.

“It was the day before we met, I found your friend. I hate to admit it, but I was wondering if I could use him for scrap parts. I didn’t know he was anything like you, I’m sorry Bumblebee. But that didn’t happen. When I was standing by him I heard one of those jets and I got scared. I tried to run and I fell and flecks of metal that came from your friend were buried in my hands and arms. But I got back up and kept running. I ended up at that hole we saw, the one you saw back then. But it was covered in debris, I think your friend did that before he died. I didn’t know there was a hole so I fell in and, eventually, I found that cube. And for some…some dumb reason I touched it.” She held both her hands up, her face scared. “I touched it and it was the weirdest pain, nothing I had even experienced, but I couldn’t pull my hands away, not at first. When I could move my hands away the flecks of metal had melted into my skin and my hands were completely healed.”

She looked up at Bumblebee then, “I think it’s obvious that that cube is the reason I was able to heal you. Maybe even why the bruise on my back is already gone even though it should’ve been there for weeks…”

Bumblebee had listened to her story in silence. She had touched the AllSpark when her hands had bits of Cliffjumper. Did the AllSpark sense Cliffjumper’s Cybertronian DNA and hadn’t realized Charlie was an organic? Did Charlie now have Cybertronian DNA in her veins?

Suddenly Charlie’s expression broke. “That cube was very important, wasn’t it? And this power I have…it all has something to do with where you’re from, isn’t it?”
He nodded and not for the first time he wished he had his voice. If only he could tell her how important she had become to all the Autobots. And the Decepticons.

Her voice was a harsh whisper, “And you hate me for keeping this from you, don’t you?”

Bumblebee blinked in surprise as she continued. “You’re my friend and I should’ve trusted you and told you about this sooner. I wanted to but I was…I am scared, Bumblebee. I’ve lost everything and I don’t know what’s going on or what I should do.” She gave him one more beseeching look, her optics leaking once again, before her head dropped. “I’m so sorry, Bee.”

Bumblebee searched for the bitterness he had felt a few minutes ago but it was gone now. Charlie was genuine, she truly regretted not telling him. And a part of him could understand why she didn’t, he had been scared and unsure before.

She still saw him as a friend, and he didn’t want to break that relationship. Not after everything they’d been through, not when they were so close to contacting the Autobots. Not when she saved my life.

Charlie was so wrapped in her misery she almost didn’t feel the warm press against her cheek. Her head shot up and Bumblebee cupped her face. His blue eyes as warm as his hand and the relief Charlie felt would’ve sent her to her knees if she had hadn’t already been sitting.

He had forgiven her.

She pressed her damp cheek against his hand and clutched his wrist around her fingers. “Thank you, Bee…”

She sat there for a few moments, his touch feeling up her chest with affection and gratitude. The horrors of the day shaken away with ease.

Finally she pulled away and glanced over to the jeep. She had turned her head just in time to see Lennox and Epps turn away. Had they been watching the whole thing?

Burns had his eyes on the two. Charlie had convinced him to take Bumblebee to the Sanctuary he had created. She didn’t like the way he looked at her friend but he saw the logic in getting allies as big as their enemies. It helped that he wanted to get to the radio tower too but it was apparently being guarded by said enemies. She hoped he and the rest of Sanctuary would warm up to him after they get the tower.
“Should we tell them about the cube?” she asked Bumblebee.

He glanced over at the group, dislike in his eyes. And after a moment he shook his head. Charlie imagined that was for the best, with Bumblebee mute he couldn’t give the details Burns would definitely want. And just because they were humans that didn’t mean she could fully trust them.

_Not like how I can trust Bumblebee._

She pulled his hand closer, pressed against her heart. “No more secrets,” she promised. “Just us.”
“So, Thrust is dead.”

Starscream stood before his throne, his back to his audience. He tried to summon a slither of emotion for his dead Con.

Nothing.

Starscream cared for very few and Thrust was at the bottom of the list. He was even under Megatron, and Starscream could have shrieked in delight when his old leader had passed.

But he pushed the thought of his former leader down, not wanting to think of the corpse that was being buffed and fluffed by Soundwave.

The Decepticon jet slowly turned around to look at Dirge and Ramjet who stood before their leader, Thundercracker and several other Decepticons making a ragged half-circle around them.

“And all you have to show for it is yourselves,” he breathed, red gaze going over the two. Dirge wasn’t meeting his optics, instead shaking in his step. He had always feared Starscream. He was always a smart Con.

Then Ramjet opened his mouth, “How were we suppose to know B-127 could kill Thrust? We were all fighting him!”

“You’re slaging with us, right?” Thundercracker spoke up, his expression one of exasperated disbelief. “We-I-told you he was dangerous!”

“And I told you your first objective was to get another human for Shockwave,” Starscream said, voice low and calm. He made a dramatic show of looking around the room, taking in the smug smirks of Shatter and Dropkick, the annoyance twisting Thundercracker’s mouth, and Skywarp… Skywarp just looked happy to be there.

“No,” Starscream tilted his head to Dirge and Ramjet. “Not one, helpless, defenseless, tiny, little human.”

Dirge had buried his head between his shoulders, deeper with each work as if he could hide his head in his torso. “I tried, Lord Starscream.”

“Oh, be nice, Screamer,” Dropkick spoke up, unexpectedly. His voice was thick with faux sympathy. “It’s not their fault their a couple of useless buckets of rust.”

Skywarp snickered behind his hand, Dropkick’s single optic glancing over to the Con with approval. Even Shatter smirked but it was more out of menace than humor.

Starscream pinched the bridge of his nose. Every moment B-127 was alive and on this planet was another moment he could be contacting Optimus Prime. Dirge and Ramjet had informed him how close the Autobot had been toward the tower that Slipstream and Blackout guarded. He had put precautions in case the humans tried to band together. But Starscream would admit to himself that he could be paranoid and the guard was also to make sure something like B-127 arriving, didn’t end with more Autobots arriving to Earth.

He was just about to decide if tearing off Ramjet’s arm would cheer him up when heavy footsteps had him looking up.

Shockwave walked into the jet’s throne room. His body seemed to thrum with energy and he immediately had the entire room’s attention.

“I need to talk with you, Starscream,” Shockwave spoke up, not breaking his gaze away from Starscream. Something about the look made Starscream want to shiver.

“What is it?” Skywarp asked, leaning forward with interest.

Shockwave looked toward him, and if it wasn’t for the fact that Shockwave knew everyone, Starscream could have sworn that he had no idea who Skywarp was.

“I need to talk with Starscream,” he repeated. Then after a beat. “Alone.”

The Decepticon leader waved his hand dismissively. “Leave us.” He glared at Dirge and Ramjet, “I’ll deal with you two later.”

The group left with obvious reluctance but as soon as the two were alone Shockwave whirled around to him. “The human girl. Where is she?”

“What human girl?” Starscream asked, knowing exactly who he meant.

“The human girl who leaked her liquids all over you,” Shockwave answered, “Did those seekers
find her?"

“Ah, B-127’s pet, you mean?"

“So she is the one,” Shockwave almost sounded excited. “Where is she?”

Starscream narrowed his optics, “Is she that important?”

“I was studying the sample I collected from you, to see if it was different from my other samples,” Shockwave began. “And oh, Starscream. I want her.”

Charlie stood between Bumblebee and the humans, looking out at the outline of Alcatraz. She never would have guessed that people would use it as any sort of sanctuary, it felt so…open.

Lennox stood next to her and let out a groan, “This is the part I hate the most.”

“What part?” she asked.

Instead of answering Lennox walked down with Epps to a small dock where a boat, just big enough for the humans, waited. She furrowed her brow at the black tarp that was inside it.

Epps caught her eye, “It’s for if any robots come flying by, they won’t shoot at the boat if they don’t see any humans on it.”

“At least they haven’t yet,” Lennox said grimly.

“Oh,” Charlie replied.

Memo stood in Burns’ shadow with his arms wrapped around Sam. Charlie could see his eyes were lit up with hope and relief and she smiled at him, glad to have helped him get this far.

*I wish my family had known about this place.*

Lennox hurried back up to them, Epps keeping the boat from drifting off. “We ready to go?” He looked up at Bumblebee, “Can he swim?”
“Um,” Charlie had no idea. “Bee, can you swim?”

In response the robot transformed into the Volkswagen and headed for the water, but before he could submerge himself Burns stepped in front of him, glaring down at the car. “You do not go ahead of us. And when we get there you keep yourself hidden, I don’t want any of the civilians on that island to see you or know what you are.”

Charlie scowled and walked over to stand next to her friend, “Why can’t he meet anyone? Wouldn’t they be happy that there’s a nice robot, one whose willing to fight for them.”

“That’s not your call to make,” Burns said, his voice rough with a held back temper. “Either he follows my rules or he doesn’t come.”

Bumblebee made a comforting hum next to her and Charlie relented. “Fine,” she growled.

“Good,” Burns said, not appeased in the slightest. “Now let’s go.”

Burns and the others headed for the boat and before Charlie could follow Bumblebee opened the door invitingly. She smiled warmly but with a twitch of worry to her lips. “Thanks Bumblebee but I can’t really breathe under water. Maybe next time.”

She picked up Conan who had obediently stood next to her and headed for the boat, Bumblebee disappearing into the water as she reached the dock.

Lennox offered her his hand to help her in and she complied, his hand much rougher than her own.

“For what it’s worth,” he whispered into her ear when she was in the boat, “I think I’m warming up to your robot.”

Charlie didn’t say anything but she felt a bit of gratitude for the young soldier’s words. If only he was the one in charge instead of Burns.

With everyone seated, the group making sure Sam and Conan were safely in the middle, Burns turned the boat’s motor on and it moved forward, gliding through the water and toward the island.

Wait…

“How do you have gas for that motor?” Charlie turned around to look at the motor where Epps sat. He grinned at her, “We’ve had some pretty successful supply runs. Mostly thanks to me.”
Lennox snorted behind Charlie.

“So it’s only the three of you?” Memo asked. “Getting supplies and saving people?”

“The civilians help when they can,” Epps answered him. “But yeah, it’s mostly us.”

“I think we’re doing pretty okay on our own,” Lennox defended, sitting between Memo and Charlie, his eyes up in the air.

Charlie leaned over the boat, looking into the murky water, “You’ll do much better now that Bumblebee is here.”

“I think we’d do a lot better if there was more than one of him,” Epps replied.

Burns spoke up, his deep voice ruining the mild lightness of the conversation. “We’ll all be better off when we get that radio tower under our control and signal for help.” Lennox and Epps exchanged a look that blatantly said: *If help is still out there.*

But Charlie glared at Burns’ back, “And you’ll get that radio tower with Bumblebee’s help.”

Burns did not reply and Charlie turned back to the water, wishing she could make out her friend’s sunny yellow form. He was keeping up, wasn’t he? Robots couldn’t drown, could they?

They were halfway to the island when Lennox suddenly leaped across the boat and turned off the motor. “Jet! Get under the tarp.”

It was then Charlie heard the familiar thrum and scrambled to help cover the group. Once they were safely hidden Charlie found herself smushed between Lennox and Epps. Poor Memo nearly sitting on Burns lap with Sam and Conan looking like they appreciated the closeness. Charlie knew that at a later date she would look back on this scene and laugh, maybe even imagine how jealous Tina Lark would be that Charlie was sitting so close to two attractive soldiers.

But right then the image of the jet ramming into their boat occupied her mind, there was also the worry that Bumblebee would jump out of the water to protect them and get badly hurt again. Charlie rubbed her fingers against her palms as if she could feel the power pulsing there. She cared about Memo, she was beginning to like Lennox and Epps, and she could admit that Burns’ heart was in the right place, just wanting safety for the remaining human race.

But she agreed with Bumblebee, she didn’t want them to find out about her powers. She didn’t want to have them see her restore him like she did under the bridge.
But I would in a heartbeat.

However, to everyone’s visible relief the jet flew past them and went quiet with distance. They threw the tarp off and started onward to the island, reaching it without any other problems.

Charlie remembered watching a video in school about Alcatraz but she never visited on a field trip. Currently it didn’t look much different from the surrounding city. The buildings themselves, while still standing had taken damage, greenery burned to nothing, any fences or security cameras destroyed. But it truly did look like it had only been touched once, like Memo said. And charlie found an endearing irony that a place that held dangerous prisoners to protect the innocent, was now protecting them again by being a sanctuary.

Behind Charlie Bumblebee drove out of the water, transforming to his full height so he could shake the water off. Lennox, who had been closer, jumped back as the droplets splattered over him.

“Hey watch it!”

Bumblebee started and looked down at the soldier, his expression looking apologetic but Epps just laughed. “You should thank him, it’s been ages since you’ve gotten a bath.”

Charlie and Memo shared a laugh, the sound visibly relaxing Bumblebee-for all of three seconds. Because then Burns was standing in front of the robot with fire in his eyes, “Turn back into a car, now!”

Bumblebee took a step back and Charlie moved forward to stand between them. The older man snapped his eyes to her, “I told you he needs to stay hidden.”

Behind Charlie Bumblebee quickly transformed back into a Volkswagen but she kept her eyes on Burns. “I get that, but stop screaming at him. If you don’t want him here let us know, Bee and I will gladly leave you to fight giant flying robots without us.”

It was only partly a bluff, Charlie wanted to see more of the Sanctuary. As much as she liked Memo she missed being around larger groups of people, which was saying something since she had always considered herself an introvert. But she absolutely hated how Burns looks at Bumblebee, as if her friend was anything like the ones who had destroyed their home.

“I don’t know if you have put this together,” Burns continued, his voice lower but no less angry. “But his kind killed a lot of our people, the survivors here, they lost love ones because of machines like him. I don’t think it’s expecting too much to keep your ‘friend’ hidden so traumatized men, women, and children don’t need to see another one of those things.”

Before Charlie could reply ("I lost family too, and I was in a terrible place before Bumblebee carried me out of it. He could do the same with the survivors.") the Volkswagen moved forward
just an inch, the headlights pressing comfortably against the back of her thighs, and she stayed silent.


Starscream stood on his balcony, looking down at the huddle of houses that made up the Organic Farm. The humans there mere dots from this height.

So small…so helpless…yet one of them had the audacity to steal what was his.

“You’re sure about this?” Starscream glared over his shoulder where Shockwave stood behind him.

“I’m always sure,” was the cool reply. “And I’m sure that if we bring that human here she can be used to our benefit.” There was a moment of silence, as if Shockwave was weighing the neccessity of saying the next words. “She may be able to bring back Megatron.”

*Over my dead body she will.* Starscream turned his body to face the other Con. “Don’t share this information with anyone else. We don’t want to give hope where there is none. As for retrieving the human…we don’t know the exact corner she’s hiding in. But I’ll go find her myself.”

*She could be very useful to me, and if she’s not…I’ll kill her before she’s even in the same room with Megatron.*

Chapter End Notes

"The next chapter won't take as long" I said.
Chapter 21

This island brought back important, yet darker, memories of Bumblebee’s time on Cybertron.

Specifically it reminded him of his first mission after graduating the Academy. The gray buildings and sense of desolation on this island called the Sanctuary reminded him of that Decepticon prison, which he found ironic.

Optimus had sent him with a more experienced Autobot named Ironhide. He had been intimidating and blunt, not believing he needed Bumblebee’s help in sneaking into the prison and rescuing one of their own from Con captivity. But Optimus had insisted and Ironhide had relented, leading the young scout to the prison that had seemed to be in the middle of nowhere.

Bumblebee could barely remember breaking in, too nervous to make sure he did exactly what Ironhide said and to stay out of the older Bot’s well, horrified at the thought of blowing the mission and disappointing Optimus.

But he could perfectly remember what happened after they snuck in (leaving a few knocked out Decepticons in corners and spare rooms). A voice that nearly made the frazzled Bumblebee jump out of his circuits.

“Took you long enough.”

The Autobot in the cell wore an easy, care-free smile as he casually leaned against the bars. A stranger would think he wasn’t currently being held captive by Cons who had no qualms with torturing prisoners for information.

Ironhide stepped toward the cell, relief lighting his optics for just a moment before he was back in business-mode. “Hot Shot.”

“Hey, Ironhide,” the younger Bot greeted before his bright blue optics turned to Bumblebee. “Who’s this?”

“Our brand new scout, B-127,” Ironhide introduced. “I already told him all about you.”

Bumblebee looked Hot Shot over, remembering what Optimus and Ironhead had said of him. Close to Bee’s age he was head-strong and a little reckless, but apparently had great potential. This Decepticon captive could one day be the future leader of the Autobots. Bumblebee bit back a sense of jealously and disbelief. Mission first, opinion on this Hot Shot later.

“Step back,” Ironhide ordered both young Bots, aiming his blaster at the cell’s lock.
Hot Shot snorted, “That won’t work. Trust me, I’ve tried. You need to get the key.”

“Where is it?”

“In Shockwave’s claws.”

Bumblebee’s optics had widened, “The Shockwave?” The Academy had taught its students about the many dangerous Cons they would be against in the war. Shockwave had been one of the most dangerous ones mentioned. Bumblebee hadn’t thought he’d have to come face to face with him so soon.

Hot Shot gave Bumblebee a sympathetic look, “If breaking out was easy I’d already be miles away, B.”

Before Ironhide or Bumblebee could respond the sound of heavy footsteps broke the silence, footsteps that were coming right this way. Hot Shot’s causal demeanor instantly disappeared, his body going rigid. “Hide,” he hissed.

But there was no where to hide. What little shadows that were in this prison’s hallway wouldn’t mask Ironhide’s bright red or Bumblebee’s shining yellow.

And even if there had been a place to hide, there would be no time. Not three tics after they caught the sound of steps, the door at the end of the hall slid open and Bumblebee’s spark did a flip of fear.

Shockwave was massive. Much bigger than himself, even bigger than Ironhide. He halted at the door, his one red optic looking over the two new Autobots, he didn’t even looked surprised that two enemies had broken into his prison.

But the Decepticon beside him certainly did. The smaller jet’s jaw nearly dropped when he saw the two. “How did you two get in here?” he demanded, he looked down, looking as if he was going over the lack of guards he had seen on the way here.

“That’s no way to greet our guests, Thundercracker,” Shockwave spoke and Bumblebee kept himself from shivering.

Ironhide stepped forward, placing himself between Bumblebee and the Cons. “We won’t be here long,” his voice was a growl, as if he was daring the Cons to step forward. “We just came to pick up our friend and leave.”

Shockwave’s large head titled slightly, “Have you?” He didn’t sound bothered in the least.
As the two spoke Bumblebee’s optics had looked down, a key was clasped between Shockwave’s talons. They had come to fetch Hot Shot to do…Primus knew what to him. *I can’t let that happen*, he vowed to himself. *Hot Shot is an Autobot like me and I need to protect him. Protect him and Ironhide.*

*It’s what Optimus would want.*

*It’s what an Autobot would do.*

“Yes,” Ironhide continued. “So if you don’t mind…” Ironhide flexed his wrists and a tik later his blasters were aimed at them both. “The key.”

The jet-Thundercracker-had braced himself, looking ready to lunge at Ironhide. Shockwave even flinch. Bumblebee didn’t believe he’d ever be as confident in his skills as this Decepticon was.

After a second heavy with tense silent Shockwave spoke again, his voice dismissive and final. “I think not. I think we’re done here.”

Thundercracker shot forward but Ironhide was faster. Snatching the Decepticon’s arm and flipping him over his back to send him crashing across the hall. Ironhide only had half a moment later to whirl around and block the blade Shockwave aimed at him. The Decepticon was fast despite his size.

But Bumblebee had taken comfort in the fact that neither were as fast as him.

As Ironhide wrestled with Shockwave, Thundercracker rose to his feet, his scarlet optics narrowed in on the Autobot, ready to attack him while he was distracted. But Bumblebee was quick to step forward, blocking Ironhide from Thundercracker. The Decepticon started for a second, took in Bumblebee’s much smaller size, and underestimated him. Optimus and Cliffjumper always said that would be his enemies’ downfall.

The two Cybertronians met half way, Bumblebee’s blade already at the ready as he sliced it through the air, aiming for Thundercracker’s head. But the Decepticon was able to maneuver out of the way, slamming a punch into Bumblebee’s torso and sending him into the wall. But just as quick Bumblebee was back up, knocking into Thundercracker and sending them both to the ground.

“You little pest!” Thundercracker snarled as the two rolled across the floor, grappling with each other in an attempt to get upper hand. But both unwilling to draw out their blasters in fear of endangering their comrades in this tight fight space.

Meanwhile Hot Shot’s was quiet, watching with open agony as his allies fought the Decepticons off.
The cell must also have a force field, Bumblebee realized as he slammed a fist into Thundercracker’s jaw, knocking his head to the side. Otherwise he would have shot at Shockwave by now. While Thundercracker was formidable, the real problem was Shockwave who could fend off Ironhide while still grasping the key tightly in his menacing grip. I need to get rid of Thundercracker first, Bumblebee decided. Then I can help Ironhide stop Shockwave.

With Thundercracker looming over him Bumblebee kicked out with enough force to push him away, his wings knocking into the wall and giving Bumblebee time to jump up to his feet.

Thundercracker looked more frustrated than furious, looking around the too small hall. “That’s it,” he snarled, lifting his arm up and shooting a hole through the ceiling. Bumblebee jumped back in surprise, was he giving up?

Thundercracker shot toward Bumblebee and grabbed his arms, effortlessly picking up the smaller bot and carrying him through the hole of the ceiling. Hot Shot’s yell followed them out.

For a few moments Bumblebee looked around the emptiness that surrounded the prison, the millions of stars in they sky, and then he was thrown onto the roof of the building, his body scraping against the metal before the friction brought him to a stop.

“There we go,” Thundercracker’s voice was somehow both triumphant and furious. “Now I have all the room I need to rip your circuitry out of your body!” Before the words had left his mouth he was diving for the Autobot. But Bumblebee was ready.

Grabbing Thundercracker’s arms as he reached for him, Bumblebee rolled backward, once again using his legs to kick into the Decepticon. Now it was Thundercracker whose plating scraping against the roof.

“I’d like to see you try!” Bumblebee shot back.

With nothing but the sky above them the two were free to use their blasters and Bumblebee guessed, as he barely dodged Thundercracker’s many fires, was that he was a seeker. He heard they had impeccable aim. Bumblebee moved to dodge another fire but Thundercracker was a step ahead of him, feigning where he would shoot and the blast of power sliced against the Autobot’s chest, and the impact sent Bumblebee down. Lying on his chest Bumblebee had taken a terrifying moment to assess the damage, only to relax a moment later he realized that, while the wound hurt, he was going to go offline thanks to it. But he did have an idea.

Bumblebee stayed completely still, forcing his body to relax, his back to Thundercracker. After a few moments he was rewarded with approaching footsteps.

Just a bit closer…just a bit closer…
Thundercracker’s shadow fell over him and he heard a dismissive snort from the Decepticon, believing the fight was over.

Bumblebee’s leg was a blur as it shout out and hit Thundercracker’s shin, knocking the Decepticon down. Bumblebee shot up and pinned him down, assessing how close they were to the hole Thundercracker shot out. Through the hole he could see Ironhide and Shockwave were directly under it, the larger Decepticon having pushed Bumblebee’s superior forward.

“Do me a favor,” Bumblebee said slyly.

Before the stunned Thundercracker could react Bumblebee once gain rolled over, taking Thundercracker with him, together the two fell through and landed on top of Shockwave. The three toppled to the floor, Shockwave’s key sliding across the floor. Bumblebee moved to snatch it up but before he could a vicious grip grabbed him and he was thrown against the wall, Shockwave’s servo pressed against his neck, leaving him dangling over the floor. Bumblebee desperately clutched the arm, unable to fire or slice at Shockwave. If he released the Con’s arm he would crush Bumblebee’s throat.

Shockwave looked over him. “You’re new,” he pointed out coolly.

“I’m B-127,” he snarled at his destined enemy. “Don’t worry, you’ll remember me.”

Shockwave was unimpressed, “I don’t remember those who have gone offline.” He raised his free hand, a sharp blade ready to drive through Bumblebee’s spark.

But then Thundercracker, who had been standing behind his fellow Decepticon (looking pretty busted up if Bumblebee bragged), let out a surprised sound, “Shockwave!”

Bumblebee mimicked Shockwave’s head turn and, to his great relief, saw Ironhide and a now free Hot Shot, with their blasters aimed at Shockwave.

“Let. Him. Go,” Ironhide growled, the key grasped firmly in his free servo.

There was a heavy moment of silence, and Bumblebee felt a flash of fear. Would he risk getting fatally shot to kill one last Autobot? Thundercracker was looking between his ally and his enemies, trying to guess the last move.

Finally, after what felt like a millennium, Shockwave released Bumblebee, the smaller bot falling to the floor before quickly jumping up to hurry to his comrades, taking the servo Hot Shot reached out to him.
“We’ll be going now,” Ironhide told the two Decepticons, standing in front of the two younger bots and starting to shepherd them out of the door. “Thanks for the warm welcome.”

Thundercracker’s optics were narrowed with malice. Shockwave was unreadable. But neither moved closer, Ironhide’s and Hot Shot’s blasters aimed at their sparks.

It wasn’t until they turned the corner, out of the Decepticon’s field of vision, and bolted.

Bumblebee couldn’t have believed they weren’t chased as the three drove away from the prison. Not until a long time had passed, and the prison not even a dot in the distance, did the three relax. No longer worried they were about to get shot at.

“That was incredible!” Hot Shot drove over to Bumblebee’s side, driving so close he nearly knocked into the yellow bot. “The way you fell out of that hole with Thundercracker and landed on Shockwave! I’m impressed, Newbie!”

“It wasn’t—it wasn’t that big of a deal,” Bumblebee insisted, feeling humbled.

“No, Hot Shot is right,” Ironhide spoke up from where the lead the two. “It was thanks to you I was able to get that key and free Hot Shot. You may be a rookie, but I’m glad Optimus sent you with me.”

Bumblebee was warmed by the praise and the success of his first ever mission. He couldn’t wait to tell Optimus and Cliffjumper how it went. For the first time he truly felt like an Autobot—and he was going to be a part of stopping the Decepticons.

“Come on, Bumblebee.”

Charlie’s voice brought him back to the present and, still in car mode, he followed her and the other humans to a smaller building off in the corner. Burns walked through the small door and Epps and Lennox followed.

“Why are we going in here?” Charlie asked.

“It’s our Planning House,” Lennox said with a teasing smile thrown over his shoulder.

Charlie frowned and glanced at Bumblebee, he was too big to fit through the door. “I’ll tell you the ‘plan’ when I come back out, Bee. Until then…” she glanced over at the Conan who was busy with
his nose buried in the grass. “Can you watch Conan?”

Bumblebee let out a hum of affirmation and Charlie’s frown turned up, “Coming Memo?”

“If it’s all the same I’m gonna stay out here with Bee and feed Sam.”

The two watched Charlie disappear into the building, Bumblebee feeling a strange sense of longing well up in his spark.

Memo looked to Bumblebee as he shuffled through his bag for Sam’s food. “I like hanging out with you more than I like hanging out with those soldiers.” The words made Bumblebee happy.

But while Memo was busy feeding Sam the Autobot glanced over at the Conan. He was getting farther from them, his nose now in the air. He looked like he was…looking for something.

Suddenly the Conan raced away, barking wildly as he headed for the heart of the island.

Bumblebee started to follow, not thinking about how Burns would be furious. Memo, seeing him start to drive off, hurried over with Sam held tightly in his arms. “Hey, hey, hey, wait up!”

Bumblebee slowed just enough so he could open the door and climb into the driver seat, placing the baby on the passenger seat. “We should have stayed-”

Bumblebee had already started moving again, trying to keep up with the Conan and not going too fast so he wouldn’t endanger Sam who laid on the seat, yawning and looking ready for a nap.

The Conan led them directly into a small cluster of buildings, shacks, and tents.

And humans.

While there were only a few dozens, it was more than Bumblebee had ever seen. And he felt Memo tense up.

If the humans were startled by the Conan-barking loudly and making a beeline through the area-that was nothing compared to their expressions when they saw Bumblebee. He had to remind himself he looked like an ordinary car, and with Memo’s hands on his wheel it appeared like just an ordinary human. He and Memo cruised slowly through the groups of humans, Bumblebee taking comfort in that Memo looked as nervous as he felt.

One of the humans, a male, walked forward and tapped the window. Memo rolled it down and Bumblebee came to a stop. “Hey there,” Memo said, resting his arm against the door and trying to
The man gave Memo a weird look, “Who are you?”

“I’m Memo,” he greeted before picking up Sam and showing him off to the public. “And this is Sam, Burns found us.”

Immediately the people rushed forward, crowding around Bumblebee to get a better look at the baby. After a few moments of gushing the first man spoke up again, “How did you get a working car onto this island. I know Burns’ boat is too small to carry it.”

There was a beat. Then: “I drove through the water.”

There were a few snickers, people taking it as a cheeky joke. Bumblebee tried to look past the crowd, looking for the Conan, he could still hear the barking.

Finally one woman stepped away from his view and Bumblebee spotted the Conan, tail wagging as a young male human who reminded him of Charlie came rushing through the crowd.

He reached his arms out to the little beast who happily jumped into the embrace as the boy let out a jubilant cry, “CONAN!”
Chapter 22

“Hey, Charlie,” Epps spoke up.

Charlie turned from Burns who’d been running through his plan on seizing the tower. Epps was looking out the building to where they’d left Bumblebee and Memo. She felt a surge of worry, “Yeah?”

“Please tell me your robot can turn invisible.”

Lennox and Burns immediately turned their eyes on her, Lennox panicked and Burns furious, and for a moment Charlie considered lying and telling them, as a matter of fact, YES. Bumblebee did possess the ability to turn invisible didn’t she mention that?

Instead Charlie tried to keep her voice from cracking as she said, “Why, uh-why do you ask?”

Epps nodded to the open door, “Because he’s gone. And so is Memo, the baby, and the dog.”

He had barely finished talking when Charlie ran past him, skidding to a halt on the grass to see that her friends were gone. Oh... fu-

“Charlie,” Burns snapped, him, Lennox and Epps following her outside. “Where is the robot?”

_Bumblebee are you trying to get me killed?!_

She caught the familiar sound of Conan’s barking and ran toward the noise. “He’s this way!”

“That’s where the civilians are!” Lennox called back and Charlie nearly tripped. She knew Bumblebee wouldn’t hurt them, but she couldn’t say that they wouldn’t hurt _Bumblebee_!

Lennox and Epps had caught up with her, running on either side of her, Lennox grabbing her arm and putting on a burst of speed. Charlie had to focus on not loosing her footing and getting dragged by the solider.

They reached a cluster of shacks and tents and people. Inwardly Charlie was floored, people were _alive!_ She wasn’t _alone!_ But outwardly she sprinted to the yellow Beetle the survivors had crowded around, elbowing her way to the driver’s door where Memo sat.

“You two are in so much trouble,” she hissed at the boy and the robot. But Memo didn’t even glance at her, looking at something ahead.
Brow furrowed in anger and frustration Charlie turned to see what he was looking at.

Her heart stopped.

Conan was in the arms of a young boy, frantically licking his face. Behind the boy was a woman and a man, the woman’s hands on the boy’s shoulders and looking down at the small dog.

Charlie took a step forward, her throat caving in and she couldn’t make any sound. But the woman still looked up and met her eyes.

“Charlie!”

Her mother nearly fell rushing toward her and Charlie met her half way, and when she was buried in her mother’s embrace every single problem fell away from her mind. Nothing mattered but the feel of her mom’s skin as they cried into each other’s hair.

Otis, her baby brother who she used to not be able to stand bolted toward them and wrapped his own arms around Charlie’s waist. The impact sending the three to the ground where they still held each other closer.

“I thought you were dead,” Charlie sobbed, kissing Otis’s hair before burying her head in her mom’s shoulder.

“I wanted to look for you,” her mom insisted, her voice wet with tears. “But soldiers came to get us, they wouldn’t let us go, then there was an attack.”

“We’re so happy you’re okay, Charlie!” A new voice spoke up.

Charlie looked up to see her step-father Ron smiling down at them with obvious relief and affection. Charlie remembered, before all this, how she hadn’t been able to stand the overly chipper man. He had felt like her father’s replacement.

But after everything that happened, Charlie was able to give him a sincere smile, “Hi, Ron.”

Suddenly the Volkswagen moved forward. Memo—who had been hanging out the window—quickly slammed his hands on the wheel to make it look like he had driven forward.

“Sorry,” he called, “My foot cramped up.”

Charlie reluctantly pulled away from her mother and brother as Memo crawled out with Sam in his
arms. “These are my friends, Memo and Sam. Memo told me about the Sanctuary.”

Her family exchanged pleasantries while the crowd watched. Lennox and Epps stepped forward, surprised to find out Charlie was Charlie Watson.

“Ron’s always trying to help us out,” Lennox commented, slapping the man’s shoulder. By his tone Charlie couldn’t tell if Lennox was being sincere or just humoring him. She could imagine Ron wanting to help but only getting in their way.

Otis, with Conan hanging from his arms, stepped toward Bumblebee. “Who’s car?”

“It’s mine,” Charlie stepped forward and ran her hand over Bumblebee’s hood. Her heart ached, she wanted to introduce Bumblebee to her family, but she could feel Burns eyes from where he stood in the back of the crowd.

Charlie’s mother furrowed her brow. “How did you get a car on this island? There’s just the one little boat.”

One man stepped up, “Her friend, Memo, said he drove through the water.”

Keeping the smile plastered on her face Charlie gave Memo a look who could only shrug. She supposed, in his defense, there wasn’t many convincing stories on how they got an entire Volkswagen Beetle onto Alcatraz Island. She was sure Burns hadn’t planned to reveal the car to the people.

“We, uh…” Charlie searched for an answer. Memo, Lennox, and Epps also looked to be searching for a believable lie.

*This is stupid. It’d be easier to just to just tell them about Bumblebee.* Charlie was weighing the pros and cons of going against Burns direct orders when said man spoke up. His voice instantly making the entire crowd go quiet.

“The car’s not important right now,” he said. “Charlie, can I speak with you for a moment? Alone.” He added the last word when Sally made to follow her daughter, and now she sent the much taller and buff soldier a reproachful look.

“Don’t worry,” Charlie assured her. “I’ll be right back. Can you help Memo with Sam?”

Sally looked torn for a moment, but ultimately decided to turn to go and help with the baby. Charlie guessed she was secretly thrilled to get to help, she used to tell her and Otis how much she missed it when they were that small.
Charlie puffed up her chest and walked over to Burns, away from her parents, friends, and the crowd.

Burns gave her a look and Charlie was already shaking her head. “I know, I know. I’m sorry. My dog heard my brother and must have went to find him. Bumblebee must have been worried and went after. But they think Memo drove him.”

“No, they don’t,” Burns replied, “They’re thinking how the hell did we get that car here. Sooner or later someone’s going to realize: If the robots can turn into flying aircraft they can turn into cars.”

“Then let’s just tell them,” Charlie hissed through her teeth. “Yes, I know they’ll be scared. I was scared when I first met him, but then I got to know him! All they need is time. And if we let Bumblebee help us get that radio tower it will help win them over!” Charlie turned on her heel, exhausted with having the same argument over and over again.

But as she turned Burns grabbed her arm, it was a strong grip but it didn’t hurt, he just wanted her to stay and continue the conversation (no matter how repetitive it was).

But it must not have looked that way to Bumblebee.

Suddenly the Volkswagen-devoid of any human at the wheel-pulled back away from the crowds, turned, and drove right between Burns and Charlie, making the two jump back to not have their feet ran over.

Then there was silence.

Bumblebee was inwardly screaming.

*Why did I do that why did I do that why did I do that*

He hadn’t meant to. He had been watching Charlie and Burns argue when the soldier had grabbed her arm. And well…Bumblebee still didn’t like Burns.

Now he sat between the two, both staring at him with expressions of shock, disbelief, and panic. And he was painfully aware of the crowd of people watching them. Except for Memo, Lennox, and Epps who looked like they were desperately trying to figure out an excuse for why a car had just moved on its own.
The male Charlie had called ‘Ron’ spoke up, “That car just moved.”

“No it didn’t,” Memo and Lennox said in unison while Epps looked up at the sky, as if ignoring the situation would make it no longer a reality.

Then the human who had first approached him and Memo took a step forward, his eyes dark and skin pale as realization dawned on him. “That car is one of those robots.”

Bumblebee had expected chaos but instead the group of people only stared at him with absolute terror. Terror and hatred and it made the Autobot want to drive back into the water.

Charlie and Burns looked at each other, and then after a moment Burns’ shoulders slumped with defeat. He threw his arm out, inviting Charlie to take over. She smiled, grim and determined, and turned around to face the crowd.

“Mom,” she began. “I want to introduce you to a new friend of mine, he saved my life-more than once-and helped me get back here to you and Otis and Ron.” She turned to Bumblebee and he felt warmer under her gaze. “This is Bumblebee.”

At those words he transformed, stretching to his full height and for once he was glad he wasn’t as tall as bots like Ironhide or Optimus. His smaller stature might be less intimidating to the humans.

But still there were cries of fear and panic as he transformed and as he looked down at the humans, only Charlie and Memo gave him friendly expressions. Epps and Lennox too busy looking at the crowd, maybe they expected someone to try and attack him.

“This is Bumblebee,” Charlie repeated as she stepped protectively in front of him. “And he’s going to help us take our home back.”

That night Bumblebee sat at the edge of the water, watching the stars as the day’s events ran through his head.

There had been yelling. Shouts of dismay and disgust as Charlie tried to explain how he was there to help them. Not one human trusted him, not that he could blame them. Burns and the other soldiers had to calm them down and Bee had caught a few looks of betrayal, as if the humans thought they could no longer trust their protectors.

Maybe there was a better way to do this, he thought to himself, feeling a twinge of guilt. He didn’t
want the survivors to hate the soldiers because of him.

He didn’t want Charlie’s family to hate him.

He had been so choked up with emotion when he watched Charlie reunite with her family that she had thought were gone forever. He was so happy for her, but even that thought was tinted with bitterness. Memo’s family wasn’t there, Sam’s family was dead, and Charlie’s family trusted him as far as they could throw him.

All of this because of the Decepticons, his thoughts were a low growl as he glared at the stars. All this because they wanted the AllSpark and Megatron. Well, they had the former Decepticon leader-his mind flashed to an image of Charlie—but they weren’t getting the AllSpark.

Some time had passed, it was getting late, when he heard footsteps.

He turned to see Charlie walking over to him, a soft smile on her face. “Everyone’s calmed down,” she told him. “Mom wanted me to spend the time with them but I slipped out when they fell asleep. I wanted to see how you were doing.” Her optics were concerned, “Are you okay?”

He nodded, he hadn’t expected the Sanctuary to welcome him with open arms.

Charlie stood by his side, resting her hand on his knee. “You should’ve seen Conan. I thought his tail would break he was wagging it so hard.” She took in a shuddering breath and gazed up at him, “It’s thanks to you we both came back to Mom and Otis. Thank you so much, Bumblebee. I’ll never be able to repay you for this.”

Repay? Charlie was his friend. He’d do anything for her, no pay required.

Worried the night air would be too cold for her Bumblebee gently picked her up and placed her on his lap. She didn’t hesitate to lean against his chest and his spark thumped. He was happier than he could explain that she was so comfortable with him.

“Burns will probably want us to go to the tower soon,” she said. “Well, he’ll want you I’ll have to sneak there.”

Bumblebee hummed, he didn’t know if he liked Charlie going into dangerous situations. Yes, she had the AllSpark but neither of them knew how to wield it or use it as an offense.

“I don’t want to leave you to fight,” she replied. “I was…I was really scared when you had to fight those three jets. I thought I was going to lose you.”
In response Bumblebee wrapped his arms around her and pressed his face against the top of her head, closing his optics. Charlie made an appreciate noise under him, her muscles slack.

She was warm and soft and felt so fragile. He remembered the beat of her spark and his own seemed to thrum in response to the memory. Could sparks even do that?

“It’s gonna be okay, Bee,” she breathed. “We’re going to get that tower back and everyone will love you and we’ll stop those robots and then…what will happen then?”

Bumblebee knew the end of this war was too far away for him to fantasize about the ending. He lifted his head and found his fingers running through her hair, such an alien thing hair was, but incredibly endearing. It was small moments like this that he drew strength from to keep going until his happily ever after was finally in sight.

“I’m going to find you a garden,” Charlie finally decided, leaning into his hand almost unwittingly.

“We’ll find so many flowers you can pick as many as you want. And maybe we’ll even find some real life bumblebees.”

_Oh, joy_, he thought but there was no real irritation in his mind, more exasperated amusement. Charlie showing him the sights of Earth…that did sound nice.

Charlie seemed to notice his hand, running her own fingers across his hand. He stilled for a moment, wondering if she was going to push his hand away. But no, instead she used her free hand to reach out for his other arm, taking it and doing her best to interlace their fingers, despite the size difference.

“I know you’re made of metal,” she began, gazing at their intertwined hands and Bumblebee desperately wished he knew what she was thinking. “But you feel so…alive. Which I guess makes sense since you are alive.” She chuckled, sounding slightly high-strung. Bumblebee took the moment to slid his fingers from her hair and move his hand down her arm and side, partly because her skin was starting to feel a little chilled, partly because he couldn’t get over how different humans felt compared to Cybertronians.

*But it’s a nice different.*

Charlie looked to be falling asleep as she leaned her back against his chest, his hand moving from her dainty ribs to her stomach, he took note her skin was losing its chill and getting warmer.

Bumblebee was unsure how much time had passed when Charlie pulled her hand away and slid off his lap, but his spark strangely ached when it did happen.
“I need to go get some sleep,” she yawned. “I got to be well-rested so I can help you make some new friends tomorrow.”
If Charlie was certain of one thing, it was much easier to win over kids than it was adults.

With a plan in mind she woke up in a pile of covers in the shack her family had been staying in. Her mother and Ron were still asleep, and Memo was on the other side of the shack (Sally and Ron having invited him to stay with them), Sam laying beside him with his eyes wide open, looking around.

Charlie sat up and stretched, her skin still warm from where Bumblebee had caressed her, and moved to shake Otis awake.

“Hm—what?” he said groggily, lifting his head up. Otis was curled up at his feet. “What is it?”

“Get up,” she breathed, careful to not wake her mother up. “You, me and Sam are going to go see Bumblebee.”

Otis was immediately wide awake but he did not look fond of the idea. “Uh…I don’t know if that’s a good idea, Charlie…”

“Don’t be a wuss.” Charlie turned away to shake Memo awake. He mumbled unintelligible and looked up at her.

“Can I borrow Sam?”

“Yeah, yeah sure, go ahead.” Memo immediately fell back asleep.

Charlie picked up Sam, cooing at the smiling infant while Otis forced himself to his feet, Conan in his own arms.

She nodded to the door and led her brother outside to her friend.

To Charlie’s relief Burns and the others weren’t near the robot when we reached him, Otis being sure he was directly behind Charlie as she walked up to him.

“I want him to make new friends,” she explained to Otis. “And if we’re both his friends, then Mom will be his friend and then so on and so forth.”

“And if he blasts us?”
“He won’t do that. He’s not like the others.”

Bumblebee buzzed with delight when they reached him, eyes shining. He knelt down in front of Charlie and extended a finger to Sam who grabbed it with delight, babbling nonsense. Even Conan squirmed out of Otis’s arms and hurried over to jump at Bee’s leg. With his other hand the robot scratched the dog behind the ears, in response Conan fell onto his back and Bee rubbed his belly.

“Bumblebee,” she began, stepping aside to reveal the boy behind her, “This is my brother, Otis. You two met yesterday. Say hi, Otis.”

The boy gave an awkward wave, “H-Hey.”

Bumblebee pulled his hand away from Sam to offer his own, equally awkward, wave. The greeting was followed by an equally awkward silence.

“So… He can’t talk?” Otis asked his sister.

“I think he could. But when we first met he fought one of those jets to save me. He killed it but not before it messed his throat up.” She walked over and pressed her hand against Bumblebee’s neck. She could see the small cavern where his voice box used to be. She had hoped her new healing powers would help him, but it didn’t appear it could conjure items out of thin air.

Bumblebee blinked warmly down at her and Charlie pulled away, hoping Otis wouldn’t notice her red cheeks. “Otis is a yellow belt.”

“I’m a black belt,” her brother spoke up, oozing offense. “For karate,” he explained to Bumblebee as an after thought.

“It’s a type of fighting style,” Charlie added.

Bumblebee hummed and then looked at Otis expectantly. After a few moments of nothing he waved his hand at Otis as if indicating that he wanted the boy to go on.

“Show him your moves, Otis,” Charlie smirked. Sam clapped his hands in agreement.

Now it was Otis who had red cheeks. Charlie bit back a laugh and stepped back as her brother started moving around, making poses and kicks and punches. Bumblebee gave him his entire attention, Conan sitting beside him with his tail wagging, and the sight made Charlie’s heart lift.

“Charlie? Otis?”
Charlie saw her mother coming up the rise, halting when she saw her son showing off karate kicks to a robot. Charlie tightened her grip around Sam and hurried over to her, “Hey, Mom!”

Sally hugged her daughter real quick, “You two weren’t there when I woke up. Please don’t do that to me, Charlie I couldn’t survive if I lost you again.”

“Sorry,” Charlie apologized, meaning it, “But I didn’t think you’d let me take Otis over to meet Bumblebee.”

Charlie watched the two as Otis, getting more comfortable, starting animatedly explaining the move he was currently showing the robot. Bumblebee listened attentively, his eyes bright with humor.

Charlie glanced at her mother whose eyes were on her instead of Otis. “What is it?”

“Nothing I just…” Sally had an unreadable expression. “I just never seen you smile at someone like that.”

Charlie hoped she wasn’t blushing. “Well, I’ve never met someone like Bumblebee.”

“Yeah, okay, give me the baby.” She reached out for Sam and Charlie let her have him.

“Is he the only kid besides Otis?” Charlie asked, she hadn’t had a chance to meet everyone yet.

“Sam’s the youngest,” Sally replied, cooing to the baby. “There’s a couple of toddlers and kids Otis’s age.”

“Can we see if they’ll come meet Bumblebee,” Charlie asked hopefully. “If the kids get to know him they’ll help the adults get used to him. Plus, I think he deserves to meet the people he’s risking his life for.”

Sally gave her an uncertain look. “I don’t have that much authority, Charlie. I don’t think I can convince the parents to let their kids near it-him.”

Before Charlie could reply Otis and Bumblebee (Conan trotting behind), walking over to them. Otis had grabbed one of the robot’s fingers and was trying to lead him back to the middle of the island.

“Where are you two going?” Charlie asked.
“I ran out of moves but I think Joey did some Tai Quan Dao, he can show Bee!”

Sally used her free arm to grab Otis by his collar as he tried to pass. “Hold on, you. You know people are still scared of—” she glanced up at the robot—“Of…Bumblebee. He can’t just march over there.”

“But I want to show him to my friends!” Otis whined.

Charlie reached over and wrapped her arms around Bumblebee’s hand, smiling down at her brother. “What if you help me bring your friends to Bee?”

Bumblebee was left on the beach as Charlie and her family went to find children willing to meet him.

His spark was fizzy with nerves and excitement, his time with Otis had went well. He had a very hyper active and confident energy, he found Charlie a bit more calm. But they had the same smile.

Meeting Otis and the other children would be an important step for both species, to build a relationship between Autobots and humans.

And he would like to do it before Burns got back. He, Lennox, and Epps had visited him earlier that morning, telling him they were going to get a lay out of the tower, and if things go according to plan they would go and try to seize it soon. Bumblebee would be ready when they did.

Charlie appeared over the rise, the sun shining through her hair as she smiled down at him. Bumblebee’s spark did the happy jump it always did when Charlie was in his line of vision. Following her was Otis, who ran past his sister, the Conan at his heels.

Behind them was a small group of children and a few adults, all looking nervous and anxious as they got closer. Bumblebee noticed that some of the children were as young as those in the pictures he had seen in the school. That felt so long ago.

*But these ones are okay…and I’ll keep them safe.*

“Joey, come here!” Otis was standing next to Bumblebee. Charlie beside him. “Show him your Tai Quan Dao!”

“Uh…” a boy with sandy blond hair took a tentative step forward, his wide eyes on Bumblebee. “I
“don’t know, Otis…”

Charlie suddenly moved away, walking over to her mother who held Sam. “Let me see the baby, Mom.”

Instantly the few other adults spoke up:

“Are you crazy?!”

“Don’t let that thing near a baby!”

“It’s too dangerous!”

Charlie gave them a level glare, “Bumblebee has been with Sam longer than any of you. They like each other.”

Bumblebee tried to ignore the sting of the words and how reluctant Charlie’s mother looked as she let her daughter take the baby.

But as Sam saw that he was being taken over to Bumblebee his optics lit up and he flapped his arms happily.

Bumblebee knelt down, his face plate shifting into a smile as the baby reached out to him and placed his chubby hands on his face.

“See?” Charlie smiled over her shoulder at the crowd. “If a baby can get along with him, you all can.”

While the adults were visibly relieved that nothing bad had happened, none looked eager to get any closer. But a small female, smaller than Otis, her hair wild and curly, ran over. The woman who must have been her mother, let out a yelp of panic and gave chase.

Bumblebee jumped back, startled, as the girl slammed her hands against his knee. Her big bright optics looked at Charlie with intensity. “Is he a real bumblebee?”

“Oh yeah,” Charlie smirked and gave the robot a sly look. “He’s just like a bumblebee.”

Bumblebee narrowed his optics. Was she being serious or did she know how much the thought offended him and decided to be a tease?
“I love bumblebees!” the little girl insisted with a passion that matched Prime’s desire to beat the Decepticons. “Look how big he is, Momma!”

“I can see, sweetie.” The mother stood close by, her optics never leaving Bumblebee. But as scared as she was, Bumblebee noticed the smallest drop of her shoulders as she slowly began to relax.

By the time the soldiers returned, they were shocked to see children crawling all over Bumblebee, treating the sitting robot like a playground. In front of him Charlie’s brother and another boy were showing off martial arts moves.

Charlie, standing a few feet away with a triumphant expression on her face, noticed Burns and the others and walked over, her triumph turning into smugness.

“Would you look at that,” Charlie grinned at Burns, waving her arm to the robot and children. “They like him.”

Burns rolled his eyes and walked off, “He needs to be ready for tomorrow.”

Charlie looked to Lennox and Epps who looked both excited and nervous.

“So there’s only two robots guarding the tower,” Epps began. “One a helicopter, the other a jet.”

“And we’re thinking Bee can lead them away long enough for us to send out an SOS,” Lennox added.

“Of course he can!” Charlie’s chest wanted to burst. They could find more survivors, maybe even contact Bumblebee’s friends. And the two soldiers eyes were practically sparking with hope.

“We got this then?” Lennox asked her.

Charlie looked over to Bumblebee who was giving Conan a scratch. “As long as we have Bumblebee, we got this.”

“Great,” Epps walked over and linked their arms together. “Then let’s celebrate.”
Charlie and Lennox explained to Bumblebee the plan for tomorrow. He agreed to being a distraction to the two Decepticons and hoped they wouldn’t try to call in reinforcements.

Bumblebee planned to do more than distract. He needed to put them offline. Only then could he return to the tower and send out a message to the Autobots.

It would be difficult but Bumblebee hadn’t felt this confident in a long time. They could do this. He could do this.

But that night the humans wanted to celebrate.

“We haven’t had good news like this in a while,” Lennox explained to Bumblebee as he walked into the room he and Epps shared. “I figure a little music, a little dancing, we deserve a good time.”

He walked back out with a strange device in his hands. “This is a guitar, it’s an instrument you make music with. I figure since Charlie will be too busy to ask for a dance I’d just see if I can still play.” He gave Bumblebee a wink and the robot tilted his head. He wasn’t sure why Lennox was getting at.

The human caught on to his confusion and rolled his eyes, “I know you’re an alien robot, Bee. But you had to have noticed how Charlie never takes her eyes off you. You know what that means.”

Bumblebee blinked and Lennox’s teasing expression turned into pity. “Oh, buddy. Well…I don’t know if I’m the one to have the talk with you. How about we ask Epps to do it after we get that radio tower.”

Bumblebee nodded as he followed Lennox back to where the party was. He considered trying to figure out what Lennox meant, but it sounded like a distraction he didn’t need right now.

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Starlight shone in the sky as the people danced around.

Bumblebee’s reputation went up when they found out he could play music, and a few brought him new cassettes that they had kept. Right now he was playing a more livelier song, watching the adults grab dancing partners and the children twirling in clumsy circles. But Bumblebee’s optics kept going back to Charlie, who was currently dancing around with her brother. She looked so happy, eyes sparkling, smile wide.
He looked around and spotted Lennox and Epps sitting not too far away, Lennox messing with the strings on his guitar while it looked like Epps was ribbing him about it. Memo walked over to join them and started to talk, his voice low. Once in a while their eyes would turn to Charlie, expressions admirable and Bumblebee wondered if she would look at any of them like that? And he wondered how he would feel about it. She did say she wanted to meet someone nice, and the three were nice he liked them. Memo was friendly, he found Lennox amusing even if he didn’t know what he was saying, and Epps was calm and collected, reminding Bumblebee of his superiors back on Cybertron. They were all good, but Bumblebee couldn’t make himself get up and try and play matchmaker.

Charlie had left Otis to spend time with his friends and she started to look around. The Autobot felt his spark quake, imagining her smile at Memo or Lennox or Epps. But her eyes went right past them and landed on Bumblebee. Her smile grew.

She hurried over to Bumblebee and held her hands out to him.

“Wanna show ‘em how it’s done?”

Maybe Bumblebee should have hesitated before he grabbed her hands. But he didn’t, he was all too happy to stand up with her and let her take the lead. The music between them as they danced around the crowd. But Bumblebee’s surroundings faded until all he saw was Charlie, her brown optics drowning him.

He didn’t want to break the surface.

Starscream flew low in the dark sky, looking for any sign of B-127 or that human girl.

As he searched he made plans on how to hide the human girl from Shockwave. It would be difficult to figure out how to use the AllSpark’s power without his help. But if Shockwave got a hold of her he’d use her to revive Megatron because that was the ‘logical’ choice.

And that wasn’t going to happen.

But he had barely gotten any ground covered when he heard a voice over his comm link.

“What is it Skywarp?” Starscream asked before the other Con could speak. Only Skywarp would comm him after he had asked the Decepticons not to comm him while he was out. “Starscream, I-”
“Lord Starscream.”

“Yeah, Lord Starscream! I-I was just flying around and uh, well you uh…you need to come see this.”

“I’m busy, Skywarp. I told you this.”

“No, Lord Starscream. You need to see this.”

Skywarp sounded scared, and even more strangely, serious. Cursing under his breath Starscream turned away from his search. “Where are you?”
Chapter 24

Slipstream and Blackout.

That was the two Decepticons that were guarding the radio tower. Slipstream lazing flying in circles and Blackout standing at the base. Bumblebee was several yards away in car mode. Charlie, Burns, Lennox, and Epps on either side of him, armed and ready.

A few hours ago they had left the survivors, huddled in their houses and told to stay put until they come back. What the soldiers hadn’t planned was Charlie sneaking into Bumblebee’s trunk and going with them when they left. Bumblebee hadn't been crazy about her idea but it turned out Charlie was very good at persuasion.

Saying Burns was mad when he found out she had tagged along was an understatement. But he was too impatient to take Charlie back to the Sanctuary and instead gave her a small hand gun he had brought along.

“Do as I say when I say it,” Burns had ordered. Charlie had promised she would but the man hadn’t looked convinced.

Now the four went to hide, leaving it to Bumblebee to do his job and get the Cons away. Once they were away they would get the chance to get the tower and send out a broadcast. Bumblebee could try the same after he got rid of the Cons.

Bracing himself for the upcoming fight Bumblebee zoomed forward, out of his hiding spot and straight to the tower.

It was Blackout who noticed him first, quickly transforming and looking incredibly startled at the sight of the Autobot. But before he could react Bumblebee transformed, threw a blast at him and two more up at Slipstream. All three hits met their mark but didn’t do any fatal damage. Bumblebee turned on his heel and transformed, skirting away. To his relief the Cons gave chase as he led them away, away from the tower. Away from the humans.

*Good luck you four.*

Charlie, feeling shaky with the weight of the gun, let Epps grab her arm and lead her to the tower, Burns and Lennox ahead.
The latter ran to the small room connected to the radio tower and tried the door, “It’s locked!”

In response Burns kicked the door, breaking it off its hinges. “Get inside.” He and Epps ran in, Charlie glanced in to see a table of buttons and levers and a couple of screens. Nothing she understood.

Stepping back she turned to where Bumblebee had disappeared, followed by the two other robots. She hoped he was doing okay. Memories of the last fight caused her stomach to tighten with anxiety. What if the got the better of him and he couldn’t get back for her to heal him?

“Did you see that?”

Lennox’s question made Charlie turn around to see the soldier looking up at the radio tower.

“See what?”

“There was…” Lennox hesitated, his eyes narrowed, “Something…”

“It couldn’t be an extra robot,” Charlie pointed out. “They’re too big to hide on top of it.”

“Yeah…yeah, you’re right.” Lennox turned to look at where Epps and Burns were still inside the small, square building, trying to start up a transmitter. “Almost ready?”

Charlie was too busy looking over the radio tower to hear the reply. She could feel malignant eyes on her, reminding her of all the evil robots she had meant up until now. If she had blinked just a moment sooner she would have missed the flash of shadow, the flick of something long and sharp at the tip, aimed right at Lennox.

Charlie was already moving as the words came out of her mouth: “WATCH OUT!” and she knocked into Lennox moving him the few paces she needed for the spear to miss him-and stab into her side.

“CHARLIE!” Lennox cried out as the blade-no, not a blade, a tail-pulled away, only to wrap around her waist and pulled her up. Lennox grabbed her hand and tried to pull her back. Epps and Burns came running out, Epps grabbing her other arm and trying to help her down. Meanwhile Burns was shooting something above her. Charlie tried to look over her shoulder and saw red eyes.

“SHOOT IT!” Epps yelled at Burns.

“I AM SHOOTING IT IT’S NOT GOING DOWN!” Burns yelled back.
Charlie let out a cry of pain as the creature tugged, with Lennox and Epps holding her arms she felt like they would pop out of their sockets.

“You’re gonna break her arms!” Burns called out.

“What the hell are we suppose to do then!?” Lennox snarled.

Suddenly a blast-smaller than the ones of the other robots-landed right beside Epps-the impact sending the two men to the ground, their grips breaking from Charlie’s arm and she was yanked up to be face to face to the creature.

It was a scorpion. A giant, robot scorpion, full of the same malice as the ones that had taken over the world. She wanted to shoot at it but she had dropped her gun when she had been stabbed by its tail. She could feel a thin, hot trail of blood running from her hip to her ribs as the scorpion held her upside down.

Burns had once again aimed for the scorpion but it was smart, holding Charlie in front of its face, keeping her between Burns and itself. The man let out a curse and didn’t fire.
Charlie tried to look around for Epps or Lennox, they must be looking for a ladder.

But the scorpion was already climbing up on top of the radio tower-higher and higher and Charlie left her stomach on the ground. Even if she could break out of its grip her only reward would be a broken neck when she fell to the ground.

*And here I thought Bumblebee had the dangerous part of the job*, she thought in half-hysterics.

.

Bumblebee had just gotten the tower out of his sight when Blackout slammed into him, tumbling him across the asphalt before Bumblebee kicked him away and jumped to his feet.

The two bots glared at each other as Slipstream landed beside her comrade.

“**We were warned you were around, B-127,**” Blackout growled.

Slipstream spoke up, her voice like acid, “**Lord Starscream informed us you’d be trying to contact your filthy Autobots, we just assumed you’d have a better plan to do so.**” Her optics were narrowed as if she was trying to figure out if he did have a different plan. Bumblebee couldn’t let her get back to Charlie and the others.
So he only shrugged, hoping he could convince her that fighting them two on one was his only plan.

Blackout cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders. “Never mind his idiocy, Slipstream. I’ve been bored for cycles. Let’s have some fun and kill an Autobot.”

He lunged at Bumblebee but he was ready for him, shooting at his shoulder and moving his blade to stab into Blackout’s neck. But the Decepticon was fast and grabbed the Autobot’s hand, using his greater size to toss him aside. But Bumblebee was quick and ran around to jump and latch himself onto Blackout’s back, similar to when he had fought Blitzwing. But unlike Blitzwing, Blackout fell backward, slamming his back, and Bumblebee, into the ground and trying to the smaller Autobot. With his hands grabbing Bumblebee all the Autobot had to use was his legs that were wrapped tightly around Blackout’s waist. In a desperate attempt he moved his legs to try and push his pelvis up, along Blackout. In retaliation the Decepticon put all his weight into his lower half and tried to flatten the Autobot’s legs. This lessened the pressure on his top half and Bumblebee managed to use his blade and take a note from Charlie, slicing his blade across Blackout’s optics, blinding him.

The Decepticon let out a shriek of pain and jumped away, putting distance between him as he rubbed at the energon now staining his face. But as soon as Bumblebee stood up, Slipstream was there, wrapping her fingers around his neck and lifting him into the air, only to immediately fling him down into the ground—the impact of his body making the ground break.

“Did your pet teach you that move?” she hissed nastily as she leered over him. Her face twisted into an ugly smirk as Bumblebee’s optics widened in surprise. “That’s right, we know about the Autobot and his adorable little human. It’s cute, really. I especially like the part where she stabbed Dropkick through the optic.” She looked around the area, “Is she here? I think Dropkick would appreciate if I brought him to her.”

Busy with her gloating Bumblebee took the chance to send a knee up into her torso, startling her enough to slip his arms from her grip and grab her shoulders, flinging her off him.

He rolled away from a blast she had fired when thrown, and then jumped up to his feet rushing to her, ready to grapple.

But then searing pain hit his back.

Bumblebee stumbled to his knees and looked around. Blackout was desperately aiming blasts through the air in a blind rage, and despite the odds against him he had hit his mark.

“Stop firing, Blackout!” Slipstream shrieked the order. “You got him.”

Bumblebee turned around too late, Slipstream knocked into him and once again he was pinned. This time the femme Con had her knee in his back, pressing his head into the cracked asphalt.
She leaned over and whispered softly, into his audio receptors: “You know, B-127, the Decepticons and I had always felt sorry for you. Thinking Optimus Prime had been cruel to let such a small thing like you join this war. But there was of us who thought you were worthy, a formidable warrior, who deserved an honorable death.” She snorted, “But I guess we were wrong.”

There was a blaster pressed against his head, “I want you to go back to the AllSpark blaming Optimus, the reason that you’ll die here on this disgusting wasteland of a planet.”

The scorpion was examining Charlie as if trying to figure her out. It was more animalistic then the other robots, and she wondered if it could sense that she was different. That she had the power of the cube.

*I don’t know what it’ll do to me if it finds out.*

Charlie looked at her surroundings, and could just make Epps on one of the tower’s ladders, half way up and aiming at the scorpion. But it noticed him too and shot at him, Epps just managing to duck it.

“No, don’t!” she cried out, reaching her arm out as if she could save him.

*Bumblebee*… She needed her friend’s help, but she had no idea where he was, and if he was faring any better than they were.

The scorpion pulled her closer, leering over her with its face so close she could feel the heat coming off its body with waves.

“What do you want with me?” she spoke lowly. “You can do whatever you want with me but once Bumblebee gets back you’re finished. He’ll tear you to pieces, and then he’ll call for his friends here and then all of you evil robots will be finished!” Charlie hoped her shaking wouldn’t make her threat less impressive.

The scorpion made a growling noise and looked to be sizing her up as a meal.

But then a bullet snapped against his head and it turned away from here to glare around. It was Burns, closer to them then Lennox and Epps, his gun aimed at the robot. Charlie’s throat constricted with terror, “Burns, go!” She didn’t like the man but she didn’t want him to get killed for her sake.
“That was a warning shot!” Burns spoke to the scorpion. “Bring the girl to me or I’ll shoot you right through the eyes. I can’t kill you but I’ll sure as hell blind you.”

The scorpion stared him down.

“I know you can understand me you son of a bitch,” Burns continued. “Bring her to me!”

The scorpion turned back to Charlie, it’s eyes unreadable and if she didn’t know better she could have sworn it was considering Burns words.

And then it tightened its grip on Charlie and she let out a scream as she felt her ribs creak, it felt like any moment her bones would break. She thought she heard Burns’ voice but her hearing and sight were starting to fell her, the pain bringing her brain close to subconsciousness. The world was fading to her edges, it hurt too much to scream and any moment she knew her ribs would break, the shards stabbing her heart and lungs-and that would be it.

And then-the second before her body would break-the scorpion let her go. She was falling at an incredible high-speed, the wind tugged her hair and ripping at her skin and she was unable to take a breath. Her ears were ringing and her vision was blurry and her only thought was…*At least it’ll stop hurting when I’m dead.*

But instead of hitting cold ground she landed in something that felt warm…and familiar. Metal hands? Bumblebee? No, the hands that held her cupped her perfectly, they were larger…different.

Charlie blinked her vision clear, her ribs aching and she forced herself to look up.

She met blue eyes that floor her, it was so easy to see the wisdom in the sapphire depths, the bravery…the goodness.

“Who…” she forced the words out, her voice croaky. “Who are you?”

The voice that answered was like thunder, booming yet…gentle, rattling her sore bones yet not causing any harm.

“I, am Optimus Prime.”
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait. I have so many projects going on (including doing some work on my own book) that things get away from me. As usual I try to keep a schedule with writing this and will get the next chapter out as soon as I can.

It had been a long time since Starscream felt such a strong bolt of fear, nearly buckling under the weight of this new knowledge.

Skywarp stood next to him, by his expression they were—for once—sharing the exact same thought.

*Optimus Prime was on this planet.*

Five Cybertronian pods had washed up on a random shore, it had been pure coincidence that Skywarp had flown by and spotted them. And while Starscream had no proof that the leader of the Autobots was on Earth, yet Starscream knew his spark wouldn’t be shaking if Prime wasn’t near.

“What—what should we do?” Skywarp spoke up, his voice shaking.

Starscream’s optics narrowed. He was leader. And neither Megatron nor Prime would take that from him.

“Send a message to all the Cons on this continent, find Prime, find his Autobots. And bring me their heads.”

*Several cycles earlier…*

“I can’t reach him, Optimus.”

Arcee’s quiet, concerned voice, filled his audio receptors and he clenched his hands.

First Cliffjumper, now B-127. Two of his best scouts missing, possibly offline. What kind of leader
was he if he couldn’t keep those under his commands safe?

The star-dotted universe yawned out before him, it had never seemed so big…and so dangerous. But Optimus forced his mind not to stray to what lay out there. He knew both of his Autobots had vanished on a rural planet known as Earth. He had collected what information he could about it and it’s inhabitants. He hoped that Cliffjumper and B-127 had simply been separated from their pods or misplaced their comm links in their attempt to keep hidden from a species that proved to be…skittish according to their history.

Ironhide’s voice broke through his silence. “Optimus, do you want me to go down there?”

Prime would rather give up his spark before he let his team get separated again. “No, we will all go.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Are you sure that’s wise?” It was Ratchet who spoke up. “This planet is populated.”

“We will use stealth,” Optimus assured his old friend. “With any luck B-127 or Cliffjumper have found a secure place where we can rest and try to contact the rest of the Autobots.”

His optics turned to the blue planet, wondering if there he could find salvation. If he could find hope.

Optimus would not find either of those.

He didn’t get a good look on the planet until their pods had crashed into the liquid that was dubbed the ocean, it had carried them to shore where Optimus had expected to see organic life in abundance.

What he saw reminded him far too much of the Cybertron they had left behind. Buildings destroyed, and nothing alive as far as the optic could see.

His comrades stood beside him, speechless.

“What happened here?” Arcee breathed.

There was a moment where none answered, but then Ratchet’s grizzled voice spoke up with unshakable certainty: “Decepticons.”

Wheeljack’s head whipped around to stare at his friend. “How can you tell?” They hadn’t seen a
Decepticon in a long, long time.

“I just know.” Ratchet growled. “I’ve fought them long enough to recognize their handiwork.”

“But why?” Ironhide spoke up, stepping forward and indicating to the destruction before them. “This planet was full of nothing but organics? And the planet is covered in liquid that could rust a bot. What could the Decepticons gain from all of this?”

“Maybe then need a new base now that Cybertron is in shambles,” Wheeljack spoke up.

“Maybe they’re looking for something,” Ratchet offered, his voice still low and heavy with anger.

“Like Cliffjumper or B-127?”

Arcee’s question was wary and a new wave of dread spread across the group. While the two scouts could stand against Decepticons better than this planet’s organics, there was only two of them. And if the rest of this planet was in the exact same shape as what laid before them…the two Bots could not stand against an entire army.

“We should have been here,” Optimus finally spoke up, an awful wave of guilt settling heavily on his spark. “We should have protected this planet from the Decepticons.”

“You can’t go blaming yourself,” Ratchet spoke up, blunt and unsympathetic. “We had no way of knowing what the Cons were doing and we don’t have time. We need to get our scouts back before those waste of Energon get to them first.”

“Maybe we can help these organics after we find B and Cliff,” Wheeljack offered hopefully as the five set out.

As they walk Optimus felt a sense of dread rising. So much tragedy had befallen this planet, and he felt that Ratchet had made a valid point. The Decepticons were looking for something. Something that was important was here. Optimus just had no inkling on what it could possibly be.

Present...

Bumblebee heard the fire of a blast and he flinched, for a split second thinking that Slipstream had shot him and he would now be one with the AllSpark.
But he was still on Earth, and Slipstream was still atop of him. But now she was looking over him to Blackout. Quite suddenly there was a bam and a hole appeared in the Con’s chest, making her fly off the Autobot and lay sprawled on the ground.

Bumblebee quickly sat up and scrambled away from the body, his optics starring. He was certain that was a fire from an Cybertronian weapon. But who…

“Of course I find you in a mess, B-127.”

Bumblebee started at his original name and whirled around to see an unexpected but a completely welcomed sight.

Ironhide and Arcee stood beside the unmoving body of Blackout. The two smiling down at the scout with warmth in their optics.

His friends…they were here…*his friends were here!*

The yellow bot jumped up and ran toward the two, wrapping his arms around Ironhide before the red bot could stop him.

“Yeah, yeah, okay, okay.” Ironhide patted his back, his voice was a mixture of embarrassment and affection. “I missed you too.”

“Oh, *B!*” Arcee gushed when Bumblebee stepped away from Ironhide. It was her turn to rush into a hug, wrapping her arms around his torso and lifting his feet off the ground.

“We were so worried about you!”

After she placed him down the two immediately began bombarding him with questions. Why were the Decepticons here? How long had they been here? Where was Cliffjumper? And the yellow Autobot felt a twinge of grief as he remembered that he could no longer speak to his friends.

The two quickly caught on that he wasn’t speaking and halted their questioning, looking at him with both concern and confusion.

Bumblebee tapped his throat, almost feeling the memory of the pain he felt when Blitzwing had ripped his voice box out. But how could he explain that to them?

*I’ll take them to Charlie,* he decided, *Charlie will-* His thought came to an abrupt halt as a new realization. Blackout was guarding that tower… Blackout who he had never seen without his companion Scorpahok. And that little menace was nowhere to be found.
Charlie… Bumblebee whirled around and bolted toward the tower, his spark in his throat. **CHARLIE!**

This robot, this Optimus Prime, placed Charlie gently on the ground where Lennox, Epps, and Burns waited. None of them took their eyes off the massive figure that held himself so differently from Bumblebee and their enemies. He looked over the three, Charlie wondered if his eyes held on her for a moment longer and she wondered what he saw.

But then Optimus’s head turned sharply, looking up at the tower. Falling his gaze Charlie saw the scorpion start to frantically crawl down, no doubt making for an escape.

Optimus moved as if to stop it but before he did a shot of energy hit the scorpion, cleanly missing the tower and sending it to the ground where it twitched for a few moments then went still.

“Greasy little parasite,” a grizzled voice spoke up and Charlie’s eyes nearly fell out of her head as two more robots appeared behind Optimus. The one that had fired the shot was red and white and despite not having any sort of age lines she could tell he carried far more years than any of the other robots she had meant.

The other robot was more gray and had strange fin-like things on the sides of his head that glowed a pretty blue. He eyes were all for the four humans, staring at them with an intense awe as if he never seen something so unbelievable.

It was then Charlie noticed the red insignia they all shared, the same one Bumblebee had, and her heart jumped with hope.

“Do you know Bumblebee?” her voice felt so small she hadn’t expected them to hear her.

But Optimus immediately gave her his full attention and while she felt intimidated it didn’t stop the blanket of reassurance that had fallen over her the moment she laid her eyes on this robot.

“Who is Bumblebee?” he asked. But before Charlie could explain the sound of something approaching caught her ears.

The three robots turned their attention to the sounds, the red and white robot bracing his gun, while Lennox helped Charlie to her feet, Epps and Burns standing in front of her in a sense that felt protective. Charlie had to remember to take the time to thank the three later on, they had stood by her and risked their lives to save her.
A familiar yellow shape appeared and Charlie’s heart felt full when she looked over Bumblebee, not horribly injured, perfectly okay. He was with two other new robots, a bulky red bot that screamed soldier, and a smaller pink and white bot that looked female.

Charlie tried to catch her friend’s eye but Bumblebee was solely focused on Optimus Prime. He looked at the robot as if all his problems had faded, that finally everything was okay, he looked like he would cry. Charlie’s father flashed in her mind and instantly Charlie understood the relationship between the two.

“B-127!”

The voice came from the gray robot who bolted toward the smaller one, picking him up into a hug and spinning around. Charlie bit back a chuckle while Lennox and Epps exchanged perplexed yet amused looks. Burns face was unreadable.

“It’s good to see you,” the older bot spoke up, his grouchy voice lighter with comradeship.

Bumblebee pulled away from the gray bot and carefully walked over to Optimus Prime, for all the immense affection in his eyes, he approached the taller robot shyly.

“I’m glad to see you again, B-127,” Optimus spoke, while his voice was level his eyes had a shine and again Charlie was reminded of her father with a bittersweet ache.

Bumblebee gave Optimus a hug, but it was quick and awkward as if he didn’t know it was appropriate. For all his fondness it was clear Optimus was something of a commander or leader and Charlie felt a rush of humor to see her friend so flustered.

But Optimus kept his expression even as he went on, “Have you been able to find Cliffjumper?”

Both Charlie and Bee flinched in unison at the mention of the deceased robot. The pink and white femme bot then stepped forward, addressing Optimus. “I think he lost his voice, Prime.”

“Lost his voice?” the red and white robot stepped forward and examined Bumblebee’s throat. After a moment he let out a hiss, “His voice box has been ripped out! How the slag did that happen?”

“It was a jet.” The words came out before Charlie had decided if she should push herself into a conversation between six giant robots. When all eyes turned on her she took comfort that the moment Bumblebee looked at her, his gaze softened even more.

“A jet?” the femme bot echoed in concern.
“That doesn’t narrow it down,” the red one said, his voice not as soft as Optimus or the femme, “We know a lot of jets who would do this.”

“I-I don’t know his name,” Charlie stammered. He was kinda red and grayish white-”

“BLITZWING!”

The yell came from the robot with the glowing fins and Bumblebee turned to him and nodded quickly.

“How dare he,” the red robot growled, swinging his massive head around as if Blitzwing would pop up at any second. “Where is he? I’ll rip his voice box out!”

“He’s dead,” Charlie spoke up again and wanted to shrink under the five gazes. “Bumblebee killed him.”

“Bumblebee?” the fin robot turned to his friend. “Is that a new name? What’s it mean?”

Before Charlie could decide if she should explain that, Optimus Prime suddenly knelt in front of her, giving her and the soldiers his complete attention. “Who are you?” he asked softly.

It was Burns who stepped up and introduced himself and his soldiers. “We’re trying to clean up the mess your friends are making,” he replied bitterly and Charlie’s eyes bulged. Did he not get the sense of respect she did for Prime? She couldn’t imagine talking to this robot with such a tone. But while Optimus’ eyes narrowed he didn’t appear to be defended. “The ones who have caused this destruction,” he looked at their surroundings, a skeleton of a city that once stood tall. Optimus’ shoulders seemed to sag. “They are called Decepticons, and I assure you they are no friends to the Autobots.”

“Autobots?” Charlie repeated the word, her brow furrowed.

Optimus indicated to his red insignia, the same one his friends share. “We are Autobots and I am afraid your home has been caught up in a war that has lasted for a long, long time.”

“A war?” Lennox stepped forward. Epps expression was almost relieved, as if all he wanted was a reason for all of this madness and destruction.

Optimus had turned his eyes to Charlie. “I will explain everything. But first I want to know who you are. Are you a friend of B-127’s?”
“Is that his name?” Charlie wouldn’t tell the bot she didn’t care for it. “I just called him Bumblebee since he didn’t get to introduce himself before he lost his voice.” She quickly cleared her throat, “I’m Charlie Watson. And yeah—” she looked beyond Optimus to Bumble-B-127, who was listening to his friends talk animatedly. “We’re friends.”

As if he heard her B-127 (she couldn’t get used to that name) turned toward her and seemed to smile, walking over to kneel beside Optimus and gaze down at Charlie. She smiled up at him, he’ll always be Bumblebee to her.

Charlie was aware of Optimus and the other Autobots watching carefully as Bumblebee outstretched his hands to her, ready to pick her up and carry her to wherever they go next. Without thinking Charlie stretched her arms up to grab his hands—and let out a yelp.

The two robots and the soldiers jolted at the sound and Lennox and Epps were at her side while Bumblebee held her shoulders as if he expected her to fall to the ground.

“Oh, Charlie.” Surprising her Lennox lifted her shirt to reveal her hip, and the blood that stained her skin. She felt Bumblebee’s grip tighten as she stared down at the stab wound she had forgotten about in all the excitement and adrenaline. Was that a speck of blue?

“That scorpion got her,” Epps said, whipped his head around to glare at said scorpion’s corpse.

Burns stepped forward and the two soldiers turned toward him, waiting for orders while the other Autobots hurried forward.

“We’ll get her back to the Sanctuary and get her patched up,” he decided before turning his eyes to Optimus and the others. “And then we’ll figure out what to do with…the rest of this.”
Epps was sent to collect the first aid kit from the island, Burns (and everyone else) deciding that it wasn’t the best plan to introduce five more-much taller-robots to the group of traumatized civilians.

Charlie admitted it would have been the smarter choice to go with Epps and let him patch her up there, but she didn’t want her family to see her injured. And she needed to help Bumblebee explain to his friends all that had happened.

Starting with Cliffjumper.

She, Lennox, and Burns sat atop one of the smaller buildings, it was easier to talk to them when they were closer to eye level. All of them but Wheeljack, who had stayed behind to study the radio tower, surrounded them. Bumblebee was staring at Charlie with obvious concern while Lennox helped her pressed against her wound to stop her bleeding.

Burns looking like he regretted not going with Epps.

“I’m sorry,” it was the first words Charlie spoke when they brought up the red Autobot. “He died.”

She saw grief in the five pairs of eyes, but none of them looked surprised.

“He had been alone on this planet for so long,” the bot named Arcee said, “Alone with nothing but Decepticons…he didn’t stand a chance.”

“He did though,” Ironhide suddenly snapped at her, making the humans jump. “He would have lasted long enough for us to come get him, but we didn’t!” He glared down at the group, his eyes blue fire. “We failed him.”

“No,” Optimus spoke up, “I was his leader. I failed him.”

Immediately the other Autobots spoke up at once, trying to insist to Optimus that he needn’t carry the blame himself, they were a team and shared their triumphs, and their failures.

After a moment Optimus moved his eyes back to Charlie, “What else happened?”

Charlie began the process of explaining everything she and Bumblebee had been through, she was
wondering if she should mention their dance on the beach or their moment in the school (it felt too private, intimate even) but she didn’t get there. The moment she mentioned the robot corpse and cube that had been dragged up a wave of shock and panic fell across them.

“What cube?!” Arcee gasped.

“What robot corpse?!” demanded Ratchet.

Charlie glanced at Bumblebee, she hadn’t mentioned her experience with the cube since it had been before she had met him and…she was scared.

She trusted Bumblebee completely and she wanted to trust his friends, especially Optimus… But what would they do to her when they found out? How valuable was the power this cube gave her? And was it more valuable than her?

But Bumblebee gave her an assuring nod and she knew she’d do whatever he wanted her to. And he wanted her to tell them everything.

“I don’t know the name of the robot,” she started. “He was a gray color, and a bunch of other-you called them Decepticons-dug him out of this massive hole. The same massive hole where a cube was.

“What did these Decepticons look like?” Optimus asked.

“There was another red and white jet, but he looked different from Blitzwing and stayed away from the hole. There was this blue and red couple, the one who carried the body out only had one eye-”

“Shockwave!” Ironhide hissed suddenly, startling her yet again. “If he was digging up bodies it has to be Megatron, he wouldn’t do that for any other bot.”

“That would explain why they’re here in the first place,” Ratchet spoke up with a growl. “They came to find their leader’s body.”

Optimus’s gaze was far away, “And they came for the AllSpark.”

The word left a pressure against Charlie’s heart, at last she knew the name of that mysterious cube. Her life had changed even before she met Bumblebee.

“And now the Cons have it,” Ironhide looked up at the sky as if he expected one of his enemies to appear. “No doubts they’ll use it to resurrect Megatron.”
Charlie’s eyes bulged, “It can do that?” Beside her Lennox and Burns exchanged a look, their expressions unreadable.

“Oh, yes,” Arcee informed her, leaving forward, “The AllSpark is the most powerful artifact from our world. With its power the Decepticons can do…almost anything they want.”

“Which they will,” Ratchet growled.

Charlie’s mouth opened before she could weigh the consequences of her next words: “No. No, I don’t think they will.”

With the exception of Bumblebee (whose eyes lit up at her words) and Optimus (who simply looked interested), the reaction that Charlie received was one that told her these robots thought she was crazy.

“We’re talking about the Decepticons,” Arcee said gently as if Charlie hadn’t heard her the first time.

“The bad robots,” Ironhide added as if she hadn’t been paying attention.

“The ones that destroyed your planet,” Ratchet finished, indicating to the destroyed Earth as if Charlie was a complete moron.

“I mean,” Charlie suddenly felt stupid. What if she was completely wrong? “I don’t think that cube—the AllSpark—still has this power you are talking about.”

Ironhide scowled, looking as if he was deeply offended in Charlie’s lack of faith in the AllSpark’s power. But Lennox spoke first:
“IT’s power is inside of you, isn’t it?”

Charlie snapped her head around to stare at the young man in alarm. How did he-

Lennox pulled his hand away, revealing the wound on her hip. Surprisingly the bleeding had stopped, but the thought immediately left her mind when she saw the blue specks that stood out in the red of her wound.

“Yeah,” Charlie’s mouth was suddenly dry. “I think it is.”

Optimus stayed completely still, his expression unreadable, but the other Autobots had physical reactions. They stepped back as if Charlie was nuclear, Ironhide turning on his heel and walking away to stand a distance away. Arcee glanced between her friend and Charlie before hurrying over
to the red robot’s side.

“That’s not possible,” Ratchet breathed, his eyes not leaving Charlie’s wound. Feeling self-conscious she placed her hand back over the injury.

Bumblebee reached forward and grazed his fingers over her hand in comfort. Charlie offered him a small smile, her anxiety decreasing, just a little.

“But it is true,” Optimus spoke up, his voice as unreadable as his expression.

“I think so,” Charlie replied before explaining what had happened after Bumblebee fought those three Cons. “I placed my hands on him, wanting nothing else but for him to get better and then…he was healed.”

“I figured that was it,” Lennox admitted, sitting back on his heels. “I saw the state Bee was in after fighting those three, only for him to be perfectly fine a few minutes later. And then you talked about getting whacked by one of those Cons and not, you know, dying. Pardon the cliche, Charlie, but you’re not like other girls.”

“But that doesn’t explain how you received the power of the AllSpark,” Ratchet said with impatience thick in his voice.

As quickly as possible Charlie told them what happened that day, how she had found Cliffjumper, his metal flecks in her hands, finding the cube and something telling her to touch it. The pain and how her hands were suddenly healed.

Optimus glanced away, deep in thought. “Perhaps…” he said at last. “The shrapnel from Cliffjumper made the cube believe you had Cybertronian DNA.”

“That seems far-fetched,” Ratchet replied, “Then again I’ve seen a lot of far-fetched things during this war.”

“Wouldn’t Charlie technically have Cybertronian DNA now?” Lennox asked. “Now that those bits of your friend was absorbed into her arms when she touched the cube.”

Ratchet glared at the human but he didn’t look dismissive of the idea.

“What happens now?” Charlie asked quietly.

Before either robots could reply Burns stepped forward, finally speaking: “The first thing that’s going to happen is we find a place for these Autobots to stay.”
Charlie and Lennox looked up at him while Bumblebee looked less than pleased that the man decided to enjoy the conversation. “What’s wrong with Alcatraz?”

Burns looked up at Optimus and Ratchet, “Don’t get me wrong. As much as I have my…issues, with all of this, if you’re willing to get those Cons off our planet I’ll welcome the help. But I have survivors who watched their parents, spouses, and children be killed by robots that look exactly like you. Bumblebee is one thing but five more of you who are much taller, is another. Besides, we have no place to hide you if a Con decides to fly over the island.”

To Charlie’s surprise Optimus nodded passively. “I understand, and you are right we need to find a place to stay out of sight until we have our bearings.” He turned back to her, “I will figure out what has happened between you and the AllSpark, Charlie. I will just need time.”

“Of course,” Charlie replied, feeling a sense of relief.

Charlie stayed with the Autobots that night. Her hip freshly patched up after Epps finally returned. It had taken a while to get away after he had told everyone that they had new allies.

“I thought Otis was going to grab my leg and not let go unless I brought him along,” Epps joked to Charlie as the four humans sat together.

The three men were trying to envision a map of the city, thinking of the best place for the Autobots to stay. Charlie, who did not know the layout of the city, spent her time continuously looking over her shoulder where the Autobots stood several feet away.

Wheeljack had returned, having used the radio tower to set up a distress signal that was sent up to space. But he had no idea how long it would take for the message to reach them, or how far away from Earth they were.

“We should never have separated,” Ironhide said.

“There’s no point kicking ourselves over things we can’t change,” Ratchet replied.

There was a moment, then Arcee stepped forward, “We should take a moment…to honor Cliffjumper.”

There were nods of agreement and then Ironhide caught Charlie’s eye as she watched them. She quickly turned away when his gaze turned into a glare.
“Let’s go over there,” he headed away from the humans and Charlie felt a new wave of guilt. Optimus had relayed to him how she had obtained the AllSpark power, Ironhide clearly wasn’t keen on the fact a human’s body (while not purposefully) used his friend’s body to essentially take the Cybertronian’s greatest artifact. Charlie hadn’t meant for it to happen, but that did little to ease Ironhide’s grief.

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Charlie jolted awake.

As usual whatever dream she had it was snatched from her mind as soon as her eyes opened. At least this one didn’t leave her struggling in her sleep like last time.

She and the guys had made makeshift beds in an old office building, the three still asleep. Charlie sat up and stretched, startled that she couldn’t even feel the cut on her hip.

I don’t even think I’m still human anymore…At least, not completely.

Standing up she walked outside, her dream not even a memory but she could feel the shadow of it clawing at her brain. She wondered if she could have a moment with Bumblebee, it would be a much needed moment of comfort.

But stepping outside Bumblebee was nowhere in sight, instead all she saw was Optimus, standing alone, staring out to the rising sun.

Feeling shy Charlie walked over to stand by his foot. “Hello.”

He looked down at her, “Hello.”

“Where are Bumblebee and the others?”

“They left early to scout for a new base,” he answered, turning his eyes back to the sky.

“You didn’t want to go?”

“One of us needed to stay with you, and B-127-Bumblebee-has experience with this planet.”

“You don’t have to call him Bumblebee,” Charlie insisted. “If his real name is B-127, then that’s
what you should call him.”

“I don’t think that’s his real name,” Optimus began, “Not anymore.” He suddenly knelt down before Charlie. “I think he considers himself Bumblebee now.”

“Really?” Charlie breathed, feeling flustered.

“I’ve known him for a long time. I can tell how he feels even if he can’t speak,” Optimus explained. “I can tell he cares deeply for you.”

“The feeling’s mutual,” Charlie assured. “He’s the best friend I’ve ever had. And I want to help him stop the Decepticons—I want to help all of you.”

An emotion flashed through his eyes so quickly Charlie couldn’t tell what it had been. “Aren’t you scared, Charlie?”

She blinked, slightly thrown by the question. But she answered honestly, “I’m terrified. I lived for months thinking I was the only human left alive, I was nearly killed by giant robots, I have this… strange alien power inside of me, and I have no idea what you will do to me—” She bit her tongue, she hadn’t meant to be that honest.

Optimus’s eyes narrowed, “What do you think I’ll do to you?”

Charlie swallowed, “I’m not trying to say you’re bad or anything but, I’ve never been through anything like this. I don’t know what I’ll do with this power, I don’t know if you plan on taking the power out of me or using me for a weapon or—”

Optimus held up his hand and Charlie immediately slammed her jaw shut.

“No one’s going to use you, Charlie,” Optimus’s voice was firm but not unkind. “Do I want to take away the AllSpark powers? Yes, but only because it is a great responsibility that will make you a target to the Decepticons if they find out. I’m here to protect you, Charlie, you can trust me.”

Charlie knew she could. It was strangely easier to believe him than it had been to believe Bumblebee. And she knew part of that was because this robot reminded her so, so much of her father, even if their personalities couldn’t be more different.

Optimus released a sound similar to a sigh and his shoulders almost seemed to sag. “But I can understand if trust is too much to ask from you, or the other humans of this planet. You needed me and I was far too late to protect you.”
Charlie hadn’t even considered that, and even with Optimus bringing it up she couldn’t find it in herself to blame them. She was just too relieved that he was here now, that they weren’t alone in this battle. And that’s what she told Optimus.

In response he reached his hand out, letting Charlie lay her hand against his palm, warm and smooth. “I am sorry that I did not come sooner. But I vow now, Charlie Watson, that I will protect you. You will live to see the restoration of your home.”

Chapter End Notes

Exposition...yaaay.

Probably none of this stuff with the AllSpark could actually happen in canon.
“And that’s what happened.”

Bumblebee stood behind Charlie, Lennox, and Epps. They had returned to the Sanctuary to share all that had happened since they left for the tower. And, with the exception of Otis, none of the survivors were happy to know there were five more robots—with even more on the way—so close to the island. Even though it was sworn up and down that these new robots were good, like Bumblebee.

*I think I’m the exception,* he realized sadly, before glancing to his left.

If only he had realized that before Wheeljack had tagged along.

The fin-adorned Autobot was crouched directly behind Epps, arms thrown across his legs and staring.

If Wheeljack could tell how distrusted and disliked he was among this crowd, he gave no sign. Instead he gazed at them with wide optics, his awe of these organics causing the blue to sparkle like stars.

*Do I look like that when I look at Charlie?* Bumblebee wondered idly, then quite suddenly felt hot under his metal.

“They all look so different!” Wheeljack told Bumblebee in Cybertronian. “I thought organics would be hard to tell apart but they’re so different! They’re all so…cute.”

Bumblebee buzzed with laughter. He would have loved to see Wheeljack call Burns cute.

Charlie stepped forward and indicated to the bigger bot, “Everyone, this is Wheeljack. He’s very smart.”

Wheeljack quickly snapped his head around to grin eccentrically at the group, making several humans took a step back. “Hi, hey, hello,” he greeted in English.

He suddenly leaned forward, making Epps jump out of the way. “It’s so nice to meet you! You’re all so soft looking, what do you use as armor? Oh, Charlie mentioned something about a thing called ‘food’, do you all use it? Whose your leader? Is it that Burns human? He’s so quiet. Are you all quiet? You haven’t said a word.”

Before Bumblebee could intervene Charlie hurried forward and placed her hand on his arm. “Wheeljack…you gotta give them a chance to respond.”

As she talked Bumblebee paid close attention to how the two reacted to each other…and his shoulders sagged in relief.

There was no fear or nervousness between the two. Charlie was comfortable around him, and Wheeljack acted like she didn’t even contain the AllSpark inside her.

*I want them to get along,* the thought was wistful. *I want Optimus and the rest of the Autobots to like Charlie. And I want her to like them, to like the world my life has to offer.* He was thrown by how important this was to him. Surely he had more important things to focus on.
“Otis,” Charlie suddenly turned to her brother. He looked as excited as Wheeljack. “Come over and say hi.”

Mrs. Watson’s brow wrinkled in concern, “Charlie, I don’t know if—”

But Otis was already pulling away from his mother to scamper over to Wheeljack. “Hi, I’m Otis!”

“Hi, I’m Wheeljack!”

Charlie opened her mouth, probably to help the introductions along, but the introductions were over. Immediately the two started to ask questions at rapid fire pace, somehow managing to answer and ask.

Charlie blinked at the sight, optics wide, before slowly backing away from the two. The rest of the humans exchanged looks before starting to shuffle away. Charlie’s parents walked over to her to talk in low voices, keeping an optic on their son and the Autobot.

Watching Otis and Wheeljack, Bumblebee felt both amused—and a little annoyed. They knew each other for five seconds and were already friends. Bumblebee had to catch Charlie from falling out a window for that.

“Well, that wasn’t too painful,” Lennox grinned up at Bumblebee.

“Painful,” Epps leaned in, “But not as much as it could have been.”

Bumblebee buzzed in agreement.

“Want to go see if Burns and Prime are back from their scouting?” Epps offered.

Bumblebee glanced over at Charlie, wanting to invite her along. But she was still talking to her parents.

“Maybe let Charlie sit this mission out,” Lennox said, a teasing glint in his optics.

“Yeah, considering last time she went out she got stabbed by a giant scorpion,” Epps said, much more serious.

Bumblebee and Lennox look at him. Epps rolled his eyes then addressed his fellow soldier, “You were thinking it, I just said it.”

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Charlie looked over to see Bumblebee and the soldiers walking away. Instinct told her to go after them, but her mom was still talking to her. A nurser before the world had gone to hell, she wanted to examine her daughter for injuries. While they had told the civilians about Scorponak, they left out the part where Charlie got stabbed—and how she had an alien power source inside her. She could only imagine how her mother would react to that.

“Mom, Mom,” Charlie broke in, holding her mother’s arms in a firm grip. “I promise, I’m fine.”

I’m fine now, at least, she thought as an image of the Autobots flashed through her mind.
“Your mom’s just worried about you, Charlie,” Ron put in, genuine concern on his face and voice.

“I know,” Charlie insisted, “But with the Autobots here, things are finally turning out…okay.”

She looked over to Wheeljack and her brother, surprised to see that Memo, Sam in arm, had appeared out of nowhere with Conan at his heels. Of course, Wheeljack looked as if he would short circuit over the sight of a baby and a dog.

“That’s getting to make new friends,” Charlie smiled at her mother. “And I’ve made friends too.”

She couldn’t even begin to explain her bond with Bumblebee and how it was so different from any relationship she had ever had. Nor could she explain how Optimus felt so much like her father.

A sudden shadow fell over them and Charlie looked up to see Wheeljack. “Can I borrow you for a click?”

“Oh,” she blinked. “Sure.”

Her mother looked like she was going to object but thankfully Ron gently led her away. He may not trust the Autobots, but he trusted Charlie who trusted them.

“Something wrong?” she asked the Autobot.

Wheeljack shook his wide head, “No, no, everything’s fine! I really like that Otis human, he’s very smart!”

“Sure he is,” Charlie thought dryly.

“And that tiny human and the weird four-legged furry human? Amazing!”

“Uh, Conan’s not-”

“But I’m getting distracted,” Wheeljack went on. “Memo told me how you two met which made me look at you which reminded me that Prime wanted me to check on your wound.”

“Ah, okay.” Double-checking Otis and company were distracting Sally, Charlie lifted her shirt just enough to show off the new scar where the stab wound had been. She fought back a shudder, healing so quickly…it was going to take awhile for it to stop feeling so uncanny.

But from Wheeljack’s expression he didn’t find it strange in the slightest, the way his eyes glittered as he looked at the scar made her feel self-conscious.

“Fascinating,” he breathed. “Cybertronians can’t self-heal like this. It’s like carrying the most powerful first-aid kit inside you. You could always heal…”

“Maybe,” Charlie admitted. “But I don’t know if I want to test that theory.”

Her words made him chuckle and she felt a glow of pleasure at making the Autobot laugh. She wanted Wheeljack to be her friend, though Otis was probably already his best friend.

“Does it hurt?” he asked, taking on a more professional tone.

“No,” Charlie ran her hand over the scar. “It feels…weird though. Like static? I guess that’s a good word to explain it.”

Wheeljack hummed in thought, “It’s probably the energy used to heal your wound. It’s really interesting how it can heal organic matter…then again, I don’t think you’re organic anymore. Not
completely anyway.”

Charlie felt a twist in her gut at the thought, which must have made her face twist because Wheeljack gave her a reassuring smile.

“That’s not necessarily a bad thing, it makes you one of a kind.”

“I don’t know if I want to be one of a kind,” Charlie admitted.

Wheeljack’s smile dropped but his voice was still gentle and sympathetic, “I can understand that. War makes us become many things we don’t want to be.” He sat up straight, “But the good news is you don’t have to handle this on your own. You have Prime, and all these humans, and B-127-I mean, Bumblebee.” He winked…for some reason.

Before Charlie could question it he had stood up and walked back to Otis and Memo, talking animatedly to the boys while Sally returned to Charlie’s side.

“Yes,” she gave her mom a side hug. “Just checking on me, like you. What’s Ron doing?”

Sally sighed, “I think he thinks it would be rude to walk away while the ro-Wheeljack, is talking.”

Starscream key his optics and audio open as he led Skywarp down the hall and toward the base’s entrance.

“Remember your mission,” he breathed to his comrade.

Skywarp rolled his optics, “It’s only like, three steps.”

“Repeat it anyway,” Starscream growled. “Humor me.”

Skywarp listed off the steps on his fingers: “Find Prime and the AllSpark girl, figure out their evil Autobot plans, steal the AllSpark girl.”

“And bring her here,” Starscream reminded. “Safe and sound. And no matter what, do not let any other Con know what you are doing. Especially Soundwave or Shockwave.”

Skywarp nodded, his optics darkening. “Trust me, Starscream. I got this.”
Finding a base for the Autobots was not going to be so easy.

Most places that were large enough for five robots to live in had been destroyed, Bumblebee could almost believe Starscream had planned for the Autobots to eventually show up.

*But if I did that I wouldn’t be able to imagine him shaking in his servos at the thought of Prime finding him,* he thought with dark glee. He wanted to go ahead and search for the Decepticon base, but the planet was large and anything they did moving forward would require a base.

For now, Optimus decided that staying near the radio tower would be the best course of action. They were expecting at least one Decepticon to arrive to check on the now silent Blackout and Slipstream. But so far, nothing. If it wasn’t for the vivid memories of what he had already seen—and fought—Bumblebee would start to doubt that Earth wasn’t crawling with the enemy.

Currently, Optimus was conversing with Ironhide and Arcee, while Wheeljack and Ratchet were talking a few feet away. Wheeljack had returned a breem or so ago, and was now animatedly telling Ratchet all he had learned about the humans.

Ratchet didn’t look incredibly impressed.

The soldiers had returned to the Sanctuary, but Bumblebee’s earlier conversation with Burns still rang in his audio receptors:

“Look…*Bumblebee.*”

The use of his name had made the Autobot start, looking down to Burns at the dock while Lennox and Epps got the boat ready.

Bumblebee knelt down, his optics wide with interest.

“I’ve been…thinking, mulling things over during…all this,” he vaguely waved his hand around, indicating all the events that had transpired since the two met. “And *I*” he sent a sideways glare over to Epps and Lennox who had their backs to them—“Should give you some form of gratitude.”

Bumblebee blinked, sure he had heard wrong.

“While, it’s your kinds’ crazy war that we got dragged into, and we could have done just fine on our own, not to mention—”

He was cut off by Epps, who very loudly cleared his throat, making it apparent the two soldiers could hear them.

“But still,” the words came through gritted teeth as Burns went on. “You and your ‘Autobots’ helping us, it will make getting our planet back easier so… Thank you.”

Burns and the soldiers had left before Bumblebee could express how touched he had been. Even if Burns didn’t like it, he was warming up to the Autobots. And he knew Optimus and his comrades must have warmed him up during their base hunt. It was so easy to look at them with a fond optic, to follow them into battle.

“Come ‘ere, B-127,” Ratchet called. The use of his old name jolting Bumblebee out of his
He walked over to Ratchet and Wheeljack, the latter speaking up, “I was just telling Ratchet about my check up on Charlie. I thought you’d want to know.”

Check up? On Charlie? Bumblebee tipped his head to the side.

“Optimus asked me to check on her wound, and I wanted to let you know she’s doing just fine, it’s just a scar now,” Wheeljack informed happily.

Bumblebee hadn’t needed Wheeljack to tell him that. Charlie would have told him herself, and he could tell by the way she behaved this morning that the wound wasn’t bothering her, he had no need for Wheeljack to check and inform about his best friend who he knew better-

*Why am I getting angry?* The image of Wheeljack lifting Charlie’s shirt and examining the scar, of him watching over her instead of Bumblebee. It made his circuits twist uncomfortably and a shade of irritation entered his mind. He wasn’t sure why.

Stop being weird, he ordered himself sternly. He wanted his comrades and Charlie to get along, checking on her wounds was part of it. And sometimes that would include touching her… The thought of Wheeljack running his fingers over Charlie’s skin made him quickly push the image away before he could think of anymore ludicrous thoughts.

Ratchet had his optics on Bumblebee and for a terrified moment he thought his emotions were shown on his face.

“How do you think the AllSpark human can help in this war?” Ratchet asked instead.

“Her name’s Charlie,” Wheeljack replied, copying Bumblebee’s thoughts. “And she can already heal a Cybertronian with just a touch. She could make your job easier.”

Ratchet sent a glare to his friend that wasn’t unlike Burns. “I don’t need to be replaced anytime soon.”

Wheeljack’s optics nearly fell out of his head. “I didn’t mean it like that, I just-”

“Besides,” Ratchet went on. “Surely she can be of more use than just a healer. Ironhide and I were throwing around ideas…”

Bumblebee adored Ironhide but he felt a stirring of dread at the mention of his name, he knew the Autobot didn’t hold any fondness for Charlie—not after he learned what had happened to Cliffjumper.

“If the cube of the AllSpark is now useless, the human now has a duty to Cybertron, including reviving our old home.”

For a moment the yellow robot entertained the idea of saving his old home, but there was a very obvious problem with that idea. Charlie would not survive the trip to Cybertron.

*I’ll never get to show her my home…*

“Humans can’t leave this planet’s atmosphere,” Wheeljack spoke up. “My new friend Otis told me about it. They used to wear special suits to go to their planet’s moon but I can’t imagine those are of any use now.”
“What do the humans call the liquids in their bodies?”

The new question came from Ironhide as the rest of the Autobots walked over to join the three.

“Oh, I didn’t ask Otis,” Wheeljack said. “I’ll ask him next time.”

“Why?” Arcee asked, stepping forward to stand at Bumblebee’s side. He was grateful to have her next to him, he had a feeling he wasn’t going to like where Ironhide was going.

“Since it’s apparently not suppose to be blue, it’s not impossible to say the power of the AllSpark is in that human liquid,” Ironhide pointed out.

Wheeljack and Arcee exchanged a look and Bumblebee felt his circuits twist even tighter. Ratchet and Optimus didn’t let their gazes fall from the red Autobot. “What are you getting at?” the former asked.

“Perhaps if we just acquired some of it—not all of it,” he added the last part with a glance at Bumblebee. “But enough to take back to Cybertron and see if it can restore our home.”

“And if it can’t?” Arcee asked.

“There’s no ifs,” Wheeljack said, “With the state we left Cybertron in…Charlie is too small, if we took the amount we need it would…”

She wouldn’t survive, Bumblebee though sickeningly as a tense silence fell between the group.

Arcee broke in, “Ironhide, you know we can’t…”

Wheeljack broke in, “You’re not thinking of doing it anyway!”

Ironhide glowered, “Don’t put words in my mouth! I’m just trying to find a way we can revive Cybertron.”

“I can understand that,” Ratchet came to his defense. “No one, not even the Decepticons, had expected we’d ever see the AllSpark again.”

“But it’s not just the AllSpark now,” Wheeljack pointed out. “It’s Charlie too.”

“I know that,” Ratchet nearly snapped. “And perhaps we should focus on getting the AllSpark out of her. That would leave eighty percent of our problems solved.”

“Couldn’t that hurt her though?” Arcee asked. “Her and the AllSpark are one now, it might be keeping her alive, especially considering the damage she took from the Cons.”

“Then what do you suggest?” Ironhide asked, a scathing edge to his voice that made the femme bot scowl.

“I suggest we either learn more or get the Decepticons off this planet, first.”

“Which we’d need the AllSpark to do!”

“We can’t put Charlie in danger like that!”

“This is a war and she is a part of it now! She has to take risks, Cliffjumper took risks, and she’s just a—” He slammed his mouth shut before he could finish the sentence, glaring to the side, his optics dark with grief and frustration.
It’s not Charlie’s fault Cliffjumper is offline, and it’s not her fault he’s a piece of her now… Bumblebee looked to Optimus. He had been quiet through the argument and his expression didn’t give away his thoughts.

The other Autobots had turned to their leader too.

Wheeljack spoke up, “What do you think we should do, Optimus?”

He hesitated, his optics thoughtful as he thought of what to say. And Bumblebee realized with fear he didn’t want to hear it.

Transforming into vehicle mode Bumblebee whirled around and drove away, back toward the Sanctuary, ignoring the yells and calls of the other Autobots.

Driving right into the water on his way to the island Bumblebee couldn’t calm his nerves. He knew Optimus would do what he thought was best. But Bumblebee didn’t know what Optimus thought was best, and what if it wasn’t keeping Charlie safe? If he agreed with Ironhide and Ratchet… Bumblebee didn’t want to go against his leader, but he wouldn’t do anything that could endanger Charlie either. She was too important, even if the rest of his team didn’t see that.

Charlie was indulging in some star gazing on the edge of the island when familiar footsteps reached her ears. She turned around to smile at the yellow robot as he sat beside her.

“Hey, jerk,” she teased.

She didn’t think Bumblebee knew what the word meant but he did give her a confused look which was enough for her to continue.

“I noticed you bailed without me,” Charlie crossed her arms with a mock pout. “Without even a goodbye either, it was incredibly rude.”

Bumblebee hummed and leaned to press the side of his head against her own, eyes sparkling with humor.

Charlie rolled her eyes, “But I guess I can forgive you, but only because I’m an incredibly merciful person. But you better not forget me the next time you go out or you’ll be sorry.” She smiled big up at the robot as he sat up. “Were you checking on Optimus and the others?”

He nodded, but the mirth in his eyes and posture immediately left. His shoulders sank and he gazed out into the water, his eyes appearing dim.

“Bee, what’s wrong?” Charlie asked, reaching forward to grab his hand.

He patted her hand as if to reassure her but she wasn’t buying it. “Did something happen with the others?”

His eyes narrowed and he shook his head, Charlie swallowed, worry making her throat ache. “Did you argue?” What could they argue over? What problems would they… “Was it about me?”

When he didn’t answer Charlie moved to stand in front of him, reaching her hands out to cup his
face and make him meet her eye.

“We’re a team, right?”

He didn’t hesitate to nod.

“Good. Now I know you can’t talk, but you still need to let me know if things are bothering you, okay? If it’s about me or not, I’ll help you fix it.” She looked up at the star-speckled sky. “We can go talk to them tomorrow, if you want.”

Bumblebee shook his head and she saw a spark of anger flash in his eyes. Charlie sighed, “Tomorrow night, then. No exceptions. They’re your friends, Bumblebee. And I like them. And I don’t want you to fight with them.” *Especially if its about me...me and the AllSpark.*

Bumblebee nodded, looking slightly appeased.

Charlie offered him a smile. “Would a hug make you feel better?” She asked more for her sake than his.

In response Bumblebee laid his head against her chest, eyes closed and hand resting against the scar on her hip, it didn’t hurt anymore. Charlie released the smallest of sighs and wrapped her arms around his head, noticing how he was slightly damp from the drive to the island, but still warm.

He was always warm.

“Bumblebee...darling...”

Bumblebee looked down to meet Sally Watson’s optics. The human woman gave him a polite, but strained smile. “Could you...step back a bit?”

The autobot’s shadow hovered over Sally and her patient, one of the humans named Reggie who had wounded his leg before finding Sanctuary. Sally, being a human equivalent of a medic, had been tending to it with what little supplies she had.

And Bumblebee supposed that Reggie didn’t appreciate a giant robot leering over him while he had his injury checked—at least, he wasn’t if his expression was anything to go by.

With an apologetic buzz Bumblebee moved away, going to sit by Charlie who was feeding baby Sam a cup full of some kind of strange mush.

“Mom likes her space when she works,” Charlie smiled up at her friend as he sat next to her.

Bumblebee’s only response was a shrug, his optics turning away from the makeshift medic office which was just a secluded corner of the Sanctuary’s village. Instead he gave his attention to the mainland beyond the island, where Prime and the Autobots, and Burns and his soldiers, were out there, looking for supplies and safety.

Lennox had asked Bumblebee if he wanted to come with, but he had declined the offer. He wasn’t ready to face Prime and the others after last night, he wasn’t sure he’d be ready hours later, despite the promise he made to Charlie.
Luckily for him, he was given a distraction kliks later when Ron walked over, a handheld transceiver (or walkie-talkie as Charlie and Otis called it) in his hands and a confused look on his face.

“What’s up?” Charlie asked, standing up with Sam laying his head on his shoulder, patting his back. Sally looked up from applying fresh bandages on Reggie’s leg.

“So,” Ron began. “As you know, Burns always leaves me in charge while they’re all gone.” That was something Bumblebee couldn’t quite understand. He liked Ron just fine, he just didn’t seem the leader type.

“And they left me this-” Ron held up the transceiver, “So they could keep contact with Sanctuary, make sure we’re all good over here, and to let us know if they find supplies or will be awhile before they return.”

“Yes,” Sally walked over to him. “What’s the problem?”

Ron looked down at the transceiver, “They didn’t tell me what to do when a stranger contacted us.”

Charlie hurried over with her mother a pace behind. “What stranger? Who is he?”

“He’s on our radio wave,” Ron explained. “Said his name is-”

Before he could finish there was a screech of static from the transceiver and Bumblebee’s antennas popped up.


“It’s Ron,” he replied, lifting the device to his face. “I’m with my girlfriend and her daughter, over.”

“There’s more of you, over!”

The voice was male, it sounded older than Charlie but younger than Burns. There was something… different about it. This voice didn’t carry the wary edge the other humans had.

Charlie-with one hand holding Sam-reached out and took the transceiver from Ron. “Hello? My name is Charlie, who are you? Where are you?”

There was only silence in response. Charlie’s brow furrowed and she looked to Ron.

“He won’t respond unless you say ‘over’,” the man explained, a sudden tired weight to his voice.

“What is your name, over?”

“My name is Cade Yeager,” came the answer. “I’m a lone survivor in the Marin Headlands, over.”

Charlie looked up to her mother, “That’s close.” She looked past Bumblebee, out toward the distance where-he assumed-these headlands were.

“Do-do you need us to come get you, over?” Charlie asked.

There was another moment of quiet, but Cade was quicker to pick up, “Can you… Over.”

“We’re closer than you think,” Charlie explained. “But I’d rather not say where over the radio, over.”
“Ah, cause the robots? Don’t worry, babes. I’ve been testing so many channels. If those dumbasses are checking them, they aren’t doing it frequently.”

Charlie looked up to Bumblebee who only shrugged. He didn’t put it past Starscream and the other Cons to not bother keeping up with radio channels. Not unless they were looking for something.

Like Autobots… Bumblebee looked up at sky.

“Do you want us to send someone for you?” Ron took the transceiver back. “There are other survovrs, we have supplies. We could help you, over.”


“How about Bumblebee and I go?” Charlie asked when the conversation was over.

Sally looked up at the robot, “I don’t know if this Cade person is as open-minded as you, Charlie. And it’s so dangerous out there for you…” “I know,” Charlie admitted, handing over Sam who had fallen asleep during the conversation. “But Bumblebee is the one most qualified for leaving the Sanctuary and since he can’t talk I can be translator. But we can’t leave this Cade guy to fend for himself.”

Sally looked to Ron who shrugged helplessly, “I know you don’t want me to agree with her Sal… but I do. This Cade guy is all alone, he needs help. Specifically, he needs these two’s help.”
I may not have gotten Cade’s character right. But I definitely wrote a character that Mark Whalberg would play. So close enough.

Charlie wished she could have enjoyed the drive to the Headlands more. Main reason being the drive was under water.

It turned out Bumblebee had the ability to keep the inside of his car mode completely dry while driving under water. Charlie had sat in slack-jawed silence, staring out into the dark abyss that was the water that surrounded the Sanctuary.

“Bee,” she had breathed, staring out the window. “When all of this is over…I gotta take you to the ocean.” She could only imagine how breathtaking a sight that would be to share with her friend. Bumblebee buzzed in agreement and her chest swelled unexpectedly.

“Okay, Bee,” Charlie began as she stepped out of the Volkswagen. “I need you to stay behind me. I’ll do the talking.”

They were in the hilly landscape of the Headlands, she had the vaguest of memories of visiting this place with her mother and father when she was a toddler. She blew a strand of hair out of her face, wishing she had been able to take the walkie-talkie with her. But they had voted that Ron needed it more than she.

“Once we find this guy, I’ll have to explain to him that you are my friend and that the Earth has been caught up in the Autobot and Decepticon war.” She led Bumblebee up the slope, taking note how untouched the Headlands were compared to the city surrounding it. “I feel he’s either going to take it all in stride, or not believe a thing we say and jump into the water to get away from us.”

She glanced up at Bumblebee who hummed in response, looking as concerned as she was pretending not to be.

“I’m sure he won’t freak out,” Charlie tried to assure him. “I mean, even if he wasn’t. What’s he gonna do to you?”

She turned her head to face forward again-only to whirl around with a yelp as a sudden crash and shuffle came from just behind her.

Hair slapping her face Charlie turned out to see Bumblebee on his back, chains were wrapped around his legs and tied to the near by trees. The gray metal was grass stained and tipped with leaves that were fluttering to the ground.

Bumblebee’s eyes were large and wide, looking around as if he didn’t know what just happened.

“Bee!” she screeched, rushing forward to start untangling the heavy metal chains from his legs.

She had barely made any process before the sound of running footsteps made her look over her shoulder.
A man, grungy looking and in a leather jacket, around the age of Lennox and Epps, was rushing downhill toward them, rifle in hand.

“AH HA!” he yelled out triumphantly. “I got you, you son of a bitch!”

*It’s Cade Yeager,* Charlie realized with a jolt, recognizing the voice. Scowling she planted her feet, staying between Bumblebee and Cade who struggled to a halt in front of her.

“Did you do this?!” she waved her arm toward the robot who was wisely staying still, looking at Cade as if he was feral animal you didn’t want to startle.

“Set a trap to capture one of the killer robots? Saved your life cause you have no peripheral vision? Uh, yeah. Obviously.” Was the sarcastic reply.

Charlie bit back an angry retort, reminding herself that this Cade guy had no idea about the Cybertronian war. “*Bumblebee,* isn’t a threat.”

Cade blinked, brow furrowed, then looked up at the robot. “This walking school bus is called Bumblebee.”

“Well, technically it’s B-127-but I call him Bumblebee. He’s *my* friend. And we came here to help you!”

The man looked between the two for a few moments. During those moments Bumblebee felt secure enough to sit up, the chains straining.

“*Friend?*” Cade echoed, as if he didn’t know what the word meant.

Charlie gave Cade a quick summary, explaining that both good and bad robots had arrived on Earth, fighting an age-long war. Bumblebee was one of the good robots and she’d happily give him excruciating details and introduce him to Bumblebee’s leader if he just helped her get her friend out of the trap.

And then Charlie was surprised. She had expected Cade to continue to be suspicious, similar to Burns. But instead-after only a moment of him taking in her words-Cade’s eyes brightened and he looked up at Bumblebee in the same way Otis did. “Stellar.”

With an easy apology he helped Charlie remove the chains from Bumblebee, bragging that he had set up similar traps around the Headlands in case the robots came stomping around.

“What if they flew around?” Charlie couldn’t help but ask.

Cade nodded to the rifle flung over his shoulder. “I have good aim. I’d shot ‘em right where they’d explode.”

Charlie shot a glance at Bumblebee, both sharing the same thought: *Is this guy serious?* But she was wise enough not to reply, and Bumblebee physically couldn’t.

When they tossed the last of the chains away the robot stood up, stretching and testing out his joints.

“You okay?” Charlie asked and smiled at the nod she received.

“Again, sorry about that, bud,” Cade said, turning on his heel and heading back up slope. “But in my defense I thought you were gonna blow-what’s your name again? Chancey?”
“Charlie,” she answered as she and Bumblebee followed after. “What have you been doing out here?”

“I’ve been prospering,” Cade replied with a lift of his chin. “Collecting weapons, food, clothes, manning my new hide ou. Fun fact about me, I was raised by doomsday preppers-everyone called Grandpa crazy.” He threw his arm out toward Bumblebee, “Well, look whose crazy now.”

*Oh, I have a guess.* Charlie thought, her mouth pulled into a thin line. This Cade Yeager…was kinda nuts.

The man turned to walk backward so he could look up at Bumblebee, flashing him the grin of a five year old on Christmas morning. “My gramps may not have known all the details, but he knew other life was out there and one day they’d arrive.” His brow furrowed though his smile stayed in place. “I didn’t expect you to be so…yellow. And small.”

“Leave him alone,” Charlie huffed. “His color and size is just perfect for him.”

Cade looked to her, then up to Bumblebee, then back to her. Before she could decipher the new expression on his face Cade tripped on a rock and fell on his back. Bumblebee releasing a laugh before abruptly stopping, not meaning for it to slip. But Charlie made sure the man saw her smirk while she helped him up.

“While I’d have preferred to stay in the family’s old bunker, that was pretty close to town and therefore blasting range-therefore one of those metal dickbags—is it okay if I say that? You’re much younger than you sounded over the walkie-talkie so I don’t know if your parents have a strict no swearing rule or…”

Charlie gave Cade a droll look, “It’s a free country.”

“Right so they hit right near my bunker which apparently wasn’t built for alien fire power and I was almost buried. So what do I do? I get all the guns and supplies I can fit in my truck and book it to the one place they haven’t touched-yet. Marin Headlands. Then I set up shop at the visitation center and have been here ever since. I’ve been trying to get the water working but…eh.”

Charlie stood before the visitation center, Cade standing next to her with his hands on his hips and looking overly proud of himself. You would think he was the king of the apocalypse. But if Charlie was being honest, the emptiness of the center carried a kind of dread, reminding her how empty the world had become. She couldn’t imagine being alone here for a long amount of time and Cade’s mannerism was starting to make sense.

Bumblebee was walking around the area, keeping his eyes either on the sky or in the distance around them. The hovering threat of a Decepticon arriving anywhere added to the desolation of the Headlands. Charlie swallowed and looked back to Cade, “So, you ready to go?”

“Oh, yeah. Where the hell is Rob and those other survivors he was bragging about?”

“It’s Ron,” Charlie corrected. “And a few soldiers made a camp on what’s left of Alcatraz. There are other survivors there.”
“ALCATRAZ!” Cade yelled so suddenly—and so loudly, that Charlie jumped back and Bumblebee whirled around to stare at him.

Cade smacked his head, “Son. Of. A. Bitch! That is the coolest place to live in an apocalypse ever! Why didn’t I think of that?”

*It’s like a child in a rugged twenty something’s body,* Charlie realized. *I don’t know if I can mentally handle any more time with him.* “So is that a yes?”

“Yeah, but not for Alcatraz. Even though that—again—is one of the coolest things ever. I’m doing this cause I want to meet Bee’s buds. I assume they’re taller and have more intimidating colors. Don’t answer, I’ll figure it out on my own, let me go grab my stuff!”

Cade rushed into the building and while Charlie considered going after him, she thought of how he’d react driving under water and decided she’d need a mental break before then.

Instead Charlie followed Bumblebee who had walked off to get a better look at the city skyline and Golden Gate Bridge, or what was left of it.

“We might be awhile,” Charlie spoke up to him. “Cade has to grab his… ‘stuff’. That’ll either take five seconds or all day.”

A buzzing chuckle and Bumblebee sat down on the grass, voting for the ‘all day’ option. Charlie walked over and leaned against his arm, eyes out on the sky, dimmed by the clouds covering the sky.

Her eyes moved away to look over at the Golden Gate bridge, the middle had been blown apart, leaving a large gap. Bumblebee followed her gaze and made a noise similar to a sigh.

“It can be rebuilt,” Charlie assured him. He looked at her and she smiled softly, “You’re very easy to read, you know that?”

He tilted his head.

“You are,” she insisted. “You can’t talk…you don’t even have a mouth…but it’s so easy to tell what you’re thinking.” She chuckled, “I can even tell what you’re thinking now, if you are interested.”

Bumblebee hummed questioningly and she gave him a cheeky grin. “You’re thinking-WOW! Charlie is sooo cool and smart. I should tell Optimus to go ahead and make her the first human Autobot. And even—” she broke into a shrill of laughter as Bumblebee reached out and gently grabbed her waist, mercilessly tickling her sides.

“Ah ha ha ha! Stop it! This won’t change that I’m so much cooler than you!”

Through the bubble of laughter she lost her balance and would’ve fell if Bumblebee hadn’t tightened his grip and pulled her closer. Charlie wrapped her arms around his neck and let out a huff. “You’re so lucky you’re not ticklish, Bee. So lucky.”

Bumblebee shook beneath her as he laughed and she buried her face into his shoulder to hide her smile. The wariness that had weighed her bones just a minute ago, her frustration with Cade, it all faded away in the robot’s warmth. Many things did. And, as always when her mind circled back to this, she was baffled by the emotional change she had gone through, how she had never had a relationship with anyone else with Bumblebee. How he had changed everything *for the better.* No matter the bad things that were happening, no matter that beyond and around her was destruction…
she could handle everything with Bumblebee next to her.

Charlie breathed against him, “…I love-”

Bumblebee jolted in place when Charlie pushed back with such force she fell to the ground. Her tongue stinging from where she had bit it. Her face on fire as she realized what she had almost said.

*That’s not-I didn’t mean it like-but I…wait what?!!*

Charlie had almost confessed her feelings to an alien robot…confessed her *romantic* feelings to an *alien robot*.

*Wait-WHAT!?!*
Worry tugged Bumblebee’s spark. Charlie was looking up at him with a strange expression on her face, it reminded him of fear. And her face was red…was she ill?

Even more concerned he reached his hand out toward her, only for Charlie to jump to her feet, startling him.

“Sorry for pushing you,” she said it so quickly it was practically one word. “I just…I was…”

Before she could finish-if she even would finish-the sound of running footsteps made their heads turn.

Cade was running toward them from the visitation center, but his optics were on something beyond them. “Look!” he called out. “Look! Is that your Autobots?”

Bumblebee followed his gaze, past the Headlands, nearer to the giant broken bridge, where five silhouettes were slowly making their way.

Bumblebee nodded, recognizing the gait of his comrades, his optics narrowed when he remembered yesterday’s talk.

Cade’s optics lit up. “Take me to go meet him! They look so much bigger than you!”

*What is with you and height?* Bumblebee thought to himself but nodded once again. He glanced over to Charlie, her face wasn’t as red but she didn’t meet his optic when she spoke up:

“Go ahead and introduce him. I’ll wait here. I…don’t know if they’ll want to see me right now.”

*She really can read my mind,* Bumblebee thought, with both wariness and affection. She knows there was a disagreement about her…but she’s wrong to think they don’t want to see her. Right?

Ironhide’s words returned to his head. Surely they wanted to see her for the right reasons…right?

“Cool, you can stay here, Charles,” Cade nodded to her. “We’ll return with five giant robots!”

And then, surprising both of them-Cade climbed up onto Bumblebee’s shoulder. The Autobot freezing at an awkward angle to keep the human from falling. Even if he kinda-sorta wanted him to.

“Away, Bumble! To the Autobots!”

Bumblebee tried to catch Charlie’s optic one last time but she had already turned her back on the two, heading back to the visitation center. Trying not to let his shoulders sink-Cade would probably fall off-Bumblebee turned and headed toward his friends, keeping his pace slow for Cade’s sake.

The human was all too willing to fill the walk with noise. “What’s your friends name? Oh, right, you can’t talk. Sorry about that. Oh man, do your friends talk?! Do any giant alien robots talk?! I never heard the bad ones talk either! It would be just my luck to take part in a literal sci-fi movie and not get to talk to any aliens!”

*Primus, it never stops.* Bumblebee pushed his pace a little bit more, making Cade quiet down as he grabbed the Autobot’s head to keep his balance. Bumblebee hoped Wheeljack or Arcee or literally
any of the others would be merciful enough to take Cade off his servos.

He held his arm out and started to wave as he started to make out the features of his friends. Optimus was the first to notice him and stopped immediately, the rest of the group halting after him and following his gaze.

“Bumblebee!” Wheeljack called out and started to make his way uphill to his ally.

“Bumblebee stop.” Cade’s voice, suddenly serious, made his footsteps falter.

He hummed in question, looking at Cade who was staring at the ground with a dark, faraway look in his optics. “There’s something I’m forgetting…Something important.”

Suddenly his optics bulged and Cade yelled out to Wheeljack, waving his arms frantically and nearly falling to the ground. “WAIT! STOP STOP! I SET ONE OF MY TRAPS HERE!”

Bumblebee jolted in place and mimicked Cade, waving frantically at Wheeljack but it was too late. A moment later Wheeljack fell flat onto his face, chains wrapped around his legs.

Bumblebee winced as the other Autobots rushed to the fallen robot’s side.

“Sorry!” Cade called.

“Okay, Charlie girl, calm down,” Charlie stood pacing in front of the visitation center, wanting the shade the building offered to cool her blushing skin.

She was blushing…blushing! Over Bumblebee!

“He’s my friend, my best friend, I get that. But he’s also not human! So…” She trailed off, trying to wrap her mind around her sudden confession. Her sudden feelings.

“Maybe I’m just a bit confused? It is an apocalypse, I just don’t have a lot of romantic options so I projected those feelings onto my friend—” She couldn’t even finish that excuse. She had Memo, Lennox, and Epps, all very sweet and attractive and had been nothing but good to her. But her heart didn’t beat like this when she looked at any of them.

Perhaps she was confused because of everything she had been through with Bumblebee. She recalled how she felt about him when they first met… She had been terrified of him—sure he wasn’t that much different than the Decepticons, even if he didn’t harm her.

But then he brought my dad’s picture to me.

Said picture was with her mother now, resting in the shed the family slept in. Her mother had been so shocked and…touched, after she had told her what Bumblebee had done for them.

He did that for me…and he danced with me… Every time that memory resurfaced she could feel the warmth of Bumblebee as she nuzzled into him on that sandy beach.

…and he protected me… She’d never forget the fear she had felt when Bumblebee had fallen off that bridge, nearly ripped to pieces to protect her and the others. She had held his head between her
hands and hadn’t known what to do if he died, a life without Bumblebee had—at that point—become impossible.

I really have fallen in love with him...

Charlie dropped to her knees in defeat, her chest tightening. “I’m a human…” And he wasn’t. He was an Autobot who had a whole destiny before him, after they defeated the Decepticons—she knew they would, somehow—he’d have to leave, to return to his home and live his life. She was only one small, short chapter of it...

He’d never accept how I feel…it would ruin our friendship, he might even be disgusted by me. Tears suddenly welled up in her eyes and she viciously rubbed them away. Only you, Charlie. You stupid, stupid girl.

The dim shade the center offered suddenly grew darker, a new shadow hung over her.

Back already. She quickly tried to erase any signs of her tears. Leave it to Bee to walk as silent as a wraith when I don’t want him to see me.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” she hurriedly assure. “I just need a quick moment then we can go.”

“Well, do hurry up. I’m pretty sure I’m on a deadline.”

Ice shot down Charlie’s spine. That wasn’t the voice of an Autobot. Slowly she turned to look over her shoulder, and was met with red eyes.

A jet, a Decepticon, one she had never seen before, was crouched before her. The visitation center just hid him from the gazes of the Autobots downhill.

“Ah, ah, ah!” The Con slammed his hand down on Charlie before she could bolt—her chest pressed hard against the grass, his palm putting pressure on her back.

“Please don’t run,” he sighed. “I’m tired. I know you and Starscream think that teleporting is as easy as lifting a servor but it’s really not.”

Teleporting? No wonder she hadn’t heard him arrive, and no wonder the Autobots hadn’t seen him. A teleporting Decepticon was just what they needed.

And this one kept talking: “I have been following Prime and his minions for what feels like solar cycles—I still have no idea what they’re doing. Looking for a base, I guess? But they didn’t have you with them, I was looking all over for you. I assumed you would be with B-127, and I also assumed he’d be with his beloved leader. But no, neither of you were and it was very annoying. I was about to give up, about to go back to Starscream empty-handed and pray to Primus he wouldn’t rip my spark out.”

He leaned over her, his eyes a few inches away from her face, red light glowing on her skin. “But then you just…showed up. Even better, you left B-127 and isolated yourself. I’m very thankful, by the way.”

Charlie swallowed the lump of terror in her throat, it didn’t budge.

“What do—what do you want from me?”

He blinked, as if he hadn’t expected her to talk. “I want nothing to do with you disgusting little flesh bags. Starscream wants you, and he’s the boss.”
“Why does he want me?” She wondered…if she screamed for help, would he snap her spine? Should she risk it? The Autobots were so close… But could he teleport faster than they could run?

The Con rolled his eyes, “Don’t play dumb, you have the AllSpark inside you.”

“The what?” Charlie tried to exude confusion while inside her heart had stopped. The Decepticons knew—and they wouldn’t hesitate to tear her open if they thought it would be in their best interests.

“The AllSpark,” he frowned down at her, but after a moment of Charlie giving him her most befuddled look, he suddenly looked less unsure. “You know what it is—it’s inside you.”

“I-I think you have the wrong human,” Charlie swallowed.

The Decepticon straightened up, looking away with a thoughtful expression, his hand still pinning her down. “You are. You’re B-127’s pet.”

“B-who?” she tried. Please be stupid, please be stupid! “I think you have the wrong human, there’s a lot of girls with brown hair and eyes so…”

For a slither of a second the Con looked genuinely distressed, but then he shook his head, his eyes hardening with irritation and determination. “Don’t try to trick me! If Starscream wants you, Starscream will have you!”

“Get your hands off her!”

A red shape slammed into the Decepticon, sending him rolling down the hill and Charlie gasping on the grass.

She sat up, shaky, as Bumblebee and Cade appeared beside her. “You okay, kid?” Cade asked while Bumblebee examined her.

“I-I’m fine.” Charlie’s eyes stayed on the fight. It had been Ironhide of all bots who had saved her and was now grappling with the jet. “Who is that?”

“Skywarp,” came the deep voice of Optimus. Charlie looked up to see the other Autobots arrive. Arcee hurrying after Ironhide and Skywarp to assist her friend.

Wheeljack knelt down next to Bumblebee, the two Autobots looking at her with concern in their eyes, but Charlie was looking up at Optimus. “They know about the AllSpark.”

Optimus’s eyes widened, Ratchet muttered something that sounded like a curse, and Wheel and Bumblebee exchanged a look.

A furious yell brought everyone’s attention back to the fight where Skywarp had slipped out of Ironhide and Arcee’s grip and hovered several feet into the sky, scowling.

“We know you have the AllSpark, Autobots!” he snarls. “And the Decepticons are going to take it from you!”

Ironhide shot into the sky but just before it hit Skywarp vanished, having teleported.

“Come back here,” Optimus called to the two after a few moments of silence. “He’s gone.”

“He’ll be back though,” Ratchet growled, still looking around the sky as if he expected Skywarp to return. “And he’ll bring an army.”
“Don’t worry, Ratchet.” Ironhide headed up the hill, holding his arm. “It’s just a Decepticon army, we can handle that.” His words got a small smile from both Arcee and Wheeljack.

Charlie stood up and took a closer look at the arm the red Autobot cradled. There were three long scratches in his arm that were oozing blue.

“Ironhide, let me fix your arm,” Charlie said, only remembering what Ironhide thought of her when he turned his blues eyes to glare down at her.

“Ratchet can do it just fine,” he replied stonily.

“Probably.” Ratchet agreed. “But I won’t. Now’s the perfect time for us to see the AllSpark’s power in action.”

Wheeljack’s eyes lit up and he leaned even closer to Charlie, making her jump back. “Yes, yes, I want to see as well!”

Feeling uncomfortable Charlie looked back up at Ironhide who looked even more irritated. But he finally let out a sigh and knelt down, offering his wounded arm to Charlie.

She moved to step forward but then Cade threw his arm into the air, having been uncharacteristically quiet during the conversation. “Hey, sorry. I kinda went into a state of shock for a minute there cause like—that one bad robot. You called him Skywarp? He just teleported and like, that was the coolest thing I’ve ever seen and I’m really hoping one of you can do that. But also, what’s the AllSpark? What’s Charlie’s going to do to Big Red’s arm?”

“My name,” Ironhide growled. “Is not Big Red.”

_He knew Cade for exactly sixty seconds and he’s already fed up. How did Cade do that?_

“Just watch,” she told him before stepping forward and placing her hands over the scratches of Ironhide’s arm.

She let out a breath, pushing her thoughts of healing the robot forward. Almost immediately the familiar blue light lit up her hands, shining against the red metal. She watched as the blue liquid was sucked into the wound, the metal knitting together before closing completely.

“There,” she breathed, stepping away. She was starting to notice an ache in her arms when she used the healing power. She looked up at Ironhide, “Do you feel better?”

Ironhide looked away, “I’m fine…thank you.”

"And thank you," she replied. "For saving me from Skywarp."

The only response was a small grunt.

She smiled softly before looking over to the other Autobots. They all looked at her with a new shine in their eyes, something almost like awe. It flattered Charlie, but it also made her feel a new sense of pressure.

But then Ratchet spoke up, “Is he okay?”

He pointed to Cade, who was staring at Charlie with a loose jaw.

“Cade, you okay?” she asked.
“You-you did-you-” he pointed a shaky finger at her, his legs wobbly. “Blue-super powers-what-”

“Easy, easy,” Ratchet, who was the closest, leaned toward him. “No need to bust a circuit.”

“I have never busted a circuit,” Cade replied, still staring at Charlie. “Now catch me.”

Ratchet didn’t move and let the human crumple to the ground.

The group headed back toward the Sanctuary. It was clear they had run out of time, the Decepticons would be here soon, and they needed to prepare for it.

But despite this Wheeljack didn’t carry the weight of his allies. He was holding a passed out Cade, Charlie sitting next to him as the Autobot talked animatedly to her. He had almost been as impressed as Cade by her healing properties, almost.

Bumblebee watched the two in front of him, trying not to let it bother him that she didn’t want him to carry her. She had said she was worried about Cade, and Wheeljack hadn’t been subtle about wanting to talk about her abilities.

But it still hurt when she wasn’t at his side.

He was so focused on Charlie he hadn’t noticed Optimus move to walk by his side.

“You shouldn’t have run away last night,” Prime told him. His voice not angry, but Bumblebee still buried his head between his shoulders.

“I know you were upset,” the leader continued. “But I also need you to know we were not going to harm Charlie.”

Bumblebee only nodded.

"I agree that the AllSpark is too much of a responsibility for her to have," he went on. "But we will not do what Ironhide suggested to get it out of her. And I must ask you not to hold judgement over him. He willingly carries the burdens of a leader on his shoulders, and grieves for our losses in his own way." 

Bumblebee wouldn't have argued with that if he could talk.

"But right now, we can not look for a way to remove the AllSpark. I imagine the Decepticons will be coming back soon, we must prepare to protect Charlie, the humans, and ourselves. And we will need to fight as a team that can trust each other."

Bumblebee squared his shoulders. He agreed with Optimus, and when Starscream showed himself- Bumblebee would make his leader proud.
“Ron? Do you have a minute?”

Charlie stood next to her step-father as they watched Wheeljack and Ratchet work. With the risk of the Cons finding them any day now, Prime decided that their first priority was keeping Charlie and the other humans safe.

Wheeljack had come up with the idea of hollowing out a space in the island, a place for the humans to hide out and cover the opening with debris.

Meanwhile Cade was having a blast with his new ‘best friends’, Epps and Lennox. The two soldiers cleaning their weapons while Cade sat cross-legged between them, messing with a pile of miscellaneous items that he had brought along with him. When Charlie had asked what he was doing he had replied that he was making a bomb to fight the Cons. Charlie left before the temptation to ask if he was serious was too great.

But now she stood next to Ron, not sure if her next question was appropriate while they were getting ready for an attack. However Charlie wanted to believe that if she got this sorted, the rest of the apocalypse would be easier to bare.

“Yeah, Charlie?” he asked, keeping his eyes on the Autobots as they shoved dirt and crumpled cement to the side.

“Could I…” she swallowed awkwardly. “I need some advice.”

Ron’s head snapped around so suddenly she thought he had broken his neck. He was looking at her with wide eyes and a hopeful smile, “You want my advice?”

“Well, yeah…I feel more-comfortable asking you then Mom. At least for this topic.” She didn’t want to risk Sally putting two and two together.

“O-oh,” Ron mumbled, looking as if on the verge of tears. “Of course. Let’s just-let’s just sit down and you can tell me what’s bothering you.”

Making herself comfortable on the dusty cement, Charlie began hesitantly. “Have you ever…liked someone romantically but…wasn’t sure you should?”

Ron frowned thoughtfully, his expression making it very obvious he was taking this very seriously. “Well, why can’t you like this person? Do you think Sally and I wouldn’t approve? Is it because of the whole end-of-the-world conundrum? Cause I promise we’d love whoever you love-parental love I mean-and now is the best time to confess to whoever you’re in love with. As long as it’s appropriate.”

Charlie’s heart twisted. She knew Ron most likely meant something like age, or if there was mutual respect. But did inappropriate describe how she felt about Bumblebee? Would the Autobot himself think that?

“It’s more like-” Charlie went on. “I’m scared he won’t…like that I like him, and it’ll ruin our friendship.”

“Ah, so that’s it,” Ron nodded, as if he understood everything. He held his chin between his thumb and finger and stared at the ground, lost in thought. Charlie stayed quiet, letting him mule over his
next words, until finally he nodded, as if he had made a decision.

He turned back to Charlie and clapped his hand onto her shoulder. “You should tell him. I can tell he likes you too.”

Charlie’s brow furrowed, “Tell who?” There was no way he figured out who she was in love with (not unless she was painfully obvious).

“Well, I’m not sure which one you like, but I know the boys are all fond of you. Which they should! You’re a sweet girl, Charlie, smart and pretty too.”

Charlie’s eyes widened, “Uh-thanks, Ron but what boys.”

He smirked as if they were sharing an inside joke. “Lennox, Epps, and Memo of course. I don’t know which one has caught your fancy, but me and your mother would approve whoever you choose. All three are fine young men and you have good taste.”

Charlie’s jaw dropped. He thought he liked one of them? Well, she did they were her friends but not she didn’t like them! “Ron, that’s not-”

“Unless you like Cade,” Ron continued. “I mean, nothing against the man but you’ve just meant him and he’s a little…” Ron shrugged, sucking his teeth and Charlie covered her face with both hands.

“God, no. Ron. It’s-nevermind. Thank you.” She stood up and dusted off her jeans. “I really appreciate your advice, I’ll keep it in mind.” She glanced down at him, “But can this be a secret between just us?”

“Of course!” Ron insisted, looking ecstatic that Charlie trusted him with a secret.

*If he keeps quiet...I guess I can let him believe that until I decide what to do. The first thing being is telling the guys to ignore Ron in case he can’t keep quiet.*

Bumblebee sat next to Lennox, Epps, Cade, and even Memo while the Autobots kept watch. Wheeljack and Arcee were on the other side of the island, with Optimus, Ratchet, and Ironhide on the other side of the water with Burns. Together the crew were determined to keep the Cons from coming anywhere near Charlie and the other humans.

Speaking of Charlie…

Bumblebee looked behind him, uphill to where the rest of the survivors were. He hadn’t seen her all day. Was she avoiding him?

He recalled how she had acted at the Headlands, she had pushed away from him as if he was diseased. Had he done something wrong?

He turned back to the four beside him, tuning in to their conversation.

Cade, naturally, was speaking: “I know you guys are all ‘military trained’ but the apocalypse happened before you two could really get battle experience.”
Lennox and Epps exchanged a look that was a mixture of humor and annoyance. “And you have more battle experience?” Epps asked, leaning back on his hands.

“I’ve had *years* to prepare for something almost specifically this—” he threw his arm out to Bumblebee, indicating him and the rest of the Cybertrons. “And I’ve been doing *awesome* by myself. Also I just made a shit ton of home made bombs so like, take that as you will.”

“Oh, I will,” Lennox said drolly.

Cade rolled his eyes and knocked his shoulder against Memo, his larger frame nearly knocking down the smaller boy. “Don’t worry Memo, these two will be singing a different tune when we blow up a couple of robots with those bombs.”

The younger boy’s eyes widened and he let out a laugh similar to when he found out Bumblebee was a friend. “Thanks for the offer, Cade. But I think I’d be more use watching out for Sam and helping with the other kids.”

A nurturer,” Cade nodded, “That’s good. That’s respectful. I’m happy for ya.” He emphasized his words by running his hand have Memo’s curls, reminding Bumblebee of how older bots would treat him back in the Academy days.

He caught Lennox looking to Epps and mouthing the words: “Who *talks* like that?”

He hummed a laugh before a familiar voice reached his audio receptors and caused his spark to twist.

“Guys! Hey, guys!” Charlie was bounding over to the group, her mildly worried expression focused solely on the Cade and the others.

“Hey! Chancy!” Cade cheered when the girl skidded to a halt in front of them.

“Don’t call me that, Cade,” Charlie wheezed, taking in a breath. Bumblebee leaned forward but her optics stayed on the humans.

*Why won’t you look at me?*

“Look, I just wanted to tell you guys that whatever Ron may or may not say to you in the near future…don’t believe him.”

With the exception of Cade the boys exchanged a confused look. “Who’s Ron?” the former asked.

The group gave him a look that as so close to disgust Bumblebee almost laughed again. “Rob,” Charlie finally said and recognition lit up the man’s eyes.

“What-what is Ron going to say to us?” Memo asked.

“That’s not important,” Charlie replied and the red returned to her cheeks. “The important thing is that *whatever* he says involving me-don’t listen.” With a settled nod she finally looked up to Bumblebee whose spark jumped at the sudden optic contact.

“You guys stay safe while keeping guard, okay,” she spoke to them all but kept her gaze on Bee. “Let me know if you need anything.” She turned abruptly and hurried back up the hill. Leaving the group of guys befuddled.

“I like her,” Lennox spoke up suddenly. “But she’s a weird chick.”
“You’d be weird too if you had an ancient alien artifact in your chest,” Epps pointed out.

“So are none of us are worried about what Ron may or may not tell us?” Memo asked, looking around.

“Well, honestly, how bad of the news can it be?” Cade asked. “We’re living in a post apocalypse and are on the look out for giant killer robots.”

“Bee, you okay?” Lennox’s concerned voice made Bumblebee turn his head. He had been looking out toward where Charlie had disappeared and there’s no telling what his face showed them. Ironhide had often committed he couldn’t not hide his emotions.

But before Bumblebee could assure him Cade spoke up, “Ah, he’s just upset cause his girlfriend is giving him the silent treatment.”

His words were met with zero replies, Lennox, Epps, and Memo looking at him as if he had just announced he was an Autobot in disguise. Bumblebee tried to read their expressions to figure out what Cade had just said. *What’s a girlfriend?* He knew ‘girl’ was another word for a female and Charlie was his friend but…putting the two words together like that clearly meant something serious.

Cade had been idly biting his nail when he finally noticed the stares he was receiving. “What?”

Lennox moved to speak, “Why are you so-”

Suddenly Epps leaned forward, grabbing his fellow soldier’s arm and hissing at him, “Shut up, I’m bored. Why do you say that, Cade? Like, what’s your thought process?”

Cade gazed at the three, then up to Bee as if they were pulling his leg. “Is it-was it not obvious? Was it not like-common knowledge?”

“I think you’re looking at their friendship too…deeply,” Lennox replied.

“Pfft! Too deeply, okay. Can you believe these guys, Memo?” Cade jerked a thumb at the two soldiers.

Memo looked around the group before sighing, “I just wanted to help keep watch…”

Bumblebee buzzed in confusion which brought everyone’s attention back to him. “Ah!” Cade exclaimed, jumping to his feet. “Poor guy you probably don’t even know what a girlfriend is. Charlie has the hots for you.”

“How? Fine! She’s *in love.* Is that the classy, mature way of saying it?”

They continued talking but Bumblebee’s audio receptors seemed to stop working. His thoughts running over what Cade had just said.

Charlie in love with him?

…*No, no. That’s not possible. They weren’t the same species. Besides, he glanced down at his friends, Lennox, Epps, Memo…maybe not Cade, they’re better fits for her anyway.*

Did that upset him? He recalled how he felt when Wheeljack told him about checking over her wound. He had been…less than thrilled. But that, and any similar feelings he had when Charlie
spent time with others, was just because she was a dear friend and he didn’t look forward to the day they’d have to move on from their lives and separate. He didn’t like that thought at all… But once they got rid of the Decepticons, the humans would no doubt rebuilt their world, Charlie would find someone-someone human. And as for Bumblebee, he’d either go with the Autobots if they left or stay behind and watch Charlie move on.

And I’ll be happy for her. Sad but happy, she deserves it… And she’s not in love with me, Cade’s wrong. Which is fine, I care about her, but I’m not in love either. So everything just fine.

Bumblebee nodded as if his inner thoughts had solved anything, ignoring the tingly of doubt that clung to his spark.

Starscream was just about to go and patrol the base when Skywarp popped in front of him so suddenly both Cons jumped back in shock.

“What are you-” Starscream began then let out a hiss, “Skywarp, it’s just you.”

“Screamer, don’t do that!” Skywarp yelled, clutching his chest. “You scared the bolts off of me!”

“It is Lord Starscream for the thousandth time,” the leader snarled. “And you should have a better control on where you teleport.” He looked to the jet’s hands and glowered.

“Wh-what?” Skywarp stammered, catching his look.

“Those are pretty empty hands considering they were suppose to carry either the head of an Autobot or the human with the AllSpark.”

“Ah…yes,” Skywarp began. “About that… So, the good news is I did find her! I think I even found her hideout! The bad news is I can’t fight a whole group of Autobots by myself.”

Before Starscream could reply a new voice spoke up: “That’s why you are bringing allies next time.”

Starscream whirled around to see Shockwave marching into the room. Looking at the glimmer in his red eye Starscream felt a pit in his chest, his plans falling away.

“If you can relocate the AllSpark girl’s hideout,” Shockwave continued, “Then I, Dropkick, even Lord Starscream, we can all handle the rest.”

Skywarp looked to Starscream with a torn expression, he knew this was going against his leader’s plan but he also knew now was the time to keep his mouth shut.

Starscream stepped foward, “Now, Shockwave, it’s unlike you to be so hasty. We can’t just blindly attack the Autobots, especially not with Optimus leading them.”

“Careful, Lord Starscream,” Shockwave’s voice carried a new tone, one that was heavy with threat. “Keep not wanting to fetch the AllSpark, and someone might think you don’t want to revive Megatron to his former glory.”

Starscream narrowed his optics. Shockwave could care less who was leading the Decepticons, all
he wanted was the girl. He probably already had a thousands planned experiments in his head, just for her.

And if Shockwave didn’t get what he wanted, he’d find a way to back Starscream into a corner, he’d have the Decepticons turning on him. The leader who didn’t want to rule under the ‘mighty arm’ of Lord Megatron.

“Don’t be a fool,” Starscream smiled sweetly. “Reviving our former leader is all I want.”
Charlie stood next to Cade. The skeleton of the Alcatraz prison gave them a patch of the roof to stand on and keep watch. Something only Charlie was doing at the moment.

Earlier that day the Autobots had spotted smoke in the distance, Prime had wanted to investigate it, assuming it was Cons, hoping it was an Autobot who had heard their distress signal. It had been several days since Skywarp’s threat and this was the first time they had seen anything even remotely Decepticon.

Despite the reluctance to leave the Sanctuary Ratchet convinced Prime that only the two would go and investigate. It made Charlie a little nervous but they still had four Autobots.

At least until Burns went over to the Bots and announced that Reggie’s leg injury had become infected, and if they didn’t find the necessary supplies, Sally couldn’t save it. There was also the fact that their food supply was dangerously low.

The four had spent a few minutes talking about the best course of action. With Prime investigating what may or not be Cons, and bringing in the fact Skywarp only knew that their base was near the Headlands, they decided Ironhide and Wheeljack would accompany the soldiers, leaving Bumblebee and Arcee to look after the island.

“If you see anything suspicious keep yourselves and the humans hidden,” Ironhide ordered the two smaller robots. “We won’t be long.”

“Don’t worry, Ironhide,” Arcee smirked at him. “We can both put up a fair fight.”

Now Charlie stood watch, Bumblebee and Arcee on the other side of the water, pacing near the deck. Once in a while Arcee leaned forward and told him something. Charlie wondered if they could fill the tension in the air.

She looked up at the gray sky, there was a very faint breeze but other than that, the world was quiet. Too quiet. Even the survivors on the island were indoors, either tending to Reggie or rationing the food supplies.


The young man was sitting by her feet, examining the small handgun Lennox had gifted to him. “That bad feeling is called having common sense, Charles.”

She frowned down at him, “You think something bad is going to happen?”

“More I assume since humanity has kind of run out of luck since our planet got taken over by alien robots. And now that there’s only you, me, Bumbles, and the pretty robot protecting the island-I imagine today is the day the Cons finally show their faces.”

Charlie swallowed. That would be just their luck, she knew Bumblebee was a skilled fighter but still…the memory of him fighting those three robots on the bridge and nearly dying…that filled her with a sense of anxiety. She tried to take comfort in the fact he had friends like Arcee to help him fight, and she also hoped that the Cons wouldn’t come in large numbers.
I guess it depends how much they want me… Charlie shuddered, she still couldn’t wrap her mind around the fact the Decepticons specifically wanted her.

“But don’t worry, kiddo,” Cade assured, having caught her shiver. He jumped to his feet and lightly patted the duffel bag that was by his side. “I have plenty of homemade bombs to blow those Terminator wannabes sky high.”

“Homemade bombs, huh?” Charlie echoed, glancing at the bag. She took a step away. “Great.”

Bumblebee stood next to Arcee, his circuits tensed, wishing Ironhide or Prime would return. He felt so exposed with only himself and Arcee watching over Charlie and the others.

Not that he didn’t trust his friend’s fighting skill. But he knew that once the Decepticons arrived, their would be many.

Why haven’t they showed up yet… Skywarp had to have returned to wherever Starscream was hiding. They should have returned to take Charlie.

Try to take her, Bee thought with an inner growl.

“I hope they get back soon,” Arcee voiced his concerns. “I don’t like how quiet it is. It feels like we’re waiting on a ticking time bomb.” She looked over at Bumblebee with a frown then glanced toward the island. “Do you think we should swim back to be closer to the humans?”

Bumblebee liked the idea, especially since he could make out Charlie and Cade standing watch on the island. But if the Decepticons did arrive before the others returned he and Arcee would be forced to fight them with the humans right under their feet. He gave a small shake of his head, best to try and keep them away from the island and trust Charlie to get the humans into hiding.

Arcee sighed, her shoulders sagging, but nodded. “You know, we haven’t had a chance to really talk since we’ve arrived. I wanted to tell you that I’m proud of you, Bumblebee.”

His optics widened. What had he done that was so special?

“Despite the odds being against you you’ve really gone far,” Arcee explained. “Arriving on a foreign planet infested with Decepticons, you survived and protected the organics of this planet. And you even found the AllSpark and kept it close.” She smiled warmly, “Even Optimus Prime would have had difficulty doing that. You’ve come far from the bumbling Academy student I’ve meant all that time ago.”

Bumblebee felt warmth spread throughout his metallic skin, flattered his friend thought so highly of him, especially when he had spent so much time thinking so highly of her.

When she says it like that… I sound more impressive than I feel. Is that how Optimus and the others think of me? He looked toward the island. I hope I live up to how they all see me.
Optimus and Ratchet came to a halt.

The smoke trail they had followed came from a large, burning vehicle, the metal blackened. Ratchet narrowed his optics before he let out a grunt of disgust.

“There are organics in that vehicle.”

Optimus had already seen him, and his spark ached at the charred bodies inside the vehicle, innocent humans that had needed their help. He wondered if they had been alive before the fire had consumed them. Had they been long dead or had their been a chance to save them?

How many humans have died because they were waiting for the Decepticons to arrive at the Sanctuary?

Ratchet looked around the area, they were surrounded by the remains of taller buildings, it almost felt...like a cage.

The same thought came to the two Autobots and they exchanged a disturbed look.

“Do you think—”

“We need to get back to the Sanctuary.”

Optimus turned on his heel, ready to bolt back to the island, when he heard the sound of air splitting. Optimus pushed Ratchet out of the way just before a blast of energy hit the ground the two Autobots had been standing just moments before. They whirled around to see a familiar figure walking toward them with a confident gait.

“Is that—” Ratchet gasped.

*Soundwave!*

“It’s a trap! *Run!*”

Burns was shoving the medicine into the back pack, desperate to return to the Sanctuary before Reggie ran out of time.

But just as he was heading out of the island Ironhide’s hand was there, pushing him back inside.

“What is it?” Burns demanded.

Lennox and Epps, carrying their own bags of supplies, hurried over to him. “What’s wrong?” Epps asked.

Ironhide was leering over the small pharmacy, his eyes on the sky ahead of them. A few paces away was Wheeljack, standing stock still.
Burns was about to repeat his question when a noise hit his ears, making his stomach drop. *A jet!*

Two shapes shot through the sky, a jet and a helicopter. But even though they were in a clear line of sight the two Decepticons passed the Autobots, making a straight line for…

*“THE SANCTUARY!”* Ironhide let out a hiss of panic. “*We need to get back NOW!*”

Bumblebee had fought many different battles, they had required many different strategies, some had been won, some had been lost. But they had all started more or less the same way.

Suddenly.

One moment he was walking next to Arcee, keeping his optic out on the island, just able to make out Charlie’s figure keeping watch—and then a large shape barreled into him, knocking him to the gravel.

*Skywarp!*

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Autobot,” the jet snarled gleefully, pinning the smaller bot down.

“Get away from him!” Arcee screeched, bolting toward them. But before she reached her friend a red blur cut between them, blocking Bumblebee from Arcee’s sight.

“Where’s your great and mighty leader, Arcee?” the red femme bot said snidely.

*“Shatter!”* Arcee growled, lunging at her enemy.

Bumblebee’s face was buried into the gravel before he saw the two start to fight, but he could hear the grappling and firing of the two femme bots as he struggled under Skywarp’s greater weight.

But then a new, calmer voice, spoke up.

“Keep these two busy,” Starscream said smoothly, a dark threat oozing from his words. “I’ll get the girl.”

*CHARLIE!*

Before Skywarp had even slammed Bumblebee to the ground Charlie was racing back down to get to the survivors.

“Get underground!” she screeched, panic tightening her chest. “Everyone get underground *now!*”

The quiet atmosphere was replaced by cries of terror as people burst out of their shelters and headed for the inside of the building, down to the hideaway the Autobots had built for them.
Charlie looked through the crowd, trying to ignore the wide eyes that were filled with trauma. She spotted her mother and Ron trying to help Reggie into the building. But the man’s greater weight and injury made them go at an agonizingly slow pace.

“Cade!” Charlie turned to the man who had followed her down. “Go help Ron get Reggie to safety!”

“But I-”

“Just do it!” They didn’t have time to play heroes. They needed everyone to be safe first. “And tell my mom to hurry and get to the hide out. We need someone to do a head count!” She ran past the crowd, catching the sight of one of the children, Lucy, hugging the building with tears in her eyes as people ran past, too terrified to notice the child.

Charlie hurried to her side, “Where’s your mom?!” She picked Lucy up before she could answer, hurrying back to the building and rushing inside. To her relief she saw Lucy’s mother waiting at the entrance, her horrified expression melting into relief when she saw her daughter.

“Hurry and get to my mom,” Charlie ordered the woman, depositing Lucy into her arms.

They two had just vanished into safety when a voice in the crowd shrieked: “ONE’S COMING HERE! ONE’S COMING HERE!”

Charlie ran out to the building’s entrance to see a familiar jet hurrying toward the island. Behind him Charlie could see Bumblebee and Arcee in the throes of battle with Skywarp and another Decepticon she didn’t know.

Prime, get back here please, Charlie begged in her mind as fear made her blood turn cold. She glanced behind her, not everyone had gotten underground yet, and if the jet saw her go in after them…

“Charlie! What the hell are you doing!?” Cade called out from the back of the group, having come out after depositing Reggie.

“I have no idea!” Charlie screeched as she raced across the ground, away from the safety of the large building and the underground hide out, she weaved between the shacks and tents that had been set up on the island. She knew this was probably the dumbest thing she had ever done—but with a Decepticon so close the hide out the Autobots made suddenly didn’t seem so safe.

Besides, they want me, not them. She couldn’t risk her family and the survivors’ lives.

With a yelp she fell to her knees as the earth suddenly shook, announcing that the Decepticon had landed.

Charlie scrambled into the shade of the nearest shack as a voice reached her ears, the metallic accent of the jet-speaking perfect English: “I do not have time to play hide and seek with you, human.” The voice sounded weirdly familiar, and she realized it was the same Decepticon who had grabbed her after she had found the AllSpark, the first time she heard them speak English. That felt like it had happened years ago but unfortunately Charlie’s fear was still fresh and left her shivering as she hid.

Then she heard a new noise—a growling, and then the sound of something heavy landing on the ground. The Con spoke again, this time in Cybertronian and while Charlie didn’t know what he said, she knew it wasn’t anything good.
Charlie tried to swallow—couldn’t—and desperately looked around. She didn’t know if she should find a new place to hide or stay put, she didn’t even know what that growling was. Her eyes warily looked up at the sky, wondering if the growler could fly.

She nearly jumped out of her skin when the fighting from the mainland suddenly grew louder. She snapped her head around to see the familiar shapes of Ironhide and Wheeljack running toward Bumblebee and Arcee, up in the air above them flew two new Decepticons. There was a rumble and the jet that was searching for her was flying back to the others, no doubt to help his allies fight her friends.

*Please be safe,* she prayed silently, wishing Optimus and Ratchet would return. But Charlie was realizing this had been a trap, they had wanted as many Autobots away as possible before they came for her. Ironhide and Wheeljack were quick to return, but that still left them outnumbered.

The crackle of gravel brought Charlie back to the island and she looked around frantically, her breath catching when she saw the shadow of a feline shape on the other side of the shack. Trying to keep herself from shaking she quietly stood up and, with painfully silent steps, started to back away to the other side of the shack.

Whatever the creature was, it was still growling, and she could hear it’s slow purposeful footsteps. Charlie was starting to wish that jet had stayed to hunt for her instead.

But then—

“Charlie!”

She turned around, her face twisted in horror, as Cade ran into the clearing, his stupid bag flung over his shoulder.

A dark shape rushed out from the other side of the shack and Charlie had to cover her mouth to keep from crying out. The creature came to a stop before Cade who had gone stock still—looking more in disbelief then terrified.

This…creature, was like a panther, it had the body shape and and posture of a jungle cat, but it was also a robot and had the malicious eyes of a beast not of this world.

It snarled hungrily at Cade who still didn’t look as terrified as he should have been, more confused—even irritated. That did nothing to keep Charlie’s heart from pounding out of her ribcage.

“Charlie…” Cade spoke up, taking a step back.

At the mention of her name the cat sharply turned its head around to stare directly at Charlie and for just a second, she wanted to kill Cade.

“Did I take something or is there a giant robot cat in front of us?” Cade continued as if he didn’t notice how much danger his friend was in.

Charlie started to back away, the robot, just as slowly, started to stalk toward her. “Cade,” she hissed through her teeth, scared any sudden movement would make it lunge. “Please just shoot it.”

“Oh, right,” Cade pulled out the small hand gun and aimed it at the robot. Instantly it swung around with a roar and jumped at the man.

“Cade!” she shrieked, her heart jumping up into her throat.
The man was knocked down, the cat pinning him to the ground, but Cade managed to shove the gun into the robot’s open maw and pulled the trigger. The shot ringing and the cat shook its head with a disgusted snarl.

“Cade!” Charlie called out again, looking around the ground for a weapon.

“Stop saying my name and run!”

The cat, apparently understanding their words, jumped off Cade and snarled at her. That was enough for Charlie to turn on her heel and and bolted.

“I must say, you’ve gotten worse, B-127.”

Bumblebee glared up at Thundercracker before kicking the jet away, his circuits ached and his vision was fuzzy thanks to Skywarp’s tackling. But the Decepticons weren’t any closer to being beaten, his friends fighting by his side.

Optimus, where are you? Bumblebee wondered in a panic as he aimed a blast at Dropkick who had jumped onto Wheeljack’s back, trying to knock him down as he fought Skywarp.

Arcee was still grappling with Shatter, and Ironhide had put it upon himself to take down Starscream. Bumblebee had been relieved to not see Charlie in the Con’s grip. But he knew that Starscream wouldn’t just leave her, especially when there had been no Autobot to stop him. He needed to get to her.

Thundercracker lunged at him once again and the two bots fell to the ground, grappling as Bumblebee tried to pin the Con down. But in his current shape, not to mention how much bigger the jet was, Bumblebee was finding it impossible.

“Wait, Thundercracker,” Dropkick suddenly appeared next to them. Bumblebee glanced over to Wheeljack, he was still standing but Skywarp was clearly winning the fight.

“What?” Thundercracker snapped, keeping the bot pinned down.

“I want to be the one to blow his head off,” Dropkick explained, a demented excitement in his remaining optic. “Then I can what’s left of him to his little pet before we do the same to her.”

Oh no you won’t! Bumblebee forced himself to go limp, feigning defeat. The trick worked on Thundercracker who relaxed his grip, just a bit, but enough for Bumblebee to slip out of the Con’s grip. He fired a blast at Thundercracker, hitting his shoulder before driving off to put distance between him and Dropkick.

Thundercracker had fallen to his knees at the blast, cradling his shoulder while Dropkick rushed toward the Autobot.

“Don’t you run away from me coward, I’ll-”

Dropkick’s violent-thirsty gaze went past Bumblebee, to stare at something over his head with a look of fear. Something not common, but welcome.
A shadow fell over Bumblebee and he looked up—and could have sagged with relief—Optimus had returned.

The Autobot leader was covered in scratches, blue liquid dripping off his chest and arms, his optics burning with fury. Behind him stood Ratchet, who didn’t look any better than his leader but looked even more ready to crush Dropkick’s head.

The medic caught Bumblebee’s look, “Don’t get too excited. Shockwave and Soundwave are right behind us. We had to spar with them for a few kliks before we could get back to you.”

“Where are the humans?” Prime demanded as Dropkick wisely moved back to join his comrades ranks, with the exception of Thundercracker they had yet to notice Optimus’s arrival.

Bumblebee stood up to nod toward the water bank. Burns, Lennox, and Epps were using their jeep as cover as they shot bullets at Shatter who fought Arcee nearby. Anytime the femme bot turned to attack the soldiers, it gave Arcee the time to get the upper hand.

Optimus looked to the soldiers and then back to Bumblebee, “Is Charlie still on the island? You need to get there and keep her safe, we’re outnumbered and with Starscream, Shockwave, and Soundwave here…they don’t plan to leave empty-handed.”

_I’ll rip their sparks out if they get anywhere near her_, Bumblebee thought darkly before he turned, ready to get to his friend and keep her safe—at whatever the cost.

Charlie ducked through a window, falling to the cracked wooden floor of the shed, right before long claws filled the square space. The paws scratched frantically, leaving long grooves in the old wood as the cat tried to break through and get her.

“Stay away from me!” she shrieked, frantically kicking at the paws.

But then Cade’s voice spoke up, with a loud “Batter up!” there was a small moment of silent, and then the noise of an explosion and the cat let out a shrill shriek of pain. It pulled itself out of the window and Charlie stood up to see it gallop away.

Peering through the window she saw Cade standing a few feet away, a piece of pipe in his hand and a smug smirk as he watched the cat run off.

“Did you—did you use one of your bombs as a baseball?” she asked, incredulous.

“Yes,” he replied. “It hit that cat and boom! Left it literally smoking.”

“How did you know it wouldn’t explode once you hit it?!”

“I didn’t,” Cade said, sounding way too proud of himself considering he could have just blown his own face off. “Now can we please get to the hide out?”

“I can’t,” she began, “We need to keep—”

The jet returned, slamming into the ground and making Charlie and Cade’s legs shake. The Decepticon looked over his shoulder to the battle, his eyes narrowed and he almost seemed frantic.
But Charlie’s view of the mainland was blocked and instead she grabbed Cade’s arm and led him inside the shack.

“Doesn’t that guy ever give up?” Cade demanded under his breath as they hid in the dimness of the shack.

Charlie just shook her head and squeezed his arm, silently begging him not to say more. They could hear the Con’s massive footprints, followed by a growling-the cat.

“What happened to you?” the jet demanded, not sounding at all sympathetic for the wounded creature. “You let a couple of humans get the better of you? Soundwave will be ashamed.”

His only response was a less than pleased snarl.

The jet moved on, “Where is the girl? We need to take her now!”

Charlie and Cade held their breath as quiet follows, a quiet that didn’t last nearly long enough.

Cade pulled Charlie down as the shack was knocked aside, splintering into a million pieces that rained down on the two as they tried to cover their heads.

Charlie peeked through her hair and saw the jet looking down at them with an unreadable expression, but when his eyes met her’s-they were less than friendly.

The Con stretched his arm out, ready to grab her. But before Charlie could make her shaking legs move, a familiar yellow shape slammed into the jet-knocking him across the ground.

“Bumblebee!” she cried out in relief. But the Autobot didn’t even glance at her, already in a furious fight with the Decepticon as they shot and punched at each other, knocking miscellaneous crowd of shelters down.

“Move, move!” Cade nearly pulled Charlie’s arm out of its socket as he dragged her out of the way right before Bumblebee fell on the remains of the shack.

“We need to get to the hide out!” Cade yanked her to her feet, but before they could move the robotic cat jumped out of nowhere, snarling menacingly and swiping at them. The two broke apart but not before the claws sliced through Charlie’s shirt, breaking her skin.

She let out a cry of pain as she stumbled to her knees, clutching the wound. That’s gonna take a while to heal.

The cat, now looking much more gleeful with blood on its claws, stalked toward her. If it had had a tongue, Charlie imagined it licking its chops.

“Hey, pussy-cat!” Cade’s voice suddenly yelled, accompanied by a small ding as a tiny round object hit the cat’s leg and rolled to the ground by its paw.

Charlie and the cat looked to Cade whose arm was still stretched out from the throw, his frown disappointed. “Huh, I guess that was didn’t.”

Boom!

To Charlie’s fortune, the explosion was small, but still managed to set the cat ablaze. The creature shrieked and jumped back, clawing at the dying flames.

Charlie glared at Cade, “You didn’t know that wouldn’t kill me you psychopath!”
“Insult me later, let’s run!” Cade ordered, rushing over and once again pulling Charlie to her feet.

Together the two booked it. Putting distance between them and the burning cat wasn’t difficult, but Bumblebee’s battle was determined to destroy what was left of the Sanctuary. They had nearly gotten crushed twice before Charlie realized where Cade was taking her.

Right before they ran into the old building to reach the hide out, Charlie snatched her hand away from Cade and hid in the shadow of the building. “I can’t go in there with the others!”

Cade scowled at her, “That’s the whole point of building it!”

“What if one of the Cons find it? I can’t let you and my family and friends get killed because they’re looking for me!”

“If the Autobots can take the risk, so can we!”

Starscream slammed Bumblebee into the building, sending bricks showering down. Cade ducked into the building to avoid the debris, Charlie turned around just as Starscream reached for her.

Bumblebee pushed through the pain and grabbed Starscream’s arm right before he grabbed Charlie. Using his shoulder he pushed the Con leader away from his friend, once again sending them rolling across the ground (if he never rolled on the ground with a Con again, it would be too soon). But as Starscream forced them to a stop Bumblebee wasn’t done, rage still blistering through his body. How dare he had tried to touch his friend. He sent a blast right at Starscream’s chest, slicing across the metal and sending him several feet back, right to the edge of the water. Bracing himself to have water in his circuits, the Autobot slammed into Starscream, sending them both into the water.

Through the murky depths Bumblebee and Starscream struggled, the Con slicing his claws against Bumblebee’s face. Bumblebee returned the favor with his fists, pressing the con’s face into the sandy ground. But Bumblebee, being so focused on crushing Starscream’s head, didn’t catch the con lifting his arm until a burning pain hit his side.

The Autobot broke away from his enemy who immediately up and out of the water.

He tried to follow, but a spot of blue caught the corner of his optic. The shot from Starscream leaving an energon-leaking wound on his side. Covering the wound Bumblebee tried to collect his strength and swim upward, but the wariness of the fighting was starting to weigh down on his limbs.

*I have to get back up there,* he told his sluggish body. *I don’t care what happens to me, I need to protect Charlie.*

Staring up at the surface, Bumblebee’s optics widened when he saw a splash, and then a small figure swimming down to him.

*Charlie… A strange sense of relief fell over him when he recognized her and her optics lit up when she saw him.*
Bumblebee reached his hand out to her, catching her and pulling her close to him. Charlie held out her arms and held Bumblebee’s face in her palms and placed her forehead against his own. Instantly warmth embraced him and his pains vanished, the wound on his side knitting itself back together.

They held each other close for a moment longer than needed before Bumblebee pulled away, still holding Charlie he swam up to the surface. She let out a large gasp of air once they broke the surface.

“I never told you,” she said after a few moments of breathing. “I’m sort of a diving champion.”

_I have no idea what you’re saying, I’m just glad you’re okay_, Bumblebee thought happily, keeping his hand on her back to keep her afloat.

A sudden scream made them look toward the mainland. Starscream had joined Shockwave in fighting Optimus, seeing the Autobot struggle made Bee’s spark panic.

“We don’t have time to swim back to the island,” Charlie said. “Just take me to the mainland I’ll hide!”

Bumblebee hesitated, but Shockwave slammed a blow into Prime, nearly sending the bot to his knees and the scout knew he needed to help his leader now.

Making it to the mainland, Bumblebee left Charlie under the care of Burns and the other soldiers and raced to Optimus’s side, shooting rapid-fire at Shockwave who was startled by the attack.

“Don’t you ever _quit_?!” Starscream hissed in fury, his body still damp from the water as he dodged Bumblebee’s fire.

The yellow bot pressed his back against Optimus, helping keep Shockwave and Starscream at bay.

“We need to turn the tide in this fight,” Optimus said, despite the uneven fight his voice was still strong and commanding. “Is Charlie safe?”

_I hope so_, Bumblebee thought warily, glancing toward the jeep where the soldiers were. He didn’t see Charlie, she was keeping herself hidden. Looking around the battlefield he saw Arcee and Ironhide were fighting Shatter and Dropkick, Ratchet and Wheeljack battling Skywarp and Soundwave.

Where’s Thundercracker!?

Bumblebee tried not to panic at the lack of the Seeker, maybe he had been beaten while Bumblebee was fighting in the Sanctuary. Maybe he had retreated, as unlikely as Bumblebee believed that.

He risked the moment to glance toward the island, but before he could get a good look Starscream was in front of him, snarling and smacking the Autobot with a force that sent him several feet away.

_I think he’s upset with me_, Bumblebee thought, half-joking. Thanks to Charlie healing him, he had a much easier time returning to his feet. But Starscream’s optics weren’t on him anymore, they were on the jeep that was several feet away. Bumblebee could just make out a flash of brown hair.

Burns had noticed Starscream’s glare and pushed Charlie behind him, his gun aimed at the jet. Starscream moved to lunge at the humans, Bumblebee tried to rush him but Optimus was quicker,
grabbing him from behind.

“Charlie, run!” Optimus called before Starscream slammed his head into Prime’s face plate. It stunned the Autobot long enough for him to escape his grip and deliver a kick, knocking the heavily wounded Prime to his knees.

“Optimus!” Charlie cried out, trying to rush past Burns who grabbed her arm, stopping her.

Bumblebee turned to look at her, trying to figure out if he should get Charlie away or help Optimus face Starscream. He took an uncertain step forward-

-a sudden pain hit him. Bumblebee blinked, his mind much more sluggish than what it was a few kliks ago. His optics went back to Charlie, and it took him a moment to register the horror that was on her face as she and soldiers stared at him.

Following their gazes he looked down-and saw a blade piercing through his chest.

*Oh...*

Shockwave pulled the blade out through the Autobot’s back, and the lack of support brought Bumblebee to his knees.

*Was that...my spark...* His mind was fuzzy as he tried to figure out the damage. The hole in his chest leaked energon and he had the sense his spark was...flickering...

He once again looked up at Charlie, who was struggling out of Burns’ grip. She broke free and was bolting toward Bumblebee, tears streaking down her face, her hand outstretched to him.

*Oh, so that’s it...*he realized, lifting a shaky hand out to meet her. His vision was starting to fade, and every moment he had been on Earth was flashing through his mind. He thought of the first hug, the first dance, the smiles, the way Charlie’s optics seemed to sparkle when she looked at him...the way his spark danced when he looked at her.

Bumblebee’s body fell, his hand falling as Charlie ran to him. His vision was growing darker, and darker, and he had one more thought, one more realization: *So that’s it...I’m in love with her.*

Everything went black.

“**Bumblebee!”** Charlie screamed out, reached out to the Autobot as he fell to the ground. She just needed to get to him, she could heal him and he’d be just fi-

Fingers wrapped around her waist and she was lifted off the ground, away from her friend, as the jet flew up above the ground. “No, no, no, no, *nonono!*

“**Quiet!”** he snarled, tightening his grip on her waist. He called down to the fighting robots. **“Decepticons! It’s time to retreat!”**

A second later the one-eyed Con, the one who had stabbed Bumblebee, stood before a blueish portal. Through the tears in her eyes she saw the Cons retreat into the portal. The jet holding her flew down to follow and once again Charlie frantically tried to break out of his grip, looking down
at Bumblebee as the Autobots surrounded him.

“Put me down!” she screeched at the Con, “Put me down!”

Ironhide rushed after Charlie and the Con, but he wasn’t fast enough.

The last thing Charlie saw was Bumblebee’s motionless body before she entered the portal and the world went white.

Chapter End Notes

Not to pour salt on the wound but I’m going on a break from this fic to give my time to other projects.
Consider this a season 1 finale, season 2 will appear some time in the future.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Season 2 is here! And it opens with a downer, I'm sorry. But stick with it things (eventually) get better.

Cade had been trying to outmaneuver the robot cat when it finally got the upper hand on him. Knocking into the human it’s claws sliced through his bag strap, sending his bag of miniature bombs several feet away.

The breath was knocked out of Cade when he hit the ground, the cat’s much greater weight pinning him down. It’s claws dug into his arms and legs, easily breaking the skin.

Cade bit his tongue to keep from crying out in pain and quickly tasted blood.

Well, I had a good life, Cade thought to himself. Actually no I’m going to die by a metal cat when I could have died by a giant robot. This sucks. Why did I get the short end of this world-ending stick? I always thought I’d be a bigger piece of this robot war puzzle, like I’d truly help them fight, maybe even be…a knight! …Nah, that’s stupid.

Cade started, realizing fangs hadn’t ripped out his throat yet. Looking up he saw the cat still standing on top of him, claws wet with his blood, but its eyes on something else.

The man turned his head and his eyes widened when he saw what the cat was staring at. The survivors, at least some of them, storming toward Cade with makeshift weapons of bats and crowbars being waved madly around. Someone even threw an empty can at the cat’s head.

“Stay away from him!” yelled someone from the oncoming crowd.

“Get off our island!”

“We’ll turn you into car parts!”

The beast snarled, looking ready to attack its assailants. Cade wished his arms didn’t look like hamburger meat, otherwise he could really use that hand gun. But just as it looked ready to leap its body suddenly went tense, head shooting up and its red eyes moving to the mainland where the larger battle was still being fought.

Before the crowd could reach it the cat jumped away, running straight into the water and swimming back to the mainland.

Some of the crowd had stopped to stare in surprise at the fleeing cat while the rest rushed to Cade’s side to help him sit up and staunch his bleeding wounds.

“Well, that was anti-climatic,” Cade couldn’t help but point out.

“Anti-climatic?!” Ron, crouched by his shoulder, stared at him in disbelief. “You nearly got your limbs torn off.”
“Yeah…” Cade said simply.

“Doesn’t it hurt?”

“Oh, I’m pretty sure I’m dying.”

“Then how are you so-nevermind.” Ron took off his thin plaid jacket and wrapped it around one of his arms, the man on Cade’s opposite side did the same.

_Aw man, I’d feel bad for bleeding all over their clothes if you didn’t have such awful taste in fashion…_ Cade blinked, feeling dizzy. _Yeah the blood loss is getting to me I’m usually so much nicer._

A new, much younger voice spoke up, “I brought this bat for nothing.”

Cade, through dizzy vision saw Charlie’s kid brother appear from the crowd, brandishing a metal bat and disappointed expression.

“Otis!” Ron gasped, his eyes looking as if they’d fall out of his head. “I told you to stay with your mother!”

The young boy showed no guilt when he answered, “Mom’s busy keeping everyone calm, and if you and Charlie get to help the Autobots then so do I! Wheeljack is my friend!”

Ron’s defeated sigh left hot breath on Cade’s neck before he and the other survivors helped to carry Cade off to the side in the shade of a nearby shed. But Otis stayed put, glaring out to the mainland that had gone uncomfortably quiet. But it was all Cade could do to keep his eyes open, his vision going fuzzy.

He was watching his bleeding legs get wrapped up, Ron talking in his ear, trying to keep him conscious, when a scream split the air. Cade’s blood ran cold as he heard Otis shout, “That was Charlie!”

Cade barely had time to process the boy’s words before a shadow fell over Otis, adrenaline shot through Cade as he saw one of the Decepticons land, look around at the huddled, stone still humans…and snatched up Otis.

“No! No, _no_!” Cade jerks to his feet only to crash down onto his chest, pain lacerating through his limbs.

Ron and the rest of the group rushed to the edge of the island but it was pointless. The Decepticon, with Otis struggling in its grip, was already reaching the mainland where a blue circle had suddenly appeared. The Con and it’s friends vanished inside, leaving the Autobots surrounding a yellow shape that was sprawled on the ground.

“No, _no, no, NO_!”

The last time Charlie had felt this painful, hollow, pit in her chest, her dad had died. It had been the scariest thing she had ever felt, giant robots attacking her town included, and she would do
anything to not have to feel that again.

So she pushed Bu-she pushed what had happened, to the back of her mind and focused on her rage and her need to escape as the jet flew through the portal. It was a split second, a world of blue and static that danced through her hair, and then she was suddenly hovering over a vast desert, heat burning into her skin.

“Let go of me!” she screeched, thrashing wildly as the jet held her in his firm grip.

His red eyes were down at the portal as the rest of the Decepticons filed through, it vanished as a jet that looked similar to her captor flew to the ground, clutching his fist to his chest. Charlie took a dark moment of glee to see how worn and torn the Cons looked, Optimus and the others definitely put up a fight. Especially Bum-

Don’t think about that don’t think about that.

“Why’d you make us run, Starscream!?” that blue bastard yelled up at the jet. Charlie resisted a smirk to see he still only had one eye. “We had them!”

“We have what we needed,” Starscream growled, holding her out for the crimson eyes to stare hungrily at her. Charlie fought a shudder, feeling naked.

One of the cons stepped forward, his one red eye looking up at Starscream and Charlie fought back the tightness in his throat. That was the robot who-Charlie shook her head and turned her head to glare up at the jet-at Starscream.

“I’d let me go if I were you!” she snarled, making sure her voice was loud enough for all of them to hear. “Once Optimus gets here he’ll rip your guts out!”

There were several dark chuckles from below her feet, she heard one speak-the jet that had tried to grab her at Cade’s old home. “Not if he doesn’t have a space bridge!”

Space bridge? Charlie looked around, an almost overwhelming sense of loss washing over her. Where the hell did they take her?

“Bring her to me, Starscream,” the bulky one eyed Con ordered. “I want to see her up close and personal.”

“One moment, Shockwave.” Starscream replied coolly.

Shockwave, the name felt like bile against her ears but Charlie knew she would remember it.

But thoughts of the Con that did…that, left her mind when the grip around her waist suddenly got uncomfortably tight. She looked up to Starscream to realize he had brought his hand closer to his face, the glare of his eyes, casting a scarlet glow across her skin. Charlie tried to repress the shiver that went up her back and pulled a scowl onto her face. She opened her mouth, planning every insult in mind, but then he spoke:

“You had every opportunity.”

Her brow furrowed. What was he talking about?

“You could have stayed away from the AllSpark,” he growled, too low for the Cons down below to hear. “You could have disappeared on this backwater planet. You could have stayed under the Autobots’ ‘protective’ shadow. But no, you went and chose every bad decision and now I have to
suffer for it.”

*What the hell is he talking about?* Charlie hadn’t the faintest idea why he wasn’t ecstatic to have the AllSpark back, and she didn’t know how he expected her to not get caught when the Cons were incredibly determined. But she didn’t voice her confusion.

Instead her face showed mock sympathy, “Poor little baby.”

And then Starscream dropped her.

It happened so suddenly that for a few moments Charlie didn’t process that she was rocketing to the earth. But then she felt the wind slice against her skin and pull at her hair, her eyes watered as the cons below grew bigger and bigger as the ground got closer and closer.

*Will the AllSpark fix me if I break every bone on landing?* She wondered, trying to keep the panic from setting in. She scrunched her eyes shut, a part of her hoping she’d die on impact, if just so the Decepticons couldn’t use her to get to the AllSpark.

But just as she expected to hit the ground, her chest slammed into a plate of metal and her eyes flung open as the breath was knocked out of her body.

Wheezing, she looked up to see it was Shockwave who had caught her, his clawlike fingers slowly wrapping around her as he gazed up at Starscream. The jet was descending, taking his sweet time.

*He could have killed me,* even her inner voice sounded winded.

“You could have killed her!” snapped the red Con with the female voice, unknowingly echoing Charlie’s thoughts.

But Starscream met her scowl with a cool look. “I was teaching her respect,” he replied silkily. “This little girl needs to understand she’s under our care and…mercy. Besides, I trust everyone’s reflexes. I knew one of you would catch her before she hit became a puddle on the ground.

“What an interesting tactic, Starscream,” Shockwave replied in an odd tone of voice and Charlie could feel the tension in the air as the two Decepticons exchanged an unreadable look.

Finally catching her breath, the ache in her ribs fading, Charlie suddenly felt a wave of revulsion as she realized she was in the hands that had ki—that had done things that she didn’t need to think about at this moment.

“Don’t touch me,” she growled, her voice rising as she started to struggle. “LET ME GO! LET ME GO!”

Shockwave gave her a dismissive glance before turning back to the Decepticons. All of them weren’t paying attention to her struggles, except for one. The jet that had been the last one to come through the portal was looking at her with an unreadable expression, his fist still clutched to his chest. The moment their eyes locked he turned away.

“Lord Starscream,” he spoke up, his voice softer than the other Decepticons, as he walked over to him. “I know it wasn’t part of the plan but I-”

*Why did you grab another one?”*

The teleporting jet’s gobsmacked question sent Charlie’s heart falling into her stomach.
Oh no, oh God, please no!

“Thundercracker,” Starscream’s voice was soft but didn’t carry the slightest hint of reassurance. “What is this?”

Otis sat trembling in Thundercracker’s hand, his large eyes staring up at the Cons but not making a noise.

“I went to find the human on that island,” Thundercracker explained. “I thought she was still there, but then I heard this one call her name.” He looked down at Otis, “He called her Charlie and I thought they were close so maybe we could use this one-”

“As leverage.”

Charlie looked up at Shockwave who had spoken, his one eye not on Thundercracker or Otis but on herself. Charlie inwardly shuddered, he must have seen her expression when she saw Otis. The Con knew how important he was to her.

“That might be a good idea, Thundercracker,” Shockwave continued. “You can put him in the farm, let’s get back to the base.”

Starscream rushed forward to stand in front of Shockwave, not bothering to mask his anger. “I will be giving the orders, Shockwave.”

The one-eyed Con was silent for so long Charlie had thought he wouldn’t answer, but then, “Of course… Lord Starscream.”

The Decepticon base was gigantic and clearly alien. It was smack in the middle of a vast and lifeless desert. But what Charlie found more disturbing was the small collection of tiny houses in the shadow of the base, guarded by two Decepticons.

Thundercracker walked past Shockwave to place Otis in the middle of the houses where, to Charlie’s horror, several humans appeared to greet him. Charlie moved to call out for her brother but her captors were already walking into the base.

The hallways were brightly lit and the cold air sent goosebumps across her arms. A rising sense of fear started to choke her. Of course, she had been scared the minute the Decepticons attacked the Autobots, but when the base doors closed behind them, she felt an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Death was waiting in these halls.

Shockwave walked into a room that felt like it had come straight out of a science fiction horror film.

It was a large room, plenty of space for the other Decepticons to follow him inside. There was a bare examination table and numerous unidentified objects hanging on the walls. Charlie’s fear skyrocketed when he saw how sharp they were.

Shockwave placed her ungraciously on the table before walking away to a corner of the room. Charlie sat up, not trusting her shaking legs to hold her up.
A shadow fell over her and she looked up to see the blue Con leering over her, his remaining eye alit with twisted glee.

“Are you going to dissect her, Shockwave?” he asked, not looking away from Charlie. “I can help.”

Shockwave didn’t answer but the blue bot didn’t seem to care, instead moving his face incredibly close to Charlie. She imagined if he had fangs he would bare them.

“Dropkick,” Starscream’s voice was a warning.

“What, Screamer? I’m not gonna hurt her. Yet.”

Dropkick lifted his hand, his fingers hovering over Charlie’s arm, probably fantasizing about breaking her arm.

“Enjoy using that AllSpark as a shield while you still can, human. When Shockwave doesn’t need you anymore, I’m going to enjoy learning about your anatomy as I pull your bones out of your skin.”

Charlie glared silently, hating the shudders that were wracking her body. But she didn’t want to risk upsetting Dropkick more, he didn’t strike her as someone who followed orders and—if he was angry—wouldn’t wait to turn her into paste. *Just stay quiet, Charlie, don’t do any-*

Dropkick’s evil smile widened, “*Your little yellow Autobot can’t save you this time.*”

Something snapped in Charlie’s mind and any sense of self-preservation left her brain. Pulling up into her full height she spat on Dropkick, making the Con let out a snarl of disgust and back away.

“I didn’t need anybody’s help to destroy your eye you blue bastard! Come near me again and I’ll finish what I started!”

Dropkick was furiously wiping at his face, and the other Decepticons were either staring at Charlie in shock or stepping closer to Dropkick in case he planned to lung at her.

And they were right, Dropkick turned to her with a look of hatred that nearly shriveled her burst of courage. “I’M GONNA-”

The red bot and Thundercracker grabbed him before he could reach her, struggling to hold him in place. Charlie only scowled at him, refusing to show any regret for what she had done.

“Starscream.” Shockwave’s voice sliced through the air and even made Dropkick stop to look at him. The bulky Decepticon turned to the jet, “If…I was leader, I’d have better control of my soldiers. After all, we can’t afford to lose the AllSpark’s power when it’s in such a—” Shockwave glanced at Charlie, “Delicate state.”

Starscream’s face was unreadable as he slowly looked to the red robot. “Shatter, you and Dropkick leave. Go and patrol.”

Shatter looked less than pleased, “Lord Starscream, I-”

“Get,” the jet hissed, “Out.”

There was a moment’s hesitation before she nodded and dragged Dropkick out of the room.

That left Charlie with Starscream, Shockwave, Thundercracker, and two other Decepticons whose names she didn’t know (not that she cared to learn any of their names). One being that teleporting
jet who was quietly standing in a corner, looking as if he was watching his favorite soap opera. The other Con was had a red visor where his eyes should have been, and although he had not made a single sound this entire time, the air around him was thick with threat.

“Good,” Shockwave spoke, walking over to Charlie. “Now we can start.”

Charlie moved to turn her scowl on him only to suddenly be pushed onto the surface of the examination style, the cold steel biting into her back.

Shockwave held her down easily with the tip of his fingers pressed against her limbs. The other Decepticons, with the exception of Thundercracker, walked over to surround the table.

“Are you going to take some of her energon,” the teleporting jet asked excitedly.

“No, Skywarp,” Shockwave replied. Charlie wasn’t sure but she could have sworn she heard a hint of glee in his voice. “I thought that for such a unique human, I’d use a data-collecting method that’s overdue.”

Charlie had been struggling since Shockwave had pinned her down but her limbs turned to ice when she saw what Shockwave had in his other hand.

It was like something she’d seen in a movie like Alien. It was a green, slug-like creature, slimy and as long as her forearm. It swiveled wildly in the robot’s grip.

Starscream and Skywarp shared a look of revulsion when they saw the slithering creature. “That’s such an ancient method,” the former commented.

“Yes, but it’s effective. It will absorb her DNA and then I can cut it open and see what we have to work with,” Shockwave answered simply.

Absorb my DNA? Charlie didn’t like the sound of that and she started to viscously struggle again as Shockwave lowered his hand.

“Don’t-” she breathed, turned her head away as the slug came closer. “Please don’t! Don’t-”

Her plea fell on death ears as suddenly Shockwave released the slug and it immediately slithered to her face. She locked her jaw but the slug wasn’t deterred and slipped through her nostrils.

Her body started to rigidly jerk as a foreign pain danced across her nerves. Revulsion sliced against her throat and she longed to vomit, but the thing that she needed to puke out she could feel—going down her throat, her chest, her stomach. It rolled around inside her body and it felt like it was tearing off pieces of her organs. Somehow it felt like it even climbed through her arms and legs, leaving her bones covered in slime. Her body continually jerked up and her vision was blurry with tears and all she could see was the glowing eyes of the Decepticons that looked on in either apathy or a twisted interest.

It felt like ages but it was actually only a few agonizing seconds until the pain became unbearable and she opened her mouth, quietly begging her enemies to help her, begged for the AllSpark to save her, begged for Bumblebee.

Suddenly the disgust rose all the way back to her throat and she felt slime against her teeth as the slug dragged its way out of her mouth, death to her broken, ragged sobs.

When it was completely out Shockwave picked it up and released her. Charlie forced herself onto her stomach, lifting herself up on shaking arms as she gagged and gagged, the only thing coming
up was her crumbling resolve. Her body felt so disturbingly hollow, violated, and she couldn’t bear to meet any of the Decepticons’ eyes. Her ringing ears vaguely heard Shockwave mention the Farm but she couldn’t bring herself to fully listen.

Too tired to try to hack up that empty feeling Charlie fell to her side, curled into herself, and cried.

That slug didn’t just take away bits of her DNA but also her courage and determination. The fear and hopelessness and grief was drowning her. She was alone, Otis had been captured and Bumblebee…

*He’s dead, I wasn’t there to heal him! He’s gone I’ll never get to see him again, I’ll never see my mother again, I’ll die here. I failed everyone!*

Something touched her shoulder and she flinched, pulling herself into a tighter curl and sobbing even harder.

“Here,” a soft voice reached her ears, it was Thundercracker. “I’m going to take you to that other little human.”

*Otis.* He would take her to her brother.

Thundercracker cradled her in hands that were nothing like Starscream or Shockwave. He kept murmuring quietly though she couldn’t make out the words. At least it didn’t shred her spirit any harder. She continued to cry as she laid in his hands, pouring out every horrible, terrible thing that had happened to her so-when Thundercracker finally, gently, placed her down, she felt empty and numb.

“Charlie!”

With an effort she pulled herself up. She was in the middle of that small collection of houses she had seen earlier, this was the ‘Farm’. Thundercracker was already walking away and Otis was rushing toward her, several humans standing several feet away and watching with mixtures of surprise and pity.

Charlie opened her arms and Otis jumped into her embrace. She buried he damp face into his shoulder. “I’m sorry,” she breathed, not just to him, but to everyone. “I’m so sorry.”
Chapter 34

Starscream’s body was burning with rage. His glare focused on the Farm where the humans had huddled around the AllSpark girl-Charlie. Besides his anger he was also in disbelief. He was finally the leader of the Decepticons, he had led an easy triumph over an entire planet! How could such a helpless, pathetic, insignificant pest ruin it all by simply not dying.

He had ordered Thundercracker and Skywarp to him and the two seekers stood behind him, quiet. Even Skywarp could sense the fiery tension surrounding his leader.

“We need to get rid of her,” Starscream finally breathed, surprised steam didn’t froth from his mouth.

“Okay, okay,” Skywarp replied, walking over to stand by him. “Now when you say get rid of her, do you mean kill her or just, throw her through a space bridge? We can do either.”

“No,” Thundercracker’s voice, tame, spoke up. “We can’t.”

Starscream’s head snapped around to glower at his subordinate. “Your fondness for these organics will be your downfall, Thundercracker.”

“I’m not fond of them!” Thundercracker insisted. “But Starscream, you tried to kill her as soon as we escaped the Autobots. The other Cons might have believed that you were just scaring her. But Shockwave didn’t. If something happens to that human he’s going to find a way to turn the others against you. She’s the AllSpark they’re not just going to let this slide.”

Starscream marched over to stand above the jet, “Then what do you suggest, Thundercracker? Do you want to be back under Megatron’s rule? Cause that is what is going to happen if we don’t do something!”

“I-” Thundercracker stuttered. “I don’t know. I just know you’re suspect number one if something happens to her.”

Skywarp walked over and casually put himself between the two. “Thundercracker has a point, Screamer.”

“Lord. Starscream.”

“Thundercracker has a point, Lord Starscream,” he continued. “And say we do get rid of her, there goes the AllSpark. And don’t we want the AllSpark?”
Starscream would never admit it but Skywarp had a point. If he killed Charlie, that would assure Megatron would be dead. But that would also assure he could never return to and revive Cybertron. And then he’d be stuck on this disgusting planet for eternity.

“We don’t even know if she can revive Megatron,” Thundercracker added. “And with Shockwave having to run his tests, we can bide our time. Let’s just wait and see what opportunities will find us.”

Charlie woke up with her entire body aching. For a moment she was lost, unsure where she was. It was a small cabin, with just a table and the hard bed she was lying on.

Then she saw Otis sitting on the foot of the bed, his eyes closed as she leaned against the wall.

All of Charlie’s memories rushed back, the battle, the slug, Bumblebee, and she threw herself practically off the bad, gagging wildly. It still felt like the slug’s residue was in her mouth and dripping from her bones.

Otis, who had immediately shot up when his sister woke up, reached forward and patted her back. “It’s okay,” he murmured like he was the older sibling. “Hold on, I’ll get Tabitha.”

Charlie, catching her breath, reached out for her brother but he was already running out of the cabin. She tried to stand up to follow but her legs were shaking and she had no choice but to lie back down.

It was only a few minutes before Otis returned, followed by three people.

The first was a tall woman who radiated authority and seriousness, the girl (who looked around Otis’ age) behind her must have been her daughter, they looked so alike. And they reminded Charlie of…someone.

Behind them the man was shorter but built, a baby girl in his arms and his eyes narrowed suspiciously when he looked at Charlie.

“It’s alright,” the tall woman assured Charlie, walking forward.

She forced herself to sit up as the woman knelt before her, placing a hand on Charlie’s forehead. Charlie could have wilted, relieved to have an adult here who took charge.

“You’re Tabitha?” she asked, Charlie could barely recognize her own voice, it was so hoarse.

She nodded, a soft smile pulling up her lips. “And you’re Charlie. Otis told us everything about
“Sounds like your the answers to those robots’ prayers,” the man commented, taking the one chair that was next to the desk. His daughter snuggled deeper into his chest, deep in sleep.

Charlie turned to her brother, “You told them about the AllSpark?”

He shrugged helplessly, “I didn’t know what else to do. I panicked!”

But Otis didn’t know what these humans would do to her, it sounded like the man considered her an ally of the Decepticons.

“Don’t be upset with him,” Tabitha sat next to Charlie. “But his stories were…quite interesting.”

The younger girl stepped forward, “He said there were good robots. Ones that fight these…what did you call them, Otis?”

“Decepticons,” Charlie answered. “And there are good robots, we’re friends with them. They’re called Autobots.”

“So it’s true,” the man spoke up. “Our planet-we-are caught up in some ancient alien robot war.”

Charlie nodded and the man swore under his breath, shaking his head and turning away from the group.

“What-what are you all doing here?” Charlie asked Tabitha. “What do the Cons want from you? Where even are we?”

A heaviness filled the air following her questions. The man still wasn’t looking at her and Tabitha’s friendly eyes seemed to darken. It was the girl who spoke, “To answer where we are: we’re in Australia.”

Charlie’s head whipped around to stare at her. That…was not one of the places she had expected the Cons to make base. “We-we are?”

“That’s what people told us when we arrived. Me and Caly-” she nodded to her daughter- “Are from America. Same as Colin and his baby girl, Mikaela.”

Charlie looked them over once more, before bringing up the other questions, “Why are you here?”
“We were taken,” Tabitha explained. “Every human here was kidnapped when the robots first invaded. And they-” Tabitha stopped, her hand covering her mouth and her eyes turning glassy. Caly hurried over to sit by her mother’s other side, wrapping her arms around her.

“We’re lab rats,” Colin’s deadpan voice brought a shudder down Charlie’s back.

The man sat up and, carefully, placed his snoozing baby on the bed. Then he stepped back and lifted up his shirt to show his side, and a horrifically long scar across his abdomen. “They stole humans from every corner of the world so they could experiment on us. The ones outside, and us, we’re the lucky ones. There have been people, men, women and children, who walked into that base and never came back out.”

“Oh my God,” Charlie breathed. She had thought the Decepticons couldn’t be more evil.

Colin let his shirt fall back to cover the scar, and shrugged. “On the bright side, if you are some big deal to those walking washing machines— they’ll probably not need us anymore.”

“Your brother said you can heal these robots,” Tabitha spoke up again, her arm wrapped protectively around her daughter’s shoulder.

“I can,” Charlie said, pushing back the thought of Bumblebee and how she wasn’t there to heal him. “Though I think they want to use me as a weapon, not a doctor… But whatever they end up doing with me, it won’t be good for any of us.”

“A few of the people here, after hearing Otis’ story, were hoping they’d let us go now that they have you,” Caly admitted. Charlie didn’t miss the mildly guilty look of hope in her eyes.

But Colin was shaking his head, “They aren’t just going to let us go, kid. And even if they did— then what? We’d be stranded in a desert, with no supplies unless that Thunderguy throws us one more bone.”

His words had Charlie’s brow furrow, “Thundeguy? Are you talking about Thundercracker?”

“I don’t bother remembering the names of my captors,” Colin said, sending her an almost venomous look. Clearly he didn’t think knowing the Cons’ by name was a trustworthy feature. “But I guess that’s him.”

“He drops supplies here every now and then,” Caly explained. “He’s the only one that seems not to be completely disgusted by us.”

“Which isn’t saying much, considering he stands by and lets that one Con… do all those things to us.” Colin added in again. Charlie was getting the feeling he found talking therapeutic. But she
couldn’t blame him, she glanced over at Mikaela. She reminded her so much of Sam and the thought of what Shockwave or Starscream could do to her made Charlie sick.

“So, Charlie,” Otis finally spoke up, having been quiet this entire time. “What’s the plan?”

“Plan?”

Tabitha gave her a sympathetic smile, “Otis told us you would find some way for us to escape, or to have your robot friends find us.” It was obvious she didn’t believe Otis, and Charlie wasn’t here to change her mind.

“Otis,” Charlie slowly stood up, her legs shaking slightly. “I don’t have a plan.”

“Not yet, but you’ll get something,” Otis said. “And even if you don’t, Bumblebee will-”

“Bumblebee…is gone.” Her throat closed and her vision started to go blurring. “He’s gone, and there’s no way for us to get out or to contact Optimus and we can’t.” She looked around the room, not wanting to break down in front of these strangers. Especially when Colin clearly thought so little of her. “I need-I need a moment.” She marched out of the cabin before anyone could stop her.

Outside the temperate was unbearably hot, and strangers were walking around with slow defeated steps. Charlie only felt worse when she saw them, there were two toddlers sitting next to their mother who was dead eyed. Did they have a father? What happened to him?

She saw elderly people, sitting in the shade, a man with no leg. Did he lose it before or after the Decepticons?

She rushed behind the cabin before anyone could notice her. If Otis really had sung her praise, she couldn’t bear anyone to look at her like she could save them.

Away from any eyes she sat down and buried her face in her knees with her arms wrapped around her legs.

The quiet was almost a relief. Charlie tried to summon up more tears but they had all been shed. She was as empty as she felt.

She tried to imagine what would happen to her, to everyone, next. Shockwave would probably find some way to extract the AllSpark and then she’d be dead. And as Colin had said, any way they got rid of these innocent people, they wouldn’t live through it. Her brother, Tabitha, Mikaela, they needed a hero. They needed Optimus…they needed Bumblebee…they needed an Autobot…but all they had was her.
She didn’t know how much time had passed as she sat with the silence. More than once her mind went back to Bumblebee, trying to hold on to the hope that he was okay, but then the fight replayed in her head again and she curled deeper into herself. Her heart no longer hurt though…it had gone numb.

…Charlie’s head slowly lifted up but there was no where there. She could have sworn she had heard someone calling her name. She hid her face away from the sun again, deciding it wasn’t surprising she was hearing things.

She closed her eyes, and in the darkness, it came again.

It was a whisper, a whisper of millions of voices, chanting her name. It sounded so deliciously encouraging, and the vision of a familiar red robot flashed through her mind.

*Cliffjumper!*

Her body seemed to lock into place and for a moment she could barely breathe. Her heart was pounding in her ears and the echoes almost seemed metallic, reminding her that while she felt like a human, she was something else. Something…more.

And then, as if the AllSpark, as if Cliffjumper, was pulling her mind to it: she started to think of what the Cybertronians saw when they looked at her.

She could remember the awe and confusion in the Autobots’ eyes. She could remember the hostility and even…fear in the Decepticons. She remembered the open adoration in Bumblebee’s eyes…every time he had looked at her, even before he knew about the AllSpark.

The awe…the fear…they didn’t see a human when they looked at her. Charlie’s head pulled up and she gazed up at the dimming sky. They didn’t see a human, they saw the AllSpark. They saw hope…and a threat. She stood up, her legs feeling more sturdy. The Autobots, the humans, they saw her as something that could help them. The Decepticons did too, but they also saw something that could be an enemy. And she was definitely their enemy.

And when Bumblebee saw her…he saw someone who wouldn’t give up. At least, she hoped he had. She wanted to be that…for him. Someone who didn’t give up, who stayed strong to the very end.

Like he had.

Charlie looked up at the base that loomed over them like a predator. Charlie’s eyes narrowed and her fists clenched. If they were going to kill her anyway, she was going to die with a legacy.
That night Charlie called the people together to plan.

They all crowded into the room she had woken up in, but despite the fact they were people from all over the world, there was enough room for everyone. It was further proof of how deadly Shockwave’s experiments were.

“For anyone who doesn’t know, I’m Charlie Watson,” she began, standing before the group, many of who out aged her. The looks she received were either of suspicious dislike or wary hopefulness. “The robots that have taken over our planet and stole us are called Decepticons, they came here looking for the body of their leader and an ancient artifact.”

Beside her Tabitha (revealed to have studied several languages) repeated what she said for the people who came from foreign countries and didn’t know English.

“And they couldn’t just ask?” one voice spoke up, hard with annoyance. As if this meeting was a hassle.

“Decepticons aren’t the asking type,” Charlie explained, “And as you all well know, they care little about hurting innocent lives. And from what I can tell, they plan to revive their leader and make Earth their new home.”

Quiet murmurs broke through the crowd, but none sounded surprised that the Cons wanted to plant their roots here.

“But how can they revive their leader,” a small woman spoke up, in a heavy Russian accent.

“With the artifact,” Charlie answered. “It’s called the AllSpark, and it has the ability to heal these robots. And…it’s inside me.”

Her words were meant with only silence, looks being passed around.

She took the chance to continue, “I don’t know what they planned to do with me. But since they didn’t kill me when I first got here I think they’ll need for at least a while. We can use that to our advantage.”

“And how?” Colin asked, standing in the corner with his arms crossed.
“I’ve gotten a few plans,” Charlie told him. “As much as I hate it, we’re going to have to stay on their good side.”

“Is that even possible?” Caly sat on the edge of the bed next to Otis, her arms wrapped around her legs.

“I’m going to find out,” Charlie turned to the rest of the group. “I need you all to trust me, I’m—” this idea was going to sound bad even to her ears- “I’m going to make them think I’m an ally.”

The people who had been very clearly suspicious of her furrowed their brows and Charlie couldn’t blame them. A mysterious girl shows up with an alien power inside her and talks of making friends with the robots who had killed so many people-she would have been wary too.

“And what do you plan on doing if you succeed?” Tabitha turned to her. Her expression wasn’t judging or suspicious, just concerned and interested.

“I want to convince them to keep you all alive,” Charlie continued. “You’re all so thin, I could persuade them to give you more supplies, and we can start hiding some of the supplies for when we escape.”

“How do we escape?” Colin asked. “Like I said earlier, we’re in the middle of the desert.”

Charlie turned to him, “I bet I can find something like a map inside the base. Or even better, a way to send a message to the Autobots.”

“Autobots?” echoed a small girl who clung to her mother’s leg.

“They’re our friends,” Charlie assured them all, feeling a knot in her throat. “They want the Cons gone just as much as we do.

“They’re already out there looking for us,” Otis spoke up with unwavering confidence.

Charlie nodded, “But we should help them and find a way to give them coordinates—if we can’t get out by ourselves. You’ll leave that to me.”

Tabitha’s brow furrowed, “That’s a lot to do for someone so young.”

“I know, but it has to be me,” Charlie continued. “I have the AllSpark, I have the best chance of going into that base and coming out alive. But I do need your help. You’ve been here longer than me, I need to know which Con is the weak link. I need a Decepticon I can convince that I’m a friend.” She shuddered inwardly just at the thought of being chummy with one of those murderers.
But she’d do whatever it took to help these people and get back to Optimus. She just wished stabbing Shockwave was in the list of possibilities.

Charlie felt a little more confident when she saw everyone seemed to be genuinely thinking about what she said, even Colin. They had faith in here, even if it was minuscule.

Finally Colin spoke up, “Yeah, it’s the Thunderguy.”

“I was thinking him too,” Charlie told him. “After what you and Caly said about him.”

“Just because he doesn’t threaten to step on us every time he comes over doesn’t mean he wants to be best buds with you,” someone in the group pointed out.

“I know—but this is the best chance we have. I don’t-I don’t want anyone else to get hurt because of those monsters.”

Her words got a few mumbles of agreement. They needed to find a way to escape, and if this strange girl was willing to risk her life to do it—they wouldn’t try and stop her.

The familiar rubble shook the ground and people immediately shed away from the door, except for Charlie who hurried past them to walk outside. Tabitha, Colin, and Otis following.

Lights from the Decepticon base was the only light source for miles around, distant stars in the deep blue sky sparkling only faintly.

Illuminated by the base’s lights a Con stood before them, red eyes glowing as it looked down at them. And…for the first time in a long time, luck was on Charlie’s side.

“Thundercracker,” she greeted coolly, putting her hands on her hips and lifting her chin. She was aware of the eyes of the people on her as they watched from the door. Charlie hoped she could keep this confident look when she was all alone in the base.

Even in the dark she could see the look of surprise on the Decepticon’s face, he didn’t expect to be addressed by name. “Yes…” he began awkwardly. “I’ve come to fetch you for Shockwave.” He knelt down and his expression became more stern, “You won’t be difficult, will you?” It was less a question and more an order.

“Of course I won’t,” Charlie replied smoothly, ignoring the painful catch in her chest at the thought of going back to that room.

Her words only seemed to confuse Thundercracker farther, but he didn’t say any more, only
reaching out his hand for her to climb on. The fact he didn’t snatch her like the others did gave her a another small glimmer of hope.
She glanced toward Otis and the others, their faces worried, and she offered the tiniest of nods. She had a specific plan to gain the Cons’ trust. Something she hadn’t told anyone.

She stepped onto Thundercracker’s hand and the moment the Decepticon stood up she reached out and grabbed his wrist, looking up at him with an intense gaze.

Thundercracker stared at her in shock as she spoke, “I need to talk to Starscream.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this wasn't isn't that long. Since more entertaining stuff happens next chapter I have no idea how long it'll take to write and I wanted to give you guys SOMETHING while you wait. See you then.
Chapter 36

Charlie watched her blood fill up the vial, noticing the wisps of glowing blue among the red. It still felt so foreign, and she looked down at the tubes that were embedded in the skin of her inner arm.

She replayed her short conversation with Thundercracker in her head:

“I need to talk to Starscream,” she had insisted, putting as much confidence and command into her voice as possible.

Thundercracker had looked like his eyes would fall out. “What?”

“He’s your leader, right?” she continued. “I have things to say that he’s going to want to hear.”

The Decepticon looked around as if he expected someone was spying on them. “Tell me what it is. I’ll deliver the message for you.”

But Charlie was adamant, “That won’t work. I’m sorry, but he’s the leader, he should know first. I need to see him. Trust me, it’ll be worth his while.”

Thundercracker narrowed his eyes as he loomed over her, and Charlie forced herself to not break eye contact. And when her bravado was starting to wither, he finally nodded. “Alright. But it’ll have to be after Shockwave sees you.”

Now Charlie sat in Shockwave’s lab, her heart thumping painfully as he took a sample of her blood. She was praying she wouldn’t be too drowsy to speak to the Con leader by the time he was done draining what felt like the majority of the blood in her body.

Shockwave’s shadow loomed over her but he wasn’t facing her, instead he was reading some date on a screen nearby. It was in a language Charlie couldn’t read, and maybe she didn’t want to know what it said. She imagined it was along the lines of, ‘cut the human open like a frog in science class’.

When she arrived in the room she had a horrifying thought that Shockwave was going to kill her immediately. But that was a few minutes ago and this robot didn’t strike her as someone who wasted time. He also didn’t strike her as someone who could be won over with flattery and pretty smiles and everything else she planned to use to get Starscream on her side.

Though perhaps she was making excuses, she honestly would rather die than act chummy around this Deception, not after what he had done to Bumblebee. The thought of the yellow Autobot made her throat hurt, but she didn’t want to push the thought of
him away. She wanted to use his memory as inspiration, as encouragement to make sure her plan succeeded.

Looking past Shockwave she saw Thundercracker standing at the entrance of the lab, watching his fellow Decepticon examine his data.

The jet glanced over to Charlie who smiled and waved her hand the best she could—what with her wrists and ankles being tied to the examination table. Thundercracker quickly looked away but Charlie hoped that was the first sowed seed to put her plan in action.

Shockwave suddenly murmured something in the Cybertronian language that Thundercracker replied too. And Charlie watched their expressions closely as the two had a conversation in a tongue she didn’t understand.

*Hey AllSpark,* she thought to herself. *Learning the Autobots and Decepticons’ language would be really helpful right now.*

But her plea fell on deaf ears and all she could understand was that—by their tone and Thundercracker’s furrow brow—the two Cons weren’t friends. She hoped she could use that to her advantage.

Finally Shockwave wordlessly released her from the tubes and Charlie quickly hurried to her feet, stumbling a bit as she stood up.

A few more words were quickly exchanged between the robots that sounded like unintelligent garbles to her, before Thundercracker walked forward and offered his palm to Charlie. She was all too eager to climb aboard, ready to get away before Shockwave brought that slug back.

Once they were out of the lab and walking in silent hallways, Charlie looked up to him. “You’re taking me to Starscream, now?”

He released a noise that sounded akin to a mechanical breath. “Yes. But I highly suggest you change your mind. Starscream is not fond of you, and whatever you do better not annoy him. He doesn’t have a healthy handle on his irritation.”

“I understand,” she assured the robot. “But I can handle myself.” And then, as a last thought, she added: “Thank you.”

The jet looked down at her for a fraction of a second, not long enough for her to see the look in his eyes. Charlie hoped Cons liked gratitude.

While coming up with her plan, Charlie had run through all of her short but horrifying interactions
with the Decepticons. Specifically she thought of the very blatant tension between Starscream and Shockwave, and how the former acted around his followers.

Until, eventually, she came upon a realization that would have made her laugh in better situations.

Starscream had the air and ego of a mean girl in highschool, he just also happened to be a world-conquering alien robot. But she was about to bet her life that he wasn’t immune to a heavy amount of flattery.

Thundercracker turned a corner and they were suddenly walking onto a small balcony that looked out amongst the vast desert and night sky. But the lights of the base illuminated Starscream and the other jet-Skywarp-perfectly. The two Cons looked at Thundercracker and Charlie with obvious confusion.

“Thundercracker,” Starscream spoke, his voice uncomfortably low. “What do you have there?”

“It’s the AllSpark human,” Skywarp whispered to him, earning a scowl from his leader.

Thundercracker straightened, “She wanted to talk with you.”

Starscream let out a sardonic laugh that made Charlie’s bones hurt. “She wants to talk to me?”

Before Thundercracker could reply Charlie, balancing on his palm, stood up and spoke, “I want to talk business, Lord Starscream.” She made sure her voice sounded confident and relaxed.

Her words were clearly a surprise to the Decepticons, but Starscream at least didn’t look irritated. Only darkly amused.

“That’s a very bold proposition considering you’re my prisoner,” he pointed out.

“I’ll admit,” Charlie twirled a strand of hair around her shoulder. “You bested me, and the Autobots.” She prided in herself that she said it so nonchalantly, without a drop of bitterness or anger. “While this entire situation has been…uncomfortable. I had time to think.”

She leaned forward, “And I believe you would rather have me as an ally than a prisoner.”

Her words were meant with stunned silence from Thundercracker and Skywarp, but Starscream’s eyes were only narrowed whether in thought or dislike, she could not tell.

“Set her down,” Starscream breathed. Thundercracker immediately placed her on the balcony railing that was big enough for her to stand easily. The cluster of buildings down below looked
small and isolated.

“You have piqued my interest,” Starscream’s shadow fell over her, his arms caging her in. “Take advantage of it.”

Oh, I will.

“The Autobots aren’t going to come for me,” Charlie said, making sure to have melancholy and acceptance in her voice. “They don’t even know where I am. I’m stuck here, and I’m not alive right now because I’m lucky, or even because of the Autobots. I’m alive cause I can and will do what it takes to survive.”

Starscream sneered. “You’re alive because the AllSpark is inside you. And we haven’t yet figured out if killing you will snuff it out.”

Charlie brushed off his cavalier tone and placed a hand over her chest, “Well, far be it from me to tell you what to do. You’ve taken over my planet with ease, so you clearly know how to get things done. But do you really want to risk losing the AllSpark? Especially when I think I want to be on your side.”

“You think?” Starscream said, tipping his head slightly. Behind him Thundercracker and Skywarp exchanged looks.

“I could be reading too much into things,” she explained. “But I think Shockwave doesn’t respect your leadership.”

Annoyance flashed in the Con’s red glare and Charlie swallowed nervously and she quickly continued, “I’m very sorry if I’m wrong. But I sensed tension and I can’t imagine you want someone who disrespects your rule to have the AllSpark. I am the AllSpark, whether we like it or not. And I prefer you.”

Another chuckle that sent shivers down her spine.

“You prefer me?” he smirked at her. “The Decepticon who dropped you?”

“The other option is the Decepticon who murdered B-127,” she replied with cold honesty. “I can forgive someone coming after me, not someone who hurts my friends.”

Starscream’s smile fell, “You don’t consider the thousands of humans that died when I arrived friends?”

Oh screw you, she thought silently, a painful pit in her stomach. She felt a horrible sense of guilt,
that she was betraying her own kind and the Autobots. She had to focus on her plan and why she had to get these robots to warm up to her.

“You want me to be honest, Lord Starscream?”

“By all means.”

“I’d prefer not to be here,” Charlie said. “But I am here. You are my ticket to survival and I am your ticket to remaining leader.” Deciding to go for it Charlie reached out and placed her hand on the smooth, warm surface of his hand. She saw Thundercracker tense at the corner of her eye and she was horribly afraid of the lack of expression on Starscream’s face.

“Shockwave doesn’t respect that you are the leader… Does-does he want to revive Megatron?”

A fist slammed far too close to her, buffeting her hair and Charlie had to bite her tongue to keep from crying out. She didn’t break the now enraged filled glare of the Decepticon.

“Who told you about Megatron?” his voice was a hiss.

“Optimus did,” Charlie continued, her voice cracking before she cleared her throat. “He told me that he was the former leader and the Decepticons would want to use me to bring him back. But, as I said, you’re leader.” She had her hand slid against Starscream’s hand in a type of carress, “Only Cons as foolish as Dropkick don’t realize how important I am, how much power I can offer. I could heal you, and other Cybertronians, easy. With a reminder of the AllSpark’s power, they will let me have whatever I want. And I want you to be leader.” She put as much feeling, as much intensity, as possible in her next words: “And I will do whatever you say.”

There was no reply, Starscream was no longer looking at her but at something in the distance. Maybe the future? Maybe a future where he saw Charlie as an ally. And in that future Charlie had the Decepticons right where she wanted them.

“You do not make this offer for free,” he finally said. It was not a question, and it did not give away if he was interested in her idea or not.

“All I want-all I need-is safety. For myself and the other humans. We’re pack animals, we work much better when we are together. Just supplies, and for the other humans to be safe from Shockwave’s experiments.” She smiled sweetly at Thundercracker who visibly started. “And for Thundercracker to tend to our supplies, the humans feel safer around him.” The Decepticon scowled at her for a moment before breaking eye contact. Skywarp continued to watch in silence, his interest apparent.

Charlie looked back up at the Decepticon before her, “That’s all you have to give me, and you will have the power of the AllSpark in the palm of your hand.” She bent her head, eyes downcast, “Lord
Starscream.”

The Con pulled away from her touch, his mouth a thin line but his eyes glittered with mild intrigue. “It took courage to come and make demands of me, human,” he growled. “You do not behave as the primitive flesh bags your kind are. And as a reward I will consider your little deal.” He turned to Thundercracker, “Take her back to the Farm and let her speak to no one.”

Charlie bit back a triumphant smile as she respectfully nodded.

She walked back onto Thundercracker’s offered hand and was carried back to her brother and the others. All the while Thundercracker refused to look at her, but instead of annoyed or uninterested, the Con looked awkward. It was an odd look, but it gave her hope that she would find a way for the Cons to warm up to her.

Now all she could was wait for Starscream’s decision.
Chapter 37

“You’re not seriously considering this, are you Screamer?”

Starscream stood on his favorite balcony, it gave him a good view of the wasteland and empty skies that surrounded the base. And it also gave him a view of the Farm, where the AllSpark girl had returned. With his superior sight he could make her out, talking to a small crowd of the humans, the one Thundercracker captured standing close beside her. He wondered if the girl could feel Starscream’s optics on her back.

“Considering?” Thundercracker echoed as the seeker returned to his leader’s side.

“Considering joining forces with a human,” Skywarp answered. “I mean, she’s entertaining—waltzing in here like we couldn’t just step on her—but she was also an Autobot ally!”

“She gave up on the Autobots,” Thundercracker pointed out, “As she should.”

“Oh, I can’t even believe you right now, Thundercracker!” Skywarp’s voice was thick with distaste. “She flutters her optics at you once and now you want to be best friends!”

“SHUT IT!” Thundercracker snarled.

“Would it kill—” Starscream spoke up, his voice low but not interrupted. “either of you…to be quiet…for just five nano-kliks?”

He turned on his heel to face the two. “As I told the AllSpark girl, I would consider her offer, and that’s exactly what I’ve done. And I can give credit where credit is due—” he sent a glare to Skywarp, “She knows how to address me."

“So you trust her?” Thundercracker asked, brow furrowed. It was impossible to tell what the seeker thought of it.

“Of course I don’t,” Starscream snorted. “But if I can convince her to do what I say, that’s an advantage Shockwave would kill for.”

“Yeah, kill you for,” Skywarp whispered, offering an innocent smile when the two seekers frowned at him.

“I could meet her ‘demands’ quite easily,” Starscream went on. “Shockwave has no use for the rest of the humans in the Farm, not while we have her. And Thundercracker, I trust you can find human supplies quite easily.”
“That’s fine,” he answered. “But what about Shockwave wanting to revive Megatron?” His voice had dropped in case any jets flew by.

That was one of his many problems wasn’t it? Not to mention he still had to deal with an impending Autobot invasion. But all the same… “I’ll tell her to refuse.”

“And then Shockwave let’s Dropkick squash her into paste,” Skywarp spoke up.

“No one will do anything without my permission,” Starscream growled. “And once we show off the power my new little pet has they won’t dare kill her. The power of the AllSpark is far more important than the corpse of the former Decepticon leader.”

Charlie woke up with sunbeams stabbing her eyes. She let out a pitiful groan and forced herself to sit up. The arm that had been stabbed with needles was sore and her stomach growled, she couldn’t remember the last time she ate.

Her mind went to her conversation with Starscream last night and a new found energy made her rise to her feet and walk outside. Once she stepped outside she nearly collided with Caly.

“Oh, hey,” she smiled up at Charlie. “I was coming to get you up.”

“Anything happen while I was out?” Charlie asked, the harsh sun making her rub her eyes. She had told Tabitha, Colin, and the others what had happened when she was in the base. They had only been cautiously optimistic though Charlie couldn’t blame them for that.

Caly shook her head, “Afraid not. The only robots that have been around are the guards.” She nodded to one of the robots that stood several yards away, its shadow not even touching the Farm. Caly lean forward as if she was afraid it would overhear, “Should we try to talk to one of them?”

“Best not,” Charlie answered. She didn’t recognize the robots on guard which means she couldn’t count they would be up for her working alongside Starscream. “No, we just have to wait while ‘lord Starscream’ takes his sweet time.”

Caly’s frown deepened and Charlie realized they had a brand new problem to deal with, “What’s wrong?”

“We really—we really need food.” Caly admitted. “Most of us can hold on longer but Maisy’s twins, and not to mention Mikaela…”
Charlie felt sick at the thought of the baby and two toddlers starving to death. That won’t happen, not as long as she was kicking.

“Tell Maisy and Colin not to worry,” Charlie told Caly, turning and stalking toward the nearest robot. “I’ll handle this.”

“Charlie, please be careful,” Caly called back and Charlie waved but didn’t look back. A part of her feared that if she turned and saw Caly’s scared expression she would lose her nerve.

When the Decepticon saw her stomping forward its red eyes narrowed—only to widen when it recognized her. To Charlie’s triumph she saw that there was a flash of fear in the crimson depths.

“I need to speak to Lord Starscream,” Charlie’s voice was loud and clear. “Now.”

Her tone made the Con scowl, “No one here takes orders from organics.”

“But do you take orders from the AllSpark?” she shot back. “I can guarantee your leader wants to see me.” That was a half lie, Charlie was only about 45% sure. “And I imagine he’ll be furious you’re making decisions for him.”

There was a flicker of doubt and the Con hesitated, trying to decide if Charlie’s point was a sound one.

But lucky for her (and maybe even the Con), a familiar face landed next to them.

“Thundercracker!” Charlie smiled brightly at the jet. “Just the jet I wanted to see!”

His face scrunched up, confused and awkward but not hostile, before he knelt down and offered his hand. “I’ll handle this,” he told the guard who looked relieved to walk away.

Charlie hurried up onto Thundercracker’s hand, “Has Starscream agreed? We need to go on a supply run now.”

Thundercracker scowled, “I went on a supply run a deca-cycle ago.”

It took Charlie a moment but she recalled a time when Arcee had explained a few Cybertronian terms to her and she let out a almost hysterical breath when she remembered that was three weeks.

“Thundercracker-humans need to eat and drink every day, if we don’t get food for everyone soon they’ll die.” Her voice hardened, “And then the deal is off.”
To Thundercracker’s credit he looked startled by her revelation and he glanced at the Farm before turning back to her, “We need to run it by Starscream.”

“Then let’s go!”

Charlie’s throat closed in when they found Starscream surrounded by a group of Decepticons, including Shockwave and Dropkick.

“Hmm,” the femme bot, Shatter, spoke up when she noticed Charlie and Thundercracker. “Thundercracker is here, Lord Starscream.”

Charlie glanced up at the seeker who didn’t look at her. Him showing up hadn’t been a coincidence.

“Excellent,” Starscream purred as he slid out of the group and marched over to them.

“What’s going on?” she asked quietly.

Starscream picked her up, but Charlie took note his grip wasn’t too tight. “We’ve decided it’s time to test the AllSpark’s ability,” he replied, his eyes dark with meaning and Charlie gave the smallest of nods.

They returned to that hellish lab, Charlie was starting to think they didn’t have any other rooms, and placed her on the examination table-thankfully she wasn’t tied down this time.

And for all of Charlie wanting to appear brave and unaffected, she couldn’t stop herself from taking a step back. It was their eyes, all looking at her with mixtures of hunger and hatred and twisted interest, it felt so weirdly violating.

Starscream stepped forward, he was practically oozing a smug aura that made Charlie’s job a little easier. “We will be testing your healing capabilities.”

Charlie bowed her head, “Of course, Lord Starscream.” She tried to put as much reverence and respect into her voice, and when she looked through her bangs she saw Starscream’s smile widen. “Who should I heal?”

Charlie assumed that they had a wounded Con waiting to join this experiment, but the way Starscream looked around he hadn’t decided who she’d heal yet.

But then Shockwave stepped forward, “Allow me to assist.” And then in a blur of movement a
blade flicked out of his wrist and he stabbed it through the arm of the closest Decepticon, who happened to be Thundercracker.

Charlie’s hands covered her mouth as she let out a strangled cry of surprise, the other Cons jumped back and Thundercracker let out a shriek of pain.

“What the slag, Shockwave!?” Thundercracker snarled, holding his arm that now had a hold in it, sparks dancing against his limb.

“You’ll be fine,” Shockwave answered casually, “I didn’t hit anything vital, and now we can see the AllSpark work from its organic host.”

Starscream looked livid as he stared at the scientist, “Next time…ask before you stab my seeker.”

Shockwave clearly wasn’t bothered by the look that might have killed Charlie if it had been directed at her. “Understood, Lord Starscream. It won’t happen again.”

There was such an obvious lack of respect in his voice Charlie didn’t understand how Starscream could take it, everything about the Con leader told her he should have gutted anyone who treated him like that. It made Charlie nervous about how useful he’d be as an ally.

But Charlie didn’t say anything, instead she silently walked over to Thundercracker who stood at the end of the table. His wounded arm was extended to her but his glare was in some corner of the room, clearly still seething but not willing to confront Shockwave.

Charlie looked at the wound and felt a sense of nauseous, it reminded her too much of…of Bumblebee’s wound. She swallowed and placed her hands on either side of the wound, hoping Thundercracker wouldn’t notice they were shaking.

Closing her eyes she let out a breath, instinctively her mind imagined the metal knitting together, the pain washing away. Charlie felt like she was releasing some of her own warmth onto the Decepticon. She opened her eyes in time to see the familiar, comforting blue light emit from her hands and surround the wound. Charlie glanced up at Thundercracker to see the Decepticon’s eyes were wide with awe, the sincere surprise felt so strangely…Autobot.

“Are you okay?” she couldn’t help but breathe the question as the wound was finishing closing up.

Thundercracker blinked and looked at her with an expression of wariness and confusion, as if he didn’t believe it was a real question.

But then he was yanked from her arms and Starscream was at his side, examining the now fully healed arm—it looked good as new. The rest of the Cons had watched in silence, didn’t move closer,
as if they were scared that Thundercracker now had a contagious disease.

“Perfect,” Starscream said at last. He shot Charlie a glance before turning to the crowd. “Congratulations, Shockwave. You have finally completed an experiment that proved fruitful.”

“Surprised the little maggot was so willing to help,” Dropkick muttered out of nowhere, his expression one of intense dislike.

“I’m not stupid,” Charlie spoke up, putting her hands on her hips. “It’s clear that the Autobots are on the losing side of this war. And Lord Starscream has proven himself to be a notable and respectful leader. It’s clear that he knows how to best use the AllSpark’s powers, and I haven’t survived this long but not making the right decisions.”

She shot a glance toward Starscream who was practically preening, soaking up Charlie’s flattery and the mixture of awe and fear in his followers. She nearly had to bite her tongue to keep from laughing—he was playing right into her hands, the dumb ass putz.
Starscream had apparently been so pleased with her performance he had no qualms with Thundercracker taking Charlie to get more supplies. Though before Charlie left with him she had asked another person to come with her, to make sure they got everything they needed.

Colin had volunteered.

It was a quiet, tense ride to the nearest city. The two sat in Thundercracker’s cock pit as he flew across the Australian desert. The fact he went so fast yet it still took him roughly thirty minutes to get to any form of civilization, didn’t give her any fresh hope of the humans escaping on their own. They would definitely need robots. *But first things first, and first we need food.*

Thundercracker landed in the heart of the town that looked so similar to the towns Charlie had passed through back in the States. The buildings abandoned, some crumbling, the streets littered with totaled cars and useless trash. But at least she didn’t spot any dead bodies.

The Decepticon sent them off to hunt for supplies, with a warning that he would have his eyes on them and that they would regret it if they tried to escape. Neither Charlie or Colin replied but Thundercracker clearly didn’t understand that the two weren’t out for themselves. Colin would never abandon his baby and Charlie would never abandon Otis.

And besides, they didn’t even have to turn a corner, Thundercracker had landed right next to a grocery store.

The two walked in, grabbed a cart each, and started to collect any and all items in silence.

While Charlie grabbed all the food, in other time she would have been planning her next step but for just one moment, she wanted to enjoy this small victory. She wanted to bring food back for Otis, and Tabitha, and Caly, and the babies, she wanted to relax and eat her fill and sleep and then she’d work on her next plan.

*I’ll soon have Starscream wrapped around my finger anyway,* she thought with a grim smile. *Though I think Thundercracker would be an easier target.* The jet was clearly less a blood thirsty tyrant and more a solider just following orders.

She was grabbing bottles of water and soda when Colin came over, his cart already carried baby formula and diapers.

He awkwardly cleared his throat which made Charlie give him her full attention.
“Look…” he began, looking anywhere but at her. “Thanks.”

Charlie tried to bite back a smile, “It looked like it hurt to say that.”

“It did,” he quipped then made a face, as if he regretted his words. “Life has been hell lately. I wouldn’t mind it as much if it was just me, but Mikaela has to grow up in this world. And she has to do it without a mother.”

Charlie could understand having to keep living even when you were without a parent, and she offered a awkward but comforting pat on his shoulder. “I know how it feels, having to grow up without a parent. But I’ll do my best that her life is as safe as possible.”

He gave her the smallest tilt of his lip before his mouth dropped. “You lost your mom?”

“I lost my dad,” she leaned her arms against her shopping cart. “He died before…all of this. I’m always going to miss him, but at least its getting easier to spend each day without him.” Her throat felt tight but she kept on, this conversation felt important. She wanted Colin to trust her, and believe that she would get them all out of this alive. “It’s harder to think of my mom. She’s with the Autobots and the other survivors we had found, she doesn’t know if my brother or me are even alive. And I…I can’t stand thinking how much she’s suffering right now.”

It was Colin’s turn to give Charlie an awkward pat on the shoulder, “If it’s any comfort, I feel the same about Mikaela’s mother. We aren’t together any more, weren’t even married when we had her. But she had gone into town when the soldiers came to lead us out of town, and then we were captured… I don’t know if she’s even still alive but-if she is, I can’t imagine what she’s feeling.”

Personally Charlie felt even worse, knowing that, but she got it. It was clear Colin wasn’t used to talks like this, but he was trying, and that part did make her feel better.

“Maybe we can still find her,” Charlie offered. “When I get us out of here, we can find Mikeala’s mother and my mother and-”

“I think Tabitha has a kid,” Colin said. “She mentions him once in a while.”

“Him too,” Charlie pulled a smile onto her face. “We’ll get everyone reunited and make this our home safe again.”

Colin looked to be ready to say more, but then the impatient voice of Thundercracker made them jump, telling them to hurry up.

Colin scowled at him but Charlie shook her head, “Wanna finish up here for me? I’m gonna go talk
When he furrowed his brow Charlie leaned forward to whisper, “As we said, he’s the weak link. And since I healed him earlier I think now is a great time to get on his good side.”

Charlie hurried outside to the Decepticon, “We’re almost done.”

“There’s not a lot of you,” he pointed out but his eyes were looking around. What, did he expect someone to be out here?

“If we collect a lot now, that means it’ll be awhile before we need to make another run,” Charlie replied.

There was a moment of silence, Thundercracker still keeping an eye on the horizon. Charlie broke the quiet, “He shouldn’t have done that.”

Thundercracker looked down at her, “What?”

“Shockwave,” she said, “He shouldn’t have attacked you. That was uncalled for.”

A flash of anger and wariness flashed through his crimson eyes before he glanced away, his hand going to his newly healed arm almost subconsciously.

“You're allies, he shouldn’t use you as a test experiment.”

“It’s none of your business,” he snapped suddenly.

“I’m making it my business then,” Charlie snapped back. “I need you just as much as you need me.”

The words seemed to catch the Con off guard and he didn’t reply, he was quiet for several seconds until Colin came out, pushing one cart while pulling the other, both full to the brim.

“Ready to go?” I asked, feeling Thundercracker’s eyes burned onto me.

Colin nodded, “Ready to go.”

Thundercracker left surprisingly quickly, setting them down in the middle of the farm and taking off without a word.
Before the Con was completely out of sight the crowd rushed to Charlie and Colin, relief and hunger glowing in their eyes and for a moment she feared she’d get trampled. But instead they thanked her profusely as she and Colin gave out food and drinks, Maisy openly sobbing as she received food for her children.

With a can of cola and an open can of chili (Colin even took the time to grab utensils he had found), Charlie found a shaded corner to sit and relax. She hadn’t even taken a sip of her drink when Otis sat down next to her, shoving chips into his mouth.

“Everything go okay while I was gone?” she asked, letting Otis lean into her shoulder.

“Yep!” he said between bites. “No one bothered us. Thanks to you.”

Charlie smirked, “I did give Starscream a deal he couldn’t refuse.”

“When do you think we can escape?” he asked.

Charlie halted, “I’m not sure yet.” As she took in before, they were too far away from any towns to walk, even if Starscream let them go. She needed to contact the Autobots to get them out of here. She couldn’t imagine any amount of flattery that would get a Decepticon to carry them to safety, not even Thundercracker. “But I’ll figure out something, just gotta work my charm a bit more.”

Otis snorted. “Charm, you?” he teased in his little brother way. But she didn’t get a chance to laugh at his little joke before his face grew serious. “But you’re okay, right? I know you’ve been through a lot, Charlie.”

She blinked, surprised. She hadn’t been hiding her stress but Otis had seemed to look at her with awe, as if she had been a super hero. She assumed, being a little kid, he wouldn’t have noticed.

“Cause like, I’m sure we can find another way,” he continued. “Wheeljack and the other Autobots are definitely looking for us. If being nice to the Decepticons is too much or not working, we can do something else. Tabitha and Caly are super smart they’ll help.”

Charlie smiled and wrapped her arm around him, pulling him into a small hug. “It’s really sweet of you to worry. But I’m the big sibling and I’m in charge when mom’s not around, which means I worry about you, not the other way around.” She pulled back and rubbed his head, “Besides, tricking the Cons is easier than passing a math test.” She thought of the slug, Thundercracker getting stabbed, the hatred that radiated off Dropkick, and quickly pushed it away.

Surprising both of them Colin was suddenly there, sitting on Charlie’s other side with Mikaela in his arms. The baby was contently drinking from a bottle and the sight filled Charlie with relief and affection.
“Happy?” Charlie asked, offering the man a smile. He didn’t feel as closed off or suspicious anymore.

Especially not when he smiled back at her, “Happiest I’ve been in a long time.”

Content Charlie leaned back and looked up at the darkening sky, a few early stars starting to shine. Her eyes widen when she saw a shooting star zoom across the sky, going much faster than she thought stars were capable of.

Nevertheless she closed her eyes and made a wish.

Chapter End Notes

A short chapter to start off 2020, but great stuff is on its way, so get excited~
Chapter 39

Memo followed Epps through the edge of town, as usual they were looking for supplies.

It’s all they ever seemed to do now. Look for supplies, find some, take them back to the others, distribute, repeat. And while Memo knew it was important he couldn’t help wishing he could do more, even though that was an impossible wish.

Ever since the Decepticon attack the morale of the humans and Autobots had dropped. He could still remember the sounds of Mrs. Watson sobbing when she was told both of her children had been taken. The sharp pain and fear in his heart when Memo not only lost Charlie, but Bumblebee had been stabbed.

Ratchet hadn’t left the Autobot’s side since the fight, doing his best with what little he had to keep him online. None of the Autobots said it, but without proper tools, they could lose the yellow robot any day now.

*If Charlie was here she could have healed him*, Memo thought as he followed Epps through a street riddled with shattered glass. If Charlie was here it wouldn’t feel so hopeless, she and Bumblebee had had a knack of making horrible situations feel better. The way they acted, they believed they would win this war.

But the Decepticons had both Charlie and Otis now, and if they were still alive, there was no telling what the Cons were doing to them. The thought made Memo sick, and it made his guilt even worse.

Compared to Charlie, the soldiers, even Cade, Memo felt so…worthless. He couldn’t even help Cade when he needed. He hadn’t needed to stay safe in the bunker to look after Sam, Mrs. Watson could have done that. Memo wasn’t going to delude himself into thinking he could have fought one of those Cons, but he could have tried to do something. Maybe he could have gotten Otis to safety before he had been snatched, maybe he could have convinced Charlie not to put herself in the heart of battle cause she was so willing to risk her life for everyone’s safety.

*I should have done something.*

And now he walked dutifully behind Epps, partly sure the only reason the soldier had invited him
was to keep him from moping around the new camp. With the Decepticons having attacked the Sanctuary both Burns and Prime had decided it was no longer safe and they would need to find a new place.

They were still searching.

“Keep up the pace, Memo,” Epps called briskly from over his shoulder.

Memo picked up his pace to walk next to Epps. The soldier had a rifle strapped on his back, he had told Memo it would be best for him to grab a weapon as well but Memo had only shook his head. He didn’t feel comfortable holding any weapon, it wasn’t in him.

“How much longer are we going to keep looking?” Memo asked, looking around the empty and destroyed buildings around them. Something akin to a skeletal hand was sitting out of a flattened car and Memo quickly looked away.

“Until we find something,” Epps said. “The sun’s barely up and Burns and Prime are counting on us to handle this while they figure out the next step.”

“What’s the next step?” Memo asked, wishing for anything that would give him a little hope. Just a little and he felt he could keep going. For Sam, for the survivors and Autobots, for his family that he didn’t know was still alive or not.

“Don’t know yet,” Epps said, his tone matter of fact, as if he wasn’t bothered by how things were.

Memo let out a frustrated breath, “Of course you don’t.”

The words had come out as a mumble, he hadn’t meant to say it loud enough for Epps to hear. But the man gave him a side-eyed look, “What’s that mean?”

“It’s nothing,” Memo replied quietly, not meeting his eye.

“It’s not nothing,” Epps said, his voice firm. “What does that mean?”

“It means of course we don’t have a next step,” Memo’s voice cracked with the strain of trying to hold back how upset and furious and sad he was. “We’ve lost Charlie, Bumblebee’s on death’s door, all we have to fight against an entire army of Decepticons are five Autobots and us. Even if we get a new place to hide, that’s all we can do. Hide! Hide and that’s it cause I can’t do anything!”

Memo slammed his mouth shut and looked away, feeling a wave of shame. Epps had more
The two had stopped walking, Epps now turned completely to Memo. “I’m worried about Charlie and Bumblebee too,” he admitted. “I don’t know if we’ll ever see her again, I’m not sure if Bumblebee will make it. I’m not sure if any of us can make it. But I’m going to keep fighting, and so should you.”

“It’s easier for you to say,” Memo said. “You’re a soldier, you can actually fight.”

“Yeah, I am a soldier,” Epps voice suddenly grew hard. “I’m a soldier who didn’t stand a single fucking chance when the Decepticons attacked. I had to watch friends die because we did not know how to fight those things, I saw people, people I was suppose to protect get murdered. Not a day goes by that me, Lennox, and Burns, don’t think about that. But we survived, and we found people to protect. You, and Sam and everyone else, you’re the reason we can still keep fighting and we will keep fighting, even if the Autobots aren’t here.”

He patted Memo’s shoulder, smiling softly. “I know how it feels to think you aren’t doing enough. But I know that you’re the sole reason Sam is alive, he’s going to get to grow up because of you. You were also the one who brought Charlie and Bumblebee to the Sanctuary, even if things haven’t gone as we expected, we wouldn’t have been able to meet the Autobots. You’re not useless Memo, neither am I, none of us are.”

He pulled back and straightened himself, his voice becoming comically authoritative, “Now get your butt in gear and find something useful.”

Memo, thrown and touched by Epps’ surprisingly encouraging words, wanted to thank him for trying to cheer him up. But then he saw something that gave him pause.

“Is that useful?” Memo pointed behind Epps.

Epps turned around to see a meteor falling from the sky, heading straight toward them.

“Am I going crazy or is that a meteor?” Memo asked.

“Might be,” Epps shrugged.

“Huh…should we get out of the way?”

“Yes, let’s.”

The two ducked into a pharmacy that was still mostly standing a second before the meteor crashed
into the road, sending bits of debris flying. They pressed there backs against the pharmacy’s wall, Epps throwing an arm over Memo’s chest to keep them from going with the debris.

When everything went quiet again they exchanged concerned look. The two were brought back to a time when several meteors had landed across the world—that hadn’t been a good day for mankind.

“I’m closer to the door,” Memo breathed, “I’ll go and look.”

“You’ll take a look by the door you will not go out there.”

Memo nodded, hoping Epps didn’t notice his shivering and crawled over to the doorway. Peeking out of it he saw that the meteor was not a large piece of space rock—but a spherical, silver shape that looked horrifyingly familiar.

Memo quickly went back to Epps side, “That’s a space ship out there.”

The soldier cursed, “I swear if that is another Decepticon I am going to lose my mind.”

“Maybe it’s an Autobot?” Memo offered, but not even he believed in his suggestion.

“Either way we can’t stay in here, come on.” Epps rose to his feet, “If we’re lucky it’ll need a few minutes to collect itself and we can make a run for it.”

“We can’t lead it back to the others,” Memo said quickly as he jumped up.

“We won’t,” Epps assured, “If it gives chase we’ll find a place to hide out until it leaves.”

Fear and panic crushed Memo’s throat as he followed his friend to the doorway. They slowly stepped out, keeping to the building’s wall as they went, eyes on the ship.

Memo started when suddenly the alien sphere split open and a robotic body pulled itself into a sitting position. It was dark gray and white and its back was to them. Memo almost stopped walking but a meaningful look from Epps made him keep going, scarcely daring to breathe.

Every step felt like it took years but at least the robot hadn’t heard their rapid fire heart beats, it was staring out into the skyline of the city. While they couldn’t see it’s face it looked deep in thought.

The wall of the pharmacy ended and Epps didn’t stop, still going at a snail’s pace, and Memo followed. He felt much less safe without a wall pressed to his back.
Epps was heading for a building across the street, Memo could imagine they would slip inside and find a back door, then they’d be officially out of this robot’s sight. Then they could hurry and get back to Prime and inform him about this.

Then there was a loud crash that shook the ground.

Memo and Epps whirled around—several yards away they saw a rising plume of smoke. That wasn’t…that wasn’t another ship, was it?!

It was then the two’s eyes widened and they turned back to the robot they had been avoiding.

It was standing up now, facing them. Instead of eyes it had a blue visor and was looking above them, to where the crash came from. While it was distracted Memo’s eyes fell on its chest and he recognized the red insignia.

“IT’S AN AUTOBOT!”

The transformer jumped, clearly caught off guard by Memo’s yell.

“Oh, woah!” it said in a male voice, “I didn’t even see you-huh…”

In one smooth movement it walked over and bent down in front of the two, despite the Autobot symbol both men took a step back.

“You’re organics,” the Autobot said, his voice friendly but confused. It kinda reminded Memo of Wheeljack. “How do you know about Autobots?”

“We know Optimus Prime,” Epps said.

“You do?!” his voice rose in excitement. “Where is he? Can you take me to him? We got the distress signal from Wheeljack but he didn’t tell us much. Oh, I’m sorry—” he extended his hand that was as large as Memo’s entire body. “I’m Jazz.”

“Memo,” he greeted, grabbing one of the Autobot’s finger and doing his best to shake it.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Epps interrupted, looking between Jazz and where the other ship had vanished. “We? There’s more of you coming?”

“Coming?” Jazz echoed and looked up to the sky, “We’re already here.”
The two humans looked up to see what appeared to be stars shining in the blue sky, getting closer and closer.

Epps let out a laugh that was filled with relief, “Do you see that, Memo? You know what that is?”

Memo imagined Epps was thinking along the words of army, or friends, or cavalry. But that wasn’t the answer that slipped through Memo’s lips: “Hope.”

Charlie had lost track of time.

She wasn’t sure how many days had passed since she was brought to the Decepticon base but at least she could say she was being productive.

Healing Thundercracker had given her a weird kind of respect among most of the Decepticons, whenever she was taken to Shockwave for blood samples and X-Rays they would give her the smallest nod. It was weird but also kinda empowering, she could see why Starscream got a kick out of it.

Speaking of Starscream, as absolutely horrid as he was, he was keeping his end of the bargain. No other humans beside herself had been taken into the base since she arrived. The constant fear in everyone’s eyes, fearing them or their loved ones would be the next lab rat, were gone. They were jubilant of course, but their wasn’t an ever present sense of dread anymore. Otis got Mikaela to laugh the other day and the sound nearly brought all the adults to tears. It kinda made flattering Starscream worth it.

Of course, she was still a subject to many experiments but none had been as horrifying as the slug.

She’d run through mazes, try and solve Cybteronian puzzles that she didn’t understand, and at one point got pricked by one of Shockwave’s claws to see if the cut would heal and how quickly. That had been the worst, partly because she thought he would cut her whole arm off, partly because she’d almost have any Decepticon touch her besides Shockwave. Him and Dropkick, the blue Con still clearly wanted nothing more than to squash her. A shudder ran down her spine every time she saw him.

But the Decepticon she saw most often was Thundercracker.

Whether it had been by Starscream’s orders or if he had volunteered, the jet had become one of the most frequent guards of the Farm. And while Tabitha and the others gave him a wide berth, just like they did with all Decepticons, but Charlie had made it a habit to walk over and have a chat with him.

And despite Thundercracker’s reserve, he had slowly warmed up to her. Charlie pulled him into
conversations, telling him about how everyone at the Farm was doing (“Maisy’s twins got Colin to play a game of hopscotch with them. They won by a landslide.”. “Tabitha wanted me to thank you for being so helpful lately.”)

In return Thundercracker told her about the antics Decepticons got into, (“Our medic Knockout contacted us yesterday, said his post was too dirty for the likes of him.” “Skywarp was trying to show off and nearly got struck by lightning.”) unfortunately he didn’t say anything that could help her escape or contact the Autobots.

The Autobots were a topic she never brought up, not only would that not please the Cons, she didn’t like the thought that they had gone back and finished the job. Charlie wanted to trust that Optimus Prime and the others could handle themselves but then her thoughts would go back to Bumblebee and she’d push it back. She only thought of him alone at night, when no one could see her crying.

At one point Thundercracker was sent to go on a scouting mission that would take a few days.

“I’ll miss you,” Charlie offered in her usual ‘let’s be friends’ voice.

Thundercracker, still looking embarrassed whenever she was nice to him, nodded quickly. “I’ll be back soon,” he murmured quietly before he flew off.

But during those three days Charlie was surprised to find that she did miss Thundercracker. His company was much better than the other Cons. Skywarp had replaced him as her escort when Shockwave needed her or Starscream wanted to show off her powers. And while Skywarp was apparently trying to be more polite (everything he said annoyed someone), Charlie no longer felt safe when she went into the cold halls of the base. With Thundercracker or Starscream Charlie felt safe enough that if one of the Cons decided to just stop listening to their leader, the jets could protect her. But Skywarp…Charlie biggest comfort was he could teleport.

When Thundercracker returned Charlie felt the strangest sense of relief. If she didn’t know any better she was considering this Decepticon a friend.

“Thundercracker!” Charlie yelled, hurrying over to the jet who had landed a few feet away from the farm. “Hey! How’d it go!”

“It went fine,” Thundercracker said in a voice that said it was anything but.

Charlie came to a stop before him, “What’s wrong?”

Thundercracker knelt down in front of her, “Nothing for you to worry about.”

What was that suppose to mean? “We’re allies, Thundercracker. You can trust me.”
The look he gave her suggested he was truly wondering if he could. Charlie sighed and reached her hand out to rest on his own, “You don’t have to tell me. It just would’ve been nice, considering…”

“Considering you’re the AllSpark?”

“No,” she smiled jokingly. “Considering you’re my favorite.”

He smirked, “Am I?”

“Yeah just don’t tell Starscream or Skywarp,” she winked.

To her surprise Thundercracker actually laughed. It was soft and short, but it was still a laugh, a nice one. An Autobot-like one.

“Speaking of Starscream I need to report to him,” he said, his smile dropping slightly.

“Okay, but feel free to come back when you’re done,” she invited. “I had to talk to Skywarp while you were gone and wow, did he say some interesting things.”

Another chuckle, “Looking forward to it. But here, before I forget.” He extended his other hand that had been formed into a fist. His fingers unraveled to reveal a small, shimmery stone in the middle of his palm. Charlie wasn’t positive but…it looked like a diamond.

“What’s this?” she asked.

“It’s for you,” he answered before his voice grew quieter, “During my trip I passed by a mine we dug through, looking for anything useful like Energon. I remembered seeing these stones and thought that…you’d might like one.” He cleared his throat and looked away, his voice becoming dismissive, “Humans like these silly things, don’t they?”

Charlie blinked, absolutely stunned. This wasn’t a casual conversation, this was a sincere gift, Thundercracker brought her a gift. She swallowed.

This isn’t fair. I tried to act like his friend but he wasn’t…he wasn’t suppose to be genuine, he wasn’t suppose to think about me and consider what I would like. I wasn’t suppose to feel terrible about tricking a Decepticon.

Charlie didn’t move to grab the diamond and Thundercracker started to fidget.

“If you don’t want it that’s fine,” he insisted. “I just thought you might-”
Charlie reached out and grabbed the diamond, holding it to her chest. “No, no, I like it. Thank you.” She looked up at him. “Really.”

Thundercracker nodded, and left in a great hurry. Probably feeling as awkward as she did.

Charlie looked down at the diamond clasped between her hands, feeling an unwanted sense of guilt.

*Why did things have to get even more complicated?*

Starscream was looking over data sent from other Decepticon posts when he heard Thundercracker call his name.

He turned around as his seeker landed a few feet from him. “Anything worthy to report-”

Starscream stopped when he saw the horrified look on Thundercracker’s face and he didn’t need to ask any more questions.

*Don’t I have enough problems to deal with!?*
“So, the Autobots are on Earth?”

Shockwave, who had gone over the data he had gathered from his tests, looked up to see Dropkick leaned against the door frame. News of Thundercracker’s discovery had spread like wildfire around the base: he had spotted two Autobots driving around this wasteland they called a base.

“It was only a matter of time,” Shockwave said with cold acceptance. “Starscream and his seekers are going to go find them, I suspect they’ll either kill them or hold them prisoner.”

Dropkick’s gaze glowed with envy, “I wish they had invited me, I’m so bored. I’d kill to shoot something.”

“But you weren’t invited,” Shockwave wasn’t sympathetic to the blue Con’s plight. “But rest assured, you will want to stay at the base.”

Dropkick’s optics narrowed, “Really?”

“Without our ‘Lord Starscream’ slithering around base, I can finally get to work,” he turned to Dropkick. “As soon as the seekers are no longer in sight, bring me the AllSpark.”

Charlie helped Mrs. Jones, an elderly woman with a thick European accent she couldn’t decipher, into a shaded place to sit.


The woman shook her head, “No dear, I’m fine.” She offered her a sweet grandmotherly smile, “You’re such a sweet thing, getting us food and more. Don’t know what we’d do without you.”

It’s no problem, let know if you need anything.”

When she walked away Charlie took a moment to enjoy the feeling of appreciation she got whenever someone sang her praise. It gave her the strength to go back into that base every day.

Speaking of the base, Charlie stopped in the heart of the Farm to see three familiar jets fly off from it, two continued straight into the sky but one made a turn and headed down to the farm.
A confusing sense of happiness and guilt filled Charlie’s chest as she dashed over to meet Thundercracker.

The Decepticon transformed midair and knelt before her, an expectant look on his face.

“I knew you’d wonder where we are going,” he said in way of greeting.

Charlie smirked, “You’d be right. Can you tell me this time?”

“It’s just a look around,” he explained. “I think Starscream is looking for more places to set up base.”

The thought made Charlie’s heart twist, “This base isn’t big enough?” Charlie indicated to the large building towering over them, as far as she could tell there was only so many Cons that stayed there, there was room for more.

Thundercracker shrugged, looking almost apologetic, “Decepticons like a lot space, and lots of them are starting to complain about their own bases being set up in…less than ideal locations.”

*Maybe they should have thought of that before they invaded,* Charlie thought bitterly. “How-how long will you be gone?” She didn’t like the thought of her being left to Shockwave without a seeker in sight.

Thundercracker reached out, as if to touch her, but stopped his hand a fraction before the tip of his finger reached her arm. “It won’t be long,” he assured in that soft, sincere voice that made Charlie’s guilt want to crush her throat. “I’ll be back in a few hours.” He opened his mouth, hesitated, then continued, “I can keep an optic out for any more of those stones, if you’d like.”

Charlie’s hand reached into her pocket where the diamond rested, warm against her thigh. She traced her fingers across it, “I-I wouldn’t know where to keep any more of these. But I appreciate the offer.” She smiled, hoping the guilt wasn’t written all over her face. “It’s really nice of you.”

He returned the smile, his clear and genuine expression making her feel worse.

“Better not keep Starscream waiting,” she said quickly. “I’ll see you when you get back.”

He nodded, “Okay, see you then.”

He flew off and Charlie walked back to the Farm with slow, despondent, steps.
Otis was waiting for her, looking curious and concerned for his sister. “Everything okay, you looked so sad to see Thundercracker go?”

Charlie looked around to make sure no one else was listening, “I wasn’t suppose to feel bad for pretending to be their friend,” Charlie admitted. Otis’ brow furrowed, “You feel bad for the Decepticons?”

“I feel bad for Thundercracker.” She pulled out the diamond to show to her brother, “He gave me this yesterday, just because he thought I would like it.”

Otis looked absolutely baffled, “What, to make you like him?”

“I guess,” Charlie quickly shoved the gem back into her pocket before anyone else could see it. “I feel bad, Otis. He doesn’t act like the other Decepticons, I don’t want to keep tricking him.”

“Well, if he likes you so much why don’t we ask him to join the Autobots?”

Before Charlie could form an answer a familiar blue shape was marching toward the farm and dread made a rock form in her stomach.

“Otis,” she breathed, “Go make sure all the kids and elderly are inside.” Otis looked to where his sister was staring, and immediately shot off to do what she said. Forcing her chin up Charlie made her way to stand in front of the Farm, as if she could block it from Dropkick’s wrath.

She glanced behind her to see Mrs. Jones was no longer resting in the shade and Caly was hurrying into a house with Mikaela in her arms. Otis was no where to be seen, the only people outside was herself, Tabitha, Colin, and a few of the other adults.

They all stood a few feet, spread out in a ragged semi circle, offering silent support.

Dropkick stopped before her, looking down at her with an arrogant snarl. If Thundercracker had acted like Dropkick she wouldn’t feel any guilt for tricking him into friendship.

“I’ve come to take you to Shockwave,” Dropkick growled.

Those words didn’t give Charlie any sort of comfort and she planted her feet firmly into the dusty ground. “Starscream didn’t’ say anything about any testing today.”

Dropkick narrowed his eye, “There are some things Screamer doesn’t need to know, little AllSpark.”
“And that kinda thinking is going to get you killed,” she said pointedly.

Anger flared in his eye and Charlie decided maybe that hadn’t been the best thing to say to this particular robot.

“I could say the same for you,” he replied. “Being Starscream’s pet has made you dangerously egotistical. Making threats to me of all Cons.”

“I’m not threatening you,” she insisted, managing to keep her voice even. “But Starscream is the Decepticon leader and he’s going to be furious if you do something without running it by him.”

There was a heavy moment of silence, Dropkick glaring down at her, before slowly looking over the rest of the humans that stood behind her.

“Alright,” he finally spoke, his voice suddenly much more chipper. “I’m a reasonable Con, we can make a deal.”

“A deal?” she echoed, a deep sense of foreboding overcoming her. She took a step back before she could stop herself.

“Yes, either you come with me, or-” in a move so quick none had time to process, a cannon appeared from Dropkick’s wrist and he fired-straight at Colin.

The man that had become Charlie’s friend exploded into liquid, becoming nothing but a puddle on the ground. It was so quick he didn’t even scream. But everyone else did, the humans let out terrified shrieks as they jumped away, some rushing back into the houses. Charlie stayed stock still, staring at what was left of Colin in stunned, horrified silence.

“We’ll get everyone reunited and make our home safe again.” Grief and nauseous rose up her throat and it took everything in her not to throw up.

“Or I do that to the rest of these humans,” Dropkick continued, his voice still sickly sweet. “And when I run out of them, I’ll go get more humans, and more, and more. And when I run out, I’ll go after your precious little Autobots.”

Charlie slowly turned to look up at the Con, he didn’t have lips but she could feel his smile. “So what’ll it be?”

Charlie released a shuddering breath, hate that was painful and thick settled into her chest, and then she took two steps forward.
“Smart girl,” he complimented mockingly before reaching out and snatching her. His fingers dug into her skin and her body flailed from the speed of him lifting his arm. But she didn’t say a word, Colin’s death, so quick, so simple, running in his head over and over again.

As Dropkick turned to walk back into the base Charlie glanced back at who was left. Tabitha was staring up at her with open horror and worry. Charlie wanted to call out for her not to worry, that everything would be okay. But she didn’t want to lie to her.

Once inside the hallways of the base Charlie recalled the first time she had been brought her, she had still been reeling from Bumblebee’s death, that slug had violated her insides. Yet somehow she knew that Colin’s murder marked that whatever happened next, it was going to be worse.

To her surprise Dropkick walked right past Shockwave’s laboratory. Where the hell where they going? She didn’t bother to ask. She just wondered how she got to the point where she was praying for Starscream to return, the conqueror of her planet, she wanted him back, and even Skywarp and definitively Thundercracker. This wasn’t their plan, they were suppose to protect the humans, he was suppose to keep them all alive!

Charlie wasn’t surprised when Dropkick stepped into a freezing cold room, and she saw a dark gray body lying on a table.

*Megatron.*

They weren’t the only ones there, Shockwave, the femme bot, several others she sorta recognized, some Cons she had never seen before. There was even Soundwave, the one Decepticon she had seen the least of, which had been perfectly fine to Charlie, the silent transformer was so foreboding.

But now he was here, now all the Cons she hated the most were here, she didn’t have an ally in sight.

“Good, you’ve brought her in once piece,” Shockwave spoke up, drawing all eyes to them.

“Of course,” Dropkick purred and Charlie wanted to stab out his other eye. He walked over and all but threw Charlie onto the table where Megatron lay. Charlie forced herself to her feet and stepped as far away as she could from the corpse.

“Welcome, AllSpark,” Shockwave said in his unfriendly, uninviting voice.

Charlie glowered at him, “What do you want this time?”
“It is obvious, isn’t it?” he asked. “We’d like you to revive Megatron.”

Charlie swallowed and looked over the body, “He’s—he’s gone, I can’t bring back the dead.”

“Let me show something,” Shockwave stepped over to Megatron’s chest. With one finger he pressed down and a cavity opened. Charlie was pushed forward by the femme bot, and she saw a flicker of blue in the former leader’s chest. His spark…just a small flame, it looked like it could be blown out with a breath, worse…it looked like she could fan the flames.

“My studies have shown you and the AllSpark are one now, and while your blood could prove to have…interesting qualites. The AllSpark is linked to your brain, if it’s within its power it will do as you ask.” He indicated to Megatron’s open chest, it was such a strangely disturbing sight, “You can strengthen his spark.”

_That’s the one thing Starscream doesn’t want me to do_, she thought with dread.

She swallowed, and bit back the fear that made her voice crack, “Starscream is the leader, shouldn’t he be here?”

“Starscream is busy,” Shockwave answered, “I assure you, he will be thrilled to see his former leader returned to his former glory.”

Dropkick and the femme bot shared a wicked chuckle.

“You will be a champion among Decepticons,” Shockwave continued. “Megatron will be good to those who are good to him.”

_A champion for Decepticons? _What would her kind think of that, what would the Autobots think of that?

Charlie’s hands tightened into fists and she tried again, “I’m sorry…but Starscream is the leader, not you. I only follow his orders.”

Muttering among the onlookers filled the room, everyone twitching from the tension in the air as Charlie forced herself not to break eye contact with Shockwave.

Only a few seconds passed before Shockwave nodded, “You are very loyal to the Decepticon who took over your planet. It’s brave of you, admirable even. Very well, I will respect your decision.”

Charlie’s brow furrowed in confusion and Dropkick let out a furious growl, “You WHAT?!”
Shockwave turned away from Charlie, “But I need to do something productive today… Ah, I know. I can clean out the Farm. I don’t need it now that I have the AllSpark.”

Charlie’s eyes bulged.

“Oh, I’ll do it for you!” Dropkick offered instantly, his red eye aglow with bloodlust.

“I’m aware of your work, Dropkick. You kill them too quickly.” Shockwave turned to Soundwave. “Ravage wouldn’t be amiss of some practice. Let him go to the Farm, let him have fun.”

Charlie started to shake as Soundwave’s chest open and the cat-like robot that had nearly killed Cade slithered out and landed on the floor. With fangs and claws glinting it slowly made it’s way to the door. Charlie could imagine it reaching the Farm, finding Otis, Tabitha, Caly, Mikaela and all the other innocent people. None of them would stand a chance-they’d be slaughtered.

“No…no,” she breathed, “Stop, STOP, STOP I’LL DO IT!”

Soundwave lifted his hand and without turning around Ravage came to a stop immediately.

Charlie turned to Shockwave, panic and grief and hatred burning in her blood. There was only one way she could save her brother and friends.

“I’ll do it.”

“Yes, you will.” Shockwave’s voice had always sounded neutral and factual, but this time Charlie could have sworn she heard a hint of malice.

Limbs still shivering Charlie crawled up onto Megatron’s chest, his metal flesh cold and hard and unclean.

She knelt before his open chest, her eyes on his flickering spark and she felt a wave of shame and self-hatred roll over her. She had flown too close to the sun, she had tried to outsmart these Decepticons, she had gone into the heart of a battle to help, when it would have been better if she had never met Bumblebee at all. Everything she had ever done, had led up to this moment.

Voices played in her head:

Her mother, Ron, the soldiers, the Farm, who were no longer safe.

Otis, who believed in her.
Thundercracker, who had considered her a friend.

Optimus, who promised that he would protect them.

Bumblebee, who looked at her with the most beautiful blue eyes.

They all trusted her, and she was about to betray them.

*I’m so sorry*, tears flooded her eyes and she wrapped her hands around what was left of Megatron’s spark. *I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m so-*

Pain.

White hot pain lashed across her body and Charlie howled. What was this? This wasn’t how it worked! It didn’t feel so awful when she healed transformers! Why did it feel so cold? Why did it feel like the spark was trying to drag her down, trying to pull her entire soul out of her body. Through her tears she saw her hands burn, her fingers blacken, red and blue blood oozing out of her skin.

And all the while the millions of voices screamed in her head.

*Traitor.*

*Traitor!*

*TRAITOR!!!*

It was the voices of Cybertronians crying out to her, having given their lives to end Megatron’s reign, who had died by his hand. They were begging her not to reawaken this evil. Not just them, her mind raced with the cries of humans who would be murdered once Megatron was alive.

*Stop!*

*I’m sorry!*

*Please!*

*I can’t let them kill Otis and the others!*
You’re killing us all!

Traitor!

Monster!

DECEPTICON!

“What are you doing!?”

The scream made Charlie jump back, her hands ripped from the spark, now full and pulsing. She saw a flash of red eyes before she fell off Megatron’s body onto the table.

The corpse jerked and Charlie scrambled backward in a panic, her sight was blurry from tears, she could barely hear as her ears rang from the voices of the AllSpark.

Her bloody hand dropped unexpectedly and too late Charlie realized she had reached the edge of the table. But before she could even muster the fresh fear of falling hands caught her and she looked up to see the familiar angles of Thundercracker.

No, no, not him.

The jet held her to his chest as he stepped away from the crowd of Cons, Starscream’s yelling reaching her ears.

“You had no right to do this without consulting me!” he snarled.

“No right!?” Dropkick nearly laughed. “Megatron was the leader before you Starscream, and he was better!”

“If you were a loyal Decepticon you would have wanted to revive him as soon as we retrieved the AllSpark,” Shatter crowed.

“Are you okay?” Thundercracker whispered to her.

“Colin’s dead,” she sobbed. “Dropkick killed him. They-they would have killed everyone else if I didn’t do it. I’m sorry Thundercracker, I didn’t want to.” She buried her face into his chest, her tears and blood burning against her skin. “I didn’t want to.”
The arguing suddenly came to a halt and Charlie forced herself to look over her shoulder.

Megatron’s arm twitched again, and then she and the Cons all watched, transfixed, as he slowly rose up, off the table and onto his feet.

He towered above them, he looked so much bigger than when he was dead, even bigger than Optimus. And a sense of malignity immediately filled the room, it was too easy to imagine all the lives this Decepticon took, all the lives he planned to take it.

And it was all thanks to her.

The Decepticons, even Thundercracker, bowed their heads as Megatron’s crimson eyes slowly looked over the room. Thundercracker covered her with his hand to hide her from Megatron’s gaze, but before he did she saw Starscream, his face impassive but his eyes betraying the frustration and fury as all his plans went up in flames.

When she was in the dark of Thundercracker’s hand she heard Shockwave’s voice, once again neutral and factual, “Welcome back, Lord Megatron.”

Chapter End Notes

NOW that I got that outta my system back to our regular scheduled updating.

(also ya'll comments are tempting me to make a thundercracker x Charlie fic)
Chapter 41

Charlie was back on the beach.

That wonderful, beautiful beach where she had been so happy.

She stood, bare-footed on the warm sand, staring out into the sea’s horizon to watch the setting sun paint the sky orange and red. She took in a breath of the salty air, and a smile pulled up her lips.

Then she heard music.

But not just any music, it was *Unchained Melody*.

Turning to her left Charlie’s heart nearly burst when she saw a familiar yellow figure, waiting for her on the other side of the beach.

“Bee…” she could barely breathe through the lump in her throat. Joyful tears fell down her cheeks as she ran across the sand. “Bumblebee!”

He was here, he was safe, he was *alive*! Charlie reached her hand out toward him, wanting nothing more for him to pick her up and carry her away.

“*Bumblebee!*”

He turned away.

Charlie came to a halt, stunned. The Autobot, who had always looked at her with kindness was now glaring at her in a mixture of hatred and fear. It made her heart nearly stop.

She reached her hand out toward him, “Bee, what’s wrong-” She mouth stopped working when she looked at her hand. It was covered in a blue liquid that dripped down on the sand. It matched the liquid that was now pouring out of Bumblebee’s chest.

“No, NO!”

She desperately tried to wipe the substance off but was horrified to realize that underneath it her hand was no longer her hand. Instead of flesh it was silver metal. A Cybertronian’s hand…a *Decepticon’s* hand.
She turned back to the Autobot who had turned to walk away, the liquid pouring out of his chest dotting the sand beneath him.

“Bee! Bee, come back!” Charlie cried out, “Don’t leave me, please!”

She took a step to follow him but fingers wrapped around her ankle. Charlie looked down and could have vomited in terror. Instead of the sandy beach she now stood on a pile of robotic bodies, the Autobot insignia flashing on so many of the corpses. Before she could try to run away more hands shot up out of the pile and dug their claws into her skin, making her bleed. But it wasn’t red blood, but the blue of a Cybertronian. Charlie lost her balance and fell onto her back, as the hands started to drag her deep into the mound of corpses.

She tried to crawl back up but thoughts of escape fled her mind when she saw what was on her chest. Her shirt had been torn at the chest, to reveal a Decepticon brand on her skin. She let out a shriek of panic and hate and started to claw at the insignia, ignoring the the tearing of her skins and the blue blood that started to trickle down her body. The symbol didn’t tear but her skin started to peel away to reveal more silver metal beneath.

Voices screamed in her ears as she was dragged into the darkness of the Autobot grave.

**Traitor!**

**Monster!**

**DECEPTICON!**

A yell ripped out of her throat as Charlie jolted up into a sitting position. Breathing raggedly she checked her hands only to see her arms covered in thick bandages. “No, no, no!” she started to wheeze, unable to get breath in her body.

“What’s wrong?!”

Thundercracker appeared in her line of sight, leaning over with a concerned expression on his face.

Charlie waved her wounded arms wildly, ignoring the pain that hung off her bones. “My hands-I was-I was bleeding and.”

“Hey, hey, calm down,” Thundercracker reached out and wrapped his fingers around her back, holding her in place. The pressure was weirdly calming. “It’s okay, you’re safe.”
Charlie pressed her back against his hand, leaning her head against his palm and managed to suck in enough breathes to calm her racing heart beat. That was a nightmare…she was okay.

She was as okay as she could possibly be.

She looked around at her surroundings, she was in a small, empty room that looked the equivalent of a Decepticon closet. She was sitting on a small table with blankets piled around her.

Everything returned to her:

“I do not recognize this base,” Megatron’s voice was slow and menacing and make Charlie’s bones freeze.

Still in pain she curled into herself and buried her face deeper into Thundercracker’s chest, swallowed in the darkness of his hands hiding her.

“Many things have changed since we last saw each other, Lord Megatron,” Shockwave began. “We are on an organic planet called Earth. We got the readings that you had crash-landed here. Starscream led a attack to eradicate the organics here before we found your body, along with the Cube.”

“Starscream led the attack?” Megatron echoed. Even when he was confused he sounded threatening.

“You were offline, Lord Megatron,” Starscream’s voice reached her ears, in his defense he didn’t sound as furious as he surely was. “With you gone someone needed to take command.”

There was a heavy moment of silence and Charlie could picture the Con leader glaring at the jet. But then he changed the subject, “You say I was offline? The Cube revived me?”

“That-,” Shockwave continued, “-is where things became unusual.”

Charlie knew they were all looking toward Thundercracker, waiting for him to reveal her so she could look in the eyes of the monster she had brought back to life. So she could be praised as the Champion of the Decepticons.

“Show him, Thundercracker,” Shockwave’s voice was flat, but he didn’t have to put emotion into his voice. It still sounded like a threat. “Now.”

Charlie felt the seeker hesitate and Charlie’s heart went out to him. She wouldn’t blame him if he crushed her between his hands right now.
“Do it, Thundercracker,” Starscream’s voice was a snap.

With obvious reluctance Thundercracker removed his hand and stretched his arm out to show Charlie to the group. Charlie sat completely still in his hand with the exception of her shaking. From the corner of her eye she saw Megatron, staring at her with an unreadable expression.

“What is this?” he finally asked.

“The AllSpark,” several of the Cons in the room said at once, Charlie could just see Megatron’s eyes widened.

Shockwave appeared in her vision and her nausea returned but she forced it down her throat.

“What is this?” Megatron’s voice became a disgusting purr and Charlie closed her eyes so she couldn’t see any of them. “Then she shall be rewarded. But not now, now I have many things to catch up on.”

Thundercracker’s voice, so much gentler than the others’, spoke up, “Lord Megatron, the human is very weak from this ordeal. Could I take her where she can rest and regain her strength.”

“Thundercracker here considers himself a human expert,” Dropkick spoke up, his voice mocking.

“Then he is free to tend to her,” Megatron replied. “We owe this small organic much, the least we can do is be sure her needs are met. And as I said, I have much to talk about with my generals.”

Thundercracker nodded and quickly returned Charlie to his chest, turning around and hurrying out the door.

“Are you alright?” he asked as soon as they were out of earshot. “Your hands!”

Charlie lifted her hands up, they were shimmering with her blood, her fingers blackened as if she had frostbite. She held them to her chest and wished she could curl up and disappear.

After turning a few corners Thundercracker walked into a bare room and placed her on a table. His hands hovering over her, the Decepticon looking panicked.

“I-I’m not sure what to do,” he admitted. “What do you need? Your hands, they’re-”
“Bandages,” she breathed, holding her hands against her stomach. “I need bandages.” Her vision was starting to fade at the edges and she tried to keep her head from lolling to the side.

So bone-exhausted she wasn’t even able to rise to her feet when Starscream stormed into the room, Skywarp following and a much slower pace.

“We had a deal!” The Con finished his words with his fists slamming onto the table, mere inches from her body.

But it didn’t bother Charlie, his words sent a flare of anger up her spine and she glared up at Starscream.

“Yes…we did,” her voice was a raspy snarl. “And you didn’t keep it! I told you to protect the humans, that’s all I asked Starscream and you know what happened? One of them died! Dropkick murdered Colin because I said I would only follow your orders!” She tried to stand up and fell on her knees, Thundercracker over to the side, reached out as if to catch her. “You don’t even know who Colin is, you didn’t care.” She glared up at the former Decepticon leader, “It looks as if we’re both failures!”

Starscream’s eyes narrowed, “You’re right. I don’t know who the human known as Colin was. I don’t make the effort to learn the names of organics who will soon be turned to dust. Which I assure you will be all of the humans now that you’ve resurrected Megatron!”

“It’s not her fault!” Thundercracker stepped forward to stand between the two. His back was to Charlie who could hardly make it out as her vision became more and more blurry.

“Shockwave had to have been planning this. He tricked us into leaving cause he knew you’d find a way to stop us,” Thundercracker went on. “She didn’t have any options.”

Starscream suddenly let out a vicious growl and slammed his fist into the wall with such a strong force that her ears rang.

“I AM THE ONE WITH NO MORE OPTIONS!” he shrieked at Thundercracker who flinched. “I knew I should have crushed her the moment we took her from the Autobots! But I didn’t! And I have not only lost my rightful place as the leader of the Decepticons, but we’re going to be stuck on this miserable planet for the rest of our lives! Megatron is a coward and wouldn’t dare take the effort needed in restoring our home to our former glory!”

He continued on, and Charlie tried to listen but her ears weren’t working anymore, and her vision was fading in and out, and she couldn’t hold her head up anymore…Charlie fell onto the table as exhaustion tore her consciousness away.
Charlie felt fresh tears roll down her cheeks and she turned to bury her face into Thundercracker’s palm.

“What’s-”

“I’m sorry,” she cut him off. “I’m sorry I resurrected Megatron. I know you trusted me. I don’t blame you if you hate me.”

“I-” he stammered, caught off guard. “I don’t hate you. You made it clear you would do what it takes to protect the humans, I can’t fault you for that.”

“But I didn’t protect them,” her voice cracked as a sob wracked her body. “Colin is dead and Megatron will…he’s going to…” She couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Why don’t you just focus on regaining your strength,” Thundercracker offered, his voice soft. “You’ll be able to handle everything better with a clear head.”

She didn’t believe that but she couldn’t stomach talking about the awful thing she had done. Instead she pulled herself closer into Thundercracker’s warm palm, feeling the smallest measurement of secure. “Sorry,” she repeated, looking at the tear stains on the Decepticon’s hand. “Can I-can I sit like this…for just a little?”

In response Thundercracker curled his fingers around her body, shielding her from the cold nothingness of the Decepticon base.

She wasn’t sure how much time had passed before her tears had dried up and she took another look at her arms. “Did you bandage me up?”

“Uh, yes,” he replied, seemingly startled by her sudden question. “You said that’s what you needed so I went to the Farm and they gave me some and well…I did my best.”

His best was impressive considering how one of his fingers was nearly as long as her entire body. But the mention of the Farm made Charlie lift her head up to face him. “Can I go back to the Farm? Otis and the others…they must be so scared and worried.”

Thundercracker looked away and for a terrifying second she thought Ravage had paid a visit to the Farm.

“I’m sorry,” he breathed. “But Lord Megatron ordered that you don’t leave the base. Not even to visit the Farm.”
Chapter 42

“Lord Megatron has summoned you, Starscream.”

The information came from Shatter who looked far too smug as she said it. It took everything in the Con to not shoot her as he passed by. Walking down the hall, back to the room, to the throne that was Starscream’s. But he knew what he’d find, Megatron sitting there as if he had earned it. As if he wasn’t the worst thing to ever happen to the Decepticons. As if there wasn’t a perfectly salvageable planet waiting for them.

And it was all her fault!

Starscream let his ego cloud his judgement. He should have known better than to let a mere human carry around all that power. Thundercracker, the soft-sparked fool, had told him how Shockwave had threatened the Farm if she didn’t comply.

Pathetic.

Because of her obsession with protecting a few humans who had no consequence to anything important, she had doomed them as well as the rest of the insects that crawled on this filthy planet! And Starscream was expecting to be there, following orders like a good soldier, and making Earth the perfect home for Decepticon-kind.

His hands clenched into fists.

He somehow managed to enter the throne room calm and collected. Even when his optics saw Megatron sitting where he didn’t belong, he kept a straight face.

Soundwave, of course, stood loyally by Megatron’s side. He was silent as death as Starscream marched into the room and knelt before his leader.

“You summoned me, Lord Megatron.”

“Yes, I had heard of all you’ve done for the Decepticons during my absence.” It wasn’t a compliment. “You understand that that is no longer necessary, don’t you Starscream?”

The seeker gritted his teeth but managed a single nod. “Of course, Lord Megatron.”

“Smart of you,” a smirk was in his voice. “But that isn’t the only reason I have asked you here. Skywarp tells me you caught prisoners while I was out.”
“Yes, Lord Megatron,” he replied. Inside he cursed Skywarp, there would be no hiding prisoners from Megatron, but it made him feel better to insult the empty-headed seeker. They could have done something to them before Megatron found out. “Two Autobots. I had planned to interrogate them, but.”

“You planned to interrogate them,” Megatron echoed and despite himself Starscream felt a cold shiver go down his spine. His leader chuckled softly, “I think not. You will bring them to me and I will handle it from there. Interrogation requires the skill of a true leader.”

*I will turn you into scrap parts the moment you have your back to me.* “Of course, Lord Megatron.”

“And bring the human as well,” he added. “She has had enough time to rest, I want to formerly meet her.”

*The feeling isn’t mutual I promise you.* Starscream rose to his feet. “It will be done. Is there anything else?”

“Hmm, let me think…oh! There is one last thing.”

Before Starscream could so much as blink Megatron rose to his feet, grabbed the seeker’s arm, and slammed his entire body into the ground.

Sparks of pain and shock riddled Starscream’s body for a moment so that he couldn’t move. Megatron did not waste time. He slammed his foot into the back of Starscream’s knee, nearly slicing his leg in half with the impact. He then grabbed Starscream’s head, lifted it and slammed his face into the floor. He did this several times while Soundwave watched in impassive silence.

When he was done Megatron leaned forward and whispered menacingly. “It is a grave mistake to consider me a fool, Starscream. I know you doubt my leadership, insist to yourself that you be make the better leader. I bet you were thrilled to see me gone, to try and take my place like the little parasite that you are.”

“What I done to displease you, Lord Megatron?” Starscream asked through the pain. “I only did what I thought was right for the Decepticons. None of my decisions were to usurp you.”

Megatron laughed coldly. “You do consider me a fool if you think I would believe one word that comes out of your mouth.” In one swift moment he grabbed the jet and flung him into the wall, Starscream’s back slamming against the wall with a loud thud. He fell onto his stomach and bit back the pain to hurriedly rise onto his hands and knees. It was clearly dangerous to be lying down near the resurrected Decepticon.

Megatron stood in the middle of the room, at his full height and optics blazing he was the
embodiment of victory—one of the many reasons the war was still ongoing.

“You think I was not told what has happened in my absence?” he snarled. “How you failed to kill the scout B-127 before contacted *Optimus Prime!* The Autobots did not even know we were here but your failure will have an army at our door!”

In just a few steps Megatron loomed over Starscream, casting a wicked shadow over him. “I know you wished to keep me dead, Starscream. I know you even tried to kill the human to keep the AllSpark away from me. But you failed. Yet I, in my mercy, have decided you could still be of use to me. I offer you a second chance that you do not deserve.” His eyes narrowed, “But I will not give a third chance. Do you understand me?”

“...Perfectly…”

“Excellent,” Megatron turned away and returned to his seat. “Now bring me my prisoners. And my honored guest.”
Charlie had been shocked to see Starscream limp into the room, looking like he had just fought an entire group of Autobots.

Thundercracker asked what had happened but the jet only said that Megatron wanted to see Charlie, and immediately limped out afterward.

*He spoke to Megatron?* Charlie thought she could guess where he got his injuries, and saw another layer of why Starscream was furious he had returned.

She didn’t try to talk Thundercracker out of taking her to their leader. It was the last thing she wanted to do but she feared Megatron would give Thundercracker the same treatment he did to Starscream.

Arriving in the room the first thing Charlie noticed was Megatron, lounging in a throne and still looking incredibly massive, at his side was Soundwave. The lead Decepticon’s eyes were on the two Cybertronians knelt in the middle of the room, flanked by Skywarp and another Decepticon she didn’t know.

Her eyes widened, where these two on the floor…

She looked up to Thundercracker, “Are those Autobots?”

He nodded, “Their names are Hot Shot and Jazz. Megatron would do well not to underestimate them. Even outnumbered we had a hard time bringing them.” He suddenly started and broke eye contact, as if he just remebered Charlie sympathized with Autobots.

“Ah.” Megatron’s voice had her whip around to see him staring directly at her. “My savior has arrived.”

The two Autobots looked over their shoulders and saw open surprise to see her. She couldn’t blame them. After all what would a human being doing amongst the Decepticons who killed so many.

*Being a traitor, that’s what I’m doing,* she thought despondently as Thundercracker walked around the two until they reached Megatron’s side.

“Sit,” Megatron patted the arm of his seat, completely ignoring Thundercracker as he spoke to her.

While Charlie hated the thought of getting close to him, she was glad Thundercracker only hesitated for a moment before placing her on the arm and stepping away. She took note he made
sure to stay in her line of sight.

Trying to keep her legs from shaking she looked up at Megatron who smiled down at her, his chin resting on his hand. “What do you call yourself, human?”

“C-Charlie,” she answered, her voice tight.

His eyes narrowed slightly, “Don’t be anxious. You are an honored guest, Charlie.” He turned his attention back to the Autobots, “You should have arrived earlier. Their surprise when they saw me, it was quite entertaining.”

Charlie didn’t reply, looking at the two Autobots. A part of her felt a wave of relief to see Autobots again, she had thought she’d die before that happened. Though the looks they were giving her was less than encouraging.

Megatron noticed their looks too, “Ah, right. Where are my manners? Charlie, this is Hot Shot and Jazz. Starscream found them wandering around and was kind enough to bring them back.” It was really unsettling how casually he mentioned Starscream, as if he hadn’t just beat the seeker. “Autobots, I’d like you to meet Charlie. A dear friend of mine.”

_Shit up_, she had to bite her tongue to keep from saying that. She wasn’t his friend! Don’t say that in front of the Autobots!

And then, surprising everyone in the room, Megatron reached his hand down and ran his finger trips through Charlie’s hair. She fought back a shudder and kept her eyes on the ground as his knuckles ran down her neck.

“She was kind enough to bring be back from the brink of death,” Megatron went on. “Aren’t I lucky? It is a shame she’s an organic. She would make the perfect Decepticon.”

Charlie closed her eyes. _Stop, stop, stop!_ She didn’t need help feeling worse! She knew what an awful thing she had done, Megatron didn’t need to rub it in. And he definitely didn’t need to be touching her. Unlike other Cybertronians Megaton’s fingers were cold and coarse.

Megatron slowly turned his head back to the Autobots, “But I digress. I did not bring you here to brag.”

“Sure about that?” the one without the visor spoke. “You’ve done so much preening, I thought you were Starscream in disguise.”

There were several different reactions to the Autobot’s words. Thundercracker’s eyes widened, the Con she didn’t know pointedly turned his head away, and Skywarp making a painful hissing noise.
Megatron, whose fingers had been tracing through her hair as if she was a pet, stopped mid-stroke.

“Oh, Hot-Shot,” he spoke, his voice was calm and unaffected but she still somehow felt his anger coming off him in waves. “Still lippy as always. Prime should have removed your voice box eons ago.” With his free hand he flicked his wrist.

The unknown Con didn’t hesitate to land a kick in the back of Hot Shot’s head, nearly knocking him off his knees. Charlie jumped, and immediately hoped Megatron didn’t feel it.

“Unfortunately for you,” Hot Shot’s voice gritted through his pain. “He didn’t.”

Megatron hummed, “Unfortunately. But I am a Con who will take advantage of any opportunity that comes my way. And right now I have the opportunity to claw out some information from two Autobots.”

The two Bots exchanged a look then the other one-Jazz-spoke up, “It’d only be an opportunity for you to waste your time, Megatron.”

“Would it?” he fained surprise. “Charlie, what do you think?”

She bit her tongue and looked away. Megatron didn’t pay her discomfort any mind.

“Soundwave,” he turned to the Con at his other side. “What do you think?”

The Con looked at his leader but was also silent.

Megatron nodded thoughtfully as if his comrade had spoken. Then turned his menacing eyes back on his prisoners. “I agree. Let’s beat it out of them.”

Both Skywarp and the unknown Con slammed their heels into the Autobots’ back, forcing them to sprawl on the ground. Thundercracker took a step back as if he feared Megatron would order him to attack them.

“The question I want you to mull over as your bodies break is this: Where is Optimus Prime?”

“Oh I’ll go ahead and answer that,” Hot Shot spoke up again, his voice mocking. “He’s somewhere you won’t find him!” He was kicked in the face this time, followed by several blows to his side.

Charlie watched with rising nausea as the two Autobots were beat, the Cons pausing long enough for them to offer information they refused to give.
“Is this…” she forced the words out. “Is this necessary?”

“Aw,” Megatron murmured. “Poor Charlie, you would not understand. This war requires less than ideal means of winning.”

Charlie closed her eyes to keep from sending him a glare. How dare he suggest she didn’t know what war was like. “Can’t you-” she began.

But before she could get her words out Jazz suddenly moved, catching Skywarp off guard and rolling under the Con, sending him falling to the ground. It was Jazz’s turn to stab his heels into the jet’s back, making sure he hit Skywarp’s neck.

The seeker let out a yowl but before Jazz could do more damage Soundwave was there, grabbing the Bot and holding him by his throat with his other hand wielding a blaster.

“Jazz!” Hot Shot shouted before his face was shoved back into the floor.

“ENOUGH!” Megatron roared, making Charlie jump.

The large Con rose to his feet and stepped down to look over the two prisoners. “My patience has been spent.” He turned away, “Dispose of them.”

“WAIT!” the screech halted the unknown Con who had lifted a blade to stab Hot Shot.

All eyes turned on her and Thundercracker looked horrified.

“Wait?” Megatron’s voice was quiet and cold.

“Please don’t kill them,” she begged. “Please, you…I saved you. Don’t you owe me a debt?”

Megatron’s gaze narrowed and Charlie half expected him to crush her where she stood.

“You’re right,” he finally said. “I owe you. You want these Autobots alive?”

She nodded, “Yes.” Her voice had become hoarse.

“Okay.” He turned to his Cons, “Lock the prisoners away.”
After the Autobots were dragged out of the room Megatron slowly walked back to Charlie, his shadow swallowing her. “You have surprised me, Charlie?”

“I-I have?” she asked, her heart hitting her chest painfully.

“Yes,” he smiled. “I expected you’d ask me for a favor. But I had assumed you’d want Shockwave’s humans released. Ah, well.” He shrugged, “I doubt they had any future plans.”

Charlie and Thundercracker found Starscream and Skywarp waiting for him in her room.

“What is it now?” Thundercracked asked, sounding exhausted.

Skywarp shrugged, “The rest of the base is over run by Decepticons who can’t shut up about how great it is that Megatron is back. I needed some peace and quiet.”

Charlie blinked, the thought of Skywarp complaining about the lack of quiet…she was too depressed to go into it. Instead she was placed on the table and walked over to Starscream. “Do you need me to heal you?”

Starscream sent her a glare but stretched his arm out to her.

“Are you sure you should do that right now?” Thundercracker asked worriedly. “You didn’t get to rest much…”

Charlie ignored him and placed her palms against Starscream’s arm and released a breath, the familiar-not painful-sense of healing slid down her arms to travel across the seeker’s body. She wasn’t completely sure why she was still helping him, but she would admit-despite everything-she still preferred this asshole over Megatron.

When that was done Charlie carefully sat down and collected her breath.

“So,” she started, sending a glare Skywarp’s way. “Did you actually put those Autobots in a cell or did you kill them where I couldn’t see.” She wouldn’t have been surprised if that was what happened.

“Oh Primus I hope that wasn’t what I was suppose to do,” Skywarp’s eyes widened in a panic. “Cause they’re in a cell right now.”

“Really?” her heart thumped. “Then can I go see them?”
Thundercracker gave her a concerned look, “You want to see the Autobots?”

“They won’t see you as an ally,” Skywarp pointed out. “Not after that creepy show Megatron put on.”

“I don’t care,” she replied. “I need to see them.” She wanted to see if they knew anything about Optimus, she wanted to know if there was a possibility they could escape and get Otis and the others out of here. She looked back toward Thundercracker, “Please.”

The two seekers looked to Starscream for advice but he snorted, “I could care less what you do. Just keep me out of it.” He turned away and headed out of the room.

“Okay then,” Thundercracker said, still sounding like he did not like this idea. “I guess we’re going to go see the Autobot prisoners.”

Thundercracker and Skywarp, keeping Charlie out of sight, reached the cell where the Con from earlier was guarding. Charlie couldn’t make out what Skywarp said but he got the Decepticon to leave and he stood watch.

The cell was a bare square room that was barricaded by a sheet of blue energy. Thundercracker typed in a code on a nearby keypad and the energy fizzed away, allowing the two to step in.

“Ah,” the tired voice of Hot Shot came from the darkness. “Look who it is. Megatron’s best friend.”
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

As you can tell I’ve been in a huge Transformers mood and want to get to a specific part in this fic. So expect frequent chapters for a while. (I’m not sure if you guys prefer this one chapter update or if you prefer I write a few chapters and then post them all at once, doing it one chapter per update feels a bit spammy)

Also also! Shout out to the lovely Youkaiyume from Discord who has helped me a lot with these next set of chapters!

Charlie flinched, “I’m not Megatron’s friend.”

Thundercracker placed her on the floor, she expected him to step out of the room to give her a moment with the Autobots. But instead he stayed exactly where he was, giving the Autobots a look of dislike.

Charlie stepped toward Hot Shot and Jazz, who shrinked back ever so slightly from her.

“Could have fooled me,” Hot Shot snarled.

“Hot Shot, stop it,” Jazz spoke up, hardly able to move what with his hands tied behind his back and his injuries still fresh. “Megatron called you Charlie. Are you Charlie Watson?”

The question startled her. “I am. Do you know me?”

“I know your friend,” he explained. “Memo.”

“Memo!” Charlie broke into a smile. “He’s okay? What about everyone else? Was he still with Optimus?”

“Who do you think sent us?” Hot Shot spoke up. “He sent us, along with several other Autobots, out across the planet to find you and your brother.”

Charlie’s jaw dropped, “Really? Are they all okay? How many Autobots got here? How did you get to Australia?”

The two exchanged a look before it was Jazz who spoke, “No offense, Charlie but uh…” he glanced at Thundercracker who stood silently behind her.
“We don’t trust you,” Hot Shot said bluntly.

Charlie swallowed, her chest twisting at the words. But she couldn’t blame them. She wasn’t a huge fan of herself either.

Jazz must have caught her expression and added kindly, “It won’t hurt to tell you that Optimus and all the other Autobots are fine.” He looked over at Thundercracker, “They’re better than fine.”

The Decepticon snorted but didn’t say anything.

But Charlie appreciated his words, it eased her heart-just a little.

“Also,” she continued. “I don’t know if Prime told you, but I could heal your injuries. If you like.”

“Charlie,” Thundercracker hissed, making her jump and turn toward him. “You’re going to pass out again if you don’t give yourself time to rest!”

She frowned, he had a point but... he wasn’t carrying the guilt and shame she had on her shoulders.

“I’ll be fine,” she promised then looked expectantly at the two Autobots.

“Why not,” Jazz shrugged. “Can’t get any worse. And I’d be lying if I didn’t want to see how an organic-AllSpark works.”

Charlie stepped forward and placed her hand on his knee, closing her eyes and filling her head with a sense of feeling. She felt herself break a sweat, and her breathing get a bit faster, as if she was winded. But she didn’t pull her hand away until she was sure he was completely healed.

Charlie took a step back, panting but pleased to see that Jazz’s dents and scratches had vanished. Both Autobots were staring at her in the same way Optimus and the others did when they first heard of her power.

“Feel better?” she asked after she had caught her breath.

“I feel brand new,” Jazz said, awestruck. “Thank you.”

The sincere gratitude in his voice nearly made her cry. “My pleasure.” She looked to Hot Shot, wondering if he was willing to let her near him.
Hot Shot looked her over, “You look like you can barely stand.”

Charlie hadn’t even realized that she was swaying on her feet. Exhaustion was starting to drag her down again but she shook her head and stepped toward him, “I’ll be okay. Let me help.”

“It’s fine,” Hot Shot said, “I can handle a few dents and I don’t want you passing out on my lap.”

“I won’t, I promise,” she insisted. “I owe you.”

Once again Hot Shot and Jazz looked at each other, confused. But it was Thundercracker who spoke up behind her, “You don’t owe them anything.”

“Yes, I do,” she almost snapped. “I can’t help Megatron and not…and not keep another Autobot from dying.”

“Oh,” Jazz replied, understanding in his voice. “I see. We were told what happened to Cliffjumper.

_Cliffjumper_, she could still hear his voice shrieking in her ears as she wrapped her hands around Megatron’s spark. But it wasn’t him who made her throat cave in as she forced her next words out: “And Bumblebee…”

Hot Shot blinked, “Who?”

Oh, right. They wouldn’t know the name she gave him. “B-127, I mean.”

“B-1…” Jazz’s voice halted. “Charlie… B-127 is still alive.”

Her heart almost burst as it flipped.

It was crazy, less than a second ago she was so despondent, so close to giving up. But those four words made her nearly break down in tears of joy.

“He-he is?” she breathed, a vision blurring slightly as a few tears escaped. “But he was stabbed. I was there, he…”

“He’s not awake,” Hot Shot quickly put in. “He’s been in a coma since before we arrived. But he hasn’t gone off line.”

_He’s not off line…he wasn’t gone…I could save him!_
“Th-thank you for telling me that,” Charlie managed the sentence, a smile nearly breaking her face. She clutched her shirt, her hand over her pounding heart. No longer from exhaustion or fear, but from the greatest sense of relief and happiness that she had ever felt. It almost brought her to her knees.

“Are you almost done yet?” Skywarp suddenly poked his head in. “Someone’s going to come down this hall soon enough. And Megatron isn’t going to be happy that you’re here, if he finds out.” He nodded to Charlie.

She turned back to the Autobots, reluctant to leave them. But Jazz quickly send her on her way. “It’s good to know you and Megatron aren’t friends,” he replied. “But it might be best to let him think that for a little while longer.”

Charlie nodded a goodbye to them both before turning to Thundercracker. She caught a strange look overcome his face before he shook his head slightly and picked her up.

“No more healing until you get your strength back,” he ordered, firmly but kindly as he led her down the hall, leaving Skywarp to turn the energy-based wall back on.

“Yes, sir,” Charlie replied, even chuckling. She was too weak from her discovery to be upset or even tired. Bumblebee was alive! He was alive!

Not only him, Memo and Optimus and everyone else was okay too! She was so happy she didn’t even care if they hated her when they found out what she was done. And they would. She would tell them herself if she had to. It was her fault Bumblebee had been stabbed, and if she could heal Megatron back, she could definitely heal him. Then they could do whatever they wanted with her.

But as she was replaying the conversation in her head one moment made her stop and look up at Thundercracker.

“Huh,” she said softly, smiling a bit.

He glanced down at her, “What?”

“You called me Charlie back there,” she hadn’t even processed it when she was talking to the Autobots.

“That’s your name,” he stated the obvious.

“Yeah, but… I think that’s the first time you ever called me by my name.”
His response to that was to look away with a flustered mumble, wondering why she had to make it weird.
Chapter 45

Charlie slept for several hours, hours of blissful nothingness. No nightmares, nothing. And when she finally woke up again she felt like an entire day had passed.

Stomach growling she pushed herself into a sitting position, arising from her mound of blankets, and looked around for Thundercracker.

Her head no longer felt so foggy, her arms didn’t burn, and-upon seeing she was alone-she was able to stand up with relative ease.

Unwilling to call for Thundercracker in fear of getting the attention of a different Decepticon, Charlie tried to measure the distance between the top of the table and the floor. This table was shorter than the one in Shockwave’s lair.

_Imagine if I could jump down_, she thought to herself. _Imagine if I could jump down and just walk out of this base._ It was such a wonderful thought, but it was a fantastical one too.

Either way foot steps reached her ears and she quickly stepped away from the edge.

She expected it to be Thundercracker, or even one of the other seekers. But her eyes nearly fell out of her head when she saw Megatron appear.

The room was so small it made the Decepticon look even larger, he looked down at her with a mild smile on his face.

“Have you regained your strength?” he asked.

“A-a little,” she answered, scared of what he would want to do with her.

“Excellent to hear,” he purred. “I have big plans for you, my little champion.”

Charlie swallowed, she could guess what some of those ‘big plans’ would be.

“But not right now,” Megatron went on, “Shockwave will be showing me all that your planet has to offer. I considered taking you but…I worried you would do something idiotic like try to run away. So you will stay here, I assigned Dropkick to look after you.”
Her jaw went slack, “Dropkick!? He’ll kill me!”

Megatron’s eyes narrowed, “That would be…very unwise of him. Don’t consider him a fool because he enjoys the thrill of battle.”

*He enjoys the thrill of murder.*

“I told him to keep watch over you,” Megatron went on. “And to not let any harm befall you. He is a loyal Con and will follow my orders to the letter… As long as no one gives him a reason to do otherwise.”

What an ominous thing to say. But it didn’t deter her from asking, “What about Thundercracker? He’s been watching over me this whole time.”

Megatron’s eyes flashed dangerously before he dark chuckle escaped his lips. “Oh, Charlie.”

She went still as a statue when Megatron reached his hand toward her. With a single finger he lifted her chin to make her meet his eye, the knuckle of his finger pressed uncomfortably against her chest.

“I know Thundercracker seems nice,” he said softly. “But he is far too close to Starscream to be trusted. They will destroy you if they get the chance. And while I do say one should keep their enemies close, I say that to those who can defend themselves.” The tip of his finger dug into her jaw, “You will keep your distance from the seekers, won’t you?”

Charlie met his red eyes. “I will,” she lied.

But Megatron had no means of telling if a human was lying or not. He only smiled with satisfaction and pulled his hand away, “Excellent. Now come, you can see me off.”

She found Thundercracker waiting alongside Dropkick, Shockwave, and Soundwave at the entrance of the base. By the glare both Megatron and Dropkick sent the jet, he wasn’t suppose to be there. But Thundercracker didn’t pay either of them any attention, his eyes on Charlie who walked dutifully behind Megatron, she nearly had to jog to keep up with him.

“You know your orders,” Megatron informed them all, giving Soundwave a meaningful look. He looked down at Charlie, “I will return shortly.” It was a promise that sounded more like a threat.

With a nod to Shockwave the Decepticon transformed and flew out of the base, his leader followed him and within seconds they were little more than specks in the sky.
Without even a glance at the other Cons in the room, Soundwave turned around and walked out of the room, leaving Charlie with Thundercracker and Dropkick.

“Well,” Dropkick hissed, giving Charlie an annoyed look. “I won’t be sitting around doing nothing while I watch you. You’ll just have to tag along while I get more important things done.”

He turned around and headed down a hall Charlie had never been through before. She looked toward Thundercracker, unable to hide the fear on her face. But the jet simply nodded for him to follow her. Taking a breath Charlie went after Dropkick, and could have wept with relief when she hear Thundercracker’s footsteps behind, following her.

Dropkick led them into a room that had a screen that was nearly as large as the wall it was on, Dropkick flicked a finger across the screen and images appeared.

Blue prints of Earth and countries, shots of Decepticons and even Autobots that she had never seen before, and all the while words flew across the screen in a Cybertronian language. She wondered how much information was on this screen that could have helped the Autobots change the tides in this war. And she also wondered how long had the Decepticons been here, out of sight, to be able to built all of this.

Dropkick looked over with his one good eye, looking smug that Charlie had, in fact, followed him. But his expression twisted into anger when he saw Thundercracker in the door frame.

“Megatron left me in charge of the human,” he snarled at the jet.

“Yes, I heard,” Thundercracker replied cooly. “But I had nothing better to do, so I thought I’d come here and check if there’s been any messages from other posts.” He stepped around Charlie to stand next to Dropkick, his fingers flying over the futuristic keyboard. “Besides,” he continued, “We can’t have you losing your temper around the AllSpark. You’re more expendable than the human.”

One could use a knife to cut the tension between the two Decepticons. She stared where she was, unwilling to get between of them. Half of her wanted Thundercracker to leave, in fear of him getting on Megatron’s bad side. But the other half couldn’t bear to ask him to leave, making her be alone with the Decepticon who murdered Colin and so clearly wanted to do the same to her.

“I mean if you want to test whose the most expendable, staying here and disregarding Megatron’s orders is one way,” Dropkick said, his voice a mocking effort to sound upbeat.

Thundercracker turned his eyes away from the large screen and turned his head to face to his fellow Con. “Worry about yourself, Dropkick,” it sounded like an order. “Don’t worry about me.”

“But I am worried,” Dropkick replied, his voice thick with menace. “And I think you best follow Megatron’s orders and leave before I get even more upset.”
The two glared at each other and Charlie realized, that in a matter of a few short seconds, they had ended up in a very dangerous situation. If Thundercracker openly defied Dropkick, Megatron would find out about it. She imagined Thundercracker getting the same treatment as Starscream and the Autobots, she imagined a blade slicing through Thundercracker’s spark and felt a sense of dread.

“Thundercracker,” she suddenly spoke up, her voice cracking slightly.

“It’s okay. You can go.”

He turned to look at her, surprise written all over his face.

“Yes, Thundercracker,” Dropkick growled. “Go before we see where your true loyalties lie.”

“My loyalties?” Thundercracker echoed, still looking at Charlie.

“We’re not blind,” Dropkick continued. “We all see the way you follow that insect around, tending to her every need like you’re sparkmates! And if you don’t go now you’ll have Megatron to deal with!”

Thundercracker looked at Dropkick, then turned his eyes back to Charlie. She silently begged him not to go out on a limb for her. She had betrayed both him and the Autobots. She didn’t deserve anyone’s sacrifices.

Thundercracker’s eyes closed, as if he had finally decided. “Okay.” He opened his eyes and turned his gaze to Dropkick. “I guess I’m a traitor now.”

It took Charlie far longer to process his words than Dropkick did. With a guttural roar the Con lunged at Thundercracker and the two robots grappled on the floor.

“Stop!” she called out hopelessly, flinching as Dropkick clawed at Thundercracker’s face.

“Stop it!” she cried out. For half a second she considered calling Starscream or Skywarp to help. But the jet had basically just turned his back on the Decepticons. They might help Dropkick instead.

Thundercracker pushed him off and slammed his fist into Dropkick’s jaw, the Con grabbed Thundercracker’s shoulder and they continued to roll across the floor. She turned back to the fighting to see that Dropkick had once again gained the offer hand, pinning Thundercracker down with a blade extended from his wrist. Panic stabbed through Charlie’s chest, not only panic. Fury. Burning, boiling fury that took her
breath away and pushed her to run toward the two Decepticons. Dropkick killed Colin, he would not kill anyone else!

“I said STOP IT!” she screeched like a banshee and slammed her hands into the arm that held Thundercracker down.

It was like time stopped. Dropkick came to a complete halt, his weapon hovering in the air, his eyes glazed over.

Instead of pushing thoughts of healing or calm into the Decepticon, her brain was chanting into her head: take, take, take. With the anger burning inside her she felt a sensation inside her as if she was pulling something. Adrenaline rushed through her body and she felt so energized it almost felt she was being shocked.

Then Dropkick screamed, his back arcing painfully and his entire body shaking. Horrified Charlie ripped her hands away and the Con fell to the floor, limbs sprawled, eyes dark.

Charlie stepped several paces away, unknowingly moving to the screen as Thundercracker crawled out from under Dropkick’s body.

His body…she had killed him…Charlie looked down at her hands, the bandages had been burned away to reveal her palms that were a fading blue.

*I took his spark.*

She started to tremble, not unlike the way Dropkick had done. Her heart was beating so quickly, an inhumane amount of adrenaline threatening to burst it.

Was this how a Cybertronian felt all the time? Was this how they were able to keep fighting and fighting and fighting? Was this how they felt when the powers of the AllSpark flowed through them?

“Charlie,” Thundercracker’s voice was low and nervous. He was staring at her in a mixture of confusion and worry.

She couldn’t stop shaking. She didn’t know how she had done that to Dropkick. What if she did it to Thundercracker?

*Dangerous, dangerous*…She was far too dangerous…

Thundercracker reached his hand out to her and Charlie jumped, her hand flying and accidentally
touching the screen behind her.

The moment her fingers touched the warm screen the energy that was making her thrum departed her body with such swiftness she nearly fell to her knees. The energy that was once Dropkick’s spark lit up the screen—and Thundercracker reached her just before the screen exploded.

He wrapped his body around her to shield her, the explosion rocking the room and Charlie could feel the heat of flames.

A moment later Thundercracker grabbed her and she let out a yelp, expecting her to unwillingly take his spark as well. But Thundercracker didn’t stop as he ran out of the room and turned into a secluded corner, holding Charlie close to his chest. The two were both shivering as warning siren blared throughout the base and the smell of smoke filled the air.

“Th-Thundercracker?” she looked up at him. “What do we do now?” She had killed Dropkick, there wasn’t any fixing that.

He looked down at her, his expression straight-faced but his eyes shimmering with fear. “We need to get you out of here.”
Her eyes widened. “What do you mean?”

Thundercracker was moving again, away from the fire that would bring all the Decepticons forward. “I mean I have to get out of this base.”

“You’re-you’re going to help me escape?” Tears started to fill her eyes. “Really?”

“Yes, really.” Thundercracker kept turning his head this way and that, worried that a Con would pop outta nowhere and want to know what he was doing.

“I can’t leave without Otis,” she told him. “I can’t leave without the Autobots either, they’ll be killed.”

“I know, I know,” he said in a exasperated tone that said he knew they would have to perform a rescue but he really, really didn’t want to. “Let’s get the Autobots out, they can help me get the humans out.”

“Do you know where we’re going?”

“Away.”


They reached Jazz and Hot Shot’s cell to find it, surprisingly, not guarded.

“What happened?” Hot Shot demanded when he saw the two hurrying toward them.

“I’ll tell you later,” Charlie said as Thundercracker started to type in the code. “Right now we have to go.”

“We’re escaping?” Jazz asked.

She nodded, “But I need your help to get my brothers and the other humans out of here. They’re at the Farm.”

“Just tell us where they are and we’ll get it done,” Hot Shot said, his blue eyes burning with determination. Despite the injuries she hadn’t gotten a chance to heal, he stood tall and prepared.
When the cell opened the two Autobots rushed out and they all turned to head back down the hallway toward the entrance-only to immediately come to a halt.

Soundwave stood in the middle of the hall, still, impassive, but so very clearly blocking the way.

Before Charlie could figure out what they could do when Thundercracker offered her to Jazz who took her in a surprised, awkward grip.

“What are you-” she and Jazz said in unison.

“Get her out of here,” Thundercracker said quickly and then he zoomed toward Soundwave in a blue blur, slamming into the Decepticon.

In a blur of motion Jazz immediately transformed, flinging Charlie into the passenger seat of his car-mode. The Bot practically flew through the hallway and Charlie didn’t get a chance to see how Thundercracker was faring in his fight.

“THUNDERCRACKER!” she cried out, pressing her face into the window. She hadn’t wanted to leave him!

With impressive speed Jazz and Hot Shot raced out of the base’s entrance, Charlie looked up to see plumes of smoke rising from the building and a few Cons flying around in the air. But none of them had noticed the two escaped prisoners.

“The Farm,” Charlie crawled into Jazz’s driver seat and put her head out, pointing toward the unguarded cluster of buildings a few yards away. “There it is! Go there!”

“Got it!” Jazz called, turning the wheel and making a beeline toward the buildings, Hot Shot close behind.

Charlie jumped out of the car as soon as Jazz came to a halt, a few people were already outside to watch the fire but their jaws dropped when they saw her.

“Otis!” she cried out. “Tabitha! Where are you!?”

Her yells brought everyone out and Charlie nearly broke into tears when she saw her brother running toward her. Behind him was Tabitha and Caly, Mikaela in the older woman’s arms.

“You’re alright! I knew you would be!” Otis nearly tackled her onto the ground as he wrapped his arms around her, tear stains on his face.

“I missed you too but we don’t have any time.” she looked up to Tabitha. “These two cars are
Autobots and they’re here to get us out. Don’t take anything just get everyone into a car now!”

Tabitha didn’t have to be told twice. With her help the two herded everyone into the two cars. It was a tight fit but Jazz and Hot Shot were just big enough to fit them, the two were silent though. Maybe to keep from startling the humans or they were too busy keeping on eye on the base, expecting one of the Decepticons to see them.

Tabitha, Mikaela in her arms, pushed herself onto Jazz’s driver seat, and officially there was no more room. Leaving Charlie without a car.

“Charlie, where are you going to sit?” Otis asked, sitting in the back seat and leaning through the window, his face scared and panic. Charlie looked from the packed vehicles to the burning building and fought back a rising sense of panic. Tabitha looked ready to stay behind herself so Charlie could escape.

But before any decision could be made Hot Shot spoke up, startling everyone. “Decepticon incoming!”

Charlie whirled around, expecting Soundwave or even Megatron, but she let out a joyous cry when she recognized the jet rushing toward them.

“It’s Thundercracker!”

The jet, looking worse for wear, transformed midair and nearly crashed in front of them.

“Why are you still here?” he demanded.

“We ran out of room,” Charlie explained helplessly. “There’s not a place for me.”

“Alright. I’ll carry you,” he said immediately before turning to Jazz, “Where do you want to head?”

“The city where you found us,” Jazz said, “Be sure to get her there.” And with that he and Hot Shot shot off, carrying the prisoners, finally free, into safety.

Thundercracker didn’t waste time and transformed back into a jet, letting Charlie climb inside. She hadn’t even buckled up when he returned to the air and went at such a speed Charlie’s head was pushed back against the seat.

Through the incredibly fast ride Charlie kept expecting to see a Decepticon at the corner of her eye, chasing after them, ready to kill Thundercracker and drag her back to the base.

Please, she prayed. Please don’t let us get captured, please, please, please.
God must have been listening, because surprising herself and probably even Thundercracker the two saw the outline of the city, and it was getting closer and closer. Until finally Thundercracker started to head down to the ground where she could see Jazz and Hot Shot still booking it toward the city.

When they reached the edge the two drove into the city but Thundercracker landed on the edge, waiting for her to leave his cockpit before he transformed, leaning on his hands and knees.

“How were you able to get away from Soundwave?” Charlie asked. She hurried over to place her hands on his arm, planning to heal him, but came to a stumbling halt, the image of Dropkick’s empty eyes flashing vividly in her mind.

“I was lucky,” Thundercracker replied, his voice a rasp. “Somehow.”

She smiled, emotion suddenly overcoming her now that the base was out of sight. “Thank you. I know I already said it but thank you, you saved our lives.”

The Decepticon reached out cupped his palm against her body, a tired but pleased smile on his face, “You’re welcome.”

Charlie, so overcome with gratitude leaned into his hand, wrapping her arms around his thumb and pressing her lips against him.

She looked up at him, thrown by the depth of his emotion in his red eyes. “Let’s go,” she breathed.

“Charlie…the Autobots aren’t going to want a Decepticon.”

“But you’re not a Decepticon,” she insisted. “You’re good, you’re better than them. You don’t have to go back or wander aimlessly, you can come with me.”

Excitement sparked in his eyes, and his smile became hopeful, “Go with you?”

She nodded quickly, “Yes. I can talk to Optimus, he and Bumblebee, they’ll understand if I just talk to them!”

But before she had finished speaking something flickered in Thundercracker’s eyes and he gently pulled his hand away from her. “Oh, I forgot.”

“What?” Charlie’s brow furrowed, confused.
“Nothing,” he stood up, “I just thought…no, it’s nothing.” He took a step back, “I should stay here.”

“Stay h- Thundercracker they’ll kill you.”

“I’ll be fine,” he insisted. “Now go before any other Cons come back.”

“Wait, please,” she took a step forward as he turned away. “What’s wrong? I thought you were coming with us! I don’t want to leave you, you’re my friend!”

He turned to look at her with an expression she couldn’t decipher, “Charlie, I wanted us to…This can’t…It’s best for you, it’s best for me, it’s best for Bumblebee, if I don’t go with you.”

*Best for Bumble…*oh.

Realization dawned on her and Charlie looked up at him, “Thundercracker, I-”

“Don’t look at me like that!” he snarled, making her jump. “Just go with the Autobots! Stay with them and never come back!” His voice cracked with emotion and his eyes shone with grief before he turned on his heel and flew back into the sky.

“Thundercracker!” Charlie cried out. “Come back, please!”

But there was no response, the jet vanished into the sky and Charlie felt a guilty twist in her chest. She had been worried when Thundercracker had started considering her a friend but she never thought…she never thought he’d feel that way about her…the same way she felt about…

*Bumblebee.*

“Charlie.”

She turned around and saw Hot Shot standing there, looking at her with an unreadable expression. How much of that had he heard?

“It’s time to go.”

Charlie held back her tears and nodded. As scared as she was for Thundercracker, despite her grief for losing such a good friend, there were things she had to do.

*Bumblebee, Optimus, everyone…I’m coming home.*
Chapter 47

How stupid could you get?

Thundercracker flew away from Charlie, ignoring her calling his name and disappearing into clouds.

He hovered there for several moments, grief and pain he wasn’t used to tearing at his spark until he wanted to tear it out with his bare hands. The pain was so sharp it dulled the rest of his injuries. Oh, that’s right. He fought Dropkick, he fought Soundwave. And unlike Dropkick, Soundwave was very much still alive and he imagined Megatron was already back at the base, furious to see it was on fire and Charlie was missing.

That was the one thing that comforted him. Megatron could no longer put his filthy claws on her again. He remembered how he had petted her as he interrogated the Autobots, it had made Thundercracker's circuits roil with disgust.

No, a vicious voice whispered in his head, Only B-127 can touch her.

Thundercracker gritted his teeth but didn’t try to shove the voice to the back of his head. It was right.

But what had he been expecting? It was stupid of him to even become friends with a human. But falling in love with her? Skywarp was no longer the dumbest Cybertronian he knew.

Thundercracker dug his fingers into his chest, wanting to soothe the pain even just a little bit.

He wanted to reason with himself. Going with Charlie would have been the third biggest mistake he would have made that day. If they didn’t kill him he would have had to stand there and watch Charlie look at B-127 with that beautiful sparkle in her eyes, a sparkle he had never seen when she looked at him. He would have had to see her flash that perfect smile at someone that wasn’t him. He would have had to stand and watch as B-127 ran his fingers across her skin that was so soft and so warm.

He could see Charlie tossing away the diamond he had given her and humiliation mixed in with his pain and grief. A part of him wished he could suddenly no longer fly, he wished he could fall.

“You look pathetic, Thundercracker.”

The seeker lifted his head to see Starscream hovering above him, looking at him with narrowed optics.
“Starscream,” he rasped.

The former Decepticon leader looked behind him, “The AllSpark is down there, isn’t she?”

Thundercracker flinched, there was no way he could fight Starscream in his current shape. “Please don’t go after her,” he begged. “Just let her go.”

The jet turned his optics back to his comrade. “Are you the reason the base is on fire right now? Did you kill Dropkick too?”

Thundercracker hesitated. The Cons didn’t know about Charlie’s newest, terrifying ability. It would be an advantage to her if the Cons didn’t learn about it.

Who cares? Asked the nasty voice, Charlie certainly doesn’t.

“Yes,” Thundercracker said flatly. “I killed him.”

Starscream actually smirked, “Someone was bound to eventually. But I wouldn’t want to be you when Shatter finds out.”

Suddenly a new figure appeared behind Starscream, and Thundercracker realized he was going back to the base.

“Lord Megatron,” Starscream said coolly as the Decepticon transformed mid flight and snarled at them.

“Where is she!?” he roared, his optics burning like fire.

Thundercracker didn’t answer, but Starscream moved toward his leader. By his body language one would never guess that not too long ago Megatron had beaten Starscream within an inch of his life.

“Not here,” Starscream growled, “I checked.”

Thundercracker was careful not to react, relieved to realize Starscream wouldn’t betray Charlie’s location. Now if only Megatron believed him.

“Come now,” Starscream said when he Megatron shot him a disbelieving look. “What do I have to gain by letting her escape? If I wanted to use her behind your back I would need her where I can reach her. You think the Autobots would let me borrow her?”
Megatron growled, “No, they wouldn’t. And I know you wouldn’t dare betray me, Starscream.”

“I am loyal to only you, Lord Megatron,” the seeker replied with a straight face.

“But you,” Megatron turned his hateful glare onto Thundercracker. “I was informed you fought Soundwave and let the Autobots escape with my AllSpark.”

*She’s not yours*, Thundercracker almost said. *And she’s not mine.*

Megatron moved closer to leer over him. “I’m curious. What was going through your circuits to make you think this was a good idea. I had considered you the seeker with the most common sense. So what made you do something as stupid as to betray *me*?”

Thundercracker tried to muster any fear…he couldn’t. He couldn’t even muster the energy to lie. “I thought she could love me,” he answered honestly.

Both Megatron and Starscream weren’t able to hide the flash of surprise at his words. But a moment later Megatron collected himself and his hand shot out, his fingers wrapping around Thundercracker’s neck.

“That was your mistake,” Megatron breathed. “Now let’s get back to what’s left of my base. I promised Soundwave he could have his way with you.”
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Charlie and the group of humans stared in shock at the circle of blue energy that glowed before them.

A space bridge, Hot Shot called it.

It turned out the Autobots that had received Wheeljack’s distress signal brought the necessary equipment to make what was basically a portal, which was how Hot Shot and Jazz had come from America to Australia. They had left it hidden in the city before being captured.

But the humans who had been experiments to robots that looked incredibly familiar to the ones that stood before them, weren’t keen to step into the futuristic technology.

“Are you sure this won’t shoot us into space?” Caly asked, holding her mother’s arm.

“Positive,” Jazz said patiently.

Charlie however, was too frazzled to be patient. Any moment now a Decepticon could appear, and she wouldn’t be able to get back to the Autobots to warn Optimus and help Bumblebee.

“Let’s just go,” Charlie turned to the group. “I promise, where we’re going is better than what we’re leaving.”

“She’s right,” Tabitha spoke up. “We owe it to those who aren’t with us anymore.”

Charlie looked to Mikaela and held back her tears, remembering the father who would never get to raise her.

There was a small murmuring of agreement amongst the group and Charlie turned to march into the portal, Otis dutifully beside her.

Stepping into the space bridge made her skin tingle and her hair stand on end as if she was bathing in static. For a full second there was nothing but blueish white light and then Charlie was no longer in Australia.

She was in the Grand Canyon.
Her and Otis’ jaw dropped in unison at the sight. Several small buildings, similar in design to the Decepticon base, were scattered around the large area and Autobots she had never seen walked around. Some carried supplies, some talked in hushed whispers, some turned to give the humans a curious gaze.

“Oh, that’s right,” Jazz’s head popped out of the space bridge, following him were Hot Shot and the humans, the latter having the same reaction as the Watson siblings. “You wouldn’t know,” Jazz continued, “Because the Cons knew about that island where they caught you Prime decided to move. We found this place and decided to set up shop.”

“This is the Grand Canyon,” Otis said, trying to emphasize with his tone how big of a deal he found this.

“Yeah, that’s what the humans called it,” Jazz nodded, not picking up Otis’ tone.

“There was one human,” Hot Shot spoke up, “What was his name…Cade! I thought he would have a spark-attack when he realized we were moving in here.”

“Cade!” Charlie shouted, “Where is he?” She turned to Jazz, “Can you take everyone to where the humans stay, please?”

“That was already the plan,” Jazz said. “Everyone couldn’t stop talking about you, they’ll be so excited.”

Charlie turned to her brother, “Go find Mom and tell her I’m okay.” She looked up to Hot Shot, “I need you to take me to Bumblebee.”

The Bot hesitated, “I was suppose to report to Prime immediately…but I suppose I can drop you off first.”

While the humans were left in the capable hands of Jazz Hot Shot carried Charlie across the clearing. All the while she kept her eyes out for Arcee, or Ironhide, or any other Autobot she knew but the ones she passed were strangers. Still, she was absolutely floored how many answered the distress signal, it gave her a sense of security.

Hot Shot took her into a room that was built into one of the walls of the Grand Canyon, stepping inside Charlie took in the room that reminded her of a much less intimidating version of Shockwave’s lab.

Her eyes widened when she saw a familiar face, “Ratchet!”
The red and white Bot nearly jumped into the air when she called out his name. Turing away from his table of medical tools his eyes widened when he saw her. “Charlie Watson…” he spoke as if he thought he was hallucinating. “Primus, you’re alive!”

“Jazz and I got them out,” Hot Shot replied, not mentioning they had help. Charlie would give him the benefit of the doubt that that would have led to a whole conversation they didn’t have time for. “She said she needs to see Bumblebee.”

“Is he still alive?” Charlie asked, fear of being too late trying to crush her throat.

Ratchet’s face was less than reassuring as he nodded, “He is but…he’s not in good shape.”

“Listen I need to go tell Prime all that has happened,” Hot Shot interrupted, placing Charlie on the table. “You can talk without me.” He hurried out of the room, leaving Charlie and Ratchet alone.

“How’s his spark?” Charlie asked.

Ratchet looked at her, “…Not good. It’s still there, thank Primus. But it’s weak, Shockwave didn’t stab it directly but he did hit it. It’s nothing but a flicker now.” “Can I see him?” Charlie asked, her blood burning with excitement and urgency. “I think I can help.”

Ratchet gave her a strange look but picked her up and led her to a small room that was hidden from passer by.

Charlie let out a choked sob when she saw the yellow body lying on a medic bed. She truly thought she would never see him again and the sight of him nearly had her breaking down. But not right now, he needed her.

“Place me next to him, please.”

Ratchet obeyed, confusion came off him in waves and she doubted he would follow her orders if not for the AllSpark thrumming in her body.

Charlie let her eyes eat up the sight of him, “He looks brand new.”

“Some of the Autobots that arrived are medics as well,” Ratchet explained, “They brought me enough supplies to fix him up, fill in the wound…but nothing we had could help his spark.”

Charlie nodded in understanding and wordlessly crawled up onto Bumblebee’s chest, it was so frightfully cold.
For a moment she sat there, looking into Bee’s face, his eyes were closed but oh the joy she felt in seeing him again was a happiness she didn’t deserve.

“Charlie,” Ratchet started. “What are you doing?”

She glanced at him, “Just trust me.”

She pushed her hand against Bumblebee’s chest and it opened, revealing the cavity where the spark was housed. It was a small ball of energy, similar to Megatron’s but vastly different.

Charlie fully expected that searing pain that burned her to her bones. But this time she would gladly welcome it, she’d welcome the agony, the screams, as many awful things as reviving him would bring—as long as Bumblebee was back.

“Charlie,” Ratchet’s voice was shocked, “Don’t—”

She wrapped her hands around Bumblebee’s spark and braced herself.

But no pain came. Instead, a strange sense of buzzing pleasure ran up her arms and through her body. She didn’t feel an awful sense of something being taken from her, she felt her chest becoming full and content. Her eyes, that had been slammed shut, popped open to see her arms and hands brimming with blue light. Her hands, while still showing the affects of reviving Megatron, were not taking any damage, instead her hands shook with the fizzy feeling that had a foreign sense of feeling. All the while the fizzy feeling continued throughout her body, ending at her lips, making it feel as if she had been kissed.

Suddenly Bumblebee’s body jolted, his back arcing for a moment before falling down again and his eyes flew open, burning with blue.

Charlie reluctantly released his spark, now large and pulsing with health. But the moment she did Bumblebee’s eyes closed again.

“No,” she breathed, crawling up to his face, “No, no, no!”

She cupped Bee’s face between her hands, tears rolling off her cheeks and splattering against his face. “Bee, Bumblebee! Please wake up! Please come back to me!”

There was no response and Charlie felt as if a black hole was swallowing her up, drowning her in despair.
This wasn’t fair! She had lost so much already! She couldn’t even heal Bumblebee? She couldn’t do one last good thing? She could save the one she loved?

Charlie’s shoulders started to shake as she sobbed, eyes downcast. She was completely spent, she couldn’t find a reason to move a muscle.

And then-

Ratchet gasped.

Charlie’s head shot up to see Bumblebee’s eyes slowly open, he blinked a few times, and then his gaze focused on her.

Charlie barely dared to breathe, her hands, still pressed against the now warm metal of the Autobot. “B…Bumblebee?”

His eyes crinkled with his unmistakable, mouthless smile. “Charlie.”

Chapter End Notes

It's chapters like this that make me think...yeah, I did deserve that Hugo award AO3 won.
Otis, personally, was in a fantastic mood.

Why wouldn’t he? His sister was safe, they all escaped the Decepticons, there were even more Autobots than before, and now he and Jazz were leading Tabitha, Caly, and the others to where his friends and family waited.

Yeah, there were some problems. Charlie told them that Megatron was revived, and he was apparently the scariest Decepticon out there. But they had Optimus, and Charlie was going to fix up Bumblebee so they’d have him too. Honestly, to Otis, the pros outweighed the cons.

Jazz led them to a large, rectangular building where he came to a halt, “Just walk on in,” he told the humans. “I should go help Hot Shot report to Optimus.”

“Can you tell Wheeljack I’m here?” Otis asked, eager to see his best friend again.

Jazz smiled with amusement, “Of course. Be right back.”

Leaving the humans to themselves there was a moment of silence where none of them moved. Otis could tell many could hardly believed they had escaped the Farm, that they were finally safe. He could also tell many were thinking of family and friends they had lost before the Autobots came to save them.

“Come on,” Otis said quickly, grabbing Caly’s arm and practically dragging the older girl after him, “I want you to meet everyone.”

Tabitha broke into a smile that reminded Otis of his mom and followed after the two children, and the rest of the group followed after her.

The second Otis stepped inside a large living area he heard the wonderful sound of barking.

He whirled around and opened his arms a second before Conan jumped into them, covering him in wet licks.

“Conan, buddy!” he cheered, his chest nearly bursting with happiness, “I’m back!” He smiled over to the others and introduced his pet, they all smiled but Maisey’s twins looked absolutely ecstatic to see a small dog.
“Conan!” a voice called, “Why are you scream-

Out of a hall way came Cade using a crutch—Otis had nearly forgotten how he had been attacked by that panther Decepticon—and the man’s eyes nearly fell out of his skull when he saw him.

Otis smiled cheekily, lapping up Cade’s surprise. “Hey.”

“HE’S ALIVE!” Cade yelled down the hallway, “OTIS IS OKAY! HE’S BACK!”

As fast as his crutch would allow Cade hurried across the room, Otis, placing Conan down, met him half way and gave the man a hug. His smile grew bigger when he felt Cade ruffle his hair.

“Ah, man, Otis,” Cade said, his voice sounding uncharacteristically emotional. “I really thought I wouldn’t see you again.”

“Can’t get rid of me that easy!” Otis stated with pride.

Just then a sound of stampeding reached his ears and he turned away from Cade to see a crowd of familiar faces rushing toward them. Lennox, Epps, Memo, his friends from the Sanctuary. And then—finally—

“My baby!”

Sally wrapped her arms around Otis and he buried his face into his mother’s chest, feeling a few tears escape as he felt the sense of security that only his mother could give him. Two more arms wrapped around him and Otis broke into a grin when he heard Ron’s voice, trying to talk through his tears.

“We knew you’d come back!” Ron sobbed happily. “We knew it!”

Several seconds passed before Sally pulled away, her son’s hair wet from her tears. “Otis, baby, where’s Charlie?” She looked around. “Is she-”

“She’s here,” Otis quickly assured her. “She went to help Bumblebee.”

Sally gave him a startled look. But Otis went on, “Meet everybody!” He turned to the group of people who had had respectively stood to the side while Otis was reunited with his family. “This is—”

“Guillermo?”
Caly suddenly ran from the group and made a beeline to Memo, nearly knocking him down as she wrapped her arms around him.

“Caly!?” Memo’s shocked voice choked, immediately returning the embrace.

Otis looked to Tabitha, jaw was slack and her eyes were wide and full of tears. With Mikaela still in her arms she slowly stepped over to Memo who looked at her with the same damp eyes.

She reached her hand out, her fingers quaking, as she cupped his cheek. “Guillermo…”

Memo broke into a watery grin, “Mom…”

It was strange. Bumblebee felt like only a klik had passed, but it was the longest klik in had ever went through.

One moment, he saw a blade slice through his chest and his vision turned black as Charlie ran toward him-and in the next moment he woke up to see Charlie sitting over him, tears spilling out of her optics. And he knew that they had been separated for far too long.

Bumblebee immediately sat up and was quick to wrap his arms around her, pressing his face-plate against her hair, shivering as Charlie put her arms around his neck and pressed her face against his shoulder. He had no idea how much time had passed but he knew holding her was painfully overdue, and for a klik he seriously considering never letting her go.

But he didn’t resist as Charlie pulled away, returning her hands to cup his face-plate and Primus, he loved when she touched him.

“Are you alright?” she asked at the same time he did. She stroked his cheek, “Oh, Bee. I thought you had died, I would have found a way back so much sooner had I known-”

He leaned forward to place his temple against her’s. “It’s okay,” he breathed. “It’s okay…As long as you’re safe.” He met her shimmery gaze. “I was so scared.”

Charlie bit her lip and looked too overwhelmed to speak. But that was alright, he just wanted to drink in the sight of her.

“Bumblebee,” a new voice spoke up.

The yellow Bot jumped and he looked up to see Ratchet standing a few steps away, looking flustered to be in the room while the two hung onto each other.
“Ratchet!” Bumblebee’s antennas lift up in surprise and delight. “I missed you too!”

“Can-can you stand?” Ratchet asked, looking as if he thought he was hallucinating that Bumblebee was awake.

The younger Bot nodded and, after Charlie slipped off his lap, he got off the table, only to stumble and catch himself on the table. Charlie and Ratchet reached out as if to catch him but he quickly waved them away, pushing himself back into a standing position.

“You’ve been in a coma for quite some time,” Ratchet explained. “Even with Charlie’s healing properties, it might take some time for your body to get used to moving.”

“I feel brand new!” Bumblebee stated, turning to smile at Charlie. She returned the smile, her optics shining. But all of a sudden she blinked and the shine left her gaze and her smile dropped slightly.

Bumblebee blinked. What was-

“What’s wrong with your hands?” Ratchet’s voice suddenly spoke up, his brow furrowed in concern. “I hadn’t even noticed…”

Bumblebee followed his gaze and his spark dropped.

Dirty, tattered bandages hung limply off her arms and her hand’s skin looked red, the finger tips blackened. Looking even closer he saw flashes of silver on her palm and blue veins running up her wrists.

Bumblebee felt a sick sense of horror. Did that happen because she revived him?

Charlie had flinched when she heard Ratchet’s question and she looked down at her hands with a look of shame.

“Charlie…” Bumblebee reached out and Charlie took a step away.

When she looked up at him her eyes shone not only with tears but with a guilt that made Bumblebee’s spark twist. “Bee, I’m sorry… I’ve done something terrible.”

Otis followed his mother, the soldiers, Memo and his family (with Mikaela left with Maisy) outside to hunt down Bumblebee.
They had only taken a few steps before the sound of rapid footsteps reached their ears, the boy pushed himself out of the crowd to see what was making his noise and his mood sky-rocketed.

“Wheeljack!”

“OTIS!” The Autobot came to a halt, nearly falling on top of the crowd. Tabitha and Caly jumping in fright to see the eccentric robot.

“Hot Shot told me you came back!” Wheeljack gushed and knelt before the group. “I keep telling everyone how my little buddy would escape! Was I right?”

Otis hurried over to him, “You were right!” He gave the waiting Wheeljack a fist bump. “Not only did I escape but I also helped everyone else escape!” He pointed to Tabitha and Caly who offered Wheeljack small waves.

“Hi!” Wheeljack said in his loud, friendly voice. Cade and Epps held back chuckles.

“Mr. Wheeljack,” Sally spoke up, looking impatient. “We were on our way to see Charlie. She’s at the medic bay.”

Wheeljack broke into a smile, “With Bumblebee? Oh, that’s great!”

He stood up in a blur and looked toward a building that Otis guessed was the medic bay.

But before anyone could take a step toward it a furious yelling came from several yards away. They group turned to the largest building that was in the Grand Canyon, Otis could guess that was where important meetings were held.

And then a voice sliced through the air and even Otis’ heart picked up in fright.

“SHE DID WHAT!?!?”

Hot Shot and Jazz shot out of the base, followed by a large Autobot that Otis didn’t recognize who looked furious.

Right behind him came several other Autobots, including Optimus Prime which made Otis feel a little better.

But then the Autobots headed straight for them.
“What the hell?” Burns’ brow furrowed.

“Oh,” realization hit Otis. “They know.”

Several eyes turned to him. “Know what?”

Chapter End Notes

Memo to me...this chapter was cut in half cause chapter 50 didn't have much going for it and I just wanted to be done with this chapter.
Chapter 50

Before Charlie could pick the best way to explain, heavy footsteps came from behind.

She whirled around and her heart and throat swelled as Optimus Prime walked into the infirmary. The Autobot leader quickly took in the sight of both Charlie and Bumblebee, relief and affection obvious in his blue eyes.

“You are both well,” he finally spoke. Charlie couldn’t help comparing his voice to the Decepticon’s leader, and how it was so much more pleasant and sincere. Ratchet spoke up, “Miss Watson was about to tell us something.”

Prime gave Charlie his full attention then and she felt dread pool in her chest. “You know, don’t you?”

Bumblebee looked between the two, clearly confused.

“I do,” Prime replied. “But I want your side of the story.” He looked to Bumblebee, “I think everyone should hear your side of the story. I’ve called a meeting.”

Bumblebee reached out, offering his hands to Charlie so he could carry her to this meeting. But before she could move Ratchet stepped forward, “Let Optimus carry her, you’ve been in a comatose state for a long time, you need some time to get the feelings back in your limbs.”

Bumblebee didn’t look happy to hear Ratchet’s order but he nodded and Charlie instead walked onto Optimus’s awaiting palm.

Having been carried around by Decepticons for she wasn’t sure how long, Charlie had a new appreciation for the gentle and careful way Optimus held her as they walked out of the infirmary.

“I missed you,” she said honestly, looking up at the Autobot.

He looked down at her with the blue eyes that reminded her of her father. “I missed you too.”

Stepping outside Charlie saw Wheeljack standing next to a group of people. Despite everything she broke into a big smile when she recognized her mother and her friends.

“CHARLIE!” they called out when they saw her but Wheeljack kept them from getting under Prime’s feet.
The leader turned his head to address the humans, “We need to hold a meeting with Charlie. I will bring her to you when it is done. Do not worry.” His words weren’t just addressed to Sally and the others, they were addressed to her as well.

*How can you try to assure me after what’s happened?*

With Bumblebee and Ratchet behind him Optimus led them into one of the larger buildings where the meetings were held. It was already full of Autobots, she caught the sight of Ironhide and Arcee, but most of the Autobots she did not recognize.

Several conversations were being held when they walked in-only to immediately drop to silence when they saw Optimus Prime. Charlie kept her eyes downcast, unable to meet the gazes of the Autobots, both confused and wary. But she did see, out of the corner of her eye, how relieved many (including Ironhide and Arcee) looked when they saw Bumblebee awake and walking.

*I have to hold on to that,* she reminded herself, turning her own eyes to Bumblebee. *I saved him. No matter what happens next, coming back was worth it just for that.*

Optimus placed Charlie on a table in the middle of the base, she saw that a strange device was placed on a human-made map and created a hologram on the table of a much larger version of the map.

But she didn’t look at it for long, instead turning around to face the crowd, Optimus at her side.

“This is Charlie Watson,” Prime introduced her to the group. “The human who the AllSpark has imprinted on.”

There were a few quiet murmurs amongst the mass, all spoken in Cybertronian. Except for one.

“That’s who resurrected Megatron?”

Ratchet and Bumblebee nearly jumped out of their skins. “SHE WHAT?!” the medic demanded, his voice shrill with shock.

Bumblebee’s head snapped back around to look at Charlie but she just as quickly turned her gaze away from him, her shame making her unable to meet his eye. She couldn’t she wouldn’t-imagine what he was thinking.

A few more voices spoke up, angrier, still in Cybertronian as if they refused to let her understand what they were saying.
“I brought Charlie here so she can tell us what happened in her own words,” Optimus continued before turning to Charlie and giving her a small nod.

Obediently the Autobots fell quiet and waited. It was time for her to speak. Time for her to confess and then accept what happened next.

She started from the beginning, after Starscream had grabbed her and taken her into the space bridge. She told them how Starscream had dropped her and how he had been furious to bring her to the base. She thought telling them about the slug would be harder, but after everything that had happened she almost felt numb to the traumatic experience. She then explained the Farm and how Shockwave had been collecting human to use them in fatal experiments. Charlie caught looks of guilt and shame in a few of the Autobots’ eyes, they blamed themselves for the humans’ suffering.

But then she told them about her deal with Starscream.

“I was trying to trick him,” she quickly defended herself. “He’s arrogant, I thought that if I stroked his ego it would keep everyone in the Farm alive and give me a chance to find a way to escape or contact you. Starscream didn’t want Megatron to come back either.”

“No surprise,” Ironhide spoke up. “Anyone who isn’t blind can see Starscream has always wanted to be leader of the Decepticons.”

“Go on, Charlie,” said Optimus.

Taking a breath Charlie wrapped her arms around herself and told them that one day Starscream and his seekers left (Hot Shot and Jazz bitterly attested to that), and Dropkick came for her. Her throat felt crushed as she told them what he did to Colin, she felt Bumblebee take a step closer as if he wanted to comfort her but she didn’t look toward him. She didn’t deserve anything, not when Mikaela was an orphan because Charlie irritated a Con she knew was deadly.

And then, somehow, she was able to tell them how she resurrected Megatron. She kept her eyes downcast, unable to look at any of them, as she told them how Megatron’s spark hadn’t been completely snuffed out, how Shockwave had threatened Otis and the others if she refused, how it hurt when his spark was in her hands. And while she felt a few stray tears fill up her eyes, she didn’t sob. She was too exhausted to.

“And then you escaped?” The question came from a tall, robust, Autobot that seethed authority that almost rivaled Prime’s.

“We all did,” Jazz spoke up. “With Charlie’s help we got ourselves and all the humans out.”

The Autobot looked toward them, “And how did you all manage to escape a heavily armed base…
just like that?"

“Well, uh…,” Hot Shot faltered. “We had some help.”

Oh… Charlie blinked, surprised. *He didn’t tell them.*

Charlie knew Hot Shot wasn’t her biggest fan, she thought he wouldn’t hesitate to tell them.

But instead Jazz spoke up in a factual voice, “The seeker Thundercracker helped us.”

Charlie’s throat felt constricted at the mention of the Decepticon, and the diamond in her pocket burned against her thigh. She hadn’t mentioned him during her confession, at least not how close they had become, she hadn’t wanted to sound even more like a traitor and… She didn’t want to remember the look on his face when he left her. She glanced toward Bumblebee, specifically at his chest. If she looked close enough she could see the outline where the blade had stabbed him. Why did everyone she cared about had to suffer for her sake?

“This Thundercracker?” Arcee echoed. “Why would he do that?”

Hot Shot shrugged helplessly, “She said she was trying to trick the Decepticons into being her allies, guess it worked on Thundercracker.”

“Let’s be honest,” Jazz added, “Thundercracker has never seemed fully dedicated to the Decepticon cause like Shockwave or Soundwave.”

The robot Autobot stepped forward, “So let me make sure I am hearing this right. This human—” he glanced toward Charlie who winced- “Now has the power of the AllSpark. And when she went to the Decepticon base she immediately tried to make allies and revived our greatest enemy.” He turned to Optimus, “Prime, I know you say she is an ally but she is leaving much to be desired.”

There were several voices agreeing with this Autobot. None of them were Optimus or the original five that arrived with him.

“She saved my life!” Bumblebee suddenly snapped, not noticing the surprised looks a few Autobots gave him. “More than once!”

“She convinced Megatron to let me and Hot Shot live,” Jazz spoke up, coming to stand next to the yellow bot. “She had a chance to let the humans escape but she chose to help us survive. Doesn’t that mean anything?”

More mutters, this meeting was full of mutters.
It was then Charlie remembered one other thing. Something she couldn’t believe she had forgotten, even among the madness.

“I’m not an ally of Decepticons,” she spoke up, her voice hoarse. “And I did do one thing that might help you believe that.”

“What is it, Charlie?” Ratchet asked.

She looked down at her hands, the filthy bandages still hung off them, her hands carrying the scars of the feats she had done. She swallowed, “I killed Dropkick.”

When the Autobots had calmed down from that revelation, she explained how Dropkick had threatened her and Thundercracker, she had been furious and she had touched him and his spark was just gone. The crowd looked at her with a mixture of fear and disbelief, but none were accusing her of lying.

With that being the last thing Charlie could think to tell them, they all looked to Prime for his final verdict.

“I understand your concern, Ultra Magnus,” Optimus began, looking at the robust Autobot. “But Charlie was not trained for war, nevertheless a war that has lasted as long as our own. Neither was she trained to hold a power as great as the AllSpark.” He looked down at Charlie, his eyes soft. Charlie was torn with comfort and disgrace. “Many of us have become…Experienced in war. And many of us have had to make unfortunate choices for the sake of others.”

He reached out his hand to Charlie, pressing his finger tip against her shoulder, despite the gentleness she still stiffened. “Megatron may be alive, but so are our soldiers, so are the human captives, and we now have one less enemy to face in battle.” He looked back to his comrades, “Megatron is not invincible, and with the help of our new allies we will defeat him, once and for all.”

The meeting was brought to a close, several Autobots leaving except for Optimus, and a few older soldiers, Ultra Magnus being one of them.

“Take her to rest,” Optimus told Bumblebee who didn’t argue.

Charlie walked into Bumblebee’s open arms and closed her eyes as she was placed against his chest. Half of her was overcome with relief and delight that she wasn’t being sent away, and while she knew some of the Autobots didn’t trust her, she wasn’t being branded a traitor. The other half of her kept saying she should be branded a traitor.
The moment Bumblebee stepped outside a chorus of voices called out their names and Charlie opened her eyes to see Otis, Lennox, and the other humans rushing toward them.

Finding a spot out of the Autobots’ way Bumblebee placed Charlie down and she was immediately enveloped by the group.

Not even the Decepticons could keep the smile off her face as her family and friends fussed over her, holding her so tightly as if they would never let go.

“We’re so glad you’re safe, kiddo!” Cade said, his voice thick with tears. He looked up from her to smile at Bumblebee, “And you too, Bee! You had us scared, thanks a lot!”

Bumblebee rolled his eyes, “Next time I get stabbed I’ll be sure to run it by you first, Cade.”

His words had everyone lifting their heads up in unison to stare up at the Autobot in slack jaw shock.

“Hey!” Lennox spoke up, smiling. “I like your voice, Bee!”

The Autobot tilted his head, “My voice, what-OH!”

Bumblebee jumped up, running his fingers over his throat. “Oh my slag I CAN TALK!” He looked around and spotted Ratchet a few yards away. “RATCHET! I CAN TALK!”

“Of course you can!” the medic you back. “You’ve been talking this entire time! Red Alert brought a voice synthesizer when he arrived! I fit it to you while you were comatose!”

“How did you not realize you were talking?” Epps demanded when the Autobot turned back to the group.

“I’m so used to talking in my mind! And no one replied directly to me I didn’t even realize…I’ve been saying stuff out loud this entire time!”

“Did you say anything embarrassing?” Cade asked, leaning forward with new found interest.

But Bumblebee ignored him, instead kneeling in front of Charlie, “What do you think?” His voice was bright but she saw anxiety flashing in his eyes, as if her answer was incredibly important to him.

Charlie smiled warmly, “I like it, it suits you.”
‘Like’ was an understatement. Hearing Bumblebee say her name for the first time had been…it had been something she would hold onto for the rest of her life. She wouldn’t object if he wanted to say her name again, over and over, just so those butterflies could dance in her stomach again.

But Charlie couldn’t imagine she could say that to him if they were alone, never mind the fact her mother was right beside her.
Chapter 51

Charlie spent the next few days resting.

Not necessarily because she wanted to but because she had no choice.

Both Optimus and Sally had ordered her to rest, and while Prime was busy being a leader to make sure Charlie stayed in bed. Sally had no such qualms.

She hovered over Charlie constantly, making sure to change her bandages frequently, making sure she ate and stay hydrated. And when Sally had to tend to other people (she had become the head doctor of the survivors), she made sure someone else was around to watch her and make sure Charlie didn’t try to leave and do anything dangerous.

Charlie had thought of insisting that guarding her wasn’t necessary, but then she remembered how both Hot Shot and Thundercracker had had to stop her from passing out after healing so many Cybertronians and decided they had a point.

The thought of the Con made Charlie turn to the small diamond that lay next to her pillow. She had kept it close as a bittersweet memory of Thundercracker. She hoped he hadn’t returned to the Decepticon base, that he was somewhere safe. Though maybe he had a point about not coming to the Autobot base after all.

Word got around among the humans about what Charlie had done, and like the Autobots the ones who didn’t know Charlie well looked at her with suspicion and even hostility.

But maybe it was the first day that really made them paranoid:

After celebrating the return of Bumblebee’s voice Charlie’s jaw had dropped when Memo introduced Tabitha and Caly as his mother and sister. Tabitha gave Charlie an extra, stronger hug, thanking her for looking after her son and helping them find each other. It eased the pain in her heart that had appeared when Colin was killed. She had failed him, but she hadn’t failed Tabitha and Caly.

Afterward Sally had grabbed Charlie’s arm and gently started to lead her back to the building where the humans stayed. “We can get you some warm water and clean clothes, honey.” She looked down at her arms and Charlie’s heart hurt at the grief shining in her mother’s eyes. “I can get you some fresh bandages too.”

The group plus Bumblebee followed after them. Burns walked over to gently grab Charlie’s other arm, examining her blackened fingers and deep blue veins. He took in her tangled hair and filthy clothing and sucked his teeth. “You look like hell, kid.”
“It’s not her fault!” Bumblebee said hotly, immediately coming to her defense.

He was walking closer than he used to, as if determined to keep Charlie close. It made her happy and she offered a soft but tired smile to the Autobot, “It’s okay, he’s got a point. I’m sure I’ll feel better after I get cleaned up.”

They were near their destination now, a group crowding around outside. Charlie recognized the survivors from the Sanctuary among people of the Farm, but there were a few new faces she didn’t know.

“Hey, Charlie,” Cade spoke up suddenly.

She looked over to him, “Yeah?”

“Can I point something out without sounding like a creep?”

Instantly Sally, Tabitha, and Bumblebee gave the young man a glare. Charlie just stared at him, after everything she had been through she forgot how absolutely weird Cade was. “I uh, guess it depends?”

Cade pointed at her leg. “I couldn’t help but notice the bulge in your pocket.”

“Oh!” Charlie said, that wasn’t nearly as bad as his question had advertised.

She reached into her pocket and brought out a diamond, revealing it to the group before she realized that maybe that hadn’t been the best idea.

“Where did you get that?” several of them asked in unison. A few people at the entrance had even walked forward to see. She couldn’t blame them, even before the Decepticons had arrived most had never seen a diamond as large as a person’s palm.

“Oh, Thundercracker gave it to her,” Otis answered, slipping between Epps and Burns to see what she held.

Charlie gave him a sharp look, she had gone above and beyond to prove how much she loved her brother—but she really wanted to give him a smack right then.

The people of the Farm who knew the name muttered among themselves and to the people around them. Charlie felt sick from imagining what was going through their head. She had helped saved them but she still not only revived Megatron but was on such good terms with a Con that not only did he help her escape but had apparently showered her with lavish gifts.
She made sure to not even glance in Bumblebee’s direction.

Cade spoke up, not sounding suspicious only confused, “One of those jets gave you a diamond?”

“He thought we were friends,” she began then quickly shook her head. “We were friends. He was good to us. All of us.” She looked pointedly to Tabitha and Caly, her gaze going over to the other Farm survivors. None of them disagreed with her.

“We couldn’t have escaped without him,” Caly came to her rescue. “I think having that diamond is a show of gratitude for his good deed.”

Charlie felt Bumblebee’s eyes burned on her back but she still didn’t turn to him. Was he wondering what Charlie knew? That Thundercracker’s gift hadn’t been purely platonic…she tightened her grip on the diamond before returning it to her pocket. A part of her wanted to reassure Bumblebee that…that nothing happened. But she wasn’t truly sure that he would care, and Charlie had already admitted enough of the terrible things she had done. She didn’t want to say out loud that she had broke her friend’s heart without even meaning to…and he might be dead because of it.

Sally continued to lead Charlie inside and upon seeing that some people still gave her looks of confusion and uncertainty she suddenly felt so overwhelmingly tired.

But that had been days ago and Charlie could confidently say that she was no longer tired all the time, and even her arms were starting to mend though slowly. Her palms had wounds had healed, the blue veins having faded until they were almost unnoticeable, and even her blackened fingers were slowly regaining her original pink color. Soon she wouldn’t need to wear the bandages anymore.

Her friends, her brother, everyone she was close to made sure to spend time with her while she was bed-ridden. Even Ron sat vigil but it mainly consisted of the two stumbling over each other in awkward conversation.

The only one who didn’t sit watch was Bumblebee, but Sally informed her that the Autobots were keeping him busy, and he stopped by numerous times each day to ask how she was doing. Charlie was happy to know he was asking after her, but after that first day she felt the need, and now had the nerve, to sit down and talk with him. She just wasn’t sure how when she was basically in a well-meaning prison.

Her prayers when answered when Cade got put on night-watch while Sally was busy. It felt like it was after midnight when Cade drifted off into sleep and Charlie managed to slip out of bed, out of one of the many small rooms of the building, and out into the cool night air.

She turned to her right and nearly collided with Bumblebee’s kneecap.
“Oh, he stammered, surprised. “Hey, what-”

Charlie waved her arms frantically and made shushing motions. “I’m escaping,” she whispered harshly, glancing toward the building again. The lights were dim and most people were asleep but she had seen the quiet shapes of a few people in the main living corridor, they would no doubt tell Sally if they saw her walking outside.

Bumblebee’s voice immediately dropped in volume as he knelt in front of her, “Where are we running away to?”

“Somewhere my mother can’t find me,” Charlie replied. “I just need a few minutes outside, please.”

He reached his arms out to grab her, his fingers wrapping around her waist. Charlie felt feel every inch of his hands pressed warmly into her skin, and she wondered if she had noticed stuff like that before. She didn’t think so, not like this.

He carried her away to a secluded corner out of the human shelter’s sight. The wall of the Grand Canyon had a jutting piece of rock that was a perfect place for Charlie to sit, her full height sitting down nearly reached his shoulder.

Charlie took a moment to appreciate she was in a place as huge and important and beautiful as the Grand Canyon (cause the small things were one of the few things they had left), then looked up at the stars.

Bumblebee followed her gaze and the two were silent in each other’s company, watching the stars and trying to find ones familiar.

After a few moments Bumblebee spoke up, “It’s good to have you back, Charlie.”

She bit her lip, her butterflies doing somersaults in her stomach when he said her name. “Did…did you know I was gone? While you were comatose?”

“Sorta,” Bumblebee began, turning his eyes to lock onto her own. “It was weird, I wasn’t… Conscious but when I woke up and saw you…I felt how much time had passed since…” he halted, his voice sounding ashamed. “Since the Decepticons took you.”

“That had been an awful day,” she said bluntly, glad no new tears threatened to spill out of her eyes. “I thought Shockwave had killed you.”

“I was already hard to kill,” Bumblebee’s voice was light, though it sounded forced. “Now with
you around it’s going to be *impossible.*”

When he saw her small smile, as forced as his own tone, he lowered his tone. Serious, he spoke, “The last thing I saw before everything went black was you, crying, and I was so scared.” He leaned closer to her, warmth radiating from his body as his hand brushed her leg, “I didn’t get a chance to say it, but I’m *so* sorry, Charlie. Everything that happened at the Decepticon base, you didn’t deserve any of it. And if I could have…I would never have stopped looking for you.”

“I know,” Charlie’s smile was sincere yet still sad. “You’re wonderful, Bee.” She meant that with every fiber of her being. He was so good, *too* good, compared to her…

“So are you,” he replied immediately. “No matter what anyone else says, you *are.*” A new hesitant look suddenly clouded his eyes, she might not have noticed if she wasn’t looking directly into the blue depths. She had a deep yearning to never break eye contact, it was stronger than anything else she knew. “During that fight at the Sanctuary there was…there was something I wanted to tell you.” If he was a human this was the part where he swallowed nervously, “Charlie, I-”

“Bumblebee!”

Ratchet had barely finished saying the name before the yellow Autobot whirled around, his back to Charlie that kept her out of sight of the medic.

“Hey, Ratchet,” he greeted, his voice slightly strained. From Ratchet surprising him or from whatever he wanted to tell her, Charlie wasn’t sure. But a hungry and scared sense of curiosity gnawed in her stomach, imagining what he had wanted to tell her.

“What are you doing out here by yourself?” Ratchet asked, having not spotted Charlie. The girl held her breath.

“Just enjoying the peace and quiet,” Bumblebee replied breezily. “Did you need me?”

“Optimus is holding a meeting,” the older Bot explained. “He’ll want you to attend it.”

“Of course, I’ll see you there.”

When Ratchet was gone he turned back to Charlie, their original conversation currently forgotten. “Can I come with you?” she asked, nearly begged. She wanted to hear what Optimus had to say, she needed to know if there was any way she could help. It didn’t matter if Prime and Bumblebee didn’t hold anything against her, it didn’t matter if all the Autobots *adored* her. *She* was the one who had to carry the responsibility of what she had done, and she would do everything she had to mend the damage.
Bumblebee gave her an uncertain look, “Optimus and your mom would want you to go back to bed.”

She drooped, not having the spirit to argue with him.

“So we’ll have to sneak you in.”

She straightened up immediately and could feel Bumblebee’s smile, mischievous and excited.

Charlie hadn’t had time to decide what was the best way to sneak her into the meeting. But she knew that she could have had all the time in the galaxy and she wouldn’t have suggested what they went with.

It turned out Bumblebee’s cavity was big enough to carry a human her size and now she lay in a tight curl, below the glass that was the Beetle’s window.

She stayed still as Bumblebee walked, feeling a thrumming sound with every step he took. Oh, she realized. His spark.

Feeling it against her skin had warmth pooling into her belly and her face felt flushed. Her mind raced with all the inappropriate jokes Cade would make if he found out about this and Charlie felt hotter, she also vowed to never let Cade know about this.

Bumblebee walked into the room where Charlie had explained her time at the Con base and strained her ears as voices sounded all around. She tried to make out what anyone was saying but only caught snatches. A shadow fell over as Bumblebee crossed his arms in an attempt to keep her better hidden from the group. She wondered if carrying her like this made him uncomfortable.

But then Optimus’ voice called the meeting in order and she focused all her attention on the voices around her.

“We finally have our next plan,” that was Ironhide’s voice. She could picture him and the other Autobots surrounding the table with the map hologram. Were they looking over it?

“We have decided that it will be best to face the Decepticon threat one base at a time,” Optimus started. “Our scouts have found other Decepticon bases all across this planet, with select groups we will storm the smaller ones, making out way across the map until Megatron’s base is the only one left.”

Just the mention of his name made Charlie shudder and Bumblebee shifted slightly.
“But we know exactly where Megatron’s base is,” a voice she didn’t know pointed out. “We will have to search for the others. Would it not be better to go straight to Megatron and finish it now?”

“Megatron’s no fool,” it was Arcee. “He knows Prime is here and will be prepared if we storm his base.”

“And he’ll have a whole army at his side,” another, unknown voice added solemnly.

“Our best chance is to take the other bases down one by one,” Optimus continued, “We will attack sporadically, they will not be able to predict which base will be attacked next.”

“All we have to do is get a hold of one base and I can the location of the rest easy,” Wheeljack added.

“It will spread them thin,” Ironhide spoke up again. “There’s a lot of them, but they can’t send entire armies to each base.”

“And,” Optimus said, “We will not fight alone.”

There was an expectant silence and to Charlie’s surprise she heard Burns’ voice. He had been invited to the meeting too. Was Epps and Lennox here as well?

“The Decepticons caught us off guard,” Burns explained, he held no bitterness in his tone to the Autobots. He knew who his allies were now, and he respected them. “We had no time to figure out their weaknesses and the best way to attack when they ambushed our countries. But now we know. I have no doubt many weapons have been left to rust, cannons and tanks, with your help we can find them and do damage to our enemy. And with the hope of victory we can find other survivors and persuade them to join this fight.”

Charlie’s eyes widened. They were going to find more people! They would build an army themselves! Humans, alongside the Autobots, would battle the Decepticons!

Her heart swelled in excitement at the thought of finding survivors, of helping convince them to fight, of having them understand the alliance they had with the Autobots.

This is it! She could have wept with relief, I can make things right again!
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The next morning Charlie convinced Sally to come with her to talk to Optimus. Finding the Autobot during a rare moment where she was alone she explained to both her mother and leader that she had snuck out last night and eavesdropped on the meeting. She didn’t mention the fact Bumblebee helped her.

She ignored the parental disapproval in both their eyes and began, “I want to help find people and convince them to help us. When we defeat the Decepticons its best that the humans are already together to start rebuilding, and since I have known the Autobots the longest, and know the dangers of the Decepticons, I can help sway people.”

Optimus looked at Sally as if expecting her to say something, but Charlie’s mother only looked at her with a furrowed brow, silent. Charlie turned her complete attention on Optimus. “I’ve healed. And I can’t stay here at the base doing nothing.”

“Watching over your kind is not nothing,” Optimus replied.

“I know, I know, that’s not what I-” she let out a noise of frustration and got to the point. “Optimus, none of the other humans are carrying the guilt I have. They blame me, both Autobots and humans-and please don’t try to convince me otherwise. I don’t blame them, in fact it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter if no one blamed me. I still have this burden, and helping the Autobots is the only one I can think to ease it.”

She stared beseechingly up at the Autobot leader, her mother still quiet, still looking at her.

Optimus’ eyes were thoughtful, and he stayed quiet for several seconds before speaking again, “I do not want you to put the burden of this war on your shoulders, Charlie. If you must carry it you must allow myself and your allies to carry it with you.”

Charlie nodded, wondering if that was possible. Wishing it was so.

“You have nothing to prove, not to the Autobots or humans, not to yourself,” he glanced away. His eyes looked a bit darker, as if he was recalling a memory he rather wouldn’t have. “Your help would be appreciated here…but what you say is true. You have become a link between our worlds, emotionally, and physically.”

Charlie’s fingers twitched.
Optimus turned back to Sally, “Your daughter would be beneficial in our plans, Mrs. Watson. But I don’t want to make any decisions without consulting you.”

Charlie turned back to her daughter, imagining Sally refusing, saying her daughter had been through enough. That they had all been through enough, and she planned to keep her daughter right where she could see her.

But instead Sally released a soft breath, a faint sigh, and nodded. “If this is what she wants. I trust her to make her own decisions, and choose the right ones.”

Touched, Charlie smiled at her mother before Sally turned sharply to look up at Optimus, “But just looking for survivors. I don’t want her to go with you during your base raids.”

Taken aback by her mother’s sharp tone Optimus only nodded respectively, apparently unbothered. “Of course. Rest assured not even Burns and his soldiers will be joining the raids right now. Not until we can find them better weapons.” He turned his head back to Charlie, “There is still more planning to be done, but I will send for you when it is time to go.”

“I’ll be ready. Thank you Optimus.”

With a final nod to the two Watson women Optimus walked away, his steps quiet for one so large. Charlie turned back to her mother, half-expecting her to now admit her true feelings about her daughter’s plans. But Sally just gave her a soft look and headed toward the human base, “I imagine you’ll be gone for a few days? Let’s pack you a few essentials.”

Charlie hurried after her, still surprised and pleased her mother was taking this so well.

Stepping inside they waved and nodded to a few passerbys. Memo and Caly were babysitting Sam and Mikaela, entertaining the babies with a game of peek-a-boo. She didn’t see any of the soldiers, they were probably helping the planning. She didn’t see Otis either but she would bet he was following Wheeljack around, Ron probably dutifully staying by his side.

While Sally collected things from the storage bins, Charlie daydreamed about what her first mission would entail. She pictured snowy mountains and abandoned European cities, she imagined finding large groups of people, all so relieved and grateful to be safe, and willing to fight for that safety. She imagined this weight being lifted on her chest so she could like herself again.

She was staring absently into one of the storage bins, her mind running in circles, when she heard Sally sniffle.

Charlie turned to see fresh tears starting to pool from her mother’s eyes, but just like her daughter she wiped uselessly at them and tried to continue her task.
“Mom?” Charlie started, she felt a cold dread to see her mother cry. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing-nothing,” Sally quickly shook her head. “You should take a few bottles of water. Some non-perishables…”

“Mom,” Charlie continued, stepping over to stand next to her. “What’s wrong? Do you not want me to go?” She hated the thought of staying put but if it kept her mother from crying like this.

“Of course I don’t want you to go,” she bit out the words, her voice warbling with a sob. “You’re my baby, Charlie. And you want to go out into the world full of dangerous robots who want to capture you and…” Sally placed her hands on the edge of the storage bin as if to ground herself. “You were gone for weeks, I thought you were dead. I just got you back and now you want to go back out and risk your life.”

Charlie swallowed the rock in her throat. Of course she knew her mother was upset, was scared, but it felt so much worse when she saw her break down like this. “Mom…” she trailed off. What could she say?

“I don’t want you to go,” Sally repeated. She then took a break and straightened, her eyes were still damp but now held a steely acceptance. “But I won’t stop you. I’ve accepted that my little girl has become a…very important part of all this.” She indicated around herself. “Even though this war isn’t ours, you put yourself right in the front lines. And they…they need you, these giant alien robots need my little Charlie to save the world.” She laughed, slightly sincere, slightly hysterical. “It sounds like a movie.” She reached out and pulled her daughter into a hug, “I’m scared. I’m terrified. But I know if we are going to get our home back, you have to be out there, not in here. I’m scared, but I’m proud.” There was a pause, “And your father would be too.”

The words, so unexpected, so lovely, brought tears to Charlie’s own eyes. The two hugged each other and cried. And all the while Charlie wondered if her father was watching over her. She had so many people watching over her.

She let a sense of security wash over her.

It was okay.

She was safe.


Thundercracker awoke with a start.

He looked around, fighting back a panicked-fueled adrenaline. He didn’t know what had caused it.
He also didn’t know where he was.

The entire world was gray, and felt fathomless. Every which way he turned he saw nothing but gray, it felt endless, but it also felt that if he reached his hand out-he’d touch a wall.

_What happened to me?_

He blinked, the question immediately bringing the answer surging to his circuits.

He remembered returning to the base, walking into a room where accusatory glares had driven blades into him.

Megatron had been furious, he had stole what he insisted had belonged to him. Starscream had refused to look at him, having not a said a word to his comrade since they followed Megatron back to base. He had wondered what Starscream thought of him now.

He noticed Skywarp, looking at him with genuine fear in his optics. But despite all the jokes that the jet was less than intelligent, this time he was wise. This time he stayed still and quiet.

He saw Shockwave among the group of glaring red optics, looking apathetic as per usual. Thundercracker had no idea what was running through the mad scientist’s mind, but he did know he didn’t care.

The only other face that stood out in the buzzing crowd was Shatter, practically thrumming in fury. He thought he saw a glint of grief in her optics and remembered Dropkick lay dead in this base. He was slightly surprised Shatter actually cared.

Megatron started to speak but Thundercracker couldn’t bother to make his audio receptors work. He could guess what the Con was saying, he was telling them everything. Telling them this seeker was a traitor and a fool, a love struck, loveless, fool.

But all through Megtron’s rambling Thundercracker kept an optic out for a specific Con. Someone he had bested out of sheer luck and desperation. He knew this Con was around, and he waited for that finishing blow.

It came quick but later than he expected. A blue figure suddenly appeared in the corner of his optic and before he could fully process it the world went dark.

_Did they kill me?_ Thundercracker had been sure that was exactly what would happen when he returned to the base. But this didn’t look nor feel like the Well of AllSparks. There was also the fact his body still ached, covered in the dents and scratches of his oh so heroic feat. He was pretty
sure he was suppose to leave wounds in the living world.

So where…

He didn’t notice the figure at first, in fact his optics went right past it, having almost done a 360 turn when he realized. He whirled back around and, he wasn’t imagining it. There was someone else here.

They looked so far away, and he reached his hand out and called to them.

The stranger turned to face him, and even from this distance he knew-he knew, and his spark burned in response.

“Charlie…”

His voice was a whisper and Thundercracker-still convinced he was dreaming or dead-took a step forward. And as if he had teleported with that one step, the small figure wasn’t so small before, and he stood before Charlie.

His fingers twitched, wanting to reach out and grab her and hold her and have her be his.

But she’s not yours.

Charlie looked up and smiled and the smile that he was so sure he wouldn’t see again filled him with such a great sense of happiness that he almost didn’t notice what was different about her.

Almost.

“What happened to your optics?” he breathed.

She tilted her head slightly and reached out to trace her fingers across her face, “What’s wrong with my optics?”

“They’re…blue.” They shone, they were gorgeous, but Charlie’s were suppose to be brown.

And even her voice, it was her voice but…it had a lilt to it, an accent, it was otherworldly.

Blue-optic Charlie chuckled at his words, sounding relieved, “Oh. That. Jeez, you scared me.” She smirked up at him, “Why wouldn’t they be?” She suddenly made a dramatic bow, “You are talking to the very first organic Autobot, remember?”
He wished he could forget. Even this—this different Charlie wanted to be away with him. Would prefer different company. That was fine, he wouldn’t try to stop her.

“Then why aren’t you with them now?” he asked, his voice a mixture of confusion and bitterness. “I didn’t rescue you so you could come back here.” *Wherever* here was.

Charlie straightened and appraised him with a new look. She seemed sincerely confused. “I…am with them. With an Autobot anyway. I’m with you.”

Thundercracker curled his lip, “I’m not an Autobot.”

She chuckled again, the sound dancing across his melting plating and making him shiver. “You could have fooled me, my knight in shining armor.”

“Then I *did* fool you,” he snarled. It felt like this…this Charlie was teasing him. Mocking him even. He didn’t have the patience for that. “I’m not an Autobot. I’m a Decepticon with my own problems. Now leave me alone I can’t—” Emotion, that overflowing, drowning emotion he had felt only after he met this human threatened to suffocate him. “I can’t do this again, Charlie.”

“Do this again?” she echoed, as if she didn’t know.

“Don’t play with me,” he ordered, his voice cracking. “You were there you know that I…you’re not dumb.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” she said dryly then stepped forward, reaching her hand out. Her glowing blue optics were lit with concern, “Now please tell me what is wrong? Let me help.”

Oh he could think of a million ways for her to help him, and he would not tell her any of them.

“Why would you want to stay and help?” he demanded, turning his back to her. Ready to walk away and…there really wasn’t anywhere to go in this gray void. “Aren’t you impatient? B-127 is waiting for you.”

“Maybe he is,” Charlie conceded, her voice quiet. “But I want to stay here with you.”

His body went rigid. He had to be dead, the Well of AllSparks was just being kind and fulfilling an impossible fantasy. But despite believing this wasn’t real he slowly turned his head to look over her shoulder.

Charlie stood there, despite her optics and voice she was still Charlie, she was still beautiful, she
was still unlike anything he had ever seen before.

He still loved her.

Her optics widened and he realized he had said that last line out loud.

“Come here, Thundercracker,” she said, her voice soothing the aches in his body. “Don’t make me talk to your back.”

He did turn and he knelt before her, even though he suddenly felt terrified to be near her.

But she smiled softly and she looked at him and it looked so similar to the way she looked when she spoke of B-127.

Charlie reached out and placed her hands against his face plate, she was still warm and soft. She was still Charlie, she was still his Charlie.

“I didn’t realize you felt this way,” she said, running her fingers across his cheek, her gaze never leaving his own. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” he choked out the words, the lie thick on his tongue.

Charlie shook her head, “No, it’s not fine. I hurt you... my poor Thundercracker.”

*Her poor Thundercracker.*

The words broke down any walls he had around his spark, “I want you, Charlie. I want to hold you and touch you. I want us to fly away and forget all of this. I want it to be just us. Please.”

In response Charlie blinked slowly, her expression unreadable.

And then she reached up and pressed her lips against his own.

His body felt awash in a soothing heat as his wounds were healed. Something wrapped around his spark and held it close, snug, firm, unmoveable.

“This is going to hurt,” Charlie breathed against his mouth. “And you won’t understand why at first. But everything is going to be okay, and I will never leave you again.”
Her words didn’t process until he felt hot liquid slosh against his feet. He looked down and made a
strangled choking noise. The gray floor was replaced with a red liquid, a blue glow swirling
through the crimson that was now lapping at his thighs.

“What-” he gasped but he couldn’t move.

Charlie still stood before him, only one hand pressed against his cheek. He looked to her, and felt
his spark drop at the sad expression on her face.

“Charlie, what’s going?” he started to panic, the liquid was rising up to his chest now and he still
couldn’t move, he could only shake. The liquid was seeping through his crevices and the sizzling
pain started up, buring his inside, slashing his nerves.

“I’ll still be here, Thundercracker,” Charlie spoke in a soft, soothing voice. “I won’t leave you
again. I promise.”

But her words did little to assure him as the liquid reached his shoulders. He tried to swim, his
limbs now twisting and kicking and the pain moving right into his spark.

The liquid passed over his head and Thundercracker was surrounded. The pain tore into his spark,
violated it, kissed it, morphed into something he didn’t recongnize.

And then that was it.

The pain was gone.

He felt like he was weightless.

Light.

Empty.

Nothing.

Chapter End Notes

We have arrived at a new arc my friends. I call this arc I-Do-Whatever-The-F*ck-I-Want.
“Due to the fact that the Decepticons will no doubt be looking for you, I’d like you to not stray far.”

Charlie stood next to Burns as Optimus relayed the plan to them. Groups of Autobots and volunteered humans had already left, through the space bridge and out to various parts of the world. They were all sent to find survivors, and weapons.

Optimus continued, “This is a large continent. I am sure there are humans still here, hiding.”

Charlie nodded, “I understand, Optimus.” She was a little put out not getting to travel outside the States but she wasn’t going to argue. She was leaving the base, she got what she wanted. Well, almost…

“What Autobots will be traveling with us?” Burns unknowingly asked for her.

“Ironhide, Jazz, and Bumblebee,” Optimus answered. He gave Charlie an almost knowing look when he say the yellow Bot’s name and Charlie blushed.

He knew? Would he say anything…? Optimus didn’t seem the type to spread gossip.

Charlie looked over her shoulder to where Sally, Ron, and Cade stood offering encouraging waves and thumbs up. Otis was nowhere to be seen, Charlie heard he was upset he couldn’t travel with her, claiming he now had just as much experience as Charlie. Sally had stated she would like to keep at least one child close in an effort not to lose her sanity.

But he wasn’t the only one upset about not going out to scout. Cade’s leg injury was keeping him in one place and she was sure that the people getting stuck with him were just as upset, if not more so.

“I have already relayed this to Ironhide,” Optimus said, bringing her attention back to him. “But you will be gone for three days, if you do not return by the third day a rescue party will be sent to look for you.”

The two nodded, Charlie keeping her back straight and chin up to match Burns. If he was any sort of apprehensive about this scouting mission, he didn’t let it show.

“If you had any more questions let Ironhide know,” Optimus went on. “With luck I will have returned to welcome you back.”
Optimus and a select group of Autobots would be going to the nearest Decepticon base to claim it and gather information. It was dangerous, and Charlie was nervous for them, but she had faith they could handle themselves. After all, she had her sincere doubts that Megatron would be at this random, nowhere base.

With an affirmative from Burns he walked off to where the three Autobots were waiting. With another wave to her mother (they had shared goodbye hugs that morning), Charlie made her way after them. But before she could take more than a few steps Optimus knelt down and stopped her with an outstretched hand.

“I can not promise you you will not find Decepticons during this mission,” he told her, his voice low. “If you see any, do not engage. I need you to hide and stay hidden until they are gone. They will be looking for you, Charlie, I imagine even Megatron is out there right now, searching.”

The thought sent cold water down her spine. But she nodded bravely, “Okay, Optimus.”

“Do not do as you did in that battle at the Sanctuary,” he ordered, because despite how it had barely been several months he still knew her too well. “Promise me.”

“Only if you promise me you won’t get yourself killed attacking that base,” Charlie replied. She had meant it as a joke but her throat still hurt a bit, imagining losing Optimus.

He nodded, serious and sincere, the only way Optimus knew. “I swear.”

“Then I swear too.”

Charlie sat in Bumblebee’s driver seat and his excited hum could be felt against her thighs.

The yellow Beetle dutifully followed Ironhide and Jazz through a bumpy back country dirt road, forest surrounding them on both sides.

She leaned back against the seat, warm against her back. “You’re in a good mood,” she pointed out with a smile.

“I am!” he replied brightly. “I can’t remember the last time we went on a drive! It’s like the good old days!”

“Good old days?” Charlie chuckled. “With you and me hiding from Cons and Conan following us around?”

“Well, Conan still follows me around when he can. We’re best friends!” he replied proudly. “But no really, it may have been dangerous but it was fun. You and me.”
Her skin felt hot and not because of the sunlight streaming through the window. She considered those days an endless cycle of Bumblebee coming to her rescue and getting injured because of it... but then she remembered the good things. The day he found her father’s picture, the dance on the beach, when they were in the school and she held his head against her chest.

“I miss those days too,” she replied, quiet, honest. “Simpler times. No less dangerous, but simpler.”

“Maybe…” Bumblebee’s voice lowered, he sounded shy. “Maybe when things calm down we can go on a road trip. It’s a big planet, I’d like to see all the sights.”

Thanks to me it’ll be a long time until it was calm again. “I think we should make it a group thing,” Charlie said. “Wheeljack would have a blast, Optimus needs a vacation, and maybe it would help Hot Shot like me better.” She wouldn’t like him if the roles were reversed, but she’d like to fix the disastrous first impression.

“Oh,” his voice was disappointed but he was clearly trying to mask it. “Yeah, that’d be fun too.”

Her brow furrowed, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“You’re not a good liar, Bee.”

He was quiet for a few moments then reluctantly spoke, “You want Hot Shot to like you?”

She hadn’t expected him to ask that. “I mean, yeah. I admire all the Autobots. I want all of them to like me.” She looked through the window to see the red vehicle ahead of them, “I think I got Ironhide to warm up to me.” At least he hadn’t been one to accuse me of being a traitor. “If I can convince him I think I could convince others. That’s one of the reasons I’m here on this mission.”

“You don’t have to go on a scouting mission, Charlie,” Bumblebee replied. “If you just give them some time to get to know you of course they’ll like you. You’re very easy to like. Burns warmed up to you, Ironhide, even a Decep-” his voice abruptly stopped.

The tension in the air could have been cut with a knife. Charlie didn’t know if she could break, she wasn’t sure if she wanted to.

But after a few moments of silence she chose to be brave, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“Talk about what?”
“About me being at the base, with the Decepticons.”

“Not if you don’t want to talk about it,” he replied. It was up to her, whatever made her happy. He always wanted to make her happy.

“It wasn’t a good experience,” she began, leaning against the window. “Especially those first few days… but I was able to make it tolerable. And I was able to help Tabitha and the others escape.”

“You’re a hero,” he replied, admiringly. But she knew that wasn’t what he wanted to hear from her.

“Thundercracker wasn’t like the other Cons,” she hurried the words out before she lost her nerve. “I didn’t mean to actually be his friend, but it happened.”

There was a pause, “I’m not surprised, honestly. I’d consider Thundercracker one of the less… intense Cons. Plus, you’re very charming.”

She blinked, his voice was casual, normal. Charlie considered asking the question that was on her tongue.

He must have sensed her hesitation. “What is it?”

“Are… are you upset?” Charlie asked, thinking of the diamond she kept hidden in her room back at the base. “I don’t want to sound like you should or anything, I’m not that important. But I also didn’t…”

“I am upset,” he broke in, bringing her rambling to a halt.

Just as her chest started to squeeze with hurt he continued, “Well, maybe upset is the wrong word. I’m not thrilled. You were kidnapped and had to stay with Decepticons, Charlie. You had to pay allies with Starscream and revive Megatron. And I know it hurt you. And I know… I wasn’t there, but he was.”

“It’s not your responsibility,” she said, her voice tight with emotion. She meant to say it the way everyone kept telling her. Bumblebee was one Bot and Charlie was a magnet for multiple forms of danger.

He made a noise similar to a hitch of breath, it sounded like it hurt. He mumbled something, his voice so low she couldn’t be sure she had meant to hear it. But she did.

“Was it Thundercracker’s?”
“It’s not anyone’s responsibility,” she replied, her voice now thick. “And trust me he knows that.” Thundercracker would rather have faced Megatron and the rest of the Cons then go with her. She wasn’t his problem anymore, she shouldn’t be anyone’s problem. But here everyone was, trying to do just that.

Another moment of quiet, so much silence. Back when he couldn’t speak they had somehow been able to fill hours with talk and singing.

“I’m sorry,” he breathed.

“No, no, don’t apologize,” she said quickly, feeling a stab in her gut at the thought of making him feel guilty. “It’s not your fault. You didn’t do anything wrong.” He never did. That was her job.

Bumblebee, apparently not knowing what to say next, if anything should be said, turned on the radio. It was The Smiths.

Charlie closed her eyes and let the music fill in the silence, guilt and confusion twisting in her belly. He had just wanted to have a nice conversation, reminisce about the old days and plan out the new ones, and she ruined it without even trying.

Her hand pulled into a fist, her nails digging into her skin. She kept ruining everything.

.

Charlie was dozing in and out, the trees were now thinning out around them, dusk was falling…

Then a missile nearly slammed right into Bumblebee.

She was thrown to the side as Bumblebee dodged, now wide awake and heart pounding. “What was that?!”

“Not friendly fire,” Bumblebee replied, increasing the speed.

Charlie sat up and looked around, she saw Ironhide and Jazz also swerving, missiles flying and exploding far too close to them. She looked up at they sky but whoever was firing at them was using cloud cover to keep out of sight.

One attack landed so close to Bumblebee dirt and rock pelted his body from the explosion. A horrifying painful strike of panic stabbed her in the heart and all she could think of was the blade going through Bumblebee’s chest.

“Are you okay?” she asked, her voice hoarse.
“I’m fine,” he replied, slightly startled by her tone.

“We have to move,” Charlie looked around. “There’s tree cover off the road! We need to get there!” She had to hide, Bumblebee had to stay safe. She swore, she swore.

“Ironhide,” Bumblebee called on his radio, “What’s the plan?”

“I can’t get a good sight of him,” the red Autobot replied, his voice tense. “We’re gonna split up, confuse the enemy. I want you both to find a place to hunker down, we’ll meet at dawn back on this road.”

“Are you sure we should split up?” Jazz asked.

Another explosion, this time Ironhide nearly crashed to avoid it.

Charlie felt sick, “Yes. We’re on a scouting mission not an attacking mission let’s go!”

Bumblebee immediately turned off the road, the grass bumpy as he drove straight into the trees. She looked behind her to see Ironhide and Jazz do the same on the other side of the road.

She prayed that wasn’t the last time she would see them. She was practically shaking in her panic.


“I’m fine,” she choked out the words. She sat back down and wrapped her arms around her legs. “I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not,” Bumblebee’s own voice was starting to rise in hysteria. “Please calm down, we’ll-we’ll find a place to stop and stay for tonight. Look we’re not even being shot at anymore.”

He was right, the world had gone quiet again. Whoever had shot them had given up when he lost sight of them. But that didn’t mean that he would stop searching. It was a few minutes of Charlie frantic breathing filling the air, and Bumblebee’s soft music to calm her, before the robot let out a surprised noise.

She lifted her head, through what little light that was still left, her eyes widened. They had driven into a small forest clearing, and in that clearing she saw a rundown wooden cabin.

“Do-do you think anyone lives here?”
“We are on a scouting mission,” he replied, he sounded relieved to see she wasn’t choking on her own breath. “Let’s check it out.”

Charlie stepped out and almost immediately fell on shaking legs. Bumblebee transformed and held his arms out to her, ready to catch her if she fell. His blue eyes were wide with worry.

She placed her hand on his palm, her cheeks blushing, shameful of how she acted, and then led him to the cabin.

“Hello?” she knocked on the door. “Is anyone here?”

When there was no answer she tried to open the door, it wasn’t locked.

Whoever lived here hadn’t lived here in a long time. The floor and walls were dusty, there was no sofa or bed, it looked like someone had cleaned it out years ago. All that was left was an old carpet on the floor. She stepped over to stand on it, it used to be red and gold, covered in intricate patterns.

“Doesn’t look like anyone lives here anymore,” she told Bumblebee who stood at the doorway.

“We can stay here for the night,” he replied, brightening. “It’s good shelter, and it’d be better to hide in here then stay out in the opening.” Shifting his body to slide through the door he straightened up once inside, his head almost touching the roof. “We’ll spend the night here and go find Ironhide and Jazz tomorrow.”

Charlie sat down, the carpet dusty, her heart still thumping wildly, her brain scolding her for not staying at the base. What the hell is wrong with me?
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

NOTE; please read:

The following chapter contains a scene of mature/suggestive material. If you are uncomfortable or uninterested in reading, the scene starts after the first three stars ***
The scene is over after the second three stars ***

“Are you alright?”

Charlie looked up at Bumblebee, the two sat on the carpet of the cabin. The moonlight sending shafts through the windows was the only light the two had, but it was enough.

The Autobot’s blue eyes glowed, he was still worried about her. “I know you’re not a fan of the battle field but…you were practically screaming.”

“Sorry,” Charlie replied, trying not to think about it. “That was clearly the last thing you needed at the time.”

“Don’t worry about me,” Bumblebee said, turning to completely face her. “I’m fine, it’s you I was worried about.”

Charlie turned her eyes downcast, her actions felt shameful.

“Talk to me,” Bumblebee said, soft and insistent. “We used to talk all the time.”

That got her.

“I’m scared,” she said, forcing her eyes up to him. “I’m scared you’re going to get hurt again.” She looked to his chest, it was too dark to see the outline of the wound. “And it’ll be my fault.”

“Charlie,” he gently scolded. “It is not your fault. And I understand you’re scared, I get scared too. But, that’s just something we have to face. Optimus tells me that an Autobot can’t know courage without also knowing fear.”

She could only stare up at him. It was different for him, trouble didn’t follow him, he didn’t cause the suffering of those he cared for. But she didn’t want to see the worry in his eyes anymore. She sighed, “You’re right, you’re right…You’re sure you’re okay, though?”
He let out a noise that was half exasperation, half affectionate. “Come here, Charlie.”

She blinked, not moving and Bumblebee reached out to grab her arm and gently bring her closer. “I want to show you something.”
He pressed his chest open to reveal his spark.

Charlie’s eyes widened, it was perfectly spherical, blue and glowing, and it was beautiful.

“See,” he breathed as she stared. “As long as my spark is okay, I’m okay, and it’s thanks to you.”

***

It took a prolonged moment for Charlie to realize the hand reaching out toward his spark was her own. She jumped, “Sorry!” She bit her lip and looked up at him, “I wasn’t thinking I just… reached.”

“You can touch it,” he replied immediately, he sounded breathless.

Surprising herself, Charlie didn’t hesitate to reach out again. This felt different from the time she healed him, it felt more vulnerable but just as intimidating.

Her fingers brushed the spark and the texture was strange, but not unpleasant. It was warm, almost hot, fuzzy like static and firm. Bumblebee flinched when she touched him.

“Sorry!” she pulled her hand back, holding her hand against her chest.

“You didn’t hurt me,” he quickly assured her. “It just… felt different.”

“Different?”

“It’s hard to explain. But go ahead, if it makes you feel better. It doesn’t bother me.”

She probably should have chosen not to do so, he was clearly fine. But still she found herself reaching out again, caressing his spark. A feeling she didn’t know danced down her arm, fuzzy and pleasant, it was making her heart beat faster. Something deep in her stomach sparked. Charlie didn’t stop, she didn’t want to stop. Her face felt hot as her hand ran across the blue orb, her fingers, still a little black from her endeavors, were numb with a electrifying pleasantness. She was snapped out of her trance when she tripped forward, realizing she had been leaning forward, getting closer.
Charlie looked up, Bumblebee had been watching her the entire time. His eyes were now dim, dark, it was a look she had never seen on him before. From the corner of her eye she saw that his fists had balled up the carpet.

“Did I hurt you?” she breathed, her voice was now husky to her ears. With great effort she pulled her hand away, the static still linger on her fingers.

He just stared at her, silent.

Charlie started to squirm, “I didn’t mean to-Bumblebee, I…”

“Touch me.”

She froze. The plea was rough and desperate, and it made her whole body shiver.

“What?” she breathed.

“Touch me.” His voice became even more frantic. And then he was pushing her down.

His weight was solid against her body but not unpleasant, and Bumblebee nuzzled into her neck. Charlie reached her hand back out to hold his spark and she realized exactly what this pleasure was she was feeling, crawling down her spine, resting between her legs. Bumblebee pushed his knee between her thighs and her breath choked. The sensation made her hand squeeze the spark and he moaned, it was unlike anything she had heard before. She wanted to hear it again.

Charlie wrapped his arm around his neck and held him against her, she saw his fingers dig into the carpet and her heart bubbled with delight.

“Charlie,” he moaned hotly as he pressed against her cheek. “Charlie…Charlie…”

She really did love the way he said her name.

“I can feel you,” she breathed, her vision blurring. “I can feel you.”

The sensation from touching his spark had traveled all down her body and she felt so connected, she felt like this was where she was meant to be. She didn’t understand, it felt so alien, so pleasant, so terrifying.

She felt Bumblebee’s hand, warm and smooth slide under her shirt and her skin jumped. He held her, she had never been held like this before. His hand slowly started to move down her stomach and she realized what was about to happen.
And at first, delight and anxiety jumped in her chest. He was going to...they were going to...what....how could...this was...

Despite the pleasure that was sending stars throughout her body she felt an unavoidable sense of nervousness and doubt when his hand reached the line of her pants.

“Wait,” she gasped out the words, hardly recognizing her own voice. “Stop.”

He did, hesitating for a fraction of a second before pushing himself up to loom with his hands to loom over her. Charlie pulled her hand from his spark and pressed it against her chest. Her heart was breaking through her chest.

She was gasping, and Bee was staying uncharacteristically quiet. His eyes were still dim, there was a new look to them and when she figured out what that look was her body felt even hotter.

“I don’t…” she started but felt silent. She needed to say something but she had no idea what. She felt confused, she was burning, she was thinking about how good the metal against her skin felt and feeling as if she didn’t deserve such a pleasure. She felt unworthy. “What was this?”

He blinked and his eyes lit up, apparently coming to his senses. “I…that was,” he stammered, his voice still rough. “I hadn’t planned for that.” A flash of fear, of his own uncertainty, showed in his eyes and he quickly sat up. “I'm going to-I think I should give you a moment... I’m sorry.”

Charlie didn’t stop him from stepping outside, instead she waited until he was gone before she held her hands up and covered her face. She let out a noise torn between embarrassment, confusion and...happiness. That was it.

While she had never forgotten the first time she had her realization, she became thrown by how much she loved him. How much she was in love with him. And what just happened, the way he looked at her...he may have been a robot but there was no way there was any misunderstanding of cultural differences.

They would have kept going if she hadn’t told him to stop. Why did she tell him to stop? It clearly didn’t matter she was a human.

The fried nerves across her burning skin answered her, reminding her of how coarse her blackened fingers were. It reminded her of everything that was wrong.

**Oh that would be a cute love story**, a nasty voice mockingly hissed in her head. **The loyal, good solider, and the pathetic little traitor. What does he see in you? Why should he see anything? He could die tomorrow, he could die by the hands of Megatron. And it would be your fault. Poor, poor, Bumblebee. His one flaw...he has such terrible taste.**
Bumblebee leaned against the cabin, his hand pressed on his now closed chest. His spark was throbbing, he was surprised steam wasn’t rolling off his body. His circuits shrieked at him to go back inside, back to Charlie, to finish it.

*I can’t believe I just did that... I can’t believe I just did that!*

The whole thing had gone completely out of hand. Charlie had been upset, he was trying to assure her by letting her touch his spark. But the moment her hand touched it an intense pleasure had rocked his entire body. The rest was a heavy, hot haze. He could still feel her body pressed into him, he had held her down, held her down while she ran her fingers across the most intimate part of him. He had touched her in places...intimate places that he might not have had he been thinking straight.

His spark seemed to hunger for her touch again, same as him. But how come...

Realization nearly drove him to his knees.

He was told about this, about this...sensation. It was during his early days at the Academy and he had rolled his eyes and didn’t think anymore of it. It didn’t interest him back then, he just wanted to be a solider.

But now it was all coming back to him. *That pleasure from a spark being held...that only happened with sparkmates.*

“Charlie’s my sparkmate.”

His voice was low, quiet, just to himself but he had to say the words out loud in order to truly understand them.

When did *that* happen?

And just as quick as the first realization the answer came to him, during the moment she revived him, the first time she held his spark. He knew he had fallen for her before then, but now it became so official.

A sheer, bright happiness glowed inside him. It was *official*. They were sparkmates! He loved her, he wanted to hold her and touch her and be right by her side *forever*. He didn’t care about complications, not about the war, not about what the Autobots and humans would think, all that mattered was that she was his, and he was definitely hers.
He turned on his heel, feeling like singing. But then he remembered something incredibly vital.

She didn’t know what sparkmates were, never mind that’s what they were now. She didn’t even know how he felt about her! Or well…she hadn’t. He had groped her chest he was pretty sure she got the I-like-you message.

But he needed to do this right, wanted to do this right. He would confess to her, he should have done that as soon as she had revived him, especially considering he had had one foot in the Well of AllSparks. He would confess and it would be nice and romantic…he would wait until dawn, before they left. It would give them time to calm down and he could also figure out exactly what he would say.

And then everything would be perfect.

***

Charlie was woken up with a rough shake.

“What-What!?” She jolted into a sitting position, half-expecting Megatron to be tearing the cabin apart.

But it was only Bumblebee, looking down at her with the excitement of a child. “You’re up!”

“You woke me up,” she said, stretching and pulling herself onto her feet. Sunlight filtered through the open door. She looked at Bee, remembered last night, and looked away. “We heading back to find Ironhide?”

“We are,” he replied, leading her outside. “But if it’s alright with you, I’d like to talk to you for a bit.”

Charlie halted, just a moment, before following after him, “Sure.” She imagined he wanted to talk about last night, which is what they needed to do. She just had no idea exactly what would be said.

Outside Charlie saw a large rock she hadn’t noticed last night, she walked over and climbed onto it, to be at a better eye level.

Bumblebee stood before her, expectant, he looked nervous and excited. “I…” he halted and looked away, “I…give me a moment please.”

Charlie smiled, she understood feeling awkward, though she wasn’t going to try her hand at starting this conversation, she’d make it more awkward. She looked up at the sky, red and orange from the rising sun. She kept her eyes and ears open but
she, thankfully, didn’t hear the sound of jet engines.

“I think it’s-”

“I love you.”

Charlie’s head snapped around, jaw slack, eyes wide.

Bumblebee wrung his hands together, eyes wide and bright and nervous and true.

“Wh-what?”

He straightened himself, “I love you…and not just like friends. Like, romantically.”

Charlie swallowed, her throat was dry.

Bumblebee continued, “Last night, after what happened, I realized something. Charlie, we’re sparkmates.”

She liked the word. “What’s sparkmates?”

“I don’t know what humans would call it,” he admitted. “But it means we’re connected, our sparks are connected. I didn’t know it could happen between a Cybertronian and a human, but it did, it has. It’s because I love you,” she felt his smile in his voice, “I’m only yours.”

Charlie let the words dance around her head, over and over. She wasn’t hallucinating, all those things…he really said it. And he meant it.

Her silence did not go unnoticed, Bumblebee shuffled awkwardly, “Um…what do you think of that? About me, being in love with you?”

Did he really need to ask? Charlie thought she had always been embarrassingly obvious.

She smiled, and for one golden moment she let herself be happy. Let her heart sing and let nothing bother her because—he loved her, and she loved him, they both loved each other. Nothing could top this moment and she sincerely wished she had been brave enough to tell him she loved him that first day. She could have been happier longer.

But reality, and the present, came after right after that happy moment.
And it came in the form of Decepticon claws. She felt Shockwave, who stabbed the Autobot she loved and violated her body. She felt Dropkick, she hatred and blood lust, still heavy in the air despite his death. She felt Thundercracker, hating her for hurting him, cursing her because he died for her.

She felt Megatron, trying to pull her down to the group and tear her open. She felt his voice in her ear, thanking her for bringing him—his little champion of Decepticons.

She tried to imagine what she must look like right now, her hair having become tangled, her clothes wrinkled, her hands still not healing completely. Charlie looked up at Bumblebee, his eyes warm and nervous and loving. What the hell did he see in her? There was nothing good left.

“How?”

His brow furrowed, “How what?”

“How could you love someone like me?”

His eyes widened, “I could list the reasons if you want.” He gave her a resigned, knowing look, “But you wouldn’t listen, would you?”

“Don’t think you owe this to me because I saved your life or anything,” she started to pace the rock as she spoke. “After everything I’ve done, how could you—”

“You keep talking like you did all this on purpose,” Bumblebee interrupted, his threw his arm out to indicate to the trees. “You didn’t ask for any of this, Charlie! You keep carrying guilt that shouldn’t be there!”

“But it is!” She turned on her heel and glared up at him, feeling tears fall down her cheeks. “It’s easy for you, you’re perfect. You could have whoever you want, you could have someone who deserves you but you’re here with me. I know you don’t get it, it’s not your fault. God, it’s not anyone’s fault. It’s me, I…I think I hate myself.”

When there was no reply she forced her head up. Bumblebee’s optics glittered with sadness. Not anger, not pain, just sadness. For her.

Why can’t you be angry at me? You just poured your heart out to me and here I am talking about myself. Why aren’t you angry?

“I wish I could see what you, Optimus, my mother, Thundercracker, I wish I could see what you all
do when you look at me. But I can’t, maybe one day when this is all over…if we can defeat
Megatron, then maybe… But then maybe he'll hurt more people, he might hurt you or one of my
family or friends, and it’s going to be my fault.”

Bumblebee took a step forward, his arms outstretched, but he didn’t touch her. “Charlie…” he
trailed off. What could he possible say to that? Tell her that she was being ridiculous, stupid? She
knew that. But that didn’t stop the crushing feeling that weighed her down and burned her hands
and hurt her heart.

There was a familiar sound of engines, but not the ones of jets’.

Bumblebee turned around and Charlie saw the familiar shapes of Ironhide and Jazz riding toward
them.

“Oh Primus you’re not in pieces,” the red robot exclaimed as he transformed. “Jazz was already
waiting at the road so we decided to go ahead and look for you.”
Burns stepped out of Jazz’s car-mode so the Autobot could transform.

“You two have a safe night,” Burns asked as he walked over. Charlie jumped off the rock to stand
beside him.

“It was fine,” Bumblebee said quickly, too quickly. Jazz and Ironhide gave him an odd look.
“Everything’s fine.”

His voice was calm though, if he was upset he was excellent at hiding it. But she would have
understood perfectly if he had lashed out at her in front of them, but he was Bumblebee. Lashing
out at her, trying to hurt her, that wasn’t him. He really was perfect.

And if she drove with him she would breakdown. That or tell him that of course she loved him and
wanted to be with him, and then he would be hurt, he’d suffer—that’s just what happened when she
cared about people.

They were all walking toward the road when she spoke up, her voice croaked slightly. “Jazz, can I
ride with you and Burns?”

Bumblebee halted, just a moment, before continuing through the trees. Both Jazz and Burns gave
her weird looks but the Autobot nodded. Ironhide’s eyes, uncharastically concerned, stayed on
Bumblebee as the small group walked quietly through the woods.
Charlie sat in the back of Jazz’s car. She was trying to keep her mind completely blank, tried not to think of the yellow robot driving behind them.

Keep it blank, keep it numb. She was close to cracking and breaking.

“Kid…” Burns started hesitantly from where he sat in the passenger seat. He could have sat in the driver seat but apparently he considered that bad etiquette. “Everything alright? I’m usually the quiet one.”

“It’s…” It wasn’t fine. She was tired of saying fine. “-Complicated.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Jazz asked.

She shook her head, “No I just… I just want quiet.”

“Okay,” Burns replied and Jazz stayed silent. They left her in peace, left her in her blank thoughts.


They were driving slow, Ironhide in the lead and clearly still expecting their attacker to be nearby. They had left the trees and was in a clear, clay-baked clearing. Charlie looked out the window to see a cavern slicing across the ground, smaller than the Grand Canyon but still fairly large.

Would any humans hide there? She doubted it. This entire area was a waste land. It was better to try and find the remains of a town, something similar to the Sanctuary.

Charlie moved her eyes forward to look through the front window, to Ironhide. She felt her eyelids start to drift, emotionally exhausted and still desperate to keep her mind empty.

She didn’t notice Ironhide slow even more, she didn’t see Burns confused expression.

But she heard Ironhide speak through the radio: “We’re being watched.”

That instantly brought her back and Charlie turned to peer out the window.
“Don’t you dare!” Jazz barked suddenly, sounding more harsh than she had ever heard him. “Odds are that’s a Con, odds are that if he sees you he’ll go ballistic and do whatever he has to get you.”

He was right, but it killed Charlie to sit in the middle of the seat, unable to see the sky above her.

“Why are there still so many clouds,” Bumblebee’s own voice filled the car and Charlie’s body tensed. “There could be hundreds of them and we wouldn’t know.”

“Just keep driving,” Ironhide said calmly. “See that canyon ahead?”

Charlie did, it loomed over them, it’s shadow cast over the ground.

“We’ll drive in there,” the red Autobot went on. “Its too tight a fit, they couldn’t fly in there.”

“And we won’t be able to fight in there,” Jazz pointed out.

“We’ll just have to try,” Ironhide replied.

But they didn’t try. They never made it that far.

Hundreds of red shots rained down from the sky and the three cars swerved around to try and avoid it. Charlie grabbed the front seat and held on with all her might as the car tried to fling her around. Whoever was shooting at them, there was clearly more than one.

There was a minute of empty air and Jazz took that time to throw the two humans out of his vehicle-mode and transformed. Bumblebee and Ironhide hurried over to them, both in robot-mode.

Bumblebee leaned over Charlie and Burns protectively, everyone’s eyes to the sky.

It was quiet, and it was terrifying.

“We’re going to have to fight,” Ironhide breathed. “Get Charlie and Burns somewhere safe,” he ordered Bumblebee.

Bumblebee looked around, took in the gash in the ground, and started to herd the two toward it. All the while their eyes stayed up above.

Charlie couldn’t breathe, something bad was going to happen. Was it Megatron? The thought nearly drove her to her knees in terror. Could he see her? Bumblebee was leaning over her and Burns, blocking them from the sky. *But could he see her?*
“Charlie, calm down,” Burns breathed, grabbing her arm. She realized she was breathing fast.

“We’re almost there,” Bumblebee said, glancing down at her. “When we get there, climb down as far as you can and stay hidden. I’ll come back for you.”

What if he didn’t? What if it was Megatron? What if it was Shockwave?

They reached the ledge, and although Charlie knew she had no right right to ask, she did. “Please stay here?”

He looked down at her, his blue eyes expressing concern, despite everything. Of course. “They’ll need my help. There’s more than one.”

“What if I can’t help if something happens to you?” her throat felt thick, it was just like when they were driving yesterday. She couldn’t breathe, “I can’t let anything happen to you.”

Surprising her Bumblebee reached her hand out and gave it a gentle squeeze, “You trust me?”

“With my life,” she said honestly because he deserved honesty.

“Then I need you to trust me that I can handle this fight,” he replied. “Okay?”

She didn’t reply, but she carefully slipped her hand from his and nodded. Fear screamed in her heart and she forced herself to ignore it.

And then the quiet broke.

A blue figure slammed down into the ground, right between Bumblebee and the other two Autobots, dust clouding around it. Jazz and Ironhide readied their weapons, Bumblebee put his arm out in front of Charlie. Charlie nearly screamed.

It was Dropkick.

The Decepticon whose spark she yanked out of his body was standing-right here-and very much still alive.

“I thought you said you killed him,” Bumblebee’s voice was breathless with disbelief.
“I did,” she replied, disbelief in the two words. She knew she did, she had felt it.

But now he was standing in the middle of this empty field, slightly hunched over, his eye she stabbed still not fixed. It was then Charlie realized something else wasn’t quite right.

He wasn’t moving like Dropkick, his head snapping back and forth to look at the other robots, his one eye glaring and white and…different. He wore a strange white collar around his neck. He also wasn’t speaking, he was growling.

“Does he act like this often?” Burns asked. Charlie and Bumblebee shook their heads.

“Dropkick!”

They all turned, the canyon they had come so close to reaching now had a new direction standing on top of it: Shatter and Skywarp.

Charlie felt a twinge of sadness to see the scatter-minded seeker here, he didn’t look thrilled to be there either.

It was the femme bot that spoke, she didn’t look happy either. Apparently everyone was as miserable as she was. But they at least hadn’t noticed her, both Decepticons had their eyes on Dropkick.

“Don’t waste time,” Shatter called down to them. “Have fun.”

Dropkick immediately lunged at Ironhide with a guttural screech.

“Hurry and hide,” Bumblebee ordered before hurrying toward the fight. Charlie didn’t waste time, crawling down the cavern with Burns. However she didn’t completely hide herself, she kept herself just high enough to see over the edge to watch the fight.

“Charlie, get down,” Burns hissed but Charlie ignored him.

Dropkick-the Con who had risen from the grave-fought in a feral and terrifying manner, he barely used his weapons. He seemed to want to tear the Autobots apart with his bare hands.

But it was still one against three and the Autobots started to subdue the blue, rabid, bot. However Charlie saw Shatter turn to Skywarp and say something, with drooping shoulders the jet flew down and slammed into Jazz.

Now with an extra Con to fight, Bumblebee and Ironhide focused their attention on Dropkick while
Jazz grappled with Skywarp.

“He doesn't fight like the others.” Burns had given up and crawled back to watch the battle with Charlie. His eyes were on Dropkick.

“No.” The longer she watched this the more questions she had. But mainly one: How was he alive!?

The battle could have lasted for several minutes, or a few seconds, the five robots a blur of color as they grappled and shot at each other. A hand was squeezing Charlie’s heart and she could hardly bare to watch Bumblebee push Dropkick away before he clawed at his face.

And then, mid-fight, the worst happened. A brand new nightmare began:

A few spare blasts of lasers scattered across the ground, stopping the five Cybertronians, even Dropkick, stopped to look up into the sky. Then their faces slowly turned back to the canyon where Shatter stood, where she no longer stood alone.

There he was.

Charlie had imagined many scenarios: death, escape, returning to the vastness of space.

But she never—not once—thought she would see Thundercracker standing with the Decepticons again.

Her old friend stood next to Shatter, wearing the same collar as Dropkick’s. Thankfully he wasn’t acting like Dropkick, his back was straight and he gazed down at the group with intelligence eyes. Eyes that...seemed different.

His head clicked to the side and suddenly Dropkick jumped away from Ironhide and Bumblebee, moving to stand in the shadow of the canyon, growling quietly. Skywarp escaped Jazz’s grip and returned to the top of the canyon. To further prove that something wasn’t right he put distance between himself and Thundercracker. Why would he do that? They were friends.

The relief of seeing her friend alive was drowned by a new sense of dread.

“Thundercracker?” Ironhide spoke up. By his tone he had assumed the same as Charlie.

The jet blinked and looked directly at the red Autobot, his eyes thoughtful. He then turned to Shatter and spoke in a calm voice, “I’m not sure I’m familiar.”
Charlie’s brow furrowed. *What?*

Shatter snorted, “That would be Ironhide, one of Optimus’ top generals.” She gave him a meaningful look, “Prime would be lost without him.”

“Tragic,” Thundercracker replied apathetically, his eyes moving to Jazz who took a step back.

“That is Jazz,” Skywarp said, his voice shaking slightly and he wouldn’t meet Thundercracker’s eye.

Then Thundercracker looked at Bumblebee and he actually flinched, his eyes widened for just a moment before a horrifying mask of fear covered his face. His eyes narrowed, “Who are you?”

“You know me,” Bumblebee spoke up, his voice confused. “We’ve met.”

“I can’t recall,” Thundercracker growled. “But I don’t like you.”

Charlie blinked.

The jet turned back to Shatter, “What do you want me to do?”

“Megatron was clear,” the femme bot replied. “Make a sample of them. Find the girl. She’s always clinging to to B-127, she’s here.”

Charlie lowered herself immediately, Burns still as stone beside her.

“Allright,” Thundercracker said, again apathetic. “That’s easy enough.”

He was a blue blur as he shot down toward the three Autobots, they didn’t even have the chance to react before Thundercracker crashed into Bumblebee, pinning him to the ground.

“NO-” Charlie’s cry-and her attempt to run forward-was blocked by Burns who covered her mouth with his hand, keeping her in place.

“Damn it, Charlie,” he snapped. “Just for once can you not run into the middle of a robot battle!”

She struggled against the stronger man, managing to pull her mouth from his palm. “I have to do something! Something’s wrong, Thundercracker wouldn’t do this!” He wouldn’t right? Was he so upset when they parted ways that he turned back to the Cons?
Up on the clearing Dropkick had joined the fight and Jazz tried to keep him away while Bumblebee and Ironhide fought Thundercracker. But the Con was quicker now, fighting with ease and even slinging Ironhide to scrape against the ground.

*Stop, stop, stop!*  

Bumblebee grappled with him, their own on one fight bringing them closer and closer to her hiding place. Burns tried to drag her farther down but she bit his arm, making the man curse.

“They’ll *see* you!” he snapped.

Charlie didn’t care! They could shoot her where she stood she didn’t care! Her friend was trying to kill the love of her life nothing else was important! Aching close but not having spot her Thundercracker was able to overpower Bumblebee, pinning him to the ground and pushing his face into the dirt. “It’s strange,” he said off-handedly. “I really, really don’t like you.”

From his hand came a wicked sharp blade that Charlie didn’t recognize.

“That’s new,” Bumblebee pointed out despite the position he was in.

Thundercracker actually smirked, “Heh. I wouldn’t know.” He lifted his arm.

*Thundercracker, stop it!*  

Charlie kicked herself out of Burns grip and crawled up onto the ground, in plain sight for all to see.

Behind her Dropkick let a furious snarl and only Jazz sitting across him kept the Con from lunging at her. That was one thing that didn’t change. But Charlie’s focus was on the jet who had turned to look at her. He had a visible reaction upon seeing her.

He jumped to his feet and took several steps away, his eyes never leaving her. They were a mixture of confusion, anger, grief, and recognition.

“Please don’t fight them, *please;*” she begged him, tears falling down her face. “You don’t have to do this, Thundercracker!”

She could hear Shatter shrieking at him to grab her but the femme bot didn’t move herself.
But Thundercracker kept staring at her. From this close up Charlie saw that his light red pupils were what was different—they were now a glowing blue, the color popping in his red eyes. And then he spoke, “Who are you?”

Charlie cracked.

And then Ironhide was there. The red Autobot slamming his blaster directly into Thundercracker’s shoulder and fired, an explosion booming.

Charlie screamed this time, covering her mouth and falling to her knees as the jet clumsily stepped away from the red Autobot. Between his neck and shoulder was a massive hole were circuits buzzed and flickered in the open air. Thundercracker looked at the massive wound, and it felt like the Cons were all holding their breath.

And then a nightmarish thing happened.

A red/blue liquid oozed out of Thundercracker’s wound, morphing and shaping itself to match the spot that been blown to bits. In a matter of seconds the liquid oozed back into his body, leaving a completely healed wound in its wake. Thundercracker flecked his shoulder and chuckled.

His smile immediately dropped when he looked at Ironhide, “That hurt.”

The red Autobot didn’t move or speak, he had been fighting in an intergalactic war in years, and he had no idea how to react to what he had just seen.

Thundercracker took a threatening step forward.

“Forget them!” Shatter suddenly snapped, she was staring out toward the horizon. “Reinforcements are coming! Grab the girl and let’s go!”

Thundercracker glanced at the dust cloud slowly coming toward them, more Autobots. Then he turned his head to look at her.

He was her friend how could she be so scared when he looked at her?

Bumblebee immediately put himself between her and Thundercracker, a silent shield against the jet.

His strange new eyes glowed with hatred, but the new Autobots were already too close. With one last look at Charlie, unreadable now, he transformed and shot into the sky. Dropkick obediently
followed, Skywarp going after, Shatter let out a furious scream and followed.

They all disappeared into the sky, gone as quickly as they had arrived.

“Are you guys alright?” Wheeljack demanded leading the small group. “We were on a supply run and heard the firing.”

While Wheeljack talked Bumblebee turned to face Charlie, his eyes widening when he got a look at her.

“You’re pale as a ghost,” he breathed and reached out to hold her shoulders. “And shaking, you need to calm down.”

“I am calm,” she breathed, hardly hearing her own words. She reached a hand out, “You got banged up, I can heal-”

“Charlie, you’re in shock.” Burns had appeared out of nowhere, kneeling by her side. “Stupid, stupid girl. We need to get you back to your mother.”

“Let’s all go,” Ironhide said. “Whatever that was, Optimus needs to know. Primus forbid the base has anything like that waiting for them. We need to tell him and then we need to figure out what the slag is going on!”

Charlie looked back to Bumblebee, looking into those big blue eyes that were exactly the same, that knew her.

Holding that to her heart she let her mind slip away.

Chapter End Notes

In a light and jokingly way, I'll say this: I hadn't planned for this when I started. But then all of you fell in love with Thundercracker so, in a way, it's technically your fault all this is happening.
Chapter 56

Several days earlier...

Starscream had known Megatron for a time many would not be able to count. He had seen him rise to power, declare a war, smite his foes with the greatest of ease. And despite a few unpredictable hiccups here and there, the seeker had been sure he knew his leader.

But then he watched in shock as Megatron dug his own grave.

His grave being Thundercracker.

The former Decepticon leader watched in apathetic silence when Soundwave caught Thundercracker from behind, knocking his former ally to the ground in an unconscious heap.

He stood beside Skywarp, waiting for a blade or blaster to go through the jet’s spark. He had pushed back anything that one would consider grief. Starscream did not grieve, especially not for one as stupid as Thundercracker, he had chosen the storm, now he had to fly through it.

But Soundwave, his body battered and bruised from his fight with Thundercracker, only took a single step back.

Megatron’s optics had narrowed in confusion, “Do you not wish to make him pay for his treachery, Soundwave?”

“I will!” Shatter suddenly said, her voice rising an octave, her optics shimmering in weakness.

“Compose yourself, Shatter,” Megatron ordered, his voice waspish. The femme bot stepped away reluctantly.

Shockwave stepped forward—because of course he did, at this point Starscream was convinced the scientist would literally go offline if he didn’t stick his greasy fingers into others’ business—“I spoke with Soundwave while you had gone to fetch the traitor, Lord Megatron.”

All attention turned on to him and Shockwave was never deterred by it, no now his single optic was glowing in that twisted, almost primal fascination that made Starscream’s circuits go cold. “And we both agreed that, instead of an execution, Thundercracker could volunteer for my latest project.” His optic roamed hungrily over the jet’s limp body. “Something that could change the entirety of Cybertronian kind. But we need him alive.”
It was clear that several Cons in the room, mostly Shatter, were not fond of this idea. But then Megatron’s smile slowly curved across his face and none dared to object. Not even Starscream, who felt sick at the realization of what Shockwave planned to do to their former comrade. By Skywarp’s face, even he had figured it out.

“I am intrigued,” Megatron finally said.

Starscream had watched in silence as Thundercracker, still unconscious, be dragged away. The jet was placed on an operation table, separated from Starscream and the rest of the Cons with a thick wall of glass.

Skywarp practically hid behind Starscream and Shatter while they watched a needle, pumped full of a red and blue liquid descended on Thundercracker’s strapped down body. Every Con in the room knew exactly what the liquid was, and the air was thick with horror and fascination.

Starscream glanced at Megatron, his optics were shimmering. Shockwave, standing next to his leader, was watching in absolute silence. They were both still as stone.

Thundercracker’s chest cavity opened, revealing his spark, throbbing and healthy. And in one quick jab the needle stabbed through it.

The liquid started to pump into the spark, it was starting to shiver and flicker and every part of Starscream’s body was telling him he was watching something unnatural—an abomination. But he didn’t take his optics off the scene until the last drop of liquid was dispensed into the spark.

Then Thundercracker screamed.

It was a primal, piercing shriek, and Thundercracker’s body arched up as he screeched, desperately trying to break the restraints.

Several Cons, including Skywarp, left the room. Shatter wasn’t one of them though, she was watching with a demented glow in her optics. She was taking this as personal revenge for Dropkick’s death.

Starscream looked over to Megatron, who stood between Shockwave and Soundwave. While the mad scientist and loyalist weren’t showing any outward reaction to the sight of Thundercracker’s agony, Megatron looked just as pleased as Shatter. But his optics had a cold calculating light to them as well, what was going through the fool’s mind?

After a long moment Thundercracker’s body collapsed back on the table, once again he was unconscious. But the readings showed he was still alive, the readings also showed something was wrong with him.
When Shockwave stepped inside to examine him Thundercracker awoke and nearly tore his head off.

After he was subdued Shockwave decided that in order to run his tests Thundercracker would have to have a few more extra changes done to him. Again Starscream watched, a twisted pit in his chest (not grief, never grief), as Shockwave ruined Thundercracker’s memory core. The seeker would no longer recognize them, he would not remember the Cons, he would not remember Charlie, he would not remember that he had betrayed them.

And then Thundercracker, without any sense of memory or self, had to endure Shockwave’s many experiments.

They learned several things.

They learned that Thundercracker optics had changed, a blue light similar to the AllSpark was now his pupils. They learned he had incredible healing properties, able to completely revive body parts that had been ripped off. They learned that the shock collar Shockwave put on Thundercracker’s neck worked quite well.

If Starscream was still leader, this would not have been a plan to even cross his mind. He found it disgusting that the AllSpark would imprint on a human, he found it disgusting that the Autobots would voluntarily befriend humans, he found it disgusting that Thundercracker had lusted after a human. But if he was still leader-and if he didn’t find the idea abhorrent-he would not torment Thundercracker. Not when it was clear that injecting his spark with the DNA of the AllSpark and organic was turning him into an incredibly dangerous creature. And while he had no memories, his prior feelings of the Cons was still there. Even before the shock collar and the tests Thundercracker showed a great dislike toward Shockwave and Megatron, a dislike that could only come from being personally wronged by them.

But this observation was cemented in fact when Starscream saw Skywarp try to talk to him.

It was during a moment where Thundercracker was left in piece, alone in the cell that their Autobot prisoners used to share. Skywarp hadn’t wanted to go alone, and while Starscream hadn’t wanted to go period, he didn’t want to risk losing the last Con who was loyal to him. So he stood a few feet away, watching as the jet peeked into the cell.

“Thundercracker?” Skywarp’s voice had sounded small, like a sparkling.

“Who are you?” the voice came out as a rasp, a rasp that still sounded so much like the old Thundercracker.

The question made Skywarp flinch, “I’m Skywarp. Don’t-don’t you remember?”
“Should I?” was the unimpressed reply. Then, “The sight of you doesn’t make me angry.”

Starscream’s optics narrowed while Skywarp looked surprised by the answer.

“Oh,” he replied. “…Thanks?”

Skywarp tried to make more small talk but when it was clear Thundercracker did not have any interest the jet walked away with his head hanging.

Starscream followed after him, before he left he could hear Thundercracker mumbling unintelligibly to himself, but Starscream did not want to step closer. If Megatron saw him talking to his latest pet then the jet would have to enjoy another meeting with his leader, and this time Starscream did not have Charlie to heal him.

It made his teeth grit, thinking of relying on that human. This was all her fault, or really, he could admit to himself, that it was all their fault. He should have killed her when he had the chance.

It was days later when a brand new nightmare arrived at the Decepticon base.

He and Shatter had returned from a patrol, Megatron had not forgotten about the Autobots. And while he boasted that Prime and his followers did not have the courage to attack them, he was sure to have optics all across this desert-just in case.

The base was more quiet than usual, and while the two Cons walked down the empty hall, Starscream was almost convinced it had been abandoned.

But no, a random Con passed by them, but once he saw the two he immediately dropped his gaze and dashed off. Starscream and Shatter had exchanged confused looks. They had both seen the fear on the Con’s face.

When they walked into Shockwave’s lab they saw what the problem was, and Starscream actually released a gasp of surprise.

“Dropkick?” Shatter choked, her voice showing more emotion than he had ever heard from the femme bot.

The blue Con who Starscream had personally seen lying sprawled, lifeless, on the base floor, was now standing. He was alive, chains holding him in one place on the floor, his remaining optic red and glaring and mindless. And the familiar white collar wrapped around his neck.
He let out a beastly snarl at Shatter’s voice. And the femme bot, who had moved to walk toward him, came to a halt. Her face was one of disbelief and horrified confusion.

“What have you done?” Starscream demanded, his own voice breathless with fear.

Megatron and Shockwave stood a few feet away from Dropkick, reading over something on a screen. They had looked up when the two arrived, and now Megatron turned to Starscream with barely concealed excitement.

“Dropkick is a faithful soldier who was taken before his time,” the leader said silkily. “And since my pet’s… What do you call it, Shockwave?”

“Blood.”

“Yes, since my pet’s blood worked so well with Thundercracker. I thought we’d try it with Dropkick.”

Starscream nearly jumped when he saw that Thundercracker was standing in the corner, looking at Dropkick with an unreadable expression.

“Dropkick didn’t have a spark to inject the liquid into,” Starscream pointed out.

“This is true,” Megatron nodded. “Luckily for us, Thundercracker was able to pull out a piece of his spark and place it in Dropkick’s chest. It worked like a charm.”

Starscream kept himself from looking back at Thundercracker. What kind of abomination did Megatron and Shockwave to create, to be able to pull out pieces of his spark and survive? To heal from any wound…to bring Cons back from the dead.

Shatter was still staring at Dropkick who showed no signs of recognizing his fellow comrade. I bet you wish you had stayed on my side now, Starscream thought bitterly.

But despite that he still wasn’t able to ignore the horror thrumming under his metal. He looked back at Megatron.

He had lost any respect for him a long time ago, but now the Decepticon leader had gone mad. He had created something that might not even be able to kill, he was building an army of undead. There would be consequences, Starscream knew. If there wasn’t they would have won the war and be celebrating on Cybertron now.

No, Megatron was offering his own spark up to the Well of Allsparks, and if the rest of the Cons didn’t watch themselves, their leader would drag them into the grave with him.
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Shatter was angry with him.

Skywarp feared him.

He didn’t care about either.

Thundercracker had led them to a small alcove that offered a good hiding spot for ones as large as the four robots, and gave them shade.

“What the scrap was that?” Shatter demanded the moment they landed. Dropkick moved to huddle in a corner, Skywarp stood behind the femme bot and Thundercracker, not looking sure what he should do next.

Thundercracker turned his gaze to the red Con. While he didn’t hold the same malice to her as he did Megatron or Shockwave, somewhere deep in his chest told him: Enemy. Hate.

“We were outnumbered,” his reply was lazy and came out in an annoyed quip. He didn’t want to listen to her shrieking, he wanted a quiet moment to himself. He needed his head to run over all the things that had just happened, to ponder those familiar yet unfamiliar faces.

“And you have healing powers,” Shatter wasn’t quitting. “That’s why you’re out here to fight! To slay the Autobots and get the human!”

The human…

“I may have healing powers much more…superior to the rest of you primitive Decepticons,” he relished her look of fury. “But that doesn’t make me immortal. Besides, Dropkick got pinned by just one Autobot. Why not go yell at him?”

Shatter didn’t even glance at the blue Con but Thundercracker saw her body go rigid. She had a chink in her armor and his words had pierced through it.

He took a menacing step forward, feeling the thrum of electricity hum at his neck.

Shatter immediately took a step back, fear bright in her optics. That was how most looked at him nowadays.
“Thundercracker,” Skywarp spoke up, his frightened voice sending a trickle of unwanted guilt down the jet’s spine.

“It’s fine,” Thundercracker reassured as he still loomed over Shatter, not taking his gaze off her. “I’m just imagining tearing Shatter’s limbs off. I’ve gotten quite tired of her bossing us around.” He glanced at Skywarp, “Aren’t you tired?”

“You can imagine all you want,” she snapped. “The moment you reach your hand out to me millions of bolts will go through your body. You may have healing properties and can bring back the dead—” her voice cracked, just slightly, at that word—“But you can still feel pain!”

“You’re right,” Thundercracker stepped away. “I can still feel pain. And the electricity from this collar is absolute agony that I don’t want to feel right now. But the next time you scream in my audio receptors I want you to remember this,” he tapped his finger against the collar. “I’m going to get this off eventually.”

He then turned on his heel and stalked away from the two, from the corner of his vision he saw Skywarp walk over to Shatter and start whispering to her. He didn’t care to eavesdrop, he could imagine a few things they were saying: scared...abomination...AllSpark... Everyone had the same opinion of him.

He passed Dropkick’s hunched over form, the blue robot still as stone and his empty red optic staring at the ground. Thundercracker felt his mind reach out to Dropkick and the others, they replied silently, they were listening, they were ready, they would do as he said.

He found a spot to sit down and rest his back against the rock wall, his hand slowly caressing his newly formed shoulder.

“That looked like it hurt.”

The voice was strange and feminine, coming from beside his thigh. He ignored it, keeping his optics on his shoulder.

“What, am I getting the silent treatment?”

“I’m not interested in talking to secret-keepers, Miss Obvious,” he replied, making sure Shatter and Skywarp didn’t notice him talking to himself.

“Secret-keeper?”

He finally turned to glare down at the small figure looking up at him, “You didn’t tell me you have
She looked up at him with surprise in her blue optics and she pulled her hand through the brown strands framing her face (hairstyles, she called it), “I have a twin?”

“Don’t play dumb, I’m eighty percent positive you knew she was out there.” It had been… terrifying. He had been fighting that yellow Bot, B-127, someone he didn’t know but hated for some unknown reason. And then he saw her—the human—and for a moment he thought it was the little blue-optic sidekick that only he could see. But then an awful, terrifying sense of ache and anger and bitterness swamped him and he realized the brown hair human wasn’t this one. It didn’t hurt to look at this one.

“That’s a twenty percent chance I’m completely innocent,” she shot back with a cheeky grin.

He narrowed his gaze, not even cracking a smile and her smile faded. “I… I might know her.”

“I bet you knew every one of those Autobots,” he accused.

She was one of the first things he knew when he… awoke. After suffering those first tests he had been thrown into a cell and she had arrived. Only he could see her, and her hands—so warm they were almost hot—had run over his body, healing the scraps and aches. She didn’t give a name, only called herself a friend. She had said she was a part of him, and he believed that.

But he also believed she knew who he was before he forgot himself.

“Even if I did,” she began, her voice slow and awkward. “It doesn’t matter. You’d still have to fight them thanks to that collar.”

“Why don’t you remove it?” he demanded. He was also pretty sure she was a manifestation of his powers.

In response she crawled up his chest, making herself comfortable before reaching her hand out to touch the collar. Her hand went right through it.

Of course it did. She wasn’t really there.

She smiled sadly up at him. “I can only touch you. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” he reassured her, ignoring the strange pressure in his spark when she was near. “Just tell me how I know B-127 and the human Megatron is obsessed with.”
She sighed then slid off him, back to the ground. “Knowing won’t make your pain go away.”

“I can at least know why it hurts.”

“Think about this, Thundercracker. You know that pain, do you honestly think its origin is a happy story. I’m telling you it won’t change a thing… I’m trying to protect you.”

He turned away from with a disgusted snort. She didn’t say more, vanishing into thin air. She’d be back, he knew. He’d forgive her secret-keeping, she knew. But not right now. Right now his optics turned back to his party.

Shatter and Skywarp seemed to be contacting someone, most likely the base to see what they should do next. He imagined Shatter was whining to Megatron about his disobedience. What would Megatron do? Kill his most valuable weapon? The most he could do was torture him and he had already done that.

Slowly Thundercracker’s optics move to Dropkick who hadn’t moved an inch. He blinked and slowly reached his mind out to him. He felt the pulse of sentience that was there because of his own spark, it replied to him, recognizing it’s alpha. Thundercracker reassured it, told it to rest, and pressed forward. He grabbed at it, and-taking a note from Megatron-crushed it while filling its senses with empty praise and promise.

Still as stone Thundercracker watched while Dropkick’s hand slowly lifted into the air, placed his claws on the rocky ground, and dragged his finger tips across the ground, leaving grooves on the rock and a shrieking sound in the air.

Thundercracker smiled.

Chapter End Notes

A shorty but a goody
The humidity of Earth was still something he hadn’t gotten used to. The thick green jungle was wet and hot, and it should have been loud, with the shrieks and calls of animals.

But it was as silent as the vastness of space.

Bumblebee stood hidden among the trees with his fellow Autobots, Arcee standing a few feet ahead of him, Hot Shot behind his shoulder.

The group stood silently on the crest of a hill, looking down at the gray building that stood jarringly out against the lush forestry.

Once in a while a figure moved by the base, a Decepticon-ignorant to the fact that they were being watched. But they wouldn’t be for long…

Bumblebee’s entire body was rigid, ready to jump down the hill and fight. He had a lot of emotions to work through and he needed to take it out on someone. His sorrow, his anger, his guilt…

His mind was numb with shock when they returned to the base, several optics wide with surprise to see he, Ironhide, and Jazz return so quickly—and with no new humans around.

Ratchet had walked over to the three Bots, now transformed into their robot-modes. “What happened?” he asked, taking in the damage on his allies’ bodies. Taking in the confused and horrified expressions on their faces, dread was suddenly thick in the air, the other Autobots realizing something awful had happened.

“SALLY!” Burns suddenly yelled out, his arm around Charlie who stared quietly at the ground.

Bumblebee felt the instinctive need to reach out and hold her but he forced himself to keep still. Sally was running toward them, her arms already open to pull her daughter into an embrace.

Bumblebee couldn’t act…the way he wanted to around the other humans or Autobots. Not that he thought Charlie would be appreciative. With her admittance of self-loathing, and what may have been a rejection of his feelings—he wasn’t sure, and the whole Thundercracker horror story he witnessed…Bumblebee was exhausted.
Ironhide explained to the listening audience what had happened, from Dropkick’s sudden resurrection to Thundercracker’s terrifying healing properties.

Immediately questions were flung at the three, demanding for any detail that would make this situation less of a nightmare.

From the corner of his optic Bumblebee saw Sally and Burns try to lead Charlie away from the robots. But before they got far she suddenly dug her heels into the clay ground and held her place.

“I know what happened,” she spoke up, loud enough for the robots to hear her but with a tone that made Bumblebee’s spark ached. She sounded so defeated and empty.

“What are you talking about Charlie,” Jazz asked as all attention came to her.

Charlie held up her arm, revealing her wrist. “I know what they did to Th-Thundercracker and Dropkick. But I don’t know how or why.” No one responded, waiting for her to continue. “While I was being held captive by the Decepticons…Shockwave kept taking vials of my blood. I had no idea why, but I bet that’s how Dropkick rose from the dead and…” Her brow furrowed and she kept her optics on the ground, “Whatever was wrong with Thundercracker. Not that I know how any of that was possible.”

“You sound awfully sure of yourself,” Ratchet said and while his voice wasn't soothing it wasn’t angry or accusing.

“That would explain their eye-optics,” she explained, forcing her chin up and indicating to her optics. “They were red and blue.”

“That’s it?” a voice asked from the crowd, skepticism evident.

“No,” her voice was hollow. “But who else to blame but me?”

Bumblebee flinched, Sally and Burns exchanged looks and Ratchet’s optics narrowed.

“Charlie,” the yellow Autobot took a step toward her, “You need rest. When Optimus gets here we can talk this over and figure out a plan.”

Her optics flashed with a pain that would confuse the onlookers. “When Optimus comes back I’ll probably be the last person he wants to see.” Then without a word she turned away and headed into the humans’ lodging, her mother and Burns quickly following after her. It left Bumblebee staring after her with the ache in his spark threatening to consume him.

Charlie didn’t step outside of the base, Sally told Bumblebee she refused to even get out of bed.
Not even when Optimus returned.

The attack of the first base had been a success, much to the relief of the rest of the Autobots.

“Were any of them undead?” Wheeljack had asked his leader.

That had gotten a reaction out of Prime and the successful party, and it wasn’t long before they were caught up with what had happened, along with Charlie’s theory was that it was her blood the Cons had used.

Bumblebee had stood quietly by while talk of what the next plan would be took place. His optics all the while straying, hoping to see Charlie come out and demand to join the meeting, to help, to look at him and not blame herself for things that were out of her control.

But she didn’t, and his bonded spark hurt at the fact.

Eventually they decided it was best to continue their original plan to take down the bases and find survivors. If Charlie was willing, Ratchet and a few of the other Bots would examine her blood to figure out the best course of action to handle Thundercracker and Dropkick. But they made no move to force her, and Sally kept watch outside of the building, an atmosphere around her that not even Ironhide would step near.

When the next base was chosen, a small one in an area the humans called ‘South America’, Bumblebee did something he felt immense shame for. He recalled how terrified Charlie had been when he had fought the Decepticons, and asked Prime to let him join the base attack.

He knew it was a mean-spirited thing to do, to try and get Charlie’s attention by making her fear for his safety. The thought made the scar on his chest burn. He missed her, and doing something like this pointed out how Charlie towered over him.

But still he went, still he stood in the middle of the jungle, waiting for the signal. A couple of the more stealthy Bots had been sent in to dismantle the base to keep them from calling in reinforcements. Once they got the signal they would rush in and take the base and Decepticons out.

Is it safe to kill them now? The horrified thought made one of his antenna flinch. Could they revive them like they did Dropkick? Had the Decepticons become unbeatable? Had Megatron found out how to truly become invincible?

He was ripped out of his awful thoughts by an explosion that shook the ground beneath their feet. Several Autobots let out startled murmurs and yelps that were drowned out by the sudden shrieks of the Decepticons as flames and smoke rose up from the base.
“You think Blurr and Mirage got caught?” Bumblebee asked worriedly.

Hot Shot spoke up behind him, “More like those two wanted to make sure we didn’t miss the signal.”

A second later Prime led the charge and the Autobots rushed after their leader, the Decepticons immediately seeing their enemies coming toward them and chaos ensued.

The thing about battle was—it didn’t hurt where it mattered. Fighting Decepticons that he had no love for didn’t hurt, despite the wounds they caused. In fact, fighting these Decepticons was the only thing he felt certain was the right thing to do. He was following Prime’s orders, protecting his friends, avenging the world Charlie lost.

Battling was the least complicated part of his life so far.

At least…it used to be.

He was fighting alongside Ratchet, a burly and large Con pushing the two into the woods were it was harder to move.

Then a guttural snarl came from behind and a shape flung itself onto the red Autobot, knocking him to the ground.

“Ironhide!” Bumblebee cried out in panic and his voice became strangled when he saw who had pinned him down.

“Blackout!” Ironhide growled, pushing the Con’s grasping claws away from his face. If he had felt any surprise or fear to see the Con he had personally killed now alive again, he didn’t show it.

Bumblebee feared they wouldn’t stand a chance fighting the undead Blackout and the bigger Decepticon but the other Con had almost immediately turned away and ran off to the main fray. The yellow Autobot almost took a moment to wonder why the slag did the Con just do that. But then he turned around and hurried to Ironhide’s side.

Using his elbow he slammed it into Blackout, the force sending them both away from Ironhide and rolling across the ground.

Interlocked with the Decepticon’s limbs Bumblebee fought back a shudder at the frigid temperature of Blackout’s metal surface. Any warmth, any sense of a spark, was gone.

Blackout slammed his finger tips into Bumblebee’s face, scratching against the surface and kicked
the yellow robot away.

Ironhide was quickly at his side, helping him back to his feet. Bumblebee pressed his hand against
the claw-marks on his face. It felt an odd choice of an attack considering a punch could have done
much more damage, clawing him just further showed how animalistic the undead Cons were.

Blackout stood before them, slightly hunched over in a manner similar to Dropkick, the collar
around his neck and a low growl coming from his throat. His eerie red and blue optics were directly
on Ironhide.

“Think he remembers that I shot him?” the older Autobot asked.

“Yeah, probably,” Bumblebee bluntly said.

“Great,” was the sarcastic reply. Ironhide then rolled his shoulders, “Well, let’s find out if he can
die twice.”

In an instinctive way that could only come from stellar cycles of training and fighting together, the
two Autobots immediately broke away. They lunged at either side of Blackout, cannons and
stingers ready.

Any other Decepticon would have dodged the upcoming attacks. Blackout jumped at Ironhide, the
blast from the red Bot’s cannon barely slowing him down as the two slam into each other. The
collision happened so fast and Bumblebee didn’t have time to stop before he was crashing into the
two.

The three grappled in a multi-color mess, Bumblebee doing his best to try and keep Blackout from
caus ing damage to Ironhide. The Con barely seemed to notice Bumblebee, clawing at the red
Autobot’s chest as if he was trying to rip his spark out.

Ironhide slammed a fist into Blackout’s jaw with enough force to throw him off. Bumblebee, his
arms wrapped around his neck and shoulder, was thrown down with him.

The blunt force of Blackout’s greater weight stunned Bumblebee as the Con fell on top of him.
Blackout used that moment to whirl around and slam his fingers around Bumblebee’s neck, pinning
him to the ground.

“Get off him-” Ironhide moved forward to help his friend but a blast from Blackout hit Ironhide
straight in the face and the red Autobot fell back, his face smoking.

“IRONHIDE!” Bumblebee cried out in panic, struggling to escape the Decepticon’s clutches.
But Blackout wasn’t ignoring him anymore, now he was turning his creepily empty optics on the yellow bot and turning his blaster to press directly onto Bumblebee’s head. A hit from this close… he wouldn’t survive.

For the one second Bumblebee cursed himself furiously for doing this to Prime and the Autobots and Charlie. But when that second was over a warrior-like cry split the air and Blackout was tackled by the slim figure of Arcee just as the gun fired. Instead of hitting Bumblebee directly in the head it hit Arcee on her torso, leaving a chipped open wound that was dripping blue.

But the femmebot didn’t flinch, hitting Blackout with several expert hits and kicks, and it seemed to subdue Blackout-until he suddenly lashed out and stabbed his fingers into her wound. Arcee let out a pain-filled scream.

“Arcee!” Bumblebee’s scream was echoed by Ironhide. The red Bot had struggled to his feet, his face smoking and cracked.

They hurried to the femmebot who pushed Blackout away. Ironhide grabbed the Con and used his strength to toss him across the ground, putting distance between them. Bumblebee meanwhile reached Arcee’s side.

“Are you okay?” he asked, worry thick in his voice as he gently grabbed her arm.

“I’m fine,” Arcee said, her voice garbled as a puddle of energon stained the ground beneath her feet.

“We need to get you back to the base,” Ironhide went back to them. “You need that wound tended to.”

“I could say the same for you,” Arcee shot back, but her voice warm with affection. “Can you even see?”

“Of course I can,” Ironhide replied, rubbing his smoldering face.

Blackout’s furious snarl had the three turning back to the Con who was standing up and looking ready to pounce again. But before it could take a step toward them a blast shot through the Con’s torso and he crumbled to the ground, still growling as he tried to crawl toward Ironhide.

Prime appeared, took one look at Arcee’s and Ironhide’s wounds and then turned to Bumblebee. “Get them back to the base.” He turned to the two wounded soldiers, “Now.”

Even Ironhide nodded in agreement.
With Arcee supported between him and Ironhide, Bumblebee led them back to where the space bridge was left.

Before they dissapeared over the hill Bumblebee looked back at the base, it was up in flames now and the Autobots were clearly winning. The Decepticons were outnumbered and had no hope for help arriving, even with Blackout they hadn’t stood a chance.

Bumblebee wished the rest of this war was as easy.
Cade and Lennox were with Ratchet when Bumblebee helped Arcee and Ironhide to the medic. Autobots who hadn’t gone to the battle giving a respectful distance but exchanging concerned murmurs.

“Oh Primus,” Ratchet breathed when he saw Arcee’s leaking wound and the cracks along Ironhide’s face.

“Don’t blow a gasket, Ratchet, we’re fine,” the red Autobot insisted, letting the medic lead him inside. Bumblebee kept to Arcee’s side, offering his shoulder as they followed the two.

Cade and Lennox were standing on a table, Lennox crouched over an array of medical tools with Cade standing a few feet away. But upon the four entertaining their heads turned around and their optics nearly fell out of their heads.

“What happened?” Cade asked in dismay as they gave Arcee the table to lie on. Ironhide leaned his shoulder against the wall.

“Well clearly,” the red Autobot looked at Cade. “We got the Cons right where we wanted them.”

“Yeah?” Cade said sarcastically, his optics on Arcee while Ratchet examined her. “Cause you look like you transformed into a blender and put your face on the wrong end.”

Ironhide glared but Cade’s words got a chuckle from Arcee which quickly turned into a hiss of pain.

“Easy,” Ratchet gently soothed, his optics on her side wound. “Lennox-”

“Hold on, I’ll grab it,” the solider replied before Ratchet finished. With both hands he grabbed a tool Bumblebee didn’t know the name of and walked to the edge of his table, handing it over to Ratchet who took it without looking at him.

“Sorry I was so funny,” Cade said in a sincere voice, looking at Arcee with shining optics.

Lennox gave a dorky smile to Bumblebee and Ironhide when the two Bots gave him a confused look. “Ratchet’s been teaching me which tools do what, I thought it make sense that Charlie wasn’t the only human to help fix you guys up.”
Bumblebee looked outside to Charlie’s building, but there was no humans in sight.

“You alright, Bee?” Ironhide’s voice made him turn around. “Your shoulders dropped so suddenly I thought you were about to fall to pieces on the ground.”

“Should-” Bumblebee hesitated, and he looked back over his shoulder to the buildings outside. “I thought Charlie would be out here…waiting.” Maybe she didn’t care like he though she did.

Cade immediately spoke up, “She wasn’t told. Sally didn’t want her to get upset so we didn’t say anything about you guys leaving for the base attack.”

“Ah,” Bumblebee replied quietly, the guilt returning for wanting to get her attention in such a mean-spirited way.

With the exception of Ratchet the rest of the group were giving him a look that ranged from concern and confusion. Bumblebee looked away.

“Do you need to talk about something, Bee?” Cade asked softly.

Arcee added, “You and Charlie don’t seem as close anymore-” she was interrupted by another hiss of pain while Ratchet worked on fixing up her wound.

“Don’t move,” Ratchet said flatly, not looking up from his work.

During that moment of quiet Bumblebee seriously considered what he should say next, and then made a decision. With out last look outside to make sure they was no one standing around to overhear, Bee took a step forward to his friends.

“Can you guys…not repeat what I’m about to say?” Last thing he needed was Prime to know about this. Or Primus forbid, Sally.

Even Ratchet cast Bumblebee a quick glance while the others leaned forward, optics hungry with curiosity and eager to hear what the yellow Autobot had to say.

Forcing back his nerves Bumblebee spoke, “I told Charlie that I love her.”

There were different reactions: Ironhide jumped back as if he had been stung, nearly tripping. Lennox dropped the medical tool he had been holding for Ratchet. The medic pulled his hands
away from Arcee to stare at Bumblebee with shock, the femme bot sharing his astonished expression.

Cade broke into a huge grin. “Aw, really?” he gushed like this was the most wholesome thing he had ever heard. “Finally! What did she say?”

Bumblebee flinched just as Ironhide spoke up, “She said no, of course!”

When Cade glared at him he went on, “I like Charlie, really. But she’s a human and Bumblebee’s a Cybertronian.” he turned to his yellow comrade. “Your worlds are too different, it would be less complicated if you spark bonded with a Decepticon.”

“But I spark bonded with her,” Bumblebee shot back, hurt by the red Autobot’s words.

“What do you mean you spark bonded with her?” Ratchet demanded. “She’s a human she doesn’t have a spark.”

“Does it count if she has the AllSpark?” Arcee asked, sitting up slowly. Her wound knitted together.

Ratchet glared at the ground, his brow deep in thought. “I wouldn’t know…”

“Not that I know what sparks are,” Cade interrupted, holding up his hand. “But Bee still hasn’t told us what Charlie said.”

Bumblebee looked away from Cade’s expectant look and he heard Lennox suck his teeth.

“That’s expected,” Ratchet said at the exact same time Cade said, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

The Autobot and human glared at each other and Arcee, rolling her optics, moved in between them. “Ratchet, thank you for fixing me up. It’s Ironhide’s turn,” she gave the red Autobot a pointed glare and Ironhide rolled his optics in reply.

While Ratchet tended to Ironhide, and Lennox watching with fascinated intensity, Arcee led Bumblebee and Cade to the side.

“Don’t listen to those two,” she said softly. “Though I’ll admit spark bonding with an organic isn’t something that happens everyday…”

“I don’t get it,” Cade spoke up, looking like he was trying to solve some complicated puzzle. “Charlie’s nuts about you. Why wouldn’t she immediately say yes so you two could run off into
the sunset together?"

Arcee blinked at the human, “You knew she had feelings for him this entire time?”

Cade smiled up at the femme bot, “I’m kind of a romance expert.”

Bumblebee wasn’t sure about that. But he did admit, “In hindsight, Charlie isn’t in the best place right now. I shouldn’t have given her more stress to work through.”

“Oh I don’t know about that,” Cade said. “You strike me as a low maintenance kinda guy.”

“Thanks,” Bee replied. “I think…”

“Maybe she just needs more time,” Arcee suggested. “I know you two are very close, I wouldn’t give up on her.”

“Oh he better not,” Cade said heatedly, as if the Charlie and Bumblebee’s union was the most important thing to him.

“Oh he better consider it,” Ironhide said from the other side of the room.

Arcee glared at the red robot, “You’re only making him feel worse, Ironhide. Stop it.”

“I’m the only one looking at this in a logical manner,” Ironhide shot back.

Bumblebee quickly turned away and walked outside before Ironhide could list the reasons he thought spark bonding with a human was a bad idea. He didn’t need any more doubt, and he wished he shared Cade’s confidence that Charlie loved him. But he couldn’t forget the look on her face, proof so much had changed and he hadn’t even been there for her during it all. He had been comatose, and now he was acting like a reckless, spoiled sparkling, going off to fight just to get her attention.

His hands balled into fists.

It was only a few minutes of aimless walking when the space bridge suddenly opened up and Prime stepped through, leading the rest of the raiding party. And while there were scratches and dents, Bumblebee was relieved to see none of the injuries were as serious as Arcee and Ironhide’s had been.

The Autobots who had stayed in base followed Bumblebee over to the group, talking over each other while the yellow robot got Prime to himself.
“Everything go okay?” he asked Optimus.

Prime nodded, “The Decepticons have fled, though unfortunately Mirage and Blurr did too good of a job—the base is nothing but smolders now.”

“What about Blackout?” Bumblebee almost couldn’t get the question out of his throat. He was scared of the answer.

“I was not able to kill him,” Prime answered. “In truth we didn’t kill any of the Decepticons, we… did not want to risk it. Blackout was taken away by the other Cons.” Prime’s optics narrowed, “That was when something strange happened.”

“Strange?”

“I had immobilized Blackout by shooting his legs—if he has healing factors they do not work quickly. When two Decepticons came to grab him he lashed out at them as if they were his enemies, I don’t think he can tell the difference between friend or foe. He had nearly torn one of the Con’s optics out when suddenly the collar around his neck activated. He was shot with millions of volts of electricity, he can still feel pain if that scream was anything to go by. I half expected him to melt.”

Bumblebee shuddered, glad he hadn’t been there to witness it. “The Cons still took him away.”

“Yes, but they clearly weren’t happy to do so.” Optimus’ gaze had darkened with thought. “Ressurecting fallen soldiers is clearly a pratice not all the Depeticons agree on.”

“Do you think they’ll try to stop Megatron themselves?” Bumblebee asked. He thought of Starscream, remembered how Charlie had told him how furious the jet had been when Megatron was revived. Would he grown a spine and disobey his leader when he handled such dark pratices.

"Perhaps,” Prime said in a tone that did not give away his real thoughts. “But we can’t rely on them to do so. We will have to keep fighting and figure out if these Cons can be killed.”

“And if they can’t?”

Optimus looked toward the building where they both knew Charlie hid. “Then we do whatever it takes to get them off this planet.”
So much boring freaking filler I'm sorry.
So glad the next chapter something interesting actually happens.
And Bee baby I promise I'll give you a good narrative POV in season three! I have no idea what you'll be doing but it'll be INTERESTING.
Chapter 60

Charlie was barely aware of the world around her, buried deep in a blanket and her body curled in a tight circle.

So many awful things had happened too close to together, all before the trauma of the Decepticon base had even become nothing more than a nightmare.

She had broken Bumblebee’s spark, had left Thundercracker by himself, hadn’t even considered what Shockwave would do with the blood he had taken from her. And now there were undead Decepticons, now Thundercracker didn’t even know who she was, now Bumblebee was no doubt outside, waiting for her, because he was good and forgiving and so much better than her.

She needed to talk to someone, someone very specifically.

So curled up and hidden from the rest of the world Charlie called out in her mind: Cliffjumper?

With her eyes shut tight she tried to call to the Autobot, to the AllSpark. She hadn’t heard Cliffjumper’s voice in so long and she was desperate to contact it again. Maybe it could help her. Tell her what happened to Thundercracker, tell her what to do about Dropkick. Tell her what to do to not make everything worse again.

Please… Charlie called out to the blackness in her mind. Please talk to me.

Silence.

I need your help.

Silence.

Cliffjumper! … Exhaustion weighed down on her bones and defeat was thick in her blood.

Please… I know you hate me, but I can’t do this by myself anymore.

A sudden jolt shook Charlie and she popped her eyes open, but instead of seeing her small bedroom she woke up to an empty black void.
Charlie jumped up to her feet, a spike of terror making her heart thump painfully. What happened? Where was-

“Is that what you think?!”

The angry voice made her whip around to see Cliffjumper, scowling down at her. He was shinning with a blue light and, to Charlie’s surprise, was human-sized though still loomed over her a full head taller.

He spoke, his voice tight with frustration as he took a step forward. “You think we have been ignoring you?”

Charlie’s mouth felt like cotton and all she could force out was the word: “We?”

Charlie felt the sense of millions of eyes staring at her and she shuddered.

“It’s not just Cliffjumper in the Well of the AllSpark,” he said his voice low and tight. “And you were the one who refused to speak to us. Ever since you resurrected Megatron.”

“But you-you screamed at me!” she insisted. “I heard you!”

“We hurt, just like you. We feel fear, just like you. It was just as much as much your screams that filled your ears as it was ours.”

Charlie swallowed, her throat felt thick. “You should have reached out to me…”

“I don’t think you would have heard us if we tried,” Cliffjumper replied, his voice losing the edge of anger. “We feel your self-hatred too.”

Fresh tears started to pool in her eyes and Charlie didn’t bother trying to wipe them away. “Ever since I revived Megatron everything has gotten worse. Do you-do you know about Thundercracker?”

“Yes,” Cliffjumper breathed. “You are right about your blood being used. That is how they resurrected Dropkick, and that is how Thundercracker has such-unnatural healing powers.”

“But if he-if he has my blood in him, blood that is linked to the AllSpark, couldn’t I reach out to him?” Charlie looked around the black nothingness as if she expected the jet to appear out of nowhere. And truly that wouldn’t have been the craziest thing to happen to her. If she could just talk to him she could jog his memory and get the old Thundercracker back!
But Cliffjumper gave her a sympathetic look and she realized that, of course, it wouldn’t be that easy. Instead the red robot reached out his hand that now was close to the size of her own, “Let us show you something.”

Charlie only hesitated a moment and then took the offered hand. Cliffjumper took a step and Charlie felt the sensation of entering a different room. And then she was blinking rapidly as light suddenly shown all around her.

Rubbing her eyes and letting them adjust she slowly lifted her head and felt a gasp escape her mouth.

They were surrounded by sparks, hundreds of them clustered close around her, but millions more out against the vastness of this black void. They looked like stars shining in the night sky and were the size of her hand.

“What is this?” she breathed softly, wonderingly, “The Well of AllSparks?” Cliffjumper, still standing by her side, shook his head, “There are many, many more of us there. I will show you it one day, but right now I need you to focus on the present. And right now…” he lifted his arm to indicate the sight before him. “These are the sparks of all the Cybertronians that are currently living.” He nodded to the bunches around them, and Charlie realized they were forming a sphere around them. “These are the Cybertronians that are on Earth.”

“Really?” Charlie said, looking over them with new eyes. She felt a sense of melancholy to see that, from a surface level, you could not tell who was an Autobot or who was a Decepticon.

Charlie took a step toward a random spark and examined it, the blue of the spark had a silvery tint to it.

“Who is this?” she asked curiously.

“Someone you have not met,” Cliffjumper replied. “But look around, see if you can recognize any others.”

Charlie did a slow 360 turn, her eyes going over the sparks. From where she was they all looked similar and she wondered how she could recognize one from another. It couldn’t be color tints like she saw from the other spark, many Autobots shared the same color.

But then she came to a stop, her eyes narrowed in on one specific spark. She walked over and reached her hands out, her fingers hovering over it. The warmth of the spark soothed her fingers and Charlie smiled, she didn’t know how but she knew. “Optimus.”

“Correct,” Cliffjumper nodded.
Charlie looked around and pointed to another, “That’s Ironhide.” She saw Arcee’s, Wheeljack’s, Jazz’s. She looked around, excitement fizzing in her veins but then frowned.

She turned to Cliffjumper, “Where’s Bumblebee?”

In answer Cliffjumper lifted his arm and pointed to her chest. Charlie looked down and let out a small noise of surprise.

A spark was hovering over her heart, and the moment she saw it she knew who it belonged to. “How did I not notice this?” she asked, flabbergasted. She took a few steps back but the spark stayed close to her chest.

“His presence is natural. It is because of your spark bond that it is there,” Cliffjumper explained. “His spark is protecting you.”

Affection and unworthiness battled inside her as Charlie reached her hands up and traced her fingers over the spark. It was soft and warm and undeniably Bumblebee.

Cliffjumper looked closely at her expression. “You think you are unworthy of his spark?”

“He just-” Charlie swallowed. “He stands so far above me.” She looked over at the sparks, “They all do. I feel so small next to them.”

“You’re not,” Cliffjumper’s replied softly, but Charlie didn’t respond.

Instead, she turned her attention back to the hundreds of sparks, searching. But after minutes of silence she didn’t find who she was looking for, but she did see one that made her blood curdle.

Holding Bumblebee’s spark close Charlie walked over to the spark that, from a distance, looked far too similar to Prime’s.

It was Megatron.

She tentatively reached her hand out, her fingers almost grazing the spark. It was deceptively warm.

Cliffjumper spoke up, apparently reading her thoughts. “You can’t destroy it.”

“Are you sure?” she asked, staring with hatred at the spark. It was so small here, she could so easily crush it between her fingers and that would be it.
“This is an observation room,” Cliffjumper explained. “Something similar to a map. Life is not so easy that you can stay in this room and defeat your enemies with a flick of your wrist. You must go back to the real world and face them.”

Charlie whipped around, “But how? I killed Dropkick but now he’s back! And I bet you he isn’t the only one!” Her thoughts went to other Cons she had seen die—Blitzwing…Thrust…

“They are not any more immortal than Megatron is,” Cliffjumper replied.

“But what about Thundercracker?” her voice cracked and she looked around at the sparks. “Where is he?”

“You will not find his spark here,” Cliffjumper said solemnly.

“Why not?” her voice caught in her throat. “Is he dead? Like Dropkick?”

“No,” Cliffjumper shook his head. “But he is…something else. Once your blood was injected into his spark it was no longer something Cybertronian.” His eyes shone with grief that surprised Charlie considering Cliffjumper had been an Autobot and Thundercracker was a Decepticon. “His spark does not have a place here.”

“How can that be?” she demanded. “I’m here! And it was my blood! He should be like me!” Her mind replayed the moment when Thundercracker had healed himself.

“But he isn’t,” Cliffjumper shot back. “You were chosen, Charlie. It wasn’t a coincidence just because your hands were covered in Cliffjumper’s metal. We sensed you and saw you and knew you could wield our power, Cliffjumper was just the key to connecting to you. We have imprinted by the pure essence of the AllSpark because you were worthy. But Thundercracker…while he doesn’t have the wickedness in his spark other Decepticons have…he wasn’t chosen. His spark was forced to absorb something that wasn’t completely Cybertronian or completely human. He is something not connected to us, and I am sorry—but there is nothing we can do for him.”

His words made Charlie’s legs feel weak. She crouched down, clutching the spark at her chest and buried her face in her knees.

“Charlie,” Cliffjumper said softly.

“I think you made the wrong decision, choosing me,” she breathed against her legs. “I feel like all I do makes everything worse.” She sucked in a shuddering breath, “Maybe it was better if the Autobots never found me.”
Silence.

After a few moments Charlie pulled her head up to see if Cliffjumper was still there. He was and was looking at her with an expression that made her start.

“Your problems will not go away if you did not have this power,” he began. “Your problems would not have vanished if you had never met the Autobots. The Decepticons would still be here, they would have still found the Cube, they would still have resurrected Megatron. But you have been given a chance to stand next to the Autobots as an equal and save your planet. That is a gift we do not want you to forget Charlie.”

There was a pause and then Cliffjumper seemed to become resigned, “But we will not pretend the power of the AllSpark does not come with great responsibilities, responsibilities you did not agree to. Perhaps responsibilities you can not handle.” He knelt down in front her, looking into her eyes with an intense blue gaze. “We want you to seriously think where you want to stand in this war, what part you want to play… But, if you wish it, we can also tell you how to remove the AllSpark from your body.”

Chapter End Notes

This arc is called I do whatever the F*ck I want because I don't know how sparks work!
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Starscream stood on his balcony and stared up at the deep blue of the night sky, taking in the millions of stars. He knew to other Decepticons, the Earth’s stars looked the same as Cybertron’s, but not to him. He could still remember Cybertron’s skies and lands and memories perfectly, and as always an uncomfortable twinge stabbed his spark at the thought of never getting to his home again.

*I could go now,* the thought slithered through his mind, seductive and inviting. He could, he could fly off this horrible planet and return to Cybertron. He could start the long process of restoring his home.

But he wouldn’t.

He couldn’t leave Megatron as the leader of the Decepticons. The fool was still treating Thundercracker and the undead Cons as if they were the best thing to ever happen to the Decepticon cause. He was either deaf to the mutterings or his followers were careful to keep their whispers low. But there was fear in the Decepticon bases, not only the fear of an unpredicted Autobot invasion (they had already destroyed two bases, which was two bases too many), but also the fear that Megatron would find them more useful if their sparks were snuffed out.

Starscream also definitely couldn’t leave with the AllSpark’s power running loose in the form of an organic girl. It made him sick to listen to Megatron fond over the human, he had talked to her for five minutes and had a twisted sense of possessiveness over her. Having such a powerful creature that you could bend to your will, Starscream could understand that. But he wasn’t obsessed with her like Megatron and Thundercracker were. However, Starscream felt an irritating twinge of embarrassment, remembering how easily she had let him stroke his own ego. She was nearly as dangerous as the Decepticon who was hunting for her.

But eventually Starscream’s mind focused back on Thundercracker, locked away in a cell until he was needed again. He could picture him now, huddled away while Skywarp kept a close distance— but a distance nonetheless. The jet feared the seeker who had once been his closest friend, and rarely spoke except to share the fears of the other Cons. But he was doing better than Shatter who kept a wide berth from the cell where Dropkick was kept, and never mentioned him. In fact he rarely heard Shatter talk at all when she was in the base, Starscream almost wanted to ask her if she regretted Megatron’s return now. If she was willing to turn on him now…

No, there were things he needed to do, to get rid of, before he could return to Cybertron. And at the moment, he could only rely on himself to get things done.

*Well,* Starscream thought, a sense of malicious excitement making his circuitry buzz. *Maybe not completely alone.*
He glanced behind him into the well-lit halls of the base and pictured Megatron sitting on the throne that had been his own. He was no doubt drunk on the thought of what he could do once Charlie was in his hands. He wouldn’t notice if Starscream was gone, he barely noticed any of his living Decepticons nowadays. And that would serve the jet just well.

He considered telling Skywarp but decided that, as quiet as he was nowadays, he didn’t want to risk him telling anyone he was gone.

Starscream turned around, *Don’t blow your gasket Skywarp, I’ll come back for you.*

He spread his wings to take off when a voice weighed gravity back onto his body.

“Where are you going?”

Starscream sent a glare over his shoulder at Shockwave who stood in the balcony’s opening. He looked at the jet with a steady, red stare.

“I was just going out to stretch my wings,” Starscream said breezily. “It’s stuffy in there.”

“I imagine that’s because of all the dead Cybertronians in there,” Shockwave said in that unnerving, apathetic way of his.

Starscream’s optics narrowed but he waited a moment before he replied. “It doesn’t bother you? Using our allies as test subjects?”

“Why would it?” was Shockwave’s uninterested question. “The Autobots are our fellow Cybertronians, yet when their bodies covered the battlefields—we simply walked over them. The humans here are as alive as you and I, that did not stop me from pulling them open to see what’s inside.”

Shockwave tipped his head up to look at the star, as if he could see Cybertron, as if he could see the countless creatures that thrived in the galaxies. “All living beings share one purpose, and it is to use one another for a greater gain.”

“Like how Megatron uses you?” Starscream snarked with a curl of his lip.

Shockwave turned his gaze back on the jet, and Starscream tried not to shudder under the look. There was something about this scientist that was so…un-Cybertronian.

“I understand that you would not believe me, when I tell you our relationship is a mutual
arrangement,” Shockwave replied. “You are used to using Decepticons who actually have worth. You have little to offer in ways of skill.”

Starscream balled his hands into fists. “I suppose that’s one of the many reasons you resurrected Megatron without speaking to me.”

Shockwave tilted his head to the side. “You are still upset about that, I see. You truly believe you were the better leader.”

_I was not the one who defied the Well of AllSparks._ Starscream didn’t dare say this out loud. He knew that either this one or Soundwave had told Megatron how Starscream had wished for him not to return.

Shockwave moved forward, closing the distance between the two. “I want you to know that I do not hold ill will toward you. Grudges are useless things to possess. I want you to know that Megatron is not a fool, even when drinking in new power.” He stood before Starscream, his mass thicker than the jet’s, and in one swift motion he grabbed the seeker’s arms.

Starscream tensed.

But Shockwave still spoke calmly, “I want you to know that whatever you do next, Megatron will know of it. And you will not be able to lie your way out of the consequences.

“What are you implying?” Starscream spat. “I am loyal to the Decepticon cause just as much as you.”

“No,” Shockwave said flatly. “You are not. No one is as loyal to the cause as myself. But that is besides the point.”

“Then what is the point-” his voice cut into a sharp growl of pain as Shockwave’s fingers slid across his arms, scraping into the metal and causing a ghastly shriek to split the air.

“The point,” Shockwave continued. “Is that when Megatron deems it fit, he will brand you a traitor and order me to destroy you.” He leaned forward, so close their faces almost touched and an unwelcome spark of fear entered Starscream’s chest. “I want to assure you, that when that day comes, I will make it as painless as possible when I pull your circuity out of your body.”

In one smooth movement Shockwave released Starscream, “Go and perform your fool’s errand, Starscream. I do not believe in wasting time for the inevitably of your betrayal. _And_ your failure.” He turned around as if to walk away.

But for some unknown reason Starscream found himself speaking up, “You’d let the risk of me
achieving my goal?”

He had never heard Shockwave laugh and the noise didn’t reach his audio receptors now. But he was sure that that question had been the closest thing the Con had ever considered a funny joke.

“You succeed?” he echoed the words as if they were foreign. “Without the help of myself or Soundwave, or an army? I don’t believe in the dreams of sparklings, Starscream.” And with just a few short steps Shockwave disappeared into the base.

Starscream watched him go, anxiety and defiance battling inside his braincore.

But there was also certainty. Certainty that if he stayed put Shockwave would get to play with his innards much sooner than the jet cared for. Even if Megatron knew he was leaving, he needed to go now. The continent the Autobots hid was a big planet, he could hide.

_They won’t focus on me_, he decided as he turned on his heel and bolted into the sky. _And when the opportunity presents itself, I will find a way to contact the Autobots and find Charlie. We have much to discuss._

Chapter End Notes

It’s really shot but I’m sick and not sure when I can get to writing the super important next chapter.
Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Charlie’s eyes popped open and she was back in bed, alone in her room. She sat up and was immediately hit with a strong sense of claustrophobia, she had to get out of this room. She needed to get out of the base.

Slipping out of her room she was relieved to see that the halls were empty. It must be late into the night. She made it outside without running into anyone.

Once outside the night sky was just starting to light up with the upcoming dawn. From where she stood she could hear the sounds of heavy footsteps and low voices, Autobots were active though she had no idea how many. Her thoughts went back to her dream, and how she had been able to recognize the Autobots from their sparks. They had been so small and dainty in her dream, they fit in the palm of her hand. A sense of protectiveness suddenly washed over her.

But nevertheless the sense of being closed in still weighed against her chest, the walls of the Grand Canyon felt like they were closing in on her.

“What are you doing up?”

Charlie jumped, biting her tongue to keep from yelling out as she whipped around to see her brother standing behind her, groggily rubbing at his eyes.

“You scared me,” she scolded lightly. “I just wanted to stretch my legs.”

Otis looked at her and with a twitch of guilt she noticed the uncharacteristic worry in her brother’s eyes. She couldn’t blame him, she knew she had been out of it for days and had locked herself away. “I just…” she looked around herself, “I wanted to go for a walk-out of the canyon.”

Otis frowned, “And you can’t just walk out because…?”

“I’m scared the Autobots will want to walk with me,” Charlie said, looking over her shoulder to see if any robots had walked into the clearing. There was nothing.

“And I just…I can’t face them right now.” She couldn’t face Bumblebee right now.

“Okay, I get it,” Otis said in a tone that said otherwise. “Well, if I can walk with you I’ll show you how to sneak out.”
Charlie’s brow rose, “You know a secret way out?”

“Cade showed me,” Otis replied. “But you got to promise I can go come with you, it’s a top secret way out.”

Charlie rolled her eyes, “Alright, I promise.”

With a suspicious look around Otis grabbed his sister’s hand and booked it to the next nearest building where the two siblings slipped behind it, their backs pressed against the wall of the canyon. They stood quiet for a few moments, Otis looking out to see if there was any passerby, then dragged Charlie to the next building which they hid behind as well.

“Wait a minute,” Charlie spoke. “Are you just going to sneak our way out of the canyon?”

“Yes.”

“That’s your top secret way out?”

“Yes.”

Charlie dragged her hand across her face, “I could have figured that out on my own, Otis.”

“But you didn’t.”

Charlie didn’t say more, simply falling her brother through the agonizingly long ‘top secret way’ out of the canyon. Eventually the sister and brother duo found themselves standing out on the barren clearings that surrounded the Grand Canyon, the base below them and out of sight. Charlie was finally able to release a deep breath.

“So,” Otis began as he followed Charlie’s walk. “Are you feeling better?”

She wasn’t surprised by this question but she still had no answer, “I’m not sure.”

“Wheeljack said you’re blaming yourself for all the bad stuff that’s happened,” Otis said. “You know, that’s really dumb of you, Charlie.”

She looked over to wrinkle her nose at her brother, “Is it?”

“Yeah, it’s not like it’s your fault this giant intergalactic alien robot war came to Earth.”
“It is my fault that I touched the AllSpark cube and got all these powers though,” Charlie pointed out, lifting her hands to examine them. They had healed from her ordeal of resurrecting Megatron. Cliffjumper’s words ran through her head. “Otis, can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” her brother shrugged.

“What would you do in if you were in my shoes?”

He looked down, “I’d probably trip. Your feet are as large as Burn’s.”

“No, doofus,” Charlie knocked her hand into his shoulder and her brother chuckled. “I mean, what if you had gotten the powers of the AllSpark?”

“I’d start thinking of my superhero name,” he replied easily.

“Otis, I’m serious.”

“So am I,” he looked up at her. “I think it’s the coolest thing that you get these alien super powers.”

“But what if you had had to bring back Megatron?” she pressed. “What if had been your blood they used to bring back dead Decepticons? Wouldn’t you feel guilty?”

Her brother rolled his eyes, “You sound just like the rest of the grown ups. You all think if you make one mistake and that’s it.”

“Otis, we’re in a war,” Charlie pointed out. “Sometimes one mistake really is it.”

“But it’s not,” he persisted. “You think I didn’t make plenty of mistakes in karate class while I was training to be a lethal killing machine? But my Sensei always said that if I didn’t get right back up, I wouldn’t be able to disable a man with one punch. So I got back up.”

“Otis our situation has nothing to do with your karate class,” Charlie replied dryly.

He let out a long suffering sigh, “Fine. Remember my comic books?”

“We’re not-”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. We’re not in a comic book. But giant alien battles are exactly what happens
in comic books so listen! You think none of the super heroes in those ever made a decision that ended up helping the villain or giving him a super strong weapon. Happens all the time. And what did the super heroes do? They brooded for a few pages and then stopped the villain.” He gave Charlie a pointed look, “Your brooding is over.”

The sun was just starting to shine into the canyon when Optimus felt a sudden sense of foreboding.

Standing in the middle of the clearing, he looked up into the lightening sky. Suddenly the sky grew darker and Optimus felt his spark jumped when realized it was the camouflage hologram that the Autobots had set up when they made base here. Because of the amount of energy it took to hold it in place, they had saved it for emergencies. Specifically when Decepticons came too close to the base.

Optimus turned as he heard running footsteps to see Wheeljack come to a stumbling halt before him. “We caught the signal of a Decepticon,” he said what Optimus already knew. “Though we’re not sure who it is, not that it matters.”

“But it does,” Optimus replied. “Who it is will tell us if they are just passing through, or are here to hunt.”

Before Wheeljack could say more the voice of Sally made both Autobots turn to the base. The human woman was calling out the names of her children. Optimus’ sense of foreboding increased.

“What is it, Sally?” Optimus walked over to kneel before her.

He could tell she was doing her best to not let her panic consume her, “Charlie isn’t here, and I can’t find Otis either.”

Optimus felt a bolt of fear as he looked back up at the sky, they were hidden from the optics of the Decepticon. But Charlie and Otis were not. And Charlie was no doubt the one the Decepticon was searching for.

“Can we head back yet?” Otis bemoaned, dragging his feet behind his sister.

Charlie barely heard him, through her walk her mind had been going over the pros and cons of Cliffjumper’s offer. And she was still as undecided now as she was then.

But her mind came back to the present when Otis suddenly grabbed her arm in a tight grip. She turned around, “We’ll go back in just a-”

“Who is that?” Otis was staring at something to their right with a horrified expression.
Charlie followed his gaze and her heart dropped. A jet was flying low to the ground, moving slow but no doubt heading straight for them.

“Starscream,” she breathed.

Immediately Otis tried to drag her back the way we came, “We have to get back to the base! We have to get Optimus!”

“It’s too late,” Charlie dug her heels into the ground. “He’ll follow us and know exactly where the Autobots base is! We can’t let that happen!” She looked desperately around, and spotted, a few feet away, a pile of boulders. “Quick, this way.”

Too scared to see how close the jet was Charlie nearly picked Otis up and hurried him to the boulders, relieved to see a small opening where they could hide themselves. “Quick, climb up!”

Otis didn’t have to told twice, hurrying up the few feet he needed to slid his body into the hole. He poked his head out, “There’s room for you, Charlie! Hurry-”

His voice was cut off by the heavy thud of something landing directly behind her. The ground shook and wind buffeted her hair. Charlie sucked in a breath for courage, and turned around.

Starscream was laughing.

The noise grated against her ears while Starscream held his hand against his face to muffle the chuckles. “I can’t believe,” he nearly wheezed. “I can not believe this. Here I was prepping for the solar cycles it would take to find you and you’re just here.” He pulled his hand away, his laughter subsided. “And you’re alone.”

Charlie sucked in a breath as Starscream glanced around. “Though I suppose the Autobots are around here somewhere.”

“I got separated,” she lied a little too quickly. “I have no idea where they are.”

“You speak as if I’m someone who cares,” Starscream said flatly, his optics gazing over their surroundings before turning back to her.

There were several beats of silence. Otis stayed hidden in the mound of boulders, quiet, while Charlie wracked her brain trying to figure out how to get out of this situation.

“So, um,” she said the first thing that came to her head, “How is life with Megatron as your leader?” And immediately she wanted to bite her tongue off for being an idiot.
Starscream’s optics narrowed, but then he smirked, “I imagine I’m in as good a mood as you are.” His smirk quickly fell, “I heard you and Thundercracker ran into each other.”

Charlie flinched.

“I must say, I’ve misjudged you,” he continued. “You felt like such an…Autobot. But Autobots are not known for abandoning those that help them, even if it is the wiser decision.”

His words felt like a slap to the face, “I didn’t abandon Thundercracker. I asked him to come with me! He refused-” she scowled. “Maybe he didn’t want to leave you and Skywarp, he was your friend.”

“He was one of the few Cons whose company I could stomach,” Starscream corrected. “Was. He’s forgotten himself after Shockwave ruined his memory core.”

*So that’s why he didn’t remember me,* Charlie thought to herself. “Can’t you fix him?”

Starscream’s optics suddenly looked darker and he knelt down in front of her. “I can’t fix anything. Not here on Earth.” Before Charlie could fully process his words his hand shot out and she was being pressed against the boulder, her back digging painfully into the rock.

“What are you doing!?” she barked, pain and fear making her voice rise an octave.


They both knew it was only the AllSpark inside her that kept Charlie’s bones from cracking, but she still found it hard to choke out the words: “I’m listening.”

Starscream leaned incredibly close, his natural body heat radiating against her flesh. “I want you,” he began. “To come with me to Cybertron.”

She had imagined a lot of requests but inviting her to his home planet was not one of them. “W-What?”

“I have little doubt the AllSpark will keep you alive in space,” he explained, straightening up. “And once there you can use the AllSpark’s powers to revive Cybertron to its former glory.”

Charlie blinked, still dumbfounded. “Why would I do that?”
“Excellent question,” he purred. He suddenly stood up, his fingers wrapping around Charlie and pulling her up with him. Charlie thought she heard Otis cry out but the wind deafened her as she was lifted.

“You will do this because the other option is Megatron.” Starscream replied, giving her a humorless smile. “Your other option is watching Megatron slaughter your Autobot allies to get to you. Your other option is to be captured and help create even more abominations. Your other option is to be Megatron’s key in ruining what’s left of your pathetic planet.”

He used both hands to hold her, almost tenderly. “But I am giving you the better option, the chance to make up for your crimes and restore the Cybertronian’s home to its former glory.” He examined her closely, Charlie’s tongue felt too thick to talk. “You do not have the traits of an Autobot, what with you abandoning Thundercracker and causing even more problems for Optimus and his ilk. But I think, and this is not something I say lightly, you have the makings of a Decepticon. I’d even be tempted to put you down such a path, a path of success and power. But only,” his fingers tightened around her body. “If you are willing to make amends for the atrocities that are all your fault.”

*All your fault.*

Hearing Starscream say the words she had repeated a thousands times, it felt like a kick in her gut. She swallowed, and opened her mouth to tell him that—if nothing else—he was right about this all being because of her.

“You’re wrong.”

The jet blinked, mild surprise shining in his eyes. But his surprise was nothing to the sheer shock that rocked Charlie after hearing those words leave her mouth. And she wasn’t done. “I’ll admit, Starscream. I had a hand in causing this mess, but I wasn’t alone.” She scowled, “None of this would have happened if you had stayed off my planet!”

Brow furrowed Charlie tried to feel that sense of self-loathing that had weighed her down like an anchor ever since the Decepticon base. But she couldn’t, everytime she thought the words ‘all your fault’ the voice sounded like Starscream.

She broke into an unexpected fit of laughter. She wasn’t going to listen to a world this Tina Harker, tyrant wannabe, prick had to say.

Starscream’s expression was unreadable as he waited for Charlie’s near hysterical fit to subside.

“How dare,” she finally gasped, “How dare you think I’d just abandon everyone to go help you, when all you’ve done is invade my planet, kidnap me, and not be there when I needed you. I refuse to help you do *anything.*”
She expected a glare, a scowl, she expected to be thrown to the ground and crushed. But none of those things happened.

Instead Starscream looked…resigned. He let out a slow sigh, and it seemed like acceptance and defeat weighed down his shoulders. “And there is no way I can convince you…”

Charlie’s brow furrowed, she had no idea how to respond to that.

The jet looked up at the gray sky, a far away look in his eyes as if he was looking at something she could not see.

“Very well,” he said finally, still looking up. “Be it so.”

He walked over to the boulder where Otis hid and uncermiounslly threw Charlie into the hole where she nearly landed on her brother.

“Charlie,” he whimpered, helping her into a sitting position. Charlie quickly put herself between her brother and Starscream who stood looking down at her with that same resigned expression.

“If I can’t restore Cybertron,” Starscream said. “Then I’ll at least make sure Megatron can never use the AllSpark for any more of his twisted experiments.”

Realization dawned on Charlie and she reached her hand out, “Starscream, don’t-”

The jet reached his hand up, clutching the boulders atop the opening and pulled his arm down. Heavy boulders came tumbling down into the hole toward the two Watson siblings, ready to crush them alive.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter was a long time coming I hope you guys liked it.
Optimus and Wheeljack watched as the jet shot up skyward, disappearing into the clouds in a matter of kliks. They had both recognized it instantly. Starscream.

“Can you pick up any organic readings?” Optimus turned to Wheeljack, trying to keep his voice calm. If Starscream had grabbed Charlie and Otis…

“Not from him,” Wheeljack was quick to assure, scanning the holographic readings that appeared from his arms. “But I am seeing two organic heat signals coming from…” The scientist looked up, his optics roving. When they stopped at a point several feet away terror made them glow. “There.”

Optimus followed his gaze to see a cluster of boulders. It took only a second to realize what had happened and panic pulsed in his spark. He bolted toward the mass of rocks. No…NO!

“. You don’t owe them anything.”

“I do not want you to the burden of this war on your shoulders, Charlie. If you must carry it you must allow myself and your allies to carry it with you.”

“But I know if we are going to get our home back, you have to be out there, not in here. I’m scared, but I’m proud. And your father would be too.”

“You didn’t ask for any of this, Charlie! You keep carrying guilt that shouldn’t be there!”

“I love you.”

“There is much you’ve yet to learn, Charlie,” Cliffjumper had said. “Do not limit yourself.”

“Charlie, open your eyes.”

Otis’s voice brought her eyes open and memories rushing back. Her arms were held up as if they could have stopped the massive boulders that had barrled down on her and her brother.

The boulders…
They hovered over them, forming a cavern that the two Watson siblings huddled in. Charlie let out a gasp when she saw the blue energy that surrounded them, keeping the rocks in place.

It was a…

“It’s a force field!” Otis shouted gleefully. “You have force field powers!”

“I-I do,” Charlie replied breathlessly, her lips tugging upward. Her arms fizzed with the energy it took to summon the field and keep it up.

“Do you know you could do that?” her brother asked, looking as if it took every muscle not to reach out and touch the blue energy.

Charlie shook her head, the back of it scraping slightly against the rock. “No, I…I had no idea.” A warm and incredibly welcomed sense of confidence soothed her heart. “I just threw my arms up and—it happened.”

Otis smiled down at her, he was sitting up while Charlie’s back was pressed against the rocky floor. “I bet you unlocked this power because you told off Starscream! That was awesome! When he said everything was your fault I was so sure you’d agree with him because that’s all you talk about anymore.”

“Yeah, I thought I would to,” Charlie replied, her hands still straight up, her veins trickling with power. “But, I can’t agree with a guy like that.” Another burst of laughter escaped her lips. “Every thing I’ve been through, and it’s Starscream agreeing with me that makes me pick myself up.”

“I mean, you have to be in a pretty bad place to agree with something that guy said.” Otis smirked then looked around, “So, uh, can this force field push the boulders away so we can crawl out?”

Charlie looked at the force field, pushed her mind forward to try and push the boulders away. Nothing happened. “We need a Plan B.”

Plan B came in the sound of something heavy moving above them, dirt and debris scattered and popped against the force field. Sunlight showed down on the two and through the haze of the energy the two saw the faces of Optimus and Wheeljack looking down on them. Open surprise shown in their eyes when they saw the force field that surrounded the two.

Charlie let her arms fall and the energy dissipated. “Optimus!”

“Wheeljack!” Otis shouted happily, jumping into the Autobot’s waiting hand.
Optimus reached in and grabbed Charlie in a gentle grip, pulling her out and placing her gently on the ground next to her brother.

“What happened?” he demanded in a voice that was firm and low. “Did Starscream find you?”

“Yeah and he tried to smash us,” Otis said with great offense in his voice.

Charlie quickly stepped in front of her brother, “He doesn’t know where the base is.”

“We found you two in a pile of rocks that’s the least of our worries right now,” Wheeljack spoke up.

“You protected yourself,” Optimus said, looking over Charlie with a thoughtful expression in his eyes. “Have you done that before?”

“No,” Charlie answered, looking down at her hands. “This is new. Starscream tried to crush us with the rocks so I threw my hands up and—that happened.”

“What was Starscream even doing out here?” Wheeljack asked, looking up at the sky as if he expected the jet to return.

“Getting told off by Charlie, that’s what!” Otis declared proudly. “You should have seen her Optimus! He was all—” Otis pitched his voice a higher octave, and squinted, a less than accurate intimidation of Starscream—“Come with me and fix Cybertron.’ And then Charlie was all—” The boy then straightened and puffed his chest out, and in a girly voice Charlie guessed was suppose to be her, Otis said: “I’ll never help you! Also you’re ugly and smell like oil!”

“I didn’t say that last part,” Charlie said dryly while Wheeljack covered his mouth to hide his chuckles. “And I don’t sound like that.”

She turned back to Optimus who was appraising her. “You are holding yourself differently,” he noted.

Charlie blushed and lifted her chin, “I…I feel better.”

Optimus’ eyes crinkled in a way that indicated that he was smiling. ‘I’m glad.’

Sally nearly suffocated Otis in a hug when the four returned. Ron standing with his arms crossed and looked torn on whether to act a disapproving parent, or if to just be happy that the two were back.
“I agreed to let your sister run around!” Sally said sternly as her brother tried to escape his mother’s clutches. “But I didn’t give you permission!” She sent a glare at Charlie who shrunk under Sally’s gaze. “But that doesn’t mean you get to go off and scare me to death either, young lady!”

“I’m sorry,” Charlie said and Otis mumbled his own apologies against his mother’s clavicle. Ron offered Charlie an encouraging smile over Sally’s head which she returned.

Charlie was just trying to decide if they should tell Sally about encountering Starscream, when a smaller Autobot walked over to Optimus and Wheeljack, the two standing a few feet away from the Watsons.

“Is something wrong?” Optimus asked, noticing the Autobot’s worried expression.

“I might be worrying for nothing,” he said. “But shouldn’t Bumblebee and Hot Shot be back by now?”

The words made Charlie’s body tense.

“They should be,” Wheeljack said. “They and Cade were just going on a quick supply run. If they’re not back—” He looked to Optimus and a look Charlie couldn’t read was sent between them.

“Wheeljack and I will go and search for them,” Optimus turned to the other Autobot. “If there is trouble we will call for reinforcements.”

The two turned to make their way to the bridge when Charlie stepped forward. “Can I come with you?” She felt a thrill of excitement and fear at her offer, but it felt like she finally shook the last of the guilt and self-loathing that held her down for so long.

The Autobots were clearly surprised by her offer. And Ron took a step away from Sally’s side, closer to Charlie. “Are you sure?”

Charlie thought of the rift that had come between her and Bumblebee. How she had reacted when he had laid his spark out in front of her. If he was in trouble, she more than owed it to him to go and help.

She lifted her chin and looked straight at Optimus. “Yes.”
Chapter End Notes

Went ahead and wrote this one out cause some of you guys were really thinking I spent time writing SIXTY TWO chapters only to kill Charlie without any of these plot threads being finished.
Bumblebee, Hot Shot, and Cade were sent to a large city that the transformers hadn’t visited before.

New York City.

Or…what was left of it.

The sprawling metropolitan that Charlie saw through rose-tinted glasses thanks to movies, was a wasteland of what it used to be. Even more so than San Francisco. When Optimus and Wheeljack, Charlie in the former’s hand, stepped out of the ground bridge and into New York, she hadn’t been able to hold back a gasp of shock.

The buildings that had been as high as the clouds were now extremely large piles of debris that littered the area. Only a few, pathetic skeletons of the sturdier buildings still stood. The many roads were backed up by crinkled cars and cement that was pulled out of the ground.

“This is…different,” Wheeljack commented, looking around the destroyed area with a thoughtful yet dark look.

Charlie swallowed, “Do you think that whatever did this-found Bumblebee and the others.”

Optimus gave her a assured look, “Do not underestimate him, or Hot Shot. They can take care of themselves.”

Charlie nodded, wanting to share Prime’s confidence. But she knew she’d feel much better once they found them.

“Can you place me down, Optimus?” she asked, her eyes roving the ruined cars. “I want to see if we can find any survivors, or at least something to give us a hint on what exactly happened here.”

Optimus complied and Charlie walked ahead of them, the two Autobots keeping their pace slow for her sake. While they walked she could catch snippets of Wheeljack mumbling to his leader, “This feels more thorough than what the Decepticons usually do. We’ve gone through many destroyed cities but none of them were like…this.”

The words made Charlie feel a sense of impending dread but she quickly squashed it. She refused to let her negative emotions and fears keep her from taking another step. She was done.

*I’m going to find Bumblebee and I’m going to keep him safe.*
Through the search Charlie looked through several vehicles, many of them telling her a different story.

This truck full of empty beer cans, it was amazing if the driver hadn’t died drunk driving before the Cons arrived.

A small car, the back seat riddled with dog hair. Charlie took a moment to realize that, besides Conan, she hadn’t run into any dogs in a long time.

A minivan with a couple of car seats…Charlie didn’t want to think too much about that one.

One little sportscar, the back completely crushed like a soda can, forced Charlie to pull half her body into the front window and she looked around, not finding anything but a single charm hanging from the rearview mirror. It brought a smile to Charlie’s face and she pulled it off, pocketing it before crawling out the window.

Optimus told her to stay close when Charlie found a car that had nothing but a rotting skeleton inside it.

She obeyed, the joy from finding her little prize gone as she was painfully reminded how dangerous of a situation they were in. She wondered if they should call out to the missing Autobots but was scared to break the eerie silence of New York.

No, instead she let Wheeljack try to find their spark signals in his little holograph she had never noticed before. But according to the furrow of his brow, neither Bumblebee or Hot Shot, or Cade were in the vicinity.

And then they almost fell into a massive hole.

Charlie, for a half-second, thought it was the hole that had hid the AllSpark’s cube and Megatron’s body. But then she reminded herself of her surroundings, and the fact both Megatron and the cube were at his Decepticon’s base. At least…she hoped they were there.

Together the three companions leaned forward to try and get a look inside the pit. There were sounds of surprise when they realized that it wasn’t just a simple-albiet huge-hole, but the opening to an underground tunnel.

“The subway station,” Charlie breathed, noticed what was left of tracks. However this tunnel was clearly much larger than the tunnels of any subways, Optimus and Wheeljack could walk through it easily.
Which apparently was what the two wanted to do right now.

“Charlie,” the Autobot leader looked down at her. “Do you think you can summon your force field if you need it?”

“I think so,” she replied. “Are we going down there?”

“I’d like just myself and Wheeljack to go,” he explained, a flash of apology in his eyes. “I do not know what we will find down there.”

“Why can’t I come?” Charlie demanded, turning on him. “You just asked if I could use my force field!”

“I’d like you to stay above ground and keep watch,” Optimus explained. “If we have to fight down there, it will be a tight packed fight. I do not want to risk you getting injured down there.”

Charlie opened her mouth to argue but ultimately closed her mouth. She knew she had been a wreck for days now, and to all of a sudden want to be back on the field, she couldn’t blame Optimus for worrying about her well-being.

“Ohkay,” she said finally. “Just please come back soon.”

Optimus nodded and jumped down into the tunnel below. Wheeljack gave Charlie a cheery wave before following after.

She was left standing in the middle of the totaled city, feeling like the quiet weighed even heavier on her body.

While she stood, keeping her eyes and ears open, her mind wandered. She replayed her moment with Starscream, the feeling as her self-loathing melted away to be replaced with self-indignation that the jet would blame her for everything that happened. Still, she found herself feeling a strange sense of gratitude to Starscream, she didn’t know when or if she’d have been able to snap out of her dark thoughts. Though she wished it could have happened sooner, if just so she could have followed after Bumblebee. She felt anxiety at the thought of him being in great danger, the sooner she got to him the better.

“Psst!”

The noise, while soft, startled Charlie and she looked around, trying to find the source.

“Psst! Over here!”
Charlie turned her head and her eyes widened when she saw a girl, around her age, standing several feet away. She was peeking out from the inside of the one of the buildings that was still standing— or at least, what was left of it’s first floor was still standing.

The girl had choppy short brown hair (as if she cut it herself), a dirty red shit and jeans torn at the knees. She also had a faded scar on her cheek, she also, also was glaring at Charlie with a furious and panicked expression.

“Are you crazy!?” she loudly whispered. “Get over here before it finds you!”

She had no idea what it was, though she could take a few guesses. Still, dumbfounded, Charlie fast-walked over to the girl. As soon as she was in arm’s length the stranger grabbed her and yanked her into the sorta shelter of the decayed complex.

“What, did you just get here?” the girl asked, looking around outside. “You’re the third person I’ve met today who has no survival instinct!”

A part of Charlie wanted to laugh at the thought of having no survival instinct—but then she recalled all her incredibly dangerous choices and maybe she just had a mean lucky streak. But the other half of her latched onto to the other thing she said. “Who are the other people?”

The girl turned around and gave Charlie a weird look before pointing to a corner ahead of him. Charlie turned around and her shoulders sagged with relief: “Cade!”

Her friend was sitting next to an older man, closer to her mother’s age, streaks of white in his grayish-brown hair and his eyes hollow with pain as he clutched his bleeding hip.

Cade had his own wound, a slash on his leg that was wrapped in a dirty looking cloth. “Charlie? What are you doing here?”

“I came looking for you,” she hurried over to the man, kneeling next to him and putting a hand on his shoulder. “Where’s Bumblebee and Hot Shot?”

“Hell if I know,” he was giving her a strange look. “You seem less…clinically depressed today.”

She winced, “Let’s just say a very unlikely person brought me back to my senses.” She glanced at the man, he met her eye before quickly turning back to his wound, a bead of sweat trickling down his brow.

Charlie turned to look at Cade’s bandaged leg, “What happened?” Her head lifted to see the girl walking over to them. “What’s out there?”

The strange girl answered, “A giant worm.”
Now that, that Charlie hadn’t expected. She shot a look to Cade, “Is she serious?”

“Oh, yeah,” Cade replied, nodding sagely. He indicated to his wound, I ended up at his tail and this is what happened when it grazed me just the tiniest bit. I don’t think it noticed me since Bee And Hot Shot were distracting it. It chased after them leaving me by myself.” He then indicated to the man beside him, “At least until I ran into this old-timer, said the worm knocking him flat on the concrete.”

“It did,” the man wheezed irritably.

“And then we ran into her…” Cade’s voice trailed off as he looked up at the girl. “What’s your name again? Alice?”

“Alexis,” she corrected. “I live here, I help find survivors and get them to the bunkers.”

“There’s survivors?” Charlie asked, surprised considering the devastation outside.

“You’re safe in bunkers?” Cade wondered aloud. “I mean I have nothing but respect for bunkers, I was practically raised in one. But this worm…” He looked to Charlie, the slightest trace of fear in his eyes. “It was clearly brought by the Decepticons, it was all metal and—it was so much bigger than Bee and Hot Shot, it’s bigger than Optimus.”

Charlie did not like the sound of that one bit.

“To answer your first question, no not really,” Alex spoke up, a sense of defeat in her voice. “But it hasn’t found us yet and…New York is a big place the odds of escaping without it finding us is…far too low. Not that anyone in the bunkers would give it try.” She looked out to the damage outside, “After all, that one worm did all that.”

Charlie’s jaw dropped, just one being…and it did as much damage as a Decepticon army. Her stomach curled and she desperately wanted to go and find Optimus and Wheeljack.

“But you keep saying those strange names,” Alexis pointed out. “Decepticons… Hot Shot… Optimus. What does any of that mean?”

Charlie wondered if they had time to explain. She looked at the man who had his hand pressed against his skin, the tips of his fingers red.

“Shouldn’t we get him to a first aid kit, first?” she asked.
In response a strange growl reached the group’s ears. Charlie and Cade tensed at the noise while Alexis’ expression grew one of fear and acceptance. “We aren’t going anywhere right now.”

Finishing her sentence was an unearthly sound of slithering, directly below their feet. Charlie’s thoughts went back to the tunnel, and fear for Optimus and Wheeljack squeezed her heart.
Chapter 65

The tunnels arched high above the two Autbots’ heads. The walls showing ragged concrete and broken pipes. The ground littered with bits of cement, brick, and the occasional subway car.

Optimus and Wheeljack walked in a taut silence, the latter searching for any life signals.

A part of Optimus feared for Charlie which they had left up above. But there was a sense of danger in these tunnels, an invisible threat, and he was still glad he hadn’t brought her down with them. Even with new powers of the AllSpark appearing the Autobot leader still found himself incredibly protective of the human.

He was relieved she seemed to be gaining the sense of determination that he had sensed when they first met. But her talk with Starscream still unnerved him. The jet had truly wanted to take her to Cybertron in an attempt to revive it? He had his doubts Megatron would agree, Earth was wounded but it wasn’t dead like their home planet. He imagined the Decepticon leader wanted to stay on this planet, with his undead soldiers and the AllSpark inside Charlie. But did that mean Starscream, a Con who he knew had been determined to be a leader, was ready to abandon his comrades and leave this planet? The thought drove home how much more dangerous Megatron now was.

But he would have to deal with that at a later date. Right now he had two Bots to find and a mystery to solve. These tunnels were not human made, but there was something about them that made him hesitate to say the Decepticons had done this.

But a suggestion was coming into his mind, a suggestion he severely hoped he was wrong about.

The two Autobots came to the end of their tunnel, where it branched off into several different entrances, each dark and thick with clutter, each blowing out a cold wind.

Wheeljack silently walked to the closest one, scanning the inside for any sign of life. After a few moments he turned to Optimus and shook his head before going on to the next one.

While he did this Optimus walked beside the tunnels, peering in to try and make out any signs that could lead him to his soldiers. At one point he came across a tunnel entrance that was completely blocked sharp bits of metal.

Optimus stalled, looking over the substance. It didn’t look any similar to the metals that he had found on Earth. But it was…familiar.

Silently Wheeljack made his way over to his leader, examined the blockage with the same confused scrutiny as Optimus, then lifted his arm to look for any life signals beyond the odd but familiar metal.
Their sparks dropped when the signal flashed red, and suddenly Optimus realized what they were looking at.

It wasn’t a pile of metal, blocking their path. It was skin. The metallic skin of a creature he had only seen once but was awfully, intimately familiar with it.

_The Driller._

A giant Cybertronian worm commanded by Shockwave, a creature hundreds of feet in length and it’s mouth rows and rows of sharp teeth. Optimus had witnessed the Driller go through entire cities of Cybertron, he had seen Autobots be ripped to pieces and crushed by this massive monster. And the fact it was now on Earth…the destruction above them now made complete sense, the humans would never had stood a chance.

Wheeljack, recognizing the Driller as well, took a step back, fear bright in his optics. But there was no sound of movement, the Driller hadn’t moved. Which meant it clearly didn’t know they were there.

Noticing this Wheeljack pulled out his weapon and aimed it toward the patch of metal, his optics on Optimus, waiting for permission to fire.

But Optimus shook his head, they needed to shot to kill. And if killing it was so easy, they wouldn’t have shot so many Autobots.

No, the two of them did not stand a chance. And another horrifying thought had come to Optimus’ head, if the Driller was here-then there was a very good chance Shockwave was as well.

And they had left Charlie alone.

Optimus turned and tried to move as fast as possible without making any noise. Wheeljack loyally following behind them without a word.

But they had almost reached the entrance where they had left her, when a growl reached their audio receptors. The world began to shudder and for a moment, Optimus wasn’t on Earth. He was back on Cybertron, watching helplessly as his home and torn to shreds and his allies screamed as they were swallowed, teeth ripped through their circuits.

Optimus jumped in front of Wheeljack just as rock and cement fell in front of them, and out of the debris came a head full of fangs.
Chapter 66

Despite the precarious stairs, Charlie and Alexis helped the two men up to the first floor. While they did so she and Cade helped explain to Alexis and the old man about the Autobots and Decepticons. They both had a silent agreement not to mention Charlie’s powers. She also explained how Optimus had come to look for Bumblebee and Hot Shot.

“Sorry,” Alex said when Charlie asked. “I haven’t seen any robots since the first attacks, only survivors and that worm.”

Speaking of, Charlie looked through the large patches of the complex’s walls. The destroyed city was once again quiet, she couldn’t detect any more of that strange growling.

“Do you think it belongs to the Cons?” Charlie asked Cade, the older man’s arm over her shoulder as she helped him up the next few steps.

“Oh, I bet,” Cade said with a hint of snarkiness. “It be so like them to have a giant metal worm, and I can’t enjoy it cause it’s trying to kill us and probably ate Bee and Hot Shot.” He noticed Charlie’s horrified expression “Or they’re both perfectly fine and made the giant worm their pet.”

Upon reaching the higher floor the two girls helped the wounded men onto the floor. The man, whose name they hadn’t asked for, had been deathly quiet during Charlie’s explanation, the large red spot on his shirt a clear reason as to why.

“How are you feeling?” Charlie asked, kneeling in front of him and placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. She thought she saw him wince.

“As good as I can under the circumstances,” he replied, his voice a horrid rasp of pain.

Charlie looked at the wound and wished she was able to heal people like she healed Cybertronians. “Just hang on, okay? I’m going to find Optimus and we can take you to the base. My mom’s a nurse she’ll be able to fix you up.”

“We should do that as soon as possible,” Alexis said, examining Cade’s leg. “Before this guy looses a limb.”

“Ah, it’s fine,” Cade assured her. “It’s just my left leg, I’m right handed.”

The other three exchanged a confused look but didn’t respond to Cade’s fun fact.

“Are there any survivors in the bunker?” Charlie asked Alexis. “Is it far?”

“It’s not far,” she answered. “There’s only a few people. Not many survive this place.”
“But you have,” Charlie pointed out, impressed.

Alexis shrugged, looking humbled. “Just lucky.”

“How do you expect to find this…Optimus?” the man asked. “It’s a large and destroyed city.”

“Don’t worry, I know what they meant.” Charlie assured. They were not far from the pit. She just hoped Optimus and Wheeljack were still safe. “When they get back Wheeljack can take you all back to our base,” Charlie told Alexis.

“Forgive me if I’m not too hopeful concerning these ‘Autobots’,” the man muttered under his breath.

“You’re not going?” Cade asked, looking at her with worry.

“I’m not leaving until I find Bumblebee,” Charlie said, feeling thick in her voice.

She caught Alexis’ surprised expression from the corner of her eye. But Cade smiled softly, “Looks like someone’s got her groove back.”

Charlie blushed but returned his smile.

Suddenly a ferocious shriek split the air and the earth started to shake. The group turned to look outside just as a large shape burst from the ground, scattering debris across it’s surroundings.

Charlie bit back a yell and Alexis, the closest to the wall, jumped back, falling on her back. Cade crawled over to her side to help her up. Charlie stayed stock still, her eyes nearly falling out of her head as she took in the massive size of this intergalactic, metallic monster. It’s long body waved in the air, thrashing. Tentacles reached out and slammed into piles of buildings and wreckage. But then Charlie found it’s head, or at least what she assumed was it’s head, and screamed.

Optimus hung from its mouth, several razor sharp teeth digging into the Autobot’s leg as he desperately fired at it’s head. Behind it’s head Wheeljack hung onto it, stabbing at it’s thick skin. She thought she saw spurts of amber liquid leak from the stab wounds but it didn’t slow the creature down.

A choked gasp escaped Alexis as the worm’s body slowly started to fall, straight for the building the four humans were in.
“OUTTA THE WAY! OUTTA THE WAY!” Cade screamed pushing Alexis out of the way.

Charlie shoved the old man in the opposite direction and a blast of air scalded her back as the two fell in a tangle of limbs, the worm just missing them.

Charlie pulled herself to her feet, the sight of Alexis and Cade blocked by the rest of the complex that had fallen into the new crevice. “Cade!” Charlie called out, panic sticking in her throat. She pressed her hands against the rubble. “Can you hear me?!” Did they get crushed?

“We’re okay!” Cade called out and Charlie felt so relieved to hear his annoying voice.

“Stay put!” Alexis yelled. “We’ll come to you!”

Charlie looked around, the worm had vanished back underground with Optimus and Wheeljack. She could hear a horrendous scraping under her feet and she felt sick.

“Don’t worry,” the man wheezed, rising onto his legs despite his wound. “The girl will at least get over to us.”

“They’re not who I’m worried about!” Charlie said, running over to one of the many holes in the building. “I didn’t realize how large it was…it could kill Optimus and Wheeljack!”

“You told me yourself how big and strong they are,” the man pointed out. “Relax, pet.”

Charlie’s blood turned to ice and she slowly turned around.

The man, originally hunched over in pain, now stood with a straight spine, looming over Charlie with his greater height-and his eyes blazing red.

Disbelief and terror make her voice a shrill whisper, “Megatron…”

“Oh,” the man blinked. “The great Optimus Prime didn’t tell you about holoforms?” He lifted his hand and waved it slightly, the flesh becoming red pixels that slowly glided with his hand before morphing back into flesh. “I should thank him if he survives.”

Charlie felt herself start to shiver. She knew Megatron had been hunting her down but she hadn’t expected to face him so soon. She hadn’t expected to face him alone.

“I see you’re in shock,” he smiled maliciously. It was so unnerving to hear the robot’s voice come out of a human’s mouth. “The Decepticons have many tricks, ones that can rival the Autobots.” He took a few steps forward and Charlie nearly choked. “And when you stand by my side you will get
Charlie forced her chin up, “I’m not standing by your side.” She hated how her voice shook. “Not ever.”

He chuckled, “Oh, Charlie. I wasn’t asking.”

Megatron lunged forward, the wound on his side clearly fake, and wrapped his arms around her neck.

Charlie grabbed his forearms, trying to keep the pressure off her neck as he leered over her.

“You made a grave mistake running away from me,” he hissed. “But I want to thank you. If you hadn’t seduced Thundercracker into making the biggest mistake of his life—I wouldn’t have my new favorite soldiers.”

Charlie scowled at him, but she feared that if she tried to speak he’d break her vocal chords. He didn’t need a pet who would mouth off.

The ground shuddered, the worm still fighting with the Autobots. Megatron gave a causal glance outside. “It won’t take the Driller long to dispose of those two. Shockwave will be pleased.” His smile widened when he felt her flinch under his hands. “Oh yes, my scientist is here as well. When we leave I’ll be sure he gives you proper gratitude. Your blood opened up so many doors for his experiments. Excellent work my little champion.”

_I’m not your champion! And the moment I can I’ll make you regret ever crash landing on my planet! I’ll make you regret even starting this war with the Autobots!_  

“It’s time to go now,” Megatron said, removing one hand and the other still had an iron grip on her throat. “Please be reasonable and not struggle.”

Charlie planned to do just that—and remembered just then that—oh, right _force fields_-when an angry voice split the air.

_“Get away from her!”_  

Alexis came tumbling down the pile of rubble, a piece of pipe in hand. In one movement she landed on the floor and took a hefty swing at Megatron’s head, only for the pipe to go straight through him. The girl’s eyes bugged as she saw the red pixels move out of the way of the pipe, and then his body vanished out of sight.
Alexis stumbled back, “What the f-”

Cade’s voice interrupted her: “WHAT THE FUCK!?”

He was still sitting atop the debris pile, clearly his leg keeping him from climbing any faster.

“Cade, it’s Megatron!” Charlie shrieked.

A cold chuckle reached her ears and she nearly broke down into tears, whirling around and trying to see where he could possibly be hiding. He was close she knew he was close, and she didn’t stand a chance against his Cybertronian body.

“Who’s Megatron?” Alexis asked, looking around wildly, the pipe still in her hands. It looked like she was questioning her sanity.

“He looked human!” Cade said, scrambling down toward her. “You saw that right I thought he was a human! They can do that, did you know they can do that!?”

“I had no idea!” Charlie snapped, her heart pumping spordacilly. “But he’s here and he knows where we are and Optimus-Bumblebee-” She forced her mouth shut, making herself take several breaths to calm herself.

“You need to run,” Cade told her, struggling to stay on his feet. “Megatron isn’t after me and Alexis! You run and hide, or go use your super powers to save Optimus and Wheeljack, either way you can’t stay here!”

Alexis stared at them, “Superpowers? What are you talking about!?”

“I’ll explain later,” Cade said, not breaking his eyes away from Charlie. “Go now!”

Charlie obeyed, all but flying down the stairs and out of the complex. A part of her thought it was cowardly for her to leave Cade and Alexis behind. But a part of her also knew that Cade was right, Megatron was after her and wouldn’t care for the two. But he’d happily fire through them if that got him closer to her.

Not daring to stay out in the open Charlie bolted to the first building that was as put together as they one she just left. She hurried in, a stitch starting in her side and her panting breaths ragged to her own ears. She saw the steps, they looked more dangerous than the last, but she ran up them anyway. There was no room for the first floor but somehow, miraculously, the second floor was still in contact. She reached it and placed her hands on her knees, sucking in several breaths.
Optimus…Bee… Fear for the four Autobots made her throat tighten and she forced herself to stand up. She needed to get a vantage point, Megatron was out there, and Shockwave, and that giant worm (Driller, he called it), and Charlie didn’t stand a chance against them by herself.

*What would I have done before my intense guilt and self-loathing episode?* Realizing the answer she headed for the large hall in one of the floor’s walls, she’d assist her location and go from there.

Feeling a bit better at having a sorta-kind plan, Charlie walked over to the wall to peer out into the vastness destruction of New York.

And came face to face with Thundercracker.
A large pile of brick and stone lay in the heart of the city, coming from several buildings and even pieces of the Empire State Building. One of the large chunks of concrete started to shift and suddenly it moved, falling to the destroyed roads below, and a hand appeared from the rubble.

Bumblebee pushed and shoved himself out of the mess, gravel and dust rolling off his dinged body. He let out a noise akin to a frustrated groan and looked around.

“Little help, here?” a muffled voice spoke up and Bumblebee turned to shovel the rubble away so Hot Shot could crawl out to sit next to him.

“Bumblebee,” he spoke up after a few minutes of collecting themselves. “The Driller is here.”

“Oh, really?” Bumblebee asked sarcastically, looking over at his friend. “I couldn’t tell when it threw us into fifty buildings with it’s tail.”

“Don’t be mean,” Hot Shot replied, holding a hand over his chest. “I think my spark chamber got dented.” He stood up and winced, “Ah, yeah, that’s a big one.”

Bumblebee ignored the ache in his limbs and pushed himself to his feet, “Do you think Cade is okay?” They had no choice but to separate when the Driller had attacked out of nowhere. “We should go and find him.”

“Yeah, that’ll be easy,” Hot Shot replied, following Bee down to the ground. “And there’s nothing I want more than to spend my energy looking for that oh so funny human.”

“If I can’t be sarcastic neither can you,” Bumblebee shot at him before they transformed and rolled out.

The ride was bumpy and slow and difficult, and the two didn’t waste energy speaking. All they needed to do was find Cade and survive to make it back to the base. Bumblebee had no idea if Optimus would want to go back and fight or if they would just have to leave it be. The Driller wasn’t like the Decepticons, it was much harder to fight and for as long as they knew it, seemed unkillable.

But the quiet, unpleasant ride, was interrupted by the noise of the Driller. They couldn’t see it but could easily hear it’s massive body flaying through the city.

“I know it’s not really the Autobot way but we need to ignore that and keep going,” Hot Shot said.
Bumblebee felt a sense of unease, “There’s no reason it will ignore us-”

His words were cut off by a terrible scream that sent a chilly shudder through Bumblebee’s circuits as he recognized who the scream belonged to.

“That was Optimus!” Hot Shot shouted, horrified.

“No, no, no, no,” Bumblebee veered sharply and shreded his tired as he hurled himself through the destroyed roads, the other Autobot right on his taillights.

But the road was soon blocked by a skyscraper that had fallen over their path and several other buildings. With a furious and terrified growl Bumblebee transformed mid-run and started to climb up the structure, aware of Hot Shot still right behind him.

He reached the top and let out a choking noise.

Shockwave stood atop the ruined building, his one optic gazing at something in the distance.

Bumblebee couldn’t hold his startled gasp back, “Shockwave.”

The Con’s large head quickly turned to look down at Bumblebee who still hung on the edge, Hot Shot climbed up to his side and his optics widened when he saw the purple Con standing in front of them.

“You fixed your vocal synthesizer,” Shockwave noted calmly.

“Yes,” Bumblebee hurried climbed up to stand, Hot Shot at his side. “And now I get to tell you I’m feeling particularly touchy about you stabbing me!”

“I assure you,” Shockwave said. “That when the time is right, I will make sure I do not miss my mark.”

His words had the Autobots pulling out their blasters, their banged up bodies tense and ready for more battle.

Shockwave was not bothered by their aggression, “Not is not that time.” He turned his gaze back to the destroyed city before them, unafraid by the two enemies at his back. He seemed to be waiting for something.

The world started to quake and Bumblebee and Hot Shot stumbled, just managing to keep themselves from falling off the shattered skyscraper.
The Driller broke out of the ground with a furious shriek, a white shape was clinging to its neck and in its jaws was a figure that made Bumblebee’s spark drop.

“Optimus!” Ignoring the enemy at his side Bumblebee hurried forward to try and get a better look. He couldn’t tell if his leader was alive in the jaws of the monster.

“You should not blame yourself for Prime’s inevitable demise,” Shockwave said calmly. Bumblebee turned toward him. “That is all any Autobot death is, inevitable.”

White hot fury burned in Bumblebee’s circuits, not just for his careless regard of Optimus’ life, not even for nearly murdering him. I’m going to rip that one optic out for what you did to Charlie…

But before he or Hot Shot could lunge at the Decepticon or rush to try and attack the Driller, a shadow fell over them and the two Autobots looked up.

Bumblebee had never met him face to face, but every horror story and Academy class analysis came back to him as he looked up at-who only could be Megatron.

The Decepticon leader, massive and hovering in the sky as if weightless, looked down at the three. His optics passed over Hot Shot with little interest, and almost did the same to Bumblebee. But at the last minute his gaze shot back and Bumblebee found himself staring into the optics of the most dangerous and evil Decepticon known to Cybertron.

“B-127,” Megatron breathed. The little yellow Autobot was almost flattered that the Con knew his name. “Of course I would find you here, what with my little pet wandering around.”

Charlie stared up at Thundercracker who looked surprised to have stumbled upon her.

“You’re actually here,” he said, his voice thoughtful. “Megatron told me that you would go where B-127 followed. I hate that he was right.”

Charlie tried to swallow, her feelings torn. She had relied on Thundercracker, not only as a protector but as a friend, he had helped keep her safe and sane when she was at the Decepticon base. But now-thanks Shockwave, Megatron, and herself-he didn’t remember her. She desperately needed him to remember her, she couldn’t help keep him safe if he was in the clutches of their enemies.

“Hey,” she struggled out the word, keeping her chin high and trying not to shake. “Long time, no see.”
The jet’s optics narrowed, the new blue pupils glowing. “You’re not talking about the time I nearly ripped B-127 in half, are you?”

Charlie shook her head, she felt sick at the memory. “No, we-we knew each before that.” She hesitated, then spoke with feeling heavy in her voice. “We were friends.”

Thundercracker looked away, mumbling something under his breath. If Charlie didn’t know better she could have sworn he was talking to someone she couldn’t see.

“You said were,” Thundercracker turned back to her. “We aren’t anymore.”

“We can be,” she was quick to assure. “I promise, I still want to be your friend. I’d still be if Shockwave hadn’t messed up your memories.”

Thundercracker flinched and reached his hand up to trace the edge of his head. But then he shot her an accusing glare that made her take a step back.

“How do you know that?” he snarled.

“Starscream told me,” she answered. “He-he was your friend too. Him and Skywarp. You don’t remember any of it?”

“I don’t remember anything,” he snapped. “All I have is feelings. And not to offend you,” he said snarkily. “But my emotions when I look at you and the yellow Autobot aren't exactly friendly or joyful.”

His words made Charlie’s heart squeeze painfully. “Things…happened. You were upset with me before you lost your memories. But I didn’t stop caring about you! I still care! Here, I’ll even prove it.” In the pocket that didn’t hold her new found charm Charlie reached her hand in and pulled out the diamond the Decepticon had given her, it felt like years ago.

Thundercracker gazed down at the stone, if he recognized it he didn’t show it. “What is that?”

“It’s a diamond,” she replied, willing him to remember anything. “You gave it to me, it was a gift. I kept it close ever since. Even after-after our fight.”

“Fight?” he echoed.

Charlie winced, maybe she shouldn’t have brought that up. “I can explain. I can explain everything, but you have to come with me. To the Autobots.”
“Come with you?” he said softly. He reached his hand out, his finger tips nearly grazing the diamond she still held out. Charlie felt her heart stop, silently she begged Thundercracker to listen to her, to take up the offer he had refused. To let them be friends again.

His finger tip touched the diamond, and the slowly his touch moved from the stone, to her arm. His eyes darkened and Charlie held back a shudder, but she let his fingers move across her arm, to her shoulder. His thumb touched her cheek, he was still warm.

Then in one quick moment he wrapped his fingers around her in a painful grip, her hands and the diamond digging into her chest. She let out an agonized gasp and stared at him with horrified eyes.

“I’ve been told recalling old memories of you would be a less than ideal plan,” Thundercracker hissed, his voice hard as the stone she clutched. “I’m willing to agree. You hurt me, I don’t know how but you did.”

“I know,” she sobbed, tears filling up her eyes. “And I’m sorry! But I can make it up to you I swear!”

He looked at her for a moment in silence, and then lifted his chin to rest directly below her chin. “Megatron wants you, if something happened to you I think he’d be upset. If I popped your head off right now, both he and B-127 would be very upset.” He smiled, “I like the thought of them suffering.”

For a moment a spark of fear made Charlie’s heart jumped. But then she took a breath, “But you won’t.”

He blinked again, clearly taken off guard by her calm tone. “I won’t?”

“Even without your memories, I know your spark is still the same,” Charlie said. “I know you won’t kill me, that’s not who you are.”

He scowled at her, and his fist tightened around her for a moment…then he let her go.

Charlie’s limbs were shaking as she looked up at him, “You’re not like the other Decepticons.”

“No, I’m not,” he agreed. “I am…” his eyes suddenly flashed with something she didn’t know. “I am so much more.” He tapped at the collar around his neck, “Which is why I’m so furious at being leashed to Megatron.” He spat the name out with venomous hate.

Charlie stepped forward, “Maybe I can help you? Or maybe Ratchet…”
“I’m not going to the Autobot base,” he said with finality, looking down at her with an intense haze of red and blue. “I don’t think you understood what I meant, Charlie.” He said her name with such emphasis. I’m not just more than the Decepticons, I am more than all the Cybertronians. And it’s all thanks to you.” He leaned forward, “I know it’s your blood that gave him these powers, made me more than what I was. You’re more than the other organics, I bet you’re even more than the Cybertronians as well.” He loomed over her, excitement and hunger dancing in his eyes. “We are better. And we could teach each other.”

His offer sounded too close to Megatron’s and it gave her a sense of foreboding. “How do you mean?”

“I have my doubts that you’d grow a new arm if I ripped one of yours off,” he pointed out. “And I can’t heal wounded Decepticons. I bet you have other abilities you’re hiding, and I definitely do.” He smirked knowingly and it gave Charlie the chills.

Once again he moved closer, his body heat radiating against her skin, his eyes deep with meaning. “You and I don’t need the Autobots or Decepticons, all we need is to get this collar off me and we can do whatever you want. I’ll gladly bring you the head of Megatron if that’s what you wish. I could give you…” his eyes roved over her body with a heated gaze, she knew exactly what that meant. “Whatever you want. You just have to come with me.”

His offer reminded her of the last time they spoke back when he helped her escape. She had asked him to come with her, he had wanted something she couldn’t give. And if she couldn’t give it to the Thundercracker who she had befriended, she couldn’t give it to this Thundercracker who didn’t even remember her.

And for the exact same reason.

“I won’t leave Bumblebee,” she said softly, but firmly.

Surprising her, Thundercracker’s hand lashed out and grabbed her diamond, pulling away from her and holding it up. “Then why keep this?!” Anger and pain made his voice crack. “I don’t even remember why this stupid rock is important, but I look at it and it hurts!” He snarled at her, “And you know that and you don’t care!”

“Thundercracker, please-” she begged.

“Why don’t you just throw it away,” he asked nastily. “I bet that’s what you did to me! And all because of your precious, little Bumblebee!”

If Charlie could think of anything to say to that she didn’t have a chance. A guttural roar and suddenly the Driller broke through the ground from behind the jet.

Optimus and Wheeljack still hanging off it. Thundercracker, distracted, whirled around to stare up
at it. Charlie took that moment to turn heel and bolt, leaving the diamond in Thundercracker’s grip.
“Where is she!?” Bumblebee snarled savagely. Behind him Shockwave’s optic narrowed thoughtfully.

“That is no longer your concern,” Megatron said smoothly. “But rest assured she will be taken care of. If I were you, I’d worry about your precious leader.”

Both Bumblebee and Hot Shot looked toward the Driller, their sparks aching to go to their leader’s aid. The former gave Megatron a venomous glare.

Megatron chuckled as he calmly landed at Shockwave’s side. “I am not cruel, go ahead. Go and see if you can save Optimus Prime.” His optics glittered with dark glee. “Or perish trying.”

Bumblebee and Hot Shot didn’t hesitate, leaving the two Decepticons behind.

They had just vanished out of sight when Thundercracker appeared, landing a few feet away from the two Cons.

Megatron gave his finest soldier a thorough look, “Did you find any trace of the AllSpark?”

Thundercracker met his gaze, “Nothing.”

Optimus could barely feel his leg anymore, only his continuous firing at the Driller’s head kept it from completing ripping his leg free. His energon pulled into its hungry maw which made it look even more frenzied.

He heard Wheeljack’s call: “Please hold on a little longer, Optimus! I’ll save you!” But the many stab wounds he gave the Driller didn’t seem to even face the creature.

Optimus was doing his best to hold on, but he was losing so much energon, the pain was making his thoughts fuzzy. And he knew that if lost consciousness that would be it. He couldn’t die yet, not while Megatron still lived, not when there was still Autobots and humans who needed him.

*I let the Autobots down when we lost Cybertron, I let the humans down when the Decepticons came to Earth. I have to make this right!*

He heard someone say his name and for a klik he was positive it was the Well of AllSparks, welcoming him home. But then he heard it again and was able to recognize the voice.
Looking over his shoulder he could make out Bumblebee and Hot Shot, alive and running toward the Driller, firing their blasters.

“Aim for it’s mouth!” Wheeljack shrieked. “Make it release Optimus!”

The two soldiers obeyed, firing well-aimed shots that missed Optimus and slammed into the Driller’s teeth.

This irritated the creature, it shook its head, rattling Optimus as it did so, then turned it’s attention on the two soldiers. It arced its long body, looking ready to dive back underground—the Autobot leader knew he wouldn’t survive that ordeal again. Getting his blaster ready he waited for the perfect moment, the Driller lurched downward, opening its maw, ready to crunch through cement and rock—and just as it opening its mouth Optimus aimed a single blast into it.

The bullet hit its mark and the Driller dropped him as it let out a screech of pain, smoke slipping out of its teeth.

Bumblebee and Hot Shot were ready, arms open to catch their leader. The force of the fall making all three slam into the ground.

Hot Shot crawled out from under Optimus and examined his leg, “Oh, Optimus…” The limb was hanging on by a few wires, sparks and energon leaking. There was no way for Optimus to stand up, no way for him to escape the Driller.

He looked to Bumblebee, “Charlie is here, find her and Cade and get back to the base.”

Bumblebee jolted in place at the news, but quickly shook his head, “We’re not leaving you, Optimus.”

“Especially not since Megatron and Shockwave are a few yards away, enjoying the show,” Hot Shot added.

The fact that his nemesis was near had Optimus forcing down a bolt of of fear. Now was not the time to panic.

“I’ll find Charlie and Cade,” Bumblebee reassured, “And I’ll get them somewhere safe. But then I’m coming right back, we’re not abandoning you Optimus.”

“I can barely move,” the leader replied, hoping his voice emphasized how reckless it was to stay by him.
Just then Wheeljack was slammed to the ground a few feet away. He scrambled up, ignoring the dents and scratches across his body. “A little help here?!” He jumped back, just barely missing the Driller’s gaping mouth.

“Excuse me,” Hot Shot said to Optimus and Bumblebee. “I’m going to go do something crazy.” He ran off before either Bots could stop him, grabbing onto the Driller’s back and holding tight while the creature flailed around.

“You slag-head!” Bumblebee yelled at his friend before jumping to his feet and placing himself between Optimus and the Driller.

Switching from blade and blaster Wheeljack fired several shots at the creature’s belly. The Driller moved to try and bite at the scientist but Wheeljack was faster than expected, managing to dodge out of the way as it burrowed its head into the ground.

Hot Shot used the distraction to climb up it’s long, spiky back. Optimus wounded body was tensed as he watched the Autobot, just one quick movement from the Driller would send Hot Shot flying. But then Hot Shot reached the head, firing several shots as it reared its head back and tried to bite at Hot Shot. The red Autobot stumbled and flailed, just able to grab at one of the spikes on its back before he fell to the ground. The creature shrieked and suddenly threw its body into the ground, Wheeljack vanishing in a cloud of dust and rock.

Bumblebee crouched over Optimus, shielding his leader from the rock and debris.

“Don’t worry about me,” Optimus insisted to his comrade. “Go and help the others.”

Bumblebee looked up at him with a torn, sorrowful expression in his optics. “Don’t make me leave you again.”

Optimus flinched, remembering the day he had sent Bumblebee on a scouting mission that ended up with them discovering Earth in ruin. The scout had thought he’d never see his allies again.

But he still insisted, “I am no use.” Blue liquid pooled around him, his body felt incredibly heavy and his vision was blurring.

He could make out the red shape of Hot Shot stumbling toward them. “Yeah, okay,” he said, voice tight with pain. “I’ve had better ideas than that…”

“Both of you,” it was getting harder for Optimus to speak. “Go, find Wheeljack…help him…”

The two young Autobots exchanged a look, as if wondering if they should listen to their leader.
Optimus was about to say that was a *direct order*, when the Driller screeched.

It threw its body back up, a burning, smoldering spot on its stomach, bits of red hot metal falling off it’s stomach.

In its shadow Wheeljack lay on the ground, his body shaking and his arm holding his blow torch that was reserved for his experiments and projects.

“Wheeljack!” Bumblebee yelled out toward him. “Are you alright?”

The Autobot slowly turned his head to look at Bumblebee, “OF COURSE I’M NOT ALRIGHT!!!”

Charlie has left the building where she had run into Thundercracker and ended up standing in the middle of the road, watching the Driller, yards away, move around as Wheeljack and Optimus fired at it. She felt sick with helplessness as she watched, not knowing what she could possibly do to stop something so massive and unrelenting.

“Charlie!”

She turned around to see the welcomed sight of Alexis and Cade, hiding behind the mounds of rubble a few feet away.

“Why do you insist on hiding out in the open where any crazy robot can see you?” Alexis demanded as Charlie rushed over to them.

“Sorry, I was…” she hesitated, her chest still hurt from her encounter with Thundercracker. And that wasn’t something she wanted to talk about with a girl she just met, and definitely not when her friends were getting thrown away like toys. “I was trying to figure out how to help Optimus and Wheeljack. The Driller has got them.”

“The Driller?” the two echoed before the ground shook beneath them as the worm collided with the ground.

“That thing,” Charlie explained, running past them to peer out.

She looked up just in time to see Optimus fire a shot into the Driller’s mouth, the creature dropping the Autobot to the ground.

Alexis and Cade grabbed Charlie’s arms before she could run toward the Autobot leader.
“He needs me!” Charlie cried, seeing the bleeding wound on the leader’s leg. “I have to help him!”

“He’s gonna need you to stay out of the way!” Cade growled, thanks to his injury he was practically leaning against Charlie. She would have escaped and ran to Optimus if it wasn’t for Alexis’ iron grip.

“I’m sure this Optimus wouldn’t want you to get crushed by the worm,” Alexis insisted. “Which is exactly what’ll happen if you run out there.”

Charlie turned back to watch the fight, only to see familiar red and yellow cars rushing toward the battle.

“Bee!” she yelled out, nearly breaking out of Cade’s and Alexis’ grip. Joy made her heart hop in her chest. He was okay! He was alive and heading straight for the Driller.

The three Decepticons moved in for a closer look, making sure to keep out of sight of the Autobots, not that they had the time to come after them.

Megatron watched with quiet, triumphant, glee as Optimus was thrown to the ground. His old foe had nothing to resort to but his pathetic followers shielding his now worthless body. A part of Megatron almost felt bad for the Cybertronian that had ruined his plans time and time again. Almost.

But really, becoming scrap and rusting away on this waste of a planet was the perfect way for Optimus Prime to go.

But still, he thought smugly, looking around. When I get to building much better cities…maybe I’ll set up a shrine: The day the Decepticons won the war. He glared down at his enemies. It was very easy.

“I can go down there and finish them,” Thundercracker offered, his optics directly on B-127. Intense dislike burned in his gaze.

“Don’t waste your energy,” Megatron replied. “Shockwave’s Driller will do the work for us.”

Shockwave was silent, watching the fight below. His optic narrowed when the Driller threw its body on top of the scientist, Wheeljack. Only for it to screech and throw its body back up, Megatron noticed the new wound on its belly. But his gaze slipped away from the Driller and to an area yards away from the battle.

His smile widened, “There you are.”
Bumblebee, leaving Optimus with Hot Shot, raced over to Wheeljack’s side. He helped the shaking Autobot back to his feet, their optics up on the Driller as it shook its head, like that would heal the melted wound on its stomach.

“Looks like you did some damage,” Bumblebee pointed out. “Congratulations!”

Wheeljack leaned heavily against Bumblebee, “I wish I could appreciate the victory. But I feel like a pancake.”

“What’s a pancake?”

“An Earth thing, I’ll explain later.” He looked over to Optimus, “Take me over there.”

Bumblebee obeyed, reaching Optimus and Hot Shot just as the Driller collected itself and turned toward them, its metal tentacles reaching out, ready to lash out at them.

Just then an all too familiar scream reached the scout’s audio receptors.

He turned to see, yards away, Megatron landing onto the ground. His red optics on three small shapes at his feet.

“Charlie!” he screeched and transformed into his car mode—rushing toward them as fast as his shredded wheels. “Cover me!” he called to the allies behind him.

The Driller snarled at Bumblebee, and would have lunged at him if not for the blasts of ammo Hot Shot and Wheeljack fired at it, distracting it from its small yellow prey.

Charlie, Cade, and the other human bolted through the nearest doorway of a skeletal building as Megatron reached for them.

“Keep your filthy servos away from her!”

Megatron turned around just as Bumblebee slammed into his torso, the impact making them both fall to the ground.

Megatron slammed his arm into Bumblebee, his greater strength sending the Bot flying across the ground.

“Bold,” the Decepticon growled as he stood up and turned to Bumblebee. “But very, very stupid.”
The Autobot rose to his feet, ignoring the sting of the Con’s hit. “Oh, I don’t know,” he bluffed. “From where I’m standing I have you right where I want you.”

“From where I’m standing,” Megatron said. “I can barely see you from all the way down there.”

Bumblebee snorted and got his blasters ready, ignoring the quake of fear in his spark as he squared up against a Decepticon that even Optimus couldn’t beat.

Thundercracker had taken a step forward when he saw Megatron go for his prey. *Friend-enemy-deserter-Charlie*. He had no idea what he had planned to do but he as brought to a halt when a voice snarled in his head.

_Autobots…base…danger…help._

Thundercracker’s optics narrowed. “Blitzwing…”

Shockwave turned to him upon hearing him speak. “What was that?”

The jet looked to Shockwave, “We have a new problem.”

Charlie and Alexis practically carried Cade up to the top floor of the building, the floor creaking under them as they placed him down.

“We can’t stay here long,” Alexis told Charlie. “This building is going to fall with that Driller moving around outside.”

But Charlie wasn’t listening, she had moved to look outside. Bumblebee was grappling with Megatron, and though she knew he was giving his all he was already wounded and wasn’t standing a chance against the much larger Con.

And on the other side of the street the Driller was facing up against the other Bots, Hot Shot firing at the creature with a panicked expression. Wheeljack trying to carry Optimus to safety.

*I have to help them*, Charlie looked at her hands, trying to run through her mind exactly how she had summoned the force field earlier-and how she could summon two at the same time.

Heart in her throat Charlie looked up. Megatron had pinned Bumblebee under his foot, his blade raised. The Driller knocked Hot Shot out of the way with one of its tentacles and lunged its fangs toward Optimus.
Charlie threw her hands out and thought one word: *Protect.*
Chapter 69

Protect.

Protect.

Protect.

Charlie’s mind, fuzzy with terror, could barely concentrate. Her eyes going between Bumblebee and Optimus and willing two force fields to appear at the same time.

She felt her arms suddenly vibrate and her eyes went to Megatron and Bumblebee. Just before the Con’s blade decapitaed Bumblebee blue energy flashed between the two, just for a moment. But in that moment the blade sliced into the energy and blue electricity sliced up into Megatron, throwing the Con back with a pained and enraged roar.

At the same time another energy field appeared in front of Optimus and Wheeljack, again for just a moment, but long enough for the Driller to slam it’s face into it.

The same blue electricity zapped its face, making the creature rear its head back with a painful howl, it’s head and teeth blackened from the energy.

Charlie, her arms still held up, felt her jaw drop. “What the h-”

“What THE HELL!!!” Cade’s loud voice nearly made her jump out of her skin. Behind her he was staring at her with bulging eyes and a wide smile, Alexis looked as if she believed she had lost her mind.

“When did you get force fields powers!?” the man demanded, sounding like her little brother.

Charlie felt a shaky smile turn up her lips and she turned around. Bumblebee was staring at her with shock, behind him Megatron was slowly rising to his feet, his arm sizzling. She looked to Optimus and the other Autobots who all stared at her with the same awed shock as Bumblebee.

Then she heard a wickedly joyous laugh.

Moving her eyes up Charlie went rigid when she saw Thundercracker and Shockwave watched the fight from above. The laugh had come from the jet, he was looking at Charlie with a smile and it looked like he mouthed the word: “Spectacular.”

“Lord Megatron,” Shockwave spoke up, loud enough for them all to hear. “We have just been
informed that one of our bases is being attacked."

Megatron, who had been moving back toward Bumblebee, came to a stop and looked up at his scientist. For the first time Charlie saw the Decepticon look torn.

Suddenly arms wrapped around her waist and she was yanked out of sight of the Cybertronians.

Alexis had pulled her into a corner with Cade, both of them wrapping their arms around her as if they expected her to slither out of their grip.

“I have no idea what’s going on,” Alexis breathed. “But I think it’s best of that big gray one doesn’t see you.”

Charlie agreed, and the three humans waited with held breath and open ears.

"Go, Bumblebee willed Megatron, his body braced. Yeah, he didn’t want his allies at this base attack to be killed—but they could go to them. They would. But first Optimus had to be healed, Charlie secure, and the Driller dead. And they couldn’t do that with Megatron here.

The Decepticon looked to where Charlie had stood and Bumblebee was ready to lung at him again. But the girl had vanished out of sight and he relaxed, ever so slightly.

Megatron scowled, uncertainty battling in his optics and once again Bumblebee willed him to go on. You don’t need her, you have Thundercracker. He could feel the jet’s gaze burning into his back, but the Con didn’t leave Shockwave’s side.

Finally Megatron looked at Bumblebee, then to Optimus, still in the shadow of the Driller which was regaining its composure. He smirked, “Dispose of them.”

The three Decepticons transformed and were gone as quickly as they had arrived, leaving the Autobots which the Driller which was now really, really angry.

“Bumblebee, to me!” Optimus suddenly called, his voice despite slurred with exhaustion, still held authority.

The yellow Autobot glanced to the building where Charlie had disappeared and it took everything in him not to go and check on her. She can handle herself, he reminded himself hurried to his leader’s side.

“I have an idea on how to take down the Driller,” Optimus said when Bumblebee and Hot Shot returned to his side. “But it’ll be dangerous.”
“Just tell us what to do, Optimus,” Hot Shot said, his voice hard with determination.

With the plan explained, Hot Shot ran several steps away before turning around and firing a shot at the Driller’s smoking head. It let out a growl and turned on him.

“Over here, scar face! Come get me!” he called. With one more shot he whirled around and transformed, driving away from the Driller.

The worm snarled and moved to go after him, the other three Autobots in its way. Wheeljack quickly blasted at it, and the wounded Driller lifted its body, its stomach arcing over the three.

Optimus’ blade slipped out of his wrist, unable to lift it himself. “Bumblebee, now!”

The scout grabbed his leader’s arm and lifted the blade just in time for it to pierce through the melted wound left by Wheeljack. Keeping Optimus’ arm steady Bumblebee watched as the blade sliced through the metal stomach of the Driller, amber liquid, circuits, gears, pooling out of the laceration.

The Driller let out a long low howl and Wheeljack knocked Bee and Optimus out of the way as its body fell to the ground, still and dead.

There was a heavy moment of silence as Hot Shot drove back to his comrades and the four stared at the corpse. Bumblebee half-expected it to rise up and attack them again, to lay even more waste onto this city. But it didn’t move, not once.

“We did it…” Hot Shot breathed. “WE DID IT!” He threw his arms up into the air in excitement, his wounds forgotten. Wheeljack hurried over and wrapped his arms around the red Autobot, the two friends sharing a laughing hug.

Bumblebee looked to Optimus, his optics sparkling. The leader nodded, “Good job, Bumblebee. You can go find Charlie now.”

With another nod Bumblebee raced away to where he had left Charlie, his spark doing a flip when he saw her and Cade and the new human appearing where he last saw them.

“Bee, did you see that?” Charlie gushed. She was smiling and the sight was a welcome surprise.

“I have force fields,” she said, “And they exploded and sent Megatron flying!”

Surprising Bumblebee she leaped and he was quick to catch her. Her arms were immediately
wrapped around his neck and his spark pulsed in excitement and he was quick to return the embrace, spinning around from the catch.

“I did!” he replied, just as brightly. “That was amazing!”

“Not as amazing as what you guys just did!” she replied as Wheeljack walked over.

He pushed himself into the hug nearly making Bumblebee fall when he nearly lost his footing. “So glad you two are safe,” he said with a tired smile.

“Oh, hang on Wheeljack,” Charlie said as Bumblebee placed her down to better hold up his friend. “I’ll get you fixed up.”

“Don’t worry about me,” the scientist assured, resting his head on Bumblebee’s shoulder. “I’m just flattened. Go fix, Optimus.”

“Optimus!” Charlie turned on her heel and ran off to the leader who sat where Bee had left him.

While that happened Bumblebee turned to Cade and the new human who had taken the stairs back to the ground floor to walk outside.

He knelt in front of them and the girl took a hestiant step back, Cade’s arm over her shoulder.

“Take me to the giant worm thing, Alexis,” Cade said, pointing to the Driller’s body. “I call dibs.”

“You can’t call dibs on something you can’t even move,” Alexis said with annoyance.

“Are you okay, Cade?” Bumblebee asked, looking at the cloth that was wrapped around his leg.

“I’m right as rain, Bee bud,” Cade smiled at him, though the grin was edged with pain.

“He’s right-handed,” the girl said with a roll of optics.

Bumblebee had no idea what that had to do with anything so instead he offered his hand, “Hi, I’m Bumblebee.”

“Oh, um,” she hesitantly took his hand, “I’m Alexis, nice to meet you.”

“I’m Wheeljack,” the other Autobot greeted, sitting down. “Have you lived here long, Miss
“Since the-” she looked at Cade, “Decepticons?” When he nodded she continued, “I’ve been here since the Decepticons arrived.”

“And you survived the Driller,” Wheeljack noted. “Then you have my respect.” He fell on his back.

A moment later Optimus and Hot Shot, now fully healed, came to the group with Charlie walking between them.

“I am afraid we can’t rest,” Optimus told the two. “We must go the base our Autobots are attacking, they will be no match for Megatron.”

“We won’t be either, Optimus,” Wheeljack bemoaned while Charlie placed a healing hand on his arm.

Optimus looked down at him, “You will take the humans back to our base and gather reinforcements. We will hold Megatron off until you get come to us.” He looked over to the body of the Driller, “I think now is the perfect time to not underestimate our abilities.”

“There are survivors not far from here,” Alexis spoke up, looking unnerved to be addressing Optimus. “I need to get them out of here, too.”

Optimus nodded, “Wheeljack will help you get them to safety. Cade and Charlie will assist to.”

“No,” Charlie looked up, “I’m going with you.”

Bumblebee blinked, surprised to see her defy Optimus and be so willing to go where she knew Megatron and Thundercracker were. But then he saw the determination in her optics, something that had been missing for ages, and affection warmed his spark chamber.

Optimus looked down at her, his expression unbreakable as Charlie refused to break from his gaze. And then he nodded, “Very well. But Cade will have to go back to the Autobot base, before he looses that leg.”

The man sighed, “Sally is gonna kill me.”

“Hurry and heal Bumblebee,” Optimus told Charlie, “We will go and prepare the ground bridge.”

The group left Bumblebee with Charlie and he suddenly felt awkward. The last time they had been
alone it had…not ended well.

But he knelt down and offered his banged up hand to Charlie. However instead of reaching out to him she was fishing into her pocket.

“Hold on,” she said. “I got you something.”

She pulled out a yellow and black shape and held it up to him. He narrowed his optics at the round shape, it looked familiar he couldn’t recall what it was…

“It’s a bumblebee charm,” Charlie explained after a moment. “I found it in a car and thought…well, I wanted to give you a gift.” She looked away and blushed. “I’m sorry, I’ve been an awful friend lately. And I mean you don’t have to take this charm if you don’t want it I just thought you might—” she trailed off when Bee reached down and plucked the charm from her hand.

“Thank you,” he replied warmly. “I love it.” Sure he still didn’t know what made him similar to these little creatures but it was a gift from Charlie, and for that reason he’d treasure it.

Charlie smiled up at him, her optics shining and Bumblebee felt woozy with tenderness. “Here, then, let me try something.” She climbed up onto his lap, gently took the charm back and reached her hands up over his head. Her entire body was pressed against him and it reminded Bumblebee of the night at the cabin, his circuitry becoming burning hot.

“There,” she said after a moment. “What do you think?”

Bumblebee looked up and saw the charm hanging from one of his annetenna, the sight made a bubble of mirth escape from him. He chuckled, “I like it.”

She gazed down at him with that old Charlie smile that he had yearned for, for so long. “Good, I’m glad. Now let’s get you fixed up.”
The Decepticon base was on the face of a mountain.

Charlie had no idea where exactly, she just knew that one minute she was standing in the flattened ruins of New York, and the next she was stepping through the ground bridge and nearly toppling down a rocky mountain side.

Large gray pillars as far as her eye could see, the sky above matching with stormy gray clouds.

But she only had a moment to take in her surroundings before the ear breaking sound of battle reached her.

Standing at Bumblebee’s side she looked down and saw, scattered across the mountain, Autobots and Decepticons locked in vicious battle. The rocks under them stained with blue, shrieks of pain and gun fire splitting the air, and from this distance Charlie couldn’t tell who was friend and who was a Con.

“I don’t see Megatron,” Hot Shot observed, his blue eyes scanning the fighting below. “How in Primus’ name did he even know about this fight? It was a random attack.”

“There’s no time to wonder about that now,” Optimus replied, his own eyes on his battling soldiers. “We need to make sure the tide of battle is in our favor before he arrives.” He looked to Hot Shot, “You and I will join the fighting.”

“What about me?” Bumblebee spoke up.

“And me!” Charlie added from below. She had wasted too much time moping about she was ready to once again play her part in this war.

Optimus pointed down and Charlie followed to see a structure laid out against the mountain, almost perfectly hidden under outcroppings and camouflaged by similar gray colors. That could only be the Decepticon base.

“Bumblebee, I need you to destroy the base. Take Charlie with you and make sure that there are no Autobots still inside.”

“You can count on me, Optimus,” Bumblebee nodded. He held out his arm to Charlie who climbed up into his grip. The four parted ways, Optimus and Hot Shot rushing down into the fray, cannons already blasting.

Bumblebee kept himself at the edge of battle, making sure to keep himself between Charlie and the crossfire.

Just before they rounded the corner to get to the front of the base Bumblebee sharply pulled back, Charlie having to hold tightly to his arm to keep from falling to the ground.

“There’s two guards,” he breathed in her ear.

The two peered around the base’s corner to see two Cons standing in front of an open entrance way. They didn’t notice Bee or Charlie, their attention on the fighting below them as they fired at
the distracted Autobots. Charlie felt her gut boil with anger, some fair fight.

Then again…maybe a fair fight wasn’t the way to beat the Decepticons.

“I got an idea,” she whispered to her friend. “Put me down.”

Bumblebee gave her a wary look but after a moment’s hesitation gently placed her on the ground.

Steadying her nerves and flexing her arms she kept her back to the base, slowly making her way to the entrance. Glancing back at Bumblebee she saw he was looking at her with a confused and frightened expression, but she open placed a finger to her lips. Stealth was the key in this.

She was able to step behind the Cons, the entrance sending cool air against her back. But she didn’t rush inside, instead her attention on the backs of the two Cons who still had their attention on the battling below.

Her mind replaying the moment she shielded Bee and Optimus, she urged the energy to rush through her arms and hit the back of of the two robots. The plan being to send them flying from the impact and allowing Bumblebee to hurry inside with her.

She waited…and waited…but nothing happened.

Charlie looked at her hands, confusion lowering her brow before she looked back at Bumblebee. He looked just as confused as her but then his eyes moved above her and widened in panic.

Charlie didn’t have to hear the grunt of surprise before she bolted inside, just barely avoiding the Decepticon hand that lunged at her.

She looked over her shoulder, keeping her feet moving as the Con snarled at her. His companion turned around but was quickly knocked down as Bumblebee, now in car mode, slammed into the back of his knees, sending him sprawling. He tackled the other con, stunning him momentarily before driving into the base.

Easily reaching Charlie’s side he popped a door open for her to jump in. As soon as she slammed the door shut he put on a burst of speed, skirting around tight corners in order to lose the two Cons.

“I gotta admit,” he spoke up, his voice a little strained. “You’ve had better ideas.”

“Fair,” she panted as she collected her breath. She examined her hand again. “I wanted to hit them with a force field like I did with Megatron, but it didn’t work.”

“Any idea why?”

“No,” she frowned. “And what a perfect time to be needing a manual.”

With another sharp turn Charlie nearly hit the dashboard as Bumblebee skidded to a sudden and awkward stop. Bracing her hands on the wheel she looked up to see Epps and Lennox, the former having fallen onto his tail bone, Bumblebee having come too close to catch him.

“What are you two doing here?” Charlie pushed open the door to hurry to their side.

Epps gave her a look. “What are you doing here?” The question made her flinch, but Charlie wasn’t surprised by the question.

“I’m here to help,” Charlie replied, helping Epps pull Lennox to his feet. She then noticed the haunted look in the two soldiers’ eyes. “What happened?”
“There’s an army base a couple of yards down the mountains,” Lennox began. “Mirage found out when he scoped the place. Ironhide let us come along but the numbers doubled and they were caught off guard. We had to stay with Jazz while he blew up the base.”

“Where is he?” Bumblebee asked, transforming into robot mode and looking around as if he expected the Autobot to appear out of nowhere.

“He told us to hide when some Decepticons jumped him,” Epps explained. “He got chased back outside.”

“We found a room,” Lennox said numbly. “We went into the first room we could when he told us to hide and we…we found what was left of the soldiers from the base.”

Charlie felt her gut twist in sympathy. After staying at the Farm, she didn’t need to hear the details. “I’m sorry. But we can’t stay here, the Cons will find us.”

“We’re going to burn this entire base to the ground,” Bumblebee said, his voice turning hard.

He turned around as if to move before suddenly whirling back around and throwing his body over the three humans just as the blast of a laser flew over them, just missing Bumblebee.

Heart pounding Charlie looked over his elbow to see the two Decepticons from the entrance, looking furious.

“Think you could just waltz in like you own the place, pipsqueak?” the one that had nearly grabbed Charlie, seethed, his blaster aimed at Bee’s head.

“I’ll admit,” Bumblebee said breezily, keeping himself between the three humans and two Cons. “I thought it be a bit tougher. You Cons are always surprising me with your lack of competence.”

As soon as Bumblebee had pushed them down Charlie had been wracking her brain trying to figure out how to summon her force fields again. And looked at the Cons’ absolutely livid expressions, figuring it out right away would have been incredibly helpful.

But she didn’t get a chance to strategize a plan, the first con shot a blast at Bee. She felt the yellow Autobot tense up, ready to take the blow to keep the humans from being harmed.

Much like last time Charlie threw her hand out—protect protect protect—and this time blue energy encircled the four friends. The blast of energy slammed into the shield before being deflected and hitting the wall. A hole appeared when the smoke settled, wires pooled out.

Lennox and Epps let out exclamations of shock, while Bumblebee looked at her with a delighted expression.

“What the-” the Cons, visibly shaken, glanced at each other. It looked like neither knew what to do in this situations.

But a thought had entered Charlie’s head and she wanted to test it out. She focused on the Cons, focused on the fact they wanted to harm Bumblebee, on the fact they’ve known doubt harmed the Autobots. With a single thought—push—the force field expanded, slamming into the Cons who were thrown across the room, smoke rising from their torsos.

“I figured it out!” Charlie exclaimed happily. She couldn’t just summon this power without reason, she needed to be focused on protecting someone for it to manifest.
But before she could explain to Bumblebee the two Cons picked themselves up and rushed off, clearly not willing to fight when they had no idea what their enemies were capable of.

“We should get down to the army base,” Epps suddenly spoke up. The attack seemed to have shaken the two from the horrors they had witnessed, and were ready to get back into the action. He hurried a few steps ahead of them, “There might still be weapons in there we can use. It’s not like the Decepticons had any use for them.”

“And from last we look the Autobots are going to need all the help we can get,” Lennox added.

“It’s worth a look,” Bumblebee agreed, standing up. “But first.” He flicked his wrist and his stinger replaced his hand, buzzing with energy. His blue eyes turned to the sparking hole in the walls, wires falling out like human’s intestines. “We set this base ablaze.”

Chapter End Notes

You guys waited so long for a chapter that really isn’t that great, I apologize.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Optimus slammed his foot into the Decepticon, kicking him off Arcee and sending him rolling down the rocky mountain terrain.

“Are you alright, Arcee?” he asked as he helped her to her feet. His optics narrowed in on her torso, she hadn’t chosen to rest and recover from the wound. At least it hadn’t reopened.

“I’ll be fine,” Arcee said, a little breathless. She looked to where Hot Shot had jumped between two Cons that Ironhide had been fighting solo. She looked back at her leader, “What are you doing here?”

Optimus straightened his spine, bracing himself for the battle that would soon arrive. “Megatron is coming.”

If the words gave Arcee any sense of fear she did not show it, her optics narrowing. “He’ll probably bring fresh soldiers.”

“Wheeljack is getting reinforcements,” he assured her.

“Then let’s do what we can until they arrive.” With another nod at Optimus she turned on her heel and ran down into the fray.

Hot Shot returned to his side. Ironhide and the two Cons had vanished but Optimus could make out his Autobot’s distinct red shape a few yards away.

Optimus turned to speak but the earth under them suddenly rocked. The two Autobots looked over to the Decepticon base to see two Cons flying off as smoke started to rise into the air. A moment later a familiar yellow car rushed out of the building, flames licking after them but not straying from the base.

Well done, Bumblebee.

Hot Shot smirked up at Optimus before his optics looked past his shoulder and terror sparked his gaze.

The Autobot leader whirled around just as an air-splitting shriek reached his audio receptors.

Optimus’ spark dropped as he saw Jazz pinned to the ground by Blitzwing and Thrust, the former tearing into him. Any Autobots nearby could not reach their comrade, the other Cons fending them off.

Optimus lunged foward, fury burning his body. Hot Shot was after him, “Be careful, Prime!”

Oh he knew, Bumblebee had told him about the death of these two Cons. They were just like Blackout and Dropkick. He knew they were dangerous, but he wasn’t going to let them kill his Autobots.

Optimus slammed his shoulder into Blitzwing with a battle cry, sending them both tumbling across the mountain, away from Jazz. From the corner of his optic Optimus saw Hot Shot attack Thrust, jumping onto the jet’s back.
But then Blitzwing was attacking Optimus, scratching and stabbing at him. Optimus was able to hold him back, grabbing his neck and slamming him into the ground, bits of shard flying from the impact.

Pain flashed in Blitzwing’s optics and he lashed out like a cornered creature.

Optimus could remember seeing Blitzwing in battle back on Cybertron. He had considered him a cunning soldier, he wouldn’t have lashed out like this before. And Optimus let himself have the smallest amount of grief for his enemy, he knew Megatron would not. Knowing the loyalty and dedication that the Autobots had to him, Optimus could never imagine himself doing what Megatron had done to his soldiers.

While he was distracted Blitzwing slammed his heel into Optimus’ torso, the sharp pain making Prime lose his grip, allowing the Con to twist out of the Autobot’s grip, kicking Optimus to the ground.

It was only his fast reflexes that kept a blade from piercing Optimus’ head, he jumped back and sent a blast at Blitzwing, the strength of the shot sending Blitzwing sprawling.

Optimus took the moment to glance over at Hot Shot, just in time to see him slip behind Thrust and stab a black right through his chest, the tip piercing through the front.

Optimus saw red and blue liquid dripping from the blade tip and watched as Thrust’s empty optics grew black and his body went limp.

Hot Shot yanked his weapon out of Thrust and watched in silence shock as Thrust dropped to his knees before the rest of his body fell to the ground.

There was a tense second as the two Autobots ignored the rest of the battle and waited for Thrust to rise to his feet and attack again. But he didn’t.

The two Autobots exchanged looks, the same thought going through their heads: He’s dead…They can be killed!

With this new revelation Optimus turned back to Blitzwing, bracing himself for the jet to either attack him or Hot Shot.

But the Con was standing, stock still, his optics on Thrust. And then, quiet, he slowly turned his head back to Optimus. The Autobot was startled by the sudden intelligence now gleaming in his optics.

He stepped toward Optimus, the Autobot getting his cannon ready.

But then Blitzwing spoke, “You’re already here.”

Hot Shot flinched and took a step back. Optimus was equally thrown by the words. There was no mistaking it, that wasn’t Blitzwing’s voice that came from the Con’s mouth. It was Thundercracker’s.

Blitzwing looked back at slain jet at his feet. “And you killed Thrust. He’s not going to be happy about that.”

He…

Blitzwing smirked before rushing into the air, landing on a large rock formation that towered over
the battle.

“If I could have everyone’s attention!” Thundercracker’s voice echoed out into the crowd.

Despite how loud the battle was they all somehow heard him, stopping the fight to look up. Optimus didn’t miss how a few of the Decepticons flinched or scowled when they looked up at Blitzwing’s body.

“You’ve all fought well,” Blitzwing/Thundercracker congratulated, his voice thick with arrogance. “But I think it’s time this battle comes to an end.”

As soon as the words left his mouth a large ground bridge, several yards above, appeared.

Stepping out onto the mountain was Megatron, large and imposing. Following him was Shockwave and Thundercracker, and if that wasn’t threatening enough, Optimus’ optics widened as several Decepticon soldiers stepped out to stand before behind their leader.

Megatron immediately found Optimus in the crowd and their optics locked. He smirked and it almost felt like he spoke.

*You can’t run away this time, Prime.*

Optimus braced himself. *There would be no more running.*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a double fuck you to Thrust!
Chapter 72

Much of the military base was an absolute wreck, not that Bumblebee expected it to be nice and clean.

Rubble, destroyed furniture, and other Earth things the Autobot didn’t recognize covered the floor of the base.

Bumblebee stayed at the entrance while Charlie and the soldiers crawled over the debris, looking for anything useful. Bumblebee’s circuits were shaking and he started to pace, his body restless. He hated hearing the fighting outside and not being able to join. He looked to Charlie as she helped Epps lift a piece of concrete so Lennox could search underneath. Bumblebee reminded himself the humans needed him more than Optimus. But the fact did little to ease his nerves. He knew Megatron would be here soon, along with Shockwave and Thundercracker and Primus knew who else. Optimus was a formidable fighter, and Bumblebee believed he could fight Megatron. But he also believed Megatron would not agree to a one on one battle. Why would he when he had the undead to do his bidding?

He looked over to Charlie again, reminding himself that when those three do show up-he had to stay at Charlie’s side.

“Holy shit, no way!” Epps suddenly cried out. He was pushing large pieces of trash off some box-shaped vehicle, a long nozzle stretching out from its side.

“Is that a tank!” Charlie gasped.

“Oh hell yes it’s a tank!” Lennox cheered, hurrying over to examine it along with Epps.

Charlie turned to Bumblebee as the robot walked forward to get a better look at it. “Tanks are weapons,” Charlie explained.

“Just what we need,” Bumblebee replied. The tank looked tough, while it wouldn’t be impossible for a Con to destroy it, it was armor that would help protect the humans.

“Don’t get too excited,” Epps spoke up, opening the hatch and jumping down. “Oh thank God, it’s empty. Anyway we’d need to find some ammo for it, otherwise all we can do is try and run over a Con with it.”

Lennox looked around the wrecked base, “There’s gotta be something in here we can use.” He jumped down and started to rummage.

Bumblebee looked around, feeling like they wouldn’t have time to thoroughly explore the room. And the longer they stayed in one place the greater their chances in being found by Decepticons.

Suddenly Bumblebee stopped, something was wrong.

Charlie snapped her head around to look at the entrance, “It’s quiet.”

That’s what it was. The fighting had stopped, he had been so used to it as background noise he hadn’t even realized…

With Charlie behind him Bumblebee bolted outside, only to stop and see all of the Cybertronians had stopped battling and were looking up at something.
Bumblebee followed their optics and started when he saw Blitzwing standing on a large rock. The Autobot lifted his hand and warily rubbed his throat.

Charlie rushed outside to him, “What’s going-”

Her question came to a halt when a ground bridge suddenly appeared several yards atop the mountain. The two stared in silent horror as several Decepticons, led by Megatron, stepped out of the bridge to leer down at the groups below.

Bumblebee looked to the newly arrived Cons and then to the battle that once again picked up. The Autobots were outnumbered. Wheeljack hadn’t arrived yet. Would they last until then?

Just as the newly arrived Cons raced down to join the fray Charlie suddenly let out a cry of fright and pressed herself against his leg.

Bumblebee sharply turned and looked up, his body going rigid.

A Decepticon-Barricade-sat atop the military base.

His red optics lazily looked over them. “B-127,” he greeted coolly. “I’ve heard you’ve got into some crazy stuff.”

His gaze went down to Charlie, “Is that her?”

Bumblebee immediately stepped forward, putting himself between Charlie and the Con. He noticed a series of metal chains wrapped around his wrist. Small chains that had been tied together, tags with human markings decorating it.

Charlie must have been looking at it too because Barricade, not taking his optics off her, lifting his hand for them to see. “Like my little trophies? Got em from some human soldiers, or what was left of them anyway.”

He casually dropped down onto the ground, his back to the fighting behind him. “From what I’ve heard this human is...incredibly important. So much so that I think Megatron would be ecstatic if I brought her to him.”

Bumblebee glared at him, “I think you’re better off finding a different way to impress your leader.”

“But why?” Barricade said, his voice rumbling with amusement. “All that’s standing in front of me is you.” He smirked maliciously, “And you’re small enough for me to step on.”

His body was a blur as he rammed into Bumblebee, sending the smaller yellow Bot off his feet. The two rolling across the rocky terrain away from the battle.

He felt the edge of a small cliff bite into his back before the momentum of the roll send them down a short drop. Bumblebee kicked Barricade off and rushed uphill, wanting the upper ground. Barricade followed after him.

As Bumblebee fired blasts behind him he was very aware of the fact the fight had sent him away from the battle, away from the base, away from Charlie.
Chapter 73

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

“Not you two.”

Megatron’s order brought Thundercracker and Skywarp to a halt. The two jets looking to him while the rest of the Decepticons rushed down the mountain to their awaiting villains.

Thundercracker glowered at him, looking far too similar to the missing Starscream. *We’ll have to beat such traits out of him,* Megatron thought to himself. But he was pleased to see Skywarp looked at him with the same fear and obedience as he always did. The purple jet was truly the smartest of the seekers.

“You two are going to be doing something much more important,” Megatron growled. “I have no doubts the AllSpark is here. I also have no doubts Optimus will do everything in his power to keep me from her. You two will find her and bring her to me. *Now.*”

Skywarp nodded, looking less than thrilled, before departing into the sky to begin the hunt. Thundercracker hesitated, looking at Megatron wordlessly before following his comrade into the sky.

Yes…after he removed Prime’s head from his shoulders, he’ll need to do something about Thundercracker’s dislike of him.

Megatron turned and slowly walked down the mountain, enjoying the crunch of the rocks underneath his feet as he made his way into the fray. His Decepticons had overwhelmed the Autobots, he didn’t see not one Autobot not surrounded by the Cons. He also felt sorry for the bleeding sparks. They never stood a chance.

And how appropriate that the New Cybertron would also be the resting place for all his enemies. Megatron casually glanced around his surroundings, yes…this would be a suitable grave for the Autobots.

As he neared Optimus he took note the Autobot leader was fighting three Decepticons at the same time. He seemed to be handling himself well, which didn’t surprise Megatron.

*After all, they must have found a way to kill the Driller.* He had been surprised to see Optimus here, still in one piece. But a part of him had been impressed and even-just a little-delighted.

While it would have been easier if the Driller had ripped Prime to pieces, it would be much more fun to slay his enemy himself.

One of the Decepticons noticed his leader walking forward and immediately broke away from the battle. The other two quickly following suit, giving Megatron room.

Optimus showed a moment of confusion before turning around and narrowing his optics at the sight of his nemesis.

“I see you’re still alive,” Megatron greeted nonchalantly, as if they weren’t in the middle of a battle ground.
Optimus glanced around as if looking for something. The AllSpark he assumed.

*She is no longer your concern, Prime,* Megatron growled inwardly. *She’ll soon be mine and you and all your Autobots will be dead.*

When Optimus turned back to him the fire of battle burned in his optics and Megatron’s spark beat with excitement. Optimus was the only one who could ever come close to matching his skill in battle, and that is one thing the Decepticon would truly miss when the Autobot was gone.

Wordlessly Optimus readied his weapon, his body rigid and ready to fight to the death.

Megatron’s optics narrowed, his smirk widened, and he lunged at the Autobot.

Charlie had left Lennox and Epps to the base as she made her way up the mountain, trying to catch the sight of Bumblebee and the Decepticon he was fighting.

But all the while she was keeping her eye on the battle, scared a Con would find her and strike. She lifted herself up onto a rock, her legs starting to ache and her stomach rumbling with emptiness.

*Not now,* she snapped at it, before looking over to the battle again.

Her body grew still when she spotted Megatron, walking leisurely as if it was a stroll in the park.

Charlie saw he was heading straight for Optimus and panic made her throat close. The Autobot was busy fighting three Cons off. He didn’t stand a chance! But before Megatron reached him the Decepticons suddenly backed away from Optimus, leaving him open for their leader to face.

Optimus turned to face Megatron and the two massive Cybertronians glared at each other.

The three Cons didn’t leave to fight other Autobots, instead they kept their optics on the two. Charlie also noticed that a few nearby Autobots and Decepticons had stopped battling each other to turn their attention to their leaders.

Charlie blinked and the two rushed at each other. Their bodies blurs as they slammed punches and kicks into each other. The onlookers dodging as blasts filled the air, Charlie dropped to her stomach, one of the blasts flying over her head. The heat burning against her skin like the rays of the sun.

Even though Optimus had already taken new damage from the few minutes he had fought the other Decepticons, he still was proving himself full of energy and a match for Megatron. The Con grabbed his arms and tried to throw his body onto the ground, Optimus quickly slammed his head into Megatron’s face, stunning the Con long enough for Optimus to push away.

A part of Charlie wanted to lift her hand and intervene, to summon a force field like she had done when Megatron attacked Bumblebee. But her arms stayed at her side.

Something was telling her that the battle between these two had nothing to do with her, that it didn’t even have anything to do with the Autobots and Decepticons fighting alongside their leaders.
This was a battle between age-long enemies and it wasn’t her place to step in.

Not yet, a voice that sounded so similar to Cliffjumper breathed in her ear.

Both Optimus and Megatron wielded blades and the weapons slammed into each other, sparks dancing across the air. Optimus, not as fresh for battle as Megatron, slammed his leg into Megatron’s knee. It caught the Con off balance and the blades shrieked as they slid against each other.

But as Megatron went down he slammed his fist into Optimus’ hip, the Autobot letting out a grunt of pain as he moved away.

When the momentum of the kick sent Megatron to the ground, Optimus lifted his bland to bring it down on the Con. But Megatron caught Optimus’ hand just in time and, digging his knees into Optimus’ stomach, flipped him over. Megatron pinned Optimus down, his blaster ready.

An Autobot-Hot Shot-rushed forward to help but two Cons pushed him to the ground, holding him back. But Optimus wasn’t down for the count, in a quick motion he slammed his blade into Megatron’s blaster, sending his arm up to fire into the sky. Optimus then twisted and was able to throw Megatron off him, jumping to his feet.

Standing above his enemy, weapon and body dripping in in blue and eyes blazing, Charlie couldn’t hold back a smile. Optimus looked so cool.

But as Megatron jumped back up to return to fighting Prime, Charlie felt goosebumps across her arms.

Someone was watching her.

Moving her eyes upward Charlie saw two familiar jets flying low over the mountain, and they were heading straight for her.

Charlie turned and bolted, trying not to trip in her haste to run. Bumblebee, she inwardly cried. Bumblebee!

Chapter End Notes

I can understand if you guys think the Megs and OP fight was short. This won't be the last time they fight and I'll do my best to make sure those fights are longer (action scenes aren't my strong suit).

But anyway just want to let you know you guys are probably not going to like the next two chapters. I'm not even saying they'll be badly written or boring you guys will just straight up not have a good time.

But I will.
Barricade’s fist slammed into Bumblebee’s jaw, the force sending the smaller robot flying. His back skidded across the rough terrain before his back slammed into a rock, stopping him.

He pulled himself up as Barricade stood a few feet away, the yellow Autobot very aware of the steep drop to their left.

“Come on, B-127,” Barricade crowed, rolling his shoulders. “You can do better than that, can’t you?”

The Autobot buzzed angrily. He wasn’t used to the unsteady ground of this mountain, where any step could send him tumbling downhill with the rocks. But Barricade had led him up to a place of flat ground, and now the battle could really begin.

Flicking out his blade Bumblebee rushed forward, ready to shove it into Barricade’s throat.

His quicker speed served as an advantage, he was able to jump and land on Barricade’s shoulder, stabbing into the crick of his shoulder and torso before quickly jumping off. He backed several feet away, just avoiding another hefty blow from the larger Con and staying alert of the drop behind him.

Barricade let out a hiss of pain and leered at him, fury setting his optics ablaze. Quick he lifted his blaster and started to aim rapid-fire shots at Bumblebee.

But the Autobot was faster, managing to dodge the ammo and came in once again, slicing at any part of Barricade he could reach. He pulled back, avoiding a swipe and transformed into vehicle mode. He drove, making a clean turn to face Barricade again as he transformed back into a robot.

He couldn’t help a twinge of triumph at the furious expression on the Con’s face.

“Not so easy to step on me, is it?” he taunted.

Barricade snarled. “Not bad,” he conceded, “But not good enough.”

The two Cybertronians slammed into each other, Barricade sending Bumblebee’s smaller frame to the ground just as Bumblebee’s stinger slammed into his torso. The Con’s body shook with the volts of electricity that zapped through his body. Bumblebee took the chance to roll out from under him, slamming his heel into the back of Barricade’s knee and sending him, stunned, onto his back.

Bumblebee took this chance to rise to his feet and look around. He couldn’t spot Charlie, but he saw the blast fire and colorful blurs of the fighting that was yards below him. He knew Megatron and other dangerous Cons were down there. He felt a spark of fear for both the Autobots and charlie, he needed to get to them.

He turned around as Barricade rose to his legs with a groan. But first the Autobot had to finish this one off.

“Had enough yet?” he lightly asked the Con, ignoring his own aches and pains.

Barricade just gave him a hard glare. If he wasn’t up for banter then that meant Bumblebee had successfully ticked him off. Which, in Optimus’ teachings, was an advantage. In the throes of battle an enemy blinded by rage can not think straight.
Maybe not, Bumblebee conceded as he braced himself. But it does guarantee their punches are going to hurt. His jaw still stung from the earlier blow.

Keeping his distance Bumblebee ran to the side, firing off stinging blasts as Barricade turned to rush him. The blasts were keeping him at bay, making him take steps back. Bumblebee let out a hoot of victory when he got a hit directly in one of Barricade’s optics, half blinding him.

But that made him cocky (another thing Optimus said had no place on the battle field), and raced at Barricade’s blinded side, ready to finish this with a stab through his head.

However he hadn’t accounted that Barricade, while slower, was still a fast Con, and he turned on Bumblebee, his seeing optic staring right at him.

He grabbed the Autobot’s arm and slammed his smaller body into the rock way, making dust and pebbles fall across Bumblebee’s body.

The yellow Autobot tried to swipe at them, pain lacerating his back and making it hard to focus. But Barricade grabbed his other free arm and held him in place, slamming his body again and again into the rock, an Autobot shape forming in the thick organic substance.

Bumblebee had to let his body go limp, the pain too heavy on him to be able to struggle out of Barricade’s grip.

The Con released his arms, letting them fall to Bumblebee’s side as he grabbed the Autobot’s head in a vice-like grip.

“That’s,” he snarled, “Enough.”

Expecting a blast to the head Bumblebee was not expected to be tossed aside, his ravaged back scraping against the uncomfortable ground to rest just inches from the drop that would have sent him sprawling to the bottom of the mountain. He didn’t know if the fall would kill him but it most definitely would have kept him from moving.

He kept still, winded and torn, watching Barricade from the corner of his optic as the Decepticon slowly made his way over to finish the job.

It was then Bumblebee noticed a small yellow and black shape not far from his head. The charm Charlie had given him, it had fallen off in the scuffle…and Barricade was about to step on it.

“No!” he snapped and found himself rushing to his feet. His mind pushed away the shrieking pain as he fired a blast at Barricade. It stalled him long enough for Bumblebee to grab the charm and hold it safely in his grip.

But then Barricade was moving to pounce on him, to rip his limbs off. Bumblebee fell onto his back, flinched at the agony, and with the charm held close to his chest, lifted his arm with his blade glinting dully.

And Barricade, not catching himself in time, fell right onto the blade. Bumblebee watched in suprise as it sunk through the Con’s chest, he felt a pull of energy fizz through the blade before vanishing. At the same time he looked into Barricade’s optics, shocked and disbelieving, as they slowly darkened.

Pushing his legs up Bumblebee kicked his feet upward with all his strength, sending Barricade flipping over his body and falling down the drop below. The Autobot looked over the side and saw the Con’s body hit several outcroppings before vanishing into the thick forestry that was far, far,
below him.

That was one Con Megatron wouldn’t be bringing back from the dead.

Thundercracker watched the girl, the AllSpark, Charlie, try to run from them. She couldn’t of course, the AllSpark hadn’t given her super speed.

No instead she found herself yards above the battle, in a secluded corner of the mountain where the rock formations made a semi circle, blocking the view of the battle below.

How stupid of her.

I shouldn’t be too hard on her, he thought venomously. She wasn’t the only one whose made idiotic decisions. Megatron actually thinks I’ll do what he orders! Unless you zap me with this forsaken collar you can’t command me to do anything! He glared down at Charlie who had realized she was trapped and pressed her back against the rock. She looked up at the two jets before throwing up a force field, the blue energy forming a small dome around her.

I can already imagine what she’ll say when we get down there, Thundercracker continued his inner monologue. She’ll beg us to not do this, to insist we’re ‘friends’. Never mind she kept following that yellow Autobot around, never mind that she probably doesn’t even care that she forgot the little ‘gift’ I supposedly given her. The diamond now lay in his chest cavity, burning against his metal flesh for reasons he had no idea why.

He didn’t know anything, not why he felt guilt, or anger, or bitterness, or longing. But they did! Charlie, Megatron, even Skywarp who was still staying by his side. They knew him but they meant nothing to him! The feelings inside him, empty and with no origin or purpose, burned through his circuitry and torn into his braincore and ravaged the thing in his chest that had replaced his spark. It had felt…lighter when Thrust was killed.

I’ll burn these emotions out of me, he snarled viciously in his head. I’ll tear Megatron apart, I’ll tear B-127 apart, I’ll take Charlie and I’ll-I’ll-he had no idea what to do. But he knew she wouldn’t agree to his old proposition. That was the only thing he was sure of and that was the problem, he was going to-

Thundercracker, calm down.

Her voice was the one placid thing in his head but he refused to listen. He couldn’t. He was weightless.

He was light.

He was empty.

He was nothing.

And it was killing him.

Thundercracker, that’s not true, you can’t-
“SHUT UP!” he snapped aloud, the voice going silent.

Skywarp had started, his expression one of anxiety and confusion as he looked at him.

Thundercracker only glowered at him—nothing, you’re nothing to me—and moved to land before Charlie and her force field. After a moment’s hesitation Skywarp landed beside him.

Charlie stood firm, her arms held out as she kept the force field between herself and the two Cons.

“Do not do this,” she told them, her voice level and firm.

_How utterly predictable._

Her expression become beseeching, “I know you don’t remember Thundercracker, I know you don’t believe me—but we were friends. I know you don’t want to do what Megatron says.”

He scowled down at her. _You don’t know me, stop pretending like you do! Stop making these emotions rile in my body!_

But as if she knew she couldn’t get to him she turned her attention to Skywarp who looked away. It looked like he’d rather be anywhere else than where he was right now. “Skywarp, I know we didn’t get to talk much when I was at the base. But I thought you were one of the good ones. You were sweet, surely you can see that if Megatron gets me—it’ll only make things worse for both Decepticons and Autobots.”

Thundercracker’s hand twitched. _Sweet, she had called him. One of the good ones, she was insisting. Did she say the same things to him when they were ‘friends’? He could easily see her lying, manipulating him to get her way. That would explain why he felt this way, she tricked him. Just like she was trying to trick Skywarp. She might even have tricked B-127. He couldn’t put anything past her._

But that didn’t explain how one of these awful, uncontrollable, out-of-nowhere emotions was rising up his throat.

He had felt this way when B-127 had put himself between him and her, that first battle…as if he had the right to keep him away from her. And now the feeling was rising back up as Charlie complimented Skywarp, trying to coax him to let her go.

_Jealousy?_

No, no, no, no, _nonono! He wasn’t jealous! He wasn’t anything, he didn’t care! All this human was giving him was suffering, it was all her fault he wanted to fall to his knees. It was all her fault he couldn’t place any of his emotions, that his mind that should have been hollow was screaming and crawling with things that had no place. He felt like he was losing his mind—all because of her._

_So maybe, the thought was almost impossible to pass through his mind but it somehow clawed and bit its way out. Maybe it would be better if I did give her to Megatron._

Charlie let out a yelp as Thundercracker tried to push his hand through the force field to snatch her. Instead pain shot through his fingers like needles and he lifted his hand to see the blue and red liquid that ran through his body was dripping to the ground. But then it slowly seeped back into the wounds and knitted hand back together.

“Are you alright?” Skywarp asked. Thundercracker had barely heard him, his voice was so quiet.
“Don’t do that!” Charlie snapped up at him, concern and fear battling in her brown optics. “You can’t get through this force field! The Diller couldn’t. You’ll just hurt yourself.”

_Hurt myself?_ He glanced between the force field and his freshly healed hand. _Hurt myself…and know exactly where the pain came from, and why?_

What a nice change of pace.

He lunged at Charlie, both of his hands digging and clawing into the force field as if he was one of his mindless, spark-less, followers. As if he could tear the energy open.

Charlie cried out in shock and fear, falling to her back but keeping her arms up as the red and blue liquid leaked from his hands and trickled down the dome-shaped force field.

“STOP IT!” she shrieked. A new type of anger was burning in her gaze as she glared at him, liquid spilling down her cheeks and her teeth gritted together.

“Thundercracker!” Skywarp spoke up in dismay, not having moved from where he stood. Watching with an expression that mirrored Charlie’s horror.

“Help me!” he snapped over his shoulder. He had to push his way through this stupid force field caused by the AllSpark. The AllSpark that was just as much to blame as Charlie, they had turned him into a husk of a Con he didn’t even know. Someone he wasn’t even sure had even existed.

He pressed his palm against the force field, ignoring the pain that burned up his arm the liquid pooling down the force field. The strength of him ending up pushing the field into the rocky ground, causing it to shudder under Charlie, her body dropping a foot along with the the ground.

He could see her arms shaking, holding up this force field against him wasn’t an easy feat. And AllSpark or not she was still an organic, she wouldn’t have his stamina.

“YOU LOVED ME!”

Her shriek split the air and Thundercracker stared down at her, his body growing still.

“You were _good_,” she snapped at him, anger and heart ache twisted her face. “We watched out for each other! I wanted you to come with me, I wanted to protect you from Megatron! And even though I can’t return your feelings, that doesn’t mean you weren’t one of my dearest friends…” She swallowed thickly, her voice warbly as she spoke, “We may not be sparkmates, Thundercracker…but we’re still friends, I still love you.”

LOVE, FRIENDS, HATE, LONGING, JEALOUSY, B-127, STARScream, SkyWarp, Megatron, ShockWave, Cybertron, Charlie, Love—it was as if all the information, all of the feelings, but none of the memory, was rolling over in his body, trying to break free. _Autobot, Decepticon, Autobot, Traitor, Spark, AllSpark, Friends, Foes, Forget, Better, He was Better, He was more, He was Empty, He was more he was Empty, HATE, Jealousy, Longing, Friends, Love, Charlie, Love, SkyWarp, Love, Starscream, Love, Charlie, Love Love Love_

Just as he was sure the chaos inside would make him explode Skywarp reached out and touched his shoulder, trying to pull him away. “Thundercracker, just—”

“DON’T TOUCH ME!”
He whirled around and swiped at Skywarp, his fingers leaving three grooves across his chest. The jet jumped back with a bark that was more startled than pained. But if he said something afterward Thundercracker didn’t hear.

Agony reached through his circuits, shutting up the wild emotions and he blacked out.

When he came to he was on his hands and knees, Skywarp and Charlie looking at him with horror on their expressions. Only a few kliks had passed, and the collar weighed heavy on his neck.

He slowly pulled himself to his feet, shaking slightly from the thousands of volts that had run through his body, punishment for striking a Decepticon. He looked toward Skywarp, he had known he would have eventually attacked a Con—but he hadn’t wanted it to be him.

He suddenly felt a gaze piercing into him, hot with fury and determination. He lifted his head.

Standing atop the rock formation that had shielded this scene, was B-127. His body already dented and scratched, but his spine straight, his head high, and his optics blazing with the adrenaline of battle and staring straight at Thundercracker.

A white flash of lighting pierced the darkened sky, illuminating the Autobot. And Thundercracker felt both a twinge of fear, and relief.
Chapter 75

Bumblebee leaped over Charlie and slammed onto Thundercracker, the wounded jet taking the brunt of the jump and the two falling down, rolling several feet before catching themselves.

Limbs aching and unable to stop shaking Charlie dropped her force field, lying on her back to catch her breath as raindrops started to splatter her skin. So caught up in her confrontation with Thundercracker she had completely forgotten that Skywarp was still there.

But the jet was paying her no attention, his optics on the battle between his friend and Bumblebee, one hand on the scratches that Thundercracker had caused.

*That isn’t Thundercracker.* Charlie made herself lift her hands to cover her mouth, muffling the sob that arose from her chest. That…jet, had tried to break through her force field, not caring if he was wounded in the process. It had been horrifying. And it had not been Thundercracker.

*He’s gone…They may have left his body intact but my friend is gone.*

Fresh tears burned against her skin as she accepted the fact. She had lost him.

She wasn’t sure how much time had really passed before the pain in her limbs eased enough for her to rise to her feet, using the rock behind her for support.

Down below Bumblebee and Thundercracker were locked up in a heated battle, the yellow Autobot was making many hits but Thundercracker was too quick to heal from his wounds and was starting to overpower him.

*He’s gone,* she reminded him. *But not Bumblebee.* He needed help.

She glanced once more at Skywarp who hadn’t taken his eyes off the two. Charlie could remember her days at the Decepticon base, were her only allies had been the three seekers. Now, Starscream had tried to kill her and God knew where he was now. And Thundercracker had been…he had been taken away.

Skywarp was the only seeker she still truly knew. And the fact made her grief almost unbearable.

Forcing in a breath Charlie moved her eyes past the two battling robots and down to where the main battle was still being held. The Decepticons were winning, even though they had only arrived a few minutes ago. It felt so much longer. Where was Wheeljack with reinforcements?

She found who she had been looking for. Optimus and Megatron were still locked in fierce combat, their attention only on each other.

She shuddered. *Is it time to intervene, Cliffjumper?*

She felt a breeze brush her ear but no answer reached her. The decision was up to her. And she needed to get Bumblebee help.

Lifting her arm up once again she focused in on the two Cybertronians, her mind spinning with one word: *Protect Optimus, protect Optimus.*
Her arm screeched in protest but a blue force field appeared between the robots, startling them out of their fight. Quickly Charlie threw the energy against Megatron and it sent the unprepared Con flying into several fighting robots.

Optimus turned on his heel and looked up, immediately spotting Charlie. She pointed to Bumblebee who had been successfully pinned down by Thundercracker.

Optimus immediately moved upward, going to his soldier’s aid. And that was enough for Charlie to drop to her knees and curl into herself, she held her arm to her chest as it ached, it felt as shredded as her heart.

Optimus rushed up the mountain, keeping an optic over his shoulder to see if Megatron would give chase, but the Con had become distracted by the other Autobots. His brave, strong Autobots.

Optimus was almost to Bumblebee’s side, the yellow Autobot struggling under Thundercracker’s grip, when a weight slammed into him from the right, sending him skirting across the mountain. He could’ve sworn he heard Charlie cry out.

When Optimus body came to halt his head hung over a precipice, the vast mountainside a sheer drop under him. He couldn’t remember the last time he had fought where the surroundings could get him killed just as quickly as his enemies.

He looked to see who had tackled him, and felt a moment of sympathy to see it was Skywarp. The purple jet was holding Optimus’ shoulders down with shaking hands, his optics dark with fear.

Too easily Optimus threw his leg up and kicked the jet off him, his greater strength, seeping out of his body but still there, serving him well. He jumped to his feet to face Skywarp, the jet looking even less sure of the battle now.

“You do not have to fight me,” Optimus warned him.

Skywarp seemed to be giving the option a thought, glancing back to Thundercracker and Bumblebee, still locked in battle. His optics moved to Charlie who curled into herself, Optimus felt his spark twist in worry-she looked like she was in pain.

Skywarp whirled back around and rushed Optimus. The Autobot accepted it, this was Skywarp’s choice.

But he didn’t stand a chance.

With great agility Optimus moved out of the way of the jet, and threw his blade down. The metal easily pierced Skywarp’s arm, the limb falling to the ground as the jet let out a sharp shriek of pain.

Optimus grabbed one of his wings before he flew off the cliff face.

*Forgive me*, he thought quietly before crushing the base of the wing in his grip, rendering Skywarp flightless. Optimus wordlessly tossed him back onto the ground where Skywarp cradled what was left of his arm.
He was one less Con to worry about.

Optimus rushed back to Bumblebee’s aid only to see the Autobot throw a punch under Thundercracker’s chin, making the jet’s head throw back and giving Bumblebee the room to slip out from under him.

He put himself several feet away from Thundercracker, making sure his body was blocking Charlie from the jet. Optimus stood by his side and give the Bot a nod. Bumblebee looked worse than wear, his legs shaking as he stood, wounds covering his body. But his optics were alive with fire.

“Are you alright?” Optimus asked.

Bumblebee nodded, “I could do this all day.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Thundercracker spoke up, his voice thick with what seemed to be hundreds of emotions. He glared definately at the two, “I’ll make short work of both of you.”

“I’d like to see you try!” Bumblebee challenged while Optimus braced himself for the fight. He reminded himself of what he had witnessed with Hot Shot and Thrust. They could be killed.

“Stay next to Charlie,” Optimus told Bumblebee. He didn’t wait to see if his ally nodded before he ran at Thundercracker. If they could stop him it would make the Decepticons a little easier to beat. And he needed to stop him before Megatron returned to finish the battle, Optimus could not face them both.

The two met half way, Optimus throwing punches and slices that met their mark—but each time Thundercracker healed too quickly. He slammed his fist against Optimus’ head before trying to knock him onto his back. But he didn’t expect the Autobot to come to his senses as quickly as he did, he grabbed Thundercracker’s wing and pressed his strength into it like he had done with Skywarp.

Thundercracker snarled, sounding like the undead, and grabbed Optimus’ shoulders. Before the Autobot could realize what was happening Thundercracker was shooting up into the air, Optimus in his grip, his wounded wing completely healed.

“OPTIMUS!” he could hear the screams of Bumblebee and Charlie but didn’t take his attention off Thundercracker. Instead he tried to struggle out of the jet’s grip before he got too high, before the Autobot couldn’t survive the inevitable fall.

“Just give up,” Thundercracker breathed, his optics glazed over. “What’s the point?”

Optimus glared at him. “The Autobots are not like you, Thundercracker. We have something worth fighting for.”

Before the jet could react blue energy suddenly enveloped Optimus’ sight and Thundercracker let out a shriek of pain. He released the Autobot, but the blue energy still surrounding Optimus didn’t fade and softened his fall against the mountain side.

When it evaporated he turned to see Charlie dropped her arm to her side. Bumblebee was at her side, his hand on her back and his optics skyward. Charlie gave Optimus a small smile, sweat beading her brow and pain clear in her optics. They needed to get her back before she killed herself saving them.

While Optimus rose back to his feet, ready to keep fighting, Bumblebee started to fire shots up at the sky. Thundercracker, now in jet form, avoided them with great speed, sky diving down toward
them. No, not them, directly to Bumblebee.

Before Charlie could summon another force field to save him Optimus ignored the pain in his legs to jump, grabbing onto Thundercracker and throwing him off balance. Optimus slammed the jet onto the ground where Thundercracker during the impact to slam his feet into Optimus’ chest. The kick send the Autobot several feet away where his black slammed into the rocks, debris raining down his shoulders.

As Charlie moved out of the way, Bumblebee was at his leader’s side, firing more blasts at the jet. This time they hit their mark and Thundercracker growled with pain before flying up again, trying to get out of range from the fire.

“You need to get Charlie somewhere safe;” Optimus ordered Bumblebee. His optics widened as, behind the yellow Bot’s shoulder, he saw the hulking form of Megatron marching toward them.

“I can’t leave you,” Bumblebee insisted, looking over to see Megatron as well.

Optimus didn’t respond immediately, turning to see Charlie had stopped several feet away from where Skywarp still crouched, cradling his arm. She was staring at him with grief in her optics.

“Megatron will come for her,” Optimus told Bumblebee. “They both will and I will not be able to fight them off. They can’t take her Bumblebee, no matter what happens.”

Bumblebee looked at him with a torn expression, while it felt like ages it had not been long when Optimus demanded the same when fighting the Driller.

But before Bumblebee could agree or refuse a blue laser slammed into his shoulder, scalding the metal and making the Autobot cry out. Thundercracker had struck when their backs were turned.

Fury, burning and intimate, glowed in Bumblebee’s optics as he started to fire more shots at the jet. But Thundercracker kept avoiding them with ease, triumph and anger battling on his own expression.

But Optimus wasn’t focused on him, instead on the wall of rock that was taking the brunt of Bumblebee’s attack. It could have been the furious rain obscuring his sight but Optimus was positive he saw the rocks shaking.

“Bumblebee stop!” Optimus ordered, grabbing his arm. The yellow Autobot followed his leader’s gaze and realization lit up his optics. “You have to-”

A blast of lighting, large and blazing, slammed into the rock wall, nearly hitting Thundercracker who flew upward to avoid it.

The impact of the lighting sent several rocks falling, and Optimus had to brace himself for the onslaught. None were large enough to cause serious damage to a Cybertronian—but a human was another story.

Bumblebee ripped his arm free of Optimus’ grip and rushed to Charlie. She was staring up at the oncoming rocks, just one of those could kill her. Optimus saw her lifting her arms just as one of the largest boulders were inches away from her-

-And then Bumblebee was there, wrapped his arm around her and letting it take the brunt of the hit, the impact so strong it threw them both backward…straight over the cliff edge.

“NO!” Optimus moved to rush forward but it was too late.
Megatron grabbed his throat and slammed him back into the wall, his optics scorching.

“Thundercracker!” he snarled up at the jet. “Get down here and fight like a Decepticon!”

The blue jet hovered in the storming air, his optics on the place where Bumblebee and Charlie had fallen. His expression was unreadable.

“Thundercracker!” Megatron snarled, pressing Optimus painfully against the rock wall.

The jet flinched and turned toward them, his own optics dark with hatred and malice. It looked like he wanted to attack Megatron more than anything.

But then lighting struck a second time.

The two Cybertronian leaders watched in utter silence as the barb of lighting stabbed through Thundercracker, lighting the Decepticon up and making him release an agonized shriek that was painful just to hear. The collar around his neck shattered with the hit. And a klik later the lighting was gone, leaving Thundercracker charred and blackened, and falling down to the mountainous abyss below.

“THUNDERCRACKER!” Skywarp cried out. The clear grief and terror in his voice made Optimus’ spark twist. The jet stood up to try and fly after his comrade, but the damage to his wing kept him grounded.

A blaster pressed against Optimus’ head and he looked back to Megatron.

“You’ve cost me my best weapon and my pet, Prime,” he growled, his voice low and not showing the wrath that was clear in his optics.

Optimus gaze narrowed, fear and grief and rage burning in his own spark. “How…dare you.”

Chapter End Notes

Guys I promise I love Thundercracker.
Chapter 76

A scream split the air, causing Charlie’s eyes to pop open. Her body aching from the fall.

Pushing herself up on shaking arms she saw the long, long drop down the mountain. She had landed on an outcropping, not far from the battle she could still hear above her.

She jolted in place when she remembered that she hadn’t fallen, they both fell!

“Bumblebee,” her voice was hoarse as she turned around. The yellow Autobot was lying on his stomach, one leg dangling over the edge of their small outcrop. His left arm was banged up, nearly flattened and with sparks jumping from the open cracks, caused by the boulder that had slammed into his arm.

All to save her from getting hit.

Bumblebee used his other arm to lift himself into a sitting position, “Are you okay, Charlie?”

“Are you crazy?” she snapped, her nerves frazzled. “Bee, you know I have force field powers! I could have saved myself!” She looked to his arm, her heart hurting at the sight. “You put yourself in danger for no reason.” Her eyes instinctively went to the scar on his chest, “Don’t you think you’ve put yourself in harm’s way enough?”

“No.”

His blunt answer had Charlie blinking up at him, surprised. “No?”

“Charlie,” he began, his voice soft yet firm. “You could be as powerful as Optimus, even more so. That’s not going to make me not want to protect you, no that’s not going to stop my first instinct being to keep you safe. You’re my friend and my sparkmate, Charlie. And because of that I’ll always put myself between you in danger, no matter how great or small.” He shrugged, “I’m sorry.”

Charlie stared up at him, blinked, and then in one swift motion rose up and wrapped her arms around his neck. Bumblebee went stiff as the stone underneath and Charlie pressed her lips against his face plate.

It wasn’t a kiss like in the movies, or the kind you read about in epic romances-mainly being because Bumblebee didn’t have a mouth. Charlie wasn’t even sure if he knew what she was doing—how intimate this was.

But she did and something inside her hummed pleasantly, and it sounded like the word: belong.

Yes, this is where she belonged.

When Charlie pulled her lips back Bumblebee was staring at her with surprise that bordered on flustered. Charlie felt her face grow hot, maybe he did realize how big of a deal that was.

She looked to his arm only to see it had healed, in fact his entire body looked brand new and Charlie’s heart was beating that extra mile that signaled she had used her healing powers. Apparently kissing activated the power as well as touching.

Kissing. I kissed Bumblebee! Charlie bit her tongue to keep a hysterical giggle from escaping her
“Let’s get back up there,” she said at last, her voice cracking slightly before she cleared her throat. “The Autobots need us, okay?”

Bumblebee’s voice was just as wobbly as her own, “Okay.”

The two found a part of the rock wall that was climbable, and with Charlie hanging from his back Bumblebee started the unsteady climb upward.

“Hold on tight,” he told her over his shoulder.

“No arguments here,” she replied, being sure to keep her eyes skyward and not at the incredibly long drop below them.

As they drew closer to the top, the euphoria and flustered awkwardness of the kiss was leaving Charlie, to be replaced by the anxiety and fear of the battle being waged ahead.

Was Optimus fighting Megatron and Thundercracker alone? Did he think she and Bumblebee had perished in the fall? Had Lennox and Epps found ammo for that tank? Where was Shockwave? She hadn’t seen not one trace of that vile Decepticon and she knew that wasn’t a good sign.

How many Autobots were left fighting an army that was larger than their own?

Bumblebee was only a few more feet to the top when a hand suddenly appeared over the age, grabbing Charlie and yanking her off Bumblebee’s back.

“No!” Bumblebee cried out as Charlie let out a yelp of distress. But just as quickly as the two panicked their bodies sagged with relief.

“Wheeljack,” she sighed as the Autobot placed her at his side.

He leaned down to help Bumblebee up the rest of the way, “Sorry, I’m late. Everyone was scattered and it took a while to get them all here.”

As Bumblebee climbed up Charlie looked over her shoulder. She saw Ironhide in the middle of the fray, strong and imposing. He was not the only newly arrived Autobot, Charlie saw with a spark of hope that her allies now evenly matched the Cons in numbers.

We won’t lose this battle that easily.

“I need to get back to Optimus,” Bumblebee told Charlie and Wheeljack, looking up the mountain side. They couldn’t see their leader but Charlie knew he was still up there.

“You go,” she told him. “I want to find Epps and Lennox and see if I can help them.” She also wanted to stay closer to the battle, to help the injured even though her body was protesting the use of so much power on so little energy.

Bumblebee looked down at her and she was floored by the emotion in his optics. He nodded, “Stay safe.”

Charlie watched him rush uphill, forcing her gaze away to look up at Wheeljack. “Do me a favor and crack a few Cons' heads?”

The scientist looked down at her with amusement, “It’ll be my pleasure.”
“How...dare you.”

Before Megatron could reply Optimus slammed his fist into the Con’s jaw, the impact of the hit ripping his hand from Optimus’ throat. Megatron landed on the rain-slicked ground, still wet from the storm that was now passing.

Megatron was quick to return to his feet but Optimus was even quicker in slamming into him, throwing his full body weight into his enemy and sending them rolling across the ground.

Megatron kicked him away, firing a blast at Optimus that hit the Autobot’s shoulder. Prime barely acknowledged the pain as he fired his own shots, Megatron avoiding them as he raced toward Optimus.

He reached his hands out, aiming toward Prime’s shoulders, ready to throw him back to the ground.

But Optimus’ elbow collided with Megatron’s head, his left optic cracking at the impact.

Before the large Con could catch himself Optimus grabbed him by his throat and, blade wielded, pierced it through Megatron’s shoulder.

The Con let out a snarl of pain as Optimus twisted the blade, before Megatron slammed the wounded shoulder into Optimus, knocking him off balance on the slippery turf. The blade ripped out of Megatron’s shoulder, leaving sparks, energon, and circuitry spilling onto the rocks below.

Megatron glowered at him, energon leaking from his face, cracks scattered across his glowing red optic. He snarled but Optimus’ audio receptors barely processed it.

Blade ready he rushed forward again but Megatron was quicker this time, ducking to wrap his thick arms around the Autobot’s torso and spinning on his heel. Optimus body once again slammed against the steep mountain side but it didn’t stun the Autobot leader.

Instead Optimus threw his knee out and snapped it against Megatron’s chest. Sheaving the blade and throwing his hands together Optimus slammed both fists into the back of Megatron’s head, sending the Con to his knees.

Optimus saw Megatron dig his own blade into the Autobot’s side but his adrenaline kept the pain numb.

This time Optimus slammed his own head against Megatron’s, his braincore shaking, and this time Megatron pulled away with a pained grunt.

With his free hand Megatron threw his fist against Optimus’ head, sending it sideways.

Optimus grabbed the arm that wielded the blade and pushed his body upward. Grabbing Megatron’s other hand in an iron grip, Optimus slowly rose to his feet, Megatron looked startled-just a moment-as Optimus pushed forward.

The two stood facing each other, Optimus’ grip keeping the blade from piercing him any deeper. He glared silently at Megatron, their bodies shaking with the effort to push the other away.

Despite the energon that caked his face Megatron smirked arrogantly, “Did I strike a nerve,
Prime?"

Optimus released Megatron’s hand, letting the blade pierce deeper into his side as he pulled out his canon and fired it into Megatron’s chest.

The blast sent Megatron flying backward, Optimus, the blade still buried in him, was sent after. The two Cybertronians rolled across the rocky terrain, Optimus slamming his fists into Megatron’s face—his neck—his shoulders—whatever body part he could reach.

At one point the blade was ripped out of him but the damage barely registered.

Megatron reached up and grabbed Optimus’ jaw and pressed, Optimus hearing a cracking sound.

The Con caught himself from the fall and tried to pin Optimus down but the Autobot was continuously throwing more punches, slamming his fist into Megatron’s jaw with enough force to push him onto his back.

Optimus straddled him, Megatron grabbing his fists and holding back anymore of Optimus’ blows, his arms struggling with the effort.

The Autobot’s gaze was blurry with rage, something he had told himself to never let happen, something he always told his Autobots. Don’t let anger overcome you, you can’t focus on your enemy if you’re focusing on your revenge.

But all Optimus could see in his mind was Bumblebee and Charlie following off that cliff. He could all too clearly see their broken bodies lying at the bottom of the mountain.

He was just about to overpower Megatron when a sudden blast of agony went through his chest. His back arched in agony as white hot energy flew through and made his body go limp.

Megatron pushed him off and hurried to his feet, dented and bleeding from Optimus’ various attacks. Shockwave was now at Megatron’s side, his cannon blaster thrumming with energy. He looked down at Optimus impassively as the Autobot leader lay sprawled on the ground.

While Optimus tried to summon the energy to rise up, despite the wound in his chest, Megatron let out a noise that was half a snarl, half a laugh.

“I never thought I’d see the day the great Autobot leader lost his temper.” He wiped at his mouth, leaving a trail of dried energon. “You almost had me, Prime.”

“Optimus!”

He turned his head to see Ironhide running up toward them, anger and panic twisted his expression. But before he could get close enough Blackout appeared out of the battling crowd, slamming into the red Autobot and sending them several yards away.

“Your pathetic followers can’t save you, Prime,” Megatron growled, making the Autobot turn his head back around to glare at him. “They’re as weak and as soft-sparked as their leader. Look at you, dying to protect this planet. Its pathetic inhabitants won’t even live long enough to appreciate the gesture.”

He stepped back, “Let one of my soldiers show you true power. Shockwave, enjoy yourself.”

“As you wish, Lord Megatron,” Shockwave replied calmly, as if he wasn’t in the midst of a battle.
He stepped forward to look down at Optimus who was still trying to rise up. He lifted his blaster and aimed it right at Optimus’ head.

“Do not take this personally, Prime,” Shockwave said with finality. “Your demise was inevitable.”

Optimus braced himself for the fatal hit, cursing himself for losing his calm, cursing himself for leaving his Autobots without a ruler. He hadn’t deserved their loyalty, their courage, their-

Shockwave’s head snapped back, the side of his face shattering into pieces, revealing the intricate circuity underneath. The Con took several, stumbling steps away before falling onto his knees, clutching the massive wound.

Bumblebee landed on his feet, standing in front of Optimus mask adored and stingers ready—one stinger stained blue from Shockwave’s energon.

“Bumblebee…” Optimus breathed, shock and relief thick in his voice. He was save.

The yellow Autobot glanced to his leader, nodded, then turned his attention to Megatron.

The Con gave a sideways glance to Shockwave before turned to scowl at Bumblebee, “Persistent little soldier, aren’t you?” He took a heavy, threatening step forward, his own sharp weapon at the ready. “This is where it really ends.”

“Bring it!” Bumblebee snapped, determination and energy pulsing from his voice. If he had any fear in facing Megatron again, he did not show it. A spark of pride warmed Optimus’ wounded chest.

If he hadn’t been paying attention Optimus wouldn’t have seen the flash of surprise in Megatron’s optics before his glower deepened. “No mercy this time.”

Bumblebee was a yellow blur as he ran up to Megatron, ducking under the blade as it sliced through the air. He aimed his stinger at Megatron’s wounded soldier and fired.

With a snarl he grabbed Bumblebee’s arm before he could escape, lifting the smaller Autobot into the air—his blade ready to stab through his spark. But Bumblebee was quick to wrap his legs around Megatron’s neck, digging his stinger into Megatron’s hand.

The pain made Bumblebee be able to pull his hand out of the Con’s grip and stab his stingers into Megatron’s head, lighting-like energy flashing.

The Con let out a howl of pain and grabbed Bumblebee, ripping him his body and slammed him down into the ground.

Bumblebee rolled away, Megatron’s blade piercing the edge of his side before he got out of the way. He jumped to his feet, ready to attack again.

“Optimus,” Ironhide’s voice reached his audio receptors.

The red Bot walked over to kneel next to his leader, putting an a shoulder under his arm to help him to his feet.

“Where’s Blackout?” the leader asked.

“Don’t worry,” Ironhide said grimly. “He won’t bother us again.”

Their optics turned back to Bumblebee who was still holding his own against Megatron.
“I hardly recognize him as that rookie that joined us so long ago,” Ironhide breathed, his voice giving away how impressed he was.

Optimus didn’t answer, his attention turning to Shockwave as the Con rose to his feet, his optic dark.

“Bumblebee, watch out!” Optimus cried out.

Shockwave fired and Bumblebee just dodged it, the blast’s impact making him fly across the rocks to land at the two Autobots’ feet.

“I’m okay!” Bumblebee quickly jumped to his feet, stingers buzzing. “I can keep going.”

Optimus wished he could say the same, it was taking the last dregs of his energy to stay standing. But he pulled away from Ironhide’s support to stand next to his scout’s side. Ironhide joined him at Bumblebee’s other side.

The three Autobots faced the wounded, but furious, Decepticons.


“She’s safe,” Bumblebee replied with confidence. “But I’m going to be honest, Optimus. I’m more worried about us.”
Chapter 78

Charlie stumbled down toward the base, careful not to slip on the wet rocks.

The military base was in her sight as she kept a safe distance from the battle. It was less loud, both Autobots and Decepticons become exhausted from the fight.

How long had it lasted? She had lost track of time. She hoped Epps and Lennox were still in the base, she hated the thought of the two soldiers going into the fray of this giant alien robot battle.

Cade would be stupid enough to do that, Charlie thought with mild amusement as she moved. But these two strike me as much smarter.

She was only a yard away when she saw two robots heading toward the base. For a moment she feared it was two Cons, ready to destroy the base along with the humans in it. But a moment later she recognized the colors of Arcee and Jazz.

Her heart quickened with worry when she saw that the femme bot was holding Jazz up, the latter covered in serious looking wounds.

“Jazz, hold on! I’m coming!” she called out even though she knew he couldn’t hear her over the blasts and yells of the battling robots.

She picked up her pace, her eyes on the wounded robot as Arcee placed him next to the base-when she felt a burning glare sizzle into her skin.

Charlie came to a dead halt and turned toward the battle.

It took her a moment to see through the throngs of moving bodies, but then she caught sight of a familiar blue shape.

Dropkick.

The blue, undead Decepticon was staring at her-hatred and bloodlust burning in his optics.

He wasn’t like Thundercracker (wherever that jet had dissappeared to), Dropkick had always hated her, had always wanted to kill her. It was a vendetta that had started the moment she stabbed him in the eye, it felt like years since that had happened.

He had brought that hatred with him from the grave and honestly…Charlie was ready to get rid of him.

Dropkick, ignoring the Autobots and Decepticons around him, rushed toward her with an animal-like roar.

Charlie pulled up a field and braced herself. Dropkick slammed into it, screeching as the energy burned against him as he slid over the force field and slammed his body into the base behind her.

She flinched as the base’s wall gave way, crumbling around the Decepticon as his torso fell inside the base. Charlie thought she had heard Epps’ yell.

“Charlie!?” Arcee’s startled voice spoke up.

As the force field fell away she turned to see the femme bot coming toward her, Jazz was leaning
against the base, blue liquid trickling down his body.

“What are you doing here?” Arcee asked.

“I came to help,” she explained, stepping toward them. “Let me-”

Dropkick’s body suddenly lunged out of the base, hunched over and snarling. A black, charred mark on his face led down across his chest, blue and red liquid dripping from his body.

*That was for Colin,* Charlie thought vehemently.

“Both of you stay behind me,” Arcee ordered, hurrying forward to grapple with Dropkick before he could attack Charlie.

She pushed him away from the base and her allies, trying to overpower him. But it was clear exhaustion from the battle was weighing on her and she was losing her endurance.

Jazz tried to stand up without the support of the base, his legs shaking. “Not a chance,” he growled. “Charlie, stay clear I’m going to help Arcee.”

“Wait, don’t-” Charlie began, “Let me heal you!” She moved toward him but stumbled, her body burning with tiredness. She looked up and Jazz, impatient, was already rushing over to help Arcee, latching onto Dropkick’s back.

“Charlie?” Lennox’s voice had her snapping her head around.

He stood at the hole Dropkick had made, looking between her and the two on one battle raging in front of them.

She ran toward him, “Please tell me you guys found some ammo for that tank!”

“Yes and no,” Lennox said as he led her inside.

Charlie scowled at him as he crawled up onto the tank. “What the hell does that mean?”

Epps popped his head out of the tank’s pit, “It means we have ammo-but it’s from War World 2.”

“It’s from what?” Charlie gapped.

Lennox shrugged, “I guess this military base was nostalgic. We’re trying to get the tank ready but we’re not sure what old ass ammo is going to do to Cybertronians. It might not hurt them at all.”

“We have to try something,” Charlie decided, hurrying back outside. “Just get it ready as soon as you can!”

Outside she focused on the battle before her. Despite the intent of the Autobots’ it was clear Dropkick was winning the battle. He pressed his foot against Jazz’s bleeding torso as the Autobot desperately tried to push him away.

Arcee was struggling in Dropkicks’ viscous grip, the Con tearing his fingers into her skin while she threw weak blows and kicks at him. Charlie felt sick at the sight, she had to try and summon her force field, no matter how exhausted she was.

She was just moving forward when someone landed a few feet away from her and the three robots.

It was a green jet, a Decepticon, he was glaring toward the fight with a red gaze. His expression
Looking at him Charlie felt the strangest sense of déjà vu, she had never met this stranger not even at the Decepticon base. But she knew him.

Her brow rose as it suddenly came to her:

*Charlie took a step toward a random spark and examined it, the blue of the spark had a greenish tint to it.*

“*Who is this?*” she asked curiously.

“*Someone you have not met,*” Cliffjumper replied.

That was this jet’s spark. This jet that was still watching Dropkick fight two Autobots.

Suddenly Dropkick threw Arcee to the ground, the femme bot struggling to rise while Jazz’s attempts to escape become more and more slow as exhaustion overtook him.

That was when the jet started to walk toward them. Charlie panicked, Arcee and Jazz didn’t stand a chance between two Cons!

“No, don’t!” she begged, rushing forward. She had to do something! She had to protect them!

But as fast as she moved her legs the jet was faster. Blaster ready he shot forward, a green blur, and pressed the weapon into Dropkick’s shoulder, firing.

Charlie came to a stumbling halt, staring in shock.

Dropkick snarled in pain and furry and moved off Jazz to attack the jet. But his finger had barely grazed the other Con before the collar around his neck send volts through his body. Similar to Thundercracker Dropkick screeched in pain and dropped to his knees by the pain. The blast from the weapon left his wounded arm hanging limply by circuits.

The jet slammed into Dropkick, pinning him down and wordlessly grabbed the wounded arm. Charlie watched in shock as the jet, ignoring Dropkick’s screeches, ripped the Con’s arm off.

He stood up and roughly tossed it to the side, glaring down at Dropkick with a mixture of dislike and disgust.

“We’re here!” Lennox and Epps suddenly called out.

Charlie turned around to see the two soldiers driving the tank over the rubble of the destroyed wall and out onto the rocky surface of the mountain.

Charlie turned back to the green jet, he was looking around as if he just realized he had an audience. With one last glare at the group he turned and flew away, back to the main battle.

“What,” Jazz’s voice was strained. “The slag was that…?”

Charlie glanced at Dropkick’s limp, still body lying on the ground. She carefully started to walk around it to get to Jazz’s side.

Dropkick’s head bolted upright and with his last arm he reached toward her, his remaining optic blazing.
But Charlie was barely able to let out a scream when an explosion hit her ears and something slammed into Dropkick’s face, going clean through it and making his head drop again.

She stared at the blue body with its missing arm and large hole in his face. She turned back to the tank. Lennox was sitting atop of the tank, looking at Dropkick with surprised that mirrored Charlie’s own.

Epps once again popped out of the tank, looking ecstatic, “The ammo actually works!”

“Well done, you two!” Arcee congratulated as she walked over to help Jazz up. “How much more ammo do you have?”

“Oh,” Epps smile fell. “We only found one more.”

Charlie and Arcee shared a look. “Best make that last one count,” Arcee said at last.

Charlie followed after her as she placed Jazz next to the base. “Who was that jet?”

“I’m not sure,” Arcee said, examining Jazz’s wounds. “There are many Decepticons, I clearly haven’t met them all.”

“I think we should thank them,” Jazz spoke up, his voice heavy with pain. “We would have been scrap metal if he hadn’t turned traitor.”

“Can I help,” Charlie asked, reaching over to touch Jazz.

But before she could Arcee’s hand came down and she gently pushed Charlie back. “You look exhausted, Charlie,” she said softly. “Conserve your energy. We’ll get Jazz back to Ratchet.”

“But he needs help now,” she insisted, hating the fact that Arcee was right. She was as tired as the Autobots looked.

“Don’t worry,” Jazz assured her, smiling through his pain. “I’ll be fine.”

Frustration welled up inside her. She couldn’t stand around and do nothing.

“Where’s Bumblebee?” Lennox suddenly asked.

“He went to help Optimus,” Charlie said. She looked up to the high hill where she had last seen Optimus and Megatron. She saw blasts of energy from the area but from where she was standing she couldn’t see any robots.

“Why don’t we use this last bit of ammo on Megatron?” Epps asked. “Can’t imagine they’ll be sticking around if their leader gets sniped.”

“You’d be right,” Arcee replied. “But you can’t get a good visual of him from up here.”

“And this tank is so slow he’ll see us coming a mile away,” Lennox added.

“Then what we need is bait,” Charlie decided.

“Where are you going?!” Arcee demanded as Charlie started her run back up to the battle.

“Just have that tank ready to fire,” Charlie ordered over her shoulder, hoping this wasn’t the worst idea.
No Bots or Cons tried to stop her as she made her way up. Charlie kept her eyes skyward, looking for Thundercracker. Where the hell did he go?

But, her legs aching from the climb, Charlie reached a spot where she could see the fight.

Her heart went up her throat as she saw Bumblebee was fighting Megatron, Optimus helping despite the large hold in his chest. The sight made her feel sick. Ironhide was keeping Shockwave distracted, the Con looked to have half of his face blown up which was one of the better things that had happened today.

Charlie glanced back down to the base. From where she stood Epps and Lennox were just small shapes, she couldn’t tell if they were looking at her. But the tank’s nozzle was aimed toward her and she would have to take that as confirmation that they were ready.

“MEGATRON!” she yelled with all her might.

Five pairs of eyes immediately turned toward her and Charlie swallowed the fear that instinctively spiked through her.

“What are you doing—run!” Bumblebee yelled toward her. He was distracted long enough for Megatron to fling his arm at him, sending the yellow robot flying. Charlie flinched.

Optimus moved to grab Megatron but Shockwave, with a tight grip on Ironhide, slammed his fist into Optimus sending him to the ground.

Megatron, with speed that surprised her, suddenly loomed over Charlie. He was looking around, he suspected that this was a trap. But he didn’t notice the tank down below.

Megatron smirked down at her, half his face dripping blue. “Hello, pet.”

Charlie tried to swallow—couldn’t. *Shoot him, shoot him, shoot him.*

“You were being quite slippery last time we talked,” his smile was still in place but a growl hung heavy in his voice. “But it looks like you’re done watching the Autobots suffer. A smart move.” His optics narrowed, she realized one of them was damaged. “Unfortunately I still think it’ll be necessary to remove your legs when we get back to base. You will not be escaping again, Thundercracker won’t be there to help you run away.”

Charlie’s brow furrowed, “What—”

Megatron’s head suddenly snapped around. Charlie turned to see the ammo-fired from the tank, heading straight for them.

Charlie willed the ammo to hit, to go straight through Megatron’s spark, she willed it to all be over.

Megatron stepped back, avoiding the tank round with ease.

It flew past the con and slammed into the rock wall behind them. The rock started to shudder madly and Charlie looked up to see millions of rocks slowly start to roll down down the mountain top, heading straight for them.

*It’s an avalanche of rocks,* Charlie realized, feeling her blood stop. *It’ll crush us.*

By Megatron’s expression he had realized the same thing.

A blast from Bumblebee hit Megatron’s shoulder and the Con snarled more in aggravation than
pain and sent the yellow Autobot a venemous look.

“This isn’t over,” he snarled, quiet so only Charlie could hear. Megatron turned toward the battle that had come to a stop when the mountain started to rumble. “DECEPTICONS RETREAT!”

Immediately the sky was filled with the Cons as they took to the air, safe from avalanche as they vanished into the cloud.

Charlie hadn’t moved, her eyes staring up at the large, sharp boulders that rolled down toward them. It was ready to bury her and the Autobots.

“Charlie, move!” someone called to her but she couldn’t recognize the voice as she realized what she had to do.

Bracing herself Charlie took in a breath and lifted her arms.

*Protect, protect, protect,* was repeated in her head over and over as she summoned a wall of blue, larger than any force field she had summoned yet.

The avalanche of rocks slammed into the wall, coming to a halt as they piled on top of each and Charlie let out a scream.

Her knees were bent and her arms shrieked in protest, she was sure her bones would splinter into a thousands pieces. But she didn’t drop her arms, she didn’t stop focusing on how she needed to protect the Autobots, to give them time to escape.

*But you have been given a chance to stand next to the Autobots as an equal and save your planet,*” Cliffjumper’s voice breathed into her ears. *“That is a gift we do not want you to forget Charlie. We want you to seriously think where you want to stand in this war, what part you want to play.”*

*I want to save them,* her own voice screamed in her head, defiant and determined. *I want to save the Autobots!*

This was no longer about reclaiming her planet, she was much deeper into this war now. She was given the AllSpark, she was *chosen*, and she chose to protect the Autobots. Bumblebee, Optimus, all of them—she’d keep them safe. Even if the Cons left and the world was safe Charlie knew she’d follow the Autobots off of the Earth, she’d go where they needed her.

She’d do whatever she needed to keep them safe—even if she broke every bone in her body to do so!

“Charlie!”

Somehow she was able to turn her head. The wall of energy loomed over her, the thousands of rocks and their immense weight hanging over her. She had no idea how long she had been standing like this, her body crying in torment.

Optimus was on the edge of the wall, safe from the avalanche with the exception of his arm that was stretched out toward her.

“Everyone’s safe, Charlie!” he called out.

She glanced over her shoulder, to her surprise none of the Autobots were down below. They, along with Lennox and Epps, had gone to safety. She looked up at her wall, as soon as it vanished the rocks would fall down, crushing her.
“Charlie!” Optimus called again. “Come to me! I will save you!”

She looked toward him and shook her head, terror making her already heavy limbs weigh a ton. There was no way she could run to him in time, there was no way he could pull her to safety…

“Charlie!” he beseeched her. His optics, usually cool with calm and wisdom, were wide and bright with emotion. “I need you to trust me! I will get you to safety!”

Her chest rose and fell, sweat beaded her brow, her arms felt like they would break at any moment. She needed to make a decision. She needed to-

“Charlie,” Optimus suddenly snapped. “You are an Autobot! And as your leader I am ordering you to come to me!”

Charlie blinked, stunned, and then with one final breath-dropped her arms and raced toward him.

She slammed her eyes shut as Optimus’ fingers wrapped around her and jerked backward, so suddenly her teeth slammed together. Any second she expected to be crushed.

But then she felt the warm surface of Optimus’ chest and she opened her eyes to see the rocks tumbling down the mountain side, a safe distance between herself and the Autobot.

Optimus was sitting on the ground, a few yards away a ground bridge had appeared. She saw Arcee and Hot Shot help Jazz through it. Ironhide and Bumblebee, beat up but standing, were next to it. Bumblebee was looking toward her with his optics glowing in relief.

Charlie looked back at Optimus, hardly believing she was still alive. “Your chest…”

“I will be fine,” Optimus told her, his voice low and gentle. “My spark was not hit.”

She swallowed and felt tears start to pool in her eyes, “You, uh-you called me an Autobot.”

Though he had no mouth she could feel a smile warm his expression. “You are worthy of the title, Charlie Watson.” His optics were warm and affectionate and Charlie’s heart swelled. “You have shown the makings of a true Autobot. I am very proud of you.”
Chapter 79

Dusk was setting in and the base was littered with the injured Autobots.

The most seriously damaged, such as Optimus and Jazz, were in the medic bay being tended to by Ratchet.

The rest sat/laid around, being tended to by the Autobots who hadn’t joined the fight, or humans who were willing to get close to the robots. Lennox was one such human, using the skills Ratchet was teaching him to help make the injured soldiers more comfortable.

Epps was surrounded by a small crowd of humans, Cade, Otis, and the new girl Alexis, were among the group. He was telling them about his own part in the fight, apparently he had shot Dropkick in the face.


Bumblebee sat in a corner of the base, not too close to others but he had a good view of the rest of the Autobots. Charlie sat on his lap, her head pressed against his chest.

She hadn’t moved an inch since the two had settled down, Bumblebee had doubts that she could. For someone who had complained that he was always putting himself in harm’s way when she was always battering her body with the over use of her abilities.

Now that he wasn’t in the throes of battle Bumblebee could replay all that had happened just that day.

There was the defeat of the Driller…fighting Thundercracker…fighting Megatron…honestly Bee knew that that was probably where his mind should have focused on. It wasn’t every day a scout like himself faced off against the Decepticon survivor and lived to tell the tale.

But what was in the front of Bumblebee’s mind was Charlie wrapping her arms around him and pressing her mouth against his face plate.

It took all his self control to not reach his hand up and caress where her lips had touched him. He at least wouldn’t do that where Charlie could see him.

He had seen Cybertronians do what she did, though only a few, and he had never asked or pried cause it felt too private and embarrassing. It was similar to the nuzzling he’d seen more often. Specifically he remembered a time Cliffjumper had randomly nuzzled Arcee which had flustered the femme bot to no end, much to the red scout’s amusement.

The point was, what Charlie had done was a big deal even if he hadn’t been able to return it (what he would have given for a mouth at that moment). And she wouldn’t have done it to just anyone.

“Hey, look,” Charlie spoke up from where she was sitting against his leg. “We’ve got company.”

Bumblebee pulled himself away from his thoughts to see Memo and Caly walking toward them. He buzzed happily when he saw Sam and Mikeala were with them.

“They wanted to come say hi to the heroes,” Caly said, kneeling where Charlie sat and offering Mikeala who looked to be ready for a nap.
“Place her on my lap, please,” Charlie asked. “Really not sure if I can move my arms, right now.”

Caly obliged and Charlie smiled happily as Mikeala snuggled into her chest, looking happy to take a nap right there.

Meanwhile Sam let out an ecstatic gurgle and held his hands out to Bumblebee, making grabbing motions. The robot hummed with laughter and reached his hand out to gently rub the top of the baby’s head, making Sam laugh with delight and grab Bumblebee’s fingers.

The two sat and talked with Caly and Memo for a few minutes, spoiling the babies with attention. But eventually, with the moon starting to rise up, the bases’ lights were up, and most of the humans started to head back inside.

“Someone’s getting fussy,” Caly said as she took Mikeala from Charlie. “Wanna get them to bed, Memo?”

“Yeah,” he agreed. “I’ll bring you something to eat in a bit, Charlie.”

“Thanks, Memo,” she smiled, her voice low. “Night, Caly.”

“Night Sam, night Mikeala,” Bumblebee called after the babies as they were taken away.

Charlie moved slightly, nuzzling against Bumblebee’s chest only to pull back a second later.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing!” he replied quickly, pretending that he hadn’t just jumped when Charlie pressed her face into his chest. He also pretended he hadn’t been very aware of her lips casually brushing against him when she pressed her face into him. “I just, uh…you did great today!”

Was that awkward? That sounded awkward to him.

Charlie lifted her chin, a proud smile pulling up her lips and her optics shining. “Optimus called me an Autobot.”

“As he should,” Bumblebee replied happily. “I knew you were an Autobot since day one.”

“Oh, you mean when I was terrified of you?” she joked.

He chuckled, “You know what I mean.”

She leaned her head back against his chest. “You don’t mind if I’m sitting right here, right? I think I could move but I really don’t know if I should.”

“Of course you can sit with me, Charlie. But are you sure I shouldn’t get Ratchet or Sally to check on you.”

“No, it’s okay. I just need to rest.”

The two looked out at the crowds that were still out and about. Most Autobots had been tended to, now talking quietly together about the battle they had survived. Cade, and a few other humans were still around, begging for every detail of the fight. He noticed Sally trying to drag Otis back inside but he was determined to stay next to Wheeljack.

“You should have all seen Bumblebee!” Ironhide called out, standing in the middle of the crowd. His optics were lit up with excitement and triumph. “Facing Megatron on his own, the Con could barely touch him. Not to mention he nearly knocked Shockwave’s entire head off.”
Bumblebee quickly glanced down as gazes turned to look at him with admiration and respect. He understood it was a big deal, but it hadn’t felt like it at the time. He just…did what he needed to do.

The rest of the crowd turned back to Ironhide who, along with Hot Shot, were giving a detailed description of their own personal battles.

But Charlie was still looking up at him.

“Oh don’t start lecturing about putting myself in danger,” he teased. “Not after the stunt you pulled.”

She sighed softly, “That’s fair. But I reserve my right to still worry about you.”

“I guess I can allow that,” he chuckled.

Charlie lifted her arm up then, placing her hand against his cheek.

“Easy,” he breathed, not meaning for his voice to sound so heavy when she touched him. “Don’t move so much when you’re still tired.”

“It’s okay,” she replied. “You’re worth it.”

Could she feel his spark trying to beat out of his chest? She had to be able to.

“Even if you are reckless,” she joked. She dropped her hand and with a small grunt moved so she could face him. “Reckless, brave, you should have seen my face when I saw you fighting Megatron and Shockwave.”

He gave a causal shrug, missing her touch. “What can I do?”

Charlie’s optics suddenly looked different, and for a moment Bumblebee was scared he had said something to upset her.

Charlie straightened herself up and lifted both her hands to cup his face. In a gentle grip he touched his fingers against her arms to help keep them up.

She smiled, and it was happy and emotional and scared and his spark shuddered in response.

“What you should do-,” Charlie spoke, her voice soft and nonchalant despite the emotions burning in her optics. “-is marry me.”
She stood silent, looking down at the burned body of Thundercracker.

He had crashed into the ground, leaving a trail of destroyed trees behind him. His sprawled body was smoking and still.

She waited for several quiet moments, and her shoulders finally drooped when she saw one of his fingers twitch.

The lighting blast hadn’t killed him, it hadn’t hit his spark. But his circuitry and wiring, they were totaled. She could fix him, but she would have to start from scratch. And she had a choice to make.

*I told him it was best that he didn’t have his memories back,* the thought to herself. *But maybe I was wrong.* His lack of memories and the turmoil of his emotions, was slowly driving him insane.

She sighed softly. His memories would hurt him, he would not be proud of his actions, but she wanted him to be the Thundercracker Charlie and Skywarp knew him as.

“Forgive me,” she breathed before placing a gentle hand on his cheek.

Shatter was digging through the rocks that now covered the mountain. She was the only Decepticon left on it, having returned after the Decepticons retreated from the Autobot battle. The rest had no doubt returned to the safety of their bases.

Whatever Megatron was doing right then, he was probably furious, having lost both the AllSpark and his lead undead soldier.

Starscream landed quietly beside her.

She still heard him and quickly lifted her head up, mild surprise show in her optics when she gazed up at him.

“Where have you been?” she asked waspishly before turning back to digging through the rocks.

“Around,” Starscream said vaguely.

He had been causally flying around this mountainous terrain, indulging the thought of making his own base here, when he caught sight of a red dot.

“What are you doing out here?” he asked the scarlet femme bot. “Did Megatron send you on a scavenger hunt?”

“Don’t mention his name to me!” she snarled, startling the jet. “This is all his fault!”
**Now that is something we can agree on,** Starscream thought to himself as he waited for Shatter to elaborate.

“There was a battle here,” she explained after a few kliks had passed. “You should have been there. Optimus and his little yellow scout nearly ripped our leader to pieces.”

“Your leader,” Starscream corrected. Inside he was preening with delight and with a little disbelief that B-127 of all Cybertronians had matched up against Megatron.

“Who knows,” Shatter continued. “They might have killed them if this avalanche hadn’t started.”

“An avalanche?” Starscream looked around. “Did the Autobots make it out?”

“Thanks to that little AllSpark human, yes, she-”

“The AllSpark human!” he suddenly started. “She’s alive!”

“Yes, and she’s a pain in the aft as she always is!” Shatter glared up at him but before she could say more Starscream turned away. It was a few moments before she realized the noise coming from the jet was laughter.

“I can’t believe this!” he spoke between laughter. “Still alive! …I give up, I give up Shatter. You can’t kill that human.”

“But you can kill Thundercracker.”

Her venomous comment made his laughter die and he turned back toward her. “What?”

“He was struck by lighting,” Shatter explained. “Fell off the mountain. I doubt he survived, even if he did his collar was shattered. He’s better off dead than a new enemy.”

Starscream watched her shovel rocks as he processed this new fact. Thundercracker, dead? An uncomfortable feeling stirred in his spark and he squelched it down.

*I have things to do. Starscream does not grieve!*

“What are you digging for?” he snapped, irritation pricking his nerves.

She turned on him, and Starscream was caught off guard by the raw grief in her optics. He had never seen her express such strong emotion.

“They left Dropkick here,” she snarled. “I tried to keep my optic on him. One klik he was fighting Autobots, the next I saw him lying on the ground. I couldn’t get to him before Megatron called for the retreat and I was pushed into the air.” She glared up at the sky. “But I’m the only one who cares! Thrust and Blackout are somewhere out here to! But who else cares?! Megatron certainly doesn’t!”

She continued digging through the rocks, her body thrumming with rage. And after a few moments of watching Starscream knelt down and started to help her shift through the rubble. Shatter didn’t acknowledge him.

They were so worked up in the task that when Dropkick’s hand shot up out of the rocks both Cons jumped back.

“Dropkick!” Shatter breathed with relief.
But Starscream was faster, he yanked the blue Decepticon out from under the rocks and tossed him onto the ground. He narrowed his optics at the sight of the Con that he had always found annoying, but never hated.

One of his arms had been viciously ripped out of it’s socket, and a hole was shot through his head. His one optic looking around wildly, mindlessly. His legs looked to have been crushed by the avalanche and his remaining arm swung wildly at the two Cons, not recognizing either of them.

Starscream steadied himself and held up his blaster, aimed at his chest, directly where that abomination of a spark was.

But before he could fire he felt a weapon aimed against his head. He aimed a sideways glare at Shatter.

“Don’t you dare shoot him,” she said darkly.

“Be reasonable, Shatter,” Starscream insisted. “You know this isn’t Dropkick anymore. We need to put it out of it’s misery.”

Then, surprising him, she said, “I know.” She dropped her weapon and looked at him with a raw emotion that Starscream couldn’t look directly at. “He’s my sparkmate. I’ll do it.”

The jet took a step back as Shatter knelt beside Dropkick. The blue Con reached his hand out and tried to grab at her, but he was too damaged to cause her any harm.

Shatter stared quietly down at him, her body emotionless and her optics far away. Starscream turned away, even Decepticons like Shatter would let themselves be so vulnerable and intimate with others. Would Dropkick have done the same if the roles were reverse?

“Hurry it up,” Starscream finally growled.

Shatter opened her comrade’s chest cavity, revealing the blue and red pulsing organ left in his chest. She unsheaved her blade.

“I will avenge you,” she breathed, her voice soft and choking as she finished, “…Dropkick.” She stabbed her blade through the spark, it burst into useless liquid.

Dropkick shuddered, then was still for good.

Shatter transformed and shot up into the sky. Starscream heard her scream out in agony, the sound echoing off the mountains surrounding them.

He glanced at Dropkick one last time then followed after her.

“I can help you avenge him, Shatter,” he spoke up once she had finished her wails.

Shatter transformed back into robot mode and glared at him, “I don’t want help from a deserter!”

“Deserter, am I!?!” he snarled. “Look what good being loyal to Megatron got all of you! For Primus’ sake Shatter he brought your sparkmate back from the dead to be his empty-headed soldier! Why be loyal to him when he could care less what happens to us!?”

She didn’t reply, which Starscream took as an invitation to continue. “Megatron is the one to blame for all this, and only his death will avenge the atrocity that has happened to Dropkick and the rest of our comrades!” He held his hand out to her, “We do not belong here, Shatter. We belong on
Cybertron. Join me, I know we are not the only ones displeased with Megatron’s new rule. We can overthrow him, and finally leave this backwater planet and return to our true home.”

When she still said nothing he pressed on, “What would Dropkick want you to do?”

She looked down at the mountain for a solemn moment, then looked back at Starscream. He never broke optic contact with her.

Her hand was warm as she took his, “I will assist you, Starscream. I want Megatron offline.”

Skywarp walked through the empty halls of the Decepticon base. The rest of the soldiers who had battled had shut themselves away to lick their wounds.

Their medic had fixed his wing but they did not have the supplies to replace his arm, and now Skywarp covered what was left of his limb with his remaining arm.

The deathly silence of the base felt appropriate, now that Thundercracker was gone. Him and Starscream.

A deep sense of loneliness stabbed into his spark and he almost stopped walking. He was the only seeker left, what was he to do now that his friends were gone.

I miss them, he thought to himself. I miss them so much. But Starscream had abandoned him and Thundercracker had not only changed but had perished.

He was passing the main room where Megatron’s throne was. It used to be Starscream’s throne, things were simpler when it was Starscream’s throne.

He was about to pass it when he caught the muffled voice of Megatron. An uncharacteristic sense of curiosity overcame him. Quiet as he could muster Skywarp walked over and peered through the crack of the entrance.

“Where is Shockwave!?” Megatron was sitting on his throne, glaring at something in his hand.

“He is still with our soldiers,” Soundwave spoke up, standing in front of his leader. His back to the door. “We have suffered great injuries. You still need your injuries tended to, Megatron.”

“What I need,” the Con snarled. “Is a new soldier! Even if Thundercracker had survived that lighting his collar was destroyed, he would no longer be under my control.”

Skywarp felt his spark twist in pain.

“And we only have one vial left of the AllSpark’s blood,” Megatron added, lifting up his hand. Between his long fingers was a glass vial, red and blue liquid swirling inside.

That was from Charlie! That was what they had put in Thundercracker’s spark.

Megatron continued, “We have to use it carefully.”

“There are many soldiers who will volunteer to replace Thundercracker,” Soundwave pointed out.
Megatron stood up and started to pace around the room, Skywarp hunkered farther back so he wouldn’t be spotted.

“And I trust them all to react just like Thundercracker did,” Megatron growled. “Even with the collar he was too rebellious for our own good. Just like Starscream, Primus knows where he is.”

He looked down at the vial, “Perhaps I should give it to myself.”

Soundwave stepped toward him, “The substance is too unpredictable. We can not risk you.”

Megatron looked over to the Con, “Shockwave hasn’t told me of any specific side effects.”

“Shockwave does not know everything,” Soundwave pointed out. “And if he believes there are facts you do not need to know he will not tell you them. I do not trust his judgement when it comes to such things. You should know everything, Lord Megatron.”

Megatron looked down at Soundwave, his body was still wrecked from the battle but he held himself high. He smirked at his loyal Con, “Trust you to look after my best interested, Soundwave.”

“I always will,” Soundwave nodded.

“Then tell me, who do you think should replace Thundercracker?”

Soundwave looked away, as if he was deep in thought. Both Megatron waited quietly while Soundwave pondered this question, before the Con finally gave a single nod. He walked around to face his leader, Megatron’s expression impassive as looked at him.

Soundwave knelt.

“Give it to me,” he finally spoke. “Give it to me, Lord Megatron, and I will succeed where Thundercracker failed. I will not have you regret this decision. I will bring the Autobots, this entire planet, to bow before you.” He lifted his head to look up at his leader, “With our own Decepticons I will build you an army that can take over a thousand planets.”

Skywarp took a step back, his metal creaking as he moved. The one-armed Con quickly bolted before Megatron or Soundwave could check who was eavesdropping.

He may not have been as smart as Starscream or Thundercracker, but he knew what Soundwave had met. Turing the Decepticons into an unstoppable army…he was going to kill them. He was going to kill Decepticons and do to them what they did to Dropkick and the others!

Skywarp was the friend of Starscream who Megatron saw as traitorous, he was freinds with Thundercracker who had been a failed soldier. Skywarp had no doubt he would not last if he stayed in this base.

I have to go! He realized as his feet carried him out of the base, he couldn’t transform anymore without his arm but he could still fly. He’d go…where would he go?

Reaching the exit and bolting into the dark sky Skywarp tried to figure out where he could go. He had no idea where Starscream had flown off to, and a bitter part of Skywarp didn’t want to go find him.

So, unless he wanted to be a loner (he did not), he only had one option. And that option had brown optics and incredible AllSpark powers.
I have to join the Autobots!

Thundercracker was floating in a vast pool of red liquid. He didn’t know where the surface was, but he didn’t care to find it. He didn’t care for anything.

Weightless, light, empty, nothing.

Feeling a gaze on him he forced his head to turn and saw her a few feet away, standing as if there was any surface to stand on. Her brown hair flowed around her and her blue optics glowed with sadness.

He sighed, “What happened this time?”

“You were struck by lightning,” she explained. “You were hurt very badly.

“Sounds about right,” he said, not really bothered.

“I am fixing you up as we speak,” she continued. “It’ll take about a day, I don’t think anything will bother you as I do so.”

“Thanks, I suppose.”

“And I’ve made a decision…” She hesitated before squaring her shoulders. “I’m giving you back your memories.”

He jolted in surprise, “You what?”

“Don’t get excited,” she replied sadly as the liquid started to drain. “I don’t think this will make you feel better. But after what happened at the mountain battle, I think it’s something that needs to happen.” She started to vanish with the red liquid. “I will see you after you are healed. Stay strong, Thundercracker.”

The jet was in a gray void that felt oddly familiar, confused and not knowing what to do he lifted his head-and was thrust into his memories:

**He watched from the stands as the gladitor, Megatronus, won another victory. He joined the applause as the crowds praised him. But as the stadium quieted down he heard Cybertronians around him start to whisper. Speaking of Megatronus’ bigger plans, plans that involved the council, plans that were larger than any gladiator victory.**

Thundercracker was interested.

**He stood still next to a purple Con named Skywarp. Out of all those who had taken the test to become a seeker, they had made the best grades. Skywarp was buzzing with nerves beside him, and Thundercracker lifted his chin to show how calm he was-on the outside. Inside he was as anxious as the purple Con.**
The two stood in the hull of the Nemesis, Megatronus-Megatron’s, ship. The great gladiator now turned leader was not there at the moment, but the seekers were not waiting for him.

They were waiting for his second in command-Starscream.

Starscream carried himself with an air of superiority that almost made Thundercracker laugh. He gave the two careful praise before going on to recite a speech about what an honor it was to serve under him. Megatron’s ride hand.

Thundercracker glanced at Skywarp. The purple Con’s optics were bright with excitement and amusement. He glanced at Thundercracker and smiled. Thundercracker decided he liked this Skywarp. He looked over to Starscream, still stroking his own ego and barley noticing the two.

Thundercracker smirked, he liked that one too. For some odd reason.

They were in the midst of battle, the Autobots trying to break into the Nemesis. Shockwave and Soundwave were holding them off while Thundercracker and Skywarp went to warn Megatron and Starscream. They either needed to retreat or call for reinforcements.

The two stopped dead in their tracks when they entered the hull—and saw Starscream standing over Megatron’s body.

Energon formed a puddle around the two Decepticons. Starscream whirled around, optics wide, only to relax when he saw them. “Ah, it’s just you.”

“What…what happened?” Thundercracker breathed, already knowing the answer. He had known him for a long time and Starscream had always talked of how he would have been a better leader. And Thundercracker even agreed.

Though he hadn’t expected Starscream to act on it.

“He didn’t even look,” Starscream said. Energon was stained on his arm as he looked down at Megatron’s body. “He was foolish enough to turn his back to me.”

He turned back to Thundercracker and Skywarp, straightening up. A new light entered his optic, a look of triumph, victory, a king. “Shoot our dear departed Megatron out into the vastness of space. I have an army to rule.”

The invasion of Earth was something he only had a bird’s eye view of. He never got too close to the ground, he took down planes and jets that fired at him. He did not want to see these creatures that didn’t stand a chance. But he didn’t tell Starscream that, he had not been eager to invade Earth either. But somehow-someway-both Megatron and the AllSpark were sensed to be here.

It wasn’t long after the fall of the humans did the scout Cliffjumper appeared, and he had put up a formidable fight, giving all three seekers scrapes to remember him by. But eventually they were able to slay him.

Then they found that brown-eyed organic female.

Starscream had toyed with her for a bit, but then she got too close the AllSpark for his liking.
He didn’t see her again until she was brought to the base. She had smiled at him, treated him with a tender kindness he was not used to. He had enjoyed the attention.

He recalled one night, while he was standing guard over the humans, that she had walked over.

“I wanted to keep you company,” she had explained. “If you don’t mind.”

He only nodded.

She had sat down while he had stood. Her gaze was up at the stars, and while he knew he was meant to be keeping watching…Thundercracker found himself watching her.

He didn’t mind the way the humans were built, it was sort of attractive.

“Is it boring having to stand watch?” she asked casually, pulling her head back to look up at him.

“I could think of worse duties,” he replied. “I prefer solo guard duty, though.”

She flinched. He didn’t like that. “Do you want me to go?”

“No,” he replied, maybe too quickly. “You aren’t annoying like…others.”

She smiled up at him, “Thanks. You’re not annoying either.”

He gave her a droll look and she laughed, “Only joking.”

It was odd to hear laughter, but he didn’t mind it. He knelt down to hear it better. “Was there something specific you needed?” He asked because he was still her captor and he found it hard to believe she wanted to spend time with him.

And yet her answer was: “I wanted to spend time with you.”

He started, and looked away. He felt flustered, he wasn’t used to that. “Why?”

Now it was her turn to give him a weirder look, “What are you the unpopular guy around here?”

“Very few Cons hang out because they enjoy each others company.”

She looked him over, “I think that’s a shame. You’re nice.”

Nice... He wasn’t sure how she could say that after all that had happened. He narrowed his optics.

“What?”

“If this is some trick the Autobots taught you, trying to soften me up, it won’t work.”

Charlie scowled at him and rose to her feet. “It wasn’t a trick. If you don’t want me around then just say so, I’ve been rejected before I can handle it again.”

She moved to head back to the other humans, but came to a halt when Thundercracker suddenly reached out. With his forefinger and thumb he held her arm, keeping her in place. She looked over her shoulder, her expression wary.

“Who would ever reject you?” he asked quietly. What a stupid human that was.

Charlie frowned, “I guess I’m the human version of you. Unpopular.”
“I’m not unpopular,” he removed his hand. “And I don’t believe you were either.”

Surprising him she smiled, surprising him further his spark jumped. “Was that a compliment?” she asked.


“Facts can be compliments,” she quipped.

He rolled his optics, taking note that there was a bubble of mirth in his chest. “You can sit back down. If you want. I know how easily tired you humans get.”

She laughed again before returning to her seat.

They talked a lot after that. So much so that when he came across a beautiful stone he wanted to give it to her. So much so he had felt such a wave of possessiveness, when Megatron was revived and touched her. So much so he openly betrayed the Decepticons and set her free.

And then-and then-

He attacked the Autobots, right in front of her.

He had threatened her, had terrified her, had made her look at him with such heart ache. He had betrayed her to.

And then she and B-127 had fallen off a cliff. Had fallen…had fallen…

.

“NO!” Thundercracker jolted away with a shriek, throwing his arm out as if to catch the human and Autobot.

But they weren’t there, smashed forestry surrounded him, mountains loomed over him. The mountains…the fight…Primus, what had he done?

“Thundercracker?”

He looked down.

The girl-AllSpark-hologram-she looked like her. And she was staring up at him with blue optics brimming with worry and kindness. “Did you-”

“I can remember,” he shuddered, “I can remember everything.”

All those feelings rushed back and this time he could place everyone. Now all the pieces in this puzzle had been fixed-and it was such a tragic puzzle.

“I hurt Skywarp…” he breathed, his body shaking. “I hurt him…and-and Charlie I-I threaten-” He looked beseechingly down at her look alike. “Is she okay? Tell me she survived that fall, please!”

She looked up at him with mournful optics, “I’m sorry. I have no idea. I couldn’t sense her.”
Thundercracker’s head fell, pressed against the mud beneath him. “It’s all my fault… It’s all my fault.”

“No, no,” she reached over and wrapped her arms around his neck. She was blissfully solid. “None of this was your fault, Thundercracker.”

“I’m so sorry,” his voice broke with a sob as he put his shaking arms around her. “I’m so, so sorry!”

Chapter End Notes

And with that season 2 is complete! I hope you all enjoyed yourselves I do say I one upped the season 1 finale. Clearly have a lot in store for the third and final season (some stuff that hasn't even been revealed yet!) and you guys will get to see it...AFTER my hiatus. It's a big season i still have loads to plan (also gotta finish Thunderstruck and work on my TLK rewrite). So until then thanks for reading and I look forward to the all the screaming in the comments.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!