You pause for a moment, considering insanity at the prospect of battling a giant robot with two kitchen knives while static-peppered Michael Jackson blares in the background.

“Nah,” you think, "Better roll with the punches.”
Stretching my scifi wings a little bit. Unfortunately in my experience when birds stretch their wings they get them caught in the cage-bars and flap all over the place until they fall on the floor and have a seizure and shit themselves. uh. Yeah.

Anyways, this story is set somewhere within the Aligned continuity with elements of the G1 timeline present. Focus will be primarily on the Prime cast. There will be smut eventually, but it's going to be a while.

I have to give credit to the brilliant Larry Niven for the concept that drives this fic. A concept that I can't mention without spoiling it. A concept I may very well run into the fucking ground because I suck at math. I'll try my damndest to do it justice though.

I am new to this fandom and readily welcome all types of criticism.

Enjoy.
Chapter 1

Prologue - Present Day

“Pull the switch.”

You close your eyes, breathing even through your nose, trying to ignore the disbelieving look you know the medic is giving you.

“Are you sure about this?”

“No I'm not sure.” you grit your teeth, keeping the last remark to yourself. He was reluctant enough to help as it was and you didn't need to give him anymore reason to doubt himself. “Yes, I'm sure. Let's do this.”

“The cortical patch was never developed for use on a cold frame, or for humans, and certainly not for anything this insane.”

You give him an incredulous look. “I was never sane and neither are you.”

“Why I...the nerve-”

“Just pull the goddamn switch Ratchet.” you exhale slowly, trying you best not to shake, to give into the overwhelming fear you kept barricaded in the back of your mind. And giving in sounded so sweet right about now, as everything you were about to lose streams through your subconscious.

“This...this isn't fair.”

“No, it's not” you reply. “Nothing is fair and you know it and you're just saying that 'cause you're worried.”
“I’m saying it because I’m right.” he replies tensely. “Not to me, not to anyone. Not to Optimus.”

You swallow hard, fighting back the tears burning behind your eyes. Your EM field pulses wildly with anxiety and you try your best to reign it in. *Please don’t notice please don’t notice.*

“How’s he doing?”

You concentrate as hard as you can on happy thoughts, on sending a warm, comforting pulse back to him. “I’m fine. Everything’s fine.”

The response is terror. Pure, unadulterated terror like you’ve never felt before, that you’d never expected to feel from him. *You* feel like an idiot. “Fine” was never fine. Fine was codeword for “not fine” for “things are actually really bad.” and “I’m pulling a suicide maneuver to save Bumblebee and you can’t stop me.” Fine never meant fine. Ever.

“How’s he doing?”

“FUCK you” you resist the urge snap back. This would probably be the last conversation you ever had with him and you wanted him to remember you as he’d grown to know you. His lab partner, his friend, an obnoxious little *shit* with just enough brains to get you both into trouble, encouraging him to break scientific and medical protocol left and right. You choose to plaster a smile on your face instead.

“Look on the bright side doc, we’ll get to see if the algorithm was correct, once and for all.”
“We broke the fraggin' algorithm already.”

“That's before we knew it was genetic.”

“That doesn't change the outcome!”

“We were trying to predict, not change.”

“We predicted wrong.” Ratchet seethes. He opens and closes his mouth several times, trying, and failing, to add to the conversation. “He's never going to forgive me for this, you know.”

“He's not going to forgive me either.” you grimace, struggling to maintain your calm facade.

“Then why are we even-”

“If you had a better idea the time to tell me was hours ago”.

He gives you a long, pained look, but says nothing. You blow out a breath.

“If you so much as even think about taking the blame for this Primus help me I'll crawl out of my grave and lubricate into your mouth while you recharge.” Ratchet makes a retching noise and damnit that's funny and you need to be serious. “There's nothing you could've done to stop me and I'd do it with or without your help.”Your smile is genuine this time. “For what it's worth, I'm glad you're here to help me.”
The tiniest twitch of a smirk settles on his faceplate. He lets out a sigh of resignation, and turns back to the patch interface.

“Let me know when you're done talking to him and I'll plug you in.”

“Please...don't do...what are you....” the pulses come in fragments. He's struggling to stay awake. Your throat burns, and you let out a long sustained whimper as his own fear roars through you. It manifests physically, a dull, strong throbbing ache in your head. If he had just stayed asleep why didn't he stay asleep.

For a moment the urge to flee is almost irresistible, to run back to his berth and curl up between his helm and shoulders and find refuge in the warmth of his em field. Give everything up for lost and just sleep against him. “Primus help me.” you think bitterly, tears threatening in your eyes. “I don't want to leave.”

“Don't leave.”

The tears come freely now. You concentrate on not sobbing.

“Can't lose...both of you.”

You sob, focusing now on not shaking.

“He's not lost. He's coming back. I'm bringing him back.” you place emphasis on the last part, for both of your benefit. It'd be so much easier to pretend to be brave if you could stop shaking.

The response is indecipherable, a melange of fear, hopelessness, hurt. The tiniest wisp of cautious optimism snakes through, and you latch onto it, throwing every shred of positive energy you had left into sending it back. This would work. There was no fucking this up. “This will work.”

You almost choke on your last word, but catch yourself. You could weep about your stolen future when this was over, if you had time.

The response is weak as he loses his fight against exhaustion and you realize this is your last chance
to speak to him. You want to thank him for everything. Thank him for rescuing you, for his trust in
you, for the chance to raise a tiny, mute, yellow sparkling as your own and watch him grow.

But most of all, you wanted to thank him for, albeit briefly, turning the three of you into a family.

And ultimately “Thank you” becomes the last words you pulse back to him as he slides into
unconsciousness. You smile softly. You’re okay with this. You’re at peace

“I’m ready.” you say finally, voice unwavering. If you were going to die, you’d at least die protecting
them. And you’d die a total badass at that.

The medic’s optics are narrowed, expression unreadable.

“When I attach the patch it will pierce your brainstem. You will be technically brain-dead for little
over five minutes while the transition takes place. You may experience brief paralysis when you
wake up” he drawls on, you suspect he finds comfort behind the blanket of technical terminology.
“I’m going to ask you one more time. Are you sure?”

“You know what my answer is.”

“Humor me, would you? If nothing else it’ll help me recharge at night .”

There’s a pause. You stare up at the ceiling, sorting your racing thoughts into a semi-comprehensible
explanation.

“Do you know what a bear is, Ratchet?”

“What does a quadrupedal omnivore have to do with any of this!”
“They were one of the most dangerous animals to ever walk our planet. They still are. We've viewed them as symbols of strength and protection since the dawn of our civilization.”

“I'm not following.”

“They're dangerous, but they almost never attack unless you provoke them first.” you trail off. A slow moving fury flickered within you and you welcomed it readily. You clench your fists, grit your teeth unconsciously. *Fuel. This would fuel you.*

“How...” Ratchet begins slowly. “Does one provoke a bear?”

Your turn to face him, and give him the stupidest, toothiest, most *feral* grin to ever disfigured your face.

“You take her cub.”
Hello Spaceboy

Chapter Notes

Trying to establish timeline, which is why everything is 80's as fuck. References errywhere.

I don't know if this is necessary but lyrics are from Peter Schilling's version of Major Tom. Because, y'know. 80's

1983 - 30 years prior

"Earth below us, drifting falling"

"mreow"

"Floating weightless coming coming"

"Merow"

"Hooooo-oooome-"

"MREOW"

You open your eyes, blearily. Beautiful, glittering stars in the distance become a melange of mechanical control lights as your vision focuses. Your back hurts. Your neck hurts, and just as you find you'd fallen asleep in your office chair you realize your leg hurts. Bad.

A large, fat, fluffy persian is busy shredding your pants. 80 dollar pants.

"Fuck you Neelix" you snarl, swatting the cat away. This is stupid. You were stupid for bothering to
put on nice clothes 100 miles from civilization in any direction in the middle of the mojave desert 
manning a NASA outpost lab by yourself. With your cat. What was even stupider, you rationalized 
earlier, was being worried about what someone would think about you wearing nice clothes 100 
miles away from civilization in either direction. So you'd put them on. And Neelix had shredded 
them. Logic.

“Asshole.” you spit under your breathe. “You owe me 80 bucks. Plus the boots you peed on. And 
the pillows. And the food, you ungrateful dick.” The cat simply stares at you.

“Mreoow”

You feel stupid for expecting anything else.

You glance back at the controls. Everything is normal. Again. And your shift doesn't end for another 
three hours. Again. The clock read 11:35. You'd been asleep for 15 minutes.

It's gonna be a long night.

You climb out of your chair, grimacing at the back/neck/everything pain your short nap had 
induced, and made your way over to the coffeemaker. There's sludge in the bottom of the pot. It's 
cold. You drink it anyways, unheated. The suits over at NASA had promised more than cold coffee. 
“You have all the markings of an astronaut” they said. “It's only a temporary post until positions 
open up at Skylab” they said. 5 years ago fresh out of MIT and sensible as a brick, you believed 
them. Now, drinking coffee grounds in shredded jeans at 11:35 at night, you wished dearly to see 
that wide eyed graduate version of yourself, so you could slap the shit out of her.

You plop back into your chair, setting the mug of glorified dredge next to the com controls(dusty as 
ever) and push the eject button on the cassette player under your desk. You didn't want to hear about 
astronauts right now. Major Tom could go fuck himself.

In the process you knock over a bottle of whiskey you kept under your desk. Of the top-shelf-ish 
variety, you’d bought it when you’d first been designated this position. You intended it to be your 
celebratory drink in the event that you discovered a new planet, contacted alien life, something 
awesome like that. Ha. As if.

You grab the bottle. Your shift isn't over for three hours and you feel particularly self-loathing 	onight. You twist the cap open. You drink. You sputter, and just as you're about to leave your chair
to find a shotglass the com signal comes online.

You nearly have a heat attack.

You shove the bottle between your knees and desperately fumble for the “receive” button. Faded red, covered in nearly three inches of dust (ewww) you press it down and hold your breath.

Static.

Five years of solitude and your first communications link is static. “Fuck me.”

“Excuse me?”

A voice. An actual human voice blares through the speaker. You almost choke with excitement.

“Ah...uh...sorry about that” you reply frantically “This is “_____ “ of astrometrics, er, I mean Observatory 709, what can I help you with?”

“This is agent Fowler, and I'm afraid I can't disclose my position.”

Folwer. You wrinkle your forehead in concentration. “I don't remember anyone by that name at control, are you new?”

“I am actually, just got promoted today” the voice replied with a hint of smugness.” But this is the Army Rangers comp.”

How the hell did you get my number “I er...congrats? But why Rangers?”
“Normally we wouldn't be the one's contacting you, but we don't have time to go through the proper channels.” There's anxiety in his voice, you note. “There's going to be a meteor shower in your area, and we've estimated the debris is going to be making landfall close to your position. Very close.”

You bite your lip. Your base was partially underground, and the structural parts that were exposed were reinforced to sustain damage from a mere meteor shower. This...this was unusual.

“It's a uh, an unusual meteor shower.” You silently praise Fowler on his telepathy skills “And by unusual I mean it's emitting a homing signal”

Aliens. You look at the bottle in your hand, dumbfounded. Aliens crash landing in your backyard. Haha take that NASA.

“You still with me?”

Motherfucking ALIENS. “Uh yeah I'm fine.” you clear your throat. “I assume you'll want me to investigate, but uh, do you honestly think I should be making first contact? Shouldn't that be like, an ambassador or something”

“Getting a bit ahead of yourself there solider. We're more concerned about the homing signal.”

“So you want me to collect a sample, run an analysis, ask it how it feels, what exactly?”
“Ha ha. Are you drunk?”

“I've had one drink.”

“Is that Major Tom I hear?”

You realize the cassette player hadn't actually stopped, and the haunting strains of Peter Schilling still wails through the speakers. You sigh.

“Yes.”

“Nice. Collect a sample if possible, run whatever diagnostics you feel necessary, I'll expect a report by Monday.”

“It's already Monday”

“NEXT Monday.”

“Alright, fine” you consign, inauspiciously imbibing a large portion of your bottle “I'll have it in by then, provided I don't contract some horrific alien virus from your space debris.”

A laugh was audible through the com. You smile in spite of yourself. “Look, I know it's pretty thankless out there, but keep up the good work. I'll be looking forward to that repo-”
The ground shakes. The com signal was cut short, but that didn't matter because *the ground is fucking shaking*. Neelix screeches. You glanced at the display. A flaming, rushing, glowing *something* of red and black catapulted towards the earth. Towards right outside. Towards the garden you had planted *right into your basil plants god fucking damnit*. You grab your keys and rush outside.

**************************

Your basil plants are ruined.

Not just ruined, but smoking, charred, blackened, destroyed, never to ever compliment Italian dishes ever again *obliterated*.

That's interesting. But not near as interesting as the strange, angular, red and black glowing pod that was responsible for obliterating your basil plants.

It glows unnaturally as you make your way over to it. “Pod” wasn't even the right description, it's more like a rock. Some sort of weird, coal black rock with red veins pulsing through it. You have no biohazard suit. No anti-radiation suit. Not even rubber gloves. But what you *do* have was 1/3 a bottle of liquor in you and the overwhelming urge to make bodily contact with this alien thing. You shakily alight your hands upon it. You lift it off the ground.

It pulses.

You nearly drop it. Surprise and disgust floods your brain as you hold it. “*Might contain some weird alien virus, probably shouldn't touch it*” you tell yourself, as you ignore every facet of common sense and clutched the strange, pulsing pod against your body.

Your instinct tells you to hold it. To keep it warm. To hide it away and protect it. These are primitive emotions. They should be ignored and you would be stupid to indulge them. You're going to carry this thing into your lab and run a diagnostic and treat it as you would any other discovery.

But your instincts fight far harder than you anticipate and you find yourself making increasingly senile excuses not to drop it when it suddenly opens.

There's a robot inside. This is what logic tells you.
But your instincts completely override your logic, and your instincts tell you it's a baby. A goddamn space baby.

It's tiny. So tiny. The size of a human infant. It's body comprised of sleek, violet metal. It's optics are red, and regard you in a mischievous light.

You stretch out a hand to press against it's head. It chirps. It coos, it lifts a tiny metal hand to grasp your finger and you feel a surge of maternal instinct so strong it almost causes you to spontaneously lactate.

“You need to stop.” you tell yourself as you hug the bundle closer to your body. “It probably assimilates entire civilizations by emitting some pheromone that makes you want to care for it.” you reason as you brush it's face(plate) with your fingers. “Fight it you idiot c'mon” it looks at you almost lovingly with it's wide, innocent eyes at it gently takes your finger and bites it. Hard.

“FUCK!” you yell as you drop the robot. It begins to wail. The pod begins to glow. “FUCK!” you hear your own voice, canned, coming from the pod. “FU---” it fades out into a garble of electronic noises and you see alien characters flash onto a screen on the side of the pod. It seems to be some sort of text, and as you watch, mesmerized, the letters morph into the English alphabet. The word “FUCK!” in bright, bold letters flashes onto the screen.

Great. You found an alien. The alien was a baby. You dropped the baby. The alien had the technology to immediately translate new languages. The first exchange between humanity and this race would be immortalized as a four letter word. How fitting.

You could not have screwed this up any harder if you tried. As you try desperately to come up with a way to explain this cosmic fuck up to your superiors new text appears on the screen, in english.

DESIGNATION : RUMBLE

You look over at the tiny robot, who had stopped wailing and had begun chewing on your charred basil plants. You make your way over to him, cautiously, this time.

“So you're Rumble, huh?”
It looks at you, drops the plants and raises its arms upward, motioning to be picked up. You reach down, remember the bite, and freeze.

“Are you just gonna bite me again?”

It just stares up at you, eyes wide, the tiniest suggestion of a grin on its mouth. You feel some vital part of your brain melt into slush. Mama bear mode engage.

“I'll take my chances.” you say as you lift it off the ground and cradle it in your arms.

******************

You screw the cap back on the whiskey and place it carefully under your desk, careful not to wake the sleeping baby robot in your lap.

At least, you think it's asleep. It stopped moving, and shut its optics. You had been worried initially, but began to pulse and emit a low, almost comforting humming sound. Like breathing. Probably. Hopefully.

You stare absentmindedly at the control display, wondering how the hell to report this, if you even should report this. You should fix the com either way, though, but as you gingerly twist the volume control a piercing shriek of feedback comes through the speakers and doesn't stop until you reach under the desk and manually unplug the bastard.

You feel Rumble stirring in your lap. You hear another piercing shriek. There was no plug on this thing. Shit.

Luckily for your eardrums it teeters out into a wail, still alarming, still loud, and somehow infinitely more devastating. You felt tears welling in your eyes. “Oh god stop please.” you press him close to you. “It's okay it's okay, you're safe.” more wailing. You scrunch your face. “Are you hungry? Do you even eat? Do you need to...do some gross baby robot thing c'mon stop.” you plead to no avail.

You try to think. It was probably scared because of the feedback. You rock scared babies to shut them up. You sing to shut them up. One of those things should work.

“Earth Below Us, Drifting, Falling.”

He stops crying. He looks up at you, red eyes wide but decidedly sleepy. Bouncing AND singing. Remember this for next time you dense fuck”

His body begins to emit the same low, humming drone it had earlier. He brings up a tiny metal hand to wipe his now half-closed eyes. You feel an overwhelming surge of protectiveness welling up inside you again because pheromones. Stupid alien altering your brain chemistry. You frown, gonna have to try and take some counter measure to-

It opens its mouth and emits a quiet, burbling static that if you hadn't known better you'd identify as a yawn. An adorable yawn.

Okay. Counter measures could come later. Right now curling up in bed with this tiny, sleepy metal infant and totally not giving into pheromones was your priority.

“You picked an awfully strange place to land, space boy.” you say, just above a whisper as he resumes the low, pulsing hum of earlier, warm in your arms.
Alright. This is really rough-cut- and not polished. It also unfortunately going to be on hiatus for a while. Writing "Blackbird" while piss-ass drunk renewed my physical alcohol dependance just enough to give me DT(Delirium Tremins kids it's not fun) and I experienced ego death while trying to fight off seizures. That is a whole lot of heavy ass-bullshit that I cannot deal with on my own so I'm going to be going to rehab for a while.

So yeah. Trying to wrap my head around why Starscream is hot gave me a goddamn seizure and is still giving me little ones and I might actually die and that sucks because I want to finish this stupid thing. I have to go to state mandated therapy for wanting to bang an f-16. So to everyone out that that want a piece of that sweet high-altitude ass please do not ever try to figure why you're attracted to asshole characters because this is too shitty to make up.

Got the idea of Transformers consuming ethanol and related substances as emergency food supplies from the Marvel Comic's version of TF, so gonna have to add that tag too.

EDIT:

Alright, so what I did was kind of write up a deadman's switch if I actually do die and I went out and wrote everything I was gonna do with this fic down and wrote another file giving instructions for an awesome, sympathetic person in my life to post up here. So if I kick it and any of you guys actually like my drunken ramblings enough to want to use them for yourself then please go ahead and do it. Take all of the credit I don't really care it would just be cool to see it finished.

“Are you sure you're finished?”

“Yes.”

“I'll finish this if you want. I'm not going into town till tomorrow and we only have penz oil left. Are you sure you're sure?”

“Yes.”

“Are you Just saying yes?”
“Ye...no.” Rumble replies honestly, using both hands to pass you the large bottle of whiskey, face stilled glued to the tv. You take it from him and finish the remaining ¼ of the bottle. You weren't altogether too fond of drinking, but you didn't like to waste either, and Rumble, like most children, didn't always finish his food. Your head feels fuzzy. Perfectly fuzzy.

It's night. You find yourself lazing back on your neon-orange couch in the den of the observatory, watching Enter the Dragon on a tv with hideous fake wood paneling. He loved martial arts movies, and popping one in your vhs usually guaranteed you at least an hour and a half of peace and quiet. That was, unless, he attempted to replicate the moves or insisted you watch with him.

Most of the time you obliged. Not because you enjoyed watching (you'd seen every movie in your pitifully small library at least six times) but because there was a chance he'd get mad and turn into a cassette and hide in the goddamn vhs player if you refused and would wait until you were blue in the face from screaming before coming out.

So you watch with him. It's more entertaining to watch him watch the movie then to stare at a blank screen back in the lab. He sits on the edge of the seat, drumming his stubby legs(pedes?) against the couch with excitement. You feel a smile creeping over your face, wondering at what point you'd stopped thinking of him as a alien and started thinking of him as a child.

It wasn't any one thing, really, not when he'd pulled Neelix's tail for the first time (and had his face(plate?) scratched up beyond belief for it), nor the time you'd spent five straight hours trying to sing him to sleep, or when he'd finally went to sleep after those five hours, humming contentedly in his recharge.

No, it'd been when a repair team had finally been dispatched to fix your broken com link several months later and collect your report that you realized you were absolutely terrified of losing him. Somewhere between the grueling lullaby sessions and the swelling pride you'd felt when he buzzed out his first attempt at language(it had indeed been a variation of “Fuck!”) he'd stopped being a miniscule alien robot. and started being a dangerous combination of “something you don't want anyone to know about” and “someone you don't want to leave ever.”

You hear the “click: of the vhs shut off, and Rumble throws his servos up in exasperation. Damn you really weren’t watching the movie. The tv automatically switches to a fuzzy, static-filled public-access channel airing a bird documentary.

“*The cowbird, an obligate parasite, has developed the reproductive behavior of laying it's eggs in other bird’s nests.*”

*Kick*

Rumble, still riled up from your martial art’s movie binge, doesn’t want to watch someone drawl on
about cowbirds, so he kicks his pedes angrily into your windowsill.

“The clueless surrogate parents raise the hatching as it’s own, though it grows twice their size before reaching adulthood.”

Kick

“This species is distributed across most of North America, it’s range extending from the northeast to the southwest”

Crash

And before you can reach him, has managed to kick it hard enough to knock over the new basil plants you started on the window. "You little shit."

You open your mouth, about to give said little shit the talking to of a lifetime but you stop when he looks at you with wide, red, apologetic optics.

“Sorry.”

You close your mouth. Between the singing and the screaming you’d developed a persistent sore throat. Maybe you should stop talking so much.

You get up from the couch, about to check Neelix’s water bowl, and just as you were about to ask Rumble if he could put the cassette back it hits you. You were just about to ask a baby alien robot who crash landed in your yard that consumed liquor as it's primary food source, that you had taught to talk, and watched martial arts movies if he could put the fucking vhs cassette back for you.

“Can you pause it for me?” you say, fighting dizziness. "I gotta go to the kitchen real quick.”

“Yes.”

Well, sort of taught to talk. He's mastered yes and no, and, having realized that 90% of conversations
did not require any other words, didn't bother to say much else. You wonder if he has a learning disability. You wonder if robots can even have learning disabilities and the room spins a little bit. You take five deep, slow breaths. It would fade. It always did. Small doses. You can handle insanity in small doses.

You smile at your revelation. An “I am so smart” kind of smile on your face as you walk into the kitchen, grabbing the water bowl and bringing it to the sink. That smile becomes a “I am an idiot” kind of smile when you turn on the tap, look out the window, and see an angry, fiery, familiar pod of something catapulting down from the sky towards your house.

You’d forgotten about the homing signal.

The large dose of insanity comes in an enraged purple and black robot who forgoes the courtesy of a door and bursts through your kitchen wall Terminator-style. It’s blank face seems to be a screen of some sort, and there’s a moment’s pause as it emits familiar electronic garble.

You wilt when you hear your own voice canned back at your from a similar dose of insanity, two years prior.

“FUCK”

You shrink under the enormity of this thing, and thank the deities you have the bladder control to not outright piss yourself where you stand.

“DESIGNATION : SOUNDWAVE.” Comes a cold, autotuned voice. “OPERATION : RETRIEVE RUMBLE.”

Cowbirds. You realize. Giant metal cowbirds

You actually managed to speed your terrified self back into the den and slam the door shut behind you before daddy Soundwave has a chance to squish you like the ant you are. The force of the door slam, on account of Soundwave’s disdain for doors, brings the entire wall of your broken house
down around you, and you’re pinned under the door. Rumble screams.

It’s a terrified scream, not a “I want to watch ‘Enter the dragon again’” scream and hearing it hurts more than the door digging into your spine.

You need to get out now. Because if you don’t the whole place is going to explode and big daddy robot is going to take your Rumble and leave you all alone. That’s not an option.

This resolve gives you enough strength to kick down the door, and enough emotional baggage to load into an airplane, because at some point he’d stopped being Rumble and started being “your” Rumble. You’re nobody’s bitch and nobody is going to use you to build nests and take your son.

You frantically scan your destroyed kitchen for something, anything to use as a weapon and notice two large kitchen knives that had spilled out from under the cabinet, still in their original packaging. They’re sticking out from under your cassette player. You fumble desperately for them and in your haste, accidentally whack the on button.

“Beat iiiiiiit!
Beat it.
Beat iiiiiiit!
Beat it.
No one wants to BE deFEATed”

You pause for a moment, considering insanity at the prospect of battling a giant robot with two kitchen knives while static-peppered Michael Jackson blares in the background.

“Nah, better roll with the punches.”

You burst through the door with all the resolve of a mouse facing an elephant, fully prepared to die just to ruin this gargantuan thing’s day.

“She is how funky-strong is your fight”

You expect to be flung aside effortlessly as you race for it’s pede, but find to your surprise that giant things are actually clumsier than you’d expect, and you actually manage to make it halfway to what you assume is it’s groin, intending a nut punch to none existent nuts, before you’re hit square in the abdomen with one of it’s tentacle’s.
“It doesn’t matter
Whose wrong or right”

“I’ll see your nut punch and raise you a falcon punch.” He seems to say, mocking you wordlessly, faceplate blank. It has no decipherable means of telling you so, but it’s smugness turns to horror as it realizes you’d still managed to firmly plant one of the knives between the layers of plating on it’s leg.

Blue fluid, robot blood, spurts out onto your freshly punctured abdomen. It burns. Holy hell it burns. You’re pretty sure you hear your flesh sizzling. You’re pretty sure you want to be dead because it would be preferable to the pain you’re feeling now.

“Not fair.” you think, iron will dissolving with your strength. “I actually had a shot but this thing has face hugger-grade alien acid blood.”

Big daddy alien doesn’t even try to kick you off his leg. You slide down effortlessly with a faint squeaking sound. Rumble shrieks. Rumble generates words that you don’t understand.

“Carrier!”

He screams it from the top of his tiny baby robot lungs as the gargantuan thing that claimed him somehow reconciles it’s entire form and turns into a fucking airplane.

He is not, however, an airplane you can load emotional baggage into and takes right off. Rumble disappears at somepoint during his transformation into his cockpit.

Great. He’d finally learned a fourth word and you’re never going to see him again. You can only stare, wide eyed as big daddy robot takes off with your substitute child. You curse your nativity.

And try your damndest not to burst into tears as “Carrier!” becomes last the last thing your substitute child screeches out into the night.
You have no idea how long you lay facedown in the dirt, wondering why the powers that be were cruel enough to deny you ability to actually die from your wound and reincarnate into a mole.

You should turn into a mole, really. You could just burrow into the earth and eat dirt and bugs and lack the mental capacity to anguish about your current situation.

And your situation is verifiable shitty right now. You're faced with the decision to either macgyver a working communication device out of what little working electronics you had left, or limp back into your smoldering pile of a domicile and find something to (relatively) painlessly end your life with.

You find yourself contemplating the latter when you hear the faint sounds of engines on the horizon.

You don't bother lifting your head when the ground shakes once more from gargantuan footsteps, at least not initially. Why would you? Clearly reclaiming it's parasitic, adopted infant from you was not cruel enough for this species and they'd come back to finish you off. They may as well. You're fairly certain your brain was thoroughly fucked from the pheromones you'd spent the last year basking in and the chances of you functioning as a normal human being are laughably low. It had to be. You're still crying.

But when a whole minute passes without the swift and merciful death you'd hoped for, you use your remaining strength to prop yourself up on your elbows and give you just enough leverage to look skyward.

There's three of them now. They don't stare through you, as the other one had, but regard you curiously, a hint of concern twisted into their metal faces (though that may have been you anthropomorphizing a bit) Part of you is flattered that they felt it necessary to send three of them to kill you. Part of you is confused. The rest is so fucking done with this shit.

So you shakily get to your feet, spit some of the dirt out of your mouth and offer them the greeting you'd so unceremoniously established between your two species.

"Hello. My name is '____'. FUCK."
There's a long, extremely uncomfortable pause.

“What,” the one in the middle says finally, looking worriedly towards its companions. “Does it mean by that?”

The one on the right makes a sound like it's clearing its throat.

“I suppose this species introduces itself through sexual interfacing.” its optics narrow. “A little unorthodox, but it's not unheard of.”

“Sweet Primus look how small it is!” left exclaims. “We'd crush it if we tried!”

“We mean no offense, earthling-” the middle one says, crouching down closer to your level. “-But at this time we may have to forgo your traditional greeting.”

Your open and close your mouth several times, hoping words would come, knowing full well they won't.

“That's not what I...did you not get the message from that other guy or what?”

“We followed a rival signal to this location.” the middle one is close enough that you can make out features, albeit vaguely. He seems to share some structural similarities with his cohorts, though if you had to guess was at least ten feet taller than either of them.

“The one that took your offspring back.” you respond, fighting a stutter. At this distance your brain was finally beginning to wrap itself around the enormity of this creature. 30 feet tall, Piercing blue optics that twisted and shuttered like a camera lenses, dull vibrations emanating from it's frame. *Like something straight out of a comic book.*
“Offspring?”

“You know, how you dump your young on another species so they’ll raise them for you?” you smile bitterly. “We have a few species here on Earth that do that. Mostly birds. But they don't come back to kill the surrogate parents because they're just dicks, not monsters.”

“I'm afraid I do not understand.”

“D-don't play stupid!” you snarl, voice shaking with the effort of keeping your broken body upright, and you launch into a ten minute long tirade explaining how you'd found the pod (conveniently skimming over your translation mishap), how you'd nearly lost your goddamn mind trying to keep the tiny mech alive and raise him in the middle of a desert with only a cat for company, how roughly a year later the larger robot had dropped by and blown up your observatory and torn the closest thing you ever had to a child from your arms.

“You send a goddamn baby robot down to the only inhabited spot within 100 miles in any direction and have it emit pheromones so I'll raise it as my own but god forbid you have it get attached to me so you come back and get it after I've spent months feeding it, teaching it, and singing it to sleep.” your voice cracks.

“He's not even gonna remember me is he?” you grit your teeth, staring into the dirt, feeling more foolish than you ever had in your life. You were stupid for thinking it was normal to get attached that fast, to an alien infant no less. You should have seen through the pheromones from the beginning, shipped him off to NASA like a reasonable person.

But you're not reasonable. You're an idiot. A goddamn idiot. And the price for idiocy is paid in gaping abdominal wounds and tears.

“Please believe me,” and you jump because he's pressed a single digit to the side of your face, tilting your head upward to meet his. “When I offer my deepest apologies for what you've had to endure.”

The gesture is far too forward for your liking, and you consider pushing him away, but it's oddly comforting. You settle on grimacing instead.
“Rumble is indeed an infant of our race, but the circumstances under which you encountered him were by sheer chance. He was jettisoned off in an escape pod when our rival faction's ship took heavy damage.” his voice is gravely, and relaxing, exhaustively so, as you find yourself struggling to keep your eyes open.

“I also regret to inform you, that our species doesn’t emit what you refer to as pheromones.” he says, optics narrowed with concern. “The parental instincts you reportedly developed were self-generated.”

You feel your composure crack. Alright. At least your weren't mind controlled. You were just fucking crazy. What a relief.

“The one that took him isn't with you guys I gather?”

“No. Soundwave is part of a military movement our race has battled for eons.” His brows furrow, and a genuinely sad expression contorts his features. “I never intended to involve other species in our civil war, but it seems it's too late for that now.”

“This is...a lot to take in.” you say flatly to no one in particular, because it really isn't. None of this is crazy anymore. Just confusing. And sad. And stupid.

There are, roughly, a million questions you should be asking right now. They run the gambit though your mind from important to absurd in varying degrees of priority. Where are you from? What war? Are we in danger? How much danger? But in the tradition of  most human females that have considered themselves mothers, biological or otherwise, the most important, pressing question comes out of your mouth faster than you can process the command to issue it.

“Is he going to be okay?”

His face falls, and it's all the conformation you need. You swallow hard around the ball in your throat, hands curled into fists at your side.

“I will not lie to you. Soundwave weaponizes his children. He cares for them fiercely, but I cannot guarantee Rumble's safety.”
You want to break. You want so badly to break into a thousand tiny pieces at the sheer unfairness of it all, from the giant middle finger you are reasonably sure the universe is giving you.

“What does carrier mean?”

“Carrier?” he replies after a moment.

“Yeah.” you confirm shakily, no longer trying to hide the anguish in your voice. “He kept shouting that word when Soundwave took him, over and over again. He was pointing at me when he said it.”

His expression is sympathetic, impossibly soft for his metal features. “A more appropriate translation in your language would be 'mother'.”

There's a brief lapse in time between the last word of his sentence and when you find your knees have stopped working. Any semblance of composure is gone as you scream into the dirt and pound your fist into the earth with directionless rage.

You've been unmade and there's no hope of ever sewing you back together because he's gone.

You lost your son.
As luck would have it

Chapter Notes

So first off, I can't even into all this support. Like holy fuck. I had no idea this fandom was so loving and supportive and now I feel like a douche for staying away from it for so long. You guys are fucking awesome and I love you.

Secondly, I don't actually hate NASA. My experience with them was much less "Holy shit I'm working for NASA" and more "Holy shit this is the Plague Dogs ohgodwhat". I support their cause whoheartedly. But I'm still gonna shit all over them in this fic because running joke.

Also if anyone knows where to find a good beta would you mind maybe pointing me in the right direction because damn I could use a beta.

"You can let go of the knives now."

"No."

I'm telling’ you, It's safe here."

"No."

"We ain’t gonna take your furry youngling, if that’s what yer worried about."

"For the last time he’s not, ugh.” you let out an angry sigh. “Just no.”

You curl up around Neelix, who had crawled out of the smoldering remains of your home unscathed, save for a singed tail and pissed expression. In the emotional aftermath of Rumble’s abduction you’d burst into exhilarated tears when you saw your precious cat unharmed, and had
since refused to let him, or your only source of protection (i.e. kitchen knives) out of your hands. Ironhide had naturally assumed this meant he was your biological child. And no amount of explaining seems to convince him otherwise.

Though you’re reasonably certain they have no intention of harming you, you find it very hard to let your guard down, even within the relative safety of their base, most of which was made up of the remains of the enormous starship they’d arrived in. You’re in the medical bay as far as you can tell, awaiting a response to their recently issued distress call. You’d seen other bots on your way in, most staring, some recoiling (“an organic? Eww.”) and one outright screaming and running in the other direction.

None of them, however, had followed you, and Optimus had disappeared rather suddenly after setting you down. So you’re now stuck in the medbay, trying and failing to convince Ironhide that your cat is not, in fact, a human child.

“I don’t know why your so self conscious about it.” he starts, and you feel your eye twitch ever so slightly. “He ain’t ugly or nothing. All you earthlings start out that furry? And with tails?”

“I told you already he’s not-” you trail off. Your attempts at explanation have been fruitless, so you redirect your efforts into screwing with him. “I mean, uh, no. He’s in the third stage. We start out as eggs.”

“Eggs? I thought you were mammals!”

“Haha, hardly. We lay giant, gelatinous, semi-transparent eggs...” you smile stupidly. *Ha ha Idiot.* “But that’s only the first stage.”

The mech looks visibly disturbed. “And the second stage?”

“Oh man, don’t even get me started on the second stage.” you say, grinning wickedly.

You hear what sounds like quiet, electronic snickering from the corner of the room and find Ratchet trying, and failing to contain laughter.

“Mind telling’ me what’s so funny?”
“Nothing, just a vocal glitch.” the medic assures him, though simultaneously giving you a look that begs “Please don’t stop.”

You momentarily forget how shitty your life is at present and shoot him a lightning fast smile.

“Alright. So get this, inside the eggs, there’s this parasitoid, but we like to call them face huggers, cause they give your face a great big hug.”

“That doesn’t sound too bad…” he says warily

“Oh it’s not bad at all.” you assure him. “Until they puncture your chest cavity and lay an egg in it. Don’t even try getting them off while they’re doing it either, they bleed corrosive acid.”

At this, Ironhide makes a retching noise, and you’re shaking with poorly-restrained laughter. “Primus that’s disgusting! How can you live with yourselves?!”

“Oh I’m not even done yet.” you continue giddily. “So you wanna guess what happens when the egg hatches?”

The red mech has his face partially obscured by his servos at this point, clearly to hide his terror beyond composure. “Do…they explode of your chest cavity and kill you in the process?”

“Ha ha oh man you don’t even…” wait. And it takes you moment to realize he’s covered his face to cover up an infuriatingly smug grin.

“HA!” he points at you accusingly. “We saw that movie over two cycles ago! Signal came in before we even landed on earth!”

Your jaw drops, and you make no attempt to defend yourself.

“Nice try earthling,” he says, leaning down to level his helm with yours. “But I’m a few million years too old to fall for that kinda scrap.”
“Worth a shot.” you reply hazily, fighting off an aneurysm on account of an alien having used “Alien” to pull a fast one on you about ALIENS.

“Speaking of corrosive,” Ratchet starts, having switched back into super serious medic mode “I need to have a look at that puncture wound you acquired.”

You cringe slightly, having almost forgotten about it, since it's not bleeding, oddly enough.

“Sure….” you say slowly, anything but. “where do you need me?”

“Examination table.” he says, gesturing towards a comically oversized platform, clearly designed for patients ten times your size. “Ironhide, help me get her up here.”

The red mech hesitates, a genuine look of unease on his face. “You want me to pick her up?”

“That’s not going to be a problem, is it?”

“I don’t know if you noticed Ratch’, but she was layin’ face down in a puddle of energon. Soundwave’s energon.” He narrows his optics at you warily. You don’t blame him. Hunched over your cat, caked in dried robot blood with a deathgrip on two kitchen knives you probably looked like some sort of nasty, pointy insect to him. Hell you wouldn’t want to pick you up either.

“Yes, well, Soundwave gave her plenty reason to hurt him.” Ratchet returns. You feel the tiniest twinge of pride rising in your chest. “Optimus carried her back with no problems. She’s not going to bite.”

“Yeah but-”

Ratchet coughs into his servo, and somewhere through the well-disguised static fit you swear you hear “pussy!”

Ironhide growls. “Fine.” He kneels down to your level and offers his servo. “Would you mind
droppin’ the knives for now? I ain’t gonna take ‘em away from you and I ain’t gonna touch your youngling either.”

“Neelix, his name’s Neelix.” you sigh in resignation, releasing the knives at long last, setting the fat, fluffy, slightly singed persian aside, and crawling into the offered servo. Your stomach lurches as he gets up, and you grip his digits with both arms to keep yourself in place.

“Relax, I won’t drop ya.” he says, setting you gently down on the examination table. You look at him skeptically, but eventually let go, and position yourself gingerly onto the platform.

“I’m gonna go and have a look at the security system.” Ironhide says quickly, with all the grace of someone that is clearly squeamish of medical procedures but refuses to admit it. “I’m not sure how much of it was damaged in the crash.”

“Perfectly reasonable excuse to leave.” Ratchet replies with a tone that isn’t condescending at all. “All the better to leave before she starts spewing acid.”

He opens his vocal processor, as if he had a ready retort, but thinks better of it and quietly storms off.

“Pussy.” you cough into your hand. The medic twitches, and to your surprise, gives you a wry, split second smile. You return it.

“Does he just pretend to be stupid?” you ask Ratchet once he’s safely out of earshot. “Or does he honestly believe I’m related to my cat?”

“He’s much smarter than he lets on,” he replies distractedly, fiddling with some odd alien instruments that totally aren’t making you nervous. “But it was mostly a coincidence that particular film was the first transmission we received from your planet.”

“THAT was the first transmission?” you say, suddenly feeling much less guilty about your first-contact F-bomb with the decepticons. “I’m surprised you guys didn’t turn your ship around in the first five minutes.”

He chuckles softly. “Mirage actually suggested we do that. He’s always been somewhat phobic of organic life.”
“Is he the one that ran off screaming when we came in?”

“No, that was Red Alert. However he, ah, enjoys a wider variety of phobias than most.” the careful phrasing on the last part lets you know that’s the most polite way he can think to word “whackjob.”

“I see,” you say, thoroughly amused at the idea of metal giants fleeing in terror from something as tiny as yourself. “Well, you can let them know I won’t be laying eggs in them. At least not anytime soon.” you put emphasis on the last word. He snorts, good-naturedly. This guy’s cool. This guy is totally gonna be your best friend and you can go on all sorts of whacky adventures with him and trust him with your life.

“Alright then,” Ratchet says, finally abandoning his instruments and leaning over you to examine to wound up close. “Where is your central fluid pump located, and how many do you have?”

You stare up at him in stunned silence, before it dawns on you that he’s actually asking where your heart is and how many you have. Gonna have to dial back on that cool part a little buddy.

“Uh, In my upper chest cavity,” you start, suddenly remembering that doctor or no, he’s still an robot with a PHD in robots. Gonna need some of that trust back too. “And I’ve only got one.”

He frowns. “How terribly inefficient. It wasn’t punctured, I take it?”

“No.” you reply shortly, feeling somewhat self conscious as he examines your eviscerated midsection. “It actually doesn’t feel like anything was damaged. I mean, I know it definitely was, but I’m not in any pain, and I’m not bleeding.”

He says nothing, staring blankly at the readings from a scanning device integrated into his right arm.

“Well, you definitely were damaged, “ he says, straining emphasis on “were.” “But you aren’t now.”

You blink. “Mind elaborating?”
“I’m not sure if I can.” he replies, optics wide with disbelief. “Are you certain this substance bled out of Soundwave?”

“It sprayed out of his plating when I wedged my knife in there.” you recall. “Why?”

“Well, for starters, it’s not even energon.” he says, brow furrowed in bewilderment “Well, it is, but nothing like I’ve ever encountered. But that’s hardly the interesting part.”

You swallow hard, more nervous than you’d been all night.

“What’s the interesting part then?” you ask, not certain you want to know the answer.

“Energon of any kind is typically toxic, corrosive even, to most organic life.” he says, bringing a servo to scratch the side of his helm. “But your system is not only unaffected, it’s begun integrating it.”

You want to be surprised, disgusted, angry, something, but at this point, at least in context, it really just makes sense. Why the fuck not?

“So you’re telling me I bleed robot blood now?” you reply flatly.

“You still have plenty of your own fluids…er ‘blood’.” he starts. “But it’s circulating your body alongside the energon, and seems to have accelerated the healing process.” plating clinks back over the interface on his arm, and he steps back, looking more exhausted than surprised. “I’d clear you with a clean bill of health myself, but we’ll have to wait for the earth faction we contacted to finalize it.”

Your heart sinks the tiniest bit. So they had made contact with other humans. You weren’t the first. You push back the mental image of your peers pointing and laughing at you. Ha ha she thought she was special. Get back to your telescope, dumb bitch.

“So, who was the first human you guys met?” you ask, trying to hide the disappointment in your voice.
“We only managed to contact your military through radio. You’re the first human we’ve ever seen with our own optics.”

You try your hardest to suppress a smile. Maybe not first contact per say, but first physical contact was something you could lord over your superiors for years to come. Close encounters of the third kind? How about FIFTH kind motherfucker?

“Which one of the stiffs at NASA had the honor of chatting you up for the first time? They give you a name?”

“We were contacted by one of your military factions, er, “army rangers” if I recall correctly. They actually forbade us contact with NASA.” Ratchet sends a confused look your way. “Too many loose ends, or so they said.”

You can no longer suppress your smile, and end up choking out a sore-throated laugh. If Rumble hadn’t been taken and you weren’t fast approaching cyborg-dom this would, without a doubt be the most satisfying moment of your life. “Haha. Drink cold coffee sludge assholes FUCK YOU!”

“In any case-” Ratchet starts, mildly amused by your outburst. “I believe it in your best interests if I continue to monitor this integration process. I sincerely doubt your planet’s medical experts have adequate, if any information on energon exposure to organic life forms.”

You raise an eyebrow. “And you do?”

His face-(plate?) contorts into the absolute groudiest expression you’d ever bore witness to and you’re not sure wither or not to laugh again or be horrified.

“What did you just say to me, you little glitch?” and you realize with dawning horror that you’d unintentionally pushed his version of a berserk button “I’ll have you know I graduated top of my class in Iacon Medical Academy, and I’ve been involved in numerous secret raids in the Kaon prison system, and I have over 300 confirmed saves!”

Oh shit don’t laugh don’t laugh don’t laugh “Hey, man I didn’t mean anything by that, relax.” you say, putting your hands up defensively.

You wonder briefly if his berserk button is a literal off/on button for how fast he snaps out of it.
“Sorry, that was a bit-out of character for me.” he blinks. “Most of that is. . . rehearsed.” he says in a sour tone that tells you his credentials have been questioned more frequently than he’d like to admit.

You default to laughter. Nervous laughter, but it breaks the tension none the less. To your dismay, however, you find yourself coughing up a generous amount of blood. *Okay, now I can be horrified.*

“I take it that’s not a normal function for your species.” he asks, aggravated expression replaced with concern.

“Not normal, no,” you manage between wheezes. “But considering all the screaming and smoke and dirt I probably inhaled, it’s not unusual.” *And kind of badass, just like in the movies*

“Is it life-threatening?”

“Probably not.” you croak, waving your hand dismissively. “I mean it’s annoying and *burns like hell* but I really don’t think it’s gonna be that much of a problem. It’s been sore for a while now anywa-”

“Ratchet!”

The voice is loud, *deafening*, and you can actually *feel* your skeleton trying to jump out of your skin. You whip your head over so fast your neck cracks a little (*fuck you skeleton*) to see Optimus, wearing an expression you can only describe as “exhausted panic.”

Ratchet returns the look, wordless. He offers you his servo, which you shakily climb into, and you both follow the larger mech to a walled off portion of the medbay, accessible by a narrow sliding door. *Must be where he disappeared to.*

You nervously wonder what sort of threat could be terrifying enough to make giant badass alien robots drop what they’re doing to huddle in a closet and panic. Godzilla? *Bigger* giant alien robots? *Humans?* (not out of the realm of possibility, considering the horrified bot’s reaction from earlier) Your mind runs wild with speculation as you white-knuckle your grip on Ratchet’s servo and the door closes automatically behind you, not knowing what manner of monstrosity to expect.
You fully hadn't expected the monstrosity in question to be another baby robot.

It’s tiny. Rumble-sized tiny, but there’s something slightly off about it’s minuscule frame. It’s smoother, ridges and joints less well defined, yellow plating semi-translucent. It’s optics are still shut, ex-venting in soft, shallow peeps.


“His electro pulses are dropping, have been dropping-” Optimus seems to have lost the ability to form complete sentences, all but confirming your suspicion.

Ratchet sets you on the ground, more roughly than you would have liked, but you hardly notice, eyes transfixed on the tiny yellow body. You notice a bizarre, stinging, but not altogether painful tingling sensation in the back of your neck that seems to spread farther down your body the longer you stare. Weird. You take a step closer, then two, but stop as the tingling escalates to tremors that stop you dead in your tracks.

The lights flicker for a moment, and you hear an alarm screech through the base for a split second before it’s cut off. Your skeleton makes a second break for freedom, but the two mechs don’t even bother looking up.

“Ironhide’s checking the security system.” Ratchet says flatly as he examines the tiny thing, retracting the plating on his arm to reveal the scanner once more. You can’t see the readings from the ground, but you don’t have to. Both of their faces are set in stone, but one is on the verge of crumbling.

“Third stage of system failure.” Ratchet says, impossibly quiet. “There’s not much we can do at this point, aside from keeping him comfortable.”

The air is thick, suffocatingly so, and you briefly wonder if this species has the ability to alter the atmosphere with emotion alone.

“What,” you ask quietly. no, not what. “Who is this?”

Optimus turns to you, and you wonder how it’s possible for a face crafted from steel to look so broken.
“His name is Bumblebee.” he says at last, defeat hanging on every syllable. “In your earth terms, he is my son. And he’s dying.”

You suddenly have a very good impression of what your face looked like when you’d been told of Rumble’s fate, because it’s staring back at you. The same desperation and hopelessness twisted into ancient metal features instead of flesh.

Part of you is relieved, that the cosmic “fuck you” wasn’t aimed only at yourself, but at you both. The other part is screaming at the top of it’s metaphorical lungs because of how much unfair bullshit the universe has decided to dump in your general vicinity.

You want to say you’re sorry, that this sucks, that everything fucking sucks but you don’t have the words nor the willpower to make it comforting.

“Why,” you ask finally, “Is he dying?”

“His carrier was brought offline during the battle that stranded us on your planet. We managed to save him, but the carrying cycle was far from complete. He was not mature enough to emerge.”

You recognize the word “carrier” and feel as if a boulder had been dropped on your spine as you click the pieces together. No. No. Goddamnit please no. “NO.”

The last one slips out of your mouth as the same thrumming/pulsing/vibrating/something returns ten times as strong and you double over as it tears through your body. The lights flicker again. The alarm comes on again, and stays on.


“It’s not.” he replies, optics locked on the scanner interface “But it’s not an intruder either.”

“I don’t understand.”
“Neither do I.” and you jump slightly when you realize he’s looking at you. “It’s “____”. She’s started spontaneously generating an EM field.” Ratchet punches indecipherable code into the interface on his arm, staring intently. “In fact, at the frequency it’s reasoning at…”

He stops abruptly, optics darting back and forth between the both of you, mouth slightly ajar.

“The parameters it’s resonating between, are similar enough to match Bumblebee’s.”

You know he’s looking at you. They both are. Optimus staring with nervous disbelief as Ratchet rattles on about how their young, “sparklings” are nourished through their carriers EM field, that the odds of finding a suitable surrogate are close to zero, how the odds of said surrogate being of a different species from a planet lightyears away are less than zero, and for this to have even the remotest chance of working that you’d have to remain in near-constant physical contact for months, half a year at least. That it’s an absolute mystery what kind of havoc this would wreck on your tiny fleshy body and there’s no guarantee of survival.

You hear them. But you can’t listen. The constant humming, the nagging suspicion that your body is a cocoon and the vibrating something is about to burst free and fly away is overwhelming. You know you’re moving, legs shaking, body trembling, towards this small, dying metal child. You know this resolve. It’s the same selfless power that drove you to fling yourself at a titan only hours ago. The same urge that told you there was no living without Rumble and that a suicidal attempt at retrieval was the only option.

The universe, the giant, unforgiving asshole universe had taken your spaceboy.

There’s no way in hell you're gonna let it take his.

“I’ll do it.”

A pause. A pause that confirms your suspicion of these beings altering the air around them, because the electricity, the bright bolt of hope is palpable.

“I cannot ask this of you,” Optimus starts, and you can almost hear his vocal processor short-circuiting at how badly he doesn’t want to utter those words. “You have suffered enough by my species hands already.”
“You’re not asking me. I’m volunteering.” you reply with a note of finality to discourage a second, halfhearted attempt at convincing you otherwise. “My mind’s made up. Don’t ask me again.”

Cautious elation flashes behind his optics. Centuries worth of stress and worry fall from his face momentarily and it stuns you how breathless his relief strikes you. Relief. You decide from that moment on, you’re going to do everything to keep that expression on his face. On everyone’s face, because relief is beautiful. Fucking beautiful.

So it’s with sweet, sweet relief you step into his offered servo, alight shakily next Bumblebee, and let the vibrations unmake you as you embrace his tiny self. There’s no pain, only white blindness and warmth as his weaker EM field latches onto your own. The humming reaches a crescendo then slows as it synchronizes, fizzling out into a low, nearly inaudible thrum.

“There. Not so bad.” you think, looking down at the sparkling in your arms. His venting has already began to even out, and you hear Ratchet’s muffled confirmation that his electro-pulses have steadied too. You feel your own version of relief, cool and comforting, wash over you as you retreat into a sidelong laying position before exhaustion can forcibly relieve you of your balance.

“Bumblebee, was it?” your eyes flutter shut, no longer able to evade sleep. “You’re an awfully lucky little guy, aren’t you?”

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“I really wish-” Ratchet begins, quietly as to not disturb the sleeping pair. “-That I could consider this a coincidence.”

The taller mech says nothing for a moment, optics fixated on the coincidence in question. “What then, would you consider this?

“Luck? Fate? Something more concrete, measurable, even.”

“Those are two entirely different concepts. Neither measurable, I fear.”

“For you, maybe.” Ratchet considers for a moment vocally addressing what they both knew, that finding a dead match for Elita’s EM was not next-to-impossible but actually impossible and that reality itself being altered was a more realistic explanation than fragging coincidence, but ultimately
chooses to remain silent. There’d be time to address impossibilities later, when his friend isn’t actively mourning the loss of his spark mate, or recovering from almost losing what he had left of her.

Right now he’d take this mountain of impossibility at face value. *Luck.*

And so he slips out of the room under the pretense of giving Ironhide a hard time about the jumpy security system, leaving Optimus alone with the unconscious pair.

“So small.” he thinks, regarding the frail human body curled protectively around his sparkling, venting in synchronicity in their recharge. He doesn’t understand why something so delicate is so willing to risk its existence not once, but twice for the children of another species. He doesn’t understand, but he’s grateful. Infinitely grateful.

He wants to thank her. Not just for Bumblebee, or Rumble, or for giving his species a second chance, but giving *him* the chance to see eyes unclouded by hate for the first time in centuries.

“_____” he murmurs, hardly above a whisper. “Thank you.”
Aaaand we are fast approaching the part where "I'm bad at math" bit might screw me over. Logic don't fail me now.

Close encounter descriptions pulled directly from Hynek's scale of UFO classifications if you're interested for whatever reason.

This is normal. you tell yourself, brain fuzzy as you carefully slide Bumblebee out of your lap, setting him next to your equally narcoleptic cat momentarily to make your way over to the other end of the room.

This totally makes sense. you say to no one, kicking aside the empty liquor bottles, which had slowly become your primary food source in the six or so months after you’d been unintentionally infected with some strain of robot blood that even robot doctors had never seen before.

Not even a little weird. you think, positioning yourself behind the line you’d drawn, regulation 5 feet 8 inches from the dartboard on the other end of the room.

No, what doesn’t make sense is that in the six months you’d been confined(of your own free will) in a room on downed alien spaceship with a premature infant robot and cat for company-

Thwuck

Is that you’d taken up dart throwing-

Thwuck thwuck

-And despite being inebriated most of the time
"Thwuck"

Are actually getting *good* at it.

"Crash"

Mostly.

"Shit." you swear under your breath as the dartboard comes crashing down off the wall. *Shit.* you think, tight lipped as a grouchy Ratchet barges through the door, most likely to bitch about said crash.

"Sup docbot." you say quickly, before he has a chance to start complaining.

"I *told* you not to call me that." he grumbles. "And I *told* you to stop throwing-"

He pauses, seeing the fallen dartboard, on which you’d managed to replicate a fairly accurate outline of Soundwave’s helm with the darts.

"Impressive." he admits, blinking, before setting it back into place on the wall. "Does you race have an inherent talent for flinging shrapnel or is that something you taught yourself?"

"Don’t know." you reply candidly. "Maybe we should ask some *other* human that had their son abducted and see if their aim improved."

There’s venom hanging in that sentence, and you instantly regret it for the reproachful look he gives you.

"Sorry." you sigh, seating yourself back on the platform next to Neelix and Bumblebee, both still fast asleep despite the crash. "I didn’t mean it like that."
“No need to apologize.” he says, and before you have a chance to try again - “How’s Bee doing today?”

“How’s Bee doing today?” you tell him as he leans over the sparkling for inspection, looming over you by proxy.

“Mnhhm. Any changes in either of your EM’s?”

You scrunch your face in concentration. The low, grinding rumble is ever present in the back of your head, if you care to look for it. But locating the secondary, softer pulse couched within it requires some concentration. You feel a gentle tug behind your eyes when you do find it, humming contentedly.

“Not that I can tell.”

“I see.” he retracts the plating over his integrated scanner, satisfied. “How are you feeling, then?”

You throw him a wry smile. “You mean aside from being bored and tired and restless and developing cabin fever on top of that?”

“Yes, yes, how do you feel?” he repeats, either ignorant or intentionally dismissive of your distress. You know him well enough to assume the latter and don’t try to hide your scowl.

You look down ruefully at the variety of empty liquor bottles lined (mostly) neatly against the wall. Some time after you’d volunteered your services as an electro-magnetic surrogate you’d begun craving increasingly higher proof until sometime after you’d imbibed a container of pure ethanol you’d given up and accepted a heavily diluted energon cube. Food as you knew it started to feel wrong, foreign to your body. You figure it has something to do with whatever mysterious substance you’d been infected with in your curb-stomp battle with Soundwave.

“Just another reason to hate that douche bag.” you frown. Just because you had lost the ability to absorb nutrients from organic food doesn’t mean you don’t want it. After three straight months of alcohol, pizza was starting to sound really freakin’ good. Or cookies. Or really just anything else.

“Yeah, I just…I dunno. Could really go for some ice cream or something.” you say, staring at the ground, knowing full well the futility of your complaint.
“Ice cream…?” he says slowly, disbelieving “your species consumes frozen mammary gland secretions?”

“Well when you say it like that it loses some of it’s appeal.” you say, suddenly feeling sick.

“What won’t organics consume, honestly?” he scoffs in obvious disgust.

“Don’t knock it till you try it docbot.” you say, clapping a hand over your mouth to hide your smile at his infuriated reaction. “If there’s one thing human’s are good at it’s making delicious, nutritionally void food.”

“So I’ve been told.” he mumbles, punching unrecognizable characters into a data pad he procured from somewhere—probably his subspace. Someday you’d ask him how exactly they managed to keep track of items they shoved into a pocket dimension located somewhere in their chest cavity, but your insanity meter has been running non-stop for the past several months, and you have a feeling that additional doses would have your brain leaking out of your ears.

You still have questions, but right now, you’d like some answers without a nature-defying-brain-fucking explanation.

“Can I ask you something?”

“Go on.”

You pause for a moment, eyes glued to the tiny yellow frame the medic continues to fuss over.

“If Bumblebee is premature, then why is he the same size as Rumble?”

He stalls in his work, throwing a cautious glance your way.

“Are you sure you want to know?” he begins. “It’s not a pleasant answer, and considering the parental relationship you had with him-”
“I’m sure.” you cut him off before he has the chance to change your mind.

He lets out a heavy ex-vent before continuing.

“Rumble, well, *all* of Soundwave’s children didn’t come into the world the same way Bumblebee did. They were engineered.”

“Engineered?” you repeat, ignoring the sinking feeling in your chest telling you that you definitely *shouldn’t* have asked because brain-fucking is preferable to heart-rending any day. *What the fuck is wrong with you.*

“Yes. Built so that they’d remain small enough to be symbiotic to his frame. So they’d be able to live affixed to him when required, and detach when needed.”

“So…like armor?” you suddenly feel nauseous. “They’re just… extra pieces to him?”

“Optimus was not lying when he said Soundwave uses them as weapons.” he states flatly, “That, however, doesn’t necessitate he not care for them.”

“Right.” you say, closer to a snarl than you would’ve liked. “Because you can totally protect your kids and justify throwing them out into a war zone at the same time. We’ve got a word for that on earth. It’s called *hypocrite.*”

“I thought it was cowbird?”

You open your mouth, but think better of it, instead turning to hide your face, flushed red with anger. Ratchet says nothing for a moment, and an uncomfortable silence ensues.

“It was…revolutionary technology at the time.”

You turn back to look at him, but his downcast optics are more interested in observing the adjacent wall where the dartboard now hangs.
“Symbiotic armor and weapons. It offered an edge, and when it first became available we dearly needed one.” That ex-vent sounds suspiciously like a sigh this time. “Yes, it required newsparks to be forged for the express purpose of weaponization, but when your infantry is ninety percent civilians without so much as a faceguard going up against war builds—”

He stops himself, you half expect the dartboard to burst into flames with the intensity his optics bore into it.

“You’re right. You can’t justify it.”

You get the distinct feeling that despite being the only other person in the room he’s not actually talking to you. The hair stands up on the back of your neck and there’s a faint, metallic taste to the air. You wonder again about their ability to alter the atmosphere, and sober upon the realization that probably would’ve been a much better question to ask, mindfuck or no.

“Did you ever find out what that weird robot blood gunk-er, energon, that got into me was?” You ask after a time, intent on re-directing the conversation. *Damage control mode activate.*

At that, he twitches. Not enough to unnerve you, but enough that you make note, and file it away for later.

“I wish.” He sighs eventually. “While it clearly contains some form of “robot blood—” he makes air quotes sarcastically “The rest of it’s composition is still a mystery. There’s no known matches in my medical database.”

“That…reassuring.” You say, making a face. “Could that be the reason my EM matches Bee’s? Or that I have an EM at all?

“Considering there’s no known record of organics actually surviving prolonged contact with normal energon, that seems to be our best hypothesis at the moment.”

“Mmm.” You agree, happy your derailment efforts are apparently working. “What are the odds of something like that happening?”
“Roughly zero.” he says, without bothering to look in your direction. “In fact, just zero. It’s impossible.”

“But it did happen.” you say matter-of-factly, crossing your arms. “Just because you can’t explain it doesn’t make it impossible.”

“Just because it’s impossible doesn’t mean you can’t explain it.” he shoots back.

You blink.

“uhhh.”

“Your primary function was to study the stars, correct?”

You say nothing for a beat, before figuring that “primary function” probably translated to ‘job.’ “yeah.” you admit.

“So you’re no stranger to the concept of probability.” he starts, finally looking in your direction. “What are the odds of your sun spontaneously combusting?”

“That’s not po-” you stop yourself, not wanting to slide so easily into the game he’d set up for you. “Not very high.” you say finally.

“Exactly. But you can still give me figures, explain the likelihood. It might be for all intents and purposes, impossible, but you still found a way to explain it.”

“Alright, I give up.” you throw your hands up in resignation. “My tiny flesing brain can’t handle this. What are you getting at?”

He smiles smugly for a split second, and you resist the temptation to make his face your new dartboard.

“We know how to measure odds. So what do we do to increase them?”
You say nothing for a moment. That question sounds like it has a deceptively simple answer, and you wonder briefly if he’s actually trying to teach you or just make you feel stupid.

“You mean *besides* taking active steps in a productive direction?”

“Yes. How does one passively increase probability?”

“You don’t. . .” you say slowly, unsure of yourself.

“We don’t.” he corrects you, *smugly*, and you have to stop yourself from reaching for a fistful of darts. “But that’s not to say there’s others who do. Do you understand the concept of luck?”

“Luck?” now *that* sounds like a trick question, if you’ve ever heard one. “As in randomly occurring beneficial events?”

“Precisely.”

“Ha, that doesn’t exi-” your scientifically trained mouth attempts to dismiss the concept faster than you can shut it. “I mean, uh,” you stutter. “You can’t…measure luck. You can’t *measure it.*” you repeat firmly, satisfied.

“But we’ve already established we can measure anything, regardless of it’s state of existence.”

“I, ahhh….” you struggle to come up with words, fighting the nagging feeling that you’re missing something very, very obvious. “You win docbot. You happy? *I don’t get it.*”

“That’s just it. I think you do.” he says cryptically. “Give it some time.” he throws you a knowing grin that infuriates you much more than it should before getting to his pedes.

“Bee is fine. You know where the com is if you need anything.” he says quickly. “And if you would, try to find some activity other than lodging shrapnel in the wall.” You roll your eyes as the door closes behind him.
You sit still for a moment, digging your fingers into your temples. You feel stupid. And you should, because you’re an idiot. Ratchet probably thinks you an idiot and that entire conversation was purely an exercise in screwing with you. “Ha ha how cute. She thinks she’s robots.”

“But that’s wrong. “ You think, blowing a stray strand of hair out of your face.” He thinks I get it, even though I don’t. So he’s probably not screwing with me.”

You shake your head. You’ve had enough dry mindfucking for one evening, and your thoroughly ravaged brain is sore from it. You can think about this later. Right now is target practice time, and you need a douche bag body to go with that douche bag head.

So you sit yourself back down, carefully place the slumbering sparkling back in your lap, shift around uncomfortably since your cat is looking at Bee with murder thoughts because “bitch that was my lap first fuck you.” and grab a fistful of darts carefully as not to disturb the volatile pair now nestled against you.

You squint at the board. Tentacles. Tentacles would be a good place to start, so you flick a few higher up than the helm on either side and slowly work your way back down, a gentle thwuck accompanying every impact. So far so good. You’ve got most of the upper body finished. The legs can wait, however, because what he needs right now is a dart right in the middle of his smug fucking faceplate.

Thwuck

“Bull’s-eye!”

You gloat to yourself for a full five seconds before the dartboard falls off the wall for the hundreth time that day god fucking damnit.

You don’t move, wondering whither or not it’s worthwhile to attempt to remove both Bumblebee and Neelix from your lap to try and re-attach it yourself when the door slides open again.

Probably Ratchet. Probably to bitch about the dartboard. Probably going to actually take it away this time and then you’ll have nothing to do except watch static-ey nature documentaries on a slightly burned tv with hideous wood paneling.
“Alright, Docbot, you win.” you huff in defeat. “Just hand me the remote so I can turn the tv on.”

“Win what?”

You freeze. Because that’s not Ratchet’s voice, that’s that low, gravelly rumble that somehow relaxes you to the edge of unconsciousness while simultaneously making your heart slam against your ribcage like a caged bear.

“Hi Optimus,” you greet him, your own voice far too quiet and high-pitched for your liking.

And you cringe a little bit, not just because your mouse impression is spot on but because if Ratchet was upset at you flinging metal at the wall then boss-bot is gonna be pissed.

“This is . . . Impressive.” he says after a beat, before setting it back up on the wall. “Do all humans share this proficiency with projectiles?”

“No really. I mean, uh I’ve been practicing.” you admit, feeling stupid, because you’d forgotten yet again that despite being in charge he’s more laid-back than the rest of the crew combined. After his initial meltdown during Bee’s darkest hour you hadn’t seen him so much as raise his voice in irritation. Nothing seems to phase this guy. Hell, Ironhide had told you he once calmly took out an entire vehicon squadron with the better part of his torso missing. Then again, he’d also spent the better half of that morning trying to convince you said vehicons consumed human infants for breakfast.

“Nice try.” you say, eyebrow raised. “But I’m too old to fall for that kinda “scrap” you make air quotes with your fingers.

“Aw sorry, I must’ve gotten confused since the scoreboard said somethin’ different.”

“You keep a scoreboard?”

“Yeah. And it says Ironhide 3, Squishy human 0.”
You narrow your eyes. “Yeah, well this human knows where your squishy parts are and where you recharge.”

The mech looks visibly disturbed. “Is…is that a threat or are you proposition’n me again? Because I don’t want to be rude or nothin’-”

“How many times do I have to tell you that’s not how humans say hello?” you let out a frustrated sigh. “It’s a threat, asshole. I stabbed Soundwave with a kitchen knife, you can’t be that tough.”

“Ha ha. We’ve got a name for mech’s that get cocky. ‘Dead.’ ” He narrows his optics, mouth set in a straight line “You got lucky. Damn lucky.”

He’s right. You sincerely doubt given the chance you’d be able to repeat your success, but talking shit to Ironhide is one of the few recreational outlets you have at the moment and you’re not going to let a chance to piss him off go by.

“Whatever helps you and your squishy parts recharge, pussy.”

“Pussy?!“ he snarls. “Get fragged fleshie. I brought you icecream!”

“Wait, what?”

“I did not mean to pry, but I overheard you mentioning it to Ratchet.” and you’re snapped back to the present as Optimus presses an actual container of ice cream into your hands.

“I…ah…uh…” you sputter, failing spectacularly at the simple task of thanking him for his thoughtfulness. “You seem less, ah, disgusted than he did, considering it’s ‘frozen mammary gland secretions’ and all.”

He blinks. “It is by no means the strangest substance we’ve witnessed other species consume.”

That…makes sense. This guy makes sense, and you want to tell him that, but you’re having trouble getting your jaw to function because holy shit he brought you ice cream. After months of liquor and the occasional diluted energon cube this cardboard carton of sweetened dairy product is the most
beautiful thing you’ve ever seen.

“Is there something wrong?” he says, confused at the longing, teary-eyed-stare you’re burning into the container. “I could get another-”

“Nonono it’s fine. It’s perfect.” you say probably too quickly and definitely too enthusiastically as you rip the lid off and taste it. “Thank you.” you manage finally.

“You…you really didn’t have to do this.” you say, still coming back from the brink of tears from beautiful, mind-numbing ice cream.

“I wish I could do more. It is largely our fault you can no longer consume organic food sources as you once did.”

“Don’t worry about it.” comes your muffled reply, spoon still in your mouth. “We had no idea what would happen and I volunteered anyways.”

“Still, I regret we haven’t been able to properly extend our gratitude, given the circumstances.”

“Hey man, relax,” you reach out a hand to touch his servo reassuringly, and find your lungs have stopped working when he turns his helm towards you. Because he doesn’t look at you, he looks in you and even though you can’t explain the difference it’s there, and it’s a little unreal.

“I don’t mind, really.” you start, once your motor skills kick back online. “If you guys hadn’t brought me here, I’d just be out in the middle of the desert in a busted observatory, probably still waiting for someone back at HQ to answer my distress call.” You smile warmly. “Besides, it’s not everyday you get to make first contact with an alien species, let alone skip straight to the fifth kind.”

“I am aware your species is new to space travel, and places high value on extraterrestrial communication,” he says, leaning in to press a digit against the side of Bumblebee’s helm, still very much curled up in your lap. “But I’m afraid I do not understand the significance of the “fifth kind.”

“There’s different, kinds of alien encounters, a scale, actually.” you start, voice shaky from the proximity, setting the ice cream aside in preparation for your mouth to stop functioning properly.
“I would like to hear of them, if you don’t mind discussing it.”

“N-Not at all.” you stutter cheerfully, as if on cue. “Well, uh, the first kind is just seeing an alien spacecraft. The second kind is finding proof it actually happened. The third is when there’s someone in the spacecraft and you can see them.” you pause. “But you guys kinda bumped me right up to the fifth kind, since you didn’t abduct me, or you didn’t mean to.”

“We did not intend it to be an abduction, though I offer my apologies if it resembled such.” and oh god when did he move in so close behind you, so close you could lean back and lay your head against his chassis if you had the courage to. “We had only your safety in mind.”

“Yeah, well, it all worked out for the best.” you say, no squeak, because he’s ex-venting against the back of your neck and it actually feels kind of nice. “Just don’t lay the sixth kind on me. That’s death from an alien.”

“I intend to prevent that at all costs.” you pretend the severity in that statement is out of centuries-old honed anger for his rival faction, not fear for your safety.

“That’s normal though.” you silently convince yourself. ”You’re the only thing keeping his son alive, so of course he’s gonna feel protective. Right?”

There’s a brief silence in which the frantic pounding of your heart actually drowns out the constant, rumbling thrum of his frame.

“It was not my intention to make you nervous.” he says at long last, and you almost jump.

“Y-y-you didn’t” you reply, cursing the return of your traitorous stutter. “I-I just can’t remember the last one, is all.”

That’s a lie. A baldfaced, outright lie and you know it. If he suspects it he makes no visible show of it.

“Are you certain you’re not nervous?” he repeats. “I have been told your kind shakes when they feel threatened. I can leave, if you wish.”
“No-!” you say far too quickly, and he recoils slightly in surprise. “No,” you repeat, softly this time. “Don’t leave.” Please don’t leave. “I don’t feel threatened.” And that might be a problem.

“Then I shall stay.” and is that relief in his voice? You try not to think about it. You don’t think about it and lean against his chassis, the gentle, constant vibration comforting. Your breath slows, and your shaking stops. Your heart, however, still hammers furiously against your ribcage. You feel sick.

“Seventh kind. Creation of hybrid.-”

You still look human, feel human, for all intents and purposes still are a weak, squishy fleshling, but it would be flat out denial to ignore the physical effects their substitute for blood has wrecked on your body.

“Either through technological means-”

Not for nothing, you probably fit the bill for hybrid, or would in the near future. So in the past two years you’d managed to run the entire Hynek’s scale of close encounters, One through seven in ascending order.

“-Or through carnal knowledge of alien.”

Well, six and a half.

You allow your eyes to quickly trace the outline of his frame, at least the half that’s visible to you. Helm tilted downward, sky blue optics half-lidded, watching over the tiny yellow sparkling curled up in your lap with weary content. So goddamn majestic he’s almost painful to look at. You bite your lip.

“Bad idea.” you tell yourself, silently hoping the sixth kind will finish you off before you’re given a chance to think otherwise.

You feel something dangerous, not just weird, not just highly-inappropriate-given-the-circumstances-, but absolutely dangerous stir within you. You force it back to the farthest recesses of your mind before it can take form, though it flickers shapelessly in it’s sleep. Some part of you is aware you’d just unintentionally reinforced this tiny flame by trying to snuff it out. That you’d given said flame all the resolve to decide the seventh kind isn’t a good idea, but an awesome one.
You scrunch your face with the effort it takes to stomp said resolve flat, as flat as a shapeless form can be expected to go. No way. Nope. You’re gonna ignore this. You’re gonna plug your ears and scream at the top of your lungs and let it grow and fester in silence until it boils over at some hilariously inappropriate time in the future.

“Bad idea.” you repeat, mostly in an effort to convince yourself. You close your eyes, breathing even, awaiting whatever bizarre dreams your subconscious had conjured for you with open arms. “Really bad idea.” your body feels fuzzy, warm, and you welcome unconsciousness as you fall asleep against his frame.
"Are you ready?"

The cloud asks you, drifting aimlessly above your head. You drift equally aimlessly under it in a sea of soft light. It's been following you for some time now, navigating the endless expanse with you, repeating it's question at odd intervals.

This doesn't make sense. This doesn't make sense in context, or out of context, because it's a dream. And dream's aren't supposed to make sense, so this is normal. And normal is refreshing. Normal is a vacation from the clusterfuck of unexplainable bullshit that is your life.

This dream is normal, and that revelation makes you smile.

In fact, this dream is so absolutely, refreshingly, blast-of-cool-air-normal that you can even tell it's a dream by mere virtue of it's normality.

"Are you ready?"

Except by that same virtue, it either isn’t normal, because you’re lucid-

"Are you ready?"

-Or because it’s not a dream.
“Are you ready?”

*That revelation makes you terrified. That revelation forces you to actually look at your cumulus companion, and take in the infinite vastness of this formless, semi-sentient, cotton-candy pink entity. Because that’s what it is. An entity.*

You’re not sure if it’s the ringing, the cold sweat, the ringing, the pounding in your head, or the *ringing* that wakes you up, but you do wake up. Suddenly. So suddenly, in fact, you jolt backwards and bang your head into the warm metal you’d fallen asleep against with a loud *clang*.

Your heart flutters nicely in sync with the painful stars now dancing across your vision because if you smacked your head against *warm* metal it means he stayed. You fell asleep against him and he *stayed*, and that knowledge is making heat rise to your face, along with more ringing.

You want to look up at his helm to see if you’d knocked him out of recharge and then pretend you *totally weren’t looking* if he caught you but you’re pretty sure you’re not capable of movement that complex right now. In fact, you’re pretty sure you’re having some sort of seizure.

“____?” Yup, he’s awake. He let you fall asleep against him and then you go and smash your head against his chassis and have a *seizure*. This is beyond embarrassing. This is some next-level humiliation that you’re never going to live down ever and he’s never going to feel comfortable going into recharge around you ever again and that sucks more than the *fucking ringing* splitting through your skull right now.

“Are you alright?” you want to answer him, because he sounds so concerned, but you can’t, because you’re a convulsing heap and it’s taking all of your willpower just to keep your head level with the ground and not *smash* into it. Though it’s then you notice that you’re not the only one shaking.

The tiny yellow frame you’d curled around is shaking too. Tiny servos clamping and grabbing unconsciously. In the whole six months you’d been here you hadn’t see him so much as twitch. Your heart drops. You search for the smaller, quieter pulse carried by your stronger one.
“Can you sense Bumblebee’s EM field?”

You open you mouth, but find yourself unable to form words. You shake your head instead. No.

His optical ridges narrow in concern. “Is there a high pitched frequency resonating in your helm?”

You want to sarcastically compliment his telepathy, but can only nod your reply.

“Try to remain calm.” he says, rendering you anything but. “I’ll contact Ratchet immediately.

“Contact for what?” you bite your lip, redirecting every ounce of your willpower into not panicking at being told to remain calm. Because if he wants docbot involved then that probably means this isn’t something you caused with your unconscious head butting, and that this is something worse than a seizure.

“Ratchet? Are you there?“ Optimus asks worriedly, tapping into his wide band com. “It’s “_____“. She’s entered endstate emergence protocol.”

“Oh.”

There’s a pause before the reply beams through, 10% or so grouchier than normal.

“Right now? Right this fragging second?”

“I am afraid so.”

Muffled cursing pans through, including a few choice phrases you’re fairly certain he’d picked up from his short time on earth.

“I just started recharging. Just started-” something loud bangs in the background. “Took me all night just to wind down enough to so much as close my optics-” More banging. More muffled cursing.
The com cuts out. Optimus gives you a concerned, albeit somewhat amused look that you return. Or you would, if you weren’t so focused on not convulsing.

“He has certainly picked up some…colorful language from you.”

“M-man that’s nnnnothing.” you smile or at least, you try to. “Sssshould’ve heard what I taught Soundwave.”

You see the faintest hint of a smile twist over his metal features as he inquires about your vocabulary exchange. Or at least, you think he does, because there’s five of him now. Your vision blurs. The ringing bursts through your head with pain so brilliant that reality bends for a moment.

“Fuck.” you mutter weakly, before the sensory overload relieves you of consciousness.

There’s burning behind your eyes, and you find yourself back in cotton-candy land

“Are you ready?”

This time you don’t hear. You listen. And listening almost shakes you apart. You don’t want to be apart, and the knowledge that this thing can make you apart with it’s voice alone scares you beyond coherent thought.

“Are you ready?”

“Stop.” you ask, pleading with the impressiveness of a mouse squeaking protest at an elephant.

It does no such thing.

“Please, what do you want me to do?”

It recants it’s previous question.
“I don’t understand!” you squeak, because you are a mouse now, clutching your nonexistent mouse skull with nonexistent paws. You open your tiny mouse mouth to ask it to stop again, to ask it why, to ask it what, but it occurs to you that maybe this is a game. A simple game. This is the dream version of a text based RPG and you have exactly two options.

Y/N?

“Are you ready?”

You prepare your tiny mouse brain a moment to consider, before deciding you don’t need a moment. “N” sends you back to the start menu. And you don’t have time enough in your short, weird-ass life to hit the back button every time a sentient pink cloud entity with a particle-combusting voice asks you a question.

“Yeah.” you squeak nervously “Let’s do this.”

“-able to contact any of the human medics?”

“I’ve been trying for the last 90 stellar cycles, they’re reluctant to send anyone out here. Only been able to communicate over the radio.”

“How much longer can she survive?”

“-Not sure. Organic brains aren’t designed to handle this level of electro magnetic activity.”

“Can you sever the link artificially?”

“-Going to have to try or else she’ll overheat.”

Ha. They’re talking about your brain, probably trying to figure out how to stop it from boiling like an egg. That’s funny. Or it would be, if every nerve ending in your body wasn’t firing off simultaneously. You wonder if you’re dying. You wonder if you’re already dead. You open your
mouth, intending to ask them if you are, in fact, deceased, but all that comes out is a whimper.

They stop talking immediately, and you see two sets of blue optics gazing down at you. One narrowed in controlled, analytical concern, the other leveled in tranquil panic. Your heart would sink, if it weren’t so busy trying to crawl it’s way up your throat.

Relief. You want relief on that face not panic. You try to smile. You try to tell him you’re fine, but can only manage another whimper.

“Bee,” you mumble finally. “Bee.”

“Bumblebee is fine.” Ratchet assure you. “It’s you we’re trying to stabilize. The EM fields won’t desynchronize on their own, so we’re going to have to separate them manually.”

Well, that explains your brain being boiled. And the ringing. And probably the debilitating pain. You try to ask him exactly how he intends to separate the them manually, what manner of creepy robot alien instruments the procedure requires, if they had some robot version of morphine, but all that comes out is a spot-on-impression of a kicked puppy. You feel pathetic.

“If you are in pain-” Ratchet starts. “-try to nod your head.”

Somehow, despite the tremors wracking your body, you manage a nod. Yes.

“Is it preventing you from communicating verbally?”

Another nod. Yes

“Do you require an organic sedative? Morphine, perhaps?”

You pause for a moment, thoughtful, before enthusiastically nodding your head. Hell yes.

“Right then. Do you know of a reputable source we can acquire morphine from?”
You consider slamming your head into the ground, but decide not to in case he took that as a yes. 
*Fuck you docbot.*

“Isn’t there anything we can give her for the pain?” Optimus asks, and christ if he would just *stop* making that face you’d feel a hundred times better. Given, you’d still be convulsing from every nerve ending in your body convincing you you’re being actively mauled by a bear, but at least he’d be *smiling*, damnit.

“Nothing that I could be certain wouldn’t do more damage.” Ratchet tells him, looking honestly remiss that he can’t offer anything else.

“I’m fine!” you want to scream at him, force your broken body upright so you could slap him right in his miserable hurt face and tell him to *stop worrying.*

But you can’t stand up, you can’t open your mouth without screaming, so you’re going to have to find some other way to calm him down, because the instinctive need do so is the only reason you aren’t panicking right now.

And so in that moment of ingenuity, you shakily place your hand on his servo. You surprise him, and he stares, confused by your gesture, but remains still. The size difference is almost comical, so you instead curl your arms around as much of his servo as you can and squeeze tightly, fixing him with the softest, warmest, most reassuring expression you can make.

*It’s okay.*

Another tremor tears through your body, and you tighten involuntarily around his servo.

*It’s okay*

He looks in you again. *In* you, bewildered, as if he can’t quite comprehend what he’s seeing, but it’s over as soon as it starts, and you can see him, *feel* him relax, feel the air lose it’s weight, feel the sweet, beautiful relief emanating off every inch of his frame.
We’re okay

“There.” you think “That’s the face I wanted to see.”

Your body is rendered blissfully numb by the relentless sensory assault, so when the next set of vibrations roar through you there’s only the faintest echo of pain as unconsciousness takes you a third time.

“Are you ready?” the voice tears through you again. Your soul threatens to shake apart.

“I said yes!” you cry out, feeling betrayed. “Stop, please, I said yes!”

“Are you ready?” and you feel your little mouse body come undone around you, evaporating until there’s nothing but your own voice left to scream back.

“I AM ready!”

This time your voice is every bit as thundering as the cloud’s, and it’s your turn to unmake it’s body. It’s blown away, bit by wispy bit until there’s no cloud left. The entity smiles. The entity has a face. And eyes. Brilliant blue eyes.

You open your own eyes open as you’re jolted awake, with the distinct sensation of having been punched in the gut by the fist of an angry god. You suck air into your lungs, but immediately force it back out because air burns. Air sets your lungs on fire. Fuck air.

“She’s back online.” you hear from somewhere above you, and the following, familiar sigh of sweet sweet relief makes the daunting task of breathing seem so much easier. You have to fight the urge to stop, however, when you recognize the same shade of brilliant blue from your brief tryst with unconsciousness.
“Hey little guy.”

It’s Bee. Optics open and seeing for the first time, regarding you with wide-eyed stupor. You’d
known him for months, he’d been constantly by your side. You’d seen him, but this is the first time
he’s seen you.

He stares at you, into you, much like his father does, and it unnerves you a little. You hold out your
hand, he grabs it with his tiny servo. You smile, the corners of his mouth twitch. You open your
mouth. He opens his.

“Beep.”

Oh god. If your brains weren’t boiled eggs before, they are now.

“Beep.” he says again.

Mama bear mode re-engage

“Beep.” he goes a third time and you feel your eyes water. You look up excitedly at your
companions but feel your heart drop at their extremely concerned expressions.

“I take it that’s not a good thing.” you say, deflated at the unfairness of a sound that cute somehow
being wrong.

“It’s not very melodically complex.” Ratchet says worriedly. “The first sounds out of a sparkling’s
vocal processor are usually high frequency chirrups or warbling.”

You wince, recalling the high pitched screeching Rumble had been capable of generating. “Does that
mean he can’t talk?”

“It’s a bit early to be making that kind of assumption.” he sighs. “But considering your vocal
processor was damaged at the time the surrogacy was initiated, we have to take it into consideration.”
You bite your lip. “So he might not ever talk. Because of me.” you say slowly, suddenly finding it very hard to look into his freshly opened optics.

“Because of you he survived.” Optimus says. “You can in no way be held responsible, unfortunate as it may be.”

He’s right, and you know it, but that doesn’t stop your lips from trembling as you mouth a silent apology to the unknowing sparkling currently tugging curiously at your hair.

*Sorry little guy.*

“So is there any particular reason I passed out and started tripping balls, or is that par for the course with this emergence protocol thing?” you ask finally.

“Tripping…balls?” Ratchet asks, eyebrow raised.

“Hallucinations.” you clarify. “Vivid ones. Sentient cloud people, mice, y’know that sorta thing.”

“Not usually, but considering your experience was the first of it’s kind, it might be. “You can tell by his tone that it’s alien-biology lesson time. “His field was buried far too deeply in your organic brain to break free on it’s own, so when his emergence protocol was activated and couldn’t separate, it sent concurrent surges back through your brain at increasingly higher intensity in an attempt to free itself. I can only imagine what kind of pain you were in.”

“A lot. Thanks.” you growl, clutching the side of your head. “So how come my brain isn’t fried?”

“You expect me to know?” he replies with an air of ridicule, but clears his throat on the withering look Optimus gives him. “That is… We’re not sure. In fact for a brief period of time, we thought it was. Your central fluid pump ceased functioning and you weren’t responding to any external stimuli.”

You blink. “You mean I died?”
“We lost you.” Optimus says, “Twice.”

_Explains the hallucinating._ “I died.” you say, disbelieving. “I actually died?”

“Both times you were out nearly twelve minutes.” Ratchet says. “From what your planet’s doctors have managed to tell me that’s a relatively rare occurrence.”

“Rare? Rare? That’s impossible!” you start, but correct yourself upon remembering your conversation from the previous day. “highly unlikely.”

He gives you the same knowing albeit smug grin, like you’re finally catching on, like you two are privy to some great big secret the rest of the universe doesn’t know about yet. You give him your best ‘I’m-probably-not-as-smart-as-you-think-I-am’ grin in return.

A grin that lasts for a split second before pain bolts through your head, weak echoes compared to the brain boiling surges earlier, but still verifiable migraine material. You clutch your head, groaning softly.

“Morphine aside, Is there anything else we can get you for the pain?”

“Um…” you pause, thinking. “Ice. Just a big bag of ice I can lay my head on.”

“Was the vehicle you requisitioned for the frozen mammary glad secretions equipped with a
refrigeration unit?” Ratchet asks Optimus.

“I’ll check.” he says, stepping out through the narrow exit.

“Requisitioned?” you repeat once he’s safely out of earshot. “Did he take an entire ice cream truck just because he overheard me asking for it?”

Ratchet shrugs. “He’s been looking for ways to repay your kindness ever since you got here.”

“Yeah but a whole truck-”

“It’s not like we can waltz into one of your stores and purchase it.” he says. “Though I’m sure he at least attempted to compensate whoever owned it.”

You shake your head, amused by the idea of the driver trying to explain to police how a giant alien robot tried to buy ice cream from him and then, failing that, one huge misunderstanding later had taken his whole vehicle. Probably in a straightjacket now.

“By the way,” Ratchet says, not bothering to look up from his data pad. “I’m going to need you to at least try to stop doing that.”

“Stop doing what?”

“Scaring the everliving spark out of Optimus. Well, both of us, but especially Optimus.”

You narrow your eyes. “Yeah, sure I’ll remember that next time the urge to electrocute my brain hits me. You know I didn’t do that on purpose docbot.”

His optic twitches slightly at the nickname, but his face remains stoic otherwise.

“I know you didn’t.” he admits, sounding far more drained than just moments ago. “it’s just. . . When you spend enough time with Optimus, you start believing everyone around him, everyone important is invincible.” he sighs. “There have obviously been exceptions to this rule, however. Glaring
exceptions.”

You look down at the sparkling in your lap, who is currently occupying himself by softly tugging at your shirt.

“Bee’s carrier.” you mutter quietly.

“Yes. Safe to say I didn’t see that coming. But considering the manner in which she offlined is the reason we were forced to land on your planet to begin with, and that you, an organic, spontaneously generated an EM field that resonates at her exact frequency that’s—”

_Not possible._ “Awfully convenient?” you prompt.

“Too convenient.” he agrees. “And I don’t believe it to be coincidence either.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s too frequent. Predictable to an extent, even. You can’t predict coincidence by virtue of it being coincidence.”

You furrow your brow in thought “So then what _would_ you call it?”

“Luck.” he says simply, ignoring the incredulous look you give him.

“Alright, let me make sure I’ve got this straight, which, let’s be honest, my skull almost split open so
that might be effecting my judgment.” you dig your fingers into your temples, totally not wanting to discuss whatever science-intensive stuff docbot is pitching right now. “You’re saying Optimus is so lucky so consistently we can, to some extent, predict the future?”

He rolls his optics “Well when you put it like that it just sounds ridiculous.”

“That’s because it is ridiculous!” you throw up your hands in exasperation. “There’s no scientific basis in that at all. What the hell kind of doctor are you?”

“The kind that’s seen far too much unexplainable slag in his lifetime to go around making it up,” he spits back. “Follow him. Follow him around for a week and you’ll see what I mean. When he falls it’s face first into an energon supply. When his canon malfunctions it blows up a decepticon armada.”

“You’re exaggerating.” you say flatly.

“When his sparkling is near death the first life form we meet on this planet happens to be one that just had hers taken away and is willing to help without a second thought.”

You open your mouth. You close your mouth. You have no words.

He’s right.

“So…randomly occurring beneficial events just happen to him? All around him?” you ask. “Does he know?”

“Not as far as I’m aware. And I’d rather keep it that way for the time being.”

“Alright, just…backup a little bit.” you say. “You’re suggesting we can predict the future. Because of his luck. But there’s exceptions. How do we factor those in?”

“We try to avoid them if possible. But in the event that we can’t, we can at least be prepared for
them, to some extent.”

“How do we prepare for an exception?”

“We look at any given situation, and estimate what outcome would likely be most beneficial to him.”

Optimus chooses that exact moment to come back through the door, bag of ice in servo.

“The refrigeration unit is still functioning.” he says, carefully handing the bag to you. “There’s more ice cream, if you’d like.”

*I’m sure there is.* “T-Thanks, maybe later.” you say, eager to use the ice as an excuse to hide your quickly flushing face.

“Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“No…” comes your muffled reply. “Well, actually,” you lower the bag just enough to make eye contact. “You could stay a little longer.”

He blinks.

“Uh, if you’re not doing anything else.” you say quickly, nervous beyond reason. “I mean we don’t have to do *nothing.* That tv gets at least one channel that comes in some of the time and, uh,”

“You nearly went offline.” he says, voice low and weary. “If all you require of me is to stay by your side, then I’ll do so gladly.”

Ratchet gives you another knowing look, having traded in his smug grin for an uncomfortable, pained frown. He leans his helm down to your level while Optimus is temporarily distracted, Bee having latched onto his servo and refusing to let go.

“This may be one of those things-“ he murmurs, almost inaudible. “That I’m going to need you to at least try to stop doing.”
Your blood runs cold, and not just because you’d accidentally punched a face-sized hole in your ice bag in the effort to conceal your face.

The seventh kind might not be a bad idea.

It might be an *inevitability*.

*---------------------------------------------------------------*

The channel does come in, albeit fuzzily. Another nature documentary, something about bears. You’d only been half watching it when Optimus had been awake, but since he’d slipped into recharge after the first hour you’d stopped paying attention entirely. Bee is still watching, making the occasional quiet “beep” when something interesting happens, but is for the most part silent. You wonder about his vocal processor. You know it’s not your fault, but you feel like shit anyways.

You close your eyes, wondering it it’s worth the effort to try and measure this experience objectively.

Under most circumstances this would have been a life-altering, soul defining, bonding moment for everyone involved. The kind of thing you file away to recall on your deathbed under “best memories” or “milestones” or at the very least “Didn’t fuck this one up.” But this isn’t most circumstances.
This is the highly convoluted-ass-backwards way of reaching this experience with some Hollywood grade special effects and B-movie writing thrown in. You came in, were thrown in from the other end of the spectrum and you have to navigate it that way whether you like it or not.

This isn’t your family. This is someone else’s family. You can’t just slide into place like the slot had been carved out for you, like no one else had ever been here before. You’re not a cowbird.

“*Grizzly bears have one of the lowest reproductive rates of all mammals in North America.*” the TV drones.

But they’re not cowbirds either. And you hadn’t slid in, you’d been forced into it with all the grace of a square peg hammered into a round hole. You hadn’t asked for this. Hell you almost died. Twice.

“*Because of this the females are fiercely protective of their young, and will readily fight to the death over real or perceived threats in their defense.*”

So maybe you didn’t get here the traditional way. Or the sane way. Or any way that requires some degree of probability. That doesn’t matter. What matters is that you’re watching a nature documentary face-down in a bag of ice cubes with a tiny, wide eyed awake baby robot in your arms while you lie curled up in the servos of his father, who, despite having fallen into recharge, hasn’t let you go.

“*Though not common, females have been known to adopt and raise orphaned cubs, and care for them every bit as fiercely as her own.*”

What matters is you are a bear. What’s worrisome is that there are no alien contact scales that contain bears, and you are now verifiably flying blind.

What’s dangerous is that you’ve honestly stopped giving a shit about scales and really just want to do bear stuff with your accidental cub. And that should be enough to keep your accidental papa bear happy while you figure out a word to describe whatever it is the three of you have.
Somewhere between the end of “Bears: All other animals are pussies!” and the beginning of “The illustrious life of the sea cucumber” you hear someone knocking on the door. Someone who also doesn’t waste half a second waiting for a reply and slams it open.

“Prahm!”

Goddamnit. “What do you want Ironhide?” you ask, not bothering to remove your face from your ice-pillow to confirm the inconsiderate bot’s identity.

“I wanted Prahm because there’s a human’s here saying they’re the ones we first contacted. I want you because your youngling got out and lubricated all over my berth!”

“Good boy Neelix.” you try not to laugh, not to avoid pissing Ironhide off further, but because Optimus is still somehow in recharge despite the door slam and he genuinely seems to need it. You, on the other hand, surprisingly don’t feel like shit.

“What do the humans want?” you hiss, whispering. “And try to keep it down would you?”

His optics flit over to the sleeping mech slouched between the berth and the wall. “Sorry.” he hisses back. “Well, they wanted to talk to him, but they asked for you too.”

“Me?” you ask, surprised. “What for?”

“Didn’t say. You commin’?”

You look back at Optimus, deep in recharge. “Yeah. We’ll wake him up later.”
“Are you sure? I know you hit a rough path earlier. Ratchet’s not gonna fry my aft for taking you outta the medbay is he?”

“I’m fine.” you assure him, climbing into his offered hand. He closes the door behind you (quietly this time, you notice) and carries you out of the med bay into another portion of the ship. You’re getting stares, mostly curious, some still uncomfortable. You recognize a few of them, but having spent most of your time confined to a single room you’ve had little time to actually meet anyone else. Which sucked, because if you were to believe the stories Ironhide has told you(which you probably shouldn’t) these guys are a bunch of B.A.M.F. war veterans who do crazy shit like throw giant metal balls at each other for fun and you can’t wait to meet each and every one of them-

“ORGANIC!” you hear screaming, and the distinct sound of glass being broken.


Inferno peels out after his reality-challenged friend. Mirage complains about the glass but doesn’t do anything about it because he’s too busy dicking around with the radio.

“Ground control to Major Tom~”

“Turn that scrap down, we’ve got a visitor!” Ironhide barks, the ability to enjoy earth music having been lost on him, much like his ability to distinguish felines from humans.

“Your circuit’s dead, there’s something wrong.”

Mirage glares at him. You glare at him too because bitch you do not turn Bowie down. “It’s not even that loud.” you whine, throwing a sympathetic look Mirage’s way. But he glares at you all the same because you’re organic scum. Actually fuck this guy too.

You finally reach the bridge, where a tall, dark complexioned human man is waiting for you, folder tucked under his arm.
“Can you hear me Major Tom?"

Can you hear me Major Tom?”

“Long time no hear, “_____”.”

You recognize that voice. *Uh oh.*

“Fowler?”

“In the flesh. I see your taste in music hasn’t changed.”

“You know him? Ironhide asks, setting you down.”

“You could say that.” you say. “He’s kind of the reason you guys found me.” *He’s also probably going to be the reason you go to prison forever.*

“Is he a male of your species?”

“As far as I can tell.”

He makes a face. “Not as furry as I expected.” he turns to go through the door. “I’m gonna go strangle Red Alert for breaking another window. Yell if you need anything.”

Fowler gives you a puzzled look.

“He thinks…you…uh…my cat…” you trail off, not quite knowing if you should bother explaining.

“I don’t want to know.” He cuts you off, thankfully. “Where’s Prime?”
“He’s in recharge. Asleep.” you add

“You’re telling me that after six months of refusing face to face contact he can’t even be bothered to bring his lazy robot ass down here to greet me in person?”

“Refused contact?” You raise an eyebrow suspiciously. “I find it pretty hard to believe he actually threatened you.”

“On the contrary. He was sickeningly polite about it. When you’re as big as him you don’t need to threaten anyone.” he sighs. “You find me someone with big enough balls and small enough brains to challenge six tons of alien metal and I’ll hire them on the spot. Brave and stupid gets you far in this business, provided you don’t die.”

“And I suppose I fit that bill?” you say, knowing better than to feel insulted.

“You’re. . .” Mostly stupid. “Not quiet in the same ballpark. Different ballpark entirely.” he says finally, leaving you really unsure about wither or not to be insulted. “I can tell you this much though, you’re a PR dream come true for these guys. You’re not only living with them, you’ve adopted one of their children, and seem no worse for wear. That’s definitely going to soften some of the hearts over at Washington and make their case for asylum far more appealing than it would be otherwise.”

You give him an incredulous look. “You’re talking like we have some way of making them leave if we wanted. Which, as far as I know, we don’t.”

“Whether we can or we can’t isn’t important. What’s important is that we build and maintain a functional working relationship between our government and their, er, faction. You’ve already unintentionally laid out the groundwork for that. We just need to solidify it with those a little higher up on the chain. Maybe have some of them meet that bouncing baby robot you adopted.”

You grimace. You don’t like that idea. The thought of strange people, government people, NASA people going anywhere near Bumblebee is enraging.
“Riiight.” you say, eyes narrowed. “I’m totally gonna hand over my infant, alien son to people who’s life’s mission is to crack open aliens. I don’t fucking think so.”

“Hey, no need to get aggressive.”

“Look, er, Fowler,” you start, polite tone betraying the warning coiled in your voice. “Don’t get me wrong. I like you. You’re a cool guy, but I just went through the rough robot equivalent of a c-section without robot morphine and spent the last 5 hours watching a nature documentary about grizzly bears.” Don’t you touch my fucking cub. “So forgive me if I come off as a little aggressive.”

Easy mama bear— he starts sarcastically, though you note he’s taken a step backwards. “It’s just a suggestion.”

“Well it’s not happening.” you growl. “What did you come here for anyways?”

“Right, to the point then—” his tone takes a darker, more sinister note. “We’ve got ourselves a little problem.”

He opens the folder and pulls out a small, slightly charred polaroid picture and hands it to you. Your heart drops.

It’s a picture you took last year, on your birthday. Rumble, ludicrous smile on his face, has a empty bottle in one arm, and a soaked, furious beyond reason Neelix tucked under the other. You remember taking it vividly, remember trying to bathe both of them at once afterwards, remember flooding the bathroom, remember swearing to never ever attempt that ever again.

You remember, and try to force the memory back along with angry tears threatening in the corners of your eyes.

“What of it?” you demand, shaking slightly at the expense of keeping your voice steady.

“You hoarded an extra terrestrial for over two years without consent. Not only that, but you deliberately hid it from my-our superiors. I don’t think I need to tell you what kind of position that puts you in.”
“But let me tell you what kind of position that puts _me_ in.” He starts. “The observatory you were assigned to was in ruins when we found it. No body, no trace. You’ve been listed as legally dead for six months already. We put the cause down as ‘freak meteor shower.’ Now I’m gonna go out on a limb and assume you don’t know what it’s like trying to write off a death as a meteor shower when there’s absolutely _no trace_ of one, but let me tell, you, it’s six levels of paperwork _hell_. The 15-minutes of sleep a night-not showering for a week straight that turns people like me into xanax-popping monsters kind of hell.” He levels his face with yours, and you can’t remember the last time you’d felt so intimidated by a flesh and blood human.

“No, No you do not. “I…uh,”

“The Seventh level of paperwork hell is trying to _undo the previous six levels._” He snarls before you have the chance to respond. “I am _not_ about to spend another week running a five-way-phone line stinking up the same suit and living off of takeout and doughnuts. Not for a _long_, _long_ time. So I’m willing to cut you a deal.”

You let out a shaky breath. If the alternative is prison then you’ve pretty much made up your mind to take whatever offer he’s giving you, but the nagging, logical side of your brain insists you cover all of your bases, even the ugly, unappealing ones.

“I’m listening.”

“We either let you stand trial, which, let’s be honest, you don’t stand a chance. And considering you’re some sort of cyborg now, prison is probably the least of your worries.” He puts his hands up. “That’s out of my hands. I can’t do anything about that.”

You cringe. So either go to prison and let the feds play alien autopsy on you, or-

“Or-” you prompt.
“Or you stay legally dead, we give you a new identity, you can stay here with your little robot family, but you work for us.”

Legally dead. As in kissing your old life goodbye. Awesome. But also as in never getting to ever brag about breaking the Hynek’s scale to your peers. Also as in your family assuming you’re dead and never getting to tell them otherwise.

You chew your lip, looking down at the burnt photo in your hand. The last time you’d spoken to them had been a few minutes before it was taken, over the phone. The call itself had only lasted a few minutes, since Rumble had chosen that exact moment to empty a bottle of whisky over your cat’s head, and the ensuing scuffle had trashed your kitchen.

“Holy crap did someone break into your house?”

“Haha no that’s just the neighbors.” you lie. “These guys throw garbage cans and scream like cats. It’s like their version of foreplay. Total freaks, man.”

-silence-

“You…you don’t have any neighbors.”

-more silence-

“…Gotta run. Happy Birthday!”

“But it’s your birthda-”

*click*

Alright. You could have left on friendlier, less vague terms. And the thought of them crying their eyes out at your funeral without so much as a severed limb to bury makes you feel like a total
asshole. But they’d probably be even more upset if your supposedly dead-self contacted them out of the blue only to inform them that you’re fast approaching mutant territory and being carted off to god knows where on treason charges.

So you never really had a choice to begin with. Just an ultimatum.

“I give.” you concede. “What’s my new job?”

“That’s to be decided. I’m sure we’ll find something for you to do. But right now-” he pulls a piece of paper out of the folder. “-You need to memorize this.”

You take the paper. “And this is?”

“You identity. Your new social security number, birth certificate, all of that’s in the folder. But what you’re looking at now is your life story.”

You scan the document, eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Military brat, resents father, fights with knives, part of an all female commando resistance group- what the hell is this, a comic book character?” you ask, tearing your eyes away to look at him in disbelief.

“Probably.” he shrugs. “We cut funding in that department a few months back, and they really haven’t been trying since then.”

“But, it sounds made up. It is made up!” you argue. “Nobody’s gonna believe it.”

“Consider yourself lucky. The last person we gave a new identity to got Cobra Commander. His legal name is now Cobra Commander. Poor bastard can’t even order a pizza.”

You dig your nails into your scalp with your spare hand, contemplating yanking your hair out. “Do I have to wear a cat-suit too or is that part optional?”
He raises an eyebrow, but remains otherwise unimpressed. “That’s entirely up to you.” I’ll be contacting you shortly with the rest of the details.”

“This is…a lot to take in. ” you blow out a breath. “It’s gonna be hard getting used to a new name. ”

“You robot buddies can still call you “___”. Hell, I’ll call you “___”, if you prefer it. But as far as the rest of the world’s concerned, you’re whoever those documents say you are. So I suggest you get to know yourself.”

And with that he makes a complete 180 and heads towards the door, humming the G.I. Joe theme quietly on his way out.

You slump down against the wall into a cross-legged position, once again fighting the urge to tear your hair out. This is ridiculous, but he’s right about one thing. You should be grateful, all things considered. It could be worse. You could be in prison for adopting an alien infant, or have had your legal name changed to Cobra Commander. Hell, you could be both.

You look again at the charred picture in your hand, feeling a slow moving fury flicker within you. No shaking this time. No tears. Because he’s not gone. Because you’re going put on as many catsuits and throw as many knives as it takes to bring that smug little shit back from his big asshole family to come live with your new not asshole family. He can teach Bumblebee how to kick things and ruin italian herbs and make noises other than “beep”. And you’ll be way too busy keeping both of them from destroying everything in sight to worry about whether the seventh kind is a bad idea or not and it’s gonna be totally awesome.

It’s with this newfound resolve you carefully fold up the picture, slide it into your pocket, and pull out the rest of the documents out of the folder, intent of following up on Fowler’s suggestion.

Get to know yourself.

You decide to start with the birth certificate, scrunching your face in doubt when you see the name.

“Marissa Faireborn, huh?” you think. “Fuck that. ”___“ sounds better.”
Dance Magic Dance

Chapter Summary

Alternative Title : Shut up and Dance with me.

In which you, the reader, do Bear Stuff(T.M.)

Chapter Notes

Sorry it took so long for this chapter to come out I was detained for a week because I punched some security officers in the nuts and had to be sedated because I hadn't slept for a week straight and thought I was Twilight Sparkle. No I am not joking, no I am not exaggerating and no there's not more to that story(Ok maybe a little bit but not much). Sleep is gud and you need it so your brain doesn't fucking melt.

Wanted to pay homage to the first TF reader-insert I ever read with the Bowie/Sunstreaker thing.

Sorry if this is kind of rough-cut I wrote this in like two days and it normally takes me a week to write a chapter.

***********

“Too colorful”

You pass over the blue and white catsuit

“Too revealing”

You skim over a black catsuit that has a generous portion of the bust cut out of it

“Not revealing enough.”

You think, looking over a yellow and black skintight option, wondering why exactly it isn’t revealing enough, if alien robots had a word for “attention whore” if alien robots had any concept of clothing to begin with, and if maybe just maybe you’re over thinking this entire process on account of a specific alien robot who you sorely wish had accompanied you here instead of your current companion.
You hear aggravated honking noises from outside the costume shop. Sunstreaker is circling the building like an angry flamboyant hawk. You flip him off through one of the windows. More angry honking. You laugh. “Haha you have to wait for me asshole.” He honestly wasn’t your first choice in partners, and he’d made it painfully clear that you weren’t his (you’d caught him trading various interplanetary slurs for “organic” with Mirage on more than one occasion), but since you’d been hand-delivered an envelope from Fowler containing 5000 USD and directions on using it to fortify your new identity and acclimate the autobots to earth culture he was the first in line on the cultural enrichment ride.

“That human vocalist on the radio yesterday.”

“Bowie?” you ask, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes. Can you locate more of his music?”


“I’m coming with you.”

And that was that. Considering his alt. mode is a sweet Lamborghini Countach you really couldn’t object. You were desperate for an opportunity to leave the base and Ratchet hadn’t objected to sparkling sitter duty. Ironhide had honestly seemed a little put out, but not enough to voice his opposition beyond shoving the younger bot for “cutting” in line.

And so here you are, flipping through catsuits in a costume shop at 3:45 in the afternoon giving the bird to an angry lamborghini while you make your best guess what kind of skin-tight abomination boss-bot would like best and why the fuck do you care damnit.

You step out of the dressing room just as the angry honking finally stops. You breathe a sigh of relief until you realize he’s driven right up against the window and the angry honking has become angry revving and his headlights are flashing on and off in a way that clearly says bitch it has been at least an hour I will drive straight through this fucking window.

You sincerely doubt he’s willing to risk scratching his finish, and considering not only calling him out on his bluff, but spitting on the window, but the startled cry from the cashier convinces you otherwise.
“Lady, is that your car out there?”

Oh fuck. “Yeah. Why?”

“Because it’s just sitting out there revving itself and I absolutely took my meds today.”

“Aww fuck,” you say, throwing money down on the counter and running out of the store in your brand-new-Game of Death replica one-piece and diving into the rolled down window before your pissed off partner has a chance to ditch you at the costume shop.

“You said you’d be under an hour.”

“I said I would probably be under an hour.” you spit back. “And because of you I got stuck with this neon piece of crap.”

“I don’t know what you’re whining about. It matches Bumblebee.”

He’s right. You give yourself a once over in his rearview. It could be worse. Bee would probably like it. Hell Rumble would have loved it. Rumble would have been fucking thrilled and probably challenged you to a sparring match(or at least kicked you until you kicked back)

Your heart sinks a little. Bee probably won’t like sparring. He doesn’t seem to be interested in doing anything other than watch nature documentaries. But damn if he doesn’t love his nature documentaries, throwing his servos up excitedly and making simple albeit enthusiastic beeps alongside the roaring/hissing/quacking wildlife. Probably trying his best to imitate them. you think, wincing at a stab of directionless guilt.

Most of your attempts to bond with him thus far had failed. Bee doesn’t want to punch things. Bee doesn’t want to watch martial arts movies. Bee doesn’t want to destroy basil plants. Hell, Bee actually gets along with Neelix and had allowed you to bathe the both of them together without making so much as a splash.

He’s nothing like Rumble. And while part of you feels like shit for wanting him to be, the other part is just crushed you’re falling short of your mama bear duties. Hell, even Ratchet voiced his concern that “sparkling-carrier-bonding-protocols hadn’t been initiated properly. Which makes you jealous as hell because he has no such qualms with his sire and the two always seem to instinctively know how
to interact with one another.

But papa bear bonding or no, you still have the nature documentaries. And you’re going to plow through as many episodes of Captain Kangaroo as it takes to keep your cub happy.

“Hey Streaker,” you start.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Change of plans.” you ignore him. “We’re going to the video store.”

He screeches to a stop in the middle of the intersection during a green light, much to the chagrin of fellow motorists.

“You promised me Bowie.”

“Calm down.”

“That was the deal. I was promised Bowie.”

“We’re still gonna get Bowie you impatient, flaming, sonovabitch just shut up!” you growl, digging your fingers into the side of your head. “We’re just gonna get a movie instead of a record. That way I can get some nature documentaries for Bee to watch too.”

“You’re still getting me Bowie?”

“Yes.”

“Alright then.” he agrees, thankfully before the police sirens get any closer. You resist the urge to slam your head against his dashboard. You better be grateful you adorable, beep booping little spaceboy.
“Are you sure ya want knives? Not something with a little more firepower?”

You pause for a moment, throwing a sidelong glance at the three bots who have nothing better to do while consuming their energon rations than watch you target practice.

“The document said knives so I’m going with knives.” you state firmly. “Besides-” you say as you throw one and it makes contact with a satisfying thwuck. “-these actually feel kinda right.”

“I dunno why you want to throw all those little ones when you could just load them up and shoot em out.”

thwuck

“Do you know what a ninja is, Ironhide?” you ask.

“A what now?”

“Guess that word didn’t get downloaded into your database.” You say, walking up to the target and pulling the knives out of them. “Ninja. Shadow warriors, badass fast little dudes. Rumble fucking loved those guys.”

He makes a face like he wants to tell you there’s healthier ways of coping with loss, but remains silent.

“Yeah, maybe I’m just overcompensating because he got taken away, and I’m trying to be the mom he thought I was. Or maybe I’m just following the orders I got from Fowler.” you walk back behind the firing line, preparing to aim again. “The point is, ninjas are small, and fast. And you guys are big, and comparatively speaking, slow, and the only reason I was able to land a hit on Soundwave is because he didn’t see me coming.”
“So You’re trying to look smaller than you already are and get faster then you already are so you have a chance to play soldier with us despite being a squishy organic?”

“I’m not trying to play soldier.” you say, blowing out a breath. “I’m playing mouse. Because that’s how you take down an elephant.”

“Wouldn’t it just be easier to use a lazer cannon?” Red Alert chimes in.

“You can’t be serious.” Ironhide raises an optical ridge. “She’d blow her own aft off with that thing. They’re regulated for a reason. Those things kill mechs.”

Red alert takes a long, shaking gulp from his energon cube. “Lazer cannons don’t kill mechs. Autobot high command does.”

Ironhide and Inferno exchange a look that clearly says not this shit again.

“They kill everyone that so much as looks at them funny. Just try to ask them about their abandoned base on this planet’s moon. They’ll deny it.”

“That’s because there *is* no base Red Alert.” Ironhide says with an exhausted ex-vent.

“Ha! That’s what they want you to believe.” he returns, draining the rest of his cube. “That’s where they dumped all the failed test subjects from the Iacon medical experiments. The ones that can still function are probably all decepticons by now.”

You furrow your brow. The chatter is making it hard to concentrate on aiming correctly and quite frankly, despite the other two mech’s reassurances, Red Alert’s particular brand of paranoid rambling is starting to make you nervous.

Inferno places a reassuring servo on his twitching friend’s shoulder plating. “I’m not saying you’re wrong, but don’t you think that if there actually were a secret base with failed test subjects running around this close to earth there’s be more evidence of it?”

Thwuck
Despite your best efforts you find yourself incapable of regaining your composure, the last knife just barely wedges itself into the outer ring of the target.

“There is evidence of it and it’s all around us.” Red Alert snaps back. “Everyone knows it’s there, they’ve just cloaked it from all of our scanners and erased it from our databases.”

This time the knife misses the target completely and whizzes dangerously close to Ironhide’s leg.

“You can take a ship up to the moon right this second and see it. You could walk right in if you had the ball bearings to take on whatever mutant freaks are still running around up there.”

You shake your head, exhaling slowly, trying not to listen, trying your best to aim for the bullseye.

“Alright,” Inferno consigns, setting down his empty cube. “Let’s just say for a moment that there is a base up there. we’ve got bots from all over on the Arc. Why doesn’t anyone seem to know anything about it?”

Red Alert narrows his optics, and lets out a sarcastic, static-y laugh.

“Ask Ratchet.”

*Ping*

Not only do you miss the target, but you actually manage to throw the last one hard enough, off course enough to dent Ironhide’s leg plating. He yelps in surprise.

“Fraggit you don’t even need a lazer cannon to be screwin’ slag up do you?” he growls. “If you put out one of my optics with those things I’ll use your furry youngling as target practice.”

You want fire back with a smartass retort, but find yourself incapable due to the sinking feeling in your stomach.
“Ratchet?” you ask, head tilted slightly to the side.

Ironhide suddenly looks rather uncomfortable.

“You two,” he jabs a thumb in the other mech’s direction. “Go take a stasis nap, you’ve got a patrol shift coming up and you haven’t recharged in two cycles. That’s an order.”

Red Alert mumbles something to himself, but neither disagree as they both shuffle through the door. The weapon’s specialist lets out an exasperated ex-vent before turning to you.

“Alright missy. We both know I can’t give you an order and I can’t stop you from running around base doing whatever you please, but I’d like to ask you a favor, as a friend.”

You bite your lip, suddenly remembering the extreme height difference between you two.

“What kind of favor?”

“Don’t ask Ratchet.”

******************

You really don’t want to watch Captain Kangaroo.

He’s a cool guy, explaining animals and stuff, but right now you really really want to throw all of the nature documentaries you’d picked up from the video store straight out the window Red Alert had broken yesterday.

Bee stares at you expectantly from the pile of catsuits on the nice new not-hideous orange couch you’d bought set directly opposite of Teletran 1, which is now capable of playing video cassettes after Sunstreaker had convinced Mirage to wire the VCR in so he could watch Labyrinth.
Actually, you kind of want to watch Labyrinth. Because it’s actually not a nature documentary and not filled with static and because you should at least try to get Bee to watch something with a plot, right?

Right. So you set the cassette in your hand down and push play. Aggressive Bonding mode engage.

But it instead cuts right to the middle of the movie. Probably Because Sunstreaker had been called out while watching it, and he’s the kind of inconsiderate fuck that doesn’t understand “Be kind and Rewind.”

“What power? power of voodoo
Who do? you do
Do what? remind me of the babe”

You sigh, getting up to rewind the cassette, but stop because Bee is dancing.

Bee is dancing. He’s fucking dancing. Trying his damndest not to fall over and bounce his tiny self up and down to the music. It’s not a nature documentary and he’s enjoying it. He’s not just staring, he’s enjoying himself. He’s loving this shit.

You grab your head and scream a tiny bit, because not only is this probably the most adorable thing you’ve ever seen him do and he’s the epitome of adorable, but this is his thing.

“Dance magic, dance (dance magic, dance)
Dance magic, dance (dance magic, dance)
Put that baby spell on me”

You sweep him up in your arms, and ignoring his surprised beeps, begin to dance with him, swaying your hips and moving your feet and taking his tiny servo in your free hand and waving it over your head like a complete dork.

Rumble wanted a kickass, knife throwing ninja mom. Bee wants a goofy, not-afraid-to-look-like-an-
idiot dancing mom. And there’s no reason in the world you can’t be both.

“Jump magic, jump (jump magic, jump)
Jump magic, jump (jump magic, jump)
Put that magic jump on me
Slap that baby, make him free”

“I’m gonna teach you all the dances little guy.” you promise him, big stupid smile on your face.
“Foxtrot, salsa, gogo, you name it, we can learn them together.” You dance faster. Harder, giving zero fucks as to how completely ridiculous you look. In fact, you give so few fucks you don’t even flinch as Optimus walks through the door, who, after a brief look of confusion, lets out a relieved ex- vent.

“I’m glad to see you two have finally discovered a bonding activity.” he says, a suggestion of a grin on his faceplate.

You can only happily nod. “Kinda wish he’d cut in.”

“Perhaps when I’ve become accustomed to treading safely around your kind-” and that suggestion of a grin is now a full-blown one. “I’ll ask to cut in.”

The room spins a little bit, and not just because you’re a clumsy sonovabitch and have finally fallen flat on your ass (and only on your ass, thankfully having spared Bee)

“Small doses.” You think. “This falls well within my insanity tolerance.”

You return the grin with your own big stupid smile, actually not blushing that hard because you’re a bear doing bear stuff, and bears can’t comprehend embarrassment.

“I got this shit.”
Soundwave doesn’t want to let go.

He doesn’t know what to do. He wants Rumble to stop screaming, wants him to stop crying out for his carrier, wants him to stop tearfully asking where “Neelix” and “____” are. Wants him to bond back to him and Lazerbeak and Ravage, his real family. Wants him to be happy.

He has no idea how to stop him from crying. But what he does know is that Rumble is far too young for a frame upgrade, far too damaged and tiny and scared to be used as a weapon, and every bit of his processor is telling him that this is wrong and shouldn’t be happening.

Unfortunately, his processor is working in direct opposition to what Megatron is ordering him to do.

“We’ve given him plenty of time to readjust.”

“ERROR.” Soundwave recants for a third time. “RUMBLE IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY PREPARED.”

“That is not your call to make, Soundwave, I would’ve thought you of all mechs to know better.” He speaks calmly, but his denta-filled scowl suggests otherwise. “We don’t want a repeat of the Frenzy incident, now do we?”

The storm of images and sounds “Frenzy” brings up almost causes Soundwave’s processor to crash. He shakes. He wants better for Rumble. But not like this.

“Don’t make me override your command protocols.” Megatron says, taking a step towards the terrified sire and his equally terrified sparkling.

Its in that terrified, confused moment, with Rumble screaming for a lonely MIT graduate trapped in an observatory and her disgruntled cat, with his spark being shredded from the inside out, Soundwave makes the boldest, most defiant mistake of his life.

He steps back.

In the end, it changes nothing. Megatron issues the override command, and he is rendered a prisoner
in his own frame as he hands Rumble over to be further weaponized, to have his memories forcibly altered, to force him into an adult frame long before he’s ready. He can only choke out a quiet, static filled sob as his family, the one he was forced to have to begin with, is torn further apart.

Maybe he should have left him with the human. Maybe he should have taken the human back with him too. Maybe they should have all run somewhere far, far away.

Maybe he should have tried.

“Designation : Soundwave.” he repeats softly to himself in the now empty room. “Status : Failure.”
You wipe the drool out of your mouth. You’d fallen asleep with Bumblebee under your arm and Neelix on your back while watching “Dolphins: The assholes of the ocean!” last night on your static filled TV and hadn’t bothered to change out of your catsuit. You look like shit.

So you decide to take a shower. They’d recently installed a small, human-sized version next to their decontamination bath just for you, so you may as well use it. You gently remove your grumpy, sleeping cat from your back, gently pull the covers over Bee, and quietly grab a towel as you head out, wondering why robots even need to take showers to begin with.

You decide you’ll ask Ratchet when he’s fixing your recently unhinged jaw.

Optimus is taking a shower. He’s taking a goddamn shower and he honestly looks like he’s enjoying it. There’s water dripping off his helm and shoulder plating onto his chassis and there’s a gentle hissing as his frame emits steam. His optics are half-closed when they finally meet yours.

“Are you also in need of a decontamination shower?” he asks in a voice that resonates at the exact frequency to make your knees stop working.

You can’t answer him because your jaw also isn’t working. And so you do what any reasonable person would do, and run away screaming to lock yourself into the nearest supply closet.
“Are you in need of medical assistance?” a grouchy, slightly perturbed Ratchet asks through the closet door.

“No I need five minutes alone with my hand.” You grumble shakily. “That almost killed me.”

“Why would finding him taking a decontamination shower kill you?”

“Oh my god.” You slap a hand over your face. “Humans happen to find that particular action extremely attractive.”

There’s a brief pause in which your humiliation reaches critical mass.

“Oh.” he says finally. “I see. I’m sure Optimus wouldn’t mind showering with you. It would conserve resources.”

You open your mouth. You close your mouth upon the realization that there is no way to explain your situation to docbot using words. So you start laughing. Giggling, at first, which leads into full blown roaring. You are absolutely breathless at the prospect of trying to explain this problem to docbot, and the fact that you can’t is funny. Everything is funny. Existence itself is hilarious. The universe itself is a joke at your own expense and that’s funny as fuck.

What’s even funnier is that Ratchet is no loner alone in this venture.

“_____”? and you recognize that voice. “_____?”

Oh fuck.

“Fowler?”
“In the flesh.” there’s a pause. “Can I ask why you’ve locked yourself in a closet?”

You pause, trying to compile a coherent responses out of “robot” and “shower” and “seventh kind” but only manage another exasperated giggle-fit.

Another pause. You don’t want to wonder what kind of face he’s making, and open the door so you can actually see it.

It’s a confused one. You decide it suits him.

“We finally have a job for you.” he says, after clearing his throat. “That is, if you’re willing to accept it.”

“Willing AND able.” you say, unable to stifle insane laughter as you mock-salute.

“Riiiiight.” he rolls his eyes as you step out of the closet. “Well a few weeks ago an icecream truck and all of it’s contents, save for the human driver, went missing in broad daylight.”

“He did that!” you wheeze. “He totally jacked that truck for me. I didn’t even have to ask!”

“Yeah, well your papa bear robot jacking that truck caused a panic in a small Nevada town. You remember what I told you about paperwork hell?”

You stop laughing. His eyes are narrowed, and he’s taken a step forward.

“Yes sir.” you mumble unable to look him directly in the eye.

“Well congratulations. Your new job is to keep me out of it.” He hands you a badge and another folder. “You’re an MIB. Now change out of that ridiculous catsuit and into an actual suit, put on some sunglasses and go clean up papa bear’s mess for me.”

You blink. “Hold on. Are you telling me I have to work coverups?”
“You have a problem with that?”

“No!” you say, defensively putting your hands in front of your face. “It’s just….you sure I’ve got the skill-set for this job? These guys just saw a thirty foot space robot take a truck with him. I’m not sure I can convince them otherwise.”

“Well lucky for you, we’ve included a handy UFO and extra terrestrial identification chart to help you with that. Check the folder.”

You open the folder. You pull out the contents. You raise your eyebrow at Fowler.

“This is just a blank sheet of paper with “Weather Balloon” written on it.”

“You’re welcome.” he says, turning towards the door. “Now when you’re done having a panic attack I’d like you to come meet your partner.”

You and Ratchet exchange confused, slightly concerned looks.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” he asks

You offer him an apologetic smile. “I can’t really take an ambulance to get fitted for a suit. Kinda sends the wrong message.”

“Understandable.” he agrees, appearing slightly put out.

“So...where’s Sunstreaker?”

“He’s uh, finishing that movie you acquired for him.” Ratchet says, suddenly looking nervous. “I wouldn’t interrupt him if I were you.”

You slap your hand against your forehead.
“What have I done?”

“Right.” you say, lowering your shaking hands “Now if you’ll excuse me I’m going to go take a human sized version of a shower. A cold one so I don’t lose my shit out there today trying to explain how a giant, sentient, dripping wet weather balloon totally didn’t jack an ice cream truck.”

************************

“Any recent drug use?”

“No.”

“Alcohol?”

“No.”

“History of mental illness?”

“Do you consider blunt honesty a mental illness?”

Shit. you dig your fingers into your temples as you work on your hardest case yet: some random kid who had been attempt to actually buy ice cream at the time of the incident. A kid that’s actually not scared shitless. A kid who’s not crazy and fucking knows it. A kid that embodies every government agent’s worst nightmares.

Stubborn.

“Alright kid, “ you blow out an exhausted breath, pocketing your ‘get away with anything’ badge “What you saw was a new, recently declassified experimental weather balloon. Kinda cool looking but nothing crazy like that.”
“Look lady, I’m not an idiot.” the teen says, narrowing his eyes. “You’re not even trying.”

Shit. This kid might look stupid but he’s got you pegged right. You scrunch your face in concentration, looking for a metaphorical shovel to dig yourself out of the metaphorical hole you’d dug yourself into. Maybe, maybe

“Have you ever seen a weather balloon?” you ask him.

“Uh…” he goes quiet. “Not in person, but-”

“But nothing. The whole “balloon” part? Bullshit. They invented it during prohibition when everyone was drunk. It’s not a balloon at all. It’s a 30 foot tall robot that turns into a truck who has a limited understanding of personal space, a voice like chocolate sex and is currently making it impossible to concentrate on doing my job.”

He blinks.

“What the fuck.”

“Look kid,” you sigh, rubbing your forehead vigorously with your hand. “I don’t care how giant, bipedal, sentient, or alarmingly dripping with sex appeal this thing was, it’s a goddamn weather balloon and the sooner you get that through your head the sooner we can both go home and take cold showers.”

He stares at you for a moment, speechless. You fight the urge to tear your hair out. Fuck this job. Fuck government coverups, Fuck-

“-sex appeal?” he says slowly. “weather balloons? robots? Sex appeal?!”

You freeze. Your jaw hangs slightly ajar, not producing words, which is probably a good thing given it’s recently forged connection to the darkest recesses of your mind.
“Look lady, whether or not that thing was a weather balloon, which it wasn’t.” he emphasizes the last part, but with caution. “None of those words belong in the same sentence. Get help.”

He hops back on his bike before you have a chance to respond, throwing a nervous glance over his shoulder before taking off with all the grace of a schoolgirl fleeing a known sex offender.

You don’t mind. In fact, you’re grateful. You now have an extra half hour to walk down to the convenience store and buy as many nudie mags as it takes to stomp your raging robo-lust back to your subconscious. And maybe also get a coffee, because deep down you know no amount of human genitals is going to fix your problem, you don’t actually want to fix your problem, and that knowledge is absolutely going to keep you from sleeping tonight.

********************************************************************************

“You really don’t do things in halves, do you?” your newly ascribed partner, a wheelchair-bound kid who’d introduced himself as Chip asks as you close the car door with five coffees in one hand and a stack of nudie mags in the other, and some random educational material you’d grabbed for Bee tucked under your arm.

“If you had any idea what I’m dealing with.” you scrunch your face as you force the thought to the back of your head. “Where are we headed next?”

“University.” he replies. “There’s a women there who swears her car drove off without her.”

You raise your eyebrow. “That doesn’t sound like something an autobot would do.”

“No.” he lets out a worried sigh. “It doesn’t.”

“I mean yeah, some of them play tricks, but most of them are extremely polite.” you say, scrunching your face up in concern this time. “Some of them sickeningly so.”
“That’s how Fowler described Optimus to me.” Chip says. “But he did still steal that ice-cream truck.”

“I bet he just walked right up to him and asked him.” you think flushing furiously, because somehow politeness and honesty have become hot as fuck. “Just straight up fucking asked him if he could take the icecream.”

Try as you may you can’t help but envision the scenario, imagining Optimus walking up to the ice cream truck, imagine him peering through the window at the terrified, fleshy, in all likelihood severely underpaid occupant wearing a stupid hat.

“I require the frozen mammary gland secretions your vehicle contains.”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!”

“I suppose this unfortunately qualifies as a robbery.”

Oh god

Oh fuck

“Uh…I don’t mean to be rude~” Chip starts slowly. “-But you’re drooling. You’re actually drooling.”

“S-sorry.” you say shakily, using every iota of willpower you possess to refrain from shoving your hands down your pants. “J-just got distracted is all.”

He blinks. “I gotta be honest. You’re pretty weird. But you’re also nice. So I’m not gonna request a partner transfer.” he says, pushing his glasses back up on his face. “But if we want this to work, you’re going to have to stop looking at trucks like you want to fuck them. Especially the ones on children’s books.”
You glance down at the stack of learning material you’d acquired. You hadn’t really bothered to actually look at what you were buying on account of a diesel engine running in the near distance had turned you on to the point of outright panting. You look over your choices:

“Steve the sentient Tornado.”

A happy, smiling tornado looks back at you from a pile of smoldering wreckage. Children are crying.

“What the fuck.” you look at the nature documentary you’d picked up.

“Ants! Crushing Picnics And Dreams!” Spend a day in the metaphorical shoes of Adam Ant in this riveting slice-of-life featurette told through 50 straight hours of static, single shot ant-farm footage! Raw! Unedited! Steamy drone-on-queen-action!“

“I’m like 90% sure this is age appropriate but that 10% margin of error worries me.” you think worriedly as you flip over the last book.

“My daddy the trucker : a 12 page coping tool for children with absentee fathers and pill-popping mothers. “

“Now this is just sad.” you frown, fighting off an aneurysm on account of not being able to get away from “dad” and “truck” no matter how hard you try.

You let out a sigh of resignation. “Alright. I can at least try to make this less obvious.”

“I mean you literally scared that last kid off with your burning robo-lust. He’s a loose end. We’ve got no idea where he went.”

“Yeah.” you admit. “Kinda fucked that one up.”

“So…here’s my suggestion. I don’t exactly know the situation back on base, and I’m not gonna ask.
But you’re going to need a way to let off some steam, if you catch my drift.”

You raise an eyebrow at him. “Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?”

He puts his hands up. “What I’m saying is find a short-term solution. Because this is honestly compromising our effectiveness.”

“Alright.” you say, sighing in resignation. “Thanks for being so blunt.”

“Anytime.” He offers you a sincere smile. You return it.

“Hey uh, this is just a suggestion,” you start. “But since my new name is slightly less ridiculous, I can probably order a pizza with it. You wanna come back to base with me for dinner? Maybe meet some of the autobots?”

“That depends.” he gives you a calculating look. “Are you gonna take care of your, uh, “problem” right in front of me?”

“I am not.” you answer sincerely.

“Then I’d love to, Marissa.” he says with severe emphasis on the last part.

“See you there, Cobra.” you reply, winking at him.

*******************************************************************************

“Mass conversion?”

You take a gulp of your coffee, throwing some scrap paper over the softcore pornography laying on your makeshift desk. You sincerely doubt Ratchet will even question your choice of reading material or lack thereof, but your shameful instinct is powerful enough that you cover it anyways.
“I know I never exactly asked you how your subspace works.” you start, setting your cup down. “But it’s got something to do with your ability to transform, correct?”

“And how exactly did you come to that conclusion?”

“Well, correct me if I wrong, but sometimes you guys seem to vary in height right after transforming, especially if you weren’t paying attention while doing it. This leads me to believe that there isn’t a hard and fast rule to the process. There’s a small margin of error every time, so you can be smaller or larger in your alt. mode, even if your default form seems to suggest otherwise. What you can’t change is your default amount of mass, which I’m guessing, is stored in your subspace.”

Ratchet blinks. He spends a half second or so looking surprised, before his trademark expression of begrudging acceptance takes over.

“You’re right.” He starts, sighing. “But you knew that already, didn’t you? So unless you intend to waste the rest of my night telling me things I already know, I’ll ask you to get right to the point. That is ,if you had one to begin with.”

You frown. Ratchet is unusually cranky this time around. You wonder if it has anything to do with Ironhide’s request that you keep your mouth shut about Red Alert’s paranoid ramblings. You bite your lip. You want to do the exact opposite, but he had been polite about it, and as much as you doubt he’ll actually lose his temper long enough to use your cat as target practice, you don’t want to give him any extra incentive.

“My question is, can you convert the mass to make your default form smaller?”

He raises an optical ridge. “Assuming one had a good reason to do so?”

You feel your face heat up. You consider turning your head away to hide it, but figure Ratchet would pick it up on his internal sensors anyways, and you don’t need him anymore suspicious than he already is.

“Just out of curiosity.” you offer. “I’m a scientist too. Or, I was.”

“Going by my observations alone, you still are.” he offers a genuine, reassuring smile and this time you do turn your head away to hide your embarrassed flushed face. “To answer your question, yes, it
is possible, some of us even make a hobby out of it. But the larger our default mass the more energy it takes to reconcile it, so as a rule, the larger we are, the more exhausting it is.”

You feel yourself deflate a little, considering the bot is question is by far the tallest. “Is it at least a good kind of exhausting?”

“That entirely depends on who you ask. I myself find it refreshing,” he replies with the slightest suggestion of a smug grin. “I don’t necessarily make a hobby out of it, but I am practiced. So if you require a demonstration I’d be happy to walk you through the process.”

Your jaw drops a little. You’re only 75% sure he’s not offering what you think he is, and that 25% margin of error worries you.

You are however, spared the need of asking as Optimus chooses that exact moment to come through the door, weary expression on his faceplate.

“Bumblebee attempted to ingest your throwing darts.” he says. “And was not pleased when I stopped him.”

“I’ll deal with him.” Ratchet sighs. “____” is taking an anatomy lesson.” he punches something indecipherable into the control interface and holographic blueprints appear on the screen. “study these as long as you want. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to ask.”

And with that he turns towards the door. You cringe slightly at the knowledge that you’d just unintentionally friend zoned doctbot, because you can’t help but watch him leave and damn does he have a nice aft.

“You appear stressed.”

You’re snapped out of your shameless ogling as Optimus kneels down next to you to look at the interface. “Are the lessons not going well?”

“Ttt-they going f-fine.” you stutter. It’s you I’m worried about. “There’s something else bothering me.”
“Would you care to discuss it?”

You bite your lip. You consider unloading the darkest recesses of your mind right there and then, but remember Ratchet’s cautionary words.

“This might be one of those things I’m going to ask you to at least try and stop doing.”

“Can I tell you about it, without telling you about it?”

“Certainly.”

“Uh, I have an idea…And it sounds bad.“ You pause thoughtfully, recalling the sandy-haired youth’s reaction from earlier. “Get help lady.” “I mean it really sounds bad when you say it out loud, but it’s kinda growing on me.” you swallow hard, failing at the simple task of keeping your voice steady while looking him in the faceplate. “In fact, I’m starting to think it might be a good one.”

“But you’re not certain of it?”

“No. I’m actually worried I might be dealing with some, uh, external influences, so I’m not entirely sure if it’s a bad idea or not.”

“It sounds like you don’t have enough information to proceed.“

“Yeah.” You agree, exhaling shakily. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“It would probably be best in that situation to, if possible, wait for more information”
That...makes sense. And why wouldn’t it? Bossbot always makes sense, at least, he does to you. But fearless, reasonable leader or no, he’s still under the influence of his uncanny luck, playing helpless, unwitting puppet master to everyone fortunate, unfortunate, stupid or brave enough to be strung along. And you fit at least two of those descriptions to a T.

“What if waiting isn’t possible?”

There’s a brief silence. You can hear the cogs whirring in his processor, you wonder if he can hear your heart roaring against your ribcage, feel your frantic, nervous breathing.

“If one has no choice but to proceed-” he begins slowly. “-then one must proceed with extreme caution.”

You’re not sure if you want to start screaming or just go ahead and rip your clothes off. Or both. You do neither, however, and settle on staring dead ahead at the screen interface in front of you, slack jawed.

“I will leave you to your coffee.” he says, leaning his helm in uncomfortably close over your shoulder, exventing hot against your exposed skin. “Ratchet is often busy, if you require any assistance with your anatomy lessons, I would be happy to assist you.”

And with that he turns towards the door. You feel the corners of your mouth twitch. You giggle quietly to yourself, setting your coffee down and grab the stack of nudie mags, failing to stifle exasperated, “I’m-having-a-nervous-breakdown-and-no-one-can-stop-me” laughter as you walk said nudie mags over to the recycling and shove them into the shredder without a moment’s consideration otherwise.

You never had a choice to begin with.

“On behalf of the entire human race, allow me to welcome you to earth.” your eye twitches involuntarily as you down the last of your coffee and throw it in the garbage, intent on spending the rest of the night with Adam ant and as much static ant farm footage as it takes to soothe your traitorous, xenophilic mind to sleep. “Let me show you how my species says hello.”
Proceed with extreme caution

Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, watch children's movies with an insomniac Ratchet, order takeout, and watch Bee build a sandcastle.

Chapter Notes

Holy fuck I am tired.

“Are you afraid?”

“This is normal." you tell yourself as the giant pink weather balloon softly shouts at you, bellowing it’s question in a booming yet somehow sweet timbre.

This is normal because you’d spent the last few days pawning off the ridiculous excuse that your friends were weather balloons onto civilian witnesses. It’s normal that you’re an ant because 50 hours of static ant-farm-footage will do that to you. So this dream must be, for all intents and purposes, a dream.

“Are you afraid?”

A nice, normal dream. A nice, normal lucid dream.

“Are you afraid?”

Goddamnit.
“I’m not afraid.” you click defiantly, as loud as your tiny, invertebrate body will allow you to.

“Are you sure?”

It’s actually spoken back. You pause, not having expected to have progressed this far.

“Afraid of what?” you ask your fuchsia inflatable companion.

“... Are you afraid?”

Fuck.

“I don’t understand!” you click back, so loudly you feel your exoskeleton shake around you.

“Are you afraid?”

“So what if I am?” you shout now, feeling your tiny ant body loosen at the seams from the volume. “Maybe I am afraid. Maybe I’m terrified.”

“Are you afr-”

“I AM AFRAID!” you scream, the force of which dissolves your body, dissolves everything until there’s nothing left but your voice. “I’M TERRIFIED!”
You’re bolted awake, the ringing that had reached a fever pitch in your head quickly fades into nothing, much to your relief. You lift a hand to wipe the beads of sweat off your forehead, the urge to pry your sticky, sweaty nightclothes off of your body unbearable.

Bee’s awake. You can’t shift yourself into a better position to see, what with your cat having fallen asleep in his trademark position on your back, but the soft light emitted by his brilliant blue optics catches your eye, and you lower your arm to look him in the faceplate.

He’s scared. His tiny servos are bunched into fists and he’s making frantic albeit soft little beeps that sound heartrendingly like whimpers.

“Did you have a bad dream too buddy?” you whisper, pulling him flush against your chest, though your heart still races. He stops his beeping but still looks up at you with wide, wary optics. You lace your fingers around one of his servos and give them a reassuring squeeze. “It’s alright. Big mean weather balloon can’t hurt us now.”

His optics lower slightly, though he still shakes. You frown. He must’ve had one hell of a bad dream to shake him up this bad. Then again, he could simply be reacting to whatever tossing and turning you’d gotten up to during your dream. But then Neelix wouldn’t still be on your back. Hell he probably would’ve scratched you for it. So it must’ve been the dream.

“Wonder if it was the same dream.” you think fighting off a yawn as you curl up around your sparkling and close your eyes. It’s still dark out, you figure you’ve still got a solid hour or so to go before it’s time to get up, and you’re grateful, because you could really use some more sleep.

*Slam*

“I figured it out!” whispers Ratchet, who has nearly torn the sliding door off it’s rail in his haste to open it.

Fuck.
“Figured what out?” you ask, not bothering to move your head.

“The algorithm!”

“What algorithm?!” you snarl, rubbing your bleary eyes.

“Keep it down would you?” he hisses, looking around warily. “The luck. Remember what I said about the luck?”

You scrunch your face in concentration. “I remember us not knowing how to predict exceptions.”

“Yes, well I just figured out how!” Ratchet explains almost gleefully hadn’t you known better. He looks frazzled for lack of a better word, and one of his optics seems to be twitching, though it might just be your imagination. You don’t want to get up yet. You really, really don’t want to get up, but docbot’s not looking so hot, Bee’s already up, and you are kind of curious so you hoist Neelix up over your shoulder and secure Bee in your arms before following him wordlessly. You wonder if he’d finally collapsed under the weight of his own genius, and if so, how much weight it actually takes to collapse a genius of his size.

He stops short in front of teletran one. You noticed a stack of cassettes next to the hastily wired in vcr almost halfway to the ceiling. There’s a pile at the bottom you suspect had tumbled off, a few you recognize.

“Ratchet, how many of these have you watched?” you ask, cautiously picking your way around the tower to stand next to him.

“How many haven’t I watched is a better question.” he snaps back, watching as the screen flickers to life halfway through “Neverending Story”.

You stare at the screen, Then back at your star-struck friend. “When’s the last time you recharged?”

“Three cycles ago. Didn’t need it.” he replies. “Look!” he gestures towards the screen as Atreyu
rides Falkor through the night sky.

You feel your eye twitch a little. “So?”

“So he’s riding that large, predatory lizard! It’s three times his size! By all means it should have killed him and consumed his remains!”

You set both your charges onto the couch so you can rub your aching head, wondering how much convincing it’s going to take to get docbot to wind down enough to sleep. “I know you said you don’t need recharge, but I think you need recharge, and I can think of at least two other bots who’d agree with me. Please don’t make me wake Ironhide up.”

“He’s riding the dragon because he’s lucky.”

You stop rubbing your head. You look at your crazed friend.

“Lucky?”

“Yes! How else could he have done it? The odds were stacked against him!”

“Falkor’s a luck dragon. He doesn’t eat people.” “you inform him, rolling your eyes. “Plus, the main character of the movie is always ‘lucky’.” you say making air quotes with your fingers. “That’s just how they are.”

“As is someone else we both know.” You freeze. Ratchet narrows his optics and kneels down to your level. “I’ve watched precisely sixty five of these ‘movies’. The vast majority of main characters share striking similarities with Optimus in that the odds are always in their favor.”

You exhale shakily, suddenly not so sure of yourself, suddenly nervous. “Except our guy is real.”

“Precisely. However I believe we can use these entertainment devices to work backwards from to predict luck exceptions.”
You raise your eyebrow. “And how do we do that?”

There’s the slightest suggestion of a grin on his faceplate as he produces a data pad and hands it to you.

“We figure out what genre of movie we’re in.”

“You kidding, right?” you deadpan, taking the data pad. “It’s action, obviously.”

“He ex-vents rather sharply. “I’d rather refrain from prematurely diagnosing the situation. But in the event I were forced to chose, I’d chose romantic comedy.”

You make the best “are you fucking serious” expression you can conceivably contort your face into. He returns it.

“Make that face all you want-” he starts, gesturing accusingly with his servo. “-but nobody dies in a romantic comedy and I’ve lost enough friends to last me several lifetimes.”

You pale a little bit at his reaction, suddenly feeling like a grade-A asshole.

“Sorry.” you mumble, eyes downcast. “I guess that was a little insensitive of me.”

“And it was pretty oversensitive of me.” he sighs, rubbing the side of his helm. “You’re right. I probably do need to recharge and no, you don’t have to get Ironhide. Just let me explain how this works first.”

“It’s like a journal, right?” you say, skimming over the entry fields in the data pad. “I just record what happened during the day in a semi-chronological fashion and it generates a genre based off of keywords?”

“Correct, though it’s a work in progress. I’ve incorporated a simple AI so that it’s identification abilities will eventually extend to not just genre, but characters, themes, timetables and plotlines, so if everything goes as planned, it should be able to generate a rough prediction, at least for the short-term.”
“I think—” you begin, failing to resist the urge to dig your fingers into your temples. “-that I’m going to need some coffee before I even begin to wrap my head around this.”

“I’ve you’ve got nothing else planned, may I suggest you finish this movie with me while you ingest your caffeinated beverage?”

You narrow your eyes at him. “I thought you said you were going to recharge?”

“The movie is almost over.”

“It’s halfway over.” you feel the beginning of a smirk tugging at the corner of your mouth. “But I think I can overlook that.”

He sighs in relief. “For the record, I’d like to do this again, once we’re both caught up on our recharge cycles.”

You offer him a smile as you plop back onto the couch, pulling Bee back onto your lap.

“Me too.”

*****************

5:50 AM : Weird-ass dreams. Woken up by Ratchet

6:15 AM : Received data pad from Ratchet, plus instructions on how to work program

6:30 AM : Got coffee, watched rest of movie with Ratchet. Fell into recharge before ending. Unplugged VCR, Didn’t wake him up.
7:15 AM: Breakfast ended early because Red Alert had robot version of panic attack when alarm went off. Turns out it was just Fowler and Chip.

7:30-9:00 AM: Boring-ass meeting. Purported decepticon sighting at local zoo, have to go check it out later in the week. Maybe find some way to bring Bee if it’s safe. He’d like that.

“Earth to “___”!”

You snap your head up from your data pad to meet Fowler’s perturbed, slightly constipated face.

“Sorry.” you admit, setting the data pad facedown on the table. “Just uh, beta testing this new program for docbot. “ you rub your eyes for a moment, still tired. “Catch me up to speed?”

Fowler rolls his eyes.

“It’s the asylum case.” Chip chimes in. “It’s going a lot slower than we’d like.”

You try, and fail to stifle a yawn. “They say why?”

“I’ll give you a hint.” Folwer says, crossing his arms begrudgingly “It rhymes with “six tons of unfriendly alien metal” and “collateral damage.”

“They’re afraid of decepticons following them here.” Chip clarifies.

You blow out a breath. “They’ve already followed them here, or did you forget the, uh, meteor shower that’s responsible for demolishing a NASA outpost lab?”

“Yeah, well, the problem with that particular incident, Marissa,” Fowler begins “Is that it still is, for all intents and purposes, a meteor shower. And god willing the feds are going to leave that one on the shelf for a long, long time.”
“Forgive me for cutting in,” Optimus says, leaning in from his (admittedly awkward) position next to you. “But do you mean to tell us that your people have not yet been informed of the decepticon threat?”

“I’m telling you we officially made first contact this year with your faction.” he says, “And if you bots want to remain here legally then it’s in everyone’s best interests to push your case through as soon as possible, ideally before said threat decides to make itself known.”

“Which, considering the, ah, “weather balloon in the lion exhibit” incident, might be a lot sooner than we’d like.” Chip sighs, taking off his glasses to rub his forehead.

“Which leads us right back to you three.” Fowler says, gesturing. “Especially your…’sparkling’, was it?”

“His name is Bumblebee.” Optimus corrects him. You feel the hair bristling on the back of your neck. “Do not make me engage mama bear mode”

“We’re still of the opinion that it would help immensely if you three would personally meet some of the higher ups. With any luck that bouncing baby bot will melt enough hearts to get your case pushed to the to of the stack.”

“He’s cute.” Chip explains. “That’ll help.”

You look down at the squirming sparkling in your lap. He’s restless because he’d rather be doing something fun. Like dancing. You don’t blame him. You’d rather be doing something fun. Like sneaking into the wash racks and waiting until Optimus showed up.

You’re ripped out of your developing fantasy by the bot in question. “We should be able to accommodate a brief meeting.” he says slowly. ‘If that will help alleviate some concern.”

You narrow your eyes. You know Optimus has very little reason to distrust humans at all, but as much as you’d like it to stay that way, you know better. Even though you sincerely doubt any member of your species would be stupid enough to try something funny in front of any giant alien robot, let alone the tallest, you can’t help but feel nervous.

“I’d feel more comfortable if it wasn’t just the three of us.” you say, glancing sidelong at your
companion. “Like maybe Ratchet and Ironhide could come.”

Optimus makes a face like he wants to tell you you’re overreacting. *Probably gonna have to get used to that.* But he nods in agreement. “Neither of them have had much opportunity to interact with humans beyond “____”. It would give them some sorely needed experience.”

“I don’t care how many bots you string along as long as they behave themselves. What I need today is confirmation you’re going to work with us on this.”

You look at Bumblebee. Then at Optimus. Then back at Bumblebee. You sigh.

“When do you want us?” you ask with a note of defeat.

“I’ll be pushing for the soonest date available, so just be prepared.” he says, getting up from his chair. “In the meantime, maintain constant cover. If you have to go out near anywhere populated, do it in disguise. At night, preferably, and with a human.”

He shuffles towards the door, followed closely by Chip, who pauses before passing you.

“Is it cool if I swing by here later tonight? I kinda wanted chinese and the takeout place just laughed at me last time I called.”

You smile. “Sure thing.”

********************************

9:00 AM : Meeting finally ended. Acquired dance music. Going to attempt to teach Bee how to hustle

9:15 AM : Attempt at hustle ended up with kicking myself in the face. Upset Bee greatly. End hustle attempt.
9:20 AM: Watching Captain Kangaroo in attempt to calm Bee down

10:00 AM: Bee fell asleep. Time to go do something productive

3:00 PM: Fell asleep also. Day is shot. Fuck.

3:45 PM: Neelix coughed up hairballs all over Ironhide’s berth. Was not pleased. Threatened to shove him up Red Alert’s exhaust pipe.

5:00 PM: Sunstreaker returned Labyrinth. Cassette was sticky. Did not inquire further.

7:00 PM: Chip came over. Got takeout. Nighttime energon rations. Hung out with Inferno and Red Alert. Red seems more agreeable but has this dumb vacant look on his faceplate. Think they might have drugged him.

8:45 PM: Chip went home. Optimus suggested we take Bee out for some fresh air.

9:00 PM: Proceeding with extreme caution

“...I can’t believe we have to do this at night.”

You sigh from your place on the park bench, resting your head in your palm. You’d given up on the swing-set after having knocked yourself ass-backwards on the return swing at least three times and now watch as Bee plays in the sandbox, concerning himself with a rudimentary sandcastle built of pillars forged from plastic pails and twigs. He seems content enough to play on his own, but your heart sinks a little knowing that he has to.

“I can’t help but feel fortunate that we’re able to do this at all.” Optimus says from his slightly reclined position beside the bench, watching him with weary content.

He’s right. They’re lucky to have landed on this planet. You’re lucky to be alive. Bumblebee is
exceedingly lucky in all respects, as is his father.

“Still,” you begin, eyes glued to your adopted sparkling’s ham-fisted attempts to add another wall to his creation “It just…sucks he can’t really play with other kids. Just because you two came from another planet.” you bury your face in your hands, growling softly in frustration. “He plays nice. He doesn’t kick or bite. He’d probably love some human children to play with. We’re not allowed to let him make friends. We’re legally not allowed to let him make friends.”

“Things may change.” he offers, though you notice his mouth is set in a straight line, unmoving.

“They might.” you agree, slouching slightly, feeling far more deflated than you have any right to. “I just-” you let out an uneasy sigh “-I wish we could give him more.”

He turns his helm towards you, and rather suddenly at that. You jump.

“My apologies” he says slowly, though maintains eye contact and you forget to breath a little. “But I believe I’m experiencing what you’d refer to as ‘déjà vu.’”

“H-how so?”

“I’ve had a nearly identical conversation before. With Bumblebee’s carrier.”

You bite you lip, eyes downcast. You’re not exactly sure if the subject hadn’t come up or he’d been deliberately avoiding it, but you’d never pressed him for information. Your instinct tells you he might be ready to open up, if just a crack.

You decide to trust it.

“What was she like?”

He says nothing for an excruciatingly long moment, long enough that you wonder if you’d overstepped.
“She was...” he begins, letting out a disbelieving ex-vent. “Very much like you.”

You let your jaw drop slightly. The faintest suggestion of a smile settles over his face.

“Fiercely protective of those she considered family, never afraid to tell others what was on her mind, though she made a habit of stuttering around myself.”

“D-did she have a smart mouth on her too?” you squeak, hating how quiet your voice had become.

“That was why I fell for her.”

You swallow hard, struggling to maintain eye contact, struggling not to curl up into a ball, struggling to simply exist next to him with the knowledge that this is happening and even if you had some semblance of control over it, you no longer want control.

“This is dangerous.” you tell yourself as he offers his hand. “Extremely dangerous” you repeat as you gently seat yourself in his palm. “This is extremely dangerous and I’m doing it anyways” you think as you wrap your arms around his infinitely larger one.

**************

Soundwave knows it’s a drone.

He’s know it’s not sentient, that it’s been programmed to plea for it’s life on an infinite feedback loop, been programmed to scream at the exact pitch and timbre of a female human. Programmed to match the exact pitch and timbre of a specific female human pulled from his sparkling’s memories.

He knows this and he knows he’d rather offline himself with his own servos than force his sparkling to symbolically murder the closest thing he’s ever had to a carrier, if he had the choice. But he doesn’t. He’d forfeited that right when he agreed to have the override command installed.
So he watches, silent as Rumble crushes the sobbing drone’s faceplate in his hands. Rumble is sobbing too, unable to stop himself as the same override commend installed in his sire is administered by the same mech his sire had sworn loyalty to. And he doesn’t stop at the faceplate, but systematically disassembles the frame piece by piece, choking out anguished cries as he tears wires from metal with unwilling, shaking servos.

“It’s largely a precaution,” Megatron assures him. “If the humans are all as naive as the one that took him in, force shouldn’t be necessary.”

Soundwave nods, if only to expedite the process. He says nothing. His words were useless when it mattered, before the frame upgrade, before the memories were forcibly altered. They’re useless now.

Maybe someday, when they have a moment alone, he’ll apologize to Rumble. Apologize to all of his children. But that will be useless too.

So he remains silent, and allows himself to dream. Dream about a reality where his family hadn’t come tethered to him. A reality where they were granted the privilege of growing and living freely. Where the loss of one hadn’t scared him into imprisoning the rest.

He allows himself to dream about being the sire they deserve.

Because it isn’t him.
**Shock the Monkey**

Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, prepare for the inevitable.

Chapter Notes

This chapter doesn't flow at all because I'm a disorganized fuck and write things in non-chronological chunks one bit at a time. I feel like this could have been a lot better but I'm so sick of punching at it.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Are you confused?”

“I’m not falling for this shit again.” you tell the giant pink grizzly bear.

You know this isn’t a normal dream, because even though you’d fallen asleep watching “Rabbits: Your garden is fucked!” you know exactly what dreaming about being a small, harmless animal means. It means your gonna scream answers back at this eye-burning magenta dream consciousness until your tiny animal body explodes and you wake up and probably wake Bee up and then you’ll be out an hour of sleep and have to watch bad movies with Ratchet.

“Are you -”

“-Shut the fuck up.” you snap. “I’m trying to think.”

“-Confused?”

At least talking doesn’t seem to shake your body from the seams this time. Maybe you can dig a little deeper before you’re forced awake.

“Yeah, I’m confused.” you admit, looking the cotton candy bear in it’s bright blue eyes. “Are you my spirit guide or something?”

The bear simply stares at you.

You remain undeterred. “So did you just pick a bear because it’s a form I could comprehend? Admittedly, I’m not too familiar with the spirit world, but that sounds like a reasonable assumption to me.”
The bear continues to stare with it's stupid bear face. You grow agitated.

“Dude, can you even hear me?” you shout this time, and immediately regret it for how hard your body vibrates. “Say something!”

The bear does it’s best impression of a punching bag with the slightest suggestion of a grin on it’s maw.

You throw up your tiny paws, squeaking in exasperation. “Bitch I will come right over there and smack that smug face right off your goddamn muzzle if you don’t answer me!”

Nothing.

You slump to the ground, sighing.

“Look, I’m just...,” you trail off. “....just under a lot of stress right now.” you flatten out against the ground, looking up at your ursine companion with your big, sorrowful bunny eyes. “I don’t know what to do about this whole “seventh kind” thing and I’m scared I don’t have any choice in the matter. Actually I’m more scared that I don’t care that I don’t have a choice.”

The bear giggles. You shoot it the nastiest glare you can twist your small, furry, prey animal face into.

“Sorry.” says the suddenly not-so-punchable looking bear.

“You freakin’ should be.” you snap back.

The bear lowers it’s head in shame. “I know.”

You roll over on the ground, staring aimlessly up at the pink sky. “You think it’s worth it? I mean, just going by what I told you?”

“You’re gonna hafta be a little more specific.”

“To just go for it? All of it, seventh kind included?”

“Well, lucky for you, I happen to be an expert in this field.”

There’s that word again. Luck.

“Alright, great, all-knowing cotton candy pink sentient dream bear, indulge me for a moment—” you prop yourself up on your paw, leering suspiciously into it’s wide, luminescent blue eyes. “How pray-tell, did you come to be an expert in any of that, including the “carnal knowledge of alien” bit?”

“Alien is a relative term”

You narrow your eyes.

Wait.
“Obviously there’s a few variables in your particular situation you’re going to have to smooth out first—” and that hint of a smirk is now a full-blown shit-eating-grin. “But speaking strictly from experience, yes. Hell yes. It’s totally worth it.”

Wait.

“Try to get him right after he’s been out on the firing range. I never quite figured out why, but sweet primus you’ll be limping for a straight deca-cycle.”

What the fuck.

“Just be careful, alright?”

Today, you decide, is not going to suck. Today is going to be awesome.

Today is already awesome because even though you had woken up an hour early, you knew where to find Ratchet, who was already halfway into Dark Crystal and you’d gone over the AI’s first compilation while face-deep in a mug of coffee roughly the size of your head.

“Adventure/comedy?”

You nod your head in agreement, sipping from your cup. “Sounds about right.”

Ratchet makes a face. “Still a little more risky than I’d like.”

“It could be worse. It could be Historical drama. Or Grindhouse. Or horror.” you shrug “I know you were hoping for one of those “boy meets girl through hilarious misadventures and dissolves into hot, steamy passionate interfacing, but we oughta count our blessings when we see them right?”

His expression contorts into a aggravated but decidedly adorable grumpy scowl. “I told you, out of all the genre’s it’s the least likely to predict any-”

“-Casualties.” you finish for him. “I’m just screwin’ with you docbot.”

He raises an optical ridge. “Are you suggesting…does screwing imply-”

“For the thousandth time-, no.” you clutch your head in frustration. “That is not how my species says hello, that is not how we greet each other, our language is filled with double-entendre’s like that.“ you roll your eyes. “You of all bots should be used to it, what with the amount of films you choked down.”

You wait for a response, eyes glued to the surreal fantasy flick onscreen. When he doesn’t reply, you
turn your head to discover he’s out cold, having fallen into recharge while leaning against the wall.

*Fuck’s sake.*

****

Alright. Today could’ve started out better. You’d rather not spend the day worrying about your narcoleptic friend, but today is still awesome, because you’d gotten the green light for sweet robot lovin’ from a sentient pink dream bear and that’s pretty freaking neat.

“two hundred and one…”

And even though you should by all means be scared shitless of the implications of who that bear could be, what that bear actually wants, and wither or not your end goals align in any particularly meaningful way-

“Two hundred and two…”

-You are far too preoccupied with beginning the ancient, humiliating dance your species requires it’s members to engage in before carnal knowledge becomes an acceptable course of action.

“Two hundred and three…”

Which means you need to be at the top of your game both mentally and physically if you want this to work. Which means doing weighted pushups with Bee on your back while Ironhide, Inferno and Red Alert look on, having decided some time ago that watching your exercise routine was by far the most entertaining thing to observe while draining their rations.

“Two hundrend and fo-”

“Two hundred my aft.” Ironhide snorts. “You’ve done forty at most.”

“Fuck off.” you spit between breathes, leering at him sideways from your face-down position on the floor.

“I can be nice or I can be honest.” he replies with a sneer. “And I recall you picking “honest.””

You growl in frustration, but don’t challenge him further. Bee beeps impatiently from your shoulders, tugging firmly on your hair, probably disappointed that his steed had stopped moving and now lies panting on the ground. Hi ho silver.

You exhale shakily. Your joints ache, your lungs burn, but you can probably force another rep out. Or two. Or eight. You grit your teeth as you roll your weight into your forearms and force yourself off the ground, smiling stupidly as the impatient beep boops become thrilled beep boops.

*Worth it.* He’s cheering you on and that makes it totally worth it. You collapse a few seconds afterwards, but you do it with a stupid, doofy grin on your face.

“Not bad for a fleshie.” Ironhide says, cocking his head to the side. “But I thought you were
“supposed to be watching movies with Ratchet.”

“I suppose I’ll take that as a compliment.” you sigh. “And I was, but he fell asleep halfway through. Again.” you throw a concerned look his way. “I don’t think he’s been recharging enough. I’m actually kinda worried about him”

His optics narrow, and for a split second you see candid worry flash in his expression, though it’s only for a split second.

“Well maybe if he’d get his lazy aft outta the lab every once and a while he’d recharge better.” he punctuates that statement with a long, noisy draw from his cube, with all the grace of someone deliberately avoiding a subject. You frown. Getting a little weird.

“Maybe he’s having nightmares again.” Inferno blurts out, prompting a nasty glare from Ironhide that he misses while looking expectantly at Red Alert.

Red Alert says nothing, only emitting a quiet, static laden laugh as he stares into his cube, mumbling incoherently, a thread of bio-luminescent drool leaking out of his mouth. You pick out a few choice phrases like “laced my rations” and “drowsy”. Ironhide looks unmistakably relieved. Your stomach twists.

You want to give them the benefit of the doubt. After all, you with your measly human lifespan, have no idea what kind of hell an eons long war can wreck on the brains of eons old soldiers. Their brand of PTSD is probably beyond the processing power of your feeble, organic mind. But you can’t help the nagging bite of suspicion gnawing at you, insisting that there’s something weirder going on than you’d like to imagine. But Ironide isn’t talking and he’s got one hell of a leash around Inferno, Red Alert fears your very existence, and you don’t want to stress Ratchet out anymore than he already is.

You shake your head. You can psychoanalyze your robot family’s motives later, when you’re not struggling to force out another pushup. A one handed pushup because Bee is still tugging on your hair and cheering and Optimus has just walked through the door and that means you need to look awesome.

“Youngbloodbot.” you think, ignoring the blood rushing to your face as he turns his helm in your direction and smiles, ignoring the splitting pain in your wrist as you lose your balance, and expertly ignoring the burning humiliation as you careen towards the floor and smack your forehead hard.

Fuck.

There’s snickering coming from the other end of the room, but it’s instantly silenced after he shoots a glare in their direction. You laugh a little, but it comes out as pained wheezing.

“Have you injured yourself?” he asks, offering you a servo, which gratefully accept to shakily get to your feet.

“I’m fine” you reply, still dizzy from the impact. “I just, ah, got a little carried away.”

He smiles, a genuine, serene, sage-like smile that has your heart fluttering. “It’s good to see you placing such high priority on physical prowess, though I do not wish to see you harm yourself in the process.”
You study the floor intently, attempting to hide your thoroughly flushed face as he offers you an energon cube, which you take, no doubt prepared to his preferences, which is warm, with rust shavings, and sickeningly sweet. “The human body is tougher than you’d think.” you say, glossing over the obvious fact that you likely no longer qualify as such. You tilt the cube to your mouth, drinking what you can only describe as a carbonated, semi-alcoholic milkshake “We might be squishy, but we recover pretty fast, all things considered.”

He nods in agreement, sipping from his own cube “Agent Fowler radioed in a request earlier this morning. Do you recall a sighting in the local menagerie we discussed yesterday?”

You take another sip of your cube. “You mean the ’weather balloon in the lion exhibit’ incident?”

“Indeed. He requested you and Chip go together to speak with the zookeepers.”

Great. More cover up work. You groan, wiping the sweat off the back of your neck with your spare hand. “Do I at least get a chance to shower off first?”

“You may take your time. The request was not urgent. Which is why I’ve requested to accompany you.”

You almost choke mid gulp. “Accompany me?” you blurt out.

“You and Bumblebee have bonded immensely over educational material documenting the non-sentient species of your planet. I would enjoy an opportunity to share this with you both.”

That makes sense. All things considered it’s a great cultural and education opportunity for him. And also a great excuse to spend time with you. Alone.

Oh.

“Thanks for the head’s up sentient pink dream bear.”

“Sounds great!” you agree happily, ignoring the copious amount of sweat pooling at the back of your neck.

“Then do not allow me to deter you from your shower further.” he turns, to leave, but before doing so you notice his optics flitting over the length of your body, so fast your certain you’ve imagined it.

“Had I not already been to the decontamination bath this cycle-” his voice is quiet, so low only you can hear. “-I would have suggested we do so together.”

You didn’t imagine it.

You swallow hard, heart slamming against your ribcage as you take the opportunity to do the same as he leaves, tracing his broad shoulder plating down to his perfectly sculpted aft with your eyes. You’re pretty sure the other bots see you looking. You’re pretty sure you don’t care anymore.

All aboard the xeno train. Next stop : Plug n’ Play, USA.

“Better watch out bossbot” you grin, wiping the sweat from your forehead. ”Because I’m gonna date the hell outta you.”
You know wearing a catsuit to the zoo is ridiculous, even more so that you’ve stuffed your throwing knives plus two larger ballistic ones into holsters underneath your pantlegs, but you’re taking Bee with you and that means taking zero chances and arming yourself to the teeth like some weird, pointy insect. You are, after all, for legal intents and purposes, a comic book character, and it’s high time you start acting like one.

This, of course, has no relation to it being your first ever excursion outside the base with Optimus. Or that it’s skin tight. Nope. Not one bit.

“That’s not why I wearing it.” you convince yourself as you zip it halfway up the bustline. “That’s totally not why I’m wearing it.” you repeat as you check your hair.

“Maybe just a little bit.” you admit sliding up next to his holomatter avatar. At least, that’s what Ratchet had called them. Semisolid holographic representations controlled remotely so they can observe the zoo undetected. Not something they do frequently, due to the amount of energon it requires to utilize them. Which makes this a special occasion by default. Which should mean spending a nice, long period of time alone with bossbot.

Keyword: Should.

You should get to hold hands with him. You should be able to go off alone while Ratchet watches Bumblebee. You should be able to purchase large quantities of ice cream, accidentally drop it in the hyena exhibit, take a picture and laugh about it afterwards.

You should be getting somewhere by now, but reality has different plans. Like Ironhide being a cockblocking piece of shit.

“We should secure the perimeter, just to be safe.” he convinced Optimus, while simultaneously shooting a look in your direction that said “this is for your cat lubricating on my berth you asshole.”

You make a mental note to teach Neelix to relieve himself exclusively into Ironhide’s recharging vocal processor as soon as possible.

So you now find yourself at the panda exhibit with Chip and a humanoid Ratchet and Bumblebee, who is unknowing cheering on a failed mating attempt by a rather enthusiastic male and a completely disinterested female.

“I almost feel sorry for him.” you say to Chip, who is busy taking a picture. Ratchet is leaning over the bar, sniffing intently.

What the fuck.

“That female isn’t even is estrus.” he states matter-of-factly, oblivious to the bewildered look plastered on your face. “No wonder he’s not getting anywhere.”

“You can smell?” you say, blinking in disbelief. “You can actually smell?”

“Can’t you?”
“Not to that extent.” you admit, deciding not to inquire as to why a mechanical life form would require a sense of smell to begin with. “You never told me that you could do that.”

“You never asked.” He rolls his optics. “Given, it’s not as highly developed as it was when sexual reproduction was our primary means of propagating, but we can still detect heat cycles.”

“You mean to tell me you guys do it like bears?” you ask. “You just…go sniff each other out when it’s time to make baby robots?”

“Well when you put it like that it sounds barbaric.” he snorts “Ours more closely resembles the mating habits of ruminant even toed ungulates, though not without some variables. Mechs are generally driven into heat by the beginning of a femme’s cycle, not the other way around, though there have been exceptions.”

“Even toed what?”

“Cloven hoofed herbivoruous land mammals, generally stemming from the cervine, bovine and caprine families.”

“So like deer?”

“Deer, goats, bison, take your pick.” He’s breathing a little harder than normal and staring way too intently into the exhibit. You honestly should be a little creeped out, but you can’t help but get the distinct impression that he’s not even looking at the bears, or thinking about bears at all.

“Ratchet….” you start slowly, unsure. “Can you smell me?”

“I can.” he replies, voice low, thick with something you can’t quite identify.

You bite you lip. “What…what do I smell like? To you, I mean.”

He turns to face you, expression unreadable, something unidentifiable shining behind his bright blue optics.

“Do you want the scientific answer or my personal assessment?”

It then occurs to you, while you’re watching a semisolid holographic representation of your best friend hyperventilate over mating pandas, that bossbot may not be the only bot whose attention you’d attracted.

_Oh shit._

“Uh, let’s do the science one.” you say awkwardly, rubbing the back of your head like a complete dork. “_What have I done?”_

“This is just my best guess so far, but factoring in the biological changes you underwent after prolonged exposure to energon, plus whatever substance your systems integrated after your fight with Soundwave-” he ex vents in disbelief “-You may have started emitting an olfactory signature that closely mimics a femme.”

_Oh shit._
“So, scientifically speaking, you smell pleasing,” he seems like he wants to say more, but thinks better of it, turning his attention back to the doomed mammalian procreation attempt.

Chip gives you a look full of thinly-veiled disgust and, surprisingly enough, sympathy.

“I knew things were kinda weird back on base,” he says quietly, out of Ratchet’s earshot. “But I had no idea it was this…uh…intense.”

You lean over the railing, cradling your head in your hands, stifling stressed, nervous laughter.

“Adventure/comedy my ass.” you dig your fingers into your skull. “It’s been a nature documentary from the start.”

***********************

Alright. So maybe today isn’t that awesome. Maybe Optimus had left your side with Ironhide to patrol for potential threats instead of doing fun, cute, Polaroid worthy things like petting goats or swinging Bee by his holographic little hands between you two like a goddamn postcard. Maybe Ratchet is starting to make you uncomfortable by getting riled up by humping bears and explaining why you smell so nice to him with science. Maybe you’re pretty sure Chip is getting creeped the fuck out by not only your, but now docbot’s behavior and is aggressively sucking down his soda and avoiding eye contact with either of you.

At least Bee is happy.

Your in the aviary now, where you can walk around underneath a canopy of tropical plants while screaming, defecating, albeit visually stunning birds fly, bounce and climb overhead. He seems especially pleased by a fat, whiskered, clumsy green one that’s climbed onto a low hanging branch to investigate your group. Bee extends a servo to touch it. It nibbles softly on his hand. He beeps excited approval. Your heart melts a little.

Worth it. You look down at the exhibit sign. “The Kakapo is a large, flightless, nocturnal ground parrot native to New Zealand.”

Neat, you think, setting Bee down for a moment so you too can extend your hand in friendship. “Hello weird, adorable fuzzy bird.”

“Following the introduction of domestic predators such as cats, it has become critically endangered, having evolved almost no defensive capabilities.”

Shit that sucks. you frown as you scratch it under it’s chin and Bee pats it on the back, impossibly gentle. “Not a lot of you guys left huh?” you ask the parrot. “Better get working on that reproducing bit.”

The bird give you a look that you immediately anthropomorphizes as “Do you have any idea how complicated that shit is?”

“I know, I know. The mating dance is a bitch, isn’t it?” you sigh in sympathy.

The parrot blinks. “Damn straight it is.”
“Your talking to a bird.” Chip deadpans. You shoot a glare his way.

“It’s a parrot.” you say defensively. “It can talk back. Sort of. Maybe.”

He shrugs “That’s cool. It’s just that Ratchet’s talking to a parrot too but he’s kinda failing at this ‘not drawing attention’ gambit.”

Sure enough, you hear muffled cursing pan over from the other side of the aviary, including a few choice phrases you probably taught him that you really don’t want Bumblebee learning.

“Ratchet?” you call out worriedly, following the slew of obscenities. “You alright?”

You round the corner to see docbot staring intently at a large, purple, iridescent, metallic bird with vibrant, glowing red eyes.

“FUCK.” goes the bird, in your own voice.

You cover Bee’s audio receptors with your hands. You groan.

You’ve been in the cowbird exhibit the whole time.

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Part of you is relived, when you hand Bumblebee off to Ratchet, split up, and escape the aviary with Chip to see the entire zoo has been commandeered by giant, asshole robots. Relieved because you’re convinced that your first date has already reached the pinnacle of shittiness, that the universe has finished extending it’s giant middle finger towards you, at least for now. Today is already beyond terrible. Today can’t get any worse. Probably.

“Greetings, small, fleshie citizens of earth.” announces a lithe, tall grey one who seems to be in a position of authority. “My name is Starscream. FUCK.”

You hang your head in a mixture of disbelief and shame.

“Well played universe. Well played.”

“We mean you no harm, we only wish to fuck you properly.”

Silence. Starscream looks towards Soundwave, optical ridge raised.

“Is there perhaps an alternative greeting in your databanks?”

The screen on his blank faceplate flashes to display a myriad of alien characters, lists upon lists of instantly translated earth greetings, if you had to guess.”

“Correction,” the seeker begins, clearing his throat. “We wish to diddle you.”

“Er…” Starscream checks the list again, appearing confused. “Bang?”

Nervous expressions turn to fear. A child starts crying.

“Create a beast with two backs?”

A older women faints. Someone screams.

“Shock the monkey?”

More screaming.

“Engage in the horizontal mambo?”

The crowd is gripped by full blown panic. Children are screaming. Adults are screaming. People of all ages are turning white and a select few have begun to vomit. Interestingly enough, you notice several individuals have begun to remove their clothing. Including a relatively posh looking girl in a sundress and wide brimmed hat next to you.

“Are you for real?” you ask her, jaw unhinged in (only minor) disbelief. “You gotta be joking.”

“Not even.” she replies, slipping the straps off her shoulders. “I, for one, welcome our new alien robot overlords.” She raises an eyebrow at your suggestively. “They’re bangin’.”

You open your mouth to tell her off like the crazy bat-shit piece of work she is. You close you mouth upon remembering why you’d come here in a curve-hugging catsuit with the bust zipped halfway up in the first place.

Alright you got me.” you admit. “They’re hot.”

“As hell.” she adds.

“They’re straight up dripping with sex appeal.”

“Clang clang bitch.” she pants, fumbling to unzip the back of her dress.

“But they’re evil” you grab her hand, preventing her from disrobing further. “They’re total assholes that hate doors and smash houses and steal robot babies away from you and put you through seven layers of paperwork hell so we need to get out of here now.”

She crosses her arms. “And miss out on an interplanetary orgy? I don’t fucking think so.”

You blow out a breath. “There’s more just as hot, not evil ones I can take you to.”

“You promise?” she asks you, looking skeptical.

You throw a pleading look Chip’s way. He looks ill.

“You two are disgusting.” he says flatly. “But yes, these guys are evil, and yes there’s nice robots. So if you two wouldn’t mind remaining fully clothed, we should work on getting out of here.”

This doesn’t prove to be too hard, as Starscream is still spouting increasingly obscure sexual
innuendo in an attempt to placate the horrified crowd and isn’t paying much attention to anything else. You manage to slip away unnoticed with your companions close behind you.

*Just need to find Ratchet.* you think as you make your way back towards the parking lot. *Just find him and make sure Bee’s safe.*” you know you should be more tactical minded, trying to think about your present situation, like how to navigate your way out of the refreshment building/arcade you’re currently winding through, but you’d activated mama bear mode back when you handed Bee off to Ratchet and there’s no turning that shit off.

So you bowl through said building with all the grace of an enraged maternal ursine, shoving aside two vending machines, a *Tron* and *Burgertime* and kicking the shit out of a stubborn *Mortal Combat* that’s blocking your access to the back door because there is no primitive entertainment deceive built by man that’s going to stand between you and your son.

*Not this time cowbirds. Not today.* Because while the universe has exhausted it’s *suck* arsenal from earlier and ruined your first outing from the base in months, ruined your chance to hang with Ratchet, to bond with Bee, and to maybe *maybe* get somewhere with Optimus, it’s not going to ruin your attempt at a clean getaway because even though the door’s dead bolted from the other side *dammit* you are a comic book character and you came prepared.

You smirk. You remove one of the ballistic knives you’d strapped under your pantleg and shove it between the wall and the door, intent on popping this bastard open with as many well-aimed kicks as you need to bust the lock and earn your freedom. You smile to yourself, a smug, “*fuck you universe*” kind of smile that turns into a “*fuck you universe*” kind of frown when the ground starts shaking. The door comes down before you have a chance to kick it, along with the wall, and the entire building comes down around you. You cough out a string of incoherent curses as the dust clears, finding yourself plunged straight into an insanity-dosage inspired scene that will no doubt would prompt the need for several more levels of paper work hell and GI Joe aliases.

“First we crack the shell, then we crack your skulls right open.”

Were you in a normal, level headed state of mind, you might scold your estranged, now inexplicably 6 foot tall son for finishing his one liner so weakly. Instead, you scream a little.

“Rumble,” you mouth, frozen where you stand. “Oh my god *Rumble.*”

Chapter End Notes

If you were at all curious what a kakapo looks like here's a great little video of one humping this dude's head.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Opv8vZ6RvB0
Goodbye Spaceboy

Your first instinct is to hug him. To engulf him in a big, tearful hug and cry on his now heavily armored shoulders. To tell him all about his new baby brother and new not asshole family he could have if he’d just take your hand and skip away with you into the sunset.

You’re also not an idiot. Your first instinct is *stupid* and your squishy ass *knows* better so you smash it down faster than he can pile drive the remaining wreckage into crushing the rest of your hilariously ill-prepared team.

“Is that one of the -not- evil ones?” says the posh girl, who you’ll call robot-fucker for now. “Because he’s doesn’t look like he can fly, and I was looking to join the million-mile high club sometime today.”

“You sick fuck.” You push the urge to strangle your cradle robbing new friend to the back of your mind. “I honestly don’t know what to tell you.” you reply tersely, not daring to tear your eyes away for even a split second. “Are you evil, Rumble?”

Rumble simply stares. You feel stupid for asking.

“Right…not sure what I was expecting.” you exhale shakily. *focus…focus.* “Rumble, do you remember me?”

“Yes.”

You feel excited tears sting in the corners of your eyes. You’re trying, dammit, you’re really trying to remain level headed and cool, but you’re still organic. You still have a mushy, hormone emitting brain that’s currently redirected every bit of it’s grey matter processing power into issuing the *protect child* command, even if said child has become a sentient death machine hellbent on killing it’s adoptive parent.

Alright then.” you blow out a breath “Are you going to attack us?”

“Yes.
“Are you just saying yes?”

“I’m going to crack your skull open.”

_Fuck._

“Chip?” you say slowly. “Robot-fucker?”

“I have a name.” she snorts indignantly. “Also pot, meet ket-

“-Point taken.” you growl. “You guys get outta here.”

“And leave you here _why_?”

“I uh. . . know this one. I’ll be fine.”

“He literally just said he’s going to crack your skull open.” Chip points out.

“Damnit Chip do you want to be a smartass and play the straight man or do you want to find Ratchet and get to safety?”

“Safety.” he answers candidly, grabbing robot-fucker’s hand and turning tail. “Good luck!” he calls out over his shoulder. You let out an exasperated sigh, turning back to said 6 foot tall sentient death machine.

“Alright Rumble, you said you remember me. You narrow your eyes. ”_How_ do you remember me?”

“You killed my carrier.”
“Fucking really?”

“No you’re not.”

“Look, I don’t know what happened to your original carrier, but I raised you for two whole years that’s got to count for something.”

“You killed her.”

“Don’t you remember anything?”

Rumble says nothing, only raising his now adult sized fist to deliver a megaton sized punch through your skull that you manage to avoid by mere inches. If you want any chance at your happy sunshine and rainbows ending without a perforated face you’re going to have to jog his memory somehow, and fast.

And so you do the only thing that makes sense at the moment, and start to sing.

“Earth bellow us-”

You narrowly avoid a sweeping kick

“Drifting, Falling-”

You dodge a piledriver to the face.

“Floating weightless, coming, comm-”
*thwuck*

The impact comes not from Rumble, but from the wall you’ve so gracefully backed into avoiding the last blow. *Ouch.*

If the throbbing in the back of your head isn’t a clear indicator that this isn’t working like it does in the movies, then nothing is. Belting out songs about astronauts is too cliché’ to work, and if Ratchet’s compilation program is any standard to go by then it’s got to be something offbeat.

“Neelix!” you yell. “Do you remember Neelix, you murderous little shit?”

He pins your shoulder against the wall. You hiss in pain.

“Whiskey!” you shout. “Bruce Lee! Enter the Dragon!”

His servo closes around your throat. You can’t breathe.

“Goddamnit….my fucking…basil plants.” you wheeze.

His optics widen. He loosens his grip.


*Getting close.*

“Boss-lady?”

*Closer*
“. . . Carrier?” he says slowly, struggling with the word. “‘_____’?”

_Holy shit._

You nod, swallowing hard as cautious optimism builds. _Please oh god please._

He releases you, staring wordlessly.

“Mom.” he says finally. “Mom!”

Optimism turns to euphoria and you throw your arms around him, laughing like a maniac. “Oh my god yes! yes!”

“Yes! Yes!” he repeats enthusiastically. ‘Where’s Neelix?’

_Damnit_

“At home, hopefully pissing in Ironhide’s berth.” you grin stupidly.

“Home?” he asks. “I thought Boss wrecked home.”

You figure by ‘Boss’ he must mean Soundwave, and a cold bolt of fear runs through you as you remember you’re still in a verifiable disaster area surrounded by asshole robots.

“We’ve got a new home.“ you say, nervously shifting your eyes. If the distant screaming is any indicator you figure Starscream had probably given up on attempting to introduce their faction through sweet, consensual robot loving and had ordered them to resume whatever nefarious activities they’d come here to accomplish to begin with.

“New home?”
“Yeah, one with a nice, not asshole dad and a baby brother that was roughly your age, but..” you trail off. You’d have time to assess exactly what manner of horrific medical procedure they’d done to increase his size later, when you aren’t being rushed by a shrieking mob of terrified zoo patrons followed closely by three vehicon drones. Keyword. Drones. As in identical and therefore expendable. As in all likelihood hilariously inept at their job and easy to kill.

The knowledge that the events of today should, at least, according to Ratchet, follow the plot of an adventure/comedy flick eases your mind somewhat. Your chances of becoming a stain on the pavement are relatively slim. You still have to concentrate on not pissing yourself, however when they order you to come quietly. You look nervously over at Rumble, who offers you a smug, albeit genuine grin.

“We can take ‘em.” he assures you, fists raised. And that’s when you remember the arsenal of elephant hunting tools you’d strapped under your clothes before you’d come here. You’d taken on a much more important decepticon ages ago, far less armed, and by yourself.

That’s got to even the odds a little.

You pause, giving yourself a moment to absorb your current reality.

Maybe it’s the knowledge that this is, in fact, a movie you’re acting out. Maybe it’s because you’re fighting back-to-back with your adopted alien robot son. Either way, you know you’re so ready for this exact situation and live or die you’re about to lay down the tranquil fury kind of ass kicking that can only come from a mama bear pretending to be a human pretending to be a mouse.

“Don’t worry mom-” Rumble says, stupid, cocky grin on his faceplate. “I got your back.”

Mom.

He actually called you mom.

If lives weren’t currently hanging in the balance you’d have screamed and hugged him right there.

You can’t -not- win.
“Wait.” you say, holding up a hand. “Wait this isn’t awesome enough.”

You waltz right up to one of the terrified civilians, wordlessly commandeer his boom box, say a quick prayer to the ambient music gods, and whack the on button, knife still in hand.

*Counting on you, universe.*

The smuggest, shit-eating-est grin to ever grace a human mouth spreads across your face as the haunting strains of *Carl Douglas* float through the air.

“~Everybody was Kung-Fu Fighting~”

*Thank you universe.*

“Alright Rumble.” you exhale shakily, calming your nerves. “We can do this. Just remember, be like water.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I dunno. Just start punching stuff *really* hard.”

“Okay!”

“~Those kicks were fast as lightning~”

You pull your knives out of their holsters. You charge forward, Rumble close behind. As you’d anticipated, the drones are not particularly adept at swatting small, fleshy creatures away from their frames and you lodge one of your knives between the plating. Rumble reaches from behind and throws his pile driver against the impact site, and the pede breaks cleanly from the leg with a satisfying *crunch*. The drone collapses.
In fact, it was a little bit frightening~”

You’re given only a moment’s reprieve, however, because they have guns. Laser guns, and the second one has taken the liberty of firing on you while you were busy celebrating the defeat of it’s inept companion. Your arm is singed, then your chest, then your inner thigh. It burns, it stings, but it also rips your catsuit in all the right places and leaves you looking at least 20% sexier than you’d been coming into the fight.

You grin, an infuriating smug “I got this shit” kind of grin. You fling a throwing knife directly into the mouth of it’s charging canon, which fizzles, and, following a brief inspection by it’s wielder, explodes, severing the arm up to the shoulder joint. It stumbles, it recoils, Rumble cripples it’s knee joints from behind, and the enraged albeit useless drone comes crashing down with a distinctive thud.

“But they fought with expert timing~”

The last one looks nervous. And why wouldn’t it be? This tiny, fleshy, mouse like thing had felled it’s brethren effortlessly, all because she’d figured out how to navigate reality without using fear to filter her view. You’re dangerous, you’re hot, and while you might not be the main character, you’re at least important enough not to be captured, maimed or killed by vehicons. Hell, you’d even gotten a theme song.

It’s with that cocky, fearless assertion you jump onto Rumble’s shoulders, using your new position to take aim and cast a throwing knife into it’s visor, presumably puncturing it’s optic upon entry. It howls, it topples over, writhing on the ground in agony. Rumble, with you still securely perched on his shoulders, proceeds to take hold of it’s helm and pull it right off, crushing it between his servos in the process. A wave of nausea rolls over you, but you cheer him on nonetheless, throwing your hands up and shouting your approval.

“Dude, Rumble,” you start, admiring your handiwork as the offlined remains of the drones smolder around you. “That. Was. Awesome.”

You high five him as you get down from his shoulders. You wipe the sweat from your brow, striking the perfect post-ass kicking post with your arms crossed. You open your mouth to deliver a one-liner containing at least one god-awful pun but are spared the need as Optimus and Ironhide come into view.
"You-" you point at him accusingly with your finger. "-sure took your sweet ass time getting here."

“My apologies.” he begins, pausing thoughtfully at the sight of said smoldering, offline remains. "Though it appears you were able to… handle things quite thoroughly from your end.”

Ironhide’s dumbfounded expression is priceless. Evidentially, Ratchet hadn’t thought to share his compilation program with the other bots, and the sight of a tiny human surrounded by robot corpses is still novel to him. You smirk infuriatingly for his benefit alone. Squishy human, one. Ironhide, zero.

“Guess I’m gonna hafta change the score.” he says, as if on telepathic cue. “Still, take it from me, missy. Don’t go getting-”

“-Cocky. Got it.” you finish for him. It occurs to you briefly that perhaps you are getting too cocky, and that your good fortune may be finite in nature, considering that it doesn’t stem from you, but that though is pushed to the back of your mind as ironhide rolls his optics and huffs in disdain.

“Ironhide, please escort the humans out the zoological park, this area is still volatile.” Optimus says, gesturing towards the terrified spectators. He grumbles, but offers no resistance as he begins to shuffle the thoroughly traumatized group away.

“I guess Ironhide was right.” you say, sighing in disbelief. “About securing the parameter, I mean.”

Optimus nods. “Indeed, however…I do not believe he was without…ulterior motive.” and that split second look of exasperation is all the confirmation you need that Ironhide is, in fact, a cockblocking piece of shit.

“So,” you begin, breaking the overt sexual tension by throwing you arm around Rumble, who you pull flush against your side despite his squirming protest. “I don’t know if you two have ever met before. . .”

“I have. . .met his sire.” he says with some trepidation, though smiles warmly at him.
“This is bossbot?”

He raises his optical ridge at the nickname, to which you merely shrug your shoulders. “Yes, I’ve heard much about you.” he says, turning back to Rumble.

“You know boss lady?” you smack him lightly on the side of the head. “-I mean my mom?”

“I do.” he says, throwing a sidelong glance in your direction. “We are close.”

CLOSE. You feel your face heat up. You’re pretty sure you’re going to start stuttering again. You’re pretty sure you don’t care. You’d come out of a giant robot fight unscathed, kicked ass with your son, your catsuit is ripped in all the right places and Ironhide is going to run out of ways to distract Optimus. You are totally getting some tonight and that’s okay. Reality is your bitch right now. Life is good.

“Prime! Fancy meeting you here!” -Says the undisputed lord and master of all things cockblocking.

Optimus ex-vents, placing a servo on his exhausted face.

“Megatron. . .”

You freeze where you stand. This guy is big. This guy is terrifying. This guy would be smokin’ if he wasn’t radiating evil off of every inch of his frame. He looks important, and with a name like that he probably is. You bite your lip nervously

“You know this guy?” you ask, turning your head towards Optimus.

“We unfortunately have a history together.” he pauses, appearing more frustrated than apprehensive. “A long one.”

“I see Rumble isn’t the only one befriending humans.” fiery red optics narrow at you, and you
visibly cringe. “A shame they perish so easily.”

This is okay. you tell yourself, taking a deep, calming breath. This is okay because if the smoking, offlined frames of three drones were any indicator, Ratchet’s AI was indeed correct and you are, in fact, playing out a script in a movie where Optimus is the main character. Which means he can only come out on top of this altercation. Which means you get a front row seat to watching two giant, alien, hot as fuck robots dukeing it out, secure in the knowledge you’d absolutely backed the right dog in this fight. Your biggest problem is not having an oversized soda and popcorn to shove in your face while you watch Megatron get his perfectly sculpted aft handed to him by your luck generating boyfriend.

Boyfriend. The corners of your mouth twitch up. Cotton candy dream bear gave you the thumbs up. It sounds right. It fits. It fits as well as Optimus’s fist into Meg’s smug fucking vocal processor. You throw your hands up. You cheer. You get up to search the remains of the refreshment stand for some sorely needed popcorn. You run smack into Soundwave’s pede

Oh hell.

You swallow hard. Soundwave is a pretty important character in this movie, and your last fight against him hadn’t gone particularly well. You’d rather the day end without another gaping abdominal wound, if possible, but a confrontation seems unavoidable, and you’d lost the element of surprise when you’d landed a hit during your first skirmish. He knows what to expect by now.

“Probably got a 50/50 chance” you think as you kick the boom box, which the terrified onlooker had convenient left behind, on again, hoping beyond hope the ambient music gods didn’t pick something reminiscent of your first fight.

Your blood runs cold as “Billie Jean” wails through the speakers. You hang you head, the MJ song all the confirmation you need to assess that you will, in fact, be stabbed in the gut at some point during this fight.

“RUMBLE, OPERATION : RETRIVE HUMAN.”

On second thought, you’ll gladly take a tentacle falcon punch over a kidnapping attempt.

Rumble simply stares
“RETRIVE “____”’’ Soundwave repeats.

“No.”

“IS RUMBLE REPEATING ‘NO’?”

“Ye-NO!” Rumble shouts defiantly back at his sire. ”Not going back!”

There’s a long pause in which Soundwave wordlessly stares down his sparkling, calculating, face plate dark, unreadable.

“RUMBLE-” he says at last. “-THERE WILL BE CONSEQUENCES.”

No sooner is the override command issued then you feel his servos close around your throat, digging, crushing. You sputter, trying to scream, but the only sound comes from Rumble, who is sobbing, helpless in his own frame as he’s forced to choke the life out of his mother.

“Rumble please.” you mouth, tears streaming down your cheeks as you claw at his grip. “Stop. Stop.”

He cries harder now, sobs wracking through his frame. He shakes his head. “Can’t! Can’t stop!”

Your head spins as you cease your fruitless struggles, caged by his steel body. Your pulse roars through your ears, you feel your grip on the ballistic knife weaken. Through your tear-blurred vision you trace the seams where his neck cabling meets his chest plating. “I can’t.” You think as the world grows fuzzy around you. “I can’t do this.” white burns behind your eyes. Your lose feeling in your limbs. You hear ringing.

You’re out of time.
“Fuck you universe” you think as you use your last remaining shred of strength, fueled by adrenaline, to plunge the knife between the plating. “Fuck you.” you think as he relinquishes his grip, frame seizing, before going limp against you. You fall backwards onto the ground, air burning your lungs, coughing up blood and bile as you cradle his helm in your arms. “Fuck you very much.”

He tilts his helm up to see you, light flicking dim behind his optics.

“…Mom?” he whimpers through a burst of weak static.

You say nothing, mouth ajar, the weight of your action having finally registered. You try to hug his helm closer to your body but you can’t. You’re shaking too hard.

“I’m sorry.” he says, voice fading, far too quiet, far too small. “I wanna go home.”

This can’t be real. This is too shitty to be real. Too fucking horrible to be happening.

So it’s then you decide, with his still-warm frame cradled in your arms, that this is, in fact, not happening.

Nope.

You lay his head down with all the care one would place a sleeping infant unto a blanket of shattered rock, and pull your other knife out of it’s holster.

Nope.

You sprint forward, manage to move fast enough, quick enough that the elephants don’t have time to react. You’re a mouse, after all, and elephants fear mice for a reason. Because mice can wedge knives between armor plating, and use the handles from said knives to climb far enough up their bodies to actually start severing neck cables with your teeth.
You actually manage to saw halfway through one before Soundwave regains enough coordination to attempt to pull you off. You feel something puncture your side. You’re pretty sure he’s run you through with a tentacle. You’re pretty sure you don’t care, but deathgrip or no you’re finally flung from his shoulders and land in an ungraceful, bloody heap on the ground.

You ignore the bleeding, ignore the pain, ignore every sensory protest your body can throw at you and limp/stumble your way back to Rumble’s corpse, because it’s not a corpse, because this isn’t happening.

“What part of nope don’t you understand?”

“N-n-nope.” you manage shakily, refusing to relinquish your hold on the still-warm cassette despite increasing protests from Optimus, who is doing his best to pry you apart. Probably because he wants to get you back to base for medical treatment. Probably because you look like you’re dying. You probably are, but that falls squarely into nope territory.

There’s yelling. There’s arguing. You hear an order to fall back, muffled because your straining heartbeat roars through your ears and drowns out most of the sound.

_I got cocky._ you think dimly, squinting through tear blurred eyes. _This happened because I got cocky._ you repeat to yourself as the world around you darkens. A faint thread of fear trickles down your spine as you contemplate your chances of dying. Probably pretty high. Maybe inevitable, judging by the amount of luminescent violet liquid pooling beneath your chest.

_Probably justified._ you think, letting what little concern you held for your own life slip away, because suddenly there’s no you. No autobots, no decepticons, no observatory being blown up, no asshole cowbird Soundwave taking your son, anything except you and the pain of knowing your son is leaving. He’s going away, he’s dying and there’s nothing you can do about it.

Somewhere between your anguish, your bitter hatred for Soundwave, for the universe, you manage to sever yourself from your anger, because that doesn’t matter. None of this bullshit matters. All that ever mattered was Rumble. Scared, lost, jettisoned from his ship-genetically altered way too tiny _Rumble._ You’d give everything you have, everything you’d ever known just to make him not afraid,
make him not tiny, make him strong enough that you wouldn’t have to battle giant robots with kitchen knives for him, make him strong enough to be ok without you. Make him strong enough to be on his own.

You’ve been unmade before, you’d been broken into a million pieces when he’d been taken the first time. But it’s nothing compared to the raw, burning reality keeping you conscious as he dies in your arms.

**********************

You shove a handful of popcorn in your face, eyes glued to the screen. Rumble isn’t looking at the screen, having instead decided to designate ever patient *cough* Neelix as his training partner. Neelix is not happy. Neelix hisses. Rumble laughs. You laugh.

“Looks like you need a new training partner.” you say, almost unintelligible on account of your mouth being stuffed with popcorn.

He looks at you. He grins. “Yeah. Probably.” He holds his servos up. “You wanna go boss-lady?”

You smile at the nickname. You set the bowl down. You get off the couch. You put your fists up. “Alright, but if mean old boss lady beats you in under a minute, you go to bed early.”

He scrunches his face in thought.

“Deal.” he says finally. “But you won’t beat me.”

You smirk, fully intent on pinning this smug little shit to the ground until he gets bored, so you’ll have an early night for once, but hesitate as something outside the den window catches your eye.

It’s another Rumble. Well, no, he’s black where Rumble is purple, but it could be his twin. It probably is.
“Whose that?” Rumble asks, pointing to the stoic figure outside.

“I don’t know.” you tell him honestly.

“Maybe he wants to fight.” Rumble offers.

He probably does. He probably came here to see Rumble. You open the window, inviting him in.

He doesn’t move.

“Maybe he doesn’t want to fight.” Rumble says, looking disappointed.

“I think he does.” you say, pausing in thought. “But maybe he can’t come in.”

“Is it because Soundwave broke the door?”

“Maybe.”

Rumble looks nervous. “Does that mean I have to go outside to play with him?”

“I think you do.”

“Can you come with me?”

You want to go with him. You’d give anything to go with him, but you know you can’t.

“Not right now.”

He looks scared. You don’t want him to be scared.
“Is it safe?”

You look back out the window at his twin.

“I don’t know. But if he’s waiting there for you, it can’t be that bad.”

He still looks reluctant, but this seems to reassure him.

“I’m gonna go outside now.” He looks up at you. “Do you want us to wait for you?”

“Nah.” you say, leaning down to scoop him into a hug. “I’ll find you guys.”

He hugs you back. “Okay.”

You break out of the hug. You get up. You open the window for him.

You let him go.

******************************

One picture.

You stare blankly at the slightly charred Polaroid in your hand.

One picture is all you have. The only proof you two had ever been together, the only proof he’d ever existed.
Soundwave had taken the body. At least that’s what Ratchet, who’s concerned faceplate you’d woken up to back in the med bay, had told you. Optimus hadn’t time to do anything else, having made retrieving your limp, profusely bleeding self his priority. You’d lost consciousness as he carried you back.

Ratchet had finally cleared you to leave, and you now find yourself cradling a frightened Bumblebee, who had been thrown into hysterics at the sight of your mangled body and has as of yet to fully calm down.

“You would have liked him Bee.” you whisper, making no attempt to stop the tears streaming freely down your face. “Maybe he didn’t want to dance but he’d have been a good big brother.”

You hiccup a little, wrapping your arms around his helm, pressing him tighter against your chest. “You wouldn’t even have to learn how to fight, he’d do it for you.”

Bee whines, a low, concerned whimper, nothing like the frantic warbling of before. He’s afraid because you’re crying, because you’re making sounds on the same frequency, same timbre as he was and he knows that’s not right. He’s scared for his mom and that knowledge brings the rest of your impossibly small world crashing down around you, and you cry against him, stroking the back of his helm as you nuzzle your face into his. You struggle to breath, to simply exist next to this beautiful, innocent thing that you’re failing to comfort.

“Sorry Bee.” you murmur, head buried, voice muffled. “I’m so sorry.” you sob, chest heavy, sick with the knowledge that it’s not Bumblebee you’re apologizing to. You choke on your breath as the rest of your willpower dissolves, and you give into the comforting numbness of admitting who you’re actually talking to.

“Sorry Rumble.” your voice cracks as you sob, letting the convulsions take your body. “Rumble I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” you curl yourself protectively around Bee, covering him, weeping against him, allowing yourself a precious few seconds to pretend your spaceboy is back in your arms. Pretending that you hadn’t failed. Remembering the first night you’d spent with him, singing softly.

“Earth bellow us…“ you start shakily, hardly above a whisper. “…drifting, falling…”

You feel pressure against your eyes, and open them to see your current spaceboy making his best attempt to wipe the tears off your face. Your knee-jerk reaction is to cry harder because you’re still failing damnit, but as you look unblinking into his vivid, sky blue optics, looking in you not at you,
you feel the beginnings of sweet, sweet relief ebb at your temples, and you feel a soft, pulsing, rumbling *something* coast behind your eyes. You recognize it as the same rhythm you both shared for months, while he slept unmoving in your arms.

“*Please stop crying. I'm here. I'm not leaving.*”

You breath even, eyelids growing heavy, beginning the slow transition from sobbing to dry heaving. You brush his faceplate with your hand, giving a small, trembling smile on his behalf.

“*Floating weightless…*” you steady your voice as best you can. “Coming, coming hoooome. . .”

When unconsciousness finally comes, you welcome it together, hand laced around his tiny servo as you meet dreamless sleep.

******************************************************************************

Optimus watches from behind the door, avoiding the sliver of light that would give his presence away.

He’s hidden. And as much as he wants to reveal himself, to offer himself as a pillar of support to the fragile, weeping human girl in the adjacent room, he doesn’t move forward.

This is his fault. He knows this. He’s accepted this as a facet of his reality. Others suffer in his presence, for his benefit alone. This is fact. This is life. This is *his* life.

This knowledge, this expectation doesn’t lessen the pain. Her child perished so that his would be cared for fully. So that nothing would question her loyalty to *his* faction. To *his* family. Her sparkling is dead because of him, because it benefits him and his cause.

He’ll live with this. He’ll carry this guilt with him, and he’ll do it silently, leaning against the wall, listening to the gentle sobbing of this tiny, impossibly small and alien thing, willing to give her life for children of another species. *His* child. *His* sparkling.
He’ll listen to her weep tonight, because he’s too haunted, too scared to comfort her.

“Primus.” he murmurs, helm buried in his servos. “Primus help me.”
More Fortunate Than Most

Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, actually get somewhere.

Chapter Notes

Alright. I'm probably gonna come back and edit this and give it more dialogue and beat it's ass with a thesaurus at some point but I just really REALLY want to get this out right now I'm so sick of hacking at it I've had to change this fucking chapter like five times already fuck.

Plz enjoy.

Soundwave knows he should be paying attention.

He’s been called up to the bridge along with Starscream for a private meeting, discussing the failures of the day previous. His instincts tell him this is important, this will bear consequences later, that this could and probably would mold their strategy for the foreseeable future.

He knows this, but can’t bring himself to do more than stare motionlessly ahead from where he’s seated, Lazerbeak on his shoulder, Ravage curled in his lap, watching as Megatron and Starscream trade banter on their most recent defeat at the autobot’s hands.

“We have underestimated the humans.” Starscream muses, clicking his talons together decisively. “A small oversight that can be easily corrected for…future endeavors.”

“We’ve underestimated Prime’s human.” Megatron retaliates. “Make no mistake. There is a distinction, and a rather large one at that.”

“Surely the difference between these small, fleshy organics is negligible at most.”

“The difference is that they were with him. And things have a habit of sliding into place for him, including comrades, no matter how unlikely or useless they may appear at first glance.”
The seeker raises his optical ridge, tilting his helm slightly.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Tell me Starscream, have you stopped to consider why it is he always comes out on top of our altercations? Why it is he misses fatal blows by mere inches, why he returns from the dead?” “Why is he alone beyond death, beyond hardship? Beyond failure itself?”

Starscream opens his vocal processor, then closes it, knowing better to supply an answer when there is, in fact, no correct answer.

“His victories are not fueled by skill, by strength, or determination, but by sheer dumb luck.”

“Luck?” the seeker returns, bewildered. “Luck?”

“Recall if you will, the incident that stranded the autobots upon this desolate rock, in which Prime’s medic was able to bring him back online by merely removing the matrix, ex-venting on it, waiting ten seconds, then placing it back in?”

Starscream’s mouth falls slightly ajar, failing to produce a response. Had he not feared severe physical retribution he would have pointed out how blatantly insane the notion was and suggested that he seek medical attention immediately. Instead, he maintains his silence, staring incredulously at his decidedly reality-challenged master.

“Surely the circumstances would be better explained as coincidence-”

“This is beyond coincidence. Coincidence is not predictable. Coincidence cannot be measured.” he closes his optics, ex-venting in restrained disbelief. “Fortune has always smiled upon Optimus. And I believe the time has come for us to utilize our resources, redirect our efforts into understanding why.”

Details are hammered out, deadlines are placed, Starscream reluctantly accepts his new mission in measuring the immeasurable. He bows before he leaves, though not without swearing under his breath that their leader had most certainly lost his mind. Megatron turns to leave soon after, but pauses before passing Soundwave’s seat.
“It is…most unfortunate that our attempt at retrieving the human did not go as planned.” he says, a look of genuine discomfort splayed across his denta filled scowl. “I did not wish to see another of your cassettes released to the stars.”

Soundwave remains silent, nodding his agreement as the warlord makes his exit. His words were no longer worthless, but dangerous. Deadly. They’d cost him more than he could ever hope to redeem in his ageless, miserable life.

They’d cost him Rumble.

Lazerbeak preens at his faceplate, Ravage nuzzles against his chassis. Both in a tired, fruitless attempt to comfort their sire. Both still hopelessly pinging their brother, old enough to understand death, too young to fully accept it.

It’s then, he decides, with his remaining family couched in his limp albeit protective embrace, that words are beyond him. Words are a tool too volatile, too unpredictable for him to utilize. His own vocal processor had taken enough from him, and for the sake of his remaining sparklings he vows against it’s continued use.

He will not speak again. Ever.

It’s with this new restriction, freeing in it’s own right, solidified in his processor, that he allows himself a moment to grieve.

“Designation, Rumble,” he weeps, frame shaking with the effort of remaining silent. “Promise: your sire will not forget you.”

**************************

“I guess we were wrong.”

You lie motionless as Ratchet examines your second gaping abdominal wound of the year, which had already begun to heal because why wouldn’t it. You’re a comic book character, and accelerated healing is par for the course.
As is a tragic backstory. One which you’re currently ruing trying to discuss with docbot.

“Not necessarily.” you say slowly, dryly, the admission of the reality around painful in it’s own right. “Characters can still die in a comedy.”

“Yes, but,” he pauses, moving forward cautiously, fearful of degrading your already strained mental state. “Then it would stand to reason the death would be funny.” he exvents, low and disbelieving. “This wasn’t funny.”

You say nothing, counting the tiles in the ceiling. He’s right. The blow at the end of your ordeal had far outweighed the unorthodox antics leading up to it.

“Maybe to someone out there it is.” you say, grimacing slightly as he prods a particularly sensitive section of your evisceration. “Setting me up with my son again just to see him die. That’s probably hilarious on a cosmic scale.” you let a weak, defeated laugh escape in spite of yourself. “Although, he insisted I killed his carrier. What kind of lame, unfunny excuse is that?”

“Considering sparklings brought online like Rumble don’t have carriers, not a very good one.”

Alarms go off in the back of your head. You give Ratchet a confused, exhausted, dirty look, one that you’re not sure you’d take back if you could. He spares a split second to look nervous, like knowing that his offhand remark would cost him later on. The urge to ignore Ironhide’s plea is almost irresistible, but you find yourself too tired, too worn to press on. You instead, once again, shun the matter to the back burner of your mind, and allow him to tactfully change the subject.

Ratchet lets out an uncomfortable sigh, “Perhaps it was…premature to diagnose the genre” he begins, prodding you painfully with some bizarre looking device that would have made you nervous under normal circumstances. “Perhaps we should have been looking for themes, or characters.”

You nod. Somehow, talking about the matter from the PoV of two film enthusiasts is relieving. There’s a cold, numbing comfort in the detachment, and you welcome it, at least for now, because it allows you to function. And given a choice between functioning at minimum capacity or crying into your cat's fur in Bee’s room in the dark, you’ll gladly take the former.

“Why is it-” you ask after a beat, a long withheld curiosity biting at you. “-That you never shared this with anyone else?”
He raises an optical ridge. “The compilation program?”

“Yeah.” you confirm, eyes unmoving. “How come you don’t want anyone else in on this? Why just me?”

He sighs, setting down his instruments and pushing the tray aside. “Initially, I did. But they wouldn’t believe me.”

You crane yourself forward, intending to fix him with a skeptical look, but recoil, hissing at the pain in your midsection.

“Don’t believe you?”

“They warrior class can be a religious lot, when it comes to things like this. That’s how they cope with their miracles and their losses.” he sighs, turning his helm away. “Optimus is too, to an extent, but he’s got more reason than any of them to question their deity’s motives.”

“Deity?” you ask, wincing as he begins to re-apply the bandages, the fabric coarse and unngiving against your shredded skin.

“Primus.” he pauses in concentration as he secures the dressing. “It’s considered taboo by many to question his will when it’s fortunate in nature, let alone attempting to measure it. It would have been easier back when I wasn’t the only scientist on board.”

“There were others?”

“There were.” a smirk tugs at the corner on his lips, resulting in a tired, lopsided smile. “One in particular reminds me very much of you.”

“What happened?”
Ratchet stiffens. You immediately regret asking as you sense the familiar uncomfortable, tense static lingering in the air.

“We…had a falling out.” he says finally. “A large one.”

The glare he gives the adjacent wall convinces you not to inquire further. There’d be time for that later, when you aren’t both exhausted, during some magical time period when you’re both the right amount of unguarded and miserable.

He offers his servo to gently help you down from the examination table, which you slide gingerly into, lightheaded and shaking slightly.

“You should be fine for the next few days.” he says. “If you feel any abnormal pain or start bleeding again, come see me immediately.

You nod, offering a weak smile as you make your way over to the door one shaky, unsteady step at a time.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” he asks suddenly.

You raise an eyebrow. “You just said I should be fine, didn’t you?”

“I know I did.” he grumbles, though averts his optics. “I just meant…taking into consideration what you’re going through, I’d understand if you didn’t want to be alone right now.”

“I’m here for you.” He doesn’t say it, and he doesn’t have to. Worry flashes faintly in the back of your mind and you wonder briefly how much of his concern is friendly, and how much managed to creep beyond that scope. Against your better judgment, you take said worry and bury it far behind your brain to be revisited at an extremely inconvenient time in the future. You had reserved this time to mourn, and that’s exactly what you’re going to do, distractions be damned.

You pause at the door, hand resting on the frame. You stare at the floor.

Silence. For a moment you’re convinced he’s done, and you begin to step forward.

“I didn’t want to tell you this yesterday.” he begins, slowly, quietly, as if afraid his voice alone would scare you away. “But when you were brought to me, your EM field was…altered.”

You turn your head back to face him. “Altered how?”

“The signature was different, and that difference was sustained until you resumed consciousness.” “I don’t know Rumble’s frequency, but I’ve seen enough of his sire’s to make an educated guess.”

“And that guess would be?”

“You merged fields with him just before, and briefly after he went offline.”

You mouth falls open slightly. The exhausted look you give him shows a sliver of light return to your eyes.

“Are you telling me…”you start shakily. “That I talked to him after he died?”

Ratchet lets out a long, weary ex-vent, cradling the side of his helm in his servo.

“And you wonder why I don’t tell anyone else.”

You close the door behind you, exhaling softly, cradling the side of your head in your hand. Ratchet promised to watch Bee for a while, giving you some sorely needed time process the knowledge that your deathbed fever dream had quite possibly been supernatural in nature.
You watch the floor as you walk, mulling over your options. You can either drag your semi-functional husk of a self into a dark room to stare blankly at the wall and fight back numbing tears, or-

“I don’t want to be alone right now.” you think solemnly, having made up your mind to forgo the wall and find Optimus. Even if he doesn’t want to talk, even if nothing he says can comfort you, you can still curl up in his hands like the tiny, trembling mouse that you are.

He tends to spend his spare time pouring over files on the bridge, so you steer yourself in that direction. It’s a fair distance from the medbay, however, and when you open one of the many doors you need to pass through to reach the other end of the ship, you come face to face with the absolute last human you want to see right now.

“Been a while, Marissa.”

It takes all of your willpower not to crush Fowler’s skull between your hands.

“It’s been three days at most.” you reply tersely, digging your fingers into your temples. “What do you want?”

“I’m not sure if I like that tone.” he says, narrowing his eyes.

“I’m not sure if I like your face.” you cough into your hand, trying to look composed despite your “haven’t slept in days” posture and complexion. You’re pretty sure you look like hell. You’re pretty sure you don’t care.

“Sorry sir.” you reply through gritted teeth. “To what do I owe the honor of your visit?”

“Better, but I could do without the sarcasm.” his amused expression belies the warning hidden in his tone. “To the point, then. I’ve got some…rather unorthodox business concerning your relationship with your papa-bear-bot.”

Despite your exhaustion, the dark circles under your eyes, and your current “Fuck everything” attitude, you still find it in you blush furiously, immediately turning your head to the side.
“Relationship?”

“I’m not blind, “____” It’s pretty obvious to even a casual observer such as myself, that you two have become rather well acquainted over the past year.”

“We have.” you say, taking a page out of Optimus’s book. “We’ve become…close.”

“So I’ve assumed correctly.“ he says, a somewhat disgusted expression coming over his face. “Don’t get me wrong. I’ve seen some strange shit in my lifetime. But I don’t want to even begin to understand how you managed the seventh kind with a metal behemoth.”

You open and close your mouth, trying to find an appropriate response somewhere in between “didn’t do anything yet”, “I don’t see how that’s any of your business” and “what the actual fuck.”

“What the actual fuck.” you say, unable to keep your eye from twitching slightly.

“You resigned any idea of privacy when you started working for me, and this is considered a matter of national security.”

“Security?” you hiss. “How does this qualify as a matter of national security on this or any planet?”

“He’s an alien, “____”. And he might be sickeningly polite, he might adore humanity almost solely thanks to your efforts, but at the end of the day he’s still a 30 foot tall sentient death machine.”

“They can get smaller.” you start before you can stop yourself. “There’s this thing they can do with their subspace like, shove some of their mass into it and-” you stop upon seeing the expression on his face go from “somewhat disgusted” to “mildly amused.”

“You didn’t need to know that, did you?”

“I did not.” he admits with the suggestion of a wry smile that you immediately want to punch off his face. “I am, however, obligated to deliver some cautionary reading material to you.” he produces a
folder, which you eye warily before gingerly taking it from his hands.

You look at Fowler, eyebrow raised, then at the document. Then back at Fowler.

“These are instructions on how to parallel park.”

“They’re also my polite way of telling you that you are, in fact, flying blind. So help me god if you get your ass stuck doing the horizontal tango with your papa bear bot I will offer my condolences. But that’s it. Nobody on my team has the credentials to be offering suggestions on this matter and the only people that do are the kind you don’t trust around your cub.”

You roll up the paper, resisting the urge to slam your head into the nearest wall. “Alright. Fair enough. But you don’t expect me to believe you came out all this way just to tell me that, do you?”

“I do not.” he admits, clearing his throat. “We pushed the meeting for the asylum case two days from now.”

Your heart stops for a moment. The idea of strangers around Bee had begun to function as your version of a berserk button and after yesterday’s incident it takes all of your collective willpower not to claw Fowler’s eyes out on the spot. You swallow hard, breathing through your nose, steadying yourself

“That soon?” you ask, hoping you’d sufficiently concealed the venom lacing your voice.

“Considering what went down at the zoo, be grateful it’s not now.” he returns, eyes narrowed. “It’s also going to function as a meeting for all the new members we recruited following the incident.”

“New members?” you cock your head.

“Not everyone buys the weather balloon excuse. The ones who didn’t are loose ends, and we don’t do loose ends. Everyone at the zoo who couldn’t be persuaded otherwise was offered a position, so you and Chip are going to have your hands full the next couple of weeks with the newbies.”

“Everyone? How many people is that?”
“More than you want to know. Regardless, you’ve got two whole days to prepare yourself, I’d suggest you use it wisely.” he turns to leave, but stops at the threshold.

“___”?

You turn your head to look at him, his expression slightly uncomfortable, though largely unreadable.

“I know officially, none of this happened, and god willing it stays that way, but,” he pauses thoughtfully. “Regarding what happened to your spaceboy, you have my sympathy.”

You spare only half a second looking bewildered, before you turn your head to study the ground, blinking back tears.

“Thank you, sir.”

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“I am glad to see you recovering so quickly.”

It’s nearly an hour later, after scouring the ship, that you finally find him. Outdoors, just beyond the entrance to the firing range.

He’s stargazing. The night sky remarkably clear tonight, and he offered you a seat next to him and a spare energon cube, which you’d gratefully accepted, despite the near-sickening level of sweetness he’s accustomed to leveling them to.

“It’s really not that bad.” you assure him. “You get punched through the gut enough and it’s starts losing it’s sting.” you give him a wry, lopsided smile. “Honestly, my teeth hurt worse. I’m surprised I didn’t get electrocuted gnawing through the cabling.”
“Your reaction was as unexpected as it was impressive.” he draws from his cube, silently. “I shudder to think of that damage you’d be capable of, had you been born cybertronian.”

You sip from your cube, tracing constellations with your eyes. Had the mood been less somber you’d probably have dragged a hastily assembled telescope out here with you, recalled some (mostly non-embarrassing) tales from your MIT days, revel in the opportunity to watch the stars with someone who had actually been there and generally have a nice, romantic evening with just the two of you.

But no. The mood had been officially killed back in the smoldering remains of the city zoo, and would probably remain that way for some time. You sigh, staring blankly into the luminescent fuchsia liquid cupped in your hands.

“I wish to apologize for my inability to be with you yesterday.” he says after a beat. “I was. . .Otherwise engaged.”

The pause is heavy, genuine in in his remorse, but also cautious. You hang your head, peering out at him from under a curtain of tousled, unkempt hair.

“It’s fine.” you lie. “After Ratchet patched me up, I feel asleep pretty quickly with Bee.”

He gives you a look, a long, concerned one that clearly tell you he knows you’re full of shit. You’re a certifiable wreck and your lackadaisical facade is equally terrible. You feel tiny, warm tendrils of embarrassment prick up your neck as you wonder why you’d even tried to lie in the first place.

“He can see into your soul you idiot. We’ve established that.” you think as you drain your cub, averting your eyes.

“You should not have to have endured the night alone.” and you can’t help but notice the guilt hanging in his words. “I should have stayed with you.”


“__”,” and you jump as he pressed a single digit against your shoulders, comforting. “You do not always need to be strong in front of me.”
Your wall breaks. Regrets, grievances you’d initially thought beyond you tumble out in a unified stream, congealing into a single sentence.

“I killed him.”

“You would have offline if you hadn’t.”

“And he’d still be here.” you cradle your face in your hands in silent, tearless anguish. “Rumble is dead because of me.”

“Rumble is dead because Soundwave issued his override command, likely on Megatron’s orders.”

“I….” you dig your fingers into your skull, shaking slightly. What he says makes sense. It always does, and that’s normally not infuriating but this time it is and you growl softly into your convulsions. You feel him move forward, making a motion as if to touch you comfortingly, but hesitates.

He sighs.

“I cannot allow you nor anyone else to take to blame for Rumble’s fate, not when it falls squarely on my shoulders.”

You crane your neck back to look at him, and find his expression unreadable.

“What?”

“Your fierce maternal feelings for Rumble may have been the only thing that could call your loyalty into question. And that may very well be why he perished. “____”, I cannot express how sorry I am.”

“But you didn’t have anything to do with it.”
“Not voluntarily, no.” “But that does not necessarily absolve my guilt in the matter.”

You blink. You open and close your mouth. Optimus sighs, appearing now older and more weary than you’d ever seen him.

“I am aware I am more fortunate than most. And . . .this knowledge tortures me.”

You say nothing for a moment, staring back at him wide-eyed and slack jawed, a million and one questions on your tongue before it finally clicks.

You hadn’t thought about what you would have done had you known Rumble’s life was in imminent danger, if that prospect had been dangled in front of you in an either-or scenario. The ordeal had ended before they had the opportunity to use him as leverage to buy your cooperation. “If it would have saved him . . .” you think bitterly. “If it would have kept him safe, what would I have done?”

You hadn’t been given the chance to decide, and for good reason. A shudder runs down your spine. You look back at him.

“So you know.” you say, eyes downcast, purposefully avoiding his gaze.

“You and Ratchet are not the first to take notice of the…bizarre happenstance that surrounds me.” he lets out an exhausted ex-vent. “Someone I once considered a dear friend made a habit out of accusing me with it, as did my spark mate.”

“Sparkmate.” you furrow your brow at the thought, trying to place meaning to the phrase. “Bee’s carrier?”

“Her name was Elita.” he says finally, far too quiet.” And the manner in which she perished…the manner in which I didn’t . . .” He trails off “. . . I should not be alive.”

You don’t want to push. You know better, you’re more sensitive than that, so despite the curiosity...
burning at your, you remain tight lipped.

“I have not merely skirted death. Rather, I seem to have been ignored by it entirely. *Despite* my best efforts, more often than not.” He continues. “If I had known what I do now, I would have never perused her company, would have warned her of the perils of merely being with me.”

“Optimus,” you say, pressing tightly against his servo. “I don’t know everything that happened, and I don’t need too, but” you swallow nervously. “You once said she was like me, and…if that’s true, then knowing how dangerous it was wouldn’t have stopped her.”

Silence. A hint of a smile across his face, though he immediately corrects it. “It’s not only that. Beyond circumstance, friendships, alliances, relationships seem to…fall into place for me, seemingly with little regard for the risks imposed to those involved. I believe there is a strong chance that this encompasses…what exists between us.”

“I already deduced that as a possibility. A while back, actually.” you let out a disbelieving sigh. “And I’ll admit, I was pretty nervous about it at first, lost some sleep over it, narrowly dodged a breakdown or two, but ultimately it hasn’t stopped me.” you feel a wary smile creeping over your face. “I decided to, uh “proceed with extreme caution.””

“I do not wish to downplay the danger this poses to you, not only as my partner, but in our limited knowledge in how our species interact, and the undeniably vast differences between them. . .”

“I’m not denying that.” you admit “But, I didn’t meet you as an alien.” you say quietly. “I met you as another parent, someone who was just as terrified as I was of losing a child. Someone who’d do anything to keep their son happy, who’s strong enough to be gentle.” you let out a shaky sigh, breath caught in your chest as you look him in the optics. “And that’s. . .that’s probably why I fell for you.”

The way he looks at you now forces the rest of the air out of your lungs. There’s relief couched in the worry, buried under the fear and the knowledge that it’s *there* is all the confirmation you need.

“You are willing to proceed, despite the possibility that these feelings were forged only to be beneficial to me?”

You bite your lips, eye downcast for a moment, running his last sentence through your head despite knowing your answer had already been decided.
“You’re not the only one it benefits.” you answer. “It’s in Bumblebee’s best interests too. And I know both of us would risk anything for him.”

He turns his helm skyward, observing the stars, silent for a beat.

“I will not lie,” he says finally. “I am frightened. Deeply frightened.”

“So am I.” you murmur honestly, seating yourself in the palm of his offered servo. “But we don’t have to go at it alone. We can be scared together.”

He turns toward you rather suddenly, blinking.

“Déjà vu?” you offer, beginnings of a nervous smile on your face.

“Not exactly.” “I know I should not be surprised by your candor at this point, but I find it comforting” he sighs “Unimaginably so.”

“Well if there’s one thing you can rely on me for, it’s brutal honesty.” you lean into his arm, wrapping your infinitely smaller ones around as much of his as possible. “I can give you that much, at least.”

“You’ve already given more than I could have possibly asked for.”

He lifts you, level with his face, and you’re close, so close you can reach out and touch him, and you do, palm flat against the smooth, metallic curve of his face.

You’re eye level with his optics, brilliant ancient blue, seeing not at you but in you, straight through to your soul and you suddenly find yourself not afraid, not scared, not frightened. He might be impossibly alien and tall, you might be a mouse by comparison, but you’re his mouse, his human, and he’s offering to be your elephant, your alien.

Yours.
You kiss him. Your face is too small and his mouth is too wide, and nothing lines up and it’s perfect. He’s warm, so warm against you and there’s the faintest hint of static when flesh meets metal and you wouldn’t have it any other way

—and he’s actually chuckling quietly, a deep, low, rumbling purr, but still *Laughing*. Optimus motherfucking Prime is *laughing* at you and that’s *so not fair*.

“What’s so funny?”

“My apologies, it’s just that I am…relieved.” and you recognize that look on his face, the centuries falling off, that bright, palpable beam of hope.

Relief, sweet, sweet *relief*. From this moment on you’re going to devote your life to keeping that exact expression plastered on his face and there’s no force strong enough in the infinite, asshole universe that’s going to stop you from fighting for that. Luck be damned.
Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, finish breaking the Hynek's scale.

Chapter Notes

Alright. So I'm sorry this took so long. I wanted it to be perfect and while I'm sure it falls painfully short of that I had to at least *try*.

This is really, really explicit. You've been warned.

“A garden?”

You sit perched atop a giant table in the mess hall next to Optimus, trying to convince a reluctant Bee to accept breakfast. Ironhide, Inferno and Red Alert sit across from you, engaged in banter you’re really not paying attention to.

“I understand humans often plant decorative flora in memorial, we had a similar practice on Cybertron. Considering we were unable to retrieve Rumble’s frame for a proper burial, I thought that perhaps we could plant one.”

You smile softly. It’s been long enough that the mention of his name doesn’t send you bursting into tears or incites the urge to go off on a murderous rampage, but it still stings under the best of circumstances. But what bossbot is offering is sweet and thoughtful, and probably the upper limit of ceremony you could expect for an extra terrestrial that didn’t even legally exist on your planet.

“That…sounds wonderful.” you say, struggling to get Bee to even open his intake long enough to get energon in. “I just….I didn’t even know your planet *had* plant life, considering it’s, y’know… metal.”

“We do.” Ironhide interrupts like the tactless piece of shit he is. “Nothin’ like the pussy little weeds you got growing here. They’re 50 foot tall mech eating abominations that spew hallucinogenic acid so you’re too busy rollin’ inside yer own processor to even try to get away.”
You fix the weapon’s specialist with your absolute best “you’re full of shit and we both know it” expression you can twist your face into. To which he replies with the widest, slag eating-est grin he can fit on his faceplate.

“You don’t hafta take my word fer it. Ask Prahm.”

You turn back to Optimus. “He’s joking, right?”

Optimus sighs “There is indeed a species matching that description. Though you may find Ironhide’s account tends to vary wildly, depending on the audience.”

“….Hey…”

You turn back to Bee, who has managed to spew the minuscule amount of energon you did get into his mouth back onto your shirt. “So, I just need to pick something out and you’ll help me plant it?”

“Precisely. I was considering participating myself, for similar reasons.” he doesn’t need to tell you why, that split second faraway look in his optics all the confirmation you need.

You run through your mental catalog of plants, immediately shunning basil to the back of your mind because basil only factors into your life to be destroyed and that’s not the kind of message you want to send.

No, you want something tough, something that nobody’s gonna eat or kick or stomp on. Something that actually retaliates if you try to damage it. Something nobody fucks with.

“A cactus.” you say finally.

He raises an optical ridge, though his expression remains unchanged. “May I ask why?”

“Because nobody fucks with a cactus.” you want to say, but are unwilling to introduce the word to Bee’s audial receptors. “Because they’re resilient. Animals generally don’t try to eat them and most of them live for a long time.”
“They do not require protection.” he notes.

You nod. “They’re usually okay on their own.”

“I understand how that would sound fitting, considering the circumstances. I had a similar thought process concerning my choice initially.”

“But you changed your mind?”

“I did. During our brief excursion at the zoological park, I had time to study some of the native flora, and it seems a “prunus serulatta” would be more appropriate.”

You dig through the back of your mind, just barely managing to attach the Latin name to “cherry tree.”

“They’re beautiful.” you say finally, struggling to come up with something to break the tension begging to well up between you two. Fleeting beauty, acceptance of transience. You know why he’d chosen it.

*Kind of wish I could’ve met her.*

You try to mentally picture how a cactus next to a cherry tree would look, and quickly come to the conclusion that it’s ridiculous. There’s no symmetry, the height difference would be jarring and none of the colors match up.

*Exactly like you two.*

“Sounds perfect.” you say as Bumblebee, having painted the entirety of your torso bright fuchsia, forgoes your shirt and spews energon directly into your face. You cringe. Optimus makes an amused sound.

“Would you like me to try?”
You want to refuse, mostly on account of your wounded pride, but you’re down ¾’s a cube, are currently wearing the other 2/4’s and have been trying for the better part of fifteen minutes to get so much as a drop in with no avail.

“Sure.” you sigh, a little exasperated as you hand him over, carefully placing him in his father’s servo. He squirms, clearly unamused by the move, looking no more willing to accept fuel than he did in your arms. You watch curiously as he cradles him against his chassis, and then, with his free servo, begins tickling him. Bee flails his servos and stubby pedes as he gently prods between his plating, and just when he opens his processor to beep protest, Optimus snatches the cube and tilts it into the sparkling’s mouth. He sputters at first, but seems to relax, and begrudgingly sucks down the fuel, optics half lidded.

Brilliant. you think as your brain leaks out your ears. Absolutely genius. You think as estrogen fueled tears pool in the corners of your eyes. “Never would have thought of that.” you admit out loud as you spontaneously ovulate.

“Perhaps a little unorthodox,” Optimus sighs, the deep, big cat kind of rumble that deactivates your knees joints(And thank god you’re already sitting down.) “But effective nonetheless.”

You nod robotically, doing your best to ride out the wave of hormones rushing through your body silently. Tsunami, more like it. You might be drooling a little bit in addition to the grey matter escaping from your head. Partially because you haven’t had a chance to touch your own cube yet but mostly because “fatherly” has now topped “politeness” and “honesty” in your list of turn-ons.

He manages to get him to finish the cube without so much as a beep in protest. You watch, enraptured in some sort of maternal instinct induced trance as he wipes the spilled fuel off his tiny helm with his thumb and then scratches him affectionately under his chin. Bee lets out a tiny hiccup and takes his thumb in his servo.

“Should really take a picture.” you think as something finally snaps in the back of your head and you’re struck with the distinct sensation of someone having broken an ice cold egg on your neck. You shudder. The rooms spins a little.

You’re suddenly aware of a suffocating silence filling the room, fraught with the feeling of having every optic in the room glued to you at once. You’re too dizzy to move, however, a surprisingly pleasant buzzing sensation has spontaneously generated in your body, and you stare dead ahead, transfixed. Weird. It takes a deafening bang, followed by the shaking ground, to snap you out of your trance.
Inferno and Ironhide are fighting.

At least, you think they are. Inferno takes the first swing and decks him across the faceplate, hard enough to leave dents. Ironhide retaliates by breaking a stool over his head and beating him with the remains. Red Alert stands poised like an angry, drugged up canine, looking like he wants to participate, but lacking the motivation to actually go through with it.

“Dude-” you start, jaw hanging. “Ironhide, what the fuck!”

The weapon’s specialist only spares you a split second look of directionless rage before turning back to the mech he currently has pinned under him in a chokehold. “Stay out of this missy or I’ll shove your cat so far up his tailpipe he’ll be coughing up fur!” he snarls.

Part of you is swelling with pride, in that he had finally managed to identify Neelix as a cat. The rest of you in concerned, because Ironhide has enough explosives on his person to obliterate a small country, and you’d prefer to be a safe distance away from him if he’s going to be brawling. Like maybe Africa. Or the moon.

You, however, having no means of interplanetary travel and being confined in a close space with the three of them, have little choice but to watch, dumbfounded, as the two mechs proceed to beat the shit out of each other for no conceivable reason.

Optimus rises from his seat, wordlessly, pressing Bumblebee back into your arms before making his way over to the volatile pair and, in one fluid motion, tears them apart, sending them both flying into the nearest respective walls with a distinctive clang.

“What the fuck.” you think, clutching Bee nervously to your chest. “What the actual fuck.”


They both shoot him looks of unbridled, feral rage, though ultimately offer no resistance as they hastily get to their pedes and shuffle through the door, Ironhide slamming it with enough force to send a large crack trailing up the wall.
“What….” you say finally, after your voice box has had a chance to kick back online. “….The hell was that?”

He doesn’t speak at first, but leans in close, so uncomfortably close to regard you, optics narrowed, ex-venting strained, labored.

“I will explain later.” he says finally, and dear god the look he’s giving you is straight up paralyzing. “Until then, it would be…advisable to make yourself scarce.”

He holds your gaze for a few more agonizing moments before he turns, heading out the door, ripping it open with the same force Ironhide had seen fit to close it with. There’s a loud screech as the door is torn off it’s rails. If he noticed, he makes no show of it, and disappears.

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“Buzzing?”

You nod, not bothering to look up from your data pad. “Ever since morning rations. Hasn’t stopped.”

Ratchet tilts his helm thoughtfully. “Was there any sort of trigger you can identify?”

“Um…” you think back to the incident, recalling how thoroughly hot and bothered you’d become by simply watching Optimus be a good father, and subsequently deciding that you do not, in fact, wish to reveal the details to Ratchet.

“Not really.” you say , carefully shoving Neelix off your lap. You’d taken Optimus’s advice to lay low, and now find yourself back in Bee’s room, while Ratchet works on the latest installment of his compilation A.I. and Bee doodles while watching “Bighorn Sheep : Testosterone on four legs!”

Ratchet tilts his helm slightly and narrows his optics, displaying an expression you know all too well to mean “you’re leaving something out you sneaky fuck.” you want to return with your best “none of your freakin’ business.” face, but find yourself staring rather intensely down at the floor, face slightly flushed.
“Hey, um, docbot” you start, sheepishly rubbing the back of your head. “Thanks for hanging with me. You’re like the only bot I can chill with right now, everyone else is acting sort of…uh…”

“Easily provoked?” he offers.

“Yeah.” you agree. “You should’ve taken your rations with us this morning. Ironhide looked like he was gonna tear Inferno’s head off.”

“I sincerely doubt it would have escalated to that level.” He says, punching something indecipherable into the data pad.

“I dunno man.” you reply doubtfully. “Kinda freaked me out. Optimus had to pull them apart.”

He rolls his optics, scoffing. “Well, you can rest assured, I am far more practiced in self-restraint than those two.”

You raise an eyebrow, but are denied the opportunity to ask him to elaborate as he pushes the data pad into your hands.

“There.” he says with an air of self-satisfaction. “It should be fully upgraded for the next phase.”

You tilt your head. “And that phase would be?”

“Character types.” He says, not missing a beat. “Optimus is the main character, we know that much. Now we just need to find out which characters we are.”

You look at the pad, then back at Ratchet. “Isn’t that something that, uh, ego might interfere with?”

“I’ve compensated for that.” He assures you. “Just punch in the answers like you’re taking a survey. With any luck we’ll have a working template within the next couple of days. Just try to answer honestly.” He stresses the last word with almost sickening emphasis. “Though rest assured, even if you do feel the need to exaggerate, the A.I can cross reference the details with Teletran 1’s files on you, so the results should be free from user error.”
You frown as you mentally ditch any possibility of embellishing your measurements and IQ.

“So, while you’re busy lamenting your inability to alter the variables favorably-” Docbot, who is clearly practiced in telepathy starts. “I have work to do. You know where the com is if you need me.”

And before you have a chance to beg him to watch this static filled, poorly named documentary with you he slides the door shut, leaving you alone with Neelix and Bumblebee and god knows how many hours of even toed ungulate mating footage.

Damn.

Except you’re really not paying attention, because Bee has finished his drawing, and is currently trying to push it into your hands.

It is’ the same fat, fluffy parrot from the zoo, replicated in all it’s drably green/grey glory in crayola colors. It’s also you, a small, flesh colored blob riding atop the kakapo with what you can assume is Bee, a small yellow smudge in your lap, along with Optimus, a slightly more well-defined blue figure sitting in front of you. You can only assume the red and white decidedly angry looking figure hanging from the bird’s legs and shaking it’s fist is Ratchet.

You stare, dumbfounded, as you feel the same cold, slithering feeling roll down your spine, along with more buzzing. You smile softly. “Bee…” you start, having difficulty forming words. “Bee, is that us?”

Bee beeps, holding his servos up, clearly asking for a hug.

“Yes it is.”

You wonder if it’s just your desperate want to understand him on some, any level, or some sort of telepathic connection you’re experiencing, but the answer comes to you, clear as day in your mind.

“It’s very good.” you tell him, eyes watering as you pull him in to your lap, flush against your chest, ignoring the buzzing, the sensation that your entire self is vibrating on some inhuman level.
"You like?"

"Yes." You assure him out loud, resting your chin atop his helm as you cradle him, shamelessly enjoying the waves of maternal bliss rocking through you. "I like it a lot, Bee."

"Make more birds." Comes the reply, nipping at the edges of your mind. You honestly don’t know if it’s your own imagination or not. You honestly don’t care. You had both shared the same EM field for so long, it’s not out of the realm of possibility you’d be able to communicate like this. And until faced with evidence to prove the contrary, you’re going to believe.

"He’s gonna grow up into a hippy" you think as you absentmindedly watch the sheep frolic onscreen while suggestive saxophone music plays. "A giant, metal, ass kicking hippy." Like one of those psychos that chain themselves to trees to protect them from bulldozers. Except he’d probably just pick up the bulldozers and throw them into a lake.

"When in rut, The american bighorn sheep demonstrates some of the most aggressive mating behavior in the world." the narrator drawls as two rams duke it out onscreen.

"Neat." you think, grabbing a crayon and beginning to mindlessly doodle alongside Bee, who has started a new picture.

"When engaged in battle, the rams will charge and smash their skulls together at speeds reaching 20 miles per hour. The sound of the collision can be heard up to a mile away."

You hear muffled cursing from the other end of the medbay, but write it off as Ratchet being…well, Ratchet.

*Crack.* Goes the tv as the rams smash their heads together

You look down at the purple abomination you’d been drawing absentmindedly. *Kind of looks like an elephant.* you think, squinting. *Or maybe a bird.* It probably should be a bird, because Bee is drawing a tree. So you put the purple down and reach for the yellow to draw a beak."
*Crack* The rams collide a second time

The cursing is louder and not entirely in English. You can make out a second voice. You shrug, assuming that someone had come in with either a foolish or easily preventable injury, and that docbot was chewing them out for it. You continue to draw, giving silver wings and a plume to your little bird.

*CRASH*

The loud, alarming sound doesn’t come from the tv, but the other end of the medbay. This prompts you to finally get off the berth and open the door to investigate, to which you’re met with the sight of a freshly trashed examination table, a matching indent in the adjacent wall, and a panting, shaking, furious Ratchet who is currently brandishing a table leg like a mace.

“Uh…” you start, picking your way over the debris. “What exactly happened?”

“Sunstreaker happened.” Ratchet shoots back.

You raise an eyebrow. “And he did this?”

“He wanted to borrow you to get a new VCR, apparently he and Sideswipe were scrapping earlier and managed to break the one we wired in.”

Your mouth hangs open. “He wanted help getting a VRC and you threw a table at him?”

“He…ah…he knew you were in here… with me” he says, having a great deal of trouble forming sentences. ”Should have known better.”

“Gee, I dunno Ratchet, don’t you think that might be overkill?” you snap back, honestly irritated because he’s like the one bot other than Optimus you trusted not to lose their shit like the collective rest of the base and now he’s instigating fights and throwing enormous furniture like the rest of them.

Ratchet doesn’t answer, instead kneeling down to your level and rather suddenly at that. You jump a little, feeling your pulse quicken, partially because he’s never been this close before, and partially
because his optics are roaming over your body with the same intensity that he had back at the panda exhibit.

He’s sniffing you. He’s definitely *sniffing* you oh god and you should really be backing away right now but that buzzing sensation in the back of your head has solidified into a hum and you can hear him humming too, and *something*’s tugging on your em field, welcoming tendrils caressing and plucking the constant pulse behind your eyes like a harp.

“ I need you to leave.”

“Leave?” you ask, having some trouble catching your breath. “Ratchet, are you feeling alright?”

“F-fine.” He steadies himself against the wall, shaking slightly. “Just…having difficulty processing some. . . Obscure code that’s resurfaced.”

“Code?” You ask before you can stop yourself.

“Heat cycle.“ He answers. “Redirects power away from the logic circuits, makes it hard to think straight. It was dormant for millennia.” He snorts out a frustrated ex-vent. “*Was.*” he emphasizes.”

You swallow nervously, biting your lip. “Heat cycle?”

“Do you *have* to ask so many questions?” he growls, far louder than you’d like, deeper than you’re accustomed to. And that faint electric smell, metallic taste in the air is back full force, his expression twisted into warning and *something* that sends your heart slamming against your ribcage. “I think we both know you’re smart enough to deduce what’s going on without me saying it outright.”

It’s then you remember, as docbot hovers over you *panting*, raw animal spark glowing in his narrowed blue optics, that this in a nature documentary. You’re surrounded on all sides by mechs experiencing the robot version of rut and you’ve been cornered by a bighorn ram, who is trying to politely ask you to leave while he still has enough self control not to slam you against one of the remaining examination tables and fuck you into next week.

And so you, skin flushing unbearably at this revelation, do what any sane person would do in this situation, and apologize to the giant alien robot for turning him on.
“Ratchet,” you start, unable to break eye contact. “Ratchet I’m so sorr-”

“Please.” he snarls with a hint of desperation in his voice. “Leave before I do something stupid.”

You open and close your mouth, at a loss for words. You decide it’s probably best to just do what he says, and leave. At least, for now. You can deal with the repercussions of this incident, of everything that went unspoken later, at some unidentifiable point in time where you’re both ready to break.

But right now, you’re driven by the need to protect what little measure of sanity you have left, and you back away, retreating into Bee’s room, pausing in thought as you address your oblivious charges.

“You two…” you start, mind blanking on logical orders. “You two keep an eye on docbot. He’s…he needs….”

Bee and Neelix stare back at you, expressions blank. You slap a well-deserved palm to your face, swearing softly.

“Nevermind….”

******************************************************************************************************

“This is your fault.” you tell the combat dummy, who smirks back at your with an infuriatingly neutral expression. “All your fault you asshole.”

The dummy says nothing, but to your credit, doesn’t disagree, so you white knuckle your grip on your ballistic knife and deliver a punch to it’s flexible rubber head that would most likely break a human recipient’s jawbone and also your hand. Fuck that hurts. You drop the knife, hissing in pain. Probably not the most effective means of handling a weapon, but you’re pissed off. And nothing says pissed off like a knife punch to the face.
Part of you sort of saw this coming. Regardless of Optimus and Ironhide’s concern for him, he spends most of his time not treating the odd self inflicted injury alone in his med bay. You’ve probably seen more of him in the past year than the rest of the crew combined. You’re the only one he trusted to share the compilation program with. You’re probably the one person he even engages in recreational activities at all with (even though he thoroughly cloaks it under the guise of “research.”) Plus, you apparently smell pretty good. It’s not totally unbelievable that he’d become attached to you, tiny, squishy fleshing or no.

But that doesn’t absolve this entire situation of *suck*, because even though he looks *damn* good for a metal titian of his age and has one of the nicest afts you’ve had the privilege to lay eyes on this side of the galaxy, *you just want your insomnia buddy back dammit* so you can both discuss probability over fantasy flicks without worrying whether or not he wants to play panda with your comically (comparatively) undersized ass.

“Figures” you think sourly as you forgo the courtesy of a *knife punch™* and opt to knee the combat dummy directly in the groin. Figures that whatever bizarre strain of robot blood you’d been infected with (which docbot STILL hasn’t come clean about) had you mimicking the scent of a hot to trot ladybot. Figures that you alone are currently the closest thing resembling said ladybot on this ship and probably this planet. Figures that your best friend was feeling the robot rut worse than the rest of the crew combined because he’d developed an attraction he only felt comfortable discussing in the presence of rare animals humping.

“*Like some romance novel trash.*” you think as you find new and interesting angles to deliver your devastating crotch-blows to your target. “*Some sort of bullshit, scifi bodice ripper garbage.*”

“So now we just need to figure out which characters we are.”

You laugh bitterly to yourself. If Optimus’s life is a movie, you can safely assume yours is a joke. One where the punch line is always at your expense. So if you can just figure out how to keep your life well within the realm of surreal humor and out of black comedy territory, you should be set. Golden. Peachy-fucking-keen.

And with the relief of knowing your life is a cosmic joke, you plant a final kick in the smug fucking face of the punching bag dummy, slide your knives back in their holsters, grab your data pad and head towards the door, looking forward to peeling off your catsuit, taking a nice, hot shower and punching “comic relief character” into the algorithm.

“I’ve been looking for you.”
-Says the inexplicably 20 feet shorter human sized six tons of alien metal with a voice like chocolate sex and a limited understanding of personal space, currently blocking your path.

"You have?" you reply, an expression of dull surprise on your face because 10 feet tall is hardly human and you still feel impossibly small and mouse-like as he walks over to you.

“I have.” he repeats in that same voice. Oh fuck. And the expression on his face could melt steel and you are absolutely not made of steel. “I was target practicing out on the firing range.”

And there go your knees. Because this is one of those instances where the joke in itself is a joke.

You’re not the comic relief character.

You’re the female lead.

And you happen to know that you are both, at this very moment, in desperate need of a shower.

Thank you sentient pink dream bear.

“And you just dropped everything to come find me?” You ask, trembling slightly from the proximity.

“I am afraid my willpower is not well tempered in this respect.” You feel some vital part of yourself crumble as he kneels down to your level. “My olfactory senses were able to pick up your scent from nearly a mile and a half away.”

You swallow hard, finding yourself unable to tear your eyes away from his optics. “You can smell me?” you ask, breath broken into jagged panting.

“I can.” He rumbles, low and gravely, “And you are ready.”

“Oh god does he mean . . . “ “ Ready for…” You trail off, redirecting every iota of your willpower not to crumble further.
“I believe you already know.” He murmurs, ex-venting hot air against your skin. “Please, if I have misread the situation-”

“You haven’t.” You snap back, louder than you intended but firmly. “He does.”

“That is fortunate, as my own heat cycle has recently begun, and I am. . .doubtful of my ability to restrain myself further.” He trembles slightly as he speaks, genuine in his struggle for self-control. “However, I require confirmation before we proceed. Do you consent?”

You weigh your options. You have exactly one and it’s getting railed right here and now in the supply closet because you’d already decided to proceed with extreme caution and you’re going to proceed.

You’re ready, wither or not you’re willing to admit it.


“Are you certain?” You can almost hear the strain, the desperation couched in that question. “I will not ask again.”

“ I consent.” you snarl with severe emphasis. “I am ready. “

“Very well.”

The lights flicker. You’re suddenly overwhelmed by the impression of having been plunged headfirst into warm water. The air is thick, so thick you’re forced to redirect every ounce of your strength into breathing, panting. There’s a heavy, metallic taste to the air that weighs your lungs down and pulls a rolling, pulsing, something from your head down to your feet and spreads out to the floor around you. It covers the room. It covers everything in the room except him.

You can breathe. But you don’t need to.
“What...” you begin quietly. “What’s happening?”

“Electro-magnetic synchronization.” The low, rumbling grind of his voice alone drains the rest of the rolling, pulsing feeling from you and leaves you shaking, knowing nothing but the sharp bite of electricity dancing over your skin. “Our fields are attempting to merge.”

You bite your lip. Hard. You struggle to maintain coherency as every square inch of your skin cries out for stimulation, as you struggle against the emptiness of existing as an individual entity. “How can we tell when they’ve merged?”

“You will know.”

He takes your hand in his servo, and forces you back against the wall, and there’s suddenly no personal space, no distance between the two of you.

“I-is this normal?” you sputter after a beat, once you’re collected enough to register how close he is. “The field’s merging, I mean.”

“For cybertronians, yes. But for humans...I am uncertain. There’s no known instances of our species interacting in this manner.”

You shiver, suddenly feeling incredibly ill-prepared for the reality laid out before you. “Alien.” your traitorous brain chants “Giant, metal, not-human alien.” This is probably dangerous. Hell, this could be straight up lethal for all you know. “So we’re breaking ground on an intergalactic scale?”

“We are.” The finality in that statement silences the voice in your head. This is happening. He’s going to fucking wreck you and there’s no force in the universe strong enough to stop him. “Hold on.”

The waves roar against you, then in you, the thundering pulse coiling beneath your spine, rolling, insisting, pulling you together. You lie flattened against his chassis, breathing with him, his spark beat locking rhythm with your heart.

“We’ve achieved synchronicity.” He says at last.
You swallow, mouth dry. “It’s over?”

“No.” And you convince yourself your hazy vision plays tricks while you watch the faintest hint of a smirk cross his face. “We may now begin.”

You find gravity no longer works the way you remember it, find no space between flesh and metal as he pins you against the floor and crashes his mouth against yours in one smooth, liquid motion, helpless as he forces his glossa into your mouth. Gentle, but with force, so much force you briefly fear for your safety, knowing full well that backing out is not an option, never was an option.

This isn’t safe, you think as electricity dances over your skin, static breaking at his touch. Your body has become a hypersensitive wreck, sensation bolting through you as his servos trace the seams of your clothing, every inch of your exposed skin. This was never safe. You could be crushed, electrocuted, you could die and that admission only leaves you desperate for more stimulation. This is uncharted territory. This is dangerous. This is-

“Awesome.” You force back, kiss back, your determination a mere ghost of his, but the want is still there, the raw need and you convey it by roping your legs around his waist, moving against him, shadowing the rhythm you both desperately want to start. You wrap your arms around his neck, digging your fingers into the back of his helm and he groans, heavy and wet into your mouth as your fingers find the groove behind his audial receptors, unconsciously bucking his hips against you as you trace the seams from his neck down to his shoulder plating.

Sensitive, you note, or you try to, but it’s impossible to concentrate while he’s working down the zipper of your catsuit with the servo that’s not busy cupping your ass. You’d forgone a bra today and you’re thankful for it as your breasts bounce free.

You struggle to free yourself from the last of your clothing, and find yourself frozen under his gaze, optics wide, brimming with curiosity. Desperate, heated pinpricks of fear roll up your neck as he stares transfixed at your exposed body, your mind overwhelmed by a fresh wave of nervous doubt. What if you’re too alien, too different?

“You’re beautiful.”

You gasp a little, raising your hand to hide your furiously flushing face, and mercifully before you have a chance to ruin the moment by saying something stupid he nuzzles his helm against your collarbone, electing a surprised squeak from your mouth, and begins to work his glossa over your breasts oh god.
You arch your back, relinquishing your grip on his helm and slide your hands down to his shoulders, digging them in hard enough to scratch the finish because he doesn’t stop at your breasts, gently prying your legs apart as he dips his helm down your body and-

And oh god he’s inside you, glossa plunging deep between your folds. You cry out, shaking at his ministrations and also in fear because it’s just his glossa and you’re already stretched out so far it hurts, so there’s no way, you can’t possibly-

“Ah f-f-fuck!” Your train of thought comes to a screeching halt as orgasm tears through you and you grind desperately against his mouth as you ride out the aftershocks. Your mind is mercifully given a moment’s reprieve to go blank, the fear reduced to a fuzzy, distant phrase in the back of your mind.

“That’s not gonna help.” You think hazily, still reeling from the orgasm. “Not gonna fit”. You’re dimly aware of gentle clinking as plating falls away, the hiss of air as something in the near vicinity pressurizes. But it’s not until Optimus slides over top of you again, helm nearly touching your forehead, do you gather the coordination to focus your eyes long enough to look.

It’s silver, biolights pulsing an vivid blue, a pearl of luminescent fluid pooling at the tip. You watch, frozen, as he swipes the pearl with his thumb and coats the length with several firm pumps of his servo.

“You’d been made helpless before, no stranger to restraint, but it’s nothing compared to the absolute surrender you feel, caged between his frame and the ground, the weeping head of his spike pressed heavy against your inner thigh.

“Wait.” You start, panic setting in. “Wait I’m not-”

“No.” He interrupts you, growling, sky blue optics narrowed dangerously. “No more waiting.”
your struggling, trapped motionless beneath him as he hilts himself inside you.

He breaks away from your mouth, groaning deep in relief and oh *god* despite the trouble breathing and the pain his voice alone could *finish you.* “Please,” he breathes, soft but strained as he runs a reassuring servo through your hair, cupping the side of your face. “Try to relax.”

You want to respond with something, *anything,* but can only whimper and nod as he ex-vents, slow, sustained, and begins to move in you. You do your best to choke back weak sobbing, tears pooling in the corners of your eyes, counting second by agonizing second, wondering when, *if* ever the pain will recede, and - *oh.*

*Oh.*

You feel a familiar snap in the back of your head, the ice cold dripping sensation rolling down your spine, bursting within you and you unexpectedly feel a jolt tear through your body. Optimus bucks painfully hard into you, optics widened in surprise. *He must feel it too.* And you realize as sparks dance over your skin that it’s actual *electricity,* undulating between you both, completing a circuit within your bodies.

That should be alarming. That should be *terrifying,* but it isn’t. It’s *ecstasy.* Suddenly every nerve ending in your body is on fire, screaming for more as the surge bounces back to him and he shudders as he drives his hips into yours. It still hurts, there’s still tears rolling down your face but you’re beyond the threshold of sensation now, aware only of the bright, bolting flow through the both of you.

You cling to him for dear life, arching your back and trying your best to match him as he fucks you mercilessly into the floor, growling as he pistons himself into you hard, *so hard* you see stars, burning pinpoints of light as white blindness takes your vision

And as the shellshock grade-ringing in your ears reaches a crescendo you begin to fear for you life, not only because you’re uncertain how much more electricity your body can handle, but you’ve begun to feel it in your *bones.* You’re scared and simultaneously overwhelmed by the desire to give in and be torn apart.

“I’m gonna die.” you tell yourself as your heart rate accelerates and white burns at your eyes. You can feel the surge circuiting back into your body and this time you’re certain it’s going to kill you. “It’s going to kill me and I’m letting it.”
Except you don’t die, because his voice is the only thing you can hear over the ringing and he’s calling your name, your name and christ it sounds like music rolling off his glossa. “…’_____’”. He rumbles again, voice heavy with static. “Overload with me.”

The galloping, thundering thrum between you builds to a low roar, your body convulses, and you throw your head back as you shatter against him, convulsing, crying out a hoarse, desperate version of his name.

He meets you not a second later, you can hardly make out your name this time, lost in a stream of indecipherable, snarled cybertronian, forcing you into the ground as overload wracks his frame. His spike pulses painfully hard within you as he spills himself, unconsciously jerking his hips through the aftershocks.

He pulls himself out and you grimace at the pain and the sensation of the hot, faintly glowing fluid trickling down your thighs. You find yourself ignoring it as he collapses beside you, pulling you in to cradle gently against his chassis.

You have no idea how long you lie there, listening to his labored ex-vents, the frantic pulsing of his spark, the low whine of his systems cooling down, but it seems like hours. And you’re grateful, because the expression on his face, optics half lidded, the suggestion of an exhausted smile, is beautiful, and you don’t ever want to forget it.

It’s then, in the relative quiet of the afterglow, that you notice the faint sound of alarms blaring in the distance.

“No way.” you groan, slapping your hand to your forehead in exasperation. ”This can’t be real.”

“The static discharge from the overload may have set it off.” He reassures you. “It’s not the first time this has happened.”

The lights then flicker, followed by a loud, resounding screech, and you suddenly find yourself showered by lukewarm water as the sprinkler system activates. You look up at him, mouth slightly ajar.
“That…however-” he begins wearily. “-Is a first.”

You growl under your breath, far too tired to be shouting obscenities, but still pissed, silently reassessing your comic relief status in your head.

Optimus chuckles softly. Probably because you look like an angry wet cat. A semiconscious, thoroughly spent wet cat. You want to shoot him an exhausted glare, but think better of it, instead twisting your body around to face him, nuzzling your head in the crook between his neck and helm. “At least we don’t need a shower now.”

He hums in agreement, moving a servo to rest over the lower half of your body. You find yourself loosing your fight with exhaustion as you lay against him, lulled by the constant thrum and the gentle hiss of steam emanating from his frame.

“We’re going to have to move eventually.” You murmur, eyelids growing heavy.

“Eventually.” He agrees, closing his optics.
Chapter Summary

Oh hey check out this piece that didn't neatly fit into any of the other chapters but is still totally relevant.

I was initially gonna tack this onto the last chapter but didn't want to spoil the mood. So have this tidbit to mull over while I try to figure out how to deal with my crippling alcoholism.

Ratchet reads.

Or, at least he does when he’s sparkling-sitting Bumblebee.

It’s mostly material aimed at a much younger audience, but it gives him a chance to indulge in nostalgia, brings back warm, blurry memories composed mostly of impressions, not picture and sound. Back from when he himself was Bee’s age, so many millennia ago.

It’s an excuse to briefly forget his vocation, forget the war, forget their dead and rotting planet.

It’s also, currently, the only fence left barricading “____” to the back of his processor.

He closes his optics, releasing a tired ex-vent. He had come close, so close to irrevocably fragging up again, and there isn’t room on his laundry list for another name, let alone two.

Three. He thinks as he watches the restless sparkling seated on his lap, impatiently vocalizing his want for story time to begin. They had become family. An unusual, interspecies, square-peg-in-a-round-hole kind of family, but still connected on a visceral level, walking on some wavelength that he couldn’t touch if he tried.

He feels foolish for even dreaming about it.

But that doesn’t stop him from pining.
He’s resigned himself to this. To dreaming about those already taken, those he knows he can never have. It’s easier this way, he tells himself. Easier because there’s no risk. He’s set up for failure from the beginning. There’s no room for error, because there’s no room to try.

They’re off limits. Both of them.

The finality in that statement should bring him solace, but it doesn’t. It breeds the kind of self loathing that’s only quelled by high grade and inadequate recharge. By throwing himself into his work. It quiets the voice in his processor telling him that if he’d only confessed at the right time, taken action before it was too late, that he could have had everything.

He could have had them both.

For a moment, he allows himself to dissolve into the fantasy, allows his processor to wander, to marvel at the possibilities, to envision a reality where the three of them functioned together. Fields merging, mingling, waking up to warm frames cradling his own. Waking up to brilliant blue optics and the kiss of warm, organic skin.

Imagine a reality where he wasn’t alone.

But no. He’d made his berth, and he’ll sleep in it. It’s a miracle as is that’s he’s trusted with Bumblebee - any sparkling, after what he’d done.

For now though, he forces those memories back. Memories of Wheeljack screaming his dissenting opinions, of himself brushing them off, of Autobot high command recognizing his work, offering him access to the supplies he needed, despite his partner’s increasingly desperate protests.

For now he shuns that facet of his reality, and preoccupies himself with sorting through the available reading material “____” had left for Bumblebee.

He pans through several titles, each more strange than the last, before finally settling on the least disconcerting book, “Steve the sentient tornado.” a happy, smiling cyclone appears on the cover, seemingly oblivious to the screaming humans and wanton destruction around it. He raises an optical ridge, but peels the book open nonetheless, clears his throat, and begins to read.
“Once upon a time, there was a tornado named Steve.”

Bee claps his servos together, beeping appreciatively. Ratchet can’t help the smile creeping up his faceplate, and reads on.

It’s a rather bizarre book, detailing the friendship between a human child and the self-aware cyclone as they travel through the neighborhood, the human gleefully watching as Steve destroys everything in sight. That is, until he brings the tornado home, and it, by it’s very nature, unintentionally brings down the human’s house.

“But I thought we were having fun!” Steve said.

“You’re scaring me!” shouted Timmy as he ran away.

Steve looked at the smoldering remains of Timmy’s house. He suddenly felt very sad.

“I’ve hurt everyone.” Steve says. “I’ve hurt everyone and I don’t know how to stop.”

Ratchet closes the book. At some point he’d noticed Bee had stopped vocalizing and his ex-vents had become soft and even. He’d fallen into recharge against him. He doesn’t get up immediately, but gently moves the slumbering sparkling from his lap onto the berth, tucking a bedding sheet around him before getting to his pedes and slowly closes the door, careful not to make too much noise.

He makes his way over to the other end of the medbay, where he calmly collects the pieces of the destroyed table, calmly places them in a waste disposal bin, and then, content with his work, proceeds to drive his fist into the wall. Calmly.

“Soundwave…” he starts under his breath, helm cradled in his other servo. “…Soundwave… I am so sorry.”
As the world falls down

Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, suffers physical retribution from being used as a human electrical outlet.

Chapter Notes

This thing is 24 pages long. Holy hell.

Also I just want to apologize for this taking so long. This was originally supposed to take place when chapter 12 did but I was a lazy piece of shit and wanted to put off writing a party scene because I hate party scenes because they are hilariously frustrating and not fun to write. Also this fic has absolutely exploded in proportion and become this enormous thing I ended up dumping all of my scifi/tf ideas into so I'm trying to be really careful with the chapters and make sure I set everything up properly and don't leave anything else because this is turning out to be a long, long fucking ride.

My headcanon is that Aligned!verse Optimus is super into poetry and literature and jumps at any chance to recite it or discuss it like a total dork.

Pls enjoy.

He’s crying.

He’s crying and you have no idea how to make him stop.

The smell of ozone burns at your eyes, the sharp edges of his limp frame cut into your arms, his optics flicker dim as weak, gasping ex vents escape from his mouth.

He’s bleeding, bleeding so bad, fuchsia liquid pools beneath you both, and you want nothing more than to lie down and bleed beside him, hold his servo in you hand and cross over with him. Tell him it’s okay. Tell him he doesn’t have to go alone. Tell him his mom’s coming with him.

“Sorry.” you mouth, no words escaping your mouth as you cradle him against you chest, pressing your cheek to the side of his helm. “I’m so sorry. Rumble. Momma’s Sorry.”
His frame shudders a final time. He goes limp. The light behind his optics flashes brightly, so brightly, before extinguishing altogether.

He’s gone.

A figure looms above you, helm tilted, observing the two of you with stoic reverence.


Rumble’s frame fades, from bright violet steel to gunmetal grey, and crumbles in your arms. Crumbles to dust, and is blown away, bit by bit until you’re left with nothing. You pound your fist into the ground and scream, scream until the resonance is so great it dissolves your body, dissolves Soundwave, dissolves the entire universe around you.

“____”

You hear your name.

“____”

You scream anyways.

“____”!

You’re bolted awake, drenched in sweat, thrashing wildly. You’re held down, pinned down, and that just makes you want to scream louder, but before you can an enormous finger presses against your lips.

“____” you hear your name a third time and two vivid, electric blue optics pierce the darkness. “Calm down.”

**Optimus.** you stop trying to scream, he removes his digit, and you stare wild-eyed into his optics.
“Bee!” you shout, desperation in your voice. “Where’s Bee?!”

“Bumblebee is with Ratchet.” he assures you. “He is safe. We all are.”

You will yourself to calm down, to slow your racing heart, hyperventilating. Bee is safe. You can disengage mama bear mode now. Bee is safe.

But Rumble is gone.

You crumble, hot tears rolling down your face as you sob, desperately grasping his digit for support as you curl your body around his hand. You want to scream, to scream so bad but no amount of screaming will bring Rumble back, so you instead cry weakly against him, letting the sobbing tear through your body. You wished it hurt. You wished weeping hurt because you deserve it. You deserve it for being a fucking failure, and there’s no form of penance the universe can dole out that will sufficiently punish you for killing your son.

Optimus remains silent, and moves to cradle you against his servo and his chassis, drawing slow circles with one of his digits against your back in a soothing motion, waiting until your tears had dissolved into dry heaving before daring to speak.

“A nightmare.” he says plainly. “You were thrashing quite violently in your sleep.”

You swallow hard, lower lip still trembling. “Y-yeah.”

“You cried out for Rumble.” and fuck just the mention of his name is enough to bring a fresh wave of tears cascading silently down your face. “Do you wish to discuss it?”

You consider his offer, finding yourself rendered motionless in the light of his optics, expression drawn into soft, heartfelt concern.

“No.” you say finally, letting out a trembling breath. “Not right now.”
“I understand.” and the warm gush of air from his processor is comforting, *so comforting*. ”Please, if there is anything I can do for you-”

He leaves the question open ended. You struggle to think of a request to fill it with, before realizing that you, in fact, have none.

“I’m fine.” you tell him, the tears having subsided somewhat. You blearily realize that you’re absolutely not in the supply closet turned training room you’d lost consciousness in, and the surface you lie against has a supple give you it, though still not as soft as you’d like. “Where are we?”

“My quarters. I brought you here, after our encounter.” he informs you. “Are you comfortable?”

“Yeah.” you tell him.

“If you wish, I can contact Ratchet, ask him for an aide to ease you back into recharge.”

You consider it momentarily, before shaking your head.

“Please, if you can, try to relax.” he rumbles laying his head back down against the berth. “You require adequate recharge for the meeting tomorrow.”

Your blood runs cold.

You’d forgotten about the asylum case.

*Shit.*

Your heart slams back into overdrive. There’s going to be people here. People you don’t know. People around *Bumblebee.*

You’re pretty sure you’re trembling. You *know* you are, because Optimus notices.
“There is no need for concern.”

“Strangers.” you manage to croak out. “I don’t….I don’t want strangers around Bumblebee.”

“I know you are frightened of exposing Bumblebee to any possible dangers, and rightfully so,” he begins. “But I am afraid I do not share nor understand your fear of your fellow species interacting with him.”

“Look,” you start, breathing deeply, your mind finally clearing from the fog of sleep, collecting your thoughts. “I know most of the experiences you’ve had with humans so far have been positive, but in my line of work I’ve seen firsthand how we treat other species in lieu of scientific discovery.” you roll over on your back, observing the high, faintly illuminated ceiling. “We’ve only just begun to reach out into space, and the things we’ve done to get there weren’t always pretty. I’ve seen my fair share of horrific experimentation back in college. Nothing I did myself, but I had to watch and learn, and that didn’t really bother me. Not at first but-” you swallow audibly, tilting your head sideways to face him. “But meeting you guys, having a family with you guys, a not human family, just put it in a different perspective for me.”

He says nothing, optics whirring and shuttering while focused on you, a habit you’d come to understand meant he’s putting a great deal of effort into choosing his next words.

“I have familiarized myself with the experiments you speak of, that your kind perpetuated in the pursuit of spaceflight.” he says finally. “I recall one particularly notorious one concerning a canid that was launched with no plans to return her or ensure her survival.”

You close your eyes, pulling the information from the back of your mind. The name is on the tip of your tongue, though you can’t quite place it.

“Her name started with an “L.”

“Laika.” he offers helpfully.

“That’s it.” you nod. “That was a pretty public fuckup. There were animal rights groups breaking down doors over that one.”
“And that is why I saw fit to mention it. You imply humanity lacks a moral compass when it concerns progress, yet a hostile reaction was provoked from the perceived immorality of the situation.” and you jump a little as he places a servo on the side of your face, tilting your chin up to meet his faintly glowing gaze. “Humanity, as a species, is as capable of compassion as they are violence. You yourself have demonstrated this to me. Repeatedly.”

You’re positive that the darkness does nothing to hide your furiously flushing face.

“Y-you’re biased.” you squeak and damnit you are never going to learn stop stuttering around him. Never.

“That may be.” that faint suggestion of a smile is enough to send your heart slamming against your ribcage. “Though I am still fully capable of objective observation, and what I have observed firsthand of your species differs wildly from the behavior in your historical records.”

“You think we’re actually improving?” you ask, stunned.

“I believe your race to be capable of more change in it’s considerably shorter lifetime than mine has in eons of existence.”

“Yeah, well, don’t sell yourself so short big guy.” you say, willing your racing heart to slow down. “From what I’ve seen so far you guys have outclassed humanity in almost every aspect on the moral compass. You—” you press a single finger against his faceplate. “-You especially.”

He blinks.

“Do you…mind elaborating?”

“I know I haven’t exactly met a lot of other sentient races, “ you start, smiling, “But I think I can safely assume you’re the only person in the known universe noble enough to feel bad about being fortunate.”

A pause. Another gush of warm air as he ex-vents. “I believe you place me on far too high a pedestal.”
“You belong up there.” you say with a hint of finality, to discourage a second attempt at self depreciation. “I mean yeah, there’s been a few humans I could liken you to, like Ghandi, Buddha-”

“Again-” he begins wearily. “You think far too highly of me. My hands are not clean.”

You open your mouth. You close your mouth.

He sighs.

“The meeting is being held here, in the Ark.” he says finally, changing the subject. “Prowl and Jazz will still be working security, the video feeds will still be running. The chances of anyone interacting with Bumblebee unnoticed are astronomically low, and the chances of anyone escaping with him are even lower.” he assures you. “He will not be out of our sight.”

That makes sense. He always makes sense, and knowing that in all probability he’s right and you’re just being an overprotective, anxious heap of nerves calms you somewhat.

“I know…” you sigh, heart still beating a tattoo in your chest. “I just…fuck it I’m nervous.” you admit, exhaling a shaky, long withheld breath.

“Is there anything I can do to help ease your mind?”

You nestle against him, already lulled by the gentle humming of his frame. “I dunno. Just…please don’t stop talking.”

“Is there any subject in particular you want me to talk about?”

“Anything.” you admit. “I just want to hear your voice.”

He goes silent for a beat, you can almost hear the cogs whirring in his processor.

“I could recite poetry, if you wish.”
Your eyes widen, and you crane your head to look up at him. “Poetry?”

“Is that not acceptable?”

“No, I mean, I’d love you to,” you say quickly. “I just… didn’t really expect someone like you to be into that.”

“I had ample time to become acquainted with it when I worked as a clerk in the hall of records, back in Iacon, and have acquired a fondness for it.”

“You… you were a librarian?” you ask, dumbfounded.

“I was.”

“And now you’re the leader of an entire military faction.” you let out a low whistle. “There’s so much I still don’t know about you.”

“Nor do I about you.” he returns. “And therein lies a welcome challenge.” the smile he offers melts your heart. “We can learn together.”

You return the smile, letting your head rest against the berth, closing your eyes. “We can.”

Your heartbeat slows, your breathing evens out, you find yourself making the steady climb back towards unconsciousness.

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” he says quietly, after a moment’s pause. “A work I recently discovered, from one of your planet’s authors.”

“I’ve heard of it.” you say softly, teetering on the edge.

“Would you like to hear it?”
"I would."

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You wake up feeling incredible.

You have no idea when you’d managed to fall back asleep, or how many hours you’d actually gotten, but you know instantly that whatever it amounted to is more than enough. You’d slept like a baby and the world is a better place for it. The air smells sweeter, the sun shines brighter (you presume) the unyielding mesh cover of the ludicrously sized berth you’d woken up on feels softer, your entire reality has seemingly gone up a level in awesome.

It’s with that pleasing thought you sit yourself upright and stretch. Today is going to be awesome. Today you’re going to accomplish things. Today you’re going to kick ass.

Today- you realize, as you slide yourself off the berth, place your feet firmly on the ground, and are instantly greeted with a searing pain in your hips - is also the day you suffer the repercussions of being used as a human electrical outlet.

"Sentient dream bear was right." you think as clutch your midsection, cursing between hitched breathes. You envision her floating in your peripheral, gloating. "Was it worth it? Was it worth it?"

"Totally worth it." You steady yourself with your hand against the wall, testing movement. It’s far worse when you exert pressure on your right leg, for whatever reason, and if you lean most of your weight against the wall walking is possible.

The way you see it you’ve got two options to pick from: Either break your pelvis trying to limp your way down to the med bay and run the risk of dying from internal injuries, or ask for help from whichever autobots are currently rounding the corridor and die from humiliation.

"Internal injuries it is." you decide, as you confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt the group at least includes Ironhide, and you are NOT about to supply him with the treasure trove of creative insults a pelvic injury from interfacing with bossbot would undoubtedly provide him with.
So you hug the wall for support, grinning stupidly wide to mask your pain as they shuffle through, and begin the arduous task of scooting your broken self down to the medbay, where you find Ratchet slumped over a worktable on the far end of the room.

“Ratchet?” you try cautiously, shuffling your way over to him. When you don’t get a response you try again, slightly louder. “Docbot?” Still nothing. You pick up a conveniently located bit of debris and hurl it at him, which ricochets off his helm with a distinctive plink.

That gets his attention. Muffled cursing, followed by some disorganized shuffling, and a bleary, cyan optic opens.

“Morning sunshine.” you say, a lopsided grin plastered on your face

“___” he acknowledges you, pulling his helm up from the table and propping himself on his elbows, letting out a soft groan. “To what do I owe the honor?”

“Did you recharge here?” you ask, a frown forming on your lips. “That doesn’t look very comfortable.”

He lets out a quiet, defeated laugh at “recharge.” and your feel your heart start to sink. “It’s not.” he assures you, pinching the bridge between his chevron and forehead with his servo, optics tightly screwed shut. “I worked through most of the night.”

Your heart sinks the rest of the way. “Working on what?”

“The compiler.” he answers, and with great effort pries a data pad from under the expanse of his slouched form. “It’s generated it’s first prediction.”

Your heart leaps back up from the depths as you find yourself, for lack of a better term, geeking the fuck out. “It did?!?” you asks, and you’d have jumped if not for the splitting pain it would no doubt arouse.

He nods, and brandishes the thin, awkward, albeit large pad in your face, which you take, expertly ignoring your protesting midsection as you awkwardly manure it into view.
“Optimus and gang attend meeting to solidify asylum case. Hijinks ensue.”

You look at Ratchet. Then at the data pad. Then back at Ratchet.

“Hijinks?” you start slowly. “Hijinks?”

“I fail to see the problem.” Ratchet replies flatly, reaching down to retrieve the pad from your arms.

“It’s…vague. Too vague.” you admit. “Hijinks could mean anything from spilling a glass of wine onto someone’s suit to mass genocide.”

“Hijinks generally refers to a comical or lighthearted misadventure. I believe we may safely rule out “mass genocide.” he scoffs.

“Yeah?” you shoot back. “I recall us taking a similar approach to the genre bit. Adventure comedy, right? Nobody dies in a comedy, right?” and no sooner than those words leave your mouth do you find yourself reeling from a different kind of pain, and despite the memories bubbling up from last night’s nightmares you find yourself frozen, unable to continue. Because the look docebota gives you now says a million and one things in a million and one languages and they all spell out defeat. And that’s when you notice several fist shaped holes in the wall, presumably the origin of the conveniently placed debris you’d chucked at him.

Punching walls is a pretty universal language and you don’t need a translator to tell you that he’s struggling with his own demons. And as curious as you are, you’re not a shit human being, so you don’t press beyond your increasingly ill-defined boundaries and you don’t inquire further, instead changing the subject with all the tact of a nervous hornet.

“How was Bee, last night?” and no sooner than the words leave your mouth do you feel like an idiot. Bee is an angel. Bee is always an angel and you know it and Ratchet knows it and has no doubt deduced that you’d awkwardly changed the course of the conversation because you’re an awkward fuck.

“Behaved himself perfectly, slipped right into recharge.” “I gave him fuel just a bit ago, was drawing again, last I checked.”

You sigh, partially because Bee is willing to take his rations without a fight from anyone but you but
mostly because Ratchet’s still got his no more bullshit look plastered on his face, which lets you know your diversion tactic had failed.

You’re going to have to address this eventually, address the fact that he’d destroyed the better half of a wall because you smelled pretty and that the destruction had occurred roughly sometime after you’d run off at his request, no less, and sought Optimus’s company.

“You didn’t come here just to check on Bee.” he says suddenly, dragging you back into the conversation.

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, I’m not one for stating the obvious, but you limped in here, and you tossed a chunk of debris at me rather than just walking over like a civilized member of your species. If one follows that train of logic, we come to the conclusion that you are, in fact, in some sort of pain.”

That sharp, condescending tone makes you briefly consider hurling another chunk of wall at him, but if there’s one thing you’d learned about docbot in your time here it’s that his trademark scowl and caustic attitude are used to mask emotions he considered inappropriate. And seeing as how you’d crawled your way in here after sustaining a pelvic injury from interfacing with his oldest friend after he’d quelled his rage in a minor fit of destruction, you don’t need to guess what exactly he’s trying to mask.

You wonder if he knows how obvious he’s being. He probably does, probably layering it perfectly between layers of If I don’t say it outright it doesn’t count and I honestly don’t give a fuck anymore. If you had to pick he probably erred towards the latter, and that should be enough to convince you to just throw up your hands and ask for help, but you don’t.

“I’m….having a human problem. A weird one.” you say , inauthenticity dripping off every word. “So I was kind of hoping I could use the communication’s channel to talk to the medics you keep in contact with.”

He gives you a look, a long, analyzing one, and you half expect him to launch into a tirade defending his medical credentials again, but inadequate recharge has finally caught up with him, it seems, and he only gives a defeated ex-vent, gesturing towards the control panel on the far side of the room.

“I have them on what you would call “speed dial.”” he says. “Third button down on the left side.”
pauses, then adds “Would you like me to carry you?”

You want to say yes. You really, really aren’t looking forward to walking that distance but you started this façade and *damnit* you’re going to see it through to the end.

“I’ll be fine.” you crack what you can only hope is a winning smile and not a grimace as you hobble over, wondering just how much more pain you could reasonably put up with to spare docbot’s feelings.

So you clamber up onto the control panel, and press the third button down on the left. And are nearly knocked ass-backwards as the dial-tone blares through the speakers.

“*Shit.*” you curse under your breath, desperately searching for the volume control, but before you have a chance a cool female voice comes through far, far louder than you’d hoped.

“How may we assist you today?”

“Hello Ratchet.” says the phone dispatcher. “How may we assist you today?”

“Um..” you start, struggling to remember your fake name. “Actually, this is Marissa.”

A pause. “I see. How may we assist you?” she repeats without missing a beat.

You once again wince at the volume, chancing a glance over your shoulder. Ratchet hasn’t moved from his slumped position at the table, but is doubtlessly listening.

“I...uh...I injured myself.” you say lamely.

“And the CMO isn’t able to address it?”

“It’s a very, uh, specific injury.”

“Can you describe it?”
You swallow hard, flustered, hopelessly scanning for the volume control again.

“It’s… a pelvic injury.” you squeak, just above a whisper. “I think.”

“Ma’m, we can’t even see you. You’re going to have to give us more detail than that, starting with how you incurred the injury.”

\textit{You wouldn’t believe me if I told you and if you did you’d hang up.} “Um…” you start, mind racing, trying to find some believable placebo to push onto this woefully inexperienced phone dispatcher. “Uh…I…. sat on a cannon.”

“…You what ma’m?”

“Sat on a \textit{cannon.}” you say, gritting your teeth in humiliation. “And it went off.”

“A cannon.” she repeats flatly, and you notice a sharp drop in her professional tone. “How are you alive?”

“Still scratching my head over that one.” you answer honestly.

“Uh huh. You actually expect me to believe that?”

“Everyone has a hobby.” you reply nervously as you façade falls apart. “Mine’s cleaning space-age weaponry naked. What do \textit{you} do on Saturday nights?”

“Ma’m, you’re not the first person who’s required assistance after experimenting with a large object, or, uh, weapon. If you could just-”

You slam what you can only hope is the \textit{end call} button, hyperventilating as a burst of static breaks through and the connection cuts off, face beat red. \textit{Well that was a bust.}

“Oh god.” you mumble, digging your hands in your hair. “Oh my god.”
"I need to be more honest" you decide, growling softly as you slide to the floor, gingerly setting your weight on your legs. "I'm going to get myself killed trying to spare feelings."

"They weren't able to help you, I take it?"

The tiniest shred of relief threads through you at the prospect that Ratchet hadn't, in fact, heard your disastrous phone call.

"No." you tell him honestly. "They, ah, said they'd get back to me."

"I see." he narrows his optics. "I'm going to ask one more time: Are you certain you don't need help?"

For a moment, you consider setting your newfound resolve to utilize brutal honesty into action, but find yourself faltering at the last second.

"Painkillers." you say finally. "I could really, really use some painkillers."

"Well if you'd just admitted that to begin with." he grumbles, and with great effort heaves himself from his seat and, makes his way over to you, where he scoops you up with his servo before you have a chance to protest.

"Hey!"

"Honestly, I don't know why you insist on putting on such a show of bravado at the cost of your own comfort. You're worse than Ironhide." he shakes his helm as he slides open a supply cabinet, revealing a stack of industrial sized crates, each filled to the brim with medical grade pill bottles.

Your eyes widen.

"Is... that... is all of that morphine?" you ask, dumfounded.
“Morphine, vicodin, methadone, oxycodone, plus a few other experimental drugs as of yet unreleased to the public,” he explains, pulling a bottle from the crate and pressing it into your hands. “I’m still not entirely certain which is the most effective on your heavily altered nervous system yet.”

You open and close your mouth several times, still reeling from the sight of at least a million dollars worth of prescription drugs. “You…I…uh.” you stumble, having lost the ability to form complete sentences.

“After your particularly difficult episode during Bumblebee’s emergence, I thought it best to stockpile these types of medications, in lieu of another emergency.” he explains. “I’m not certain of the exact dosage you need, but considering your generous tolerance to every other organic sedative, overdosing shouldn’t be a concern.”

“I uh…I…thanks.” you blurt out. “But where did you even get these?”

“Don’t ask.” he says darkly, and sets you back down on the floor.

You do nothing for a moment, trying to simultaneously process the fact that docbot had somehow procured several crates of painkillers for you, that he'd quite possibly done something illegal to acquire them, and also figure out exactly how much morphine you’d need to ingest before you could pretend none of this was happening.

**************************

“You look nervous.”

“And what makes you say that?”

“Well,” Ironhide begins, screwing the top off of some sort of flask he’d produced from his subspace. “For starter’s, yer hidin’ behind my pede.”

You stand at the far end of the mess hall which had been hastily converted into an emergency meeting room. The autobots, to their, part, had done what they could to make the humans feel at home by bringing in an assortment of human sized furniture, and stocking their own, gargantuan
versions against the back wall, for the time being. Having no reliable means of hiring caterers, you and Sunstreaker had instead gone and blown at least 3000 USD on groceries and pre-prepared food, most of which ended up being liquor. A decision you felt justified, considering tonight’s objective.

“Maybe I like it back here.” you retort.

“Mmmph.” he responds, tilting the flask to his intake. “You also darted over here not even a second after Prahm started talking to those dressed up fleshy.”

“He doesn’t need me over there.” you say, prying a lock of lose hair away from Bee’s grabby servos. Among CIA officers and whatever other “officials” they’d seen fit to add to the mélange of positions on the committee, you feel sufficiently out of place, and rightly so. Astronomer turned adoptive mother turned MIB agent served no purpose at the war table. You’re not entirely certain why Optimus always saw it necessary to have you at this side during these events. Admittedly you found the value he placed in your opinion deeply flattering and to an extent endearing, but probably misguided.

And so you, at the first opportunity, had managed to excuse yourself and scrambled to get yourself and Bumblebee to the only means of cover, which, currently, is located behind Ironhide, sipping on a generous portion of whiskey you’d poured yourself on the way over, which, you remembered too late, is completely ineffectual on your heavily altered biochemistry, and does nothing to quell your nerves. You’re still ludicrously on edge from the prediction Ratchet’s program had generated, and the several varying interpretations the word “hijinks” could possibly have.

“I can understand bein’ unsettled if ya ain’t used to this sorta thing.” he starts, screwing the top back on his flask. “But what I don’t understand is why yer cowerin’ behind me. He narrows his optics at you. “You get in a fight with Ratchet or something?”

Your heart sinks a little. Ratchet is hovering near the area where most of the booze had been deposited, talking to someone you don’t recognize. You’d passed by him once when you’d grabbed your drink and had avoided eye contact, still extraordinarily uncomfortable in his presence from the events of the previous day.

That, however, is absolutely none of Ironhide’s business. “What, I can’t hang out with my favorite weapons specialist?”

“You only ever hang out with me during rations.” he says rather sorely. “Or when you can’t find that hairy, incontinent bastard younling of yours.”
“And here I thought he’d finally identified him as a cat.” you think ruefully.

“You need to calm down. I checked the security system not one, not two, but three times.” he stresses. “I had to, especially after you two nearly blew it out after fraggin’ last night.”

You nearly lose your grip on your drink, and Bumblebee. Fortunately, you manage to correct yourself, though at the cost of a particularly nasty twinge of pain bolting through your midsection. *Fuck.*

“Fragging?” your voice cracks. “W-who said anything about fragging?”

“Look, there’s only so many things on the Ark capable of generating a static discharge that powerful, and Prahm’s one of them.” he leers at you, the corners of his lips turned upward in a lopsided smile. “If he hadn’t holed himself up with you afterwards we would’ve spent the rest of the cycle high-fivin’ him.”

“That…that doesn’t prove anything.” you take a long gulp of your drink, mostly to hide your guilty flushing face.

“He left his wide band open.”

You choke on your drink, spraying a generous portion directly onto Bee, who squeals furiously.

“What?!”

“Given, it was only for a few minutes, but by the time he’d remembered to close the channel, we’d heard enough. I figure yah knocked it on at some point during yer ‘facin’.”

You vividly remember digging your fingers into the seams on the back of his helm, behind his audial fins, remember the sound that had come out of his vocal processor when you’d done so
“Did…did anyone say anything to him about it?” you sputter finally, having completely given up on your charade of innocence.

“I didn’t. Can’t guarantee no one else did.”

Great. So they all heard. Ratchet, who’s feelings you’d nearly dislocated your hip trying to spare, had heard. You’d limped your way down the medbay without assistance, lied to an army medic and ingested two standard sized bottles of morphine for nothing.

Ironhide, seemingly remorseful at the thousand yard stare plastered on your face his teasing had no doubt elicited, lets out a gruff sigh.

“Lemme see yer cube.” he says, swiping your cup out of your hands before you have a chance to protest and tipping his flask into it, filling it to the brim before handing it back to you.

You bring the cup up to your nose, giving it a suspicious sniff, and feel like you’d been punched upside the face for how potent the smell is.

“What the hell is this?” you ask, eyes watering.

“High grade.” he says simply. “It outta settle you down a bit.”

You stare at the luminescent liquid. “You’ve been drinking this whole time?” you ask him incredulously.

He shrugs. “I figure it’s gotta be 5 o clock somewhere in the multiverse.”

You open your mouth to reprimand him for drinking on the job, then close it, upon recalling that you had, in fact, ingested two standard sized bottles of morphine before coming here. Ratchet had been
correct, your tolerance, due to your alteration, had skyrocketed, and the amount you’d shoveled down had just barely taken the edge off. Still, you’re not exactly in a position to judge, and bring the cup to your lips.

It burns your lips. It burns your mouth. It burns the whole way down, but you manage to imbibe a hefty portion before you finally choke and sputter.

You wonder if your metabolism had been altered too, for how instantaneously you relax.

“Holy crap.” you say, blinking, raising the cup over your head to keep it from Bee, who had begun making grabs for it.

“Not bad is it?” Ironhide smirks. “Brew it myself. Yer be hard pressed to find a stronger batch on the planet.”

You consider reminding him that he is, in all likelyhood, the only one brewing high grade on this planet, but find your tongue feeling heavy, and you decide against speaking at all as you lean against his pede, the world spinning slightly.

*Not the worst thing that could happen.* you think fuzzily, because getting plastered on alien booze falls somewhere on the safe end of the *hijinks* scale, and if tripping over yourself or letting an inappropriate comment slip is the worst thing that comes out of this evening then you’ll be glad for it.

“That-” comes a voice from behind you, nearly startling you into spilling your drink. “- is some A Plus parenting you’re doing.”

You spin around to see Chip, who had finally uncovered your hiding place and fixes you with a scrutinizing look.

“Ffff.*Fuck off Chip.*” you begin, but manage to stop yourself from swearing at Bee’s expense. “You know I’m nervous”

“So am I, but you don’t see me guzzling down alien booze.”
“That-” you gesture accusingly at him with your hand, still wrapped around your cup.”-is because it would probably kill you.”

“…Point taken” He adjusts his glasses. “I figure you’re trying to hide over here, so I’ve come to gently remind you that you’re being counterproductive to the exact reason there’s a meeting in the first place.”

You sigh, glancing up at Ironhide, who only offers a disinterested shrug in reply. “He’s right, y’know.”

“Look,” Chip begins, “Fowler didn’t tell me everything, and I didn’t ask, but I read the report, and I can put two and two together. I know you’ve got a good reason to be freaked out right now. So I want to suggest a compromise.”

“Let me guess,” you start. “Fowler put you up to keeping me from going Rambo?”

“Actually, I was my idea.” He offers you a soft, apologetic smile. “Meeting people this high up on the command chain can be nerve-wracking for anyone. So why don’t we work our way up? We’ll talk to some of the new recruits first, let you get nice and warmed up before you have to introduce yourselves to anyone else.”

Chip, you decide, is an angel. A deadpanning, straight-shooting, easily-disgusted angel. And that’s not the high grade talking, not all of it. He’s been a really cool dude from the get go and you’re remiss you can’t express your gratitude aside from a slurred. “Thank you.”

“You can thank me by redirecting any and all questions about interspecies relationships away from me.” he says simply.

“Noted.” you smile. “Mind throwing me some quick figures about the er, zoo incident, so I look smart?”

Chip inhales dramatically.

“Well, the total damage incurred at the zoo incident culminated at 3.5 million. That’s structural
damage *only*, not factoring in the loss of animal life, including several critically endangered species, whose cost we haven’t even *begun* to calculate.”

“Yikes.” you cringe physically, remembering the fat, fluffy, *exceedingly rare* parrot Bumblebee had been so fond of. “What about medical costs?”

“Surprisingly none.”

You give him an incredulous look.

“One elderly woman had a heart attack while the decepticons were failing to introduce themselves, but she had a preexisting condition.”

“I remember escortin’ her out.” Ironhide remarks. “Think she was fakin’ it.”

You and Chip both raise your eyebrows at the red mech, but ultimately remain silent.

“We should really start trying to mingle.” Chip says finally, motioning forward “We’ll take it slow, baby steps and all that.”

“Yeah.” you raise your cup at Ironhide, trying your best not to slosh the drink inside. “I’ll catch you later.”

He responds by taking another draw out of his flask, nodding his helm. “Mmmph.”

You follow Chip, who steers you towards a group of people hovering on the far end of the buffet table. Most of them are zoo patrons, though you’re having a hard time recognizing them without expressions of pants-shitting fear plastered on their faces. A few of them you remember from the cover up cases you’d worked with Chip. One in particular rings with alarming clarity.

A sandy haired youth catches your eye, one who is in the process of shoving a tiny sandwich in his mouth, sees you, and freezes, mouth still ajar.
It’s the ice cream truck kid, the same one who had questioned your mental stability, then quite possibly broken an Olympic speed record in his haste to get away from you.

“Uh…” you start, utterly at a lose for words. “Hi?”

He remains frozen for a moment, eyes deer-in-the-headlights wide, before slowly shoveling the rest of the sandwich in his mouth, refusing to break eye contact.

“This is Spike.” Chip introduces you. “And by Spike I actually mean “Torpedo.”

You know better than to be surprised at ludicrous choice in fake names by now, but cock your head to the side anyways. “They didn’t even give you a last name?”

He swallows. “It’s hyphenated.” he gestures towards the yellow bundle in your arms. “I guess you ended up adopting one of those ‘weather balloons’?”

You let out a frustrated sigh, shaking your head. “Look, kid, I was just doing my job-”

“It’s fine.” Spike cuts you off. “I was briefed and everything.” he leans down to optic level with Bumblebee, and while you expect to be scared, and stiffen yourself accordingly, your heart doesn’t leap into your throat like you’d anticipated as he softly “boops” Bee in the middle of his helm with his index finger.

“This one’s a helluva lot less intimidating than the others.” he says, the beginnings of a smile creeping over his face.

You open your mouth to agree, but are cut off by a sharp, excited beep as Bee grabs his nose with a servo, much to Spike’s surprise. For a moment, you expect him to jerk back, but he instead gently removes it with his hand, snorting good naturedly.

“I…I think he likes you.” you say, feeling cool relief wash over you for the first time that night. Chip was right. If there’s a right way to slide into bureaucratic bullshit, it’s this. You half-consider asking Spike if he wants to hold him, but a sharp prod in your shoulder turns your attention elsewhere, on a familiar, posh-looking brunette.
Oh hell.

You grit your teeth “Hello, robot fu-er…enthusiast.” you quickly correct yourself.

“Astoria.” she corrects you, and without missing a beat. “That piece of high-altitude ass over there.” she gestures wildly towards the far end of the room, where Powerglide is busy berating a DJ-ing Sunstreaker for his choice in music, which had been nothing but Bowie throughout the entirety of the night.

I'm going to just go ahead and assume you mean Powerglide.” you sigh, recalling her resolve to join the million mile high club. “What about him?”

“Introduce me.”

“I hardly know him.”

“How? How could you not know someone that hot? You live here!”

“Look, uh “Astoria, was it?” you ask, tilting your cup to your mouth.

“Actually, it’s Moondancer now.”

You narrowly avoid spraying out your drink for the second time that night. “Let me guess.” you swallow a painfully large amount of high grade. “They ran out of GI Joe names?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know. I didn’t really question it.”

Of course you didn’t. You wipe your mouth with the side of your hand. “Alright, look, Moondancer, I have a hard enough time juggling Optimus, Ratchet, Bumblebee, Ironhide, and the two stooges he keeps around. There’s like 45 of them total, I can just barely keep most of their names straight and half of them are recolor’s of the same frame type. I only recognize Powerglide because he’s the only flyer on the ship and also a giant tool.”
“Moondancer” blows a stray strand of hair out of her face. “Tool, I can deal with. What I can’t deal with is the size difference. Or where exactly they keep their dicks.”

“Oh my god.” you haphazardly try to cover both of Bee’s audible receptors with one arm. “Do you freakin’ mind?” you hiss. “Jesus, you’re blunt.”

She rolls her eyes. “Look, all I know is that you promised me hot, not evil robots.”

“And I delivered, didn’t I?” you shoot back.

“But the other guys were willing to put out right then and there, so god help me if you led me back to a ship full of metallic greek gods that are also prudes-”

“Stop just stop.” you hang your head. “They’re not prudes, they do have genitals and yes, you can interface with them.” you tell her, painfully aware of the fact that your cup is almost empty.

“So?” she asks, tilting her head.

“So what?” you snap back.

“So what’s it like?”

You open your mouth, having had at least 200% over your daily recommended bullshit dosage for today, fully intent on telling her to fuck off. You close your mouth as you remember why you’re here in the first place. You’re here to help foster a positive working relationship between your two species, and spreading the word that the seventh kind is not only survivable, but mind blowing can only help your cause.

Hijinks, after all, could definitely encompass encouraging peace and goodwill between species by egging on a sex crazed robot enthusiast.

“Go find out.” you say, smiling wryly, a warm, fuzzy feeling spreading in your chest, probably due in part to the high grade, because this is how interplanetary exchanges should be held. You’re a visionary. You’re paving the path for countless encounters to come-
“So you’ll introduce me?”

“Introduce yourself.” you spit.

“Having trouble with the newbies, Marissa?”

Thankfully (and you hope you never have to use that term again) you whirl around to see Fowler, a glass of bourbon in one hand and a bemused smile on his face.

“Not at all.” you say with forced politeness. “I was just briefing, ah, “Moondancer” here on proper interpersonal conduct with our autobot comrades.”

Astoria lets out a huff, and you half expect her to pester you again, but she surprisingly turns heel and walks off towards the far end of the room, presumably to make good on your suggestion and badger Powerglide about a close encounter of the seventh kind. Hope he doesn’t end up considering the sixth. Once she’s safely out of earshot, Fowler blows out a breath, shaking his head.

“Uncle Sam’s moustache, there’s enough of you people to start a support group. You—” Fowler points his finger accusingly your way. “Should write up a manual, let these, “enthusiasts” know what they’re getting into.”

You eye twitches slightly.

“Uncle Sam’s moustache?” you ask suspiciously. “Are you feeling alright?”

He looks uncomfortable for a moment.

“Recently I’ve been trying to curb my use of explicative’s.” he explains, sheepishly rubbing the back of his head. “I’ve had to get…creative.”

“Yeah but moustache-”
“Anyways-” he cuts in before you have a chance to finish. “There’s someone I’d like you to meet. An important someone.” you gulp audibly, silently pining for more high grade. “The kind of someone who is very excited to meet your baby bot.”

Oh god. You unconsciously hug Bee tighter against your chest while Fowler escorts you over to the mixed drink station, where an older, bespectacled, slightly balding man of asian heritage is busy assembling a Tom Colins while speaking nervously to Ratchet. Your eyes meet his optics for a brief moment. You can’t make heads or tails of his expression, and decide you don’t want to, and quickly cast your eyes downwards as you feel the heat rising to your face.

Fowler clears his throat, and the man jumps slightly as he looks up, almost spilling his drink in the process.

“Dr. Fujiyama, this is Marrissa Fairborne. Marrissa, this is Dr. Fujiyama.”

You grit your teeth at the name, but politely extend your free hand anyways, to which he bows slightly. You both exchange nervous glances.

Awkward.

“Oh, my bad.” you force a smile, feeling like an uncultured idiot.

“No no, it’s my fault.” he waves his hands rapidly and you can see tiny droplets of sweat forming on his forehead. Your immediate impression of him is shady, and that just makes you want to take Bee and run even more, but you remind yourself that not everyone is used to tiptoeing around metal titans, let alone conversing with them. He’s probably gonna need another drink. Or four.

“Dr. Fujiyama is one of the world’s leading experts on robotics.” Fowler informs you, jerking you back to reality. “He was drafted into the committee responsible for handling the asylum case.”

The fact that they’d saw fit to enlist an expert in robotics, as apposed to someone who’d studied alien life makes you uncomfortable for reasons you can’t quite put your finger on. You feel the dormant mama bear within you stir.

Dr. “you’re making me nervous” Fujiyama nods, taking a long, shaking draw from his glass. “I’ve been fascinated by them since I was a boy. His eyes drift down to the squirming sparkling in your
arms. “And this small one is?”

“Bumblebee.” you inform him, hoisting him up on your hip, silently wincing. “Say hi Bee.”

Bee stares at him, optics impossibly wide, before quickly turning his helm and nuzzling it into your chest, emitting a soft, nervous beep of protest. You silently sympathize with him. “I don’t want to be here either.” but you roll your eyes and let out a huff of exasperation to maintain your façade of calm. “C’mon now, don’t be shy. It’s okay.”

Bee turns his helm partially, exposing a single optic, before reluctantly raising a tiny servo.

“Fascinating.” Fujiyama leans in and takes the servo in his own hand, inspecting it, and it’s your turn to jump. Calm down calm down. you tell yourself. Don’t upset Bee. “I notice he doesn’t speak. Has his language pack not been installed yet?”

His choice of words bothers you more than you’d like to admit.

Mama bear opens her eyes.

“His vocal processor doesn’t function correctly.” Ratchet cuts in finally. “’____’s processor was damaged at the time the surrogacy was initiated.”

Fujiyama blinks. “’____’?”

Ratchet freezes for half a second, optics widened, but it’s only a second. “I’m sorry. Marissa.” he corrects himself.

Fujiyama tilts his head in consideration, but ultimately seems unconcerned. “Surrogacy?” he asks. “I was told that he was adopted.”

“He’s both.” you cut in.

“We….lost Bee’s carrier shortly before we arrived here on earth.” Ratchet sighs, mouth set in a
straight line. “He was in critical condition, and on the verge of off lining, when Marissa showed up, and by some miracle happened to have an electro magnetic field similar enough to hers to allow a surrogacy.”

“So, your kind are born, rather than assembled?”

_Assembled._ That sends a chill down your spine. You’re pretty sure he means nothing by it, but his technical terminology is rubbing you in all the wrong ways.

_Mama bear bares her fangs._

Ratchet, however, continues nonplussed.

“Sexual reproduction is an archaic means of propagating for us, but we _are_ capable of it. It’s exceedingly rare, however, due to the scarcity of femmes. There has always been a great disparity between the numbers of our sexes, for reasons we’ve yet to deduce. I would be pleased to elaborate, but I understand your species places somewhat of a taboo on discussing it in public.” He pauses for a moment, gauging the roboticist’s reaction, and when he offers no dissenting opinion seems to deflate slightly, and despite your nervousness you have to stifle a giggle at his reaction. _Guess he was looking forward to teaching cybertronian sex ed._

“Regardless,” he continues on. “The developing sparkling is referred to as a “bitlet”, and is entirely reliant upon the carrier’s field to regulate vital functions such as their central fluid pump, which would have likely been the reason Bumblebee would have expired, if not for Marissa’s intervention.”

Fujiyama regards Ratchet with wide-eyed stupor, drinking in every word. “Incredible.” he begins after a beat. “So your kind has evolved more than one means of procreation?” and you realize that even though he’s still talking to Ratchet his eyes remain trained on the squirming sparkling in your arms, and that really shouldn’t raise the hair on the back of your neck but it _does._

“We have,” Ratchet begins. “In fact, there’s multiple methods of-”

Dr. “your really starting to freak me out now” Fujiyama cuts him off, rather abruptly “Would it be alright if I held him?”

You freeze. You can _feel_ your pupils constrict, feel your nostrils flare.
You hesitate. Fowler gives you a warning look. *This is why you came here.*

So you swallow hard, force the mama bear part of yourself back in her cage snarling and screaming, and hand Bee into his outstretched arms.

Bee, however, is yet to be sold on the idea, and clings desperately to your bosom.

“Beep”

“*Please no.*”

“Bee it’s okay, really.” you say in a soothing voice that belays your nervousness, trying to pry his tiny servos from you, which are actually gripping your boobs painfully tight. *ouch.*

“Beep”

“*Why scared?*”

“It’s *safe.*” you tell him, finally succeeding in prying him away from your chest, and into Fujiyama’s waiting arms. Bumblebee, for his part, is not about to take this transgression peacefully, and begins to struggle wildly in his grasp.

Is there a way to get him to stop moving so much?” he asks as Bee proceeds to knock his glasses off with a flailing servo. “Some sort of override command, perhaps.”

Your heart skids to a stop.

*Override command.*

Your blood turns to ice. Your eyes widen. The breath catches in your lungs.
Suddenly, there’s no meeting, no Fujiyama, no autobots, no Ark, no nothing, just you and the searing smell of burning wires, the feel of warm energon spilling in your hands, bright red optics burning dim as a metal child grows weak in your arms, sobbing softly.

_Mama bear roars._

Fowler, who seems to have determined that something’s awry, touches you softly on the shoulder. “Everything alright Marissa?”

Ratchet, who has taken notice of Fujiyama’s exceedingly poor choice of words and their subsequent effect on you, makes a motion as if to reach out to you, but thinks better of it, instead pressing his servo to the side of his helm, either to activate his comlink or in a frustrated gesture of uncertainty, you’re not sure. You’re too busy trembling, too busy sliding down the rabbit hole to care.

Part of you is aware that if you do, in fact, lose your shit and proceed to maul this man, that it’ll ruin everything that you worked for, everything Optimus worked for, ruin any chance Bumblebee would have at having a normal childhood on this planet. You’re also aware that the part of you that’s able to comprehend that outcome is buried under several layers of PTSD bullshit, because bears don’t think that far ahead. You feel logic itself drain away from your brain as a mélange of rage and adrenaline take it’s place.

Hijinks, you realize, could definitely encompass strangling a robotics expert with your bare hands while channeling an enraged maternal ursine.

Bumblebee seems to have accepted his fate in Fujiyama’s arms and has stopped struggling. He stares at you with wide, sad optics and lets out a single, frustrated beep.

_Help._

“I’m going to murder this man.” you realize with dawning horror as the music changes, _Dance Magic Dance_ providing gloriously inappropriate contrast to your homicidal urges. “I’m going to murder this man to the styling’s of David Bowie.”

But before you’d have a chance to reenact an MA rated episode of “when animals attack you feel a firm hand on your shoulders, dragging you back out into reality.
“My apologies, agent Fowler, Dr. Fujiyama,” and you crane your neck to see Optimus once again inexplicably reduced to a third of his size, ten feet tall, still towering over you and your simarily sized companions. “But I require “_____”’s presence immediately.”

Your breath hitches, eyes still glued on Bee and the decidedly dead man that’s currently holding him. The adrenaline doesn’t immediately filter down but you don’t find yourself resisting as he pulls you into his embrace.

“That,” Fowler begins after a beat, irritated, probably because he chose to use your real name instead of the moniker. “Prime, what the hell?”

“I am remiss to interrupt your conversation, and mean no ill will.-“ Optimus begins sincerely. “But I believe in earth terms, this is what one would consider ‘our’ song.”

You’re still screaming on the inside, but enraged maternal ursine or no, you’re no match for his strength at any height, and are helplessly strung along as he pulls you out mercifully un-crowded portion of the floor. You whip your head back around to stare wild eyed at Bee and Dr. Fujiyama. You find your gaze gently redirected to shining blue optics as he cups your chin in his servo, forcing you to look him in the face.

““_____”” he rumbles in that exact frequency that brings you to the edge of exhaustion and makes your limbs go limp. “Calm down.”

You feel your eyelids grow heavy, and hate that he can do that with his voice alone. Your heart, however, still thrashes wildly against your ribcage.

“We’re safe.” he assures you, pressing you tightly against his chassis. “Bumblebee is safe.” he rocks you back and forth gently, to the music, and that’s when it dawns on you that you’d both been dancing this whole time.

You figure Ratchet had com’d him when he saw you about to go nuclear, and Optimus had come up with it as the only solution available to avoid a social faux pas, and had then com’d Sunstreaker to change to music. Quite frankly, your mind is blown from the sheer genius of it.

But what you find infinitely more fascinating is that you’re keeping up. You don’t understand, because you normally dance like a narcoleptic weasel and suddenly everything is coming to you so
easily, so fluidly, like you’ve done this thousands of times before. How? your traitorous, logical mind chants. How is this possible?

You decide you don’t care. You don’t care and you let him take you, servo pressed against the small of your back as he holds you against him. You find yourself blushing damnit when you try to look him directly in the optics.

“S-stop.” you start, muttering as he brings his helm flush with your forehead, closing what little distance remained between you two.

“Stop what?” he asks, innocently, and you find yourself grasping for answers. Stop what, indeed. Stop being so handsome, stop being so gorgeous? Stop calming you down from the brink of insanity?

“Stop making me fall in love with you.” you think but don’t say, because even though it’s accurate, its cheesy as hell and you’re not about to confess in front of a bunch of NASA scientists, government officials, and a choice few robot fuckers. Not right now.

“Nevermind.” you reply finally, face flushing hideously. “Don’t stop. Please don’t stop.”

“I do not intend to.”

You wonder how this must look to everyone around you, considering that he’d not only managed to mass convert down to a third of his size, tear you away from your ill-fated meeting and start ballroom dancing flawlessly to a song never intended for it within the span of 30 seconds. Probably pretty strange. But what strikes you as odd is that you’re still keeping up with him. You’re not dancing like a narcoleptic weasel, not tripping over your feet, not making a damn fool of yourself and that makes less sense than every other facet of your reality right now.

“Hey.” you ask him, once you’d managed to claim a single shred of your sanity back. “How exactly do you know how to dance?”

He raises an optical ridge. “I could ask you the same thing.”
“I guess all that time practicing with Bee paid off.” you say finally, “But I asked first.”

“There is still much you have yet to learn about me.” he smiles, the kind of smile that makes your legs jelly and *fuck* if you weren’t having a hard enough time dancing with a (mercifully numb) dislocated hip. *Damn I make terrible decisions.* You think to yourself.

“May I cut in?”

*Speak of the devil.*

You both turn your heads to see Ratchet, who has similarly diminutized himself to near-human height, holding out a servo, waiting politely.

At first, you wonder if he’s asking *Optimus* to dance, and then find yourself desperately wishing he *had* because things can only get so awkward between you two before one of you has a meltdown, and you’d come far too close to one already today.

“Of course.” Optimus gives you a final, comforting squeeze before gently transferring you to Ratchet’s waiting arms, excusing himself from the makeshift dance floor. You watch him leave, re-immersing himself in the crowd, no doubt to answer several hundred questions about mass displacement. Part of you wants to yell for him to come back, and you half consider it, but you’d nearly made an enormous mess of things once tonight, so you steel your nerves, swallow hard, and turn back to Ratchet.

The music changes again, “*As the world falls down*” plays softly as you begin to dance. You realize that Sunstreaker had probably just ripped the entire soundtrack from the Labyrinth cassette. Someday you’re going to have to have a stern conversation with him about piracy laws and also not getting physically intimate with VCRs, and just as your mind begins formulating some particularly unsavory images you’re snapped back to the present.

“I want to apologize.”

You blink. Ratchet’s expression is one of genuine remorse.

“Apologize?” you ask, because even though you know exactly what he’s talking about, you hadn’t expected him to ever actually *address* it.
“Yes. Apologize.” He repeats. “For how I’ve been acting.” he pulls you closer, and your head is pressed dangerous close against his helm. “I don’t want things to be awkward between us.”

“I don’t either.” “you swallow nervously, throat dry. “So…about yesterday. Are we….are we alright?”

A pause. He dips you dangerously close to the floor, you gasp in surprise. He pulls you back, flush against his chassis, cyan optics piercing into yours, and you briefly forget how to breathe.

“We’re fine.” a genuine smile splays across his faceplate. You want to laugh, scream in relief.

“So we can still be insomnia buddies?” you ask hopefully. “Still watch horrible movies together?”

“As long as I continue to function.” he smirks, so confident, so cheerful you find yourself blushing damnit.

There’s a brief pause, in which you bask in the glory of suddenly not awkward physical contact, relief oozing out of your pores, feeling completely and utterly at ease with the world. You see a small crowd gathered around Bee, who has found his way into someone else’s arms, and even though that’s scary, it’s okay. Somewhere in the background you hear Astoria shouting “You lying piece of shit.” Probably at Powerglide. Probably after she had seen with her own eyes that mass conversion is indeed possible, and that he’d run out of ways to spurn her advances.

You feel a laugh rising in your throat, and misstep in your attempt to stifle it. A dull twinge of pain shoots up your leg. You swear under your breath. Time to try the honesty thing.

“Hey, Ratchet?” you start, favoring your right leg. “Now that we’re cool again, can I ask you a favor?”

“Certainly.” he says, optical ridge raised. “What is it?”

“Can you like, maybe carry me back to the medbay as soon as this is over?” you ask, gritting your teeth. “Because I’m pretty sure Optimus fractured my pelvis.”
Magic

Chapter Summary

Sorry for how short it is, but it kind of seemed better off on it's own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s ungodly early. You’d been woken up by Ratchet again when the AI spat out another prediction. “A trip to the movie yields unexpected results”. Which he’d shouted as he’s torn open the door. In his haste, he’d knocked over a canister sitting on one of the overburden shelves in the room, which in a flurry of movement reminiscent of a rude goldburg device, had culminated in drenching Neelix in some sort of faintly glowing oil.

You had half a mind to throw a pillow or your soaking, semi-luminescent cat at him and just roll over because it is ungodly early and Bee had NOT wanted to recharge last night. But he’d(rather smugly) informed you that he’d already started your “hot caffeinated beverage dispenser” and had a copy of Legend waiting to play in brand new as-of-yet unviolated VCR. And if there’s anything to motivate you to get your sleep-deprived ass out of bed it’s the opportunity to watch surreal fantasy flicks with an equally sleep deprived salty grump of a robot doctor.

So you’d dragged your half-comatose self out of bed, graciously accepted the coffee and settled down on the couch across from Teletran One, while you try to comb the luminescent fluid (that Ratchet had assured you wasn’t toxic. Probably.) out of your cat’s fur. Ratchet, having forgone the use of a more mobile piece of giant alien furniture, has instead opted to seat himself beside you on the floor, looking uncharacteristically laid back with his back against the wall and his legs spread out in front of him, sipping from a cube who’s contents he takes a great deal of effort to block from view with his servo.

He’s close, close enough you can hear the welcoming thrum of his frame, and feel the warm gushes of air from his ex-vents on the side of your face, and you find yourself once again infinitely grateful that you’d managed to smooth things out with him the night before. Especially since you’d both discovered that Optimus had, in fact, managed to fracture your pelvis.

Mercifully the damage has been negligible, and was almost already healed. He hadn’t done anything beyond presenting you with additional painkillers and a stern warning to “Be more careful, slag-it!” You thought you’d seen him grip the edge of the medical berth you were splayed out on painfully tight.
You told yourself it was your imagination.

Bumblebee sits on the floor directly in front of the couch, dividing his attention equally between the movie and a sparkling toy Ratchet had recently provided him with that resembles an unholy union between a litebrite set and a hunk of bismuth. It seems to be some sort of 3-d puzzle, as far as you can figure, and has a tendency to make your eyes water if you look directly at it for more than a few seconds, so you keep your eyes on screen, for the most part.

“It’s still rather vague, I know.” he admits before you have a chance to bring it up yourself. “But it’s learning. For now we still need to look at the prediction and then deduce what the best possible outcome concerning Optimus would be.”

“And how would we do that?”

“Well, if we apply that logic to the events of yesterday, we can see that the aforementioned “hijinks” worked in our favor. Your exhibiting symptoms of a physiological breakdown forced me and Optimus to not only mass convert down to a less intimidating size, but also perform actions that those around us considered disarming and relatable. I believe it had an effect known as “anthropomorphizing” on them.”

You let out a low whistle. “So you guys keeping me from having a nuclear meltdown let them see you as humans.”

“Human-like.” he corrects you. “The case is being fast tracked on account of that. We couldn’t have engineered a social stint like that if we’d tried. Even Dr. Fujiyama seemed to relax considerably after that, and he’d been intensely perspiring for the duration of our conversation.”

You feel yourself stiffen at the mention of his name, an action that doesn’t go unnoticed by your companion.

“Honestly, I can’t understand your distrust of your fellow organics.” he scoffs, rolling his optics. “He was a pleasant enough person, if not…er…”

“Tactless?” you offer.

“I was going to say “moist” or “sweaty”, but that is an equally valid descriptor.”
You look up at him, eyebrow raised, but his optics are glued to the screen. It’s during the scene where the protagonist profusely apologizes to a distraught unicorn standing guard over it’s mate’s frozen body. The haunting music sends a shiver down your spine and gives you goose bumps. You wonder if there’s a rough cybertronian equivalent to that, and consider asking him, but a more pressing question comes to mind.

“Y’know, I gotta ask you something.” you say, worming a particularly embedded hunk of oil out of Neelix’s fur, to which he responds by digging his claws into your leg. *Fuck you cat.*

“And that would be?” Ratchet asks, optics unmoving from the screen, tilting the cube to his intake.

You set the brush down, pausing thoughtfully. “You’ve got hundreds of movies to chose from, all sorts of genre’s. But the overwhelming majority you choose to watch are fantasy.”

“Your observational prowess remains unrivaled.” he scoffs.

You half consider throwing the brush, or Neelix at him, but settle on rolling your eyes. “What I mean is, why?”

“Am I not allowed to have a preference?”

You slap your hand against your forehead. “Of course you are. I just want to know why you prefer them.”

There’s a pause. A long one. For a moment you’re not sure if he’s going to answer at all, and you sigh in resignation, pushing the fat, fluffy, slightly cleaner persian off of your lap and reaching for your coffee.

“Magic.” he says finally.

You freeze mid-reach, certain you’ve misheard him.
“Magic?”

“Magic, as a storytelling device, generally isn’t explained or measured.” he drains the rest of his cube. “It’s not *explored*. We’re forced to accept it at face value. For all of it’s supposed mystery, it’s, in a sense, laid bare.” he sets his empty cube on the floor. “And that is something I find immeasurably refreshing.”

There’s a loud, fluttering *thunk*, much like someone had dropped a wind chime, then subsequently stomped on it. Bee lets out a delighted *beep*, and you find, much to your chagrin, that he’d managed to cleave the prism in half, and is currently preoccupied with stuffing the energon goodies it contained into his intake.

*Oh hell.*

That thing was old. That thing predated human civilization by millions, maybe *billions* of years and Bee had smashed it to get at a rust stick. There’s probably some sort of deep, existential statement in there somewhere, but it’s lost on you as you’re torn between how exactly to scold him for it and how exactly to apologize to Ratchet for allowing him to dismantle an aeons old relic under your watch.

You look over at Ratchet, who observes the scene with narrowed, analytical optics, mouth set in a straight line. *He’s gonna be pissed. You think. He’s had this thing since he was a sparkling and Bee broke it.*

Ratchet’s mouth twitches. Ratchet emits a sharp, barking sound that you’d never heard him make before.

Ratchet is *laughing.*

“It appears he’s solved it.” he says after several hearty guffaws, in which you stare, completely bewildered, at your companion.

“He *broke it*.” you correct him after several seconds, jaw unhinged in disbelief.

“Ah ah ah.” he holds up a digit. “The objective was to *retrieve* the rust stick. “ He turns to you, mirth shining in his optics. “His methods may have been unorthodox, but he achieved the end goal, nonetheless. Ergo, he *solved it!*”
His good mood is contagious, and you find a stupid, doofy grin spreading over your lips despite your reservations. There’s no broken furniture, no fresh holes punched in the walls, and that’s enough to let you convince yourself that his good mood is genuine. He’s happy and laid back because he’s *actually having a good time for once*. So you smile, and nod, and accept his unexpected outlook at face value. You tell yourself that he’s acting the way he is because he’d finally gotten adequate recharge the previous night.

And not because you can smell the high grade on his breath.

Chapter End Notes

You could totes watches this video if you wanted to see a rube goldberg machine in action. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUbjzvu1DqE

(No I didn’t just use that phrase as an excuse to post that video nope not one bit)
Unexpected Results

Chapter Notes

This thing is 26. Pages. Long. And that's after I cut it in half. The smut's in the other half which is almost done and should be up in the next few days. Forgive me.

Also I've switched from using "____" to (y/n) to denote when your name is being used.

Sorry this took so long. Pls enjoy.

“For the last time, there’s nothing I can do about it!”

Minutes before the end up the movie you’d been contacted by Fowler, who had crisply informed you that an introductory meeting for the new agents was being held, and that you and Chip were going to run it. He’d hung up before you’d had a chance to protest otherwise, and you’d reluctantly left Bee in Ratchet’s care without finishing the movie.

And so you and Chip had started the meeting, which, insofar, had been nothing but complaints about the ludicrous fake names and backstories, most of which had clearly been pulled directly from comic books.

“Your other option is being released back into society with a schizophrenia diagnosis and a legal record of hospitalization for mental health.” Chip says, addressing the group with narrowed eyes and a no more bullshit look on his face. “I don’t like it either. You don’t have to call each other by your new names. I’ll call you whatever you want. But for all legal intents and purposes, I am Cobra Commander, you guys are whoever your papers say you are, and if you need to order a pizza, you have to run it through someone with a less ridiculous name. Got it?”

An exasperated yes pans through the group simultaneously.

Chips sighs. “Okay. Good. Anyone have questions?”

A dark complexioned youth dressed like a campy interpretation of street punk fashion raises his hand.

“Yes, um,” Chip pauses, struggling to remember the moniker. “BonBon?”
“Yeah, I heard you can get freaky with these guys.” He says in a thick new york accent. “Is that true?”

Chip visibly cringes, but continues on. “Ah, yes, since an alarming number of you have actually professed interest in this subject, we’re obligated to provide some cautionary reading material regarding err, intimacy with autobots, which should be included in the folder containing the documents on your new identities.” He says, pausing to give the group in question a chance to flip through their papers.

Astoria, unsurprisingly, is the first to raise her hand.

“Yes, Moondancer?”

“These are instructions on how to rotate tires.” she says flatly.

“And that’s our polite way of telling you that we do not, in fact, have any idea how one safely goes about intimacy with a cybertronian. At least not officially.” Chip throws a withering look your way, and you feel your face flush horribly. “An anymore questions?”

Several hands shoot up.

“An anymore questions that aren’t about alien sex?” Chip clarifies.

All of the hands drop back down. All of them except one, which you chose to address this time in order to give poor, thoroughly traumatized Chip a break.

“Yes?” you say brightly, acknowledging the attractive young blonde woman in the back. “You… uh,”

“Carly.”

You check your cheat sheet, which has the fake names listed next to the real ones, find “Carly”, and
“Alright, Carly.” you say finally. “What’s your question?”

“What material is cybertronian ammunition comprised of, and is it explosive by nature or is it rendered volatile by a different process?”

“Oh…” you fumble, being nowhere near qualified to answer. “That sounds like a question for our resident munitions expert, Ironhide.”

“Is he the one that talks like Colonel Sanders?” she asks. “Because he also told me that decepticons consume human infants as their primary food source. Is that true?”

*Oh my god.* You slap a palm to your forehead. “What do *you* think?”

“I think he was screwed with me, m’am.”

“You thought correctly.”

“I also thought he wasn’t half-bad looking.”

You let out a soft groan. Chip, true to form, looks visibly disturbed, though hides it behind a well practiced façade of professional distaste.

“Look,” he begins, pulling you off to the side as soon as the Q and A ended “I know Fowler thinks he’s being real funny with all these fake pamphlets–”

“To be fair, they are pretty clever.” you cut in.

“But they’re not *informative.*” he stresses “I’m starting to think we might actually have a situation on our hands. A situation that requires guidance from someone who has…er…experience in this field.”
Oh hell, you swallow nervously. “Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?”

“That’s exactly what I’m suggesting.”

“Why me?”

“I don’t know how you think your relationship with Optimus looks from an outside perspective, but it’s pretty obvious.” he sighs, pushing his glasses back up on his face. “I can see it. Fowler can see it. Everyone that’s working with us can see it, and because of that you’re an authority figure on the subject, whither you like it or not.”

“What do you want me to do?” you say, caving. “Write up a guide on how to not die while interfacing?”

“That’s exactly what I want you to do.”

***

Alright, you’re probably not the best person to be writing safety literature on xenophliac encounters, but factoring in that you’re currently earth’s leading expert on robot-human relationships, and that a surprising number of the new recruits had turned out to be fascinated by the subject, compiling a guide not only seems necessary, but top priority. The most beneficial thing you can do for your cause right now is emphasize the similarities between your races, and that’s not even that hard. They play like humans, party like humans, wage war like humans, and make love like Norse fucking gods. You might not be entirely comfortable divulging the sordid details of your sex life, but if it means securing the best possible child/sparkling hood for Bumblebee then by god you won’t stop until every human within a hundred mile radius is begging for a ride on Thor’s hammer.

You want this case to go as smoothly as possible, so everyone can stop hiding and Bee will get a chance to grow up and play with human children. They can pick flowers and kick anthills and get into fistfights with other children over Pluto’s gravitational effects on Uranus and force his parent’s to hold apology BBQ’s and…

Okay. Maybe he doesn’t need your childhood verbatim, but being able to play in the sunlight with other children is still important.
So you’d sat your ass down, determination vibrating through every nerve ending in your body, put pen to paper, and gave yourself over to the creative process.

*How to prepare for interface*

1. *Acquire lubricant*

2. *A lot of lubricant*

3. *Maybe also learn some yoga*

4. *A lot of yoga*

Two and a half hours in, and you hadn’t made much progress. But that’s okay. Writing’s an art, not a science, and after another fifteen minutes of crumpling paper and tearing your hair our, you decided to try a different approach, which is where you find yourself now.

*Thwuck*

Literally throwing things against the wall, and seeing what sticks.

The things in question are darts, through which you’d speared pieces of paper with prospective titles onto. Everything from the inoffensive but bland—*“A practical guide to interspecies relationships”*—to the brutally honest *“Once you go cybertronian, you break your pelvis.”*

You’d moved your dartboard behind your makeshift desk some weeks ago, after Bumblebee’s hundredth or so attempt to shove the darts into his intake. It had been, until recently, collecting dust, much like your desk, but after the identities of the recently recruited MIB officers had been finalized you’d been forced to dust it off. Fowler had offloaded a metric fuckton of paperwork on you and sarcastically welcomed you to “paper work purgatory”, which you’d interpreted as a thinly veiled threat to not fall behind.
Being the well organized and responsible adult that you are, you had begun sorting them out by degrees of priority, and then several minutes later had promptly shove them into the nearest bin, with a lackadaisical promise to power through them the next Ratchet felt like having an insomnia pow wow and nodded off before finishing the movie.

*Thwuck*

You ignore the sharp, sinking feeling in your heart as you shove your ever present concern for Ratchet, and your related anxiety on account of the most recent prediction, to the back of your head. You need to focus, _damnit._

*Thwuck*

*Thump*

That startles you enough to throw off your aim, and you end launching the dart carrying "Wham Bam with a Van" straight into the ceiling. You whip your head around just in time to see Astoria dump at least fifty stuffed animals on your desk.

“Um…” you begin, “What are you doing?”

She cocks her head to the side. “I could ask you the same thing.”

“I…” you trail off, trying to come up with a believable excuse, but them upon remembering exactly who it is you’re talking to, decide not to bother.

“I’m writing a guide.” you say flatly, struggling to keep a straight, professional face. “On how to interface.”

Astoria looks as though someone had told her Christmas and her birthday had been moved to _today_ and that someone was also a robot brandishing genitalia in her face.

“Oh my god you are a saint!” she exclaims, throwing her arms around you and pulling you into an exuberant embrace. “I spent hours grilling tall dark and aerodynamic and he’s shut up tighter than a cyber duck’s asshole. Quick, how do I open an interface panel and can I get my tongue in it without being electrocuted?"
You wonder briefly if her surprising knowledge of cyber-fauna is cause for concern, but chose to ignore it. “I-I haven’t got that far.” You admit sheepishly. “In fact, I’m still working on the title.”

“You’re stuck on the title?” she says, ripping her arms from you so fast you spin slightly. “I need this thing like yesterday and I’m not the only one!”

“It’s not that easy alright?” You retort, once you’d steadied yourself.

“Naming it’s like the easiest part!”

“Like hell it is!” you snap back “You think you can do better? Fine. Go ahead. Give me one.”

“Close encounters of the seventh fine : A guide to seeing stars with your star-crossed lover.” she says, without missing a beat.

You blink. Wow that was actually pretty good. You open your mouth to tell her so, but close it on account of your injured pride. You narrow your eyes. “Name three more.”

Astoria inhales sharply : “How to please a ‘bot in 30 ways, Space Fuckin’, Auto Eroto Mr. Roboto.”

“…Give me three more.”

“The spy who fragged me, It’s raining cyber men, Fifty shades of Gunmetal Gray.“

Holy shit.

“There’s more where that came from, isn’t there?” you ask, thoroughly defeated.

“I think we both know the answer to that.” she says, sneering. “Should I continue?”
“No…you can stop. Please stop.” you say, still reeling from how badly you’d been told. “You know, you still haven’t told me what’s up with the stuffed animals.”

“Oh that,” she says. “Yeah Powerglide took me to the carnival last night and won all this stuff sharp shooting.”

Your immediate reaction is to ask her what exactly she expects you to do with a pile of stuffed animals, but a far more pressing question comes to mind.

“You…you actually convinced Powerglide to interface with you?” you begin, dumbstruck. “And here I thought he was more interested in the sixth kind.”

“Nah, he was too beat after using his holomater avatar. Says it uses up a ton of energy.”

You find your mind drifting back to the ill fated “zoo incident” recall how wiped Ratchet had looked both during and afterwards, having had to project both for himself and Bumblebee. Guess he’s not trying to spurn her advances after all.

“Okay, but, uh seriously,” you say, gesturing towards the plush mountain she’d dumped on your workspace. “What’s this all about?”

“Yeah,” she begins, turning to the pile and tugging on the ear of an oversized purple rabbit. “I don’t really need like, fifty stuffed animals. I figured you could give them to Bumblebee. I can’t imagine there’s a lot of toys lying around a downed military starship.”

Your mouth falls open. That’s…actually really thoughtful what the hell. You look at the stuffed animals, then back at up the grinning, shameless, considerate brunette that you had pegged entirely wrong.

“I…” you start, still in disbelief. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t need to say anything. Just finish that guide as soon as you can, because no lie, if Powerglide tells me he’s down to ‘face, I’m going in.”
“Noted.” you say, still dizzied slightly.

“I mean it. I’m gonna hit that A-10 like the fist of an angry god.”

“Okay.”

“Hit him so hard King Arthur couldn’t pull him outta me.”

“I get it.”

“So,” she says, placing her hands on her hips. ‘What’s it like?’

“Oh my god.” You pinch the bridge of your nose. “Look, I already told you-”

“I mean what’s it like being a mom?” she cuts you off. “And don’t you dare tell me “Go find out.”

That surprises you, enough that you drop the cluster of un-thrown darts you’d been unconsciously clutching in your other hand. “What?”

“You adopted that little one right?” she pauses, scrunching her face up in concern. “Please tell me you adopted him. I don’t want to have to run out and find rubbers that fit a jet.”

“No no, he is adopted.” you tell her, trying to collect your racing thoughts long enough to provide a coherent answer to her question, because you honestly have no idea how to answer it. “Yes, it’s equal parts maternal bliss induced comas and channeling enraged grizzly bears. It’s…uh, neat.”

Whatever answer she’d expected, it obviously wasn’t that.

“Neat?” she says, blinking. “Neat? You have this tiny, living, feeling thing that depends on you just to exist and that’s all you have to say about it? Neat?!”
Thankfully, you’re spared from having to explain yourself further, as a loud, cheery beep peals out from under the pile of stuffed animals.

“Sorry, I gotta take this.” you say, honestly relived for the interruption as you reach under it to retrieve your data pad. Ratchet had recently fitted it with a text based messaging system to allow you to communicate with him from anywhere on the ship. He had assured you that he’d only given himself and Optimus access to your channel, but within the first few minutes you’d received a slew of messages between Sunstreaker and Mirage clearly not meant for your eyes.

It seems during your enthusiastic conversation with Astoria, you’d missed a some notifications, the first few a continuation of the conversation between Mirage and Sunstreaker. You know just enough cybertronian to deduce that it’s a highly xenophobic riddle joke with a non-sequitur punch line that involved hurling all of humanity at the sun. Sunstreaker had agreed, but in a subsequent message had stipulated “Except for Bowie though.”

The rest, thankfully, are in English. Optimus, who had been out on scouting duty since early morning relayed a simple “I have acquired a cactus for the garden. : )” complete with smiley, and an attached picture of a freshly unearthed 25 ft saguaro. Your heart melts a little, but just as you begin to reply three more messages crop up simultaneously.

_Probably a delay._ You think, and then let out a frustrated sigh when you see the sender is none other than Ironhide.

“-Your youngling is in my quarters again. Come get him before he lubricates.”

“-I’m serious. Come get him.”

“-He lubricated. I threw him out the window.”

A wave of panic surges through you, before you remember that the Ark is lodged in the side of a mountain, and the only unobstructed windows are located near the bridge, or wherever Red Alert feels like having an anxiety attack. But before you can call him out on being the lying piece of shit he is, the door slides open to reveal none other than said shit piece.

“You get my messages?” he asks, and before giving you a chance to respond, turns to Astoria. “That punk lookin’ fella you got assigned as a partner is looking for ya.”
She raises an eyebrow. “Why?”

“Hell if I know. I only got room in my processor for two earth languages and Spanish ain’t one of ‘em.”

Astoria huffs, but takes her leave nonetheless, muttering under her breath.

“Another language huh?“ you say as the door closes behind her. “Can I safely assume you’re also fluent in smartass?”

“Japanese, actually.” he says, reaching into his subspace to procure a familiar flask, and promptly popping the top open. “Had to memorize my alt. mode’s blueprints to make adjustments to my weapons system.”

You blink. “Oh.” and then, to cover your embarrassment of your joke having fallen flat, begin to clean up some of the papers that had been knocked askew when Astoria had dropped the stuffed animal pile on your desk.

“Powerglide wasn’t kiddin‘.” Ironhide continues nonplussed, gesturing towards your desk. “The prizes y’all give out for handling firearms are just as squishy as you are.”

You snort at his observation. “I still can’t believe he actually took her out.”

“I’m not.” Ironhide says, taking a long draw of (presumably) highgrade. “More than a few of us got curious after we heard ya gettin’ busy through the wide band.”

“Fuck.” you nearly lose your grip on the stack of papers, though thankfully recover. “Did they now?” you ask, doing your best to remain unflustered and not give him the satisfaction of getting under your skin.

“Seaspray and Tracks especially.”

“And you? You ask, tilting your head. “That little blonde chick with the firepower fetish seemed awfully intent on getting to know you.”
“She was.” he screws the top back on his flask. “But I’ve got a lady back home. Actually, so does Powerglide, not like that’s ever stopped ‘im. Fragger’s got a piece of aft on every planet.”

You let out a long, low whistle. “I know a tool when I see one.” You set the stack back on your desk in a neat pile. At least I did something productive. “You didn’t come in here just to bug me about my cat pissing in your room again.”

“I’ve dismembered mech’s for less.” he says, narrowing his optics. “But no, I didn’t. Y’know that storage closet you’ve been using as a training room?”

You do, of course, because it’s filled with fond memories. Most of which are completely overshadowed by your most recent one of getting fucked into the floor. “What about it?”

“Well, I was thinking about Bumblebee, and how he oughtta be getting to the age where he needs more exercise, so I rigged a speaker system in there so you can listen to that godawful wailing you call music on your planet while yer teaching him to dance.”

For the second time that day, you find yourself absolutely floored by someone’s generosity on Bumblebee’s behalf.

“Ironhide…I don’t…I can’t even… thank you!” you finally manage to blurt out.

“Yer welcome.” he grins, clearly amused by your sputtering. “I set up a tiny obstacle course too.”

You bite your lip. “That might be jumping the gun a bit.”

“It’s got a tiny firing range.”

“That’s completely unnecessary.”

“With cat-shaped targets.”
“Oh my god.”

***************

Music?

Check

Mirror Ball?

Check

Ridiculous disco-themed outfit you’d been pressured into buying when you’d gone out to get the mirror ball?

Check, unfortunately.

After Ironhide had informed you of his gift, you had eagerly dropped what you were doing to retrieve Bumblebee. You sorely needed a break, and couldn’t think of a better way to blow off some steam then by prancing around in severely outdated clothing while provide your sparkling with some much needed exercise.

But for whatever reason, Bee is not having it today, and is resisting your efforts to teach him to Hustle at every turn.

Figures You think sourly, taking a deep breath, trying to keep your calm. Figures he’s getting fussy at the one bonding activity you share that doesn’t involve watching five hours of cephalopod mating footage or the social structure of zooplankton.

He’s just testing his limits. You remind yourself, though that realization would be infinitely more calming had Bee cared to test his limits on anyone other than you. He behaves himself perfectly for Optimus and Ratchet, though you suspect the later is because tends to placate him with goodies he
kept stashed on top of his supply cabinets. Hell, he even listened to *Jazz* on one occasion, when he’d passed by while Bee was refusing to take rations and offered to help.

“*Little mech’s just lookin’ for a change of pace, is all.*” he’d said as Bee contentedly sucked down his cube, while you, covered head to toe in energon, had resisted the urge to tear your hair out.

You let out a soft, frustrated growl, but shove your frustrations to the back of your mind and turn back to Bee, who is hunched over in the middle of the floor, wearing a peeved expression about as intimidating as a wet kitten.

“Alright Bee, let’s give it one more go.” you say, tugging at his servo, to which he promptly resists.

Beep

*No.*

“C’mon hun.”

Beep

*Want to stop.*

You grab under his arms, trying to scoot him back onto his pedes. “I’m serious Bee. Get up.”

Beep.

*Let’s stop.*

“Oh my god.” you hiss through clenched teeth as you hoist him up, to which he begins flailing and in doing so, manages to strike you across the face. Hard.

You yelp in surprise, and end up dropping him back on the floor. You rub the spot where he’d struck you, bewildered.

“Did you…did you just punch me?” you say, dumbstruck, your anger dissolving into exuberance far
faster than you’d like, because maybe he’s got some fight in him after all.

You little shit.

Bee fixes you with wide, guilty optics, seemingly wracked with guilt once he realized he’d struck you, and boops out a sorry as you get back to your feet. You pat him reassuringly on the helm.

“Pfft. You think that’s gonna put me down?” You put your fists up in front of your face, excitement you hadn’t felt since Rumble was in your care welling up inside you. Part of you is aware that this probably falls under the scope of awful parenting, that encouraging behavior like this, especially in a sweet little bot like Bee, is a terrible thing to do.

But an equally terrible thing to do, you reason, would be to let him grow up without the faintest idea of how to defend himself. You finally have an in, the opportunity to actually teach him something, and if there’s one thing you’d learned in your time as a mom, it’s how to wrestle a tiny metal child.

“You wanna go little guy?” you say, grinning like an idiot. “Put ‘em up.”

Bee blinks, confused, but actually raises his stubby servos in front of his face to mirror your own.

“Can you do this?” you ask, jabbing your right fist out in slow motion, nudging the side of his helm. “Try it.”

He doesn’t act right away, probably still confused as all getout that his tantrum had elected this kind of reaction, but mimics your movement, extending a tiny fist, slowly, that comes to rest against your chin.

“Beep.”

You hurt?

You shake your head. “I’m fine Bee.”
Why tears?

You wipe your eyes vigorously. “Those aren’t tears.” you say defiantly. “They’re liquid pride.” And that’s about 75% true. The possibility of teaching him how to fight, while wonderful, had also pulled memories of a certain tiny ninja bot to the surface of your mind, and you find yourself struggling to keep your composure.

A sharp, cheerful beep, not Bee’s kind, rips your attention away from your lesson. The data pad, which you’d left over in the corner emit’s a faint light, indicating a new message had come through.

You blow out a breath, get to your feet, and scoop up the pad, absolutely not looking forward to scrolling through more poorly translated jokes involving organic slurs or whatever bullshit complaint Ironhide saw fit to issue about your cat.

It’s from Optimus.

“-I came across a drive through movie theatre during my scouting mission, and was wondering if you’d like to accompany me to a viewing.”

You briefly recall the prediction Ratchet had woken you up over “A trip to the movies yield’s unexpected results” and find yourself fighting off the heebie jeebies. But not even the heebiest of jeebies can dull your enthusiasm about a date with bossbot, so you reply back as fast as your human fingers will allow you.

“Sure! How far away are you now?” you punch back, miraculously avoiding any spelling errors.

A pause. “About Twenty feet.”

What.

“Wait...what? Where are you?!”
Another pause. Your heart roars as another notification comes through.

“Outside door.”

You rush towards the door, which opens to reveal Optimus, who is positively beaming, a soft, playful smile on his face.

“Uh…” you begin, a flustered mess because damnit that was really sweet. “Hi.”

“Hello.” he begins, optics flitting up and down your body, probably taking note of your ridiculous outfit. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Just getting Bee some exercise.” you say, rubbing the back of your head sheepishly.

“I apologize for not giving you adequate time to prepare.”

“It’s no problem.” you say waving dismissively. “Just gimme a minute to change into something less ridiculous.”

He says nothing for a moment, blinking his optics.

“I do not mean to impose.” he begins. “But if it’s not too much trouble, may I request a particular frame covering?”

You blink, trying to wrap your mind around “frame covering”, before realizing he probably means clothes.

“Uh..sure!” you reply, “Which one?”

“During the meeting we held, you were wearing a flowing garment,” he begins. “I believe you referred to it as a ‘dress’?”
You think back to the meeting, trying to remember what you’d worn and then find yourself confused when you actually do.

“You actually liked that?” you ask, bewildered at the prospect of an alien who’s race only had the vaguest concept of clothing having any kind of preference.

“It was very becoming of you.” he pauses. “Although it may, perhaps, look most becoming on the floor of my quarters.”

Your mouth falls open. The data pad slips out of your hands and clatters to the floor.

“D-d-did you …“ you start, stuttering like an idiot. “Did you j-just imply what I think you implied?”

“I have.” he continues, his smile quirking into almost-smirk that makes your knees weak. “Though I believe that activity may be best delayed until we return.”

***

The nice thing about drive in theaters, is that it’s one of the few locations in which you’re able to spend time together in public without fear of being caught.

The not so nice thing about drive in theaters in the lack of choices in movies. Namely that there’s exactly one.

Not that you have anything against Godzilla. Or terrible dubs. You don’t really have a problem watching two giant monsters duke it out onscreen in the middle of a city while terrified citizens flees and scream in uninspired, choppy English voiceovers.

But one of the giant monsters is a robot. And as stupid as it is for Mecha Godzilla to trigger an internal debate over the definition of personhood, you find yourself nervously repeating Fujiyama’s choice of words over and over again in your mind instead of enjoying the movie.

At least Bumblebee's enjoying it. You’re both in Optimus’s cab, Bee situated in your lap so he can better see the screen, making thrilled noises as the giant reptile gets body slammed by his mechanical counterpart into a building, completely obliviously to your mental anguish. Does he consider them the same? You muse, wondering how anyone could draw a comparison between this adorable little
bot and a gargantuan metal giant built for the express purpose of fighting another giant and then, recalling exactly what Bee would grow up into, find yourself feeling much more lost than you’d care to admit.

A sharp grunt, which seems to emanate from all around you, breaks your concentration.

“Could you… please refrain from doing that while Bumblebee is with us?”

“Doing what?”

“Handling my parking break.”

You realize you had been absentmindedly worrying the parking break between your fingers while lost in thought, and wonder why exactly he wouldn’t want you touching it with Bumblebee in the vicinity and- oh.

Oh hell.

“Oh crap sorry sorry.” you squeak, immediately withdrawing your hand.

“Do not be. I should have warned you.”

Your face flushes horribly as you wonder what other erogenous zones you may have unintentionally triggered. “Is…is there anything else I shouldn’t touch while I’m in here?”

“The underside of my steering wheel is also…sensitive in that respect. However, I would not object to… pursuing this in a more private setting.”

If you weren’t already considered strange for finding a giant robotic life form attractive, you figure getting hot and bothered over the prospect of stripping down and stroking the insides of a peterbilt cab would be enough to brand you as certifiably insane. But hell if certifiable insanity isn’t fun.

“Just, um, for future reference.” you say, trying your best to calm down. “When you’re in this form,
where’s your interface array located?”

“…You are currently situated above it.”

Fuck

“You have been unusually quiet.” he starts, tactfully changing the subject. “Is something wrong?”

A sigh escapes your mouth. There’s no point in lying, perceptive as he is.

“I’m just…a little disenchanted with how my species portrays mechanical life.” you admit, gesturing towards the screen.

“It was my understanding that the mech portrayed was not sentient.”

“It’s not. He’s not.” You reply, correcting yourself. “But…we only ever show them as slaves, or war machines. Or both.”

“But not equals.”

You shake your head. “Almost never. Even in media that’s supposed to be non-violent, like stuff intended for kids, where we can’t show humans fighting or killing each other, we’ve got no problem depicting robots doing the same things, gruesomely, sometimes.”

“Because they are not human?”

You feel sick. Optimus lets out a heavy sigh.

“We have not exactly given your species much reason to see us as anything other than war machines.”
You snort. “If that were true I wouldn’t have to write a safety manual on interfacing to hand out to the new agents.”

“I’m sorry?”

“I…never mind.” you continue. “The thing is, even though the handful of us aware of your existence seem to like you guys, a lot, and I’m sure the rest of the world would too, I’m just worried about how they might like you. There were some people at the meeting that, while super excited to met you, were probably more interested in figuring out what makes you tick.”

“I assume you are referring to Dr. Fujiyama.”

The hair bristles on the back of your neck at the name. “ I am.”

His venting hitches and he lets out a quiet, contemplative sound. Probably the closest someone as polite as him would ever come to saying ‘Not this shit again.’ “I believe you may be feeling an unnecessary amount of apprehension toward him. He has done nothing to merit suspicion.”

“I know, I just…” you look down at the sparkling in your lap, enthusiastically clapping his servos at the explosions onscreen. “I want Bee to be able to go out and play with other kids without having to worry about wither or not they see him as an equal or some sort of cool toy, or be terrified someone’s gonna scoop him up and use him to reverse engineer weapons. I want him to have a childhood.”

“If anyone is to be held accountable for not affording Bumblebee a childhood, it is I.”

You open your mouth to tell him otherwise, but the words die on your tongue. He’s not wrong, not exactly. While he’s done everything in his power to keep both you and Bee safe and happy, that doesn’t negate that he’s the leader of a military faction and any offspring of his, by extension, would never be destined to grow up normally. Your dreams of sunshine and butterflies and apology BBQ’s were just that. Dreams.

Hopes thoroughly dashed, you lean back into the seat, trying to come up with something to break the thick, uncomfortable silence that had fallen. Bee does it for you, chirruping excitedly, but not at the movie. He’s looking out the side window, into the car parked next to you. You lean in to see what he’s looking at, and your heart jumps into your throat.
It’s a kid. Eyes wide, mouth open, staring directly back at Bumblebee. Short straw colored hair and wide blue eyes, he roughly resembles what Bee’s holomatter avatar looked like, though several years older, and you suddenly feel like an idiot for opting out of a disguise for him. You assumed it would be dark enough that it wouldn’t matter, and you would have been right, if not for this inconveniently observant child, who’s probably going to start shouting and kicking the back of his parent’s seat the second he breaks eye contact. Screw you kid.

Bee raises his servo in a clumsy wave. The blonde kid finally blinks and shuts his mouth, which curls into a smile. He waves back.

He then proceeds to lean back into his seat and continue watching the movie, without saying anything to anyone else in the car, as though he hadn’t just seen a baby robot. You blow out a breath in relief. Thank you kid.

You rest your head against the seat, allowing your eyes to drift back to the screen, forcing your anxiety on account of giant robot dinosaurs to the back of your mind.

Not everything has to be a battle. All things considered this night still safely falls under the definition of “Quality family time.” You still got a chance to get dressed up and see a movie with your robot boyfriend and robot son and you’re probably gonna get some sweet robot sex later.

“(y/n)” Optimus says, after several minutes of silence, snapping you out of your thoughts.

“Yeah?”

“I intended to say so earlier,” he begins. “But you look especially beautiful tonight.”

Scratch that, you’re absolutely gonna get some robot sex later. And that’s a good thing because you’ve taken it upon yourself to write the robot Kama Sutra and it’s up to you to make sure no fellow enthusiasts wind up grievously injured for their efforts.

“T-t-thank you.” you say, blushing furiously. You are so getting laid tonight, you pretty much get to brag about it for safety reasons, and that’s awesome. Everything is awesome. The cluster of sports cars with eye-burningly awful paintjobs that has just pulled up beside you both is awesome.

Wait.
“Optimus?” you start, quietly. “I don’t think those are cars.”

“Nor do I.” he replies, voice having dropped an octave.

"Do you recognize them?"

"I believe so, but in their earth-based altmodes I cannot be certain. They may very well be planning a stealth attack.”

A gargantuan mech chooses that exact moment to burst through the back of the screen, bellowing a completely unnecessary battle cry.

“…It appears I was mistaken.”

“I didn’t know this was a 3-D movie.” Slurs a clearly inebriated patron in the front row, seconds before the mech steps on him. Hard.

He lifts his pede and you have only seconds to turn Bee around and press his face into your chest, sparing him the sight of the crushed body and rapidly growing puddle of blood. The mech grimaces as it observes the entrails plastered to the underside of his pede “Gross. I stepped on a rat.”

Oh god.

“(y/n?)” Optimus asks quietly. “Are you buckled in?”

You swallow the bile rising in your throat. “No.”

“Then I apologize.”

“For wha-”
You get your answer as he peels out of the parking lot at 60 mph in reverse, slamming you into his dashboard. You see stars, but thankfully had managed to cushion Bee with your body. The mech wastes no time transforming into a near perfect replica of Optimus’s altmode, though with a different color scheme, and tears off to follow you, the rest of the vehicles close behind.

“Are you alright?” he asks once he’s turned onto the highway.

“Fine.” you say, clambering back onto the seat, clutching your head.

“I’ve already called for backup.” he says, anxiety bleeding through his otherwise calm tone. “However…I am afraid I cannot outrun them for long.”

“Who are they?”

“Stunticons.” he replies flatly. The one who murdered that human is Motormaster.” there’s a pause. “I cannot remain in this form. I’m going to have to engage them until help arrives.”

“You’re going to engage them alone?” you ask, making no effort to conceal the fear in your voice because ludicrous luck or no a five on one battle is pretty much a fancy word for suicide.

“I have no choice.”

He’s right, damnit. “I’m gonna have to make a run for it, aren’t I?”

“I’m going to slow down as much as possible at the upcoming curve and open my door, but you’ll need to exit while I’m still moving. I need you two to run as far as possible and hide, either I or another autobot will come find you.” Another pause. “I am sorry. Please, be careful.”

You swallow hard. “Don’t you dare die.”

“I do not intend to.”
“I’m serious.” you say, a hard ball forming in your throat. “I…I...uh.” you wrack your mind for an alternative for what you really want to say.

He slams on his brake. He opens his door. You’d reached the curve.

You’ve run out of time.

“Good luck!” you shout as you tumble out and hit the earth with a muffled thud. Mercifully you’d come into a wooded area, and the ground is covered in soft pine needles that break your fall, though you kind of wish you’d smacked your head to spare you the need to do it yourself.

“Good luck?” you think miserably as you flee into the woods. “Good luck?! Christ you may as well told him to eat slag.” That’s not true and you know it, but you still feel like a verifiable pansy for not being honest.

You dive behind the nearest tree once you’re certain you’re far enough away, poking your head out to observe the action. The rest of the hideously colored vehicles have transformed. You grit your teeth, expecting them to dog pile Optimus at the first opportunity, but they instead, rather awkwardly, form a circle around him.

“I, Dragstrip, should receive all of the credit for finding him!” Shouts the neon yellow and magenta one. “I tracked him down!”

You raise your eyebrow.

What.

“Well I’m Wildrider and I want to bust something up!” snarls the black and red one.

The hell.

“I’m Deadend and I’m honestly more concerned about the inevitable heat death of the universe.” another one says flatly.
“Primus, why don’t you just tell him your creation date and favorite color too?” Says the only one who’s sane enough not to speak like a comic book character given a single panel to introduce himself.

Thank you. This guy. This guy you like.

“Enough, all of ya!” the one Optimus had informed you was Motormaster shouts. “Stunticons! Combine to form-“

He stops mid sentence as an explosive round plows directly through Wildrider’s head and Ironhide comes into view, laughing like an idiot.

And here comes the cavalry.

The cavalry consists of Ironhide, Sideswipe, Sunstreaker and Powerglide, who comes tearing in overhead. Relief washes over you, followed by excitement, because damn if there isn’t anything more awesome in the entire universe then watching giant car robots fight.

Motormaster’s mouth falls open, optic twitching.

“…Nevermind. Stunticons, make slag outta them!”

All hell breaks loose. At least at first. After the initial clusterfuck of punching and kicking the carnage seems to have conveniently been divvied up into one on one battles. Mostly. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker are busy kicking Deadend back and forth between them like a soccer ball capable of existential dread, while Ironhide pistol-whips the only mech who hadn’t given his name. Powerglide drops into a spiraling nosedive, making a beeline towards Dragstrip. He transforms seconds before impact and plants the heel of his pede directly into his face, thus executing a literal flying jump kick and also probably the most kickass thing you’d ever seen.

And Optimus, of course, is fighting Motormaster. He’s unsheathed his axe, snapped his battle mask closed(and christ is he gorgeous with that mask on) He stands poised to attack, textbook definition of
badass, but doesn’t move forward.

“Motormaster, please, I must ask you to reconsider.”

“Get fragged!” the other mech snarls.

Optimus lets out a deep, exhausted sigh, before swinging the axe full-force against the side of his helm, sending him flying.

“I tried.”

The mech, after plowing through several trees, tumbles to a stop roughly three yards away from your hiding place. Shit. Your breath catches in your throat as he dizzily raises his helm. “Please don’t see me please don’t see me.” You think, flattening yourself against the ground around Bumblebee, trying to disappear into the forest floor.

Bee, who is having trouble ventilating through the pine needles, dirt, and dead leaves, sneezes. It’s an adorable sneeze, and you find it cosmically unfair something that cute could be functionally identical to a death sentence.

Motormaster, who had still been in the process of reorienting himself, jerks his helm in your direction, and his glowing red optics meet your eyes.

Fuck.

Your imitate reaction is to scream, and you do, hoping you’re still within hearing range of the autobots, but it the mech Ironhide had been fighting seems to have grown tired of the pistol whipping, had managed to tear said pistol from his servos, and had used it to blow off one of his pedes. Optimus had immediately come to his aid, and the other three are still locked in active combat.

You’re on your own.

“Well what do we have here?” Motormaster says, getting to his pedes. “Another rat? With a sparkling?” He grins wickedly. “So this is why Optimus made a run for it instead of fighting us on
the spot. And here I thought he was just bein’ a coward.”

You wrap your arms around Bee, jump to your feet and go tearing off in the other direction, cursing your luck, cursing the universe, cursing your own idiocy. *Should’ve taken the prediction more seriously.* You think ruefully, weaving in between trees at breakneck speed while the gargantuan mech follows you at a leisurely pace. You should’ve vowed never to leave the base again after establishing characters could die in this story.

Bee shivers in your arms, beeping incessantly. Long beeps. Warbling, scratchy beeps. Probably the closest he can come to actually screaming.

It then occurs to you that Bumblebee cannot, in fact scream. He can’t scream and that’s *not fair.* It’s not fair his carrier died, his sire’s the leader of an entire military faction with a target visible to the known universe painted on his back, not fair his mom’s a squishy organic incapable of protecting him in any meaningful way. That’s not fair because he’s an *infant* and infant’s shouldn’t have enemies but he does and *fuck this.* *Fuck everything. Fuck Motormaster in particular.*

So you decide that if these are your final moments, *both* of yours, then there’s no reason to spend them terrified. Fear does not help you. Fear causes your joints to stiffen, limits movement, clouds your brain with adrenaline. Fear is *useless* to you right now, and if you’re going to die here you’re going to die doing what a good mama bear would do.

Keeping your cub happy.

“It’s like dancing Bee!” you say cheerfully, swinging your body to the side to narrowly dodge a giant pede. “We’re doing the hustle!” dirt sprays in your face as he uproots the tree you’d hidden behind. “Just do the hustle with me Bee!” you clutch his helm against your chest as you skid sideways and duck, Motormaster having thrown said tree directly at you.

“Do the hustle!” you sing at the top of your lungs as the oak lands with a heavy *thoom* behind you, plowing straight through a briar patch to avoid his servo by mere inches. You skid to a stop when you reach the precipice of a hill, a long, steep descent your only clear path ahead. It’s equal parts rock and dirt, and you frantically try to determine the slope, and what your chances are of traversing it without breaking most of your bones.

“Doo doo doo do do do do do do do!” you keep singing, covering as much of Bee’s body as you can with your own as you roll yourself down the hill sideways. “Do do doo” *ouch* “Do doo doo” *fuck.* “Doo doo do do!” *Goddamnit.*
Your off-kilter serenading comes to a halt when you tumble to the bottom of the hill and collide directly with the support beam of an old cabin. The impact knocks Bee out of your arms, and sends him skidding several feet away. You wheeze, clenching your teeth through the pain and force yourself upright to look beyond the cabin to find the clearest escape route, but considering the 50 or so foot sheer drop into the river below, you’re pretty sure you’ve boogied your way to the end of the line. You’re not sure what kind of asshole considered the edge of a cliff to be prime real estate, but if you make it out of this alive you’re going to track him down and have his zoning permit revoked.

Motormaster slides down the hill that had kicked your ass effortlessly. Maybe not another cosmic middle finger, but cosmic salt in the wound nonetheless. The ground shakes as he corners you on the shoddy, creaking porch of this equally shoddy house. You scan your immediate surroundings for something, anything you could conceivably use as a distraction and spy a rock, knocked loose from the foundation a few inches away.

At the angle his helm is tilted at, there’s not much hope at hitting his face with a direct throw. But if six months of throwing darts and your half-assed attempts at playing ninja had taught you anything it’s that there’s more than one way to hit a target.

“Please work please work please work.” you think furiously, exhaling a long withheld breath, and chucking the rock directly at the overhang.

What follows is a violation of physics so thorough Newton would break down and weep. The rock ricochet’s off the overhang, off the side of his helm, whizzes back at a 90 degree angle to hit the tin roof with a resounding plink, and then in a movement you’re certain involved supernatural forces, bounces directly back up into his left optic.

There’s a brief silence, in which you can hear the distinct crinkling of his optic glass shatter. Motormaster pauses for a moment, expression of utter disbelief mirroring your own, then looses a deafening howl of pain, clutching the now profusely bleeding socket with his servo. He stumbles just enough to collide with the side of the cabin, and promptly tumbles over with an earth-shattering thoom.

The luck, it would seem, is still in effect.

“Just don’t get cocky this time.” you think furiously, because while he honestly seems like the kind of villain to show up just long enough to present a threat before disappearing off the face of the earth, the last time you made assumptions could not have conceivably ended worse.
Don’t get cocky, but don’t get scared either.” All things considered you do still have a luck generating giant robot for a boyfriend who’s also probably the main character. As scared as you are, you’re also pretty certain both you and Bumblebee are plot-relevant enough to not get killed of by a season one bad guy. Optimus would, most likely, show up last minute to plant his fist in his dangerous-but-not-deadly face.

So then that leaves you with only one option.

Get angry.

And damn if there isn’t a better time to get angry. The shockwave from the combiner’s collision with the earth has knocked a portion of the rotted roof lose and sends a pile of debris crashing down towards Bumblebee. It misses his helm by inches, but scrapes his tiny arm with a sickening screech. Bee squeals, equal parts pain and terror. You feel something deep within you snap.

You should probably be more scared than you are, but you’d activated the bear part of mama bear, and you’re less concerned with your own life then you are about making this titanic asshole miserable as much as you can as long as you can for having the audacity to hurt your cub.

You might not have your ballistic knives with you, or throwing knives, or kitchen knives, or anything that could be considered a weapon, but what you do have is a “fuck this” attitude, enough fury to power a neutrino star, and intimate knowledge as to how to ruin a giant robot’s day.

While he’s writhing on the ground you scan his frame for any possible plating gaps. You notice a narrow divot between his helm and shoulders where wires and cabling are visible, and recall how disoriented Soundwave had become when you attempted to sever them.

Better than nothing.

You steel your nerves, spit some of the dirt and pine needles out of your mouth, channel your inner maternal ursine and fling yourself at his neck. You wrap your hands around the topmost cluster of cables and pull as hard as you can, and while the gargantuan mech roars in pain they do not break.

You bite the cables as hard as you can, and in one fluid motion jerk your head backwards and pull in both directions with your hands.
You’re given roughly a nanosecond to admire your handiwork as the cable finally splits in a frayed tear, before your vision goes white, every nerve ending in your body on fire as the electricity surges through you.

You’re knocked ass-backwards in a twitching heap, struggling for breath. To your surprise Motormaster’s howls of pain have dissolved into laughter. He turns to face you, face a ghoulish caricature of broken glass and energon stains “Looks like the rat doesn’t handle electricity very well.” he cackles. “Does she?”

Despite the severity of the situation, you can’t stop your own exhausted laughter from tumbling out of your mouth.

“This rat survived Optimus overloading in her.” you say, making no effort to conceal the shit eating grin plastered on your face. “That was nothing.”

His expression, which runs the gamut from confused, enraged, horrified, and once again enraged, is priceless. Priceless and terrifying, because the loss of an optic and a neck cable, far from being enough to hinder a mech his size, is absolutely enough to bump him from angry to furious. He gets to his pedes as you scramble to sweep a violently shaking Bee back into your arms. You struggle to get to your feet, only to find your legs refusing to function.

Exhaustion, it seems, has finally taken it’s toll. Your limbs are screaming and limp and refusing to follow your orders to move damnit and the most you can do is scoot weakly backwards. Even bears have limits. You think bitterly, curling protectively around Bee in a last ditch protective measure.

“Any last words, rat?”

“Yeah.” You spit. “Get fucked.”

He pauses for a moment, blinking his remaining optic.

“If you were gonna say hello you should’ve done it before I ran you off the road.” He snarls. “This is a time for goodbyes.”

You fight back the urge to slam your head against the ground. “Goddamnit.” But also breathe a sigh of relief, because there’s no way he could possibly end your life on a one liner that weak.
“Uh, I mean” you begin, searching your brain for the analogous cybertronian explicative. “Get fragged.”

He snarls in rage. He lunges at you with a gargantuan metal hand. But before he can crush you both into oblivion he catches an equally gargantuan fist to the side of his face.

_And there he is._

Optimus, true to form, has showed up just in time to permanently rearrange the stunt icon leader’s facial features. And as expected as his arrival is, you can’t help but shout in jubilation as the tides turn in your favor and you once again get a front row seat to the best spectator sport this side of the galaxy.

Well, less “spectator sport” and more “curbstomp battle.” Whatever mercy Optimus may have been willing to extend to the mech had vanished the second he made a grab at you and Bumblebee. You could give a blow by blow, but it’d read more like an autopsy report.

It then occurs to you that this is the first time you’d actually seen him angry. He’d been more frustrated than infuriated when Megatron had showed up to piss on your parade at the zoo. Probably because you weren’t in immediate danger and Bumblebee was far from harm’s way. Now that a decepticon had missed the opportunity to crush you both by mere inches, it seems to have flipped some sort of switch in his processor that circumvented his gentle giant persona and activated a fresh-out-of-fucks to give berserker.

_Papa bear mode._

And holy hell, is papa bear mad.

Motormaster attempts to pull himself upright only to have his helm driven back into the dirt as Optimus plants a pede on his back. He moves to relive him of his weapon but when the mech refuses to relinquish his grip Optimus simply wraps both servo’s around his arm and in one smooth motion, tears it clean off, where it parts from his shoulder in a shower of sparks and a spray of energon.

The combiner, either still in shock from the pain of losing a limb, or choosing to ignore it, takes the second or so pause in which Optimus had tossed the arm aside, to attempt to swing around and kick him, but Optimus catches his pede before it has a chance to make contact with the back of his helm,
and twists it. Hard.

It doesn’t part from the rest of the leg, but if the sick crunching sound and exposed wires are any indicator it’s rendered useless all the same. The shock, it seems, has worn off, because Motormaster is howling in pain again. Deep, guttural barking, tapering off into wheezing bursts and-

He’s laughing. The sick fuck is laughing.

“So the rumors are true. You have sired a sparkling.” Motormaster’s grin widens. “And have found willing organic vermin to care for it.”

Optimus has stopped his assault, but keeps his canon pointed directly at him. “That vermin was able to successfully incapacitate you, of her own volition.” he says, taking note of his ruined optic and dammit you shouldn’t be blushing like a schoolgirl at a time like this, but you are.

The mech growls, infuriated, but minus two limbs is in no position to retaliate physically. “Why haven’t you killed me yet?”

“Unlike your faction, I do not kill unless necessary.” he says flatly. “You are no longer a threat, and may one day redeem yourself, unlikely as it may seem.”

Motormaster snarls. “You’re going to regret letting me live, Prime”

“You are far from the first mech to make that threat.”

“Maybe not. But I’ll be the first that knows about your sparkling.”

Optimus freezes.

It then dawns on you that up until now, a decepticon had never laid optics on Bumblebee before. He’d never come within Lazerbeak’s line of sight and you’d handed him off to Ratchet before Starscream had tried to introduce himself and Soundwave with awkward sexual metaphors.
Bumblebee had been the autobot’s collective best held secret.

Until now. Now this psycho with a hard-on for wanton destruction is going to march his charred, beaten aft right up to Megatron and divulge everything about the worst weapon Optimus could have possibly made to be used against himself.

Optimus says nothing for a moment, narrowed optics trained on the sparking, mangled heap of a mech splayed out on the ground before him.

“(y/n)?” he asks you without turning his helm. “Please, cover Bumblebee’s optics.”

There’s a long, pregnant pause, in which the humidity noticeably thickens, and you become painfully aware of the pine needles and dirt digging into your skin. You turn Bee in your arms, pressing his tiny helm against your chest with both hands.

“Okay.”

Two things happen so fast, that it’s only in the following minutes you’re able to slow down the scene in your mind and decipher what actually happened.

Motormaster rears his head, twists his torso, and lunges out toward you and Bee with his remaining arm, and before he has the chance to fully extend it, Optimus shoves his cannon into his intake and fires it, where it ignites inside his fuel tank and explodes.

You’re rather gruesomely reminded of an urban legend concerning poprocks and soda as his entire upper frame becomes engulfed in flames. He convulses in his death throes, and as a strangled, static-filled groan bursts from his incinerated vocalizer it dawns on you that he’s still alive. Optimus, quickly realizing his error, forces his helm down with the tip of his cannon and you can only watch wide-eyed and slack jawed as the combiner takes a second round of cybertronian lead to the face.

His entire frame seizes, then finally goes limp.

The silence is thicker now than it’s ever been, with Optimus regarding the corpse, expression unreadable through his battle mask. What feels like an eternity passes before he kneels down and gathers the frame in his arms, almost gently, and brings it to the edge of the cliff, where he releases it into the river below.
“I…regret it ended this way.” he says, far too quiet for your liking, and you’re not sure if he’s talking to you or the now deceased decepticon, whose frame hits the water with a resounding splash that reverberates off the canyon walls.

Sharp, crackling static breaks the tension. You jump, nerves still sky high from the fight, before realizing the sound is coming from his wide band, probably knocked on at some point during the fight.

“Hey Optimus, you there?” comes Powerglide’s voice

“I am.” he replies, appearing genuinely relived to have his attention diverted. “What is it?”

“Um, well, you’re not gonna believe this but, uh Sunstreaker took a nasty spill-”

“Is he in need of medical assistance?”

“…No he’s fine. It’s not so much that he fell, but what he fell into.”

“…Please elaborate.”

“Well, long story short, we found an energon deposit.”
Blow your mind

Chapter Summary

In which you, the reader, gets completely fed up with shitty foreshadowing.

Chapter Notes

I KNOW this was supposed to come out like three weeks ago and I'm sorry it took so long. I just started a new job and have been trying to schedule everything so that I still get time to write. I think it's working, but things are gonna be sorta slow while I work out the kinks and try to streamline everything. Thank you for being patient with me.

Also thank you so much for continuing to leave comments. They mean the fucking world to me. All of them. And the fanart...I can't even...I have no idea how to respond to it. I want to attach them to the fic but I need to check with all the individual artist and figure out how the coding works on this site first. I just am fucking floored by all the support I've gotten for this 74,275+ word coping tool. I love you guys. You're awesome.

Thirdly I want to apologize for focusing so much on this fic and neglecting the others in favor of it. I swear the next update to come out is going to be the Ratchet fic I promised, followed by an update to Blackbird.

Please enjoy.

“An energon deposit you say?”

The medbay is as crowded as it’s ever been since arriving on earth, though it’s not as if that were saying much. Other than the odd self inflicted ailment or injuries incurred from minor skirmishes between troops, Knockout has had the room almost entirely to himself.

Which, given how “cozy” (uncomfortably cramped) the hab suites were aboard the Nemesis, suited him just fine. More room to work on his pet projects, more room to detail himself, more room to sulk in mind numbing boredom.

He can’t exactly say he’s enjoying the company of four severely beaten soldiers, a freshly offlined corpse, and a certain surprisingly disinterested air commander, but it makes for a welcome change of pace regardless.
“That is correct.” Dragstrip recites firmly, though anxiety is clear in the proud mech’s voice.

Starscream hums, still not bothering to look Dragstrip’s way. “And you just let them take it?”

Dragstrip gulps, audibly, but maintains his infuriated expression. “We didn’t let them take anything. That pretty ‘bot frontliner of theirs fell into it.”

“At which point you were too thoroughly defeated to do anything about it, no doubt.” Starscream muses in a voice which, while still dripping with venom, comes across as completely disinterested.

The mech winces, but is cut off before he has a chance to defend himself further. “Enough with your pontificating. Just file a report as soon as you get that ghastly wound on your face welded shut. Feel free to embellish it.” He continues, waving a servo dismissively. “If Lord Megatron gets wind that your defeat was every bit as thorough as it was humiliating, he’ll be far less lenient than I.”

Dragstrip blinks, disbelief that Knockout could feel across the room, but he ultimately offers no more resistance as he walks himself to the nearest medical berth and unceremoniously plops down, jaw unhinged.

“You have something to say doctor?”

For the first time that night Starscream has peeled his optics away from the screen and regards the medic with a sort of amused placidity. It’s then Knockout realizes his own mouth is hanging open.

“Nothing of importance.” he begins, nervously clearing his throat, struggling to come with an acceptable combination of words. “I am merely surprised at your…generosity in dealing with the stunticon’s failure.”

“Would you rather me add to your workload by doling out physical punishment to our already grievously injured troops?”

“Not at all.” he says, waving his servos in a defensive gesture. “It was simply unexpected.” And rather refreshing at that.
Starscream sighs, wings drooping to half mast. “Did you honestly believe I sent them out there with any expectations for success? They were a control group.”

Knockout fights the urge to let his jaw drop open again.

“I’m…sorry?”

“If I’m going to be tasked with something as ridiculous as measuring Prime’s uncanny good fortune than I’m going to do it right.” he says, bitterness heavy in his voice. “I have, in fact, established that we decepticons fair miserably against him 99.9% of the time, no matter how high the odds are stacked in our favor. Not only did they come out of that encounter unscathed, they managed to offline two of our solders and fall face first into an energon supply. We now have enough information to deduce that this is likely not, in fact, coincidence.”

Knockout’s processor comes to a screeching halt. He’d heard through the grapevine that Megatron had set his SIC on a completely ludicrous mission, but given how ludicrous the mission was, he hadn’t expected it to be more than a rumor. He’d expected Starscream taking it seriously even less.

“So, if I’m understanding this correctly,” Knockout begins slowly. “You’re saying Big O’s got some sort of… ability that operates beyond our scope of control?”

Starscream rolls his optics at his eccentric choice in nicknames, but continues regardless. “Correct.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, how exactly do you intend to work around something like that?”

Starscream says nothing for a beat, drumming his talons along the console.

“Think of it like a story.” he says at last. “A simple story, in which the morality is decidedly black and white. In this narrative, white I.e. “Prime”, overwhelmingly comes out on top, while we, the black-” he uses finger quotes to accentuate that one. “-are doomed to failure after humiliating failure due to our role as antagonists. In this situation, there is simply no outcome in which we will succeed.”

Knockout receives several warnings in his HUD concerning his overheated processor, and decides to abort the attempt to wrap his mind around something this preposterous, least he suffer a cascade failure. “And how do we go about changing something like that?”
Another pause. Starscream finally turns to face the medic, a wry smile weaving over his perfect mouth.

“We add shades of gray.”

A shout brings Knockout’s attention to the screen his commander had been so engrossed it. It’s footage depicting a young human male, riding atop a furry, serpentine, somehow flight capable creature as the two fly through the night sky.

“If you don’t mind me asking, my liege,“ He begins, optics narrowed in confusion. “What exactly is it that you’re watching?”

“A form of human entertainment.” Starscream says. “You’ll notice that the protagonist tends to fair overwhelmingly well against his foes in most of them. Why, we could even draw a corollary, if we felt so inclined. It would stand to reason that if we are at a significant disadvantage due to our…role in this story, then we could benefit from enlisting the help of those without roles. “

“The aforementioned “shades of gray?”

“You’re quick to catch on, doctor.” Starscream says, turning his attention back to the movie.

A comfortable silence has fallen. Most of the chattering had ceased. When he turns his helm to see why, he finds his patients, save for the blue mech, are all watching the screen.

The human child was now attempting to traverse a swamp on horseback, and was shouting tearful encouragement at his horse to push onward while it actively sinks into the earth.

“One day we will all succumb to the pull of the void.” Deadend interrupts, electing growls of protest from his gestalt mate.

“I’m gonna shove my fist up your void if you don’t shut up!” Dragstrip snarls.
As much as he’d like to join his engrossed patients, Knockout’s processor is absolutely swimming from the absurdity of the situation, and he feels the desperate ache to latch onto something familiar to reorient himself. So he decides to check on the navy blue mech, the only one who wasn’t prone to loudly announcing his name at odd intervals. He’d taken the broken gestalt bond far worse than the others, and had been brought in as a silent, shaking wreck with a haunted look glowing behind his yellow optics. He’d administered a sedative in an effort to calm him down roughly an hour ago, and was hoping to see some improvement.

"How are you doing, er-"

"Breakdown." he answers, gazing up at the ceiling, lazily swatting at something in his peripheral.

"Right. Forgive me. Has the sedative taken effect yet? I gave you enough to put down a dinobot, you should be positively flying by now."

"Lubricate in my intake and tell me you love me."

"...I'm going to take that as a 'yes'."

***

Bee won’t go to sleep.

He’d spent the entirety of the ride back to base plastered against your chest, tiny servos gripping your dress hard enough to tear holes. He wouldn’t let go when you’d stepped out of the cab, hadn’t let go when Ratchet had looked over his (mercifully) small injuries, hadn’t let go when you and Optimus had brought him back to his room.

But when you finally do manage to pry him away from you, you immediately wish you hadn’t. Tiny, hiccupping beeps wrack his trembling frame as lubricant pools in the corners of impossibly wide optics.
He’s crying. Damnit he’s crying and you don’t know how to make him stop.

Optimus rubs the back of his helm with a single digit, murmuring something almost inaudibly quiet in cybertronian. For a moment you can’t take your eyes off his servo, finding it so surreal that the same hands that had torn a mech to shreds less than an hour ago are now soothing a terrified infant.

“Bumblebee, you can relax. We are in no danger.” and Bee might not be calming down but you are, you can’t help yourself when he uses that voice, radiating warmth and calm, coaxing sleepiness out from the recesses of your mind.

Bee stares at him when he says it and for a moment he stops hiccupping, but the tears still flow and he shudders all the same.

“Beep.”

Scared

“There is no need to be.”

“Beep.”

Still Scared.

“You are safe. We all are.”

“Bee hun it’s alright.” you say finally, unable to bear the display any longer and pulling him back into your lap, trying your best to gently wipe the tears away. “You’re safe now. We’re safe. Big mean decepticon can’t get you now.”

This is probably the first time you’ve ever genuinely had trouble getting him to sleep. He’s been overwhelmingly easy to handle most of the time, and had even managed to calm you down once during your lowest, and you feel somewhat out of practice in the art of getting children to sleep. You think back to your early nights with Rumble, gritting your teeth through the warm, bittersweet wave of emotion that sweeps through you at his memories. He had cried constantly, deafeningly, until
you’d rocked him and sang him to sleep.

You rock scared babies to shut them up. You sing to shut them up. Remember this for next time, idiot.

“This is Ground Control To Major Tom—” you start slowly, softly. “You’ve really made the graaade—” you begin to rock back and forth in your seated position. “And the paper’s want to know whose shirt you weaaar, now it’s time to leave the capsule if you daare”

Optimus regards you silently, using the servo he had been stroking Bee with to cradle your back, and you lean in to him as you continue, swaying the rapidly tiring sparkling in your arms.

It’s working. you think, smile creeping on your lips as the tears trickle to a stop and his optics begin to shutter sleepily. “For hereeeeee, I am sitting in my tin can, Faaar above the world. . .” you trail off, lowering your voice into a whisper. ‘Planet earth is blue, and there’s nothing I can do…”

You wait until his optics flutter the rest of the way shut and his venting evens out into long, peaceful breaths before you dare stop singing. But when his optics stay shut you let out a long withheld sigh of relief. Thank you, Rumble.

“It appears he’s finally slipped into recharge. Optimus says finally, hardly above a whisper.

You let out a quiet, good natured snort. “At least he listens to me when it’s time to sleep.”

He sighs, optics glued to the slumbering sparkling in your lap. “It is true that Bumblebee tends to behave himself around me, but when it comes to calming him down—” he turns to face you, mouth set in a sweet but exhausted smile. ”-That seems to be something that only his mother is capable of.”

You hesitate for a moment, bewildered at why he’d chosen this exact moment to bring up his deceased spark mate. But your bewilderment gives way to sober exhilaration as you realize he means you.

You stare intently down at Bumblebee’s sleeping form, and now Neelix’s, who has curled around him in a fluffy, protective ball. Anything to tear your eyes away from his optics, because if you look any longer you’re going to forget how to breath again.
"Damnit I told you to stop making me fall in love with you."

***

“So what now?” you ask him as he slides the door shut behind you. “We’ve still got the whole night ahead of us.”

Optimus says nothing, staring at the opposing wall with exhausted intensity.

“I am required to inform Agent Fowler about this incident.” he says finally with a tired ex-vent. “And to tell him that a human was allowed to perish under my watch.”

You make a noise of disgust at the memory” RIP drunk guy I hope you’re setting up grotesque jokes in heaven.” but also because oh my god is he actually trying to take the blame for this?”

“You didn’t allow anything.” you reason. “That asshole just showed up and smashed him like a bug."

“That human should not have died…It was my poor judgment that allowed the situation to escalate. If I had engaged the stuticons the moment I suspected they were near, instead of fleeing.”

“*He is.*”

“Stop. Just…stop.” you say, digging your nails into your head. “I’m not going to let you beat yourself up over this. You had your infant son with you. Anyone else would have done the same in your position.”

“There is no one else in my position.” you feel your heart sink at just how tired he sounds uttering those words. “Primes do not have sparklings, and are generally never in a position where creating them would be possible. I am… rather at a loss for a frame of reference.”

You open your mouth to correct him, but are once again reminded how woefully little you know of his culture, let alone the weight of his designation.
“Look, “ you say finally. “Raising a normal kid in a normal family is hard enough. You have to do it in the middle of a war on an alien planet with only another weird squishy alien to help you out all while leading an entire military faction and maintaining diplomatic relationships with said planet and trying to keep those giant asshole murderbots from killing everything in sight. “

“I am aware that this may be due in part my…uncanny good fortune, but I have never had my hand forced in this manner.” he says, weariness tempered behind his even tone. “I am…trying.”

“Trying?” you ask, incredulous. “The fact that you haven’t had a nuclear meltdown is impressive enough. But despite all of this you went the extra mile and still managed to take me out on a date. You’re not just “trying” you’re succeeding. You’re doing a damn good job and I’m not gonna let anyone tell you otherwise, especially not yourself.”

He turns to face you, blinking, and you watch as at least some of the exhaustion falls from his face.

“I was…unaware of how badly I needed to hear that.” he says, giving you an soft smile. “You are too kind.”

“No, I’m honest. Brutally honest.” you say, rubbing the back of your head sheepishly. “We had this conversation already, remember?”

“It seems I was in need of a reminder.” he says, kneeling down and offering his hand “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” you say, gripping his thumb for dear life as he brings you level with his face, feeling your heart speed up at the proximity. It slams into overdrive when a sharp, crackling sound pierces the air.

*Wideband* you think as he presses a digit over his audial receptor. *I hope he remembered to turn it off.*

“Optimus, sir?”

“Prowl?”
“Am I interrupting anything?”

“I am free to speak. What is it?”

“Well, I’ve just received word from Agent Fowler. We’ve been officially granted asylum in this country.”

Your heart slams into your ribcage at warp speed. Optimus’s optics widen to impossible proportions.

“You are certain?”

“Yes. Also Fowler specifically requested that I tell (y/n) that it was largely due to Dr. Fujiyama’s involvement, and ask her if she is capable of inserting her foot into her mouth.”

You make a mental note to clock Fowler across the face before hugging him. You still don’t want Dr. “not as bad as your thought.” Fujiyama within a hundred yards of Bumblebee, but honestly can’t find it in yourself to give a shit right now. Bee is going to be able to play with other children. Bee is going to be able to have friends. You have done everything within your power to secure him a childhood. You’ve made bears everywhere proud.

“You don’t actually want me to put my foot in my mouth do you?” you ask Optimus pleadingly. “Because I still don’t trust that guy.”

“I…do not require….such a display.” Optimus says, seemingly having trouble forming coherent sentences through his elation. “I… could not have possibly done this without you. And I am remiss that I have inadequate means with which to show you my gratitude.”

You open your mouth to tell him that he doesn’t need to, that you fully consider him and Bee and Ratchet and everyone else family and you’d gladly move mountains for them any day of the week, but a far more exciting option forms in the back of your mind, one you’re sure you’d both find agreeable.

“Well…I can think of at least one thing you can do for me.” you say, fighting the urge to dissolve into a stuttering mess.
“Anything.”

“Since we’ve got the rest of the night to ourselves,” you attempt what you can only hope is a coy, sexy smile. “Wanna go celebrate?”

He looks at you, optical ridges knitting in analytical concern. For a moment you wonder if you’d somehow grievously offended him, but it’s only a moment, before you find yourself knocked ass-backwards off your feet as his EM flares and crashes over you with the force of a tsunami.

“Should…should I take that as a yes?” you ask dizzily, laying plastered against the palm of his hand.

“Forgive me, I have been reigning in my field ever since we returned.” he admits. “I wasn’t expecting you to be open to the idea, given the circumstances.”

“Yeah, well, I am.” you say, panting. “I figure we could both use some R&R after what just happened.”

“R&R?”

“Nevermind. So you’re down to ‘face?’”

An amused chuckle escapes his vocalize. “As your kind says, I am most certainly ‘DTF’.”

You’re not sure wuther to laugh or swoon, but you’re certain you’re talking to the only being in the known universe who could make something that stupid sound so hot.

“As much as I hate to interrupt you two-” comes a disembodied voice “-I feel like I’m morally obligated to inform you two that I’m pretty sure the entire base can hear you.”

Your face might not be made of metal, but you’re pretty sure your expression of dawning horror matches Optimus’s exactly.
“It appears I have neglected to shut off my wideband.” he says slowly, pouring every shred of his self control into not visibly cringing. “Can I assume this is Chip?”

“And Fowler.” he adds. “And Moondancer and Bonbon and Skeletor and-”

“We get it!” you cut him off. “How the hell did you get on the autobot’s wideband?”

“Accidentally. Fowler just gave us all walkie talkies, and we’re still working out all the kinks. This was the first channel we tried. I was on my way to give you one, but it sounds like it might not be the best time.”

“Understatement of the stellar cycle.” Astoria scoffs. “She’s supposed to be writing the robot Kama Sutra isn’t she? You’re interrupting field research!”

“As important as that is,” comes Fowler’s voice “We’ve got an all-hands on deck situation at the drive in theatre, and that takes priority over learning how to get the ‘bot’s engine’s revving. Marissa’, I want you to teach these rookies how to identify a weather balloon.”

You slap your hand to your face and groan loud enough that it’s audible over the radio. Someone laughs at your expense.

“Who was that?” you snap.

“Um…” Astoria starts. “Torpedo?”

“Can you punch him for me?”

“I can have Skeletor punch him for yo-”

“Enough.” Fowler says firmly. “I want you all in my office in five, that’s an order.”

“Is that what you’re calling the cupboard in their ration’s hall with a human sized hole cut out of it?” asks Chip.
“…It’s under construction.”

Chip sighs. “Look, Fowler, I have more experience than, er, Marissa does in this department. I’ll handle the onsite training for the new agents. Marissa, please just finish writing that guide.”

Your jaw drops open, finding yourself once again floored by Chip’s generosity.

“I…don’t know what to say.” you tell him. “You’re really doing me a solid here.”

“You can thank me by using your not-ridiculous name to buy me a round trip plane ticket to Honolulu because I am taking a fucking vacation.” he says bluntly, followed by the distinctive blip to indicate he’d turned his radio off.

Optimus, who had been taking both the embarrassment of being overheard and the off-color conversation through his own audial receptors with an almost sage-like serenity, makes a noise like he’s clearing his intake.

“Your partner has shown exceeding generosity despite his reservations.”

“That’s Chip for you.” you say. “Equal parts considerate and disgusted.”

He hums in agreement. “Since the need for your presence has been annulled, may I suggest we proceed with the ‘R&R?’”

“You pick up on earth euphemisms pretty fast.” you smile. “And yes. Hell ye-”

“Prahm!”

You whip your head around to watch as Ironhide comes limping down the corridor at breakneck speed, still minus a pede from the fight earlier.
“Optimus raises an optical ridge. “I cannot imagine that Ratchet has cleared you as fit for duty in your condition.”

“He hasn’t.” Ironhide pants. “Red Alert picked up a single decepticon signal about three miles away from here.”

You fight the urge to scream and tear your hair out.

“Is it headed in our direction?”

“Naw, it actually left almost as soon as it showed up. But we need to do a parameter sweep just in case.”

“I am not going to allow you to accompany me while injured.” Optimus says flatly. “Return to the med bay immediately, and if you see Jazz on the way back tell him to meet me outside.”

Ironhide nods in agreement and turns to leave, but flashes you a lighting fast shit-eating grin before hobbling out of sight.

“Oh my god.” you grumble, digging your fingers into your head. “This timing could not get any worse.”

“I believe a more accurate version of that statement would be that Ironhide’s timing could not get any worse.”

You raise an eyebrow. “Wait…do you mean?”

He ex-vents, expression an amusing mélange of frustration and sheepishness.

“Ironhide was perfectly capable of asking Ratchet to com any available autobots and requesting them to go on patrol. He did not require permission.” He shakes his helm in disbelief. “It appears he is engaging in a behavior your species refers to as “cockblocking.”
You say nothing for a moment, surprised that “cockblocking” is even a word in his vocabulary, then smack your palm against your face upon remembering the shit-eating grin.

“He came tearing out of the med-bay on one foot just to interrupt us?” you groan “That asshole is making a sport out of this!”

Optiumus’s frustrated expression gives way to a wry smile. “Rest assured, we will have ample opportunity to extend the same courtesy when his spark mate returns.”

You uncover your face, mouth falling open in stunned silence that he would actually suggest that form of retaliation, but your confusion gives way to jubilation as you ponder the endless scenarios in which you could prevent Ironhide from getting robot nookie.

“Oh my god this is going to be awesomet!” you squeal. “We could lock Neelix in his room while they’re ‘facing so he pees on everything. No, wait, let’s go back to the zoo and get a lion. No, wait, all the lions.”

“That, while effective, may be a tad excessive.” he says, mirth shining in his optics nonetheless. “I’m going to send you the access code to my quarters on your data pad. You can wait for me there.”

“Alright.” you say, as he gently sets you down “Don’t take too long.”

“I do not intend to.” he says as he turns to leave, but pauses midstep.

“I must inquire as to what “guide” Chip was referring to.”

Oh hell. “Oh that uh…” you rub the back of your head sheepishly. “Well, it turns out there’s actually a few people interested in doing what we’re doing.”

“In what manner?”

“Uh…In the ‘lights off, clang clang’ manner.” you say, making air quotes. “Chip convinced me to write up a safety guide, so nobody gets hurt during a ‘close encounter’”
You feel your face heating up furiously. You’d been so eager to nail down the case and keep robot/human relationships at their absolute maximum that you’d totally neglected to ask him wither or not he was comfortable with you sharing the details of your berthroom antics. *Probably a dick move.*

“Don’t get me wrong, I wasn’t exactly sold on the idea either.” You say, putting up your hands defensively, trying not to wilt under his gaze. “I like our privacy. But the relations between our species are so new, good, but new, I don’t want anyone getting hurt.”

“I am not admonishing you.” he says at last. “You have shown exceptional foresight in deeming this necessary.”

*Whew.* You blow out a breath, reminding yourself yet again that despite his position of authority, he is, in fact, laid back as *hell.*

“And in the interest of providing as thorough instruction as possible—” he begins, mouth curving the into the closest you’ve ever seen him get to a smirk “—I fully intend to give you something to write about.”

***

His quarters, as you’d expected, are spotless. That much you’d expected, and had been able to see through the relative darkness last time you’d been in here.

What you hadn’t seen were the enormous floor to bottom shelves, filled almost entirely with data pads, and, bizarrely enough, some tastefully preserved mechafauna, lending it the feel of a futuristic castle library.

There’s a shelf near the end of his berth that seems to get more use than the others, judging by the somehow neatly potted gigantic saguaro cactus he’d sent you a picture of sitting next to a cherry tree sapling. But what you find most amusing is the pile of human books he’d somehow acquired lying next to them.

They’re all poetry. *Old* poetry. Like renaissance era old. A few names you recognize, but considering you spent most of your free time studying stars instead of eloquently describing them the rest are lost on you. You recall him lulling your panic-stricken self back to sleep by reciting all 143
verses of “The rime of the ancient mariner”, but still find it infinitely amusing that he found written verse to be the most relatable aspect of humanity.

“How a nerd.” you think, heart fluttering. “A giant, gorgeous, warrior space nerd.”

You pick one up out of curiosity, finding yourself wondering exactly how he manages to even open them when his fingers are half as long as you are, when the hiss of the door opening sends your skeleton searching for the nearest escape route.

“I did not mean to frighten you.” Optimus says, as you turn to face him, and before your very eyes reconciles himself down to a third of his height in a whirl of impossibly complex movements.

“I’m just a little jumpy from earlier.” you admit, once you’d gotten over the awe of watching him give a metaphorical middle finger to the laws of physics by simply existing.

“I see you’ve discovered my guilty pleasure.” he says, gesturing towards the book in your hands as he makes his way over to you on the now comically oversized berth. “Would you mind reading some to me?”

You blink, a little surprised at the question, but the look he gives you, optics wide, and smile soft and encouraging, is pretty much impossible to say not to.

“Sure!” you return the smile, skimming through the book’s index. “Uh, any poem in particular?”

He pauses for a moment, optics whirring and shuttering in concentration.

“Night.” he says finally. “It should be located on page 69.”

You tilt your head in curiosity. That’s an old one. Like 17th century old, and you briefly wonder why his taste in poetry is decidedly archaic, but remind yourself that you’re reading for an aeons old mechanical alien life form that you’re also in a sexual relationship with. If you were the type to question preferences you probably would have done so the first time he fragged you into next week.

“Alright.” you say, clearing your throat nervously as you begin. “The sun descending in the west, the
evening star does shine, the birds are silent in their nest, and I must seek for mi-

You’re interrupted by a shrill squeak emanating from your own throat as Optimus claims the side of your neck with his mouth, allowing his denta to gently graze your skin.

“I do not recall telling you to stop.” he rumbles, gushing hot air against the nape of your neck.

*What the hell.* ”Uh okay, uh.. “ you swallow hard, forcing yourself to continue. “Farewell, green fields and happy grove…Where flocks have took delight” he hums, clearly pleased before sliding a servo down the front of your dress, cold steel coaxing goose bumps from your skin and sending your heart slamming into your ribcage.

“Fuck!” you inhale sharply, throwing every shred of your self control into keeping your voice steady- “L..uh…W-When wolves and tigers h-howl for prey, They p-p-pitying stand and weep,”-and failing spectacularly.

“You skipped a stanza.” he murmurs against your skin, mouth pressed in the groove between your neck and shoulders as he slides his servo further down, thumbing the waistband of your panties. “Several stanzas, to be precise.”

“You’re n-not exactly making it easy to concentrate-gah!” you yelp, his servo having slid past your wasitline and down between your thighs, tracing agonizingly slow circles around your pussy.

“Try.” there’s a hint of warning kneaded into his voice, and you have to fight back another gasp as he slides one of his fingers inside of you. You’re panting, definitely panting as you bite your lip and try to regain enough coordination to continue reading.

“S-seeking to drive their thirst away, and k-k-keep them from the sheep, b-but if they rush dreadful, the-” you choke back a sob as he works a second finger in, thumb mercilessly strumming your clit. “Ah…um…r-r-r- receive each m-mild spirit, new w-w-worlds to inherit.”

“Concentrate.” it’s harsher than you expected, a demand, and you have no idea how he expects you to do that while you’re grinding feverishly against one servo while the other removes your dress. He unclasps your bra with a single digit and if you weren’t trying to recite seventeenth century poetry while hovering on the edge of ecstasy you’d be damn impressed.
“And t-there the lion’s ruddy eyes, shall flow with t-tears of gold,” you bite back a humiliating, needy mewl as he presses you back against the berth, and you feel the familiar rush of his field surging, the sensation of being submerged in warm water, head pulled beneath the waves.

“I must know,” and you’re snapped back into reality as he withdraws one of his servos, tilting your face up to meet his optics, narrowed in almost predatory slits. “If you once again grant me consent to proceed.”

You drop the book. You return the look with impossibly wide eyes.

“I…yes goddamnit yes!” you blurt out.

“I…require you to be more precise-”

“I consent!” you snarl, eyes narrowing in return. “Honestly I don’t know why you-”

You’re not given a chance to finish. He covers your mouth with his own, forcing his glossa into your mouth and pinning you against the berth with his frame. His EM flares, tempest, ocean-esque in its expanse, and you once again find yourself willingly drowning. You can’t breathe. You can’t breathe and you don’t need to.

You surrender again, caged like an animal between the berth and his frame. You squirm under him, squealing as he runs his glossa over your collarbone, tugging your panties the rest of the way off and working a third digit into you. Full, so full. You’re a shaking, ragged wreck beneath him, already chasing climax, and when he slips his mouth over your breasts, rolling your nipple between his denta you find yourself thrown over the edge.

“Oh fuck Optimus!” you cry out as orgasm tears through you, arching your back and thrashing wildly through the aftershocks.

You see him pull back through your bliss hazed vision, and notice the panel covering his interface array is almost bowed out, no doubt from the strain of his pressurizing spike.

“I..um…” you swallow nervously once you catch your breath, pressing a hand against the bowed metal. “I’d like to return the favor.”
“That is…not necessary.”

“I know it’s not necessary,” you say “But I’d like to try.”

He doesn’t attempt to dissuade you further. He reclines back on the berth so that you’re atop him, but gently, firmly covers your hand with his servo, pressing your palm against the panel and guiding your fingers into a narrow seam hidden beneath. You watch, mesmerized, as the metal blossoms open and his spike finishes pressurizing before your eyes.

You manage to stop yourself from gasping, but your mouth falls open in silent awe nonetheless.

Its… it’s art. It has to be. You hadn’t the opportunity to see it up close the first time, but now that you have there’s no other word for it. Threads of light woven in impossibly ornate patterns along the polished silver length, pulsing the same otherworldly blue as the rest of his biolights, lending it an almost supernatural appearance.

It’s also, bluntly put, enormous. And so help you god, you have no idea how this thing ever fit inside you.

No wonder I fractured my hips. You think nervously. There’s no way you’re getting his spike in your mouth without suffocating, so you find compromise by wrapping your hands around the shaft and coaxing the tip into your mouth, drawing your tongue directly under the head.

Pinpricks of static burst beneath your fingers as it twitches in your hands. Optimus groans, wet and heavy and christ you glad you’re already on your knees because there’s no way they’d work after that. Iridescent pre cum pearls at the tip and you lap it into your mouth as gracefully as you can. It taste like static somehow, like the charge itself and the sensation is enough to elicit a muffle squeal from your throat.

His servo, which had been cupping the back of your head, digits entwined in your hair, tightens it’s grip. Much to your disbelief, he actually forces you down on his spike. You choke, and try to withdraw to catch your breath, but find yourself held rigid in his grasp as he forces your head back up to look him in the face.

There’s a change in his expression, an almost carnivorous intensity reflected in his optics.
“I want you-” he begins, voice eclipsed in a low, rumbling growl. “To look at me.”

You’d seen a glimpse of this, the first time you’d interfaced, when he’d announced playtime was over in not so many words. You’d chalked it up to a one time display of dominance in a heat cycle driven state of mind, and hadn’t really expected it to make another appearance. But it had, and you’d be flat out lying if you tried to claim said display isn’t riling you up. He honestly looks like he might eat you alive and that shouldn’t turn you on, but it does. It does so bad.

So you do what any prey animal fearing for it’s life would do, and comply, training your eyes on his face, optics half closed, denta gritted painfully tight as you continue. You give an experimental squeeze near the base, earning you a sharp hiss and an unconscious buck of his hips, forcing what little of him you could fit in your mouth into the back of your throat. Can’t breathe, can’t breathe. But that doesn’t matter, because if the last thing you ever see is his metal features twisted in beautiful agony through your tear blurred vision, then you’d die happy.

“Not yet.”

He pulls you off of himself right on the cusp of overload, venting hitched and ragged. You choke on air, lungs screaming protest as you’re free to breathe again, a bead of iridescent fluid breaking between your lips and the tip of his spike.

“In the interest of completing your guide-” he reclines against the berth and the wall, legs spread, beckoning you forward in a pose that you pray remains seared into your mind forever“-May I suggest we try a different position?”

You need no further encouragement.

He offers his servo to steady you as you impale yourself on his spike. Slowly. There’s no way to make this painless, and it’s going to sting at best, but you try to make it as easy as possible, rubbing the tip between your pussy lips several times before daring to ease the head in.

Optimus hisses, and unconsciously bucks his hips up. Hard.

Your mouth opens in a silent scream, the wind thoroughly knocked out of you. That hurt. Holy hell that hurt.
“My apologies…I did not intend to move so carelessly.” he says. “Are you alright?”

You grit your teeth, blink back tears, and give a simple nod in agreement. “F-fine.”

He pauses, giving you a moment to adjust to his size before he begins to thrust upwards. Slowly, thank god. You feel a familiar jolt tear through your body as the circuit begins again, and you throw back your head and cry out at the sensation of raw electricity flowing through you. He runs his servos over your body, one on your hips, one tracing the thick outline his spike makes against your lower belly as he moves within you.

“Warm.” he murmurs into your ear, helm resting behind your shoulder “You are so incredibly warm.”

You’re so glad you chose this position, because this way you can run your hands over his broad chassis, watch the play of protomass under abdominal plating, so much like human muscle as he rolls his hips into you. He’s built like a young god, carved from steel instead of marble, and damn if there isn’t something almost holy in rocking the balled lighting between your bodies. The surge circuits back to you, coiling at the base of your spine and shooting upwards throughout your entire body, every nerve ending igniting in blinding ecstasy.

“(y/n),” oh, and that predator comparison fits in the way that he purrs against you. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

“What?”

“If you want me to continue fragging you, then I require you to tell me so.”

Your mouth falls open. “You…you’re serious?”

He answers your question by slowing his pace to a fraction of what it was, leaving you in wanting agony.

He is.
“I-I want you to frag me!” you blurt out, mind still thoroughly blown from the turn this is taking.

“Is that all?”

“I want you to frag me into next week!”

“I am already doing that.” he states plainly in that deadly, thunderous purr, pace hard but still torturously slow.

“I want you to break me!” your voice cracks as you move desperately against him. “I want you to overload in me!”

“Ask me.” your head swims with disbelief, because ask is only a few precious steps away from beg and right here and now the meaning is all the same. “Ask me and I’ll do it.”

“Oh god,” you choke back a sob, nearly in tears. “Optimus, please!”

“Please what?” his voice is thick with the effort of restraining himself. “Tell me what you want me to do.”

“Oh god,” you choke back a sob, nearly in tears. “Optimus, please!”

“Please overload in me!”

“I am not done with you yet.” and a fucking smirk splay onto his face as he watches you squirm desperately on his spike. You choke out a frustrated cry. It’s not like you ever entertained the idea of taking the reigns during intimacy with a metal titian, but the amount of control he’s exerting over you is almost ridiculous.

An idea hits you as the circuit begins it’s retreat. You hold your breath, still your body, and manage to cut off it’s escape route. The charge builds within you, and you wait until your vision goes white and the shell-shock grade ringing returns before you release it all at once.

Optimus lets out a sharp, startled yelp as his entire frame convulses. He forces himself steady, desperately trying to stave off overload, servos leaving your body to grip the sides of the berth. The resounding, ear-splitting shriek of metal tearing metal splits through the air.
In his effort to regain control, he’d ripped the side of the berth off. Those same servos that had been resting gently on your hips, tracing the swell of your belly, had just crushed steel.

Oh god. Oh fuck.

You’re ripped back to the present as your back collides with the berth and you suddenly find yourself beneath him. You open your mouth to cry out in shock but find yourself speechless. The look he gives you now, electric blue optics narrowed into downright predatory slits, is paralyzing.

“You…” he begins in a low, savage snarl, so much like a big cat. “…Have made a grave error.”

He presses a servo over your lips and you’re given a split second of utter bewilderment before you realize exactly why he’d covered your mouth.

He thrusts back in. Hard. So hard you’re forced to arch your back with the force as he fills you to the hilt. You see stars. You scream against him as the surge reignites, the pain threshold crossed as he wastes no breath and proceeds to brutally fuck you into the berth.

It hurts. Dear god it hurts and if you weren’t bleeding before you are now. You’re pretty sure your pelvis is fractured again. Hell, you’ll be lucky if it isn’t crushed by the time this is over.

“S-slow down!” you whimper once he’s removed his servo from your mouth to slip beneath the small of your back, offering him better leverage to drive his hips into yours.

“No.” he says flatly, but in that deep booming baritone of his its one of the most frightening iterations of the word you’ve ever heard.

“Please!”

“I said no.” he snarls, and holy hell he actually looks mad. There’s not even a defined pace anymore, just raw force as he wrecks you, the force of his thrusts rolling through you bone-deep.
Alarms go off in the back of your mind, but you can’t find it in you to care, because sexually enraged
Optimus is the absolute hottest version of him there is. He’s tearing you up inside and you don’t
care. Some part of you tells you that you should be thrashing and screaming, that you should be
trying to get away, but if you are prey then he’s already got you by the throat.

He’s slowed down, pace still feral and unrelenting but with climax visible on the horizon he finds
reason to be gentle once more. He presses his lips against the side of your neck, bringing the servo
not supporting the small of your back to take your hand, lacing his fingers between yours.

The ringing begins again, resonating inside your head. You can barely hear your name slip off his
glossa again. “(y/n), I am close.”, and his voice is so beautiful like this, bathing your name in metallic
layers and static “Please…come with me.”

The charge circuits back. You find yourself sinking in the hollow between consciousness, the world
ascending around you as you’re thrown backwards with immeasurable force. The urge to be
destroyed, obliterated at a molecular level resurfaces, and you want nothing more than to be blown
to stardust

“(y/n)” and the way he calls your name, weaving through harmonics of his native language and your
own, is like prayer. “Primus, (y/n)!”

The surge reaches it’s zenith between you both, then bursts.

And you become stardust. You are dust as you let the white blindness unmake you and you dive
backwards off the edge with him. He reaches overload, roaring, and gods the sensation of his spike
pulsing within you sends you spiraling as his whole frame shudders, and he spills himself within you.
He jerks his hips through the aftershocks, repeating fragments of your name like a broken, static
filled mantra.

His voice is a beacon in the sea of light and sensation calling you back to the physical realm,
rebuilding you piece by agonizing piece. You’d stay dissolved, stay in your immaterial state if not for
him demanding you retain your form, demanding you stay with him. And you do, beginning the
impossible task of pulling yourself back together, making yourself solid again just to keep the smile
plastered on his face.

There’s a brief interlude, in which you both remain still, hypersensitive to the reactions of each
other’s bodies, every movement, every twitch magnified painfully. He pulls you flush against his
chassis, still hilted inside you, touch somehow feather-soft as he cradles you in the crook beneath his
neck with a single servo. You shiver at the warm gushes of air from his processor, murmuring things
When he finally does pull out you hiss in pain through your teeth, opaque silvery fluid flowing out in torrents to mingle with the slow trickle of neon blue.

Optimus freezes, a combination of horror and disbelief etched into his expression.

“You…” he begins, optics widened in shock. “…Are bleeding.”

You raise an eyebrow at him, and consider asking him what exactly he expected after plowing you like a goddamn tractor, but the look of unbridled self-disgust on his face makes you reconsider your words. “Calm down. It’s not like you did it on purpose.” you say, once you’d managed to catch your breath. “It’s okay.”

“It is not okay.” he says, regarding his own shaking servos. “I have injured you during a most intimate act. I…lost control.”

“It’s not that bad. Really.” you say, putting your hands on his servos and lowering them away from his face. “Look, humans just get hurt easily. It’s fine. We heal pretty good to make up for it. And it’s not like we come out of interfacing with each other unscathed all the time. Plenty of other people bleed or fracture their hips. Hell we tend to brag about it.”

You can almost hear his spark stop in its tracks.

“I…fractured your hips?”

Oh shit.

There is no suitable euphemism for the expression on Optimus’s face. Thousand yard stare doesn’t cut it, not with those electric blue optics that could see right down though to your soul. Million light-year stare maybe, but that would imply that there’s actually something to look at and he’s not just suffering a processor crash at the revelation that he’d actually hurt you.

This is bad. This is bad in a “never touch you again, roll you up in bubble wrap and carry you
around in a giant cat carrier for the rest of your life” kind of bad, and if you don’t find some
unorthodox way of turning this around he’s gonna turn off the interface tap for good. And you,
having tasted robot nookie, have decided that a life without it is not one you want to live.

“Yes…you did fracture my hips.” you say slowly. “But they’ve already healed. And, like I said, I am
absolutely gonna brag about it.”

That finally seems to snap him out of it, and the look of self-loathing is replaced by one of confusion.

“…Brag about it?”

“Didn’t you hear me earlier?” you say, flashing him a toothy, self-satisfied grin. “In human culture, at
least, if something gets torn, pulled or broken, it’s generally because it was that good. And believe
me, it was.”

“How…?”

“You honestly think I would’ve jumped at the chance to do it again if I didn’t enjoy it?” you ask,
baffled. “You’re normally 30 feet tall, its impressive enough that you haven’t stepped on me. A few
cuts and bruises are nothing, and I’m more than willing to put up with them if it means I get to touch
you.”

His optics are still terrifyingly wide, but he’s stopped shaking, and seems to be slowly snapping out
of whatever error his processor was giving him.

“I am…glad your injuries are not incapacitating.” he says, letting go a long withheld ex-vent. “And
deeply touched that you would choose to endure them in order to be with me. But it is the manner in
which I have inflicted them on you that continues to frighten me.”

You frown. “Manner?”

He looks away, but not so fast that you can’t tell the look of self-disgust you’d worked so hard to
vanquish had returned.
“Sometimes…after combat, or extremely trying situations I can become worked up. In a carnal fashion. It is a side of myself that I am deeply troubled by. I do not allow it to surface, and the fact that it has…” he trails off, optics narrowed in deep, contemplation.

“Where is your personal data pad?”

“I think if left it in Bee’s room.” you say, raising an eyebrow. “Why?”

“I am going to send you a phrase I cannot utter myself. The message will be heavily encrypted and will erase itself after being opened. I need you to memorize it.”

“What is it?”

“…It is my override command.”

Your heart stops. Your jaw falls open.

“What?!?”

“Please, if I ever lose control again and you find yourself in bodily danger because of me, do not hesitate to use it.”

“No. No way in hell.” you say, struggling to maintain your composure after not only hearing that cursed phrase again, but learning that he has one too. “I don’t even want to know it.”

“It will immobilize me in the event that I will not respond to your pleas to stop.”

“You get carried away and scratch me up a bit in bed and you want to give me the power to paralyze you?!” you say, flabbergasted. “You are completely overacting. Why do you even have an override command?”

“I…do not wish to discuss that right now.” he says after a pause, a faraway look in his optics before his shutters them. “Please…at least consider it. It would give me peace of mind knowing you had a
means of defending yourself from me.”

“I’ll think about it.” you say finally, hesitantly, having absolutely no intention of doing so but eager for a chance to drop the subject.

“Thank you.” he sighs, reclining at last and pulling you atop his chassis, servo resting gently on your back. You lay your face against his chest plates, listening as the frantic pulsing of his spark gradually evens out to an even thrum.

“Hey,” you say after you’d both had a chance to calm down. “Why didn’t the alarms go off this time?”

“I temporarily disabled them in my quarters. I did not think it necessary to provide the entire base with yet another indicator of our activities.” he says with a hint of well camouflaged mortification in his voice. “Nor did I wish to risk waking Bumblebee after the difficulty we had convincing him into recharge.”

“Mmmph.” you agree, recalling that he had actually tried convincing an infant and had met with some degree of success. Despite his muteness neither of you have had much problem communicating with him. Recently his vocalizations have been audible on at least some level to you, and he seemed to have enjoyed some sort of nonverbal bond with Optimus from the getgo.

“How well can you understand Bumblebee?” you ask, unable to bear the curiosity eating at you any longer. “I can get the gist of what he’s saying most of the time, but I feel like it’s different for you two.”

He blinks.

“You…are able to hear him?”

“You’re not?”

“I am. I am surprised to learn that you can, though considering the changes to your biology perhaps I should not be.”
You spare a moment to ponder what other kind of crazy superpowers you may have imbued from your prolonged contact with robot blood, but push it to the back of your mind. That sounds like a super fascinating and maybe gross question for Ratchet with probably an equally fascinating and gross answer.

“You are correct in implying that he and I communicate differently.” he goes on. “If a sire spends sufficient time interacting with a developing sparkling, a bond can be coded, similar to the one between the carrier.”

“Bond?”

“It functions much like a spark bond, in that emotions, audio clips, and even images can be transmitted in some capacity, though they fade as the sparkling ages, while a spark bond remains intact unless one or both partners perish.”

“Like a psychic connection.” you say, awestruck. “That’s amazing.”

“I am apprehensive that my relationship with Bumblebee will not remain as close as it is once the bond fades, but the news that you are able to hear him gives me hope. If he capable of generating at least basic harmonics then communicating with him will not be difficult with fellow cybertronians, though given the frequencies it may prove impossible for most humans.”

You feel your heart sink a little bit at that information, and have to stop yourself from outright snarling at the giant middle finger the universe continues to extend in your direction.

“So you think I can hear harmonics?” you say, choosing to tuck away your frustration for later and focus on the conversation at hand. “Is that why you say my name differently?”

“Differently?”

“When you say my name during…well during interface, and you kinda…slip into your native language, it sounds almost melodic.” you say. “I’ve heard you guys speaking cybertronian before, but when you do it, it’s…well it’s different.”

“Names in cybertronian are spoken utilizing several different frequencies simultaneously.” he says after a moment’s hesitation. “This allows us to assign descriptions and designations to the names as
necessary, such as faction, rank, specialty, area of origin, and so forth. The dialect I am most accustomed to using is an archaic one. It is onomatopoeic in nature and makes gratuitous use of adjectives. It was considered not only inefficient, but dangerous, and fell out of use during the early days of the war.”

“Dangerous how?”

There’s a long pause, and you watch his optics shutter and whir in concentration.

“I am having difficulty finding an appropriate analogy to liken it to,” he says finally. “It functions similarly to associating emotion to a name, in that the feeling is largely automatic and is difficult to suppress.”

“Except… you can hear it?”

“It leaves little room for deception by it’s very nature. The war state rendered it obsolete.”

“Because it’s too difficult to hide your feelings towards someone or something when you address them?”

“Precisely. For this reason, I was also unable pronounce Bumblebee’s name for a period of time following my spark mate’s demise. I…so closely associated him with her death that I could not restrain the harmonics for pain and loss, and it rendered his name incomprehensible.”

You swallow hard, blinking back tears. This is probably the most tragic thing you’ve heard him say yet and your chest physically aches for it. “But you can say it now.” you say. “And when you do it sounds so…calming.”

“When you volunteered to the surrogacy, and he was no longer in danger of dying, it gradually became easier. I, thankfully am at a point where I can assign fitting harmonics to his name.”

“Which are?”

His expression softens.

“And you wouldn’t be able to say those words in your language if you didn’t mean them, and that’s also why it sounds so calming when you say it.”

“That is correct.”

“So…when you say my name, you’re also describing me. Honestly.”

“I am.”

“And when you do, it sounds like music.”

“I am rarely afforded opportunity to express my emotions, but when I am, I chose not to temper them.”

You clap a hand over your mouth, resting somewhere between having your mind thoroughly blown or bursting into exhilarated tears, because he’s basically saying he has to physically restrain himself from singing your name at his most uninhibited and he doesn’t want to.

“I…I don’t think my language has enough words to tell you how I feel about that.” you say shakily.

“Then I can only hope that it is a welcome feeling.”

“It is.” you reassure him. “I just…you guys can completely rearrange your bodies, change sizes by shoving your mass into a pocket dimension, form psychic bonds with your loved ones and unborn children and have to literally stop yourselves from singing someone’s name when you care about them.” you say, gripping the sides of your head. “Your race is so fascinating and there’s so much I don’t know yet and you’re on the verge of killing each other off and that’s not fair.”

A brief silence falls. You remove your hands from your head to look back at Optimus, who looks like he’s just seen a ghost.
“Sorry, I didn’t…I didn’t want to upset you.”

“You haven’t.” he says, optics still wide. “It is merely…your grievances sound remarkably like something Elita would have said.”

You, admittedly, not knowing much about Elita other than her apparently having a smart mouth, had just naturally assumed she was some sort of drop dead gorgeous kickass amazon, and find yourself amused at the comparison. “I wouldn’t have pegged her as the tree-hugging type.”

“She was very much a naturalist, and immensely fascinated by other species. In fact—” he gestures towards the shelves. “—Most of the preserved specimens were hers. She was frequently lamenting how our conflict was driving our native flora and fauna to extinction. Which, I suppose, engenders a devastating irony in our endangerment.”

You let out a frustrated sigh, once again reminded that the cosmic middle finger wasn’t reserved exclusively for you.

“We decided on Bumblebee’s name, after a small species of mecha insect that was responsible for facilitating the growth of crystal gardens. It was a species she was incredibly fond of, and tried desperately to save, though ultimately to no avail.” he sighs, glancing up at one of the containers that houses a specimen, a delicate, golden little creature with mesh wings and wide, iridescent optics. “I find it rather surreal that you and Bumblebee have made learning about your own planet’s wildlife a bonding activity.”

Uncanny, semi-measurable luck or no, that is pretty surreal. Spooky, almost, considering the vivid dreams you’d experienced featuring the blindingly pink shape shifting entity that had recently taken on the form of an equally blindingly pink grizzly bear, who grins and lazily waves a paw at you from across the room.

Wait.

Your confusion quickly melts into pain. Brilliant, white hot, pain. Your body jerks involuntarily and you’re given a split second to cry out an explicative before you smash your head against his chassis.

“(y/n)!“ Optimus shouts, simultaneously bolting upright and restraining your convulsing self in an effort to keep your from further self harm. “What is wrong?”
“I d-d-don’t-” you try to answer him, but your stuttering is cut off as Optimus cries and grasps his own helm with the servo not holding you.

“Fields.” he says at last through gritted denta. “Our EM fields won’t disengage.”

You think back to the end of Bumblebee’s surrogacy, when his field had become buried in your organic brain and, having been unable to separate, had send concurrent surges back in an effort to free itself. You figure this is a similar situation, except Bee’s field had been a mild, underdeveloped one and Optimus’s could probably short circuit a power plant.

Oh hell.

Some part of you is aware that despite the pain resonating in his own helm Optimus had resumed his default height and was desperately com’ing Ratchet while carrying your shaking, bleeding and naked self down to the medbay as fast as his pedes would take him. You let out a frustrated cry in spite of yourself. Of course. Of course this would happen right after you’d convinced him he hadn’t hurt you. He’s probably never going to touch you again and that sucks almost as much as Ratchet seeing you buck naked and having a goddamn seizure because of interfacing.

“Can you still hear me?” he asks, once you’ve been transferred to a medical slab. The scent of high grade is fresh on his breath and you feel like crying. Not because you fear for your life in the hands of an inebriated medic(although maybe you should) but because that means he started knocking drinks back roughly sometime after hearing you both discussing your plans for the night through the wideband and goddamnit Ratchet stop hurting yourself.

“What part of ‘be more careful slag-it’ did you not understand?!” you search for a witty retort, only to find yourself rendered utterly speechless by Ratchet’s expression. At first glance it’s the same grouchy, irritated no-nonsense mask he wears when dealing with patients. But it is, for all intents and purposes, a mask, and one you’d had considerable practice peering behind.

He’s terrified. He’s every bit as terrified as Optimus and maybe just as hurt and that sucks because that means the burden of calm has fallen on you and you’d very much like to join them in panicking right now.

But you don’t. You instead bite back every shred of logic telling you that you are in fact, in serious bodily danger and chose to plaster a stupid, shit eating grin on your face.
“T-t-the c-c-c-c-carful part.” you say finally, struggling to steady your voice through the convulsions, which seem to be coming in waves, and you’ve hit the crest of a particularly large one just now.

You unconsciously snap your head up, courtesy of the seizure, and find yourself looking into a pair of mischievously narrowed, familiar blue eyes.

“Are you sick of this yet?” asks the sentient pink dream bear.

You, being nowhere near prepared to deal with this level of astral waking state bullshit, begin to laugh hysterically.

“F-f-f-f-fuck you.” you tell the bear.

“That’s how you ended up like this in the first place!” Ratchet shouts.

“W-w-w-wasn’t talking to y-y-y-you.” you tell him, swatting haphazardly at the hysterically laughing ursine floating in your peripheral vision.

“Then who are you talking to?”

You don’t reply, though that’s due in part to you slamming your head repeatedly against the table. While you don’t know 110% who the gleefully taunting entity is, you’ve got a pretty good idea. And while Ratchet has proven lenient in his understanding of the supernatural, you still doubt he’d accept something this ludicrous. And you really, really don’t want to be making that kind of accusation in front of Optimus, if you can avoid it.

“M-Mama bear.” you say finally, defeated, having devised no other way to describe her. “Giant pink b-bear with glowing blue eyes with a s-s-s shit sense of humor laughing her ass off at me.”

“She’s hallucinating again.” Ratchet scowls, faceplate scrunched in concern. Optimus’s face is leveled in tranquil panic, or you think it is. Your vision becomes increasingly fuzzy with each passing convulsion.
“(y/n)” you can feel he’s pressed one of his digits against the side of your face, tilting it towards him. Focus on the sound of my voice. “the fear bleeds through his voice so clearly now. “Don’t follow her.”

“Of course he’s gonna say that.” the bear rolls her eyes. “C’mon. We won’t be gone long. It’ll be fun. I promise.”

You try your best to ignore the white blindness, to ignore her beckoning, but find it harder and harder to focus as your limbs lose their weight and your surroundings dissolve around you.

“(y/n), stay with us.” his optics are a vivid blur swimming in your steadily dimming vision. You can’t see, but you can feel the cool metal of one of his digits curl softly, so softly around your hand. “Please stay with us.”

“I…” you begin, but your tongue feels like lead, and you grow painfully aware that you’re losing your fight against unconsciousness. You hear a muffled shout from Ratchet.

“Optimus, If we’re to have any chance of disengaging the fields before (y/n) slips into cardiac arrest, I’m going to have to separate them manually. I’m going to induce stasis.”

Figures. One way or another you’re going under and you can’t for the life of you come up with a smartass retort to put either of them at ease before you do.

“Sorry.” you say, so quiet you’re not sure he’s heard. You throw every remaining shred of your strength into squeezing his finger before letting a final, long withheld breath go, and taking the bear’s offered paw.

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“Hiya.” says the bear, once you’d finished materializing into her realm. “How was it?”

“How was what?” you ask dejectedly, absolutely not in the mood for whatever spirit world small talk she had in mind.
“The interfacing,” she says, mysterious lilt to her voice. “Did it blow your mind?”

“That-” you begin, thrusting an accusing finger directly at the bear’s snout “-is not funny!”

“No, it’s not.” she agrees, mirth shining in her eyes. “It’s hilarious.”

“I…” you let out a frustrated growl. “Am one hundred and ten percent done with your shit!” you snarl. “Enough with the vague hints. Enough with the repeated questions. Enough with the shitty foreshadowing. I know exactly who you are so just come out and say it!”

A playful smirk. The bear rears on her hind legs and you watch as she becomes formless in a whirl of pink smoke and impossible geometric shapes, pulling herself piece by piece out of thin air until she stands before you humanoid, same shade of cotton candy pink, same sky blue eyes.

Like a fairy. You think as her form solidifies. A giant, metal, ass kicking fairy.

“Sorry, where are my manners?” she begins, kneeling down to your level “Name’s Elita. Nice to meet you.”
Holy fuck has it really been three months since this updated? Fuck me.

So this chapter is sort of the end result of me coming up with all the dialogue pretty much a year in advance and them coming back and trying to fill all the action in. Considering this chapter is almost nothing BUT dialogue, it feels choppy and incomplete to me. I'm probably gonna come back and beat it's ass with a thesaurus later.

Sorry this took so long. Pls enjoy.

“What.” you say flatly, staring up awestruck at the gargantuan, kickass, yet still somehow so very elegant and feminine female robot before you.

“Elita. She repeats, rolling her optics. “I know your audial receptors are functioning. I kicked aft, took names, and ‘faced like a seeker in heat.”

“You’re also dead.” you say shakily, realization hitting you brick-hard. “Which means I’m dead.” You bring up a semi-transparent hand to stare at in disbelief. “I died from interfacing with Optimus. Oh god he must be devastated.”


You blink.

“I got knocked into a coma from interfacing with Optimus.” you say, clutching the sides of your head in a different kind of agony. “Oh god he must be humiliated.”

“He’s probably a little bit of both. A lot of both. Actually yeah he’s probably pretty upset.” she says, wringing her servos and biting her lip. “But let me just go ahead and assure you that you’re fine. Actually this really couldn’t have gone any smoother, considering the circumstances.”

You blow out a shaky breath. “When you put it like that it almost sounds like you planned this.”
“I did. She says, placing her servos on her hips proudly. “Well, okay, not all of it. They stipulated that you had to be in a coma. The interfacing part was my idea.”

You fix her with your best *are you fucking kidding me* face.

“Why?”

“Hey, if you can think of a better way to get knocked into a coma, I’m all audial receptors.”

You open your mouth. Your close your mouth, upon the realization that she’s *right*. You’ve got nothing.

“Yeah.” she smirks, crossing her arms. “You’re *welcome*.”

Your heart beats a tiny bit faster, and you would probably kick yourself if you weren’t certain it would lead to further humiliation. You don’t exactly have a frame of reference, having never laid eyes on a cybertronian female before, but you don’t need to in order to decide that she’s in the upper scale of attractiveness on *any* planet. Smooth, curvaceous frame, rose colored biolights, features carved out of porcelain. If Optimus was a norse god, then she’s a straight up *valkyrie*.

*No wonder he fell for her.* you think, suddenly feeling incredibly underwhelming in your god-given meat suit. And you can’t help but find yourself thinking, rather sorely, that your limp, fleshy, *miniscule* ass wouldn’t be winning any beauty contests, at least by robot alien standards.

“Look, this isn’t a contest. I’m dead and you’re not.”

You blink. “I’m sorry?”

“You’re feeling inadequate.” she says flatly. “You’re turning green.”

“That’s some pretty dated terminology” you say putting your hands on your hips defensively. “Also, I *totally* am not!”
“No I mean you’re literally turning green.” she says, gesturing towards your arms, which, much to your horror, have begun slowly taking on a toxic sludge-like hue.

“What the fuck!” you shout, flailing your limbs in a misguided effort to shake the color off.

“Yeah you gotta be careful around here. “ she says. “Emotions pretty much shape reality. There’s no way to lie about anything, when you’re happy the sun comes out, when you’re sad it starts raining. When you’re jealous, well…”

“What happens when you get angry?” you ask, eager to change the subject.

“You explode into a billion tiny pieces and it takes you forever to pull yourself back together again.” she says. “Or, in your case, you wake up. I don’t have that luxury.”

Your mouth falls into a soft “oh.” as you recollect your first few terrifying encounters with her, in which one or both of you had wound up evaporated at some point.

“Yeah. Try not to get angry.” she says firmly, but with a hint of desperation in her voice. “And be honest. I mean, you can’t not be up here, but it’ll save us both a lot of trouble if you’re not stressing out trying to save face.”

“Alright fine.” you say, staring lazers into the ground in humiliation. “You are clearly extremely attractive by any planet’s standards and I’m feeling inadequate by comparison.”

“Awesome! We’re making progress!” she says, clapping her servos together excitedly. “But like I said, this isn’t a contest.”

“But if it was a contest, you’d win hands down.” you say glumly.

“I would.” she says smugly. “But don’t be so hard on yourself. You’ve got organic appeal.”

“Organic appeal?” you ask, blinking. “What’s that?”
“You’re exotic. Also could you please stop blinking so much? It’s creeping me out.”

“Exotic how?”

“Soft? Supple? Velvety? Flocculent?” she says, scrunching her faceplate at the increasingly obscure adjectives. “I never actually got to touch one of you guys, I’m just making educated guesses based on the xenobiology I know. You are warm though, right?”

“We are.”

“That definitely helps. Cybertronians as a rule don’t emit a lot of heat. Warm things are pretty nifty to us. Most organicphiles specifically cite that as the reason they’re attracted to those types. *Your type.*” She emphasizes, and you’re not sure if you’re disgusted or flattered by the knowledge that at least some of these metal giants actually *fetishize* your race.

“Alright, so just back up a bit.” you say, putting your hands up. “So are you gonna actually tell me why we needed this little dreamscape powow or what? Why couldn’t you just do this while I was asleep?”

“Aside from your habit of freaking out and blowing everyone and everything to bits?” she asks, rolling her optics.

You growl softly in frustration. “Look, it was your idea to show up as a terrifying omnipotent voice in the dreamscape. I’m not about to apologize for getting the *shit* scared outta me.”

“I’m not asking you to.” she says, barely containing a snort, probably at the memory of your terrified self. “But we’re not in the dreamscape this time. Well, *we are*, but not for long.”

A fresh wave of fear washes over you at the foreboding emphasis she puts on *long.* “You did say I’m not actually dead, right?”

“You’re not.” she reassures you. “But you’re not dreaming either. You’re in the realm of the primes.”
Thunder rumbles ominously in the distance the second she stops talking, perfectly punctuating the end of her sentence. You raise an eyebrow at her.

“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Youp.” she smirks. “Reality is kinda malleable up here. At least for now. Once you start your trial it’a whole ‘nother ball game.”

Trial, you narrow your eyes suspiciously. “So you yanked my soul out of my body to throw me into some afterlife crash course for dead military leaders?”

Elita’s mouth falls open.

“Do you…do you really not know what a Prime is? Were you honestly so fixated on getting your hands on Optimus’s aft that you completely neglected to ask him what being a Prime meant?”

Your find yourself sweating bullets under her scrutinizing optics. “Um…yes?”

She holds her piercing gaze for another agonizing ten seconds, judging every cell in your guilty, inconsiderate body before bursting out laughing.

“That’s okay. I was too.” she wheezes, once given a chance to catch her breath. “Well, that and I was probably the only bot in the world that didn’t bring it up or treat him differently because of it, and he thought it was refreshing, so I didn’t bring it up a lot. I actually learned most of what I know here. Which is a lot. To save us both some time, all you really need to know is that it’s both a political and spiritual position.”

“Kind of like the pope and the president rolled into one?”

She cocks her optical ridge at the earth terms, but offers no disagreement. “Yeah. Except for the entire planet. That, and the matrix kinda works like a two way phone line between him and our deity. Not that the asshole ever answers, so far as I know.”
That’s pretty cool. That’s actually cool as hell, and while part of you is desperately fascinated by Optimus’s apparent ability to contact their robot god at whim the rest of you is still reeling from the revelation that you’ve been banging the space pope.

“Okay,” you start slowly, taking deep even breathes, trying to stave off an aneurysm. “So…he’s pretty freaking important. I get that. But why the hell am I here?”

“You’re important by proxy.” She says simply. “You’re important to someone that is important, and that puts you in a pretty interesting position. Well, actually, this was sort of a plan B kinda deal. You were supposed to get knocked into a coma the first time you interfaced, which was supposed to happen the first time I gave you the green light for crossing wires.” she says, expression souring. “We actually got knocked off course pretty bad.”

You think back to the first time you’d geared up for the seventh kind, to the ill-fated zoo-incident, to the biggest split-second mistake you’d ever made in your life, and the resulting pulse of fury that bursts beneath your belly is so powerful it almost brings you to your knees.

“Excuse me for not being in the mood after getting yet another tentacle gut punch and watching my son die.” you bite back, a wave of fresh venom surging through your voice.

There’s more lightning. Thunder rolls in the distance. Elita’s optics widen to impossible proportions as she puts her servos up defensively. “Whoah, scrap, calm down, I’m sorry.”

“Why the fuck should I calm down?” you seethe, “You arrange to have me knocked into a coma, laugh at me when I do, and then have the audacity to tell me I didn’t get my hands into Optimus’s interface array fast enough for you? No seriously. Give me one good reason to calm down.”

“Because in this realm emotions literally shape reality and you’re causing a massive storm.” she says flatly.

You look upwards at the quickly blackening sky, notice the pleasant breeze has become a hurricane-class wind and the entire dreamscape seems to be hovering precariously on the cusp of a tropical storm.

“Alright fine.” you say finally, inhaling deeply, watching in disbelief as the wind slows down and the clouds return to their original merry pink selves in the span of about five seconds.
Elita wipes the top of her helm with her servo letting, out a relieved “whoo.” “Look. I’m sorry.” She says after a pause. “That came out wrong. I know it wasn’t your fault. Scrap got in the way.”


“Oh, Ironhide’s good, don’t get me wrong, but old buckethead is kinda the undisputed lord and master of all thing’s spike blocking. It’s just…” she ex-vents harshly, suddenly looking extremely uncomfortable. “…Interfacing when you did kinda threw us for a loop. A major loop. I mean, nothing we can’t work with, but it’s added a whole ‘nother level of difficulty.”

You snort. “Are you gonna actually tell me what happened or are you gonna be all vague and mystical about it as per every other encounter we’ve had so far?”

“The second one. I’ve got a quota to fill.” she says, throwing a lopsided smile your way, and you feel the knot in your chest loosen as some of the mischief returns to her optics.

“Let’s walk and talk. Seriously. This place is pretty cool once you get over the shock of being dead. Not that you’re dead.” She adds quickly, shooting you a glance over her shoulder.

For the first time since your arrival you actually take the opportunity to take in your surroundings, which, simply put, is an eye-burning fusion of 4 dimensional 8 bit graphics and hyperrealism, creating a beautiful TRON-esque paracosm directly out of a graphical designers worst nightmares. The landscape pans out into a non-distinct grid in the event horizon, tiny, sprite-like bits falling like snow into the abyss only to flutter back down from the sky moments later.

“Okay.” You admit, letting out a low, impressed whistle. “That’s actually pretty cool.”

“I mean seriously. Look at this thing.” She says, gesturing towards a levitating something that you can only describe as a cross between a humming bird and a fabrige egg that seems to constantly shift it’s mass around a glowing, starlit axis. “How the fuck does it even do that?”

You, unsurprisingly can offer no answer. “What is it?” you ask leaning down to gently prod it’s side, to which it emits a high-pitched, friendly hum.

She shrugs. “Beats me. I’ve been calling them Biters, since the first one bit me. I think.”
You raise your eyebrow. “Biters? Really?”

She huffs. “Alright, smartass. What would you call it?”

“Um…” you think, searching for an equally smartass retort. “A ‘Whatthefuck Isitiscus.’” you say, offering a smug smirk at her exasperated expression.

She rolls her optics. “That is exactly the kind of stupid joke Chromia would’ve made. I swear, she never gave a flying frag about environmental activism, she just needed an excuse to blow scrap up.”

“Mm.” you agree, attention completely eclipsed by the tiny whirring thing, which had since nestled into the palm of your hand, torn between curiosity and the fear that despite having no visible mouth it may somehow, in fact, bite you.

Elita, either oblivious to your waning attention span or choosing to continue in spite of it, has launched into a zoological rant that you’re certain would be completely lost on you even if you did have any sort of idea what Cybertron’s eco system was like. And while she rattles off about the 30 distinct subspecies of turbo fox, nine of which were extinct, three of which had been sent to an off-planet reserve, you realize that Elita is, in fact, also a giant nerd.

They were perfect for each other. You think, unable to stop a doofy grin from spreading over your face.

“-But those were just mechcanids,” she continues. “Don’t even get me started on the military industrial-complex’s effects of the habitats of cyberecats-”

“How did you meet Optimus?” you ask, genuinely curious, but also genuinely tired of her textbook knowledge of tree-hugging goblygook.

“He was still Orion when I met him. When you become a Prime, you change your name. But we met at a protest.” She says, somewhat wistfully, bending down to pluck a neon bright flower that releases a faint, pixilated pollen with the breeze. “We were holding it right outside the hall of records, y’know, for publicity reasons. He came out to politely ask us to stop throwing things. So naturally I picked up the nearest waste bin and chucked it directly at his head. He went down like a fly.“

“-But I felt awful almost immediately afterwards.” she continues hastily at the prompt of your
terrified expression. “So I ran up there and pulled it off him, asked him if he was alright. You know what he told me?”

_That was completely unnecessary and you’re insane?_ You cough into your hand. “What?”

“Nice shot.” she says, snorting at the memory. “And then he suggested we go get dinner. Of course I blew him off, y’know, totally wasn’t my type—” she feigns a coughing fit, through which you can clearly make out “femmes” “—But he just kept showing up, asking about our cause, asking me why I’d gotten into it in the first place, just dragging me into really deep conversations. Eventually I started tolerating him, and by the time he got off at night everyone had kind of dropped off anyways, so we’d go walking around the city.”

“Then one night, we came across this asshole kicking a turbofox. I was ready to tear his head off but before I had a chance Orion just waltzes up to him and politely asks him to stop. Of course the fragger doesn’t look to see who’s asking, he just takes a swing at him, hits him square in the chassis. Orion, y’know, being a freakin’ behemoth even _before_ he got the matrix doesn’t even flinch, just raises an optical ridge at him. So instead of realizing he screwed up and apologizing like a sane ‘bot, this guy just turns around and stomps on the turbofox’s back. _Hard_. Crushed his spine and everything.” she makes a disgusted face at the memory. “You know what Orion did?”

“Did he ask him to stop again?”

“No. He _decked_ him. And then picked him up and threw him into a dumpster for good measure.”

“You’re joking.”

“Nah.” she says, smile growing to wolfish proportions. “The punch pretty much made my spark stop in it’s tracks, but putting that fragger in the trash where he belonged made me want to blow him on the spot.”

“Did you?”

“Well, actually we took the turbofox to his friend’s emergency clinic. Who wasn’t exactly happy about being bothered after hours to treat a _mechanimal_, but he did anyways. I offered in the waiting room. He suggested getting dinner first.”
“So, can I safely assume that’s how you and Ratchet were introduced?”

“I don’t think he ever really forgave me for that. That guy can hold a grudge like nobodie’s business.”

You feel your heart sink a little. “So he’s always been that grouchy?”

“For as long as I’ve known him, yeah.” she says, though averts her optics. “Though that’s probably because me and Optimus had our first frag in one of his supply closets.”

You choke on air.

“So speaking of first frags, or I guess, in this case, second, you mind giving me a blow by blow? I only came in like maybe a nanoklick before your processor started getting fried.”

“You…You want me to describe how it felt interfacing with your spark mate?” you say, voice heavy with disbelief.

“Pretty please?” she asks demurely, batting her optics. “It’s been so long.”

“She’s a freak.” You think, swallowing nervously. “A giant, metal pink ass-kicking freak.”

“It’s…” you pause, trying to find some way to convert the nigh supernatural experience into English. “It’s like I was…”

“About to dissolve? “ she prompts. “Like you were coming apart at the seams and wanted to?”

“Yeah. “ You nod in agreement, dizzied slightly from the mere memory. “That’s exactly it.”

“Ha!” she crosses her arms, wearing an infuriatingly smug grin for your benefit alone. “Again, you’re welcome.”
“Excuse me?”

“I taught him how to do that.” And that smug grin is downright *wolfish* as she leans in level with your face. “Everything he knows. Poor guy didn’t know *what* to do with me. It was *adorable.*”

“So…you were his first?”

“His first femme, yeah.” and you’re honestly remiss for a glass of water to drink and then subsequently spray back in her face. Her pretty, pink, infuriatingly *smug* face.

“Here’s the thing though,” her expression softens, unbecomingly apologetic. “You actually *were* coming apart at the seams.

You blink.

“What.”

“Yeah, you know that dose of ‘robot blood” you took back when Soundwave gave you a tentacle gut punch? It’s been messing with your biology pretty bad. I’m sure you figured out that much by now. But when you play around with EM fields, especially one as big as Optimus’s that has remnants of hundreds of others in it, it’s kind of destabilizing you at a molecular level.”

“What the fuck.” you say flatly. “What the actual *fuck.*”

“Yeah, that’s probably the end result of your biology trying to adapt to ours. That, and I can’t imagine the amount of electricity you withstand during overload is doing you any favors. Do you have *any* idea how much static discharge someone his size produces?” she asks, helm cocked to the side. “It takes about 0.2 amps to kill most organics of your size. Care to guess how many you took?”

“I…” you trail off, still processing the knowledge that your body had become *molecularly unstable* to the best of your ability. “No, not really.”

“Thirty thousand.” she says, matter of factly.
“Thirty thousand?” you repeat. “Thirty thousand? That’s…that’s as much as a lightning bolt.”

“Yup. Honestly, I don’t know why you’re not charcoal.”

“Dully noted.” you reply, the dizziness subsiding somewhat. “You know, I’ve noticed he’s got sort of a…dominant streak in him.” you recollect, eyeing her curiously. “Are you responsible for that too?”

Her face falls.

“Not exactly, no.” she says, mischievous light in her optics extinguished. “We…. ah…most of us didn’t come out of the war without some sort of hang up. For someone in his position I guess he just started…needing more control to unwind. At least that’s how I figure it. I mean, that’s why I mentioned the firing range, ever since the battle at tyger pax it always got him really riled up, but not in a bad way.” she cocks her head to the side. “Has it gotten worse since then?”

You blink. “Um, the firing range thing is still pretty accurate, but other than that, I don’t really have a frame of reference.”

“Well, I don’t know if this will put things in perspective or not, but when I first met him, he actually liked being put in stasis cuffs.”

“Okay yeah, it’s gotten worse.” you swallow nervously, averting your eyes. “Way worse.”

“In what way?”

You, admittedly, have some reservations about disclosing your berthroom antics with your significant other to his deceased spark mate, and understandably find yourself hesitating to divulge the details.

“Don’t be stingy.” she urges, as if on telepathic cue. “I think we’ve already established that I’m not going to hold it against you.”
“Alright, fine.” you snap, flustered, wondering if a bloodless, astral representation of your face is still capable of blushing. “In the “make you recite poetry, overload denial, beg me to keep fragging you.” kind of way.”

She says nothing for a beat, blinking.

“This” she spits finally, venom in her voice. “I don’t know what I hate more, the idea that something that hot is probably the symptom of a deteriorating mental state, or the fact that an organic coaxed it outta him.” She whines. “Do you have any idea how much work I had to put in just to convince him to do alt.mode? He was afraid he’d dent my bumper. My fragging bumper!”

“It’s not like I asked him to alright?” you spit back defensively “It just happened!”

“That’s even worse-”

“And it wasn’t all overloads and rainbows either.” you snarl. “He fractured my pelvis. Twice.”

If looks could generate photon beams then you’d be a smoldering pile of ashes. But Elita mercifully redirects her gaze before incinerating you.

“I can’t even stay angry.” she says, letting out a low whistle. “I’m just too damn impressed.”

You open your jaw. You close your jaw. You make a mental note to find better ways of conveying your astonishment.

“You...what now?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not fleshtagger by any means, but if I weren’t dead I might have to make an exception. If you managed to get a mech as sweet as Optimus to frag you like a mechanimal outside of a heat cycle then you’ve got to have something going for you.” she says, her frustrated pout returning to the half-gorgeous-half-infuriating smirk of earlier.

You eye twitches.
“Did you just…” you begin, voice hoarse with disbelief. “Did you just call me hot?”

“I bet it’s your aft. I mean, don’t get me wrong, when it comes to frame types, I kinda have the whole package going on. But damn do you have a nice aft.” and you can only watch in dull surprise as the most gorgeous alien robot goddess this side of the allspark reaches down and sharply taps your ass with her enormous index finger.

Something inside you snaps.

You can deal with having a friendly chat with the ghost of your robot boyfriend’s dead spouse. You can deal with the knowledge that your robot boyfriend, under ideal conditions, is also a religious icon and the leader of an entire planet. You can deal with being sent to a dimension generally reserved for robot deities because said boyfriend cares about you enough to actually make your squishy, alien self relevant in the grand scheme of this universe.

But having said ghost admit that you’re doing a great job succeeding her, call you attractive and slap the astral representation of your ass? That’s where you draw the line. If this were a video game, your immersion would be ruined. If this were a book, you would’ve returned it to the library and sent a spit-covered letter to the author.

But this is reality. And this shit just isn’t adding up.

“This is ridiculous.”

“I know right? How can something be so soft and firm at the same time? And that jiggle ratio-”

“No I mean this is ridiculous.” you say, jumping out of the way before she can assault your posterior a second time. “You don’t just drag me up here and tell me that you’re A-ok with me banging your husband and raising your son and then call me hot!” you sputter.

“Would you rather me tell you to jump off a cliff and call you a family-stealing glitch?”

“No, I…uh..” you flounder. “I want you to be honest. Because frankly this is starting to sound like some lotus eater crap and I don’t want to wake up millennia later in some gross alien cocoon or
She gives you a look that lets you know she’s clearly questioning your sanity before offering you a halfhearted shrug. “Look. I’m just calling it like I see it. I’ve been watching you ever since you met Bee.”

Her expression softens impossibly as his name leaves her mouth, a faraway look shimming in her optics. “I know Optimus explained the bond to you, I came in right about then. A lot of what I know is through him and his dreams.”

Your mouth falls open. “You can still talk to him? Even though you’re—dead you struggle to come up with a softer alternative. “—here?”

“Yeah.” she lets out a quiet, contemplative ex-vent. “You hear stories about this kinda thing, but I always just thought they were mushy-tear-jerking bull scrap.” and no sooner do those words leave her lips there’s a palpable change in the air, humidity heavy in your lungs and hanging thick in the air as rain begins to fall. It’s a gentle, spitting rain, not entirely warm but not cold either. A faint echo compared to the maelstrom you’d unintentionally conjured earlier.

It then occurs to you that she’s had ample time to practice NOT causing tropical storms and hurricane class winds with her emotions and that’s almost half as heartbreaking as the misty, faraway look in her eyes or the way her voice cracks as she continues.

“You want to know why I’m not mad?” she drops to one knee, looming over you, electric blue optics narrowed. “Bee wasn’t the only one I managed to contact. Not entirely. I figured out how to jump in and out of dreams. Mostly Optimus’s.

I thought I was being nice, showing up every night, patting him on the back, telling him I missed him, all that jazz. You know what his reaction was?”

You swallow nervously, averting your eyes. “No—”

“He begged me to not let him wake up. And when that didn’t work, he started begging me to kill him.”

Your heart drops into your stomach, and you have to fight off a wave of astral nausea as the thought sinks in.
“Oh…god.”

“That lasted for a week or so—” she says, in-venting shakily. “Before he started getting angry. and I usually only lasted a few minutes before he’d wake up screaming or get up and start breaking things. He tore his berth off the wall once, that was stupid loud.” She shakes her helm, optics glued to the floor. “He started blaming me for dying, leaving him with Bee, leaving Bee in the shape he was in. I mean, a few kliks after he woke up and finished trashing whatever it was he was trashing, he’d slump against the wall and take it all back, but he was right damnit. It was my fault. Bee was dying because of me.”

Her expression softens, her lower lip trembling slightly. “I watched him get worse every day, watched his tiny, sick little frame struggle just to vent, watched his electro pulses get weaker and weaker. I was powerless to help. At that point I was just biding my time ‘till the inevitable so I could lead him back to the Allspark with me, I could at least give him that.” Those impossibly vivid, sky blue optics begin leaking and damnit you don’t want them to be.

“He here there was this tiny, breathing, living thing me and Optimus had created, and I couldn’t do a damn thing to help him. I remember meeting him, so close to the edge, this thing I’d failed at caring for, failed at giving him any sort of life, remember pulling him into my arms, telling him everything would be alright as he slipped away. All because of me.”

She pauses to bring a servo up to her face, furiously wiping away tears “But then you showed up, out of nowhere, this weird, squishy organic who took one look at him, went “frag it” and pulled him back with absolutely no regard for what it would do to you, or if you’d even survive it. And you almost didn’t.”

You reach back to rub the back of your head sheepishly, but abort the gesture, having honestly no idea how to appropriately react to the situation. “Well…I mean…anyone else would’ve—”

“No. They wouldn’t.” she says flatly. “And you didn’t even stop there. You’d just been traumatized by having Rumble ripped away from you, and nobody would’ve blamed you if you never wanted to lay eyes on a sparkling ever again. But you just sucked it up and went ‘Gee, I might be emotionally crippled by having my first alien child taken away, but let’s give it another go.’ And you’ve been hauling aft not just to keep him safe and happy, but to change your planet’s perception of alien life to give him the best possible life he can possible have despite the war.”

She kneel down to your level once more to prod you roughly in the chest with one of her digits. “Believe it or not, you don’t have my respect and Optimus’s spark wrapped around your finger just because it’s convenient. It’s because you’re a fraggin’ saint.”
You feel your eye twitch again as you search your woefully ill-prepared mental catalogue for a way of responding.

“So…” you saw slowly, carefully. “You’re not jealous?”

This time it’s her optic that twitches. Violently.

“You…you’re…an idiot!” she sputters finally. “A noble, selfless idiot, which is worse than a normal idiot because you’re making me feel bad about bitching at you for it!”

“Look, I might be jealous, but I’m not mad.” she says firmly. “There a difference. Besides. It’s not like you’re cybertronian, or like Bee’s ever gonna call you ‘carrier’ or ‘mom’ anyways. He can’t.”

You feel as though a metric ton of bricks had been dropped on you.

“No.” you agree bitterly. “I suppose he can’t.”

She blinks several times, rapidly, as though she’d just now began to register what she’d said.

“Scrap.” She swears. “Scrap that just kind of tumbled out of there.” she makes a soft growling noise as she clutches her helm. “Damnit Elita you are an AFT.”

“An accurate aft.” you say through gritted teeth. “You’re right. He can’t talk, and I’m the reason he can’t talk.”

“You’re the reason he’s alive.” she says. “Honestly, when are you going to stop blaming yourself for something you had absolutely no control over?”

You sigh, picturing Bee’s face in your minds eye, bright optic’d and beeping cheerily in his scratchy, warbling parody of a voice. A voice you’d stolen. You’d turned this over a thousand times in your mind, wondering if you’d just screamed a little less, had taken better care of your throat, had even the slightest idea of how electromagnetic surrogacy’s worked that maybe he’d be saying your and
Optimus’s names by now instead of thinking them.

A pathetic, fluttering sob of frustration escapes you as you answer.

“Probably for the rest of my life.”

Elita makes a noise like an angry cat, digging her fingers into the side of her helm.

“I think I can see—” she begins through gritted denta. “—why Optimus likes you so much.”

A brief, suffocating silence follows, in which you try to set up a mental barricade against the sheer surrealist of the situation in a last-ditch preventive measure to steel yourself for whatever challenges lay ahead. If your experience thus far was any indication you figure it’ll be another passive aggressive-conversation-heavy-off color walk in the park peppered with some ass-backwards compliments towards yourself, but you can’t help the sinking feeling your gut telling you something awful looms on the horizon.

“Anyways.” Elita says finally, breaking said suffocating silence. “Your first trial is actually pretty straightforward. All you need to do is find the thing.”

You cock your head. “Thing?”

“Not “thing”. The thing. The super important mysterious thing. Which is probably in there.” she says, gesturing forward.

You’d been so invested in the conversation that you had, in fact, failed to realize you had been walking the whole time, and had come to the edge of a clearing. The grid like, pixilated texture of the ground sharply converges into a hyper-realistic forest floor. You raise your head to see a massive stone temple rising from the earth, the worn rock peering from behind a centuries old curtain of moss and vines and organic debris. It’s ancient. It’s breathtaking.

It’s also extremely out of place.

“Um,” you start, scratching your head in genuine confusion. “Considering we’re in the uh, “Realm
of the Primes”, is there a reason this place looks so, y’know, earthy?"

“Yeah, that’s probably the result of your organic brain trying to comprehend higher information. That’s not a dig at organics. I swear.” she says, once again putting her servos up defensively. “It happens to cybertronians when we dream too.”

“So if our situations were reversed, this would look more, I dunno, metal?” you ask.

“Probably.” she answers, shrugging. “But the thing is, when you still have a physical body like you do and aren’t just, y’know, dead, you end up seeing a more symbolic representation, rather than what’s actually going on. I don’t know if they did that deliberately, or if that’s just the way it is, but my money’s on the former.”

You sigh. “And I guess you’re still not gonna tell me who “they” are, are you?”

There’s genuine sympathy in the smile she gives you this time. “Nope. Sorry.”

You slouch your shoulders in frustration. “So, if I’m hearing this correctly, all I gotta do to snap outta my coma is make my way to the center of the labyrinth and bring you back this “super important mysterious thing?” you say, making air quotes.

“The super important mysterious thing.” she corrects you, smirking as you clap a hand to your head and growl in frustration. “But wait, there’s more!”

“Please no.”

“Just to prove I’m not a total athole, I’m not gonna send you in alone.” she says, placing her servos on her hips and looking completely and utterly pleased with herself. “Not gonna lie, I had to jump through some serious hoops to get these two bumped up here, so try not to plow through the labyrinth too fast.”

You open your mouth, intending to flatly tell her there’s no motivation she could possibly offer you to keep you from tearing your way back tooth and nail to the physical world as fast as possible, when you’re suddenly knocked forward with incredible force, and kiss the forest floor with a distinctive
Sonovabitch you wheeze, breathless but before you can even raise your head to identify your attacker you feel a second, equally heavy something join the dog pile and render you utterly paralyzed against the ground.

Elita is laughing. That’s infuriating. Two other voices join her. That’s…not infuriating. Because you recognize at least one of them and that gives you enough nightmarish strength to actually push these roughly-human sized metal bodies off your back and crawl out from under the dog pile to stare teary eyed and unbelieving at your assailants.

“I know you told us not to wait for you-” Rumble says, grinning like an idiot. “-but we did anyways.”
Okay, so my birthday present to myself was making myself post this without losing my goddamn mind during the editing process so it's really rough/raw around the edges and by that I mean it looks like 100 different kinds of baked ass. It was also supposed to be part of another chapter but it got too long and I had to portion it off :/

Sorry updates are like three months apart fuck me.

Please enjoy.

The shovel’s too big.

It’s too heavy, too long, and every three steps it causes Bumblebee to stumble, which causes Optimus’s spark to skip a beat as he narrowly avoids smacking his tiny helm or face planting into the dirt.

But Bee had insisted on bringing it, had insisted on helping him. And so he’d allowed him to carry it out on his own, even if his collective fumbling had set them back nearly an hour.

Not that he minds. It’s a pleasant enough morning. Partly cloudy, high of 70 degrees, only 10% chance of dust storms in the afternoon. When he’d looked up the forecast last week it’d been 20%. He’d intended to tell (y/n) to bring a poncho and protective eye gear, just in case.

His spark lurches. Were he alone he might actually allow himself to laugh at the irony. But he’s not alone, and if he laughs he’ll have to explain why to Bumblebee, and that’s a conversation he can’t even have with Ratchet without struggling not to purge his tanks in shame.

“(y/n)”

Optimus freezes at the name. Not because he’s startled, but because despite the warbling and the static it almost sounds pronounceable this time.

Normally, Bumblebee would inquire about (y/n) by sending an image of her face through the bond and the accompanying feeling (namely worry, longing, anger or curiosity) would allow him to make
sense of what he was trying to say. But Bee is steadily approaching the age where the bond would begin to die off, and lately he’d been making fledgeling attempts to not only vocalize names, but attach adjectives.

Were his vocal processor undamaged, the resulting noise would have sounded something like a simplistic electronic keyboard to human ears. But in Bee’s case, it sounds more like harsh radio feedback.

Which was all the more devastating, considering the adjective string he’d chosen contained the glyphs for “birdsong” and “sounds pretty”. The last one could have been warm or sunny, but it’s too garbled to be certain.

It takes him a moment’s contemplation to realize that he’s asking where she is, as he’d neglected to mentioned that vocally or through the bond, but instead chose to convey it by gesturing wildly at the cactus he’d brought back for her.

“Why isn’t she gardening with us?”

Body language, visuals, and three different layers of distorted vocals, all to communicate a six word sentence.

He’s going to sorely miss the bond.

“She is sleeping Bumblebee.” He says, wishing he were able to say sleeping without a ball forming in his intake.

“She’s always sleeping now.”

There’s no adjectives this time, but he does use the bond, and brings up an image of her unconscious face. He has no idea when it’s from, but he wants to believe it’s a memory from when they recharged together, because she looks so peaceful. Too peaceful to be clinging to life where she lie now.

“She is…very tired Bee,” and he hates himself for responding like that, but what else is he supposed to tell him? That she’s in a coma with an incinerated nervous system because he wasn’t careful enough? Because he put her there.
Bee doesn’t respond and mercifully, Optimus thinks that’s going to be the end of it. But his reprieve is short lived when Bee, having already grown tired of digging holes, throws his shovel down next to the dirt pile he’d amassed, easily half as tall as he is.

“Beep.”

“No more gardening.”

Optimus sighs.

“Why not?”

“Beep.”

“I’m hungry.”

Of course he is. That’s what happens when you spill three cubes and refuse anything but a single rust stick for breakfast. He’s going to have to come back here later, probably right before a patrol shift, probably going to miss a stasis nap, which doesn’t matter anyways since he can hardly close his optics without seeing her face and-

He needs to calm down. He pinches the ridge between his face and helm and vents deeply before turning back to his sparkling, who had begun throwing dirt fistfuls of dirt to convey his impatience.

“You are...hungry?” he repeats flatly, optical ridge raised.

“Beep.”

“Yes.”

“Hello ‘hungry.’” He says with a completely straight face. “I am your sire.”
A moment passes. Optimus watches in amusement as Bee’s face twists in confusion.

And he has to fight a genuine smile when Bee begins shrieking.

***

Thinking back on it, your life for the past two years had been an endless clusterfuck of unexplainable events.

You’d discovered aliens. You’d moved in with them. You’d adopted two of them, fallen head over heels for their leader and became the unrequited love interest of their CMO who also happened to be your best friend.

One would imagine that you’d have developed some sort of immunity to cosmic bullshit by this point.

But as you find yourself suddenly struggling to breathe in your dead adopted son's crushing embrace because of the arbitrary enforcement of natural laws in the dreamscape, you find yourself coming to grips with how woefully ill-adjusted you actually are to dealing with said cosmic bullshit.

Rumble finally releases you. You stumble, but manage to keep yourself upright. You take a deep breath, summon the courage to look at him head on, and smile.

And then promptly begin to vomit.

Your psyche, it seems, having run out of ways to communicate how completely and utterly done it is, has resorted to manifesting through physical symptoms. You’re not exactly sure how you manifest physical symptoms in the astral plane, nor are you sure how exactly you vomit, having not eaten since your arrival here, but you do. It’s pastel-colored and pixilated like everything else, and that’s probably something you’d like to learn more about if you weren’t busy swimming in the emotional tsunami triggered by your murdered child hugging you.
A few moments of stunned silence pass while your companions watch you dramatically lose your lunch.

“Wow.” Elita says finally. “I wasn’t expecting that. I mean, I don’t exactly know what I was expecting, but it wasn’t that.”

Rumble’s reaction is decidedly more crestfallen.

“Whoops,” he says, face twisting in concern. “I hugged you too hard.”

You wipe your face. You stumble. You give up trying to look at him head on a second time and stare at the ground.

“Rumble,” you say flatly. “Why did you hug me?”

He looks at you with a blank expression that clearly says that doesn’t warrant a response. And he, unsurprisingly, gives none.

“Why did you hug me?” you say again.

He looks at you quizzically. “You don’t want me too?”

“How can you hug me?” you rephrase your question, voice shaking. “Why would you even want to touch me?”

His optics widen, a completely unfitting expression of concern coming over his face.

“Are you okay?”

He’s asking if you’re okay. The child you’d killed with your own hands is asking if you’re okay.
Rumble’s frown deepens when you don’t respond. He reaches out a servo, gently turning your face towards him.

“Did I hurt you?” he asks, familiar red optics peering straight into your eyes. “I’m sorry if I did.”

You can’t breathe. You don’t need to breathe up here but you can’t breathe because he’s apologizing for hurting you.

“I didn’t mean to hug you so hard.” There’s genuine worry in his voice this time and guilt on his face. “Sorry Mom.”

Mom.

You don’t scream. And part of you is very, very proud of yourself for that. But you do collapse to your knees, you do curl up into the fetal position, and you do start hyperventilating. Hard.

“How…can you….still call me that.” you blurt out between gulps of air. “How…you can…mom-”

“The same way Boss is still Boss.” he answers simply, expression a mélange of confusion and concern.


“But you held me too, when you were done fighting Boss. I wish you didn’t hurt him either, but I understand why you did.”

For a bot as developmentally stunted as Rumble he’s got an extremely well-adjusted view on the situation. You’re not entirely sure where he’d acquired such seasoned wisdom from, but you’re too busy staring at the plating gap between his neck and shoulder where you’d once plunged a ballistic knife into.

There’s not even a scratch.
That shouldn’t make you start crying, but it does.

It’s raining. Well no, it’s raining, thundering, lighting, and hailing-golf ball-sized ice. It makes an almost deafening plunk plunk noise as it ricochets off Rumble’s frame, which he’s currently using to try and shield you from your stress-induced hurricane. You try to stop sobbing long enough to apologize for at least one of the godawful weather patterns you’d conjured, but before you can even open your mouth an enormous hand plants itself directly into the shaking earth beside you.

“You need to calm down.” Elita says softly.

“What…”

“Look, I know this was a lot to take in, and maybe I underestimated your reaction to seeing him again, and I’m sorry for that.” she says. “I don’t know how you’re feeling right now, but I can see it, and I know you want to sit here and bawl your eyes out and once your done with that probably grill these two for answers about their past with Soundwave, but this realm literally can’t handle that.”

Your eyes dart between Elita’s paradoxical expression of soft concern, Rumble’s grimace as he continues to brace himself against the storm, and his twin, peering nervously out from behind a cherry-red 8-bit palm tree swaying precariously in the wind.

“How?” you want to ask, but only manage another sob.

“Don’t panic, but remember what I told you about exploding into a million itty bitty pieces or waking up? If you do that now, we don’t get a do-over. I’m not going to have any kind of control over what happens to you or where you end up,” she gives you an exhausted smile. “So, y’know, don’t freak out or anything. Deep breaths, okay?”

You wonder how she can be so calm while the entire realm, along with her plan is teetering on the edge of obliteration. It’s a tempered, tranquil panic, eerily similar to Optimus’s. It’s an attractive quality, you decide, one that, after several deep breaths, you remember that you actually share with them.

You joked your way through two massive seizures and your own brief death before. You can find a way to handle this. You get a chance to go on a kickass adventure with your dead son and you’re not gonna fuck it up.
So you take your rage, your anguish, and your curiosity, already hopelessly tangled together and compress it into a ball.

And you take that ball and smash it into oblivion.

The rain slows, the clouds clear, and the hale stops, though not without a last few spiteful ice chunks you narrowly avoid as you crawl out from under Rumble, dust yourself off, and try to lay claim to at least some part of your composure as you wipe the tears off your face and force yourself to look at him.

“Rumble,” you say shakily. “Can we pretend I didn’t just have a nuclear meltdown like the giant wimp I am?”

“No,” he says bluntly. “We don’t have to pretend.”

“You didn’t have a meltdown.” Elita reassures you. “You just temporarily forgot how well-adjusted you are.”

You can’t help but laugh. “If you sugarcoated that any harder I’d get diabetes.”

“Luckily for you I’m pretty much tapped out on empathy for the time being.” she says. “Are you guys ready to kick this trial’s butt yet?”

You’re honestly more ready for a stiff cube of high grade and a long nap, but spare her your reservations as you face Rumble.

“You got enough sick ninja moves left to help your nervous wreck of a mom get through this thing?”

"FRAG YEAH!" Rumble shouts, fist pumping into the air inches short of your face and narrowly avoiding upper cutting your head clean off.

“Holy crap watch it.” you say, jumping backwards several feet after the fact. “I don’t want to die before we even go in.”
Rumble cocks his head. “You can’t die. And if your head comes off you can just put it back on. You can put anything back together.” He gestures towards his darker twin, who had only recently left his position from behind the palm tree to inch closer to the three over you over the course of your conversation.

You breathe a sigh of relief, partially at the revelation that dismemberment seems to be a non-issue here(However disconcerting.) but mostly because the shy little bot hadn’t gone running to the pixilated hills after witnessing your breakdown.

“Is this your brother?” you ask after a moment.

“Frenzy.” Rumble corrects you. “He got taken away from Boss and the rest of us really early.”

You feel your heart plummet, your mind providing no shortage of dark scenarios that “taken” could be referring to. But you’d resolved to ignore your burning, bitter curiosity just moments ago and don’t press further.

“Hi Frenzy.” you say brightly, offering your hand. “My name is (y/n).”

Your hand isn’t even done extending before Frenzy violently recoils. Your heart sinks again but you can’t really blame him. In the five or so minutes he’s known you, you did burst into hysterics, projectile vomit and conjured a class-five hurricane from sheer stress. Hell you wouldn’t trust you either.

“He doesn’t like to be touched.” Rumble says. “And you gotta go slow.”

*Of course.* You blow out a breath and try again. “Sorry, that was rude of me.” you say softly. “Are you going to come with us?”

Frenzy just stares.

“He doesn’t talk a lot.” Rumble says after a few awkward moments. “Sometimes you just have to start moving and make sure he knows he can come.”
That’s not too hard. You’re used to meeting the metal children that had come into your life halfway in one capacity or another, and the few years you’d been granted with Rumble had increased your patience in that respect to nigh-leviathan proportions. If Frenzy needs you to take baby steps, then you’ll take baby steps. That’s not a problem.

What is a problem is adhering to Elita’s plea not to ask any sort of questions whatsoever about their past, least the paracosm collapse in on itself. But that’s okay. Because you console yourself by promising that if you ever find out exactly what happened to render this ‘bot into the nervous, nonverbal, developmentally stunted mess he is, you’re going to feed them their own spark.

“Okay, are we all set now?” Elita asks. “Done with any flashback inducing questions or overdramatic weather altering meltdowns?”

“Overdramatic?” you ask incredulously.

“I mean, can I send you in there without having to worry about finding any of you slumped over in a pile of emotional goo?”

You grit your teeth. “I can’t promise anything.”

“Can I be reasonably certain?” She asks, exasperated. “Just give me something to work with. Are you probably gonna be okay?”

You look at Frenzy, who, unsurprisingly, gives no response, and at Rumble, who merely shrugs. Then back to Elita.

“Probably.”

“I’ll take what I can get.” she says, before clapping her servos together with renewed zeal and the air of a amusement park safety inspector. “Please form a line single file into the trial entrance. I’ll be able to see and hear you at all times, but you’ll only be able to hear me. Please keep your servos and pedes wherever you feel like. If at any point you feel like you need to take a break or get off the ride, that’s too bad.”
“Thanks.”

“Hookay.” she says, gesturing towards the labyrinth with finger pistols and a wink. “Good luck. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do and try not to die.”

“But we’re already dead.” Rumble points out.

“Then try to beat my high score.”

“You’ve never done this before.” you say flatly.

“Just fraggin’ go already!”

***

Ratchet knows he’s dreaming.

Because when recharge does come now, more often than not it's lucid.

The young, ever bewildered scientist part of him finds enjoyment in exploring and recording the experience, cataloging the tells, the recurring places and characters, memorizing what wakes him up and what sends him into retreat from lucidity.

The tired, exhausted war medic part of him finds it cosmically unfair that he’s managed to find a way to be awake even when he's asleep.

He knows because his servos don’t looks right when held in front of his face, the light switches don’t work, and his chronometer reads a wildly different time whenever he looks at it. These tells remain consistent throughout all of his dreams.

But the most damning evidence is that he’s had this dream before. Almost to the point where he’s memorized it. But if he can keep that knowing itch a gentle one, barricaded in the back of his processor, then he can continue as though this were real.
“Ratchet you fucking tease!”

And oh, what he’d give to make this real.

He’d never quite gotten over the image of (y/n) in the washracks, of her being wet. The mane of organic hair that lays darkened and plastered against her face, the water droplets that run down from her collarbone, between her breasts, the gentle sheen of her skin reflecting in the dim light.

She’s beautiful. She's a pit-slagged organic and somehow she's beautiful.

And right now, she’s his.

He’s sitting down with his back against the wall, under the faucet, watching as she grinds desperately in his lap beneath the spray of the water. She has one hand on his shoulder, one buried between her thighs, already working herself to the finish line even as she bucks furiously against him.

She's warm, and even warmer inside, he's sure, and he doesn't want to wait to find out, he needs to find out. So he pulls her hand away, and she squeals in protest, but when he slides his own servo beneath her instead, and presses his middle and index digit at a gentle curve as far back as he can reach she begins sobbing.

Ratchet smiles. He doesn't need to be rough, to break bones. No, he can have her screaming his name with a feather's touch.

He pumps his arm three, maybe four times at most, and she breaks against him with the sweetest fluttering little cry. He can make out parts of his name, coming breathy, dizzily through her lips, and the look on her face, Primus, he’d frame it if he could. But he can’t study it long enough to commit it to memory, not when she’s already busied her free hand with freeing his painfully pressurized spike.

He stops her from impaling herself on him. He always does.

“Are you sure you want this?” he asks, clearly, calmly
“P-positive.”

“You’re certain?”

“Ratchet please!”

Sometimes he’ll make her tell him why, sometimes he’ll make her beg. But tonight he’s feeling generous and doesn’t delay her further, only providing gentle support, holding her steady as she lowers herself onto his spike.

And he’s inside her. Oh god he’s inside her and she’s so warm, so tight, he can feel every twitch, every pulse of her body around him. He hisses through his denta, clenched so tight they could break but he relents when she covers his mouth with her own, lips petal-soft and swallowing his surprised cry. He forces his glossa into her mouth, buries his fingers in her hair and presses her head against him, because it’s not enough to just be inside her, he wants her everywhere.

In an instant his cool façade fades and he’s gone. He’s lost within her. It always happens here, right here he starts losing control. The tiles swim beneath them and reality loses it’s edges, but she’s still solid, still so very there and real as he rolls his hips into her. Breathing hitched, tears pooling in the corners of her eyes as she pleads with him to break her over and over again.

And he intends to. He’s going to, if he can just ignore this overwhelming something welling up in his chassis.

He recognizes that something now. It’s a feeling, and sadly, infuriatingly, not the feeling of anticipating climax.

It’s guilt.

“You’re dreaming, Ratchet.” (y/n) says softly.

She’s gone perfectly still, a sad expression on her face as the outline of her body begins to blur.

Ratchet in-vents sharply.
“No…”

“You’re dreaming.” she repeats, placing a hand on his face. “I’m so sorry.”

“No…please.”

He stops thrusting. He’s not even moving anymore, just desperately curling his frame around hers, telling himself that if he could just cover enough of her that’s she’ll stay here, that she won’t melt or fade away. They don’t have to be interfacing, don’t have to be doing anything if he can just keep holding her.

“Sorry.” she says again, and he thinks maybe he feels her holding him back, just for a moment, before she dissolves into a brilliant spray of pale light.

He’s knows it’s over. And he feels like an idiot for expecting otherwise, for thinking he could wake up with anything other than the empty ache in his arms.

But he doesn’t wake up.

“Of course.” Ratchet thinks bitterly, because even the way she leaves him is one of the tells. If she melts or fades out he gets to wake up in a panic, swear loudly, and take a fast-acting sedative so he can face the day without looking like the berth had kicked his aft halfway across the acid wastes.

If she dissolves, then he gets drop kicked into another dream.

It’s not a dream proper, but a memory this time, granting him the perspective of both an onlooker and through the optics of his younger self. Processing two viewpoints simultaneously is a little vertigo-inducing, but he’s too busy reeling in dawning horror to feel dizzy as he begins to recognize his surroundings.

He’s back on Cybertron, in the basement levels of the Iaconian hospital. He’s accompanied by a faceless medic, though he recognizes the frame immediately, and comes to realize he’s trying his best not to remember his face.
He looms behind Ratchet, somehow, despite there being almost no noticeable height difference, but the creepy sonovaglitch had always seemed far taller than he was. Maybe it was his eerie-sing-song voice, or the fact that he could have sworn he’d seen him walk right through a wall once.

Or maybe it’s merely the fact that, while they’re both hovering over a severely injured Soundwave, strapped down and cracked open like an egg on the medical slab, Ratchet’s mouth is set in a firm line, while the other medic’s smile is downright ghoulish.

“But the contamination risk…”

“You were the one you suggested waiting until after the fissure occurs to start the dosage. There’s no risk to your spark whatsoever.” and there’s that voice again, the one that sends a cold bolt through his frame even now. “You’re getting cold pedes, aren’t you?”

“I wanted volunteers. Not…prisoners.” he wishes he’d sounded more desperate, instead of hiding behind his deadpan professional tone like the coward he was.

“And I wanted a no-strings attached reach around from my colleague, but he’s too hung up over some burly, soft-spoken librarian to even look at me.” The medic leers. “My point is, work with what we’ve got. Besides, it’s not like our tongue tied prisoner has explicitly withdrawn consent, right Soundwave?”

Soundwave hadn’t uttered a single word in the entirety of his internment. And he doesn’t start now. He does, however, reply by suturing several audio clips together, pulled directly from the medic’s previous conversation, to form an entirely new sentence.

“Eat mY ENTIRE aft.”

Were the circumstances different, Ratchet might have found himself impressed.

“If that’s not a green light, then, I don’t know what is.” The medic says “We’re due a report on the first attempt tomorrow. It’s now or never. So are you going to play ball or do I have to take a whack at him?”
Ratchet spares his companion a last look of disgust before turning to Soundwave, stoic and unrelenting even splayed out like a mechanimal on the vivisection table before him.

“I’m solving a problem.” he hears his younger self thinking for the first time. It had become his mantra since then.

“No…” Ratchet mutters softly, prisoner himself in his memory’s frame. “No you’re not.”

A faceless mech like Soundwave had very little means of conveying his confusion, but there’s subtle indicators, like the slight tilt of his helm and the cessation of his cooling fans as he observes Ratchet unveiling his spark chamber before him.

He has even less means of conveying terror, but Ratchet has no other word for it. Soundwave had coolly tolerated every other procedure inflicted on him. He hadn’t so much as flinched when faced with the prospect of dismemberment or death, but when his own chamber is forcibly opened, he begins trembling.

“Request : Desist.”

It’s his own voice. It’s tinny and detached but it’s still his and didn’t think his resolve could waver any harder but his shaking servos prove him wrong.

“So you can talk. “says the medic. “And here I was going to give you the benefit of the doubt when you didn’t answer any of our questions. That was awful rude of him, wasn’t it Ratchet?”

Ratchet’s not sure if his willpower is more tempered then he thought, or if his body had just completely frozen in place. Either way, it’s the only thing keeping him from whipping around and roundhouse kicking the other medic into a wall.

“I’m solving a problem.”

“Request : Desist.” That almost sounded desperate, he thinks. It has to be his imagination, because desperation is an emotion and Soundwave can’t vocally produce emotion.
The chambers are aligned, and already he can both feel and see the fluorescent tendrils from his own spark reaching towards Soundwave’s. The resonance between them is a feeble hum, and Soundwave’s weakened spark can only produce the softest of vibrations in fruitless defense.

“Do it Ratchet.” The medic says, rubbing his servos together in anticipation. “Make this birdie sing.”

“Desist. Please desist.”

It is desperation. He’s not imagining it. Soundwave is scared. Soundwave is terrified. Ratchet's terrified and he’s doing it anyways. He closes the distance, the cyan glow from his chamber eclipsing Soundwave’s and he’s not sure if the ringing in his helm is from the resonance or from Soundwave screaming.

The walls are shaking. Windows and glass vials are shattering. The other medic is shouting something about his vocal processor and why didn’t they disconnect it sooner. But Ratchet isn’t listening, isn’t focused on anything but the sickest, worst parody of an overload tearing through his frame as the spark merge completes.

“…Solving a problem.”

He doesn’t wake up screaming. He thanks Primus for that small favor.

His servos still shake, still hyperventilating, and he can’t see straight, but he can probably convince himself to blame that on the small pile of high-grade cubes that had accumulated on the shelf behind his berth.

He rolls over, one servo shielding his oversensitive optics from the lights, glowing painfully bright even at their lowest setting and checks his chronometer.

He’d been in recharge for less than a cycle.

His processor spawns a million and one reasons that he needs at least eight cycles to stay optimal, six just to stay functional, and a plethora of conditions aggravated by inadequate sleep, both short term and long term, and he knows he’s erring towards the other end. But even if he could somehow coax himself back into unconsciousness now, he wouldn’t want to, not with the memories so raw and fresh, threatening to play on infinite loop if he so much as shuts his optics again.
"You're dreaming Ratchet."

Primus, what he'd give to hear her say that, even though minutes ago it almost broke him.

He decides he is going to hear it. He’ll pull his wretched, aching frame from the berth, start that godawful caffeinated beverage dispenser, and also maybe make a short trip to the wash racks while it’s perculating before waking her up. Somehow, despite the nightmares and the self-loathing strong enough to make him nauseous, his spike is still painfully hard, and if he has to chose between being scraped to death by his interface panel or the ability to look (y/n) in the face for the entirety of Conan the Barbarian then he’ll chose the latter. His sanity is riding on it.

He’s elbow-deep in his supply cabinet, fishing out the vacuum sealed tins, trying to remember the difference between Arabica and Peruvian beans and which variety of the bizarre, burnt plant matter seems to keep her awake the longest when he remembers.

He can’t wake her up.

How long he stays frozen like this, coffee tins in his servo, halfway out of the cabinet, he doesn’t know. But it feels like an eternity.

He white knuckles his grip on the door. He could tear it off. He could throw the tins. He could march himself right back own to the medbay and start flipping tables again, just start mindlessly breaking everything in sight because that’s what he’s good at.

But ultimately, he does none of those things, instead falling back against the wall and sliding down to a crumpled heap on the floor, and begins laughing. Laughing so hard lubricant pools at the corners of his optics and streams down his face, and his frame shakes from the effort of keeping himself quiet.

At least that’s what he tells himself, and what he’ll tell anyone who finds him keeled over with his face buried in his servos.

He’s just laughing.
The super important mysterious thing

Chapter Notes

I'm really tired I don't have alot to say about this one except yet again this was supposed to be one chapter that splintered off into like four. Some of it's because the plot went through several overhauls but it's mostly because I've avoided planning this part for like two years and just planned everything around it since I'm so fucking lazy.

Pls enjoy love you guys

EDIT : AHAHA THIS THING IS 19 fucking pages long holy fuck

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It's still two degrees off.”

It's the third time that week that Carly and Astoria were asked(begged, if Ratchet's irritable, sleep deprived manner would allow him the social graces to do so) to watch Bumblebee. At first it was under the guise of providing him an extra few hours to catch up on his work, but when he'd temporarily slipped into stasis while showing them how to operate the rough cybertronian equivalent of a microwave, it'd become painfully clear those extra few hours would be better spent studying the insides of his optical lids.

Not that either of them minded, considering this absolutely warranted overtime pay, and that Bumblebee is cute enough to be considered a viable means of fertility treatment, even if he is currently trying his damndest to squirm out of Astoria's arms.

“You honestly think two degrees is going to make a difference?” She asks, narrowly avoiding a small, flailing servo as she watches Carly fuss incessantly over the not-quite-lukewarm-enough cube.

“Sparklings are exceptionally sensitive to internal temperature fluctuations before their first plating upgrade.”The blonde recites methodically. “And since Bee's a premee we have to be extremely careful. “

“Oh my god it's fine. I checked it. Ratchet checked it. You're still checking it.” Astoria groans. “That thing's had more fingers in it then I did on my twenty first birthday. “

The cube almost slips out of her hand.
“Tell me you’re not serious.”

“No, I’m not. It was my eighteenth.”

The cube still doesn’t fall out of her hands, but she fumbles, and the resulting splatter paints her blouse bio-luminescent blue.

“Careful, that shit stains.” the brunette says, pointing lazily. “And it’s mildly corrosive to cotton-based clothing. I’ve lost three sundresses that way.”

Carly makes a noise like an angry cat, furiously wiping at the glowing stains “I was supposed to meet Torpedo later for a movie.”

“You mind explaining to me what could possibly compel you to chase human ass while surrounded by these two-story-tall metal gods? “

“Because Spike’s actually really sweet and funny and surprisingly mature for his age and-“

“-And because tall dark and trigger happy is robot-married?” Astoria finishes for her.

Carly sighs, but doesn't disagree. “Isn't Powerglide too? “

“Not married, no, and totally not serious from what I can tell. I figure if she does decide to show up we can just ménage a troi until nobodie's mad anymore or somebody breaks something.”

The blonde manages to tear her eyes away from her ruined clothing long enough shoot a are you fucking serious glare her companion's way, complete with twitching eye and gaping mouth.

Astoria shrugs. “It works for Bonobos.”

“Have you ever had a genealogy report done? You might be more closely related to them than you’d
“Yeah, I did actually. Turns out I’m 0.1% Spanish Basque and 99.9% fuck you.”

“You sound like a gonzo porn producer’s smartass answering machine. How are you even real?”

“Look, there’s an intergalactic war going on. We could die at any moment, and I want to go out like I lived: wearing C.K Eternity and buried-face deep in an autobot’s crotch.”

Carly growls softly, digging the fingers of her spare hand into her head. “You do realize there’s a baby like five inches away from your whore mouth memorizing everything that comes out of it, right?”

“Yeah, and if his dad is any indicator, he’s gonna grow up hot. So you might want to start making an impression now.”

“Maybe if I wanted (y/n) to snap out of her coma and actually kill me I might consider it.”

A long, painful silence follows, complete with averted eyes and awkward coughing.

“Yeah, uh, speaking of that—” Carly begins after an agonizing fifteen or so seconds. “Has her condition improved at all or is she still completely ah...”

“Still messed up pretty bad, yeah. Ratchet said there’s “sufficient neurological activity to suggest her organic processor is functioning uninhibited,” but he also made a face like he just stepped on a lego when I asked.”

Carly winces. “Did they ever come clean about exactly what happened?”

“No, but considering the last we ever heard from her was “Gee Chip, thanks for covering for me so I can finish writing 50 shades of gunmetal grey.”, I think the situation kind of explains itself. Just...” she hisses through her teeth. “Probably don’t bring it up around anyone. Like, ever.”
She snorts. “Because you're afraid Optimus will pull the plug on your flyboy with benefits?”

“Because it's rude.” Astoria shoots back. “I once put two guys in the hospital trying to pull off a three-way spider monkey and I felt like shit. I took care of it, paid all of their bills, visited them twice a day every day but one guy lost his internship and the other one permanently damaged his rotator cuff, and no amount of candy or morphine can make up for that. I can't even imagine what it feels like to put someone in a coma with your dick, but it's probably also shit, and if I can spare the big guy's feelings by keeping my mouth shut, then I will.”

Carly blinks. Carly makes a note to surgically attach her foot to her mouth.

“Wow, uh...yeah okay that's a pretty good point.” she says, nervously rubbing the back of her head. “I just...I didn't-”

“You just weren't expecting something that sensitive from me, were you?” Astoria finishes for her, making a face as though she was just forced to ingest something inedible.

“If I'm being honest, I also wasn't expecting you to know what a bonobo was either.”

“I have a degree in animal behavioral sciences.” she says, rolling her eyes. “Everyone assumes I'm an idiot just because I know how to have a good time.”

“Well, I guess I fall safely under that spectrum.” she says, at long last removing the temperature gauge from the cube and placing it in Astoria's free hand. “Sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” the brunette says, trying her best to offer the cube to Bee, who seems far more interested in shoving fistfuls of her hair into his intake.

“Hold on, Optimus showed me a trick once-” Carly says, extending her hands towards the struggling sparkling.

“Wait, is that the tickling thing? Don't do the tickling thing.”
Carly looks rather put out, but withdraws her hands regardless. “Why not?”

“Because last time I tried that he didn't drink it, he just held it in his intake and spewed it back at me the moment I turned my head. Which, by the way, is how I lost one of my sundresses.”

Carly raises her eyebrow while setting down the cube. “And here I just assumed you got it covered in transfluid.” she sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. “I suppose I owe you another apology.”

“Actually, that's how I lost the other two.” Astoria smirks while trying, and failing, to peel Bee's helm away from her chest, where he's actively nuzzling his face to avoid another doomed feeding attempt. “Should we just give up on the energon? He had like four rust sticks already.”

“You do know those things have like the rough nutrient profile of a cold poptart, right?”

“Yeah but these were like, jelly filled or something. Also what's wrong with poptarts?”

Carly sighs, but doesn't press further. “Let's just try to get him into recharge for now. If he wakes up hungry later we'll deal with it then.”

“You mean *I'll* have to deal with it since you'll be too busy chasing highschool-age ass.”

_He's eighteen and we're just getting coffee._ She doesn't even bother defending herself this time. “We just have to sing to him right? Does it have to be a David Bowie song or can it just be about space travel or... what? I think I'm seeing a theme here but I'm not sure what it is yet.”

“I think it needs to at least be based off of a Bowie song even if it is about space travel, because last night I tried “Fly me to the moon” and he just threw crayons at me. “

“Speaking of crayons” Carly begins, procuring a neatly folded piece of paper from her pocket and handing it to Astoria. “-Do you think this is, uh, cause for concern?”

Astoria, rather awkwardly unfolds the paper with her free hand, revealing a drawing Bumblebee had made earlier that day. She looks at the drawing, then at Carly, then back at the paper. She grimaces.
“Is...is that an elephant?”

“I think so.”

“Tell me it's kissing that bear, not strangling it.”

“I think the x'd out eyes and tongue sticking out kinda negates that theory.”

“Can I assume the red and white blob on the floor is supposed to be Ratchet?”

“We can also probably assume those aren't energon cubes he's lying in.”

Astoria lets out a low whistle. “That's some Dr. Phil shit if I've ever seen it.” she says, shifting Bee around on her lap to face him. “You're looking at some serious therapy little guy.”

“Should....should we tell someone? Like Ratchet ?”

“I'm pretty sure he's reenacting the scene in the drawing right now.”

Optimus?”

“With the amount of stress he's already under? I don't think so. He fell asleep during a video conference with the Airforce General and Fowler reamed him for nearly an hour afterwards.”

“Yikes.”

“Yeah. And like halfway through her cat somehow climbed up on him and he just...froze. Like refused to even touch it with his servos. Ironhide had to get it off of him. Tell me that's not an early-stage trauma response with a straight face.”
“I can’t.” Carly says, removing her hairband to massage her temples. “How about Ironhide? There's no reason we can't tell Ironhide.”

“What's he gonna do, shoot the budding dysfunctional family problems away?”

Carly glares. “He's not just a one dimensional walking stereotype okay? He's got goals and aspirations and feelings and all sorts of character development. Have you ever bothered to ask him why he joined the autobots? Or how he met his sparkmate?”

“Did they both involve firearms and explosions?”

Carly opens her mouth, then closes it before planting her face squarely down on the table.

“What about Chip?” she says, not bothering to hold her head up.

Astoria raises an eyebrow.“Why?”

“Because despite genuinely not wanting to be here he's really considerate and thoughtful and could probably help us find a robot therapist without having to go through Fowler or Optimus.”

“Okay yeah that's pretty solid reasoning.” Astoria agrees while lifting her hat, which Bumblebee had begun making desperate grabs for in his boredom, off of her head and wedging it onto his helm. “You see that Bee? We came to a compromise by talking it out like responsible adults. Because respect. And Friendship. Today was brought to you by the letter S.”

“For “Suckup.” Carly groans. “You think a five second Bigbird spiel is gonna make up for everything that came out of your mouth tonight?”

“I can hope.” she says, tilting Bee's face up to look him in the optics. “You can keep the hat. Please don't tell your dad.”

Bee opens his mouth, emitting a shrill, warbling vocalization that could be better phonetically described as whoop.
“Is that a yes?”

Bee blinks.

“I'm going to take that as a “yes””

“Can we just try to get him into recharge already? It's already like 15 minutes past his bedtime.”

“Right right.” Astoria says, getting to her feet with a strained oomph as she shifts the sparkling’s weight in her arms. “Damn kid, you're getting heavy.”

Bee gives her a split-second look she immediately interprets as insulted, but remains silent.

“Did we ever figure out which song we were gonna use?” Carly asks. “What else is based off of a Bowie song?”

Astoria shrugs, an impressive feat with her arms full. “I dunno. Rocket Man?”

“Worth a shot.”

“What about Shatner's version of Rocket Man?”

“If you so much as sing a single verse in his voice so help me god I will punch you in the tits.”

“Noted.” She says, swaying Bee gently from side to side as she begins to sing.

“And I think, it's going to be, a long, long, 'till touchdown brings me 'round again, to find, I'm not the MAN, they think I am at home, oh no. ”
“Astoria!” Carly snarls.

Astoria snickers, burying her face behind Bee's helm to hide her shit-eating grin.

“I'm a Rocket Man~” she continues on in a normal, melodic timbre, much to her friend's relief. “Rocket maaaaaan, burning up his fuse out here alone~”

Bee sighs, optics growing heavy as he finally allows himself to relax in her arms. She's warm, she's pretty and she smells nice, and the way she sings is making him sleepier by the minute. But he almost wishes she'd stop. Because that way he could close his optics, curl up tight and remember someone else's face and someone else's voice.

That way he could pretend his mom wasn't already asleep.

***

It's not really a trial.

A trial involves testing your limits, questioning everything you thought you knew about the universe, and possibly being forced to walk blindfolded over a bed of hot coals while a stern but sagely spirit guide guilt trips you about missing your grandma's birthday to sneak half a pack of warm bitch beer in the school parking lot.

A trial could also be room after room of simplistic logic puzzles peppered with dangerous but not deadly enemies. And honestly, you probably prefer that, even if you do feel gipped on the spiritual integrity portion of this trial.

But that's where you find yourself now, navigating through a room containing exactly two doors, two massive stone cubes (one by each door) and a two-sectioned collapsible ceiling that punches the floor like the fist of an angry god every ten seconds.

After you'd finished pissing yourself (because the arbitrary enforcement of organic bodily functions had been important to the Primes, clearly) it had taken you only about 30 seconds of observation to solve the puzzle: move the first cube under the first section (Which the twins had done effortlessly),stalling it and allowing you access to a narrow ridge that circumvented both sections, run around to the other door, and push the second cube far enough in to stop the second ceiling. Easy peasy.
What you'd failed to account for is the width of the ledge, in that it's too narrow for anyone but you to walk on. Which means you're going to have to push the second cube in alone.

“WHY ARE YOU STALLING?” Rumble shouts from the other end of the room, over the methodical *tha-thunk* of stone colliding with metal “ARE YOU SCARED?”

You blow out a breath. “No, I'm not stalling and no, I'm not scared, I'm just...perfecting my timing.”

“IT'S BEEN SEVEN MINUTES!”

“Perfecting timing takes *time*!”

“IS THAT A JOKE? I DON'T GET IT.”

“I...” you trail off, wincing as ten second rotation times out and the ceiling collapses again with an eardrum damaging *thud.* “Just...gimme another minute.”

“DO YOU NEED SOME ENCOURAGEMENT?” Rumble yells, gesturing accusingly at his twin “BECAUSE FRENZY JUST CALLED YOU A WUSS.”

You look at Frenzy, who merely blinks in response.

“ARE YOU JUST GONNA *TAKE* THAT?”

You're not exactly sure what's going on, or if it's supposed to be angering or endearing. You do, however, regardless of Rumble's projecting or Frenzy's actual opinion of your wussiness, know full well that you're being an *actual wuss* and if you want this adventure to stay safely in “kickass” territory then you're going to have to redeem yourself.

“Oh really?” you smirk, playing into their game. “I survived two tentacle gut punches, took down three vehicons...”
“WITH MY HELP-”

“-and-” mildly inconvenienced a gestalt leader once “-punched Motormaster’s optic out, and you think I’m too chicken shit to finish a puzzle?”

Frenzy narrows his optics. Maybe. You can't really see from this far away.

*Talk shit get hit kid* You think, trying to muster as much anger as you can at the nonverbal twin to continue with your charade and also maybe also make your knees start working again.

“WATCH THIS.” Rumble says, roping his arm around his twin. “SHE GETS REALLY STRONG WHEN SHE'S MAD. THIS IS GONNA BE SO COOL.”

*No pressure, not at all.* You swallow hard, eyes darting between the ceiling and this giant chuck of rock you're supposed to use as an umbrella. You give it a cursory push.

Nothing.

A cursory shove.

More nothing.

A cursory *throw all of your strength against this immovable object and expect it to budge.*

A small chip falls off the from where your nails have dug in. You feel offended.

You slump against the rock, sighing heavily. You wonder if you're not strong enough or just not angry enough, or maybe if you've overlooked some laughably simple alternative to the puzzle like a false wall or *throwing your hands up and leaving,* but your resolve is falling faster than the deathtrap of a ceiling and you're quickly sliding into a confused, frustrated funk.

“YOU CAN DO IT MOM!” Rumble shouts again. “SHOW THAT CUBE WHO'S BOSS.”
He said the “M” word. It's then, you remember, that your freakish superhuman abilities are powered solely by the encouragement of small children on any plane of existence. So in that moment, you're filled with enough adrenaline to kill an NFL linebacker make this cube your bitch so you back yourself up to the edge of the room, roar like the bull elephant you've suddenly become and charge shoulder-first at the stone.

You close your eyes, bracing for impact, fully expecting your body to crack open like an egg and all of the accompanying pain that comes with it and-

-And it doesn't happen.

The cube actually moves. Not just budges, scoots, and grinds begrudgingly along the floor at a snail's pace but moves.

Rumble is cheering. You're still grunting like a strongman trying to dead-lift a freight train so you can't exactly hear him, but you can see it in his face. He actually looks proud of you and that realization sends you flying so high and so hard you push the cube the rest of the way through. You're unstoppable. You're a motherfucking beast-

And unobservant beast. You think ruefully, as you realize a split second-too late that you've pushed the cube too far forward to stop the second ceiling, which comes down on top of you like the shoe of your troubled 2nd grade self on top of a caterpillar you'd found on the sidewalk.

The pain is brief. Mind breaking and soul-shattering, but brief. You wonder if the spray of your guts and blood looks anywhere near as dramatic and colorful as your victim so many years ago. You apologize to the caterpillar gods, and steel yourself for whatever purgatory they saw fit to send you too when you suddenly find yourself standing upright at the far end of the room, decidedly un-squished.

“What.” you say weakly, blinking in disbelief, examining your somehow unharmed astral body.

“Hot slag you did it!” Rumble rejoices, giving you a friendly thump on the back that probably would have punched physical you's outline into the stone floor instead of just forcing you to kiss it in a crumpled heap. “Frenzy said you couldn't do it but you overdid it! Look at his face!”
Frenzy looks on with his mouth set in a firm line you could maybe interpret as mildly surprised.

“Priceless, right?” Rumble says.

You sigh shakily, throwing a hopeless glance upwards. “So does this place operate on video game logic or what?”

Cold silence greets you.

“Can you even hear me?” you ask again. “You said you’d be able to hear me—”

“I can hear you, sheesh.” your heart skips a beat as Elita's voice peels through the empty air. “I was just cross checking “video games” with my available vocabulary, and yeah, that's a pretty accurate comparison.”

You gulp. “Is there a game over screen?“

“Most of the time, yes. But lucky for you, I've got all the cheat codes, including the one for infinite lives. “

You instantly brighten. “You got the ones for infinite amo too? Or to let me fly? Or send me directly to a warp pipe?“

“Pfft. That would ruin half the fun.”

“Fun?” you ask, disbelieving. “Fun?! I Just got pancaked by 20 tons of steel!”

“Yeah but you solved the puzzle. I didn't even re-set the room after you got smashed, which, by the way, I was totally supposed to do.”

“Or you could have given me the code for temporary invincibility so I didn't get smashed to begin with.”
She huffs in indignation. “You know what would've been nice? If I could have gotten a “Gee Elita, thanks for making this trial laughably easy by bringing Rumble and Frenzy back and giving me infinite lives, that sure was swell of you.”

“You don't actually have those codes, do you?” you ask.

“I...that's not the point!”

You almost allow yourself to snicker quietly at the defeat in her voice, but choke it back last second. Pancaking aside, the labyrinth had been laughably easy up to this point, most of the puzzles had been tutorial-grade difficulty and what few enemies you'd encountered the twins had quickly turned into stains on the floor.( And wall, and ceiling, and once on the side of your face, much to your disgust) All things considered, you're actually making really good time.

But if this dungeon is anything like the choose your own adventure books you binge-read as a preteen, then some smartass mythological animal will probably show up any moment to impede your progress by demanding you answer a riddle.

"Hello" says the gargoyle blocking your path in a decidedly smartass drawl.

Somewhere deep in the recessives of your mind, your twelve year old self can be heard screaming.

“Wait-” Rumble says, blocking your path with his outstretched arm. “I think I know the answer to this one.”

You blink. “Wait, seriously?”

“Yeah.” he says, pushing past you to the front of the smartass statue. For a split second you feel compelled to stop him, common sense telling you that his short time in the living world hadn't exactly provided him with the literary writ to tackle riddles. But he moves forward with such confidence, self esteem practically oozing out of him, you decide to keep that little nugget of doubt to yourself.

Along with your dawning realization that he hadn't even heard the riddle yet.
“What-” is all you manage to say as Rumble reveals the pile driver on his right arm, pulls back, and delivers a 4.9 pascal bitch-slap to the smartass gargoyle, who doesn't even have time to shriek in surprise before disintegrating into a pile of smartass rubble.

You stare at the rubble. Then at Rumble. Then back at the pile.

“Y’know at some point we're probably going to come across a puzzle we can't smash our way through.” You say, kneeling down to pick up a chunk of the debris.

Rumble kicks disinterestedly at the pile. “Guess he wasn't all he was cracked up to be.”

You drop the debris.

“Did you...did you just make a pun?” you ask, mouth agape.

“Is that what you call it when you exploit different meanings of a word but instead of it being funny everyone just screams?”

Holy fuck “That's exactly what that is.” you say, awestruck. “If you're suddenly so literate why didn't you even try to solve the riddle?”

“That's how we were supposed to solve it” Rumble says assertively. “It wasn't even a riddle. It was a joke. I just delivered the punch-line.”

You scream.

“Who taught you how to do those?” you ask once you're sufficiently screamed out.

“The old guy that was with Elita,” Rumble says. “It's like every other thing that comes out of his mouth. I don't think he he actually likes them though, he just does it to piss her off. Frenzy hates them too.” He says, cocking his head in his direction.
Frenzy just stares.

“I don't think I've ever seen him this mad.”

You sigh. There's probably a super interesting story about this mysterious old bot who's responsible for teaching your developmentally stunted son just enough about the nuances of language to safely murder riddle spouting statuary. But you're too busy reeling from the sharp vertigo uppercut the next portion of the dungeon doles out as you step over the rubble and into the next room.

You want it to be *Relativity*. You really, truly, madly want it to be M.C. Escher's *Relativity* and just the mind-boggling-eye-burning painting terrifying inebriated art students the world over but a quick glance around at the cackling muppet-esque creatures peppering the impossible staircases and the haunting strains of glam rock music playing softly in the background dashes your hopes. Along with any other hopes you had of this room not being ripped directly from a certain fantasy movie.

“Oh my god.” you say, clutching your head. “We're not in a labyrinth. We're literally in *Labyrinth*.”

This revelation fails to provoke any kind of reaction from the twins. Probably because you only watched the movie with Bumblebee but also probably because they're too busy staring at the enormous glowing sword wedged into a block in the ceiling. Or floor. Or wall, depending on how you look at it. Considering the layout of the room and Elita's confirmation that this part of the realm indeed operated on video game logic, you wouldn't be surprised if there were a Pacman physics mechanism involved. One could, theoretically, fling themselves down into the abyss only to land safely on the ceiling-floor with inverted gravity.

Theoretically, that is. Admittedly, you're having trouble convincing yourself to test your hypothesis, considering the chance of falling into the sky and whatnot.

Fortunately, Frenzy has no such reservations.

“How-” you say flatly as you watch the pint-sized black robot wordlessly propel himself into the aether, only to land gracefully feet-first on the ceiling. “-The *fuck* did you know how to do that?!”

Rumble, who had been eyeing the entombed saber like a piece of hard candy, makes an amused noise. “He's good with stuff like this. He was always able to figure stuff out way faster than the rest of us. A lot of the time even before Boss did.”
You find yourself flinching at the mere mention of Soundwave, but also pushing back a wave of bitter curiosity at the revelation that there were more than just the three on them in their sad parody of a family. You want to ask, badly, but Elita's warning plays through your mind.

I know you want to grill them for answers, but the realm literally can't handle that right now.

You're spared the opportunity to sulk about your unsaited curiosity as Frenzy wraps both servos around the handle and in one smooth motion, frees the sword from the pedestal in a total King Arthur moment and then, having no desire to bask in it's unearthly glow, throws it upwards, where it falls into Rumble's waiting arms below.

“I think-” Rumble says, presenting the weapon to you like a metal, heavily armed shield maiden. “-This is probably what we were looking for.”

You alight your own shaking hands upon it. Clothed in an ethereal blue-white glow, emitting a low but powerful hum and clearly meant for someone many times your size it clearly fits the bill for a crazy artifact hunt. Plus, when you finally dare to take it into your own hands, it's surprisingly light, and seems to have altered it's size so you can wield it uninhibited.

“Allright Elita-” you say, voice shaking in anticipation as you steady the sword with both hands striking the most badass knightly pose you can, hair blowing majestically in the wind. “We found the thing.”

There's a long, awkward pause, in which the majestic wind dies down, and your arms start cramping.

“Uh, you can beam us up now.”

“That's a thing.” Comes her disembodied voice finally. “Not the thing.”

“It's a magical kickass glowing saber we pulled out of the ceiling floor in the center of the Labyrinth from Labyrinth!” you snarl. “What other thing is there?”

“The journey itself?” She offers “The friendships you made along the way?”
“We met exactly one other sentient being and we smashed it.” you deadpan. “Come on!”

“Wow, someone's grouchy.” she hums. “Would you like a hint?”

“No, I want to stand in this exact position until I get a blood clot.” you growl sarcastically. “Tell me!”

“Okie Dokie. You see that ominous figure looming behind you? They probably have it.”

You whip your head around so fast your neck cracks, and the sword nearly falls out of your hands.

It's...it's you. Well, it's you with creepily blacked-out demonic eyes, a generous swathe of stage makeup, a voluminous ash blonde wig, wearing the tightest most ass contouring-genitalia-compressing pants this side of reality and rolling a crystal ball lazily between velvet-gloved fingers.

Once given a moment for the surprise to wear off and be usurped by soul-crushing disappointment, you let out a long, heavy sigh.

“You're not the goblin king.”

“No, I'm not.” Says your doppelganger. “But if you defeat me before midnight, I might just give you your baby back.”

You almost drop your sword. You almost fall to your knees. You almost have an aneurysm.

“You...you can do that?”

“No.” she says simply. “I can't do that. No one can. He's dead and you killed him with your own two hands.”

Oh. you think as you recover from your almost meltdown. Psychological warfare.
“So it's this kind of fight huh?” You groan, rolling your eyes. “Sorry asshole, but you couldn't have picked a more emotionally flatlined subject if you tried. I could not be more burnt out on this bullshit and if you think you're gonna turn me into a weeping pansy with this overused infinity angst generator of a plot point you've got another thin-”

Your melodramatic monologue is cut painfully short when she hurls the crystal ball at your face so hard it actually ricochets off your cheekbone into the wall where it shatters, knocking the saber out of your hands and sending you flying several feet backwards.

“No, it's a normal fight.” she says simply as she reaches down to take the saber for herself.

“Oh.” you say soberly, wiping what you're pretty sure is blood away from the side of your face.

“Aw scrap, it's on now!” Rumble shouts, brandishing his piledrivers. “Bring it evil boss-lady!”

“No wait-” You hold up your hand “Rumble don't!”

“Why not?!”

“Because-” if you get injured I'm probably not going to be able to avenge you and look like a giant jackass “-This is my fight.”

“What?”

“Uh, it's like an honor thing,” you say quickly. “Like remember Enter The dragon? When Chuck Norris had to fight Bruce Lee?”

Rumble immediately drops his fists to his sides, an expression of sage-like acceptance coming over his face.

“Okay.” he agrees reluctantly. “But if you can't figure out how to kick your own aft then I'm coming over.”
And that leads you to your next hurdle: how exactly does one defeat themselves? Or, more accurately, how does one defeat an evil shadow version of themselves dressed up like David Bowie that's immune to punching and has commandeered your badass magical sword?

And so you do what you've found yourself doing time and time again when having absolutely no clue how to proceed. Singing off key at the top of your lungs.

Rumble grimaces. Frenzy plugs his audial receptors. Your shadow cringes, but that doesn't stop her from swinging the behemoth sword at you, which you narrowly dodge seconds before being cleaved in half.

"Why are you singing?" Rumble yells. "That didn't even work when you were fighting me!"

Why indeed. You exhale sharply. "Because we need a song to fight. We always need a song to fight."

"Then find a radio!"

"There is no radio!"

"You want music? Because I can totally do music." says your shadow as she snaps her fingers, and the slow, rhythmic strumming of *Ziggy Stardust* resonates throughout the entire room around you.

"No..." you say weakly, because while hilariously unfitting music is one thing, plain unfitting music without some sort of overt irony is a whole 'nother ballpark. It lacks the devil-may-care *lets do this* pump that showtunes or a classical overture would have given to it's shrugging, eyebrow-raising participants, instead providing ripe breeding ground for poorly-timed punches and sloppy roundhouse kicks.

~ Now Ziggy really sang, screwed up eyes and screwed down hairdo
Like some cat from Japan, he could lick 'em by smiling ~

You throw a punch at the side of her head which, she easily dodges, and counters with an elbow to the back of your head.
~ Ziggy played for time, jiving us that we were voodoo
The kid was just crass, he was the nazz ~

You spring back to your feet with a *dynamic entry* style kick and miss her completely, but that's okay because you've already given up inside.

~ With God given ass
He took it all too far

*But boy could he play guitar~*

While she's busy laughing you make a full-body lunge for your sword, which she simply flips over, sending you flopping on the floor with all the grace of a dead fish.

~ When the kids had killed the man I had to break up the band
Oh Yeah~

You don't even try to get up.

~Ziggy plaaaaaaaaayed guitaaaaaaaaaar~"

“Are you going to kill me?” you ask, not bothering to look up, partially because you don't want to see the disappointment in Rumble's optics, but mostly because you're just *done*.

“No, I'm just going to waste your time.” says your shadow, shrugging. “We both know if you go long enough without robot dick you'll just die on your own.”

You bite your bottom lip hard, choking back frustrated tears, because she's *right*. There's not enough robot dick in the known universe to make up for the time you've *already* wasted in this glam-rock infested shithole.

But...that's not true. Not entirely. Because before you're even done *having* that thought you're flooded with vivid memories of a specific robot dick attached to a *specific* robot and you know full well that you'd spend a literal eternity in this shithole if it means you get to touch Optimus again.
"Just five seconds" you mutter under your breath. "Just five fucking seconds with him would make up for this. For all of this."

“You ain't kidding.” your shadow says, experiencing a full body shudder at the mere though.

And that's when you remember, shitty costume and ability to conjure music out of nowhere aside, the boss of the dungeon is still for all intents and purposes, you.

“Hey,” you say, lifting your head up just enough to look yourself in the creepy black eyes. “Remember that time really early on we caught him showering?”

Her eyes widen.

“You bet your ass I do.” she says. “He literally had steam coming off of him. The water wasn't even hot.”

“Remember the way the water rolled off his shoulders and down the curvature of his aft? Like a waterfall? The Roman's couldn't have engineered a aqueduct system with that much sex appeal.”

“Mother of god.” says your doppleganger.

“And the way he swivels his hips when he turns around? That full blown runway model pelvic tilt?” you pause to silence a whine coming from your own throat. Concentrate. “I thought it was a subconscious thing but sometimes I swear he does it on purpose”

“Of course he does it on purpose!” she seethes, breathing hitched. “Somewhere deep down in that armor there's a full blown exhibitionist screaming to get out.”

“Remember his face?” you say, feeling unusually fortunate that you're already lying in a heap on the floor. The same cannot be said for your shadow, whose legs have begun to shake. Boy do you know that feeling. “Those sleepy half-closed optics with his mouth just the tiniest bit open? Like he's trying to play it off that he's oblivious, like he doesn't know why your jaw’s hitting the floor. “
“That fucking tease!” she snarls, or tries too. It tapers out into a squeak as she sinks to the floor. “He knows goddamn well what he does to me!”

*It's working.* You think, teetering on the edge of disbelief. *Holy shit it's working.* You shouldn't even be surprised. Deep down you knew it would, and if you're being honest you'd *really* like to join her in becoming a pile of sex-charged hormonal goo on the floor right now, but if you want a chance to ever lay your hands on the object of your mutual affection again you need to finish what you started.

*Focus.* You tell yourself, forcing the mind-clouding amount of arousal to the back of your mind with a long exhalation.

“Remember what he looks like when he's about to overload?”

“Oh *fuck me!*” she doubles over.

“The way he starts shaking and the lights behind his optics actually *flicker*? Like he's almost ready to black out he's so into it?”

“Sonovabitch!”

“How staticy and metallic his voice gets *right* before? When he's calling your name?”

She doesn't even cry out this time, just staring blankly ahead, mouth open and foaming.

*Now.*

You summon the last of your strength, spring forward, and lunge for the sword.

It almost, almost works. But at the very last second she snaps out of her trance, albeit dizzily, and manages to roll her limp, shaking self just out of range, and you collide with the floor with an underwhelming *thud.*
“Nice try.” she says dizzily, holding the side of her head. “But you didn't even mention his spike.”

“If I did you would've had a stroke.” comes your muffled retort.

“THAT WAS REALLY GROSS.” Rumble shouts. “DO YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU YET?”

You turn your head to politely decline his offer, but freeze, watching in dull surprise as Frenzy calmly walks over to the edge of one of the staircases, unscrews his own head, and after a moment's hesitation, spikes it downwards into the sky, where half a second later it comes catapulting down from the ceiling and collides with the doppleganger's head, missing your own face by inches.

You're not sure which is more relieving: The wet, cracking sound her skull makes upon impact, or the knowledge that you'll probably never witness anything that badass ever again.

You'll decide later. You didn't come this far not to double tap and fail last second from the efforts of a meddling half corpse, so you reclaim the sword at long last, relishing the warm pulses it sends from the handle to the palms of your hands and all the way through your body in sweet reunion, and swing it down full-force behind your shadow's neck.

You probably should cheer triumphantly, or drop a snappy one liner or something, but you're too unnerved by the sight of your own head rolling off your shoulders and the spray of blood coming from your own neck to come up with anything on the spot.

“Uh...” you say after a few awkward seconds. “Thanks for...sticking your neck out for me?”

“That was awesome!” Rumble says, “I mean the pun was awful but the decapitation was awesome!”

“Thanks.” you say, trying to stave off a wave of nausea as you lean down to gingerly pick up Frenzy's head and hand it back to his waiting, outstretched arms. “I don't know how you get used to this. You're probably not supposed to be used to this.”

“Are you kidding me?” Rumble says, jabbing at his brother's frame “He was whining like a sparkling the whole time. Whimp.”
Frenzy, who is still in the process of re-attaching his head, pauses just long enough to give his sibling the finger.

Rumble growls and reaches for him, but you catch his servo in your hand.

“Please...no more fighting right now.” you say with an exhausted sigh. “Rumble, thank you for listening to me when I asked you not to help, and Frenzy....thanks for not. ”

“Hey!”

Frenzy finishes screwing his head back on and tilts it up to regard you, and you watch, dumbstruck, as the tiniest suggestion of a smile weaves over his lips.

Your heart slams into your ribcage as an enormous, doofy grin spreads over your face because you got him to smile.

“Okay Elita.” you say with renewed zeal. “Now we're done. We have literally exhausted every possible action in this dungeon. Please get us out of here.”

Another long, awkward pause.

“Why do you never respond on the first try?” you ask, shaking your head.

More silence.

“Oh come on!” you snap. “What are you even doing up there?”

“You just finished the boss fight by eloquently describing Optimus's spike, what the hell do you think I'm doing?!?” she snarls.

You let the fact that you'd left everything but his spike out of the description fall to the wayside, as
you're too busy recoiling in horror.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“That's my line.” she hisses. “You didn't even have to kill your doppleganger. What you did shouldn't have worked. None of this should have worked.”

“Then how were we supposed to find the thing?”

“The crystal ball!” She shouts finally. “You were supposed to at least look at it after she threw it like normal, non-psychopaths but no, you just had to focus on chopping your own head off-”

“The ball was the thing?” you ask, heart plummeting, recalling how it had shattered into a billion pieces after it had finished shattering your pride and maybe also your jaw.

“Just...just go look at it.”

You're spared the need as Rumble comes walking over to you, cupping the shards and a large, surprisingly unbroken portion of the crystal in his servos. You feel a scream willing up in your throat as you look at “The ”super important, super smashed thing and also your only ticket back to the world of the living, but are shocked into silence as the unbroken portion begins to move of it's own accord, and then, at the prompt of your lightest finger touch, shatters the rest of the way, revealing a tiny, bright eyed, and absolutely alive bird.

“Is there a bird in there?” comes Elita's exhausted voice.

You open your mouth. You close it.

“Yeah.” Rumble answers for you.

“Congratulations.” she says. “You found the thing.”
“I leant upon a coppice gate

When Frost was spectre-grey,

And Winter's dregs made desolate

The weakening eye of day. “

He's read this poem before.

It's only four stanzas of eight lines each, and it takes him exactly a minute and fifteen seconds to read out loud. Thirty, if he really felt like taking his time and enjoying himself.

“The tangled bine-stems scored the sky

Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted nigh

Had sought their household fires.”

And if he's being honest, the last hour or so he allows himself to spend with her before his scheduled mandates recharge is the only time of day he's truly enjoying himself.

He's made a ritual of it. He'll come in quietly, as if it made a difference, warmed cube in one hand and datapad in the other. (He had, begrudgingly, transcribed his collection of earth poetry to text, after the books had begun to fall apart, despite his gentle use) And he'll greet her, softly.

Then he'll check her vitals. He can count on one servo the number of times he'd seen a spike or dip, every occasion on which he'd frantically com'd Ratchet or, barring a response, dropped his cube and pad and went tearing across the base to bring him back. He'd dragged him out of his berth once, bleary-eyed and screaming and nearly woken everyone out of recharge. Ratchet had, at that point, revealed that he'd installed a separate interface on his integrated scanner for the express purpose of tracking her vitals. If she so much as coughed every alarm in his system would be set off in sequence unless he physically went back to the room that held her body and manually disabled it. Curiously, he had averted his optics while he told him this. Optimus hadn't pressed further.

Lastly, he sets himself gingerly on the floor(quietly, again,) takes a long, shaking draw from his cube, and then he talks.
He starts by telling her about his day. Pleasant things, if possible. Bumblebee buzzing out an attempt at an explicative, Red Alert emptying an entire magazine at his own reflection, Agent Fowler accidentally letting a “Love you.” slip while ending a call with the Secretary of defense.

On cloudier days, he tries to keep it brief. But things still slip through he cracks, and he'll admit that he snapped at Jazz for loudly humming the M.A.S.H. theme song while on recon, or uppercut a vehicon when he probably could've just pushed him over. Or, more recently, how he'd become too terrified to even brush a finger against the side of her face for fear of harming her further.

On days there's nothing worth recalling, he skips straight to the poetry.

He tells himself she can hear him. And really, there's no reason he can't believe that. Human physicians that specialized in this field had found evidence to suggest that it stimulated neurological activity, at least to some degree. Wither or not she's merely manifesting bits and pieces of the readings in an endless dream, or actually able to hear his voice remains the question.

“At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited; “

And he suddenly remembers her voice, her singing, more specifically, a specific song she'd used to lull Bumblebee to sleep on the rare occasion he wouldn't slip into it on his own.

“He attributes it to the poem itself, the mention of birdsong perhaps triggering his memory. But it hits him so hard, and the song sounds so vivid, so crisp and fresh in his mind he can almost hear it and-
“So little cause for carolings
   Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
   Afar or nigh around, “

It's a ping. A really, really weak ping, more like a whisper, a suggestion of a ping.

At first he thinks he's glitching. He sighs deeply, shaking his head, feeling foolish and more tired than he has in centuries. His finger hovers on the sleep setting of the datapad, ready to retire when it happens again. Still soft, still barely there, but there all the same.

“That I could think there trembled through
   His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
   And I was unaware. “

“This is... not possible.” he says, optics wide and mouth gaping as he stares disbelievingly at the comatose, barely breathing, natural law defying body before him. “Not possible.”

He presses his shaking servos against his audial receptors, activates a private com channel, and makes no effort to disguise the exhausted panic in his voice.

“Ratchet!”

Chapter End Notes

Don't know if this is necessary but the poem is "The Darkling Thrush" by Thomas Hardy
You haven't heard from Elita in over an hour and you've been stuck in the boss fight room next to your own bleeding corpse. Rumble and Frenzy, after having broken, smashed, and violently disassembled at least one of everything in the room, had taken to playing a game with a billion made up rules that mostly involved Frenzy throwing things and Rumble hitting them out of the air with the glowing greatsword.

You had considered participating at one point, but the sight of your own headless body had convinced you otherwise, so you now sit across the room at the base of one of the physics-fucking staircases, allowing “the super important mysterious thing” to flutter back and forth between your outstretched hand your shoulder, and the top of your head.

She's tiny. You'd established this before, anything that could fit comfortably inside a crystal ball has to be, but she fits snugly in the palm of your hand. As if sensing your thoughts she puffs out her plumage, though it has less of the effect of making her appear larger and more like an aggravated cotton ball.

“You're not scaring anyone, sorry.” you say, stroking the top of her head with your index finger. She cocks her head, narrowing wide, jewel bright yellow eyes into analytical little slits.

“You seem like you can understand me.” you say, drawing a finger under her beak and tilting her head upwards. “Can you talk?”

She blinks, and bobs her head rapidly up and down in what you can only anthropomorphize as an enthusiastic yes.

“Alright.” you say, grinning like an idiot. “My name is (y/n), what's yours?”

She opens her wings, ruffles her feathers, and makes a great show of hopping excitedly up and down along your arm before responding.
“Fuck!”

Your eye twitches.

“Fuck!” the bird repeats.

“No.” you say flatly. “We're not doing this again.”

“No!” you snap, slapping a hand to your forehead, “That's wrong and you know it's wrong you sentient, sapient, smartass little shit!”
She pauses, tilting her head, blinking her eyes baefully. For a moment, you actually feel bad.

Until she starts pecking your face off.

“FUCK!” you yell.

“FUCK!” she repeats in singsong exuberance.

“Do you want me to stop her?” Rumble asks, looking away from the sword for the first time in hours.

“No I'm fine” you say with a sagelike calm as you swat wildly at your head and run in circles.

“Are you sure?” he says, getting to his pedes. “She's pecking your face off.”

You feel a wave of maternal warmth wash over you at the pride of having raised such an observant child. And also more pecking.

“Still no.”

“I'm gonna stop her.” Rumble states matter-of-factly. “Frenzy, take your head off. I have an idea.”

“NO TO BOTH OF THOSE THINGS” you say, covering your face with both arms.

Frenzy doesn't listen. To you. He responds to Rumble without missing a beat and promptly unscrews his head, which he then pitches to his twin from across the room. Rumble, in what is probably the greatest misuse of a magical artifact you'd seen outside bootleg hentai you'd bought from a guy in a van, uses the gargantuan glowing sword as an impromptu baseball bat and swings at Frenzy's head, sending it flying towards the bird. And you.

You both barely have time to duck, but manage to move out of the way in time. Her with high-speed
ariel acrobatics and you with a split second backwards limbo that would probably look pretty badass slowed down.

You only have a split second to ponder how your slo-mo matrix-esque maneuver would look on film before she resumes pecking, a cheery “FUCK” pealing from her beak on every third or so strike. Rumble is already sprinting across the room to retrieve his brother's head, loudly promising not to miss this time and Frenzy's headless body has decided to help by pelting you both with debris.

“Would you like to take a break?” Elita's disembodied voice asks from nowhere.

You respond by loosing a muffled scream with your hands covering your head and your face pressed against the floor.

“Is that a yes?”

It's not a no. But disregarding the assault, you're actually having reservations. Namely about letting Rumble leave your line of sight for any reason ever again but also about leaving the “super mysterious important thing” ™ you three had worked so hard so retrieve alone with the two of them, even if she is currently trying to relieve you of your eyeballs.

“How are we taking a break?” you ask finally, unmoving from your huddled position on the floor. “Will these three be safe here, will I be able to see or hear them from where we're going, how long are we going to be gone, and where are we actually going?”

“Holy slag, you wanna pack them a bagged lunch too?”

You lift your head up to peer upwards, since clearly that's where disembodied voices emanate from. “I can do that?”

“No. That was a joke. Nobody refuels up here. Everyone's dead. Almost everyone.” she adds hastily at the prompt of your scowl. “But to answer your other questions, Yes, I can you can't, I can and have been altering the flow of time so that's not even an issue, and that's a surprise.”

 Were your jaw not already pressed against the floor, it would have hit it.
“What?”

“A surprise, squishie.” she says, clearly rolling her optics from a dimension away. “Like when you clearly asked for a seeker femme escort and they send you a a grounder mech with a cheap paint job and wings welded on. Except, y'know, nice.”

You're not touching that one. “I meant the other thing and you know I meant the other thing.” you growl.

“Oh. Yeah. I can control time to some degree and it flows differently up here to begin with. We could be gone for hours they probably won't even notice we left.”

The resounding clang of metal hitting stone reverberates throughout the room as Rumble drops the sword and also Frenzy's head.

“You're leaving?” he asks, optics wide.

“Okay, well, they wouldn't have noticed.” Elita continues. But you're too busy trying to wring your heart out of the vice Rumble's expression has shoved it into to listen.

“No.” you say quickly, trying to keep your eyes from watering, because the face on Frenzy's detached head now matches his brother's. “I'm never leaving you ever again. In fact, I'm never taking my eyes off you ever again.”

“Even when I'm lubricating?”

“Especially when you're lubricating!”

“That's gross.” He says, though his face remains scrunched in worry. Hell even the bird looks sad, having perched on Rumble's shoulder and tilting her head, eyes widened in what you can only anthropomorphize as fear of abandonment.

“Fuck.” she says sadly.
Elita sighs in frustration. “Look, to them, it would be like five minutes at most. They can finish playing whatever dumb game they're playing, you get a moment to relax and collect your thoughts, then you can all regroup here and finish the dungeon together. Everyone wins.”

“We're not done with the dungeon yet?” you ask in disbelief.

“If you were, would you still be stuck in this room with a new weapon, a quest item and a dead boss?”

You can't argue with that, so you don't, sighing heavily as you get to your feet.

“So, we're only be gone for five minutes, right?”

“Yup. I've almost got it down to a science.”

You throw a last, concerned glance at your circumstantial brood. “Can you guys behave yourselves for five minutes?”


“Right. Can you guys not murder each other for five minutes?”

“Murder!” tweets the bird. You're not sure if that's an improvement.

“We're already dead.” Rumble reassures you. “So yes. And no. But mostly yes.”

That's depressingly relieving. You sigh again. “Alright. I'm going with her. We'll be able to see you so If you need me for any reason just scream and I'll be back.”

“You're...not actually going to watch me lubricate are you?” Rumble asks worriedly.
You blink. “You don't even need to lubricate anymore.”

“Yeah, but if I did, I don't want you watching.”

“Hoo-kay, this is getting unhealthy.” Elita says, and with a sharp snap, you suddenly find yourself whisked out of the labyrinth and back into the surreal landscape you'd first materialized in, thoughtfully sparring you the need to come up with a one liner to go out on.

“Where are we?” you ask, once given a chance to take in your new surroundings, namely which are slides. Multicolored pixilated slides of all shapes and sizes disappearing off into the infinite horizon.

Elita, who has materialized beside you, leans down to your level, grinning widely. “You ever play shoots and ladders?”

You raise an eyebrow. “Have you?”

“No. But I've seen into your dreams and I know you did as a kid, so that was a rhetorical question. I just thought it was a good analogy.”

You blink. “So...this is a game?”

She frowns. “No. Actually, that wasn't really a good analogy.”

“So what are these things?”

“I dunno, actually. I've just been calling them slides.” you scoff at her lack of creativity, and she rolls her optics, but continues. “More importantly, you can use them to get in and out of dreams. I'm not really sure how they work, but I figure it has something to do with EM fields.”

She reaches out to touch the slide directly in front of you both, and it momentarily changes from an iridescent rainbow to pulse a rich, cobalt blue. “Most of the time it's a total scrapshoot as to where it
goes, and you get dragged into some stranger's dream just to get punted out again, but some of them go to bot's you know, or, at least ones that I knew, and after a while you can sorta tell which ones are which.” she gestures towards the slide. “Go ahead, touch it.”

Curiously, you extend a hand to the slide, watching in bewilderment as the material beneath you pulses the same shade of blue, before once again fading out to a rainbow multicolored expanse.

“Yeah, that's what I thought.” She says, smiling softly. “You can use it too. Guess where this one goes.”

Your breath catches in your lungs as your mind draws a parallel between the color the slide takes upon being touched and a particular pair of optics.

“Optimus?” you begin shakily.

“Ding ding! We have a winner!” She claps her servos together excitedly. “You gotta be careful though, Ratchet's actually looks pretty similar and let me tell you, you do not want to end up in one of his dreams.”

You feel a nervous, worried tug at your heartstrings but decide to let it go for now. You bite your lip. “Are you sure this is a good idea? We're not just gonna upset him more by showing up in his dreams?”

“Nah check this out, I've been doing some field research. Literal field research.” you roll your eyes again as she raises her optical ridges at you. “This shade of blue, like the bluest blue to ever blue indicates his EM is clear right now. So he must've had good day. I mean like a really good day and wasn't thinking anything negative when he went into recharge. We're entering a positive environment. I can't guarantee he won't get a little emotional, but between the two of us, we should be able to calm him down.

You feel your heart warming, and can't help a big, goofy smile from spreading over your face at the revelation that he'd actually had a good day. “Wow, you've really done your research.”

She shrugs. “Naturalists gonna naturalize. Doesn't matter where I am. If there's an environment, I'm gonna study it. At least nothing can go extinct up here. “She says, letting out a scornful huff “I think.”
You stare at the edge of the slide, swallowing nervously. You want to see him. You want to see him so bad, but you can't help but feel the invasion of something as intimate as a dream can't come without consequences.

“I...I'm still not sure.” you say, wringing your hands.

Elita throws a defeated, but understanding sideways glance your way. “Alright, that's cool, uncertainty is an important trait in a scientific mind. I value that, even if I don't necessarily like it.”

You cock your head. “I wasn't expecting you to be so understanding.”

“No, I totally get it.” she says, placing a hand on your shoulder. “Take as much time as you need to – psych!” She shouts as she shoves you headfirst down the slide.

“What the fuuuuuuuuuu-” you scream as you go tearing headfirst down the pixilated, infinitely changing geometric blue dream slide.

In the distance, you can faintly hear her maniacal cackling as she jumps on behind you.

*

You come to rest in a heap the the bottom of the slide. You manage to roll out of the way before Elita comes crashing down from behind you, letting an exuberant “Whee!” trail off as she gracefully launches herself from the end, somersaults midair, and lands in a picture perfect superheroine pose.

“Showoff” you think but don't say as you try your damndest not to cough up more pink pixel vomit. And then try your damndest not to slip into cardiac arrest when she begins screaming.

“Oh my god Oh my god!” she shrieks in fangirlish glee, clasping her servos to the side of her face. “We're in the crystal gardens!”

Your heart drops as you take in the surroundings, rows upon rows of beautifully manicured tower-tall cellophane flora extending as far as the eye can see in any direction. “I thought we were supposed to be in Optimus's dream.”
“We are but he's dreaming about them!” she squeals. “This is so fraggin' sweet! I haven't seen this place in aeons! You know the species we named Bumblebee after? They were necessary to spread pollen nanites and once they went extinct the plants had no way of reproducing so they all died! Both of those things are really heart wrenching but I'm too stoked to think about that right now! Look at this! She says, wrapping both her arms around the base of and literally hugging what you can only assume is some sort of rare alien tree. “Optimus proposed to me under one of these!”

You let out a little gasp and clutch your hand over your heart. “Really?”

“Uh huh.” she says, optics half-lidded and misty as she rubs her face lovingly against the trunk of a tall, spindly bamboo looking species. “And then I blew him under one of these.”

You choke on air.

“Uh, shouldn't we be, uh, trying to find him?” you ask “I mean that's the entire reason we came.”

“He's right over there.” she says, lazily waving in the other direction. “Geeze, chill out a little. That's the other reason we came.”

You whip your head around so fast you'd probably dislocate it in the waking world, and sure enough, there he is, looking as relaxed as you've ever seen him, reading poetry from a leatherbound earth book, seated lengthwise across an enormous version of your cat, calmly ignoring a flock of winged datapads which are quietly fluttering around him.

“Um...” you say, searching for appropriate words to address the situation. “Um...”

Elita nullifies the need by springboarding herself off the tree, onto Neelix, and sidling right up against him. “Hey hun how ya been? Long time no see!” she says as if nothing's happened, kissing him on the side of the helm and swiping the book out from his servos. “Whatcha reading?”

Optimus, for his part, looks every bit as dumbfounded as you do, and gives you a look of complete and utter confusion as his optics dart between you, Elita, the book, then back to you again.

“The Fairy Queen.” he begins very, very slowly. “An ultimately unfinished fifteenth century epic. It is largely allegorical in nature and is viewed by most as thinly veiled praise for the country’s matriarch at the time.”
“Huh. Neat.” Elita says, squinting at the book before shutting it, and giving you both a disappointed once-over upon seeing your expressions of bewilderment hadn't changed. “Dude, what's wrong with you two?”

You cough. “Nothing. I mean....I was just expecting this to be a little more...y'know...emotional.”

She rolls her optics. “Look, we could get all sappy and weepy and spend our time bawling our optics out and apologizing and just have a mutual pity party until he wakes up, or we could have fun.” She narrows her optics. “I'm pretty sure I don't have to ask you guys which one you'd rather do. So follow my lead and relax. Both of you.”

“Am I dreaming?” Optimus asks at last.

Elita sighs. “What do you think?”

“I cannot fathom another explanation as to how either of you could possibly be speaking to me right now.”

“Did the flying datapads or giant organic cat not tip you off?”

He blinks, as if suddenly aware of his surroundings. He looks at his seat. Neelix purrs. A datapad lands on his shoulder and lets out an electronic squawk. He blinks again.

“It would seem not.”

You can't help the laugh that slips out of you, and when he turns to you, genuine disarmament in his optics, you finally feel something unhitch deep within your chest. “Okay cool, it looks like you're lucid now.” you say, holding you arm out and letting one of the datapads, human sized, strangely enough, land on your outstretched hand as you make your way towards them. “So now that that's established, can you tell us how you've been? If you're doing okay?” Please tell me you've been doing okay.

He sighs deeply, dismounting from his seat (who had begun to yawn and stretch) “It...has not been easy. My life has not been without joy in the absence of you both, but we have faced considerable
difficulties.” You have to bite your tongue hard to keep guilty tears from welling up in your eyes. “But today-” His optics widen in realization, and he lays a servo against the side of your face. “(y/n) something happened today.”

“Something good?” you ask hopefully.

“Yes, wonderful, it was...” he trails off, a soft frown forming on his lips. “I cannot remember now.”

Curiosity twists in your chest, but you force it down. As long as it's good and he's okay that doesn't matter. It can wait till this whole thing is over and you wake up. Whenever that may be.

“Don't worry about that right now.” you say, smiling softly, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder, which, oddly, is now nigh-human height, give or take several feet. All three of your sizes seem to be oscillating relative to how close you get to each other, though Optimus and Elita still tower over you. “Now that you know you're dreaming and therefore can do literally anything, what do you want to do?”

He stares at you for a moment, then at Elita, then back at you, clearly trying to take this all in, before the sound of thunder tears through the vicinity so suddenly and so loud that you fall right on your ass. Elita is laughing so hard at your expense she's fallen over. You have no idea what's so funny and why Optimus looks so completely and thoroughly ashamed of himself until you realize it's not thunder, it's his engine roaring and what the hell does that even mean and-oh.

Oh.

“I was wondering how long it'd take you to get to that conclusion.” Elita says, wiping tears of absolute mirth from her optics.

Optimus honestly looks like a puppy caught chewing on a shoe. “I do not wish to make either of you uncomfortable, or coerce you into an act you do not want to pursue.”

You suddenly become painfully aware that you're talking to the only being in the known universe actually nice enough to ask two women in a lucid dream if they're comfortable having a threesome. You swoon.
Elita throws her hands up. “Oh my god It's your dream. Do what you want to do! All of it!” She says, making her way towards you.”Look, (y/n)'s already undressing.”

Despite having not yet recovered from your swoon, you look down to realize that you are, in fact, stripping your clothes off. “Uh. Y-yeah. Look's like she's right.” you say dizzily.

Cautious elation flashes behind his optics, but Optimus still isn't sold.

“You two are...agreeable to this arrangement?” he asks, voice still tinged with disbelief.

“Does this answer your question?” Before you have time to suggest that the three of your should talk it over or get dinner first, Elita has you by the back of the neck, and she's kissing you.

She's kissing you and she's got one servo on the small of your back and one already tangled up in your hair and she smells like sweet girly metal and how is that even a thing. Why are her lips so soft, why are you going limp against her but more importantly why do you care damnit just go with it.

She breaks the kiss. You don't need to breathe but for the first time up here you feel like you have to.

“Considering this is his dream-” you ask finally once you catch your breath. “-Is this something we're doing on our own, or is he making us do it?”

“Both.” she says, smirk crossing her lips. “Stop worrying so much. Live a little.”

You huff. “Tough talk coming from someone who's literally dead.”

“Oh man squishie, that's cold. Really cold” she says, wrapping her arms around herself and mock-shivering. “In fact, I might just freeze to death again if you don't use that soft organic body to warm me up.”

You let out a frustrated sigh. Some far off part of your mind is screaming at you that even though this isn't exactly wrong, it's not really right either and that now's a really good time to take a step back and re-evaluate what in the actual fuck you're doing. But you're honestly too angry, too confused, and too turned on to give that line of thinking any actual thought.
“Fuck it.” you say under your breath, before literally throwing yourself at the femme, sending you both crashing to the ground in a heap.

“That would be the idea, yes.” Elita says.

You growl. “Can you maybe stop being a smartass long enough for me to get my bearings? I'm nervous.”

She sticks her glossa out at you. “Make me.”

So you shut her up. With your lips. You pin her glossa against the roof of her mouth. You're still nervous, honestly, you're getting more nervous by the second, so you're not exactly how you've managed to take or continue the dominant role. It probably has something to do with it being Optimus's dream, who wouldn't want either of you to feel lost or unsure of what to do next, which is really sweet of him.

It's also probably how he's wound up between the two of you, despite you having no recollection of anyone actually moving. His mouth is on hers, so suddenly and so hard she actually recoils slightly in surprise, but his servos are on you, one gently kneading your breasts and the other sliding down to cup your ass.

“Poor baby.” Elita purrs as she pulls away from his lips stroking the painfully bowed out cover of his interface panel. “We didn't mean to forget about you.”

Optimus grunts, bucking into her touch, but also maybe because his face is nuzzled in your chest and you're gently tracing your fingers along the grooves behind his audial receptors.

“I see you've found his soft spots” Elita says, still mercilessly stroking the panel, which you're honestly surprised hasn't split yet.

“You mean these?” you say, pressing the tips of your fingers into the grooves. He groans against your skin, wet and heavy and thank primus your body is on pornstar autopilot because inside you're shaking hard enough to vibrate through solid matter.
“Yeah, that’s one of them.” She hums thoughtfully. “But try the seams on his chassis.”

His optics go wide, but all that escapes his vocalizer is a weak “what-” before you’ve squirmed out of his grasp, slide down to the juncture where his perfect metal abs meet his adonis belt, and draw your tongue along the seam all the way up to his collarbone (or, the rough metal equivalent thereof)

He cries out. He actually cries out and struggles beneath you. You make a mental note to never question Elita about anything ever again.

“Okay, okay, calm down.” she says. “We’re being mean, I know, but you’ve been a great sport so we’ll skip straight to the real relaxing stuff now.” you watch in stupefied awe as she slides down between his legs, closes her optics, presses her glossa beneath a hidden seam and opens his interface panel with her mouth.

“Primus.” Optimus hisses as his painfully pressurized spike is freed.

“Holy shit.” you say, feeling what little blood you had left in your brain rush down between your legs. “Holy shit.”

“Doesn’t take much to make you two sacrilegious, does it?” she asks wryly, palming his spike between her servos.

“Elita-” he growls in warning.

“Right, right.” she says, giving the length a slow, experimental lick, before taking it entirely into her mouth, down to the hilt.

There’s no way around it, you’re impressed, especially considering you’d just barely managed to get your mouth around him at all without suffocating or dislocating your jaw. Your mouth hangs open anyways as you watch her, at a complete loss as to what do do next.

“Gith behin hish pike.” Elita says suddenly.

You blink “Come again?”
“Beeg enuf fur booth”

“What?”

“Halph meh.”

“I'd really like to participate but I can't understand you.”

“I said get your face in here and help me.” she says, popping the head out of her mouth, a thread of precum breaking on her lips. “Um, hello, there's two of us. Don't make me do all the work.”

“Where?” and is that a whine coming out of your throat? Good god. “There's no room left.”

“Make room.” she says, grabbing a tuft of your hair and yanking you down to face-level with his spike, nearly spearing you in the eye in the process. “Just cram your head in wherever you can and go to town.”

You want to ask more, but she's already slipped him back into her mouth. She's not bringing her head all the way down though, focusing her attention on the tip and leaving you enough room between the middle of his shaft and the base to actually do something. You decide to take her up on her advice, and begin to draw your tongue along the length, one hand wrapped around his spike, the other laid against his hip to steady yourself as you work.

He groans, heavy and static laden and when you risk an upwards glance you meet his optics, half-lidded and dizzy but still boring into yours, denta gritted so tight you're worried they might crack. The heat between your legs grows desperate, and you do whine because his face is so fucking beautiful right now you can't even see straight.

He's hovering on the cusp of overload, you know that much. Elita knows too and the manic gleam in her optics at the prospect of getting a facefull is as arousing as it is infuriating because you suddenly realize you want to be there, but before you have the chance to fight over it Optimus moves backwards, pushing you both away.

“Stop.”
You freeze, and obey immediately. Elita continues nonplussed.

“I said stop.”

She does stop this time, allowing him to fall out of her mouth with a gentle 'pop' as she regards him in confusion. But confusion turns to realization and into elation when she's sees the animalistic gleam in his eye. Because while you recognize the drop in his voice and the change in his face as par for the course, it's new for Elita, and the dom aspect, however subtle, is driving her wild.

“Yes sir.” she says breathily, mock-saluting. “How should we proceed?”

He says nothing at first, seeming almost taken aback. He'd probably expected more resistance, at least from her, and you can almost hear the cogs whirring in his processor as he narrows the infinite possibilities down.

“I want you,” he begins slowly, optics narrowed. “To touch each other.”

It's unexpectedly simple. Elita looks at him with an optical ridge raised. You decide you don't want to give him the chance to think up something more complicated, so you climb on top of her again before you lose your nerve. She looks like she might protest, but thinks better of it. She's nibbling on your neck and you're grinding against her leg and not so sure where to put your hands, and right as you're thinking maybe they'd feel good cupping the back of her head-

“Pin her down.”

It's not hard, but it's not soft either. But it's not a plea, it's far removed from a plea.

You look at Optimus, then back at Elita. Then back at Optimus.

“Me?” you ask, voice tinier than you'd like. “Pin her down?”

“Have I not made myself clear?” and you can feel the shiver running down Elita's spine at the tone
of his voice. “Press your index fingers into the seams beneath her arms, where they connect to her shoulders. She will become immobilized.”

It's a command. It's long and wordy but it's a command any way you spin it, and you think you see fireworks going off in the back of Elita's optics at that revelation. But that may also be because you've immediately complied and dug the tips of your fingers in and she gives the dirtiest little moan, bucking so hard you're nearly thrown from your position straddling her hips.

“You...” she growls, shaking voice tinged with betrayal as she snaps her head up to glare at Optimus. “You dirty, no good, pit slagged-”

“Considering your ... leniency in divulging the weaknesses in my plating, I thought it only fair to share yours.” He's smiling. He's fucking smirking and you think you see teeth. “(y/n), while you are engaged in this position, I suggest you explore the seam beneath her spinal strut.”

Your hands are on her aft before she can even finish spitting out a panicked “Wait what-?” and you find it, a smooth divot right where her lower back curves into her buttocks, where their equivalent of a tailbone would be. She squeaks, fucking squeaks, and it's all you can do to hang on as she thrashes beneath you like a cotton candy pink mechanical bull.

Optimus makes a very soft displeased noise. “I believe I instructed you to pin her down.”

You gasp, either because her hips are grinding against your exposed pussy or because the sudden drop in his voice is actually scary. “I'm ah... I'm trying.”

“Try harder.”

This time it's an order. A short, blunt, right to the point order, and the stuff of Elita's wet dreams because she's shaking beneath you. Not a meek “please take me now” kind of shaking, but anticipatory-going-in-for-the kill kind of shaking. If Optimus is a big cat then she's clearly a she-wolf, and you're some kind of suicidally inclined sheep who honestly just wants to be torn to shreds.

“You heard him squishie.” the she-wolf says with a smile two fangs short. “Dominate me.”

There is a finite amount of teasing you can be reasonably expected to put up with in one sexual encounter, and you'd just reached your limit. Sheep or no, you've watched enough nature
documentaries to know how predators play, so you slam her down by the shoulders, press both thumbs into the seams Optimus had shown you earlier, and while she's too busy reeling in shock to put up a fight, you go for her throat and bite down. Hard.

She yelps but it teeters out into a loud moan, followed some time later by a “Do it squishy wreck me.” You're not sure if it actually hurts, and you're hoping it doesn't but you're beginning to suspect she's a closet masochist anyways and have no means of discerning if her cries are from ecstasy or pain. Or both.

The pressure of a servo on your back snaps you back to reality. In the brief window of time between Elita's shit talk and your pornstar perfect cop-out of a response Optimus has wedged himself behind you both. You freeze against her as you feel the warm air of his venting on the back of your neck, but your blood and heart turn to ice and promptly *shatter* when you feel the shaft of his spike sliding against you, head weeping precum and pressed somewhere between both your and Elita's thighs.

“Please,” he breathes, lips pressed against your shoulder and optics narrowed at the femme beneath you. “Do not discontinue your activities on my behalf.”

His weight bears down on you, and you think you're going to die. In the position he's in, length of his spike pressed against your pussy and the head against Elita's (you can only assume) he could be preparing to fuck either one of you. You like sharing, you're not a selfish person but you are a *desperate* person and you think there's a good chance you might actually explode if you don't have his spike in you *right this fucking instant*.

*Oh god oh please let it be me.* You think while Elita looks up at you with an expression that clearly says *“Bitch don’t make me fight for it because I will fight.”*

“What-” you say finally, whimpering as he slides a servo down to your ass, using the other to support himself upright as he towers over you both like the living fortress he is. “-Are you going to do?”

“I am going to frag you like I'm trying to breed you.”

You wish you could see his face. You wish you could see his face because you're 99.9% positive you're never going to ever hear anyone say anything that hot *ever again.* Judging by the look on Elita's face ash she looks up at him, the expression he made uttering it must've been *smoldering.*
“What about me?” she asks with a pout you clock in at about 2500 degrees Fahrenheit. You think steel boils at that temperature.

He answers her by simultaneously crashing his lips into her and driving his spike into you so hard you see white.

“You're next.”

You close your eyes, turning your head away because you don't have NASA approved sunglasses and you're certain that the look on either of their faces could eclipse the sun.

Not that you need your eyes. Your field of vision is a sea of red and blue and pink and white and it's swimming anyways because without the fear of causing you bodily harm looming in his conscious Optimus is holding nothing back. Elita is crying out just from the vibrations of getting fucked through you. You're pretty sure if you were back on earth you'd be a stain on the floor by now and that thought shouldn't have you throwing your head back and screaming his name out within the first five seconds but it does.

You could be done. You could have been finished off when he first firmly instructed you to start touching her, and part of you really wants to lie back and let the pre-orgasmic haze sweep you off the plateau. But your conscience isn't satisfied with just letting Elita watch, even though she's probably as close as you are just thinking about the railing she's about to get. So you scrape together what little composure you have left and beg Optimus to relent.

“No.”

You can feel his denta against your shoulder as he growls. You should have known better.

“Just...to move...let me-” his spike presses so far forward against your cervix you involuntarily choke on air. “Her valve.” you sob. “Let me get to her valve!”

A split second pause in which he slows down to a snails pace (that tests your very sanity) is all you get. But it's also all you need to plant your head firmly between her thighs, grab her hips, and, taking a leaf out of her own book, use your tongue to press into the groove behind her interface panel.

You're granted a “Wow, squishy, you learn fast.” as the plating falls away to reveal her valve. You
You have to manually force yourself to keep breathing.

It's pink, of course, like the rest of her, that's no surprise. Shades of coral pink and magenta and the palest white biolights adorning the parameter, with her own lubricant pearling like glowing, incandescent dewdrops. There's probably at least a dozen tropical flowers you could liken her to and you have never regretted not perusing a degree in botany more than you have right this fucking second.

You want to classify it. You want to sketch it in your field journal and name it in latin. You want to receive the Nobel peace prize for discovering it while your peers applaud you in a scholarly but polite jealous rage.

But you're not a botanist. So you do what a normal person confronted with a metal alien amazonian pussy would do.

And you bury your face in her.

You can't see her face. That's probably a good thing, since she can't see you, considering Optimus's patience had worn out and it's taking most of your concentration just not to go cross-eyed. But the noises she's making, the neediest, filthiest electronic mewling lets you know that you're doing something right. Good god the painters of the renaissance couldn't have immortalized something this visually stimulating in painting, so you study ever taper, every curve, ever petal soft fold and burn it into your mind's eye and pray to the powers that be you don't go blind before she overloads.

You could die here. You could drown because she's an ocean of sweet femme scent and floral metals and you don't want to ever breathe normal air again. The farther you press your tongue into her the more you feel a pleasant buzz, almost like a battery, except you've only ever experimented with AA's in your youth, and whatever she's got humming down here could probably power a Ferrari on a trans European racecourse. Her warning about 30,000 volts dances through the back of your mind, and you find yourself infinitely grateful that you're somewhere you can't possibly be harmed.

And quite honestly, a little disappointed.

That's when you realize that, dream or no, you're still actually in a considerable amount of pain, both from Elita crushing your skull with her amazonian thighs, and from Optimus plowing you like a mechanical drafthorse. Which leads you to consider four equally frightening possibilities.

A : Optimus actually wants it to hurt
B : Elita wants it to hurt

C : You want it to hurt

D : All of the above

You can't think about that right now because Optimus has slowed down again and as much as your thoroughly ravaged pelvis is screaming in relief you're also ready to fall backwards off the plateau with both of them and you literally snarl in desperation as your building orgasm fizzes out of existence.

“Who pulled the breaks?” Elita hisses, voice cracking. “You don't pull the brakes on a *fuck train. ”

“I am...close” Optimus growls between labored ex-vents. “I do not wish to...*finish* so abruptly when-” the groan of frustration he lets out nearly pushes you over the edge, and it takes all of your strength just to hang on.”-When I have yet to attend to you.”

Elita huffs. “Well, if you need to hold off just lie back and think of Alpha Trion.”

Optimus freezes. You freeze. Time itself is frozen still because every second he's not moving in you is an *eternity* and *Oh my god way to ruin the mood holy shit* *Fuck you Elita.*

“-Kidding! It s a dream! You don't have a refractory period!” She giggles. “By all means, go ahead and overload!”

She's going to pay for that. She is *absolutely* going to pay for that and you make her pay when you suck on her clit, rolling it between your teeth while you thrust three of your fingers into her soaking wet pussy as fast as you can and as *hard* as you can and-

And she's gone. She's *done.* Her optics actually flicker as overload takes her, and this time you can see her face, and it's perfect. A perfect sex cyberkitten face and *you're the reason she's making it.*

And when you feel Optimus bury his face in your shoulder, voice eclipsed in layers of static and broken english you finally let go. His spike spasms within you as orgasm tears through you both, his servos gripping your hips so hard you're sure they'd break under any other circumstance. The fluids filling you, spilling out of you is hot, Elita's body is hot, everything is so *hot* and your vision is swimming as he falls to the side, turning you in his arms to kiss you before either of you have a chance to catch your breath.
You don't understand how something who was ready to crush you in the throes of carnal passion just seconds ago is holding you so gently now, cradling you against his chassis and under the crook of his neck and murmuring softly in unintelligible cybertronian. It's a paradox. But you're not given a chance to ponder further because the second he unsheathes his spike from you Elita is already fluidly inserted herself between you two.

“We're not done yet.”

“No,” he replies, optics narrowed. “We are not.”

You're about to ask just how exactly she intends to entwine the three of you this time, but she demonstrates before you can ask, maneuvering you onto her lap, facing her, one servo cupping your ass as she leans forward to wrap her legs around Optimus's waist.

“Oh.” you say softly in realization as she sinks herself onto his once again fully erect spike. “Oh.” you bite your lip and grit your teeth as she fills the agonizing emptiness inside you with long, slender, extremely dexterous fingers. “Oh fuck me.”

“That is the idea.” Elita purrs.

If you could move your arm enough you'd probably swing at her for making the same deadpan joke twice. But you can't move your arm, and her tits are in your face. Her breast plating had fallen away to reveal them some time ago, but you hadn't had the chance to do anything about them until now. They're not soft, though they have a give to them similar to the material you can feel between plating gaps, and they mold pleasantly into your hands.

“I know they're not as soft as yours, squishy,” she begins, stifling a moan as you draw a nipple into your mouth. “But they, ah... work about the s-s-same.”

You can only hum in response with your mouth full, and then squeal as Optimus changes his rhythm, a galloping, two parted buck that has you both clutching desperately at each other for support. With your belly pressed so tightly against hers you can actually feel his spike through her.

“Oh wow you are tight.” she purrs as she works her fingers within you in time with his thrusts “How in the pit did you ever get your spike inside her?”
“Very carefully.” he rumbles, venting hot air against the back of your neck. You assume he's referring to your waking activities and suppress the urge to remind him that he once dislocated your hip and that careful doesn't seem to even be a word in his vocabulary when the predator comes out to play. That's probably something that's supposed to serve as cryptic foreshadowing for a massive problem later, but you're not gonna worry about that right now.

“Oh Primus I've missed this.” she says, cradling his helm in her servos and she bounces herself slowly, deliberately up and down. “I missed your shoulders, I missed your chassis, I missed the way your audial fin almost pokes me in the optic, I missed your voice, I missed your smile-” you tell yourself the crack in her voice is out of unbridled pleasure, not because she's on the edge of a cathartic breakdown. “I missed-”

The sharp crackle of thunder draws you all to a screeching halt. For a moment, you're worried the realm is on the verge of another storm, but as the bite of electricity hums in the air and an unexpected but familiar rolling pulsing something bursts beneath your stomach, sending shockwaves through all three of you, you realize it's anything but.

“The charge.” Elita breathes, optics wider than you'd ever seen. “How can there be a charge? There shouldn't be a charge.”

“And yet there is.” Optimus says after a beat, having accepted this unforeseen event with a sagelike calm.

You swallow nervously. “Is this not supposed to happen, or-?”

“There's not supposed to be a charge between three of us.” she says, somewhere between panic and bewilderment. “There shouldn't be a charge up here at all.”

“But is it bad?” you ask, struggling to keep your voice steady as the electricity builds within you, the urge to complete the circuit maddening.

“No.” he says, optics going soft as a cautious, elated smile forms over his lips. “Merely...unexpected.”

There's no telling who begins to move this time. As the balled lightning courses through you, you briefly forget what it's like to exist as an individual entity, and you really don't want to remember.
You're sandwiched between the most masculine, unyielding and the most unapologetically feminine beings in existence. You're in the nexus of the fucking universe right now.

It's like dancing, some far off part of your mind tells you, and while it's far from a perfect metaphor it's the best you've got, the closest you can come to describing how you're riding the wavelength generated by your bodies. She's the harem dancer moving freely and he's the shaman invoking old gods and you're the bystander thrust into the circle with no hope of matching either of them. She is the melody and he is the beat and you're the quiet percussion drowning in their song. You're every note they're not hitting, every beat they miss, the air reverberating between them and you don't want to be anything else.

They're singing. Every breath they draw is electronic, angelic song and your name is in the chorus. You sing with them, mediating voice lost in the resonance between tambourine and war drums. The charge within you reaches fruition, and your body clamps down around her fingers. You bury your face in her chest as Optimus breaks within her, and the lightning bursts between you three.

Silence falls, save for heavy venting and the leftover static discharge breaking over your skin. The sky, a deep, midnight indigo before, has turned to daylight, and the sunbeams diffusing through the crystalline plants paints the entire ground, you three included, in fractured rainbows. You briefly entertain the thought that your collective overload had actually caused a time rift or a solar flare, but are too enamored with the play of colored light reflect off their plating to give it further thought.

“Beautiful.” Optimus says after a moment, cradling you both against his frame with either arm.

“Bitch I know I am.” Elita says once her venting has evened out. “But the rainbows are nice too.”

You roll your eyes. “Could you not for like thirty whole seconds or is that too much to ask?”

“I'll give you fifteen but even that's pushing it.”

“I was referring to the two of you.” he clarifies, optics crinkling in amusement. “Though I must admit this is a rather breathtaking turn of events.”

You hum in agreement, burying your face into the side of his neck. "You know what would make this perfect?"
"A fat cy-gar and a barrel of pre-war vosian highgrade." Elita says flatly.

You huff. "I was going to say broadcasting everything that just happened directly into Megatron's visual feed. And also Ironhide's. But MOSTLY just Megatron."

She snorts. Optimus actually chuckles softly and you feel ludicrously accomplished. "That too. But seriously, the highgrade. And a nice warm frothy mug of mulled energon for Mr. Straight edge over here." she says, lazily poking Optimus between the optics.

"With rust shavings." He stipulates.

She rolls her optics. "God you're such a friggin' sparkling. You want a jelly filled rust stick to stir it with too?"

"I would not be opposed to that."

"As long as we're making demands I'd like a milkshake." you say miserably, mourning your ability to ingest human food without feeling like you'd taken a megaton punch to the gut. "Or ice cream. Or cake. Or icecream cake or cookies-"

"I'd like five more minutes." Elita interjects suddenly. “Aw scrap."

Both you and Optimus raise an eyebrow in curiosity, but are spared the need for elaboration as the ground beneath you begins to shake, and the sky itself begins to shatter like glass, blinding bright light pouring through the cracks. You wrap your entire body around Optimus' arm for support in a death grip.

"What is happening?" he asks in alarm.

Elita sighs heavily. "Looks like you're waking up." She says, untangling herself from his embrace and getting to her pedes in one fluid move. "Oh well. Up and at 'em Tiger."
If his face had fallen any faster you'd be in a time warp.

“Please...not yet.” with his other arm now free he uses both to clutch you painfully tight against his frame. “I...I am not ready to wake up.”

“You never were sleepyhead.” Elita says, tearing your body from his arms and throwing you over her shoulder before you have a chance to scream your opposition.

“Fff-” is all you manage to get out, struggling wildly in her clutch, throwing an outstretched hand towards Optimus in a last ditch effort to fucking stay.

He doesn’t deserve this. Frankly, nobody deserves to be taken to robot Eden to have mind blowing sex with their dead wife and comatose girlfriend and then have their soul crammed back into their three dimensional body, where they have to wake up alone and continue raising an infant and fighting a pointless war. But Optimus especially doesn't deserve it. Sadly, you lack the ability condense all of this into five seconds, which is probably how much time you have before the dreamscape completely disintegrates.

“No.” there's straight up desperation in his voice, his face, everything as he reaches his servo out to take your hand, missing it by mere inches. “Don't let me wake up. Don't let me wake up.”

There's tears running down your face. You're screaming, you're clawing at every part of Elita you can reach, but as you'd previously established she's an amazon at any height, and your protests are as about impressive as a wet sponge, no matter how fierce.

“Sorry hun gotta go!” She says cheerfully, giving a mock salute as she gives a running start, leaps through the air, and dives headfirst into one of the cracks, engulfing you both in blinding white light.

You both materialize instantaneously in a massive, ivory white sandy expanse. A desert, probably, with stupid ivory white pixilated sand and stupid levitating rainbow pyramids and a stupid dayglow orange sphinx that probably asks you stupid riddles.

Elita lets you go, and you fall unceremoniously into a stupid heap at her feet. You cough stupid sand out of your lungs, wipe stupid, still flowing tears from your face and cry silently in equal parts agony and rage, stupidly.
“Whelp.” Elita says, in a sickeningly happy go lucky tone that is not helping your skyrocketing rage meter. “He is totally going to wake up covered in his own transfluid.”

You cough up more sand. You clench your fists.

“You sure weren't kidding about that dominance thing.” she says, bringing a finger to press against her bottom lip thoughtfully. “That's uh, that's pretty pronounced. I'm gonna go out on a limb and assume it's from stress build up, not something deeper.”

Her attempts at playing psychiatrist, while warranted, only incite your further. If you had anything other than sand to hurl at the back of her helm, you probably would.

“Damn shame though-” she says, placing one servo on her spark chamber and the other on her forehead in a stereotypical swoon pose. “-Because that was hot as slag.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?!” you snarl as your rage meter reaches critical mass, and you do, in your desperation, hurl a fistfull of sand at her face.

“What the hell.” she says flatly, shielding her face with her servos. “Are you throwing sand?”

“How can you be so nonchalant about this?!” you yell. “Are we going to pretend none of this just happened?

“Who the fuck throws sand?” she asks, bewildered. “At least have the courage to punch me you wimp.”

“I'm improvising and you're not listening!” you shout. “How can you just teleport us to the middle of the desert while he's begging us not to go? How can you just leave him? Didn't you see his face?!”

“I did.” She says, letting her servos fall to her side to reveal her face. Her tear-streaked-still-crying-absolutely-broken face. “I just didn't want him to see mine.”

You drop your remaining fistful of sand, and also your jaw. It starts raining again, a gentle, warm rain with clouds that don't quite eclipse the midday sun. She drops to her, knees, head tilted skyward
as her entire frame shakes in silent sobs.

“It should be a hurricane.” she says, smile still plastered over her crumbling face. “But I found out a while back that if you go somewhere that experiences lower than average rainfall, like say, a desert-” she gestures with the servo that isn't holding her face. “-It doesn't storm as bad. It's really quite fascinating. I'd love to publish my findings. I'd call it “Fuck you Beachcomber for stealing my thesis title back in Xenobiology 101.”

You open your mouth. You close your mouth.

“You could come up with a better title than that.” you say softly.

“I did, but he stole it. Fragger.” she says, laughing quietly, optics screwed shut as she doubles over. “I...I didn't want him to see me like this.”

“...Beachcomber?” you try cautiously.

“Optimus!” she snaps back, so hard that you actually flinch. “He watched me cry enough times when I was alive. I should have been stronger for him.” she says, shaking her head. “I should have been a lightening rod instead of, y'know, fucking lightening.”

You're at a loss for words, having difficulty imagining someone like Elita being anything other than a bastion of kickass support. “I'm...you're kinda losing me here.” you admit.

“A lightning rod.” she repeats. “Y'know, so you can try to absorb at least some of the sad bullscrap life throws your way so they don't have to take it all. And someone in Optimus's position gets a lot of bullscrap.” she sighs.

“He was always the calm one. He was always the one trying to cheer me up, holding me together, even though he was the one taking all the lightning. That's not how it's supposed to work.” she hiccups, the saddest little wheezing in-vent and you feel your heart break a little. “You can bet your sweet organic aft that if I had a chance to do it over again I'd be be the pillar of support to him that he was to me. He needed support. He needed it and I couldn't give it to him.”

She's sobbing into the ground now. Something deep within you is crying out in existential unease as you watch a titan crumble in front of you. Your instincts are screaming at you to do something
comforting, say something comforting, put your laughably small arms around her and pull her against against your chest until she stops, but you remain frozen in place.

“Look,” you say awkwardly after a beat “I'm not a billion years old or whatever and I wasn't there when you two were together, but I can tell when someone is being way too hard on themselves.” you say, closing the distance between you too and placing a comforting hand on her, while still roughly human sized, totally massive shoulder. “The way he talks about you, how strong and funny and how much of a smartass you were, it couldn't have been that bad. And I'm not just saying that to protect my own ego since he likes to compare us.” you assert. “Honestly, it sounds like you were holding him together.”

She looks up at you, and the haunted glow in her optics could have reanimated an entire cemetery.

“You know what the last thing I ever said to him was?”

You freeze again. She laughs darkly as she tilts her head back towards the ground.

“I'm scared.” she says softly. “He... had his servo behind my neck, because I was too weak to even lean forward. Ratchet had just handed him Bumblebee, and he was sort of just cradling him in front of me so I could see him, my arms didn't even work at that point. And he was so tiny, (y/n), so tiny, and he's not moving enough, he's not moving at all and Optimus is just trying to make the best of all of this while he still can, he's still in shock, he's knows how fucked we all are but he's not crying or breaking down or anything because he knows he's never going to get this again. “ she ex-vents. “And while I'm laying there, being held by him, holding our son, I tell him that I'm scared of dying.”

“I could have said something funny, or comforting. I could've made some smartass retort. But I didn't.” she snarls, slamming her fist into the ground with directionless rage. “I was terrified of dying. I died terrified of dying and he's the one that has to live with that. He's going to feel guilty every damn day for the rest of his life and I put that on him.”

There's no appropriate reaction to this. No facial expression, noise, or gesture in the grand social encyclopedia to tell you how to act. So it's with the cold comfort of knowing you can't not fuck up that you proceed.

“There's nothing wrong with being scared.” you flounder. “And he would have felt guilty even if you'd gone out on a kickass one-liner throwing confetti and giving the finger to the universe.”
She laughs. It's closer to a hiccup, but it's a start.

“He shouldn't have to feel guilty at all.”

“No.” you agree. “But he blames everything on himself and forgives everyone else. That's just how he is. So you'd better start forgiving yourself because we both know he already has.”

She narrows her optics. “I don't want to forgive myself.”

“And he doesn't want you wallowing around in your own misery over a shit choice of last words after what I can only assume was an epic space battle with lasers and explosions and a heroic sacrifice that I'm sure you're still not going to fully explain until the end of the trial.”

“I'm still on the fence about explaining it at all.” she says, sighing heavily, tilting her head back up to look you in the eyes. “Tell you what, squishie, I'll make an effort to stop wallowing and clear up this rain if you make me a promise.”

There's light in her optics and the tears have stopped. You're getting somewhere.

“What?”

“Be his lightning rod.” she says, reclining back into a seated position in the sand, staring contemplatively into the distance. “Be his guiding light, his guardian angel, all that mushy stuff.” she sighs. “Just be better than me.”

“That's...a pretty tall order.” you say dizzily, plopping unceremoniously down beside her.

“I know it is.” she smirks, and you feel an enormous weight come off your chest as your heart begins to flutter damnit. Even with puffy optics and a tear streaked face she still takes your breath a little bit away. “That's why I want you to promise.”

You slide into a thoughtful silence. It's not like you need to actually think about it, considering keeping Optimus sane and safe had been your MO for some time now. But processing the fact that his dead wife, whom you'd just shared an astral menage-a-troi with, is asking you to take care of him
for the rest of your pathetic human life span is going to take a few seconds.

You close your eyes. You take several deep breaths. Moderate doses. You can take insanity in moderate doses.

“I promise.” you say firmly, leaning just the tiniest bit into her shoulder. “I'll do it. I'll smash your record, beat your high score, write my name on the top of the scoreboard. It's on.”

She grins, wide and snarky but genuine and the overwhelming relief it sends crashing through your veins makes your head spin. “Cross your spark and hope to die?”

You put your hands up defensively “I don't want to die.”

“I don't want you to either.” she says, falling back into the sand and taking you with her in the process, and you fall into the hollow between her arm and her chassis, head now resting on her breastplate. “But when you do, and you get sick of waltzing around organic afterlife or whatever, come look me up.”

“So we can give Optimus wet dreams on a regular enough basis that he won't miss us?’

“Yeah.” she says, staring off into the sky, aimlessly drawing phallic shapes in the sand with her finger “But also because I like you.”

Your heart skips a beat. You swallow hard, pretending to intensely focus on her drawings(which had already devolved into a stick figure orgy) pretending to get more comfortable while you actually hide your face.

And pretending very, very hard that you're not blushing as her other servo wraps itself around your hand.
You have no idea how long you lay beside Elita in the pixel desert in your post orgasmic haze, but it's long enough for you to panic about, make peace with, re-examine, and then resume panicking about possibly maybe someday developing a crush on your boyfriend's dead wife. And also long enough for Elita's stick figure orgy to evolve into a series of episodic three panel comics she dubbed “Buckethead and the spikeblocker experience featuring Irondouche,” whose plot consisted of two suspiciously familiar looking cartoon mechs finding exciting new means of preventing or interrupting interfacing.

You wait until she's done with her latest installment, which involves Buckethead transforming into a trebuchet to slingshot Irondouche at two airborne seekers engaging in alt.mode interfacing before interrupting her.

“You think we should be getting back to the trial anytime soon?”

“Oh frag yeah whoops.” She says, snapping her fingers, and you find yourself ripped from the relative comfort of her embrace to be unceremoniously dumped onto the hard, unforgiving floor of the boss room.

Ouch. You think but don't say, not wanting to lose face in front of the twins and the bird, who, you realize, once you'd gotten to your feet, are running away screaming from your dopperganger's corpse, which is currently engulfed in flame.

You blink.

“Do you have any water?” Rumble asks plainly, having immediately ceased screaming upon your arrival. Apparently his faith in your ability to correct any situation is so strong that the three's collective hysteria vanished the moment he laid optics on you. You wish you shared their confidence.

“How-” you shriek at the top of your lungs. “-DID YOU START A FIRE?!”
“We got bored.” Rumble says simply.

A long, exaggerated whistle pans out of thin air. “Considering there's nothing to even start a fire with, color me impressed.” Says Elita.

You grab your hair. You tear out your hair, which, in the manner of most things in the dream realm, instantly regenerates, losing most of it's visual gag appeal in the process. Rumble had once managed to break every window in your house and shave your cat while you were busy plucking your eyebrows with the bathroom door open but this still takes the cake by a large margin.

“I leave you alone for ten minutes and you set my corpse on fire in a room with no combustible material!” you whine. “Damnit Rumble I gave you one job-”

“And I did it!” He snaps back with righteous ferocity. “We didn’t even move for the first ten minutes! You were gone for an hour!”

An electric silence falls over the room. Your eye twitches. You look over your shoulder at the ceiling corner, which, while empty, has the intended effect of letting Elita know you are trying to incinerate her face with your eyeballs.

“Oh slag.” Elita says softly.

“You said ten minutes.”

“I said probably ten minutes.”

“You said they wouldn't even notice we were gone.”

“That was before you interrupted me.”

You grind your teeth. Your shoulder joins your eye in twitching, which isn't so much intimidating as it makes you look like a stroke victim. “If I had known...that there was even an iota of a chance that
we wouldn't be back on time-"

“Then you'd have sat here forever without blinking watching Rumble lubricate?”

“That's not the point-”

“Please don't watch me lubricate.” Rumble interjects.

“The POINT is everybody's fine!” Elita blurts out. “You're alive, nobody's hurt, everything is okay-”

“You expect me to believe you just used your time altering powers incorrectly and it didn't have major repercussions everywhere else?”

“No but I expect you to believe that the repercussions are minor inconveniences at most and that you're better off spending that nervous energy on something productive, like, say, finishing the trial.”

That's right. You're still stuck in this labyrinth with two postmortem children, a shit talking bird and a cool but useless sword. You'd open your mouth to argue but don't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing you'd tried, and failed to produce a witty retort. You heave a disgusted sigh instead.

“Okay.” you say, pinching the bridge of your nose. “So we defeated the boss, acquired a weapon and found the “super important mysterious thing”-”

“Yeah, that's getting kinda old. Can we abbreviate? Like “S.I.M.T. for short?”

“You're the one who picked it.” You roll your eyes, but humor her anyways. “The S.I.M.T.-”

“But still do the finger quotes.”

“How about I shove my fingers right up your exhaust port?”
“You already did a couple of times. By accident. I was going to say something but I kind of liked it.”

What comes out of your mouth next is equal parts loud coughing and squealing the first half of her name. Rumble and Frenzy give you long, troubled, uncomfortable stares in stereo.

“Lewd!” the bird peeps cheerily.

“So...we found ...her-?” you say, gesturing at the bird once you'd given up on collecting yourself and continue as a flustered mess. “That's all you told us to do.”

“Correction. I told you to bring me the S.I.M.T.”

“So, we just need to get out of the dungeon with her?”

“Yup.” she says simply. “But you forget the finger quotes.”

“I'm not doing them.”

“But it makes it official.” She whines.

“Bite me.”

“I already did.” the level of smug in her voice is probably toxic. “A lot.”

While you're busy choking on air, Frenzy, being the responsible, task oriented child he is, shoves his still-detached head under his arm and makes finger quotes in your place. You feel oddly touched.

“So we're leaving?” Rumble asks, resting the behemoth greatsword behind his shoulders in a stereotypical hero pose. “We get to take the sword, right?”

You blow out a breath. “Yes, we get to take the sword.”
“Because I like the sword.”

“I understand that Rumble.”

“That’s not a spike metaphor I just really like it.”

“That’s extremely age inappropriate, Rumble.”

“But I’m never gonna get older.”

He's got a point. A heart breaking point, but a point nonetheless, and you're not going to let it kill the collective buzz.

“Alright you got me,” you sigh. “For the rest of the quest you get to make as many dirty jokes as you want.”

“But it's not a joke.”

You groan. Good-naturedly. You already have the dungeon at least partially memorized, solved all the puzzles and killed all the enemies during the first walkthrough. Even if they respawn and the puzzles reset this should be a cakewalk. Heck, you might even pop out of your coma before Optimus develops a crippling phobia of physical touch and Ratchet binge drinks an entire oil refinery. There's no reason in the world your party's morale can't be sky-high right now.

It's with this newfound confidence that you inhale sharply, put one foot in front of the other, and step back through the door into the room with the riddle cracking gargoyle, surging with cautious elation and hope for the future. You're so busy surging, in fact, that while you notice several large chunks of debris falling from the ceiling, no doubt loosened by Rumble's 6.4 pascal bitch slap from earlier, you fail to realize the danger it could possibly pose to small, finely boned, flight capable animals.

“FU-” Is all the super important mysterious thing (SIMT) manages to peep out, before being knocked out of the air by a particularly hefty portion of the ceiling, and reduced to a stain of feathers and blood on the floor.
Sixteen paces.

One hundred and sixty feet, a sliding door, the ten or so seconds it takes for him to remember what he changed the combination on the lock to his supply cabinet this cycle (the creation date of Ironhide's dubiously named “water gun”) All that stands between Ratchet and his emergency stash of high grade.

Well, that, and Optimus.

Not that he's actively keeping him from it, or even aware of his yearning as he fidgets endlessly with a palm-sized jewel bright prism in his right servo, largely ignoring the animated film Ratchet had suggested they watch, partially because he'd been scouring the entire planet for a VHS copy of “The Last Unicorn” for months, but mostly to ease the tension the subject at hand had already begun to build.

“Dr. Fujiyama continues to offer his assistance. “

He's a barricade in of himself. Ratchet has never found himself quite capable of excusing himself from his presence. Optimus is always the one to end the conversation, the one to leave first. When it's just the two of them, he can't find it in him to not hang on every word.

But right now he'd rather be paying attention to anything other than this conversation. And the movie provides a welcome distraction.

“Please! Please do something!”

“What can I do? Do you think the Red Bull likes card tricks?”
“And you honestly believe-” Ratchet begins cautiously. “That he can be trusted? “

“He has given us no reason to suspect ulterior motive.”

“I know someone who would vehemently argue otherwise.” Ratchet sighs “If (y/n) were awake- “

“She is not awake.” he doesn't snap. He never does, but cutting him off is as close as he's ever come, and it stings all the same. Ratchet recoils.

“She is... not awake.” Optimus, seemingly remorseful, repeats softly. “And with her identity altered, she has no remaining family capable of making medical decisions on her behalf. As such, we find our hands forced.”

_We are her family now._ Goes unsaid, and he agrees with it. But he can't help the twist of unease in his spark. For reasons either of them had yet to deduce, she'd shown significant aversion in dealing with scientists of her own species, especially concerning the unusually perspirant Fujiyama.

“She never trusted him.” he ventures, carefully.” I can hardly imagine she would consent to being left in his care.”

Optimus's optics are fixed on the screen. His choice not to respond is a calculated response in of itself, telling him that, while he acknowledges his opinion, he's already steeling himself to disregard it. Ratchet clenches his denta.

“ _If I could, I would change her into some other creature, some beast too humble for the Bull to be concerned with. But that would take a real magician with real magic, and I can't pretend anymore._ ”

It's far from the first time he's found himself in this position, forced to clash with friends and family over a patient's wishes. There'd been countless mechs who left explicit instructions to be brought offline in the event of prolonged stasis, and he'd done what he could to accommodate their wishes within the parameters of the oaths he'd taken. Despite the (sometimes violent) protests from those surviving the patients he did what he could to honor the their wishes. In that respect, he hadn't regretted his decisions. Not one.
Aside from generously vocalizing her deep distrust, (y/n) had left no such instructions, and Ratchet doesn't want the responsibility of interpreting them as such. Nor does he want to classify her as an exception. But considering the circumstances, considering her relationship with Optimus and his own unresolved....attachment, he has little choice.

“The magic chose the shape, not I! I am a bearer! I am a dwelling! I am a messenger!”

“You are an idiot!”

And so he watches, transfixed as Optimus rolls the prism between his thumb and index digit, down the rest of his digits, and back to his thumb again, over and over.

He'd begun constructing it several months ago, tinkering with it in his spare time and citing increasingly dubious reasons to excuse himself to work on it. In that time it had evolved from a simplistic rubix-cube like algorithm to an absolutely labyrinthian puzzle that, in addition to having over five hundred possible solutions, would play an entire jukebox's worth of music upon completion, mostly by a glam rock artist (y/n) had been particularly fond of.

He s extraordinarily handsome like this, bathed in the dim light, and a warm wave of shame washes over him for noticing that at a time like this. But he wonders how anyone couldn't notice, how anyone could look at someone like him and not notice, not notice the soft, ethereal light cast by his optics, ancient wisdom bleeding through far too young a face.

But it's the smile that brought Ratchet to his knees, time and time again.

He s not smiling now, and he shouldn't be. His mouth is set in a firm line, as it always was these days. But when he does smile, and he does, rarely, but he does- it's impossible to describe. It's like waking up after recharging for a week straight. It's like returning to a home you'd thought had been long destroyed. It's like...

Sunlight. Ratchet thinks, tearing his optics away, because he wants to focus on how he looks when he's happy, not how he looks now. He can drum up those memories, even now, and he s grateful for it.

He understands how Elita had fallen for him. He understands how (y/n) had fallen for him. And he can't find it in himself to blame her.
“You've trapped her in a human body! She'll go mad!”

As much as he tries to fight it, he remembers her voice. That unsteady, almost-confident "I-might-be-nervous-but-you-shouldn't-be” timbre that she used to address him. He’d heard her, unwittingly, at her most raw, and if he wanted he could imagine that she'd once used it on him, that same unadulterated plea that he'd heard through the wideband. She'd spared a portion of that shaking, terrified brilliance for him.

That shouldn't give him hope. That shouldn't raise his spirits, given the circumstances, but it does. Shouldn't give him the purchase to slip, even momentarily into fantasy, but he does. He d kept the recording like the filthy voyeur he is, not bothering to justify it because how could he? If he could hear either of them, both of them say his name like that, like a heated, desperate prayer then he could die a happy mech.

He wants them both. More then either could ever know.

He tells himself he could make them happy. He would not interfere, he would embellish. If they were oceans, he'd sail them, Two stars in the night sky, he'd map the distance between them.

He could fit in. He could carve out a slot for himself. Make himself useful.

But Ratchet knows, even before that thought is issued, that he's lying to himself. But thank Primus, lying to himself is an art he'd perfected, an art expedited by highgrade, which, while a mere hundred and sixty feet away from him, involved pushing past Optimus.

And, as he'd already established, that was something he simply isn't capable of.

“So you believe,” Ratchet begins, shoving every fiber of unprofessional bias (worry) back behind his processor. “That its in our best interests to hand her over? “

Optimus does not immediately respond. Three more instantaneous movements of his fingers and the prism is solved, beaming pastel colored lights and a music box-esque version of “Young Americans”. For a precious few seconds he sees the corners of his mouth twitch. It's almost a smile. Ratchet's spark skips a beat.
Right before a ball forms in his intake, because it's just an almost-smile and it's already over as Optimus slips the prism back into his subspace, sighing deeply. His optics drift back towards the screen, and Ratchet's thankful they didn't land on him

“Considering our woefully limited options “ he trails off. He doesn't need to finish. “-Then Fujiyama's approach seems most promising”. His optics flicker. Ratchet desperately wants to pretend they don't. “If he can offer a compromise in this situation then we cannot ignore it.”

“I wish you had let the Red Bull take me! I wish you had left me to the harpy!”

And there it is. The dismissal. The so diplomatically worded override of his opinion that to unseasoned audials it doesn't even sound like an override. He'd seen it coming, but can't help the sharp twist of betrayal he feels in his tanks.

Ratchet says nothing for a beat, observing the floor. “She would probably rather die than allow him to touch her.”

Optimus visibly stiffens at his blunt choice of words, but does not disagree. “Given the uniqueness of the situation, I believe she could have been convinced to allow it.”

“We have no way of knowing that.” he growls. He wasn't supposed to growl. It was a growl in his head before he said it but it wasn't supposed to come out like that.

Optimus blinks, he probably anticipated the opposition on some level, but hadn't expected him to actually vocalize it.

“We do not.” he agrees, cautiously. “But we have also found ourselves in a position where we are forced to make an ...educated guess.”

“I can feel this body DYING all around me!”

“And clearly you're the only one qualified to make that guess.” That wasn't supposed to come out at all. Ratchet wants to feel awful for it, needs to feel awful for it but when he reaches all he finds is more self-justified anger. Tendrils of panic lap at the back of his mind, familiar, the kind he feels
when he can't conjure situation-appropriate emotions. Panic is not an option. That's what the high grade, sixteen paces away, is for.

Optimus opens his mouth, and closes it. In the aeons that he'd known him Ratchet can count on one servo the number of times he'd been at a loss for words. The last time was when he'd been betrayed on the senate floor, immediately after which he'd delivered the speech that had unintentionally granted him the Primeship.

Were he given adequate time to recover, he's certain the power of words would be returned to him in full. But Ratchet doesn't give him time.

“Given the uniqueness of the situation-” Optimus begins to repeat. “-I believe-”

“You believe what? That she'd agree to you signing her over like a cadaver?” Ratchet snaps, finally allowing frustration to get the better of him. He pinches the ridge between his chevron and helm, screwing his optics shut. “Slag it, Optimus, how much of this is your honest take on her reaction and how much of it are you embellishing with your own brand of morality? Can you even tell where one begins and the other ends anymore? Because I can't!”

No reply comes. When Ratchet moves his servo and tilts his helm back up he immediately wishes he hadn't. He sees a glimpse of Orion in his optics. Something still capable of being broken.

Ratchet chokes on an apology, hovering somewhere between “I didn't mean to yell” and “I didn't mean that at all” but decides against words, choosing instead to -cautiously- place a comforting servo on his shoulder.

And immediately regrets his decision when Optimus recoils. Violently.

Of course he'd forget. He, who had watched in cold horror as his best friend's aversion to physical contact with anything smaller than himself had developed into a full blown phobia of touching anything at all would forget. Ratchet's helm spins.

“You were dreaming, my lady”

“But I am always dreaming. Even when I am awake. It is never finished.”
“I...am sorry.” Optimus says at last.

“Don't apologize.”

“It was not my intention to react so adversely.”

“Don't apologize.”

“I understand that this is my mistake.” he continues, optics set into a thousand yard stare that, thankfully, isn't directed at Ratchet. “I take full responsibility for (y/n)'s condition, and every complication that has arisen as a result.”

“*Please* stop apologizing.”

“I respect her reservations. I respect your reservations and perhaps I am imposing my own beliefs upon her. Upon both of you, But...Ratchet-”

“Please...”

“-I don't want her to die.”

It's then, having exhausted every avenue of providing meaningful counsel or comfort to his friend on both a professional and personal level, Ratchet relinquishes his last shred of hope, and sinks back into his seat. He gives up trying to enjoy the movie, gives up trying to remember when he stopped paying attention, gives up on trying to draw any sort of meaningful parallel between Schemdrick the Magician or Prince Lir's concerns and his own because as much as he'd like to think otherwise there is no parallel.

“Drown out my dreams. Keep me from remembering, whatever wants me to remember it.”

He also gives up on any hope of reaching the cabinet, because Optimus is burying his face in his
servos and there's not enough highgrade on this miserable planet to make him forget that long buried underneath his calm exterior lies something as fragile as glass.

And he'd just made the first crack in it.
Some guy named Occam

Chapter Notes

Wow it's been over a month fuck me sorry for unpolished roughness and possible shit logic. I'll probably come back a couple times to spellcheck and shit pls enjoy.

Soundwave is bored.

He's bored, he's cold, his spinal strut is killing him because Ravage had docked sideways and is too deep in recharge to wake without manually disengaging him.

Not that he could bring himself to do so anyways. He'd been hyperaware of his stress levels as of late, and had slipped into a reactive neurosis by keeping a berth-side vigil all night every night, only allowing himself to sleep when Soundwave is fully awake and mobile. If he so much as remains seated for over an hour, he'll jerk himself awake, violently, eject himself without prompt and place himself upright, statue still at his sire's feet until it's time to move again. Rinse. Repeat. Ad nasuem.

He doesn't need that here, not out in the frozen recesses of this planet with his air commander and two humans at the entrance to an underground facility. No, he'd much rather Ravage stay fast asleep, even if he has to shift his weight from pede to pede and manually activate his cooling fans every cycle just to keep him there.

Lazerbeak, however, is wide awake, and very, very curious. He pings him relentlessly, bringing up hundreds of facts pulled from the database about the wasteland they're in the weather they're experiencing in said wasteland, and about humans.

The shorter, bespectacled human is perspiring profusely. Lazerbeak brings up a (admittedly limited) document on human body language, the gist of which informs him it's a subconscious action that indicates stress or fear. It also holds social implications that the individual displaying these traits is untrustworthy. He eagerly points out an addendum on several genetic disorders that prompt perspiration, regardless of the situation.

Soundwave finds his thoroughness and eagerness to learn amusing and feels a thread of affection trickle down for him, but has enough information to assume the human in question displays these symptoms because he is, in fact untrustworthy.
They both are. While one stands nervous and shaking, the other, taller, paler human seems to be losing his battle with the keypad to let them into the base. Lazerbeak prompts several monitors into his visual feed, indicating an elevated body temperature and heart-rate, clearly from frustration. He also sends him every possible number combination for the 10 digit keypad and an ETA on how long it would take him to break it. Soundwave acknowledges him, but dismisses it all the same.

“Have you forgotten your password?” Starscream says at long last, leaning against the adjacent wall, lazily regarding his own talons.

“I haven't” says the taller human curtly. “The battery's dying.”

Starscream makes an offhand remark in cybertronian, the punchline to some sort highly xenophobic riddle joke that involves hurling all of humanity at the sun. It's peppered with vosian and Soundwave can't be bothered to put forth the effort to understand it.

The human pulls back, expression of almost zen-like contemplation on his face, moments before planting his fist into the wall besides the keypad, so hard it leaves a dent in the aluminum metal siding and sends a dull thoom resonating throughout the warehouse.

He winces, hissing under his breath as he shakes his hand out, a behavior Soundwave understood to indicate a moderate amount of pain.

“The power must've shorted out again.” he swears softly “Fuck.”

Starscream throws Soundwave a sidelong glance, optical ridge raised, before turning his attention back to the human, clearing his intake.

“That won't be necessary.” he says, waving a servo dismissively. “We've already been introduced.

The human throws a confused glance at his companion before turning back to Starscream.

“Remind me again why a “hyper advanced civilization-” he makes finger quotes. “-Is interested in our facilities.”
“Curiosity.” he says simply. “Believe it or not, for the time being we may be of use to one another.”

This is taking too long. Soundwave doesn't exactly want to be anywhere else, but he knows he doesn't want to be here, and his frustration bleeds through to Lazerbeak. Before he has time to issue a plea to “Stay put” he dislodges from his docking station and flutters over to the lock, unsheathing tentacles nearly identical to his and using a hair-fine wires, impales the keypad. No more than a second passes until the unit disengages with a distinctive “blip”, and the gargantuan metal door slides open.

The bespectacled human wears an expression of almost fanboyish awe. If his companion is impressed he shows no visible signs of it.

“How did he do that?” he says without so much as raising an eyebrow.

“Human algorithms are...” Starscream pauses, undoubtedly scouring his processor for a tasteful alternative to 'idiotically simple' “...charmingly antiquated.”

“You mean inferior.” the human says plainly.

Starscream ex-vents, but does not disagree. “Even the more limited among our kind can decipher them in a manner of seconds.

The human narrows his eyes. “You're telling me that this.... accessory, with no priory knowledge of our numerical system is capable of processing 100,000 combinations in less than a second.”

Starscream laughs, a low, velvety, still excruciatingly haughty laugh. “As you said yourself, your algorithms are, plainly put, inferior.”

Lazerbeak, having broken the code, now busies himself with repairing the keypad. Soundwave feels the tiny white hot pinpricks of nervous excitement as he simultaneously sutures the very same wires he’d bypassed and maps the interior of the mechanism. He’s so engrossed in his work that he's failed to notice the smaller human moving in within a few feet, mouth ajar in gleeful bewilderment.

It's a few feet far, far too close, and Soundwave ejects an electrically charged tentacle to dissuade
him from getting closer, grazing his chin and knocking him several feet backwards in the process.

The human scrambles for his glasses, which had skidded to a stop near the wall, and cups his now profusely bleeding chin in his free hand. Soundwave is pretty sure he's made his point, but pulls up a relevant music file just to be certain.

The taller human raises an eyebrow as MC Hammer's “Can't touch this” Resonates off the tin walls of the warehouse.

“I see the concept of using out of context audio clips for comedic purposes isn't foreign to your species.” he says, cocking his head at the seeker.

“Soundwave may very well share a sense of humor on par with the less, ah, refined portion of your population,” Starscream says distastefully throwing an unamused glance over his shoulder. “-But make no mistake my minuscule friend, that was a threat.”

“A threat.” he states flatly. “That's unwarranted. We've commit ed no hostile actions.”

“Which is why it was only a threat. He's rather touchy when it comes to his charges. That was merely a casual display of protectiveness. Think of the damage that would have been done, had he actually become enraged.”

“So...children?”

“They are not properly his offspring. They were bonded to him in a process that utilizes a derivative of the substance we spoke of earlier.” Starscream finally leaves his position against the wall to elegantly loom himself over the humans, an action that has it's intended, intimidating effect on the shorter one, but not so much the taller, who could not look any more unimpressed by the display if he'd tried.

“Derivative?” he repeats.

“A substance rare on our homeworld, but found with alarming frequency on your planet. In high doses it grants immeasurable strength, but forms an almost immediate physical dependence, which if not carefully monitored, is almost certainly fatal. The bond Soundwave and his charges share results from a low, continual, watered down dosage.”
“And this would be the form that isn't fatal to humans.” the taller one asks, turning to his companion, who is still nursing his bleeding jaw.

“There...ah...has been at least one case, yes.” he says, wincing in between words to get to his feet.

Starscream hums in agreement. “Dr. Fujiyama has informed me that energon seems to have some fascinating effects on your species when doled out in appropriate measurements. It would seem our races are more compatible than we initially realized.”

Starscream continues on, explaining in excruciating detail the mutant substance coursing through Soundwave's veins, the process in which he and the cassettes were bonded, his violent impulses when they're threatened, and the failsafes that had been forced into his frame, circumnavigating his processor “for the safety of everyone involved.”

Soundwave, given no recourse other than to listen to his commander talk about him like the highly prized science fair display he is, cuts his audio receptors off. Lazerbeak was no doubt recording the entire conversation and would catalog it by date, length, and how boring it was(He'd come up with a rating system closely mimicking those of human movie critics, Starscream's reports and Shockwave's presentations were generally given 0/10) so if need be he could revisit the file later, hopefully in the privacy of his quarters, where there were walls to punch and berths to tear off the wall and flip.

But for now, he tunes them out. And he reflects on the human in question.

He could search the rift in his spark left by Rumble's departure, those last few memories frozen in time. Search for her face, her voice, and the blinding fear and sting of betrayal that he would have he would have undoubtedly attached to them in his final moments.

But he finds no fear as he warily sets foot over the threshold and grasps the static tendrils left from the bond.

Only trust. The kind he'd felt for Soundwave. For a parent.

As far as Rumble had been concerned, that's what both of them were.
And maybe, had that realization come earlier, Soundwave might have the courage to admit that what they were planning made him *sick*.

“So I've been informed that you've already offered the autobot's help for their... *unfortunate* predicament.” The seeker carries on, kneeling down to prod the smaller human in the chest with the tip of his talon. “And that they've been *terribly* rude despite your generosity, most certainly out of fear you'll learn too much from the experience.” he sighs dramatically. “Why they are so *dreadfully* stingy with their technology, I'll never understand. We deceptions are *more* than willing to share.”

“For reasons you still haven't made clear.” The taller human, who is clearly trained to smell bullshit coming from several galaxies away says. “What do you require in terms of payment?”

He narrows his optics. “You're a shrewd business man, I'll give you that much. But there is nothing in the way of monetary reward you can offer me. I merely require assistance with a rather...unorthodox experiment. And I'm certain you'll find my terms quite reasonable, Mr...”


*

“Trust me, this is going to work.”

That, you think glumly, sounds like something that would be inscribed on your tombstone. Or, more accurately, something a smartass member of an adventure party would cheekily suggest be inscribed on your tombstone.

But your party is suffering from a derth of smatassery at the moment, and when you crane your head around half-expecting-mostly-hoping for said cheeky response to manifest you're only greeted with the twin's equally glum expressions.

“I believe you.” Rumble says. “I believed you the last five times too, but I still believe you *now.*”

*Ouch.* you try not to visibly cringe
Frenzy, who had, thankfully re-attached his head at some point during the last several attempts to exit the labyrinth, holds the (as of right now) un-smashed S.I.M.T. In his servos who, in her usual manner, attempts to cheerily address the current mood with a single word.

“Disappointment!” she peeps.

You sigh. “That's pretty vague.”

“Overwhelming disappointment!”

“Still not very situation specific.”

“Disappointment in yourself both as a person and maternal figure!”

“Please stop.”

She opens her beak again but Frenzy thoughtfully holds it shut with index digit and thumb. You flash a weary smile his way.

Before you'd had time to break down into a screaming fit after her first gruesome demise, the three of you had found yourself re-materialized back in the boss room, next to your (now softly smoldering) corpse. After a brief period of disorientation, you'd found her loudly repeating her favorite four letter word from inside the husk of the shattered crystal ball.

It hadn't taken a genius to deduce that the next challenge was to get out with the bird in once piece, especially considering that the once mindbogglingly linear map had now been turned inside out and upside down, and that the monster population had quadrupled. But it had taken probably thirty additional attempts to backtrack to the dungeon entrance, each of which resulted in an additional death, to have you stepping back to re-asses the situation.

Several small, still noticeable events had given you a vague sense of unease, like how all of the walls could now be punctured with enough force (Rumble had excitedly discovered)whereas before the only sections that could be perforated could be distinguished by an ugly, obvious brick pattern. Or how enemies immediately perish when the great-sword is unsheathed without so much as touching them. (The one eyed bats tended to explode mid air).
That, coupled with the fact that you'd smashed the gatekeeper instead of answering the question and (apparently)defeated the boss the wrong way, leads you to a frightening conclusion.

“Does this place run off of video game logic or what?”

“That's a pretty good comparison, yeah.”

You'd performed a game breaking glitch. And thus rendered the game unbeatable.

You'll admit, you'd been tempted to give into blind panic. After all, with no discernible means of ripping the cartridge out to hastily plug in a game shark or drop kick yourself into debug mode, you are simply, unequivocally *fucked*. But thankfully, either due to your fighting spirit or (more likely)stress induced apathy you hadn't slide into despair, and instead began formulating a plan faster than you could say “fuck you and your early console analogies, I'm going home.”

“So you actually have a plan this time?” Rumble, who is currently in the process of polishing his sword with a rag you can only assume he pulled off your corpse, asks. You silently thank him for his resolve not to make spike jokes, but your eye twitches anyways.

“Yes, I do, and it's a good one.” You say confidently. “Frenzy, set the bird down.”

He gives you a look, *his* look, which doesn't involve his expression changing AT ALL but you just *know* it means he's questioning your intelligence.

“Just you wait you smug little shit.” you think, somewhat maniacally as he gingerly sets her on the floor.

“Thank you.” you say. “Bird, stay put.”
“Fuck?”

“Good girl.” you turn your attention back to the twins. “You two, follow me.”

Frenzy looks like he might hesitate, but ultimately offers no resistance as he follows you through the doorway.

“Frenzy thinks this is bullshit.” Rumble says as he brings up the rear.

“I'm well aware.”

“I can kick his ass if you want.”

“I'm flattered, but that's not necessary.”

“He shouldn't be talking slag like you won't hear. I know you know what you're doing.”

His unwavering faith in you despite your multiple fuckups is so adorably sad that it could probably trigger congestive heart failure. You clench your fists. *This better work.*

You set foot over the threshold, and automatically cringe, anticipating the chunk of rock you'd watched fall from the exact same ceiling panel to crush the SIMT at least thirty times to miss you by mere inches.

It doesn't budge.

Frenzy raises an optical ridge.

You proceed further backwards. Without the low drone of ambient music the soft whine of Frenzy engaging his pistols is deafening. He motions for you to fall back before you round the corner, where a two headed swashbuckling amphibian with a pirate accent had jumped you the last twenty nine times, dispatching the S.I.M.T. with his cutlass.
“What's going on?” Rumble asks worriedly.

You proceed further still. Rumble shuffles hastily to avoid a tripwire that, on twenty eight occasions, he'd sprung with his pede, which released a massive rotund boulder to chase the four of you Indiana-Jone-style down 3/4's a mile of winding corridor, into a trap door, which deposited you into an aqueduct full of piranhas that fed into a metal sieve dangling precariously over a pit of molten lava. The S.I.M.T. remained physically unharmed, but in her attempt to match the three of you explicative for explicative, her tiny lungs had given out, and she expired in your hands.

There is no tripwire. Furthermore, the enemies have not only *not* quadrupled in number, they haven't resurrected at *all*, and the map is once again linear. But most importantly *holy shit you were right*.

“Remember how easy it was getting in here?” you say, letting the biggest, shit eating-est grin distort your face. “How stupid easy all the bad guys and the puzzles were, and how everything changed once we picked up the bird?”

The twins looks at each other. You take it as your cue to continue.

“When we pick her up, it trigger's the second half of the trial. When we *don't*, it just assumes we've haven't gotten that far yet and doesn't respawn the enemies or alter the map. And since the map was *literally* just straight back before we grab the bird, we can assume the boss room is at the back of the labyrinth.” You say, gesturing grandly towards the entrance right as you walks back through it. “So it would stand to reason-” you say, hastily running the parameter of the building, only pausing to clear away some hyperealistic vegetation. “-That if we busted a hole in *this* wall-” you step back, making finger frames to be certain you're dead-center. “-It will lead straight into the boss room.”

“So we can get the bird without going back through.” Rumble finishes for you with a low whistle, turning to roughly elbow his twin. “I *told* you she knew what she was doing!”

Frenzy just gives you the *look*, which, under happier circumstances, you would have encouraged him to trademark so that his likeness could be used in PSA posters dissuading highschoolers from drinking or having unprotected sex. You're not exactly sure *what* you were expecting from him, but he's still not impressed. You roll your eyes.
“Rumble, can you-”

“ALREADY DOING IT HOLD THIS!” Rumble shouts as he throws the great-sword over his shoulder, which knocks you upside the jaw and flat onto your ass as he runs over to the stone wall and, without missing a beat, delivers a 6.9 magnitude cunt-punt to the ancient structure.

“A precision cunt-punt” You marvel once your head stops spinning, considering he’d punched clean through without so much as a hairline crack spreading into the surrounding rock, revealing the gravity-violating-physics-fucking boss room you’d come to loathe.

Your heart races as you scramble upright from under the sword, dragging it behind you in your haste to bolt through the freshly punched door. Rumble plucks it from your grasp as you overtake him, causing you to stumble, but you’re far, far too excited to reprimand him for tripping you for what was probably the hundredth time that day. You tear through the rubble, over the upside down sideways stairs, past your thoroughly charred still lightly smoking corpse, and over to the shattered crystal ball.

“Fuck!” chirps the S.I.M.T.

You fall to your knees. You cup the bird in your hands, rubbing her affectionately against your cheek and whispering sweet nothings to her under your breath like the small, foul mouthed child she is.

You did it. You beat a shoddily programmed game rendered impossible by design. You broke it the right way.

With triumph flowing through your veins you lift her above your head like a tiny, twittering trophy as you march yourself right back outside, savoring the expression of dull surprise on the twin’s faces.

“Hot slag we DID IT!” Rumble yells, punching the air. “I so knew that you knew what you were doing!”

Your bottom lip trembles, but you push back tears of both maternal and personal pride.

“What say you now Frenzy?” you say, turning towards the silent twin. “Still think my plan was bullshit?”
Frenzy merely shrugs. You redirect all of your willpower into not pitching the bird at him like a feathery softball and giving him the finger.

The bird stretches her tiny wings, preparing for flight, deep violet pin feathers shining iridescent in the sunlight.

“Well, I guess this is it.” you say, holding your cupped hands open and lifting her skywards. “You're free, tiny swearing quest item.”

She gives you one long, almost forlorn last look.

“One more f-bomb for the road?”

“Goodbye.” she says simply.

You cock your head, but you don't have the chance to inquire further as she takes flight, soaring jubilantly upwards, singing the most beautiful farewell song as she climbs towards the sun. You exhale. As happy as you are that you'd finished this stupid test and that it's finally over and you can get back to your life as a human electrical outlet in the waking world, you're honestly going to miss her a little. You feel faint pangs of loss as you watch her shrink into the horizon.

Followed by pangs of disbelief, terror, and what the actual fuck as she explodes right before disappearing from view.

“Fuck.” you say sadly

The world goes dark, and, for what was only the thirty first but felt like the billionth time that day the four of you find yourselves back in the boss room.

“No.” you mutter between clenched teeth, angry tears willing up in your eyes. “No...no...no.”

You sink to your knees. You punch the floor. You curl up into a ball and scream into your hands.
The bird uses this opportunity to perch in your hair.

“Sorry.” she chirps.

You feel ex-venting on your neck, and peek out from under your arms just enough to see that Frenzy has knelt down to your level to place a servo on your back, expression of uncharacteristic concern on his face.

“You don't have to comfort me.” you choke through your surprise. “You're allowed to laugh. I deserve it.”

“He doesn't think it's funny.” Rumble says, sitting down beside you. “And he thinks a razor is going to solve all our problems.”

You scrunch your face in confusion. “Razor?”

“Some guy named Occam has it.” he continues. “He says that since the S.I.M.T. dies no matter what we do, that we're not actually supposed to make it out with her alive.”

That's extremely astute, and something you hadn't even considered. You slowly uncurl yourself, and lean between the wall and Frenzy's shoulder, who, despite his earlier reservations, seems to have overcome his aversion to physical touch in order to comfort you. You feel a ball forming in your throat as you pluck the bird from your hair.

“Elita told us we had to bring it to her...” you trail off.

“I know. But he thinks maybe what she said we're supposed to do and what we're actually supposed to do are different.”

You almost place your hand on Frenzy's shoulder, but decide better of it, he'd already breached his comfort zone enough out of sympathy and you don't want to push him further. Instead, you direct most of your weight back against the wall, leaving a few inches of space between you two. He ex-vents softly and visibly relaxes. Rumble has no such reservations and flops down with his head in your lap.
You feel a soft smile spreading over your lips.

“What do you guys think about taking a break?”

“We’re already doing that.” Rumble says.

You groan. “Officially taking a break.”

Frenzy gives you a thumbs up. You pluck the bird from to top of your head.

“I'm sorry we can't make out of here with you.” you stroke the top of her head with your index finger. “And I'm not really sure what we're supposed to be doing if we can't do that.”

She blinks.

“But I figure we can still make the most of the time we have together. I owe you that much.” you say, cradling her against your chest. “Can you sing? I know you can talk, but can you sing?”

“I can talk.” she repeats, tilting her head.

“Yes, that's been pretty well established.” you say.” But I want to know if you can sing. Like, with words.”

“I can sing.”

You sigh, exasperated. “Is that all you're gonna do? Just echo everything I say?”

“Want to sing.” the bird clarifies.

You blink. That's probably the first actual response you've gotten out of her so far.
“Um, okay.” you pause, flipping through your mental catalogue of songs you have memorized, settling on a familiar subject.

“This is major tom to ground control~” you start softly, gently inviting her to follow.

“I'm stepping through the doo-oor” she finishes, much to your awe and confusion. And I'm floating in a most peculiar waa-aay~” her voice isn't a mere mimicry of yours anymore, but has developed a high, pearly, almost angelic quality. “-And the stars look very different todaa-aaay~.


You smile. “Actually, it's Space Oddity, Major Tom is the name of the song by Peter Schilling about the same character, but written about a decade and a half later.”

He narrows his optics. “Nerd.”

“I'm your mom, so that makes you a nerd too.” you say, sticking your tongue out.

“Then what's Frenzy?” he asks, looking up at his twin, who has begun air conducting along with the song with his index digits.

“A dork.” you say simply. “A really, really smart dork.”

“Isn't that just a nerd?”

“I don't know.”

“~We know Major Tom's a junkie, strung out on the heaven's high~”

The bird, who had finished her song over the course of your conversation, has switched to Ashes to Ashes without prompt, much to your surprise. It strikes you just how haunting her melody is.
Though she has no visible means of telling you so, you can feel the exuberance coming off of her as she sings her little avian heart out, and you can't help yourself as a big doofy grin spreads over your face at just how happy she is.

“Damnit Elita, you better not have sent me to the astral realm just to teach birds David Bowie songs.” you grumble, as she finishes the last strains of the melody and nestles into your chest, sleepily preening herself before closing tired golden eyes.

Between your exhaustion and the relative peace of being sandwiched in between your makeshift family, you feel something unclench deep within you as you follow suit, weariness overwhelming you as you fall into unconsciousness.

“Hey.” Elita says as you suddenly materialize at her side, giving you a distracted, non-committal nod, both servos occupied with opening a package of double fudge chocolate chunk sandwich cookies. “Welcome back.

You yawn, blinking unevenly, too sleepy to be gripped by terror at having been suddenly teleported again. “It's over?”

“It's over.” she repeats, thumbing the easy open tab.

“Where are Rumble and Frenzy?”

“Safe. Hanging out with a mutual friend.” she says, raising an optical ridge as the tab rips off halfway through the perforated line.

You assume she means the old mech that spoke mostly in puns Rumble had mentioned earlier, and release a breath you didn't know you were holding. “The S.I.M.T is gone, isn't she?”

“She is.” Elita says, pausing to give the package a final, thoughtful look, before punching holes in the top with her fingers and tearing the top off, popping three of them in her intake at once.

"Okay, last question." you say. “Where the fuck did you get cookies?"
"Optimus's subspace."

You, as a (former) scientist, someone trying to find a foothold in their supernatural clusterfuck of a life, and an all-around curious person, understandably have a billion and one questions about how exactly this is possible.

"What." you say flatly.

"I'm not actually eating them." she says simply. "I can't. I'm probably just displacing the molecules in the waking world and like crushing them into dust or something. That and if I could eat them it would clog up my tanks so bad I'd probably expunge my t-cog out through my exhaust port."

You cringe at the mental image, and then choke at the following organic equivalent of said mental image. "Can... can you even taste them?"

"No. I have no idea what any of these organic ingredients are. They could taste like a seeker femme who went three weeks without an oil bath for all I know."

You clutch your head. "WHY is it always seeker femmes with you?"

"Because I never actually got to interface with one while I was alive and now I have a complex."

That makes complete and utter sense. So you don't ask for further elaboration and simply stare lasers into the ground, feeling the weight of your failure with nothing further to distract you.

"Look," you start, swallowing hard. "I know I fucked up the trial, can we get this whole "You're not worthy" spiel over with so I can wake up and maybe devote the rest of my life to finding him someone that is, because I still really care about hi-"

"Yeah I'm gonna stop you right there." she says, optics still glued to the ingredients list. "You passed the trial. With flying colors."

“I... what now?”
“Passed. I know you can hear me, stop trying to be cute.”

“I'm not trying to do anything!” you blurt out.

“That's why it's cute.” she says, and you're not sure if it's the cautious optimism flowing through your veins or the offhand compliment that's making you dizzy, but you stumble regardless. “The trial was a test of character. The whole point was to see how you'd act with your options whittled down to the nub in a no-win-situation. Long story short, everyone liked what they saw.”

Liked what they saw. A council of robot deities watched you scramble around in a maze like a gerbil for god-knows how long and unanimously decided that you've got what it takes to date their poster boy. That's almost enough to let you punch through your curtain of self-deprecating surrealism and be incredibly fucking proud of yourself. Hell, you'd be burning bright enough to give off UV radiation if not for Elita's expression, which, put simply, is crushed.

“If I passed, then why do you look like a kicked puppy?” you ask.

“Because that wasn't the original point. It literally changed mid-game, and kudos to you for being so adaptable, I can't stress that enough, but that wasn't part of the deal.”

“Changed mid game?” you venture cautiously.

“Yeah. Y'know games tend to get unstable if you whip out the compiler while someone's actively playing it.” she glowers, which would be far more intimidating without her mouth full. “You shouldn't have been able to kill the gargoyle or your guide or pull the sword out of the ceiling without her help. You shouldn't have been able to get outside at all, especially with the programmer actively taking a dump on you while you're doing it, but I digress. You did everything you could and when you couldn't win, you made the best of it. Which wasn't part of the deal.”

“You've said that twice now.” you say nervously.

“That's because I'm pretty bent out of shape about it.” she says, pulling another three cookies out, staring absentmindedly into the distance. “Actually, I'm furious. You hear that asshole? Furious.”
You open your mouth, but close it, watching as her optics narrow and you steadily realize she's not starring off into space, but staring down something only she can see.

“Wasn't part of the deal.” she mumbles, shoving one of the cookies into her mouth, then, after a moment's hesitation, hurling the other two like high-fructose-vitamin-enriched shuriken into the air. “Wasn't part of the deal.”

Part of you want to believe she's lost her mind. That part is promptly curb-stomped by the part of you that knows Occam's razor is a dull, rusty blade that probably couldn't cut butter where you are now.

“That's NOT FAIR!” you duck to avoid the spray of crumbs flying out of her mouth, her angry, fuming, should-probably-have-fangs-by-now mouth. “YOU DON'T GET TO JUST CHANGE THE RULES HALFWAY THROUGH!”

“Who are you talking to?” you ask flatly, since you know by now it's far more likely that she hasn't lost her mind and is, in fact, having a conversation which what you can only assume is the asshole code monkey responsible for your misfortune.

“What DO YOU MEAN “OUT OF YOUR CONTROL? “ There's NO WAY you can expect me to believe a pit-slagged excuse like that!” she's fucking fuming, digits digging into the side of her helm as she screams at empty sky. “NOTHING is out of your control!”

You're frozen, brain stuck somewhere between “go help her you insensitive twit” and “don't touch her AT ALL”. So you watch her as the awkward, anxious mess you've become, complacent in your inability to calm your enraged friend whom, you can't help but notice, somehow manages to look more appealing the angrier she gets.

But before your helpful brain has the chance to suggest you procure blunt head trauma for the audacity of that observation, you find yourself faceplanting into the ground anyways as a deafening reverb shakes the entire dream world.

"What the fuck was that?” you say, spitting copious amounts of sand out of your mouth.

"(y/n),” Elita says, having abandoned her shouting match to kneel down and place a servo on your shoulder, looking you dead in your watering, sand filled eyes. "I'm sorry."
Your heart skips a beat, which coincides simultaneously with another realm-shaking reverb.

"Why?" you say, after you've had a chance to crawl to your knees and wipe your eyes.

"Because there's only three cookies left." she says, and you realize as the bottom drops out of your stomach that there's actual tears in her optics. "I'm like 99.9% positive Optimus got them for you and forgot, and I was so busy throwing them and I wasn't even paying attention and- FRAG."

Your heart lurches, the ground spasms again, enough to knock some of the bricks loose from the floating pyramids. A sandstorm roughly the size and ferocity of a tidal wave looms on the horizon. You swallow nervously, and promptly choke on more sand.

"You're not...you're not sorry about the cookies are you?"

"I'm extremely sorry about the cookies." she repeats flatly, tears streaming freely from her optics "You're so slagging selfless you were already making plans to find Optimus a replacement for you because you thought you failed the trail and I threw away all the cookies!"

The paracosm itself swims from the undulations. You watch in disbelief as the smartass sphinx that probably asks riddles falls apart before you ever get a chance to find out if it asks riddles.

"Elita what's going on?"

"I'm sorry." she repeats through gritted denta, turning her head as though she suddenly can't bear to look at you. "Frag, it's going to take me forever to reassemble myself after this."

You brace yourself as the wave breaks and the sandstorm crashes over you both. The ground beneath you fissures, then shatters, leaving you both to stand on nothing.

“I'm sorry.” she repeats, mantra-soft this time as she pulls you into her arms, and this is a terrible, awful, no good time for your face to be heating up but it is. “Sorry.”
More shaking. You watch, helpless, as her arms are blown away bit by bit into the sandstorm, along with the rest of her, and she dissolves around you. The reverb reaches a crescendo, and you realize with dawning horror that it's your own heartbeat, roaring in your ears, resonating throughout the prison your body has suddenly become around you.

And it is a prison. You can't move, your head is pounding with monsoon-grade thunder and your eyes are burning in the raw, painful light. White blindness obscures your vision as unimaginable pain courses through you. You can't see, but you can smell, cold steel and blood so strongly you retch. Plastic binding cuts into your ankles and wrists as you convulse against the platform you're restrained against.

Wrong, you think, the pain too brilliant to allow your brain coherent thought. Wrong. Empty. Gone. Worry. Panic. PANIC.

And that's exactly what you do as the convulsions slow down and the blindness recedes, because the first thing you recognize swimming in your field of vision are faces. Human faces. One of which, you recognize, as Dr. “Welcome to your worst Nightmare” Fujiyama.”

“Good morning, Marissa.” says the face you don't recognize. “Or do you prefer (y/n)?”
Garbage humans

Alright I'm trying a new writing technique so if all goes well I'll be shitting out chapters much more quickly so yay let's keep our fingers crossed.

pls enjoy.

If you had a nickel for every time you'd woken up strapped down to a vivisection table, you'd have exactly one nickel, which you would then proceed to jam into Dr. "Should have killed you the first time" Fujiyama's eyesocket.

But you don’t have a nickel. The most you can do is glare menacingly, and you can’t even do that right. Your eyes burn whenever you blink or move them and even squinting is a Herculean effort and hurts.

So you close them again, despite the burning. Part of you hopes if you just keep them shut long enough you’ll be slingshot out of your body and back into Elita’s arms. You can still smell her, still feel her smooth steel skin against your weightless face, but the adrenaline has washed the dream-haze from your veins. The sensations of her touch are requisitioned to memory and give way to agony, because there’s tubes and wires coming out of incisions on your body both fresh and old, but mostly because she’s gone. Not only that, she’s dead. She’s been dead and you have no idea how to get back to her or if you’re ever going to see her again.

There’s tears in your eyes at this revelation, and a sob catching in your chest. It stays in your chest, since your mouth is so dry and all that escapes your lips is a shallow gush of air. You sound like a weak baby bird and you’re about as helpless as one, and can only stare unenthusiastic lasers at the nest-raiding tomcats clouding your vision.

“I knew you were fucking garbage.” you say finally, except your tongue feels like lead and your lips are numb, so it comes out more or less like “I kew yew ’r fookin gorbash.”

“That’s one of the more interesting off-the-cuff comments we’ve gotten.” says the guy who’s not Fujiyama but probably also garbage. “I was at least expecting a “Who are you?” or “Where am I?”

“You’re an asshole.” you say slowly this time, forming your words with care. “And I’m not where
I’m supposed to be.”

Not-Fujiyama narrows his eyes. “And where exactly are you supposed to be, then?”

“With my robot family” you think, but don’t say, since you frankly know nothing about your location or captors other than “Not good.” and are absolutely in a position to be tortured or pumped for information, and while Fujiyama is at least privy to your situation, you don’t need to give them a jumping off point. “Doing my job.” you say finally.

“Which is...what, exactly? Faking your death, falsifying your identity and using a comic book character as an alias so you can operate as an MIB agent on paper while actually wasting the taxpayer’s dollars playing house with extraterrestrials?”

He’s got your number. You should have seen that coming, considering he’d addressed you by both your real and fake names, but you’re not about to give him the satisfaction of asking him how he knows that, least it function as an opportunity for him to introduce himself.

“Since you’re determined not to ask, my name is Silas.” says not-Fujiyama. “And I believe you’ve already been acquainted with my colleague, Mr. Fujiyama.”

Fujiyama pushes his glasses back up with his index finger. “It’s “Doctor.”.”

“Considering the amount of times I’ve watched you pass out and vomit, it’s hardly Mister.” you feel the tiniest thread of amusement slither down your spine. You might actually feel feeling some stockholm-grade kinship with the man if not for his face, which seems to function without moving any muscles whatsoever and has an almost-uncanny-valley quality to it. It strikes you as humorous that you’re still able to be unnerved by “not quite human” faces at all, considering the beings you spend most of your time with have androgynous metal ones.

And that’s when you start laughing. Squeaky, wheezing, pathetic laughing, but still laughing.

Silas raises an eyebrow. “It wasn’t that funny.”

“That’s not why I’m laughing.” you croak over a coughing fit which is probably going to send your
tortured lungs into spasms. “I live with aliens and got abducted by *humans*. Do you get the irony or did you leave that back with your other three facial expressions?”

“What makes you think you were abducted?”

You open your mouth, and upon realizing that frightening possibility is closer to a *probability* than you’d like, and also that you have no ready retort, leave it hanging open.

“Eat shit.” you say despite your reservations.

Tall dark and not-Fujiyama turns to his companion. “You want to tell her how her alien “family” signed the paperwork to turn her into the rough legal equivalent of a cadaver or should I?”

"Eat shit." you say again but with gusto.

“The subject was legally signed over to our custody, that is correct.” Fujiyama says, having the gall to address you as “*The subject*” while prodding at the IV line going into your wrist. He continues to avert eye contact while scrawling something down on his pad. Which, you realize, to your dawning confusion, horror, then *anger*, is actually a-

“Datapad.” you growl flatly. “So you sorry fucks didn’t just abduct me, you reverse engineered their tech too.”

Silas makes some facial expression or lackthereof. The two exchange glances.

No cold, smartass quip. You’re surprised. “Got nothing to say in your defense?”

“I don’t make a habit of defending myself. To an anthropomorphizing, xenophilic, bleeding-heart hippy like yourself my work makes the third Reich look like a church fund-raiser on my least productive days.” Silas stipulates. “I just keep forgetting how....out of the loop you are.”
You emit a low hiss, having run out of eloquent ways to ask them to ingest feces. "Well gee, considering I spent the last few weeks unconscious I thought you might cut me some slack for not staying on top of things. But no. Clearly I’m responsible for situation, including the whole being *fucking kidnapped* bit.”

“Signed over.” the taller man corrects you.

You huff, averting your eyes, trying to keep the unease rising in your chest at bay. Honestly, it’s not *completely* ludicrous to think that Optimus may actually have done so in desperation if you were dying. Even Ratchet had only a tentative understanding of human physiology, and though you don’t exactly qualify as such anymore you could understand him deferring to human specialists rather than risking the play himself. You understand, you really do, but still feel the hot sting of betrayal, having honestly preferred death to your current situation. At least then you could be back with Elita and the twins.

"I understand". you think, picturing their faces while swallowing hard. "*It’s not like you had any idea how badly you were fucking up." This is at least partially your fault. You should have made a harder case for your distrust of Fujiyama. You’ll come on stronger next time. Bringing back his freshly ripped out spine with the skull still attached Predator-style might effectively get your message across. Or his dismembered remains packed into a briefcase. You could also go the crafty DIY route, make leather furniture with their skin. Heck the tall one’s big enough you could probably make an entire loveseat with a matching throw-pillows stitched out of their scalps.

“You’ve gone awfully quiet.” says the taller man. “Warming up to the idea that your ‘bots might not be the knights in shining sentient armor you thought they were?”

“No I’m channeling my inner leather craftsman.” you say with completely sincerity. “When’s the last time you saw a dermatologist and how often do you moisturize?”

He widens his eyes, which, on a normal person with a normally functioning face would probably convey a moderate degree of confusion. “You’re...one of the more unusual hostages I’ve delt with in my lifetime, I’ll give you that.”

“Thanks. And you’re an asshole.” you say, offering a winning grimace. An asshole you’re beginning to prefer at least marginally over Dr. "*Might make a nice lampshade*” Fujiyama. At least he talks to you like an human. A human he has no qualms torturing and killing, yes, but still a human. Fujiyama regards you with the same kind of apathetic excitement you’d expect from a child pouring salt on a slug for the first time.
“An asshole working for the benefit of humanity.” says Silas. “When these titans turn on us, and make no mistake, they will, at least we’ll be prepared.”

“If they turn on you it’s going to be because you conned them into some sort of shit legal contract so you could take their stuff and play amateur surgeon on me.” you groan. “Why are you such a dick?”

"What exactly did you expect us to do? Bow down to our new alien overlords? Join hands and sing kumbaya?” he leers at you. "Let their leader fuck us raw-dog into a comatose heap the first chance we got?"

It then occurs to you that at some point, either Optimus or Ratchet had been required to actually divulge WHY you'd slipped into a coma to begin with, and your heart sinks faster than an early 1900s ocean liner hitting an iceberg. That must've been humiliating. But Silas’ reaction to the expression on your face is fuel enough for you to push that awkward revelation to the back burner and fix him with a smarmy shit eating grin.

"Okay I’m going to lay this down nice and simple; you don’t fuck autobots, you make love. Sweet, dangerous, electrically charged love." you say, calm voice belaying your beet red face and pounding heart. "Yep, humiliating. ‘Also, ‘First chance?’ Nu uh. Took me almost a year. You gotta wine and dine a guy like that."

He raises an eyebrow, which, considering his depressingly small index of expressions, probably means he's disgusted. You roll your eyes.

"Maybe I expected you to act like decent human beings and, y'know, not make a mad grab for their technology for your dickwaving contest with whatever country your country hates right now." you flex your wrists. "You KGB? I didn't detect an accent but your blinding sarcasm might've thrown me off."

"Your information is....charmingly antiquated," he says, once again raising an eyebrow. You almost feel accomplished. “Regardless, we’re operating outside the paradigm of government.”

“So lemme guess, this is one of those militia deals where you’re reciving under the table state funding, or something like that?”

“Something like that.”

There’s a momentary lapse in conversation. You close your eyes, swallowing at the ball in your
throat. Like it or not, your artificially manufactured bravado is running out, and you feel the, itching, shooting little pricks of blind panic setting in beneath your heart. If you want to stay sane then you want to stay angry, because angry you at least isn't panicking you. So you force deep, slow breaths, in through your nose, out through your mouth, and scan the room for some sort of infuriating visual cue to mix into your cocktail of cold, creeping rage and righteous fury.

There's a clock on the wall, clearly broken, the second hand moving endlessly between 12:35 and 12:40 instead of clockwise. It's only mildly annoying, but it's constant thick thuck could be the based of your drink. Gin.

Fujiyama's glasses slide down to the edge of his nose, and he pushes them back up. Again. And Again. And Again. Vermouth.

The binds holding your wrists are clearly too tight, and had been too tight for some time, leaving a deep indent in your skin that had begun to welt. It's painful, but it invites worry moreso than that about how long you've actually been here, and if you let it sit for too long it'll have the opposite effect. Ice.

The IV line inserted into your arm itches. You have absolutely no way to reaching it. The glass?

“No.” you think bitterly. “The glass is the situation itself.” This has to be the shaker, since it’s obnoxious enough to make any situation infuriating if you concentrate.

You’re almost done, you can feel the fear receding under a nice little blanket of fuck everything on the outskirts of your conscious mind. All you need now is a nice, fat, pimento olive to garnish your rage martini and you’ll be back to buzzin’ on haterade in no time.

“C'mon think.” you cajole yourself, your enthusiasm for playing hospital bed eye-spy fading. There’s nothing to latch onto. Not-Fujiyama kinda has a nice butt, but it mostly just reminds you of Optimus’s and that just makes you realize how bad you miss him and how miserable he probably is. Anxiety. Don’t need anxiety.

You’re going to have to dig around internally for your garnish. Luckily, you did just have your soul ripped from the aether, where you were enjoying some quality post-mortem bonding with your adopted children to be forced into a flesh prison which is in an actual prison or, more accurately, imprisoned in a lab while the same sneaky, backstabbing sonovabitch that you once let hold your infant son and his stoic beefcake partner in crime play human alien autopsy on you.
And that’s when it hits you.

*You have no idea where Bumblebee is.*

*There you go ma’m. Now, if we could just see your ID.*

“Where’s my son?”

They freeze. They both slowly turn away from the datapad in movie-perfect mirror synchronicity you’d find impressive but disconcerting in any other circumstance.

“Don’t just fucking stare at me, I asked you a question.” you spit. “Where’s Bee?”

Fujiyama opens and closes his mouth several times and adjusts his glasses again, doing a spot on impression of a carp with poor eyesight that’s also a douchebag. “The subject seems to have become aggravated.”

“You goddamn right I’m aggravated!” you snarl. “You tell me where my robot kid is right this fucking second.”

Silas actually blinks, though that’s probably because your voice has dropped several octaves and is more readily identified as grizzly bear deep-throating a chainsaw than a human female.

"So help me god if I find out he’s within a twenty mile radius of this deep-state-funded chopshop shithole I’ll-"

"You’ll what? Glare us to death?"

You flex your wrists hopelessly against the restraints. If only he knew the whack-ass-voodoo synchronicity shit you’re capable of when you want the right things for the right reasons. Or, more specifically, when *Optimus* wants the right things for the right reasons. It’s probably better that he doesn’t, element of surprise and all that, but it does beg the question how in the actual hell you managed to be kidnapped at ALL with Bossbot’s luck. Which suggests a possibility so bizarre and so
far removed from your and Ratchet’s meta approach to studying the situation that you’d never actually given it any credence.

*His luck literally ran out.*

That’s ridiculous. That’s straight up ludicrous and doesn’t warrant any further thought. At least, that’s what you tell yourself instead of admitting it’s such a terrifying idea you can’t handle or accept it in your current situation. Nope. At some point in the immediate future Optimus is going to bust through a wall gun’s blazing, politely kick everyone’s ass, accidentally allow a ceiling panel to crush the garbage humans in a heroic effort to shield you from an explosion that will just gently singe his plating in a badass way, hold a moment of silence and then take everyone out for ice cream. This is the most logical outcome. *In your universe this is the most logical outcome.*

You don’t even have your fingers crossed as Silas abruptly ends whatever disagreement the two had been having and heads towards the exit. He shoves the datapad roughly back into Fujiyama’s arms on his way out. Fujiyama fumbles, but retains his grip and shuffles hastily through the door after him. It closes with a pneumatic whoosh, and the overhead lights dim as it clicks into place, allowing an otherworldly glow that had been rendered invisible by the overhead fluorescent fixtures to now fill the room.

With the two gone, you’re now able to see the right side of the room, which had been entirely obscured from your line of view. There’s a pile of gross discarded medical equipment, an enormous door that probably leads to an enormous closet full of enormous skeletons, and a dried out house plant, which likely perished from overexposure to Dr. “Eat shit and die.” Fujiyama’s face.

You can make out another another hospital bed bathed in the violet light, and your breath catches in your throat when you realize you’re not alone.

There’s another girl. Of asian descent, black hair pulled tightly back into a bun, wearing an entirely too tight, entirely too short red cheongsam with a large metal banded collar held in place with a padlock. She isn’t strapped down like you are, but that’s a small worrisome detail compared to the network of polycarbon lines mapping the short distance between your beds, funneling glowing purple liquid in a lazy, hypnotic drip. Some of the tubes are hastily suspended to the ceiling with zip-ties, probably to save space, but lending it the appearance of a iridescent spiderweb shining in the moonlight. “Would make a good Halloween decoration.” you think, over the dawning horror that you’re actually hooked up to this arcane contraption and that it’s *feeding your blood into her.*

You want to vomit. And you do, a little bit. Mostly just acid and bile. You want to panic, but you keep that in check too, focusing as hard as you can on the inevitable badass heroic rescue/ice cream social you’d already deduced would occur. Probably within the hour. Heck, you could probably just
lie back and decide what flavor you want, if the thought of food of any sort didn’t make you more nauseous.

Maybe you should focus on something else. Like your roommate

You should probably try talking to her. Considering the amount of DNA you’ve shared you’re almost socially obligated to make her breakfast or call her a cab. Plus, she might be your best bet at escaping this high tech butcher shop in the extremely unlikely event the Calvary comes in late.

“Uh...” you start. “Hi.”

She lies unmoving. If not for the gentle rising and falling of her chest and the occasional blinking, you’d think she were asleep. Or dead.

“So, uh, considering our situation-” you gesture weakly with your hand at the network of plastic tubing circulating bioluminescent blood connecting you both like tangled marionettes.“-We should probably at least know each other’s names.”

No reply.

“I’m...” you cut yourself off instinctively, having almost forgotten to use your pseudonym but upon remembering she’d been present for the entirety of your conversation, you figure it’s a moot point. “I’m (y/n). Sometimes I’m Marissa but mostly I’m (y/n).”

Still no answer.

“Can you hear me?”

Her eyes flit over to you momentarily, but she doesn’t move her head.

Ten seconds go by without further response. Your heart sinks.
“Do you...do you not speak english?”

“I speak perfect english, I’ve just got nothing to say to you.”

_Ouch. Rude._

“My name is Shao Shao Li. But you can call me Shao Shao Li because I don’t plan on knowing you long enough to get a nickname.”

_What an Ice Queen._ you wince but push on anyways. “So how’d you wind up here?” you ask with mock enthusiasm. “You get your brain fried crossing wires with a giant alien truck too?”

“No.”

You hazard another guess. “Airplane?”

“No.”


“I didn’t have sex with any robots, sapient or otherwise,” she says flatly.

You furrow your eyebrows in concern. “So they just kidnapped you off the street?”

“No I’m doing it for the money.”

You loose a disappointed exhale at her answer. “Are you at least doing it because you have a sick relative or something?”
"I just wanted the money.

"You're not exactly making it easy to like you."

"I don't need you to like me."

You roll your eyes. Someone who signed up to have their blood replaced with biologically filtered energon for a wad of paper isn’t really any better than the sick assholes that offered the position to begin with, but she’s the only other person in the room and at least marginally more likely than your captors to be talked into helping you escape, so you internalize your disgust and carry on with the painful small talk.

"Okay, so you’re sort of a supersoldier of fortune kinda deal. Not my cup of tea, but I get it.” You begin. “But you mind telling me what’s up with the the cheongsam and metal collar with the padlock?"

"I just came back from a party."

You raise your eyebrow.

"A costume party."

"....."

"...It was a fetish thing."

You sigh. “At least you’re honest.”

Shao Shao replies by assuming the exact same expression she’d had for the past ten minutes and presumably her whole life.
This isn’t going over well. It’s looking more and more like your eccentrically dressed roommate isn’t going to help you. In fact, it’s far more likely that she’ll get in your way, if not downright prevent you from leaving. There’s muscle roped around her thin limbs, she’s got the build of a practiced athlete, and while you’ve come a long way from your kitchen-knife wielding days and have at least some hand to hand combat training under your belt, you don’t exactly feel spectacular about your odds of winning at an actual confrontation. You did break your pelvis, you’re not exactly sure how long you’ve been comatose, and you’re probably missing an important amount of robot blood. Which she now has.

You swear under your breath, close your eyes again, trying to slow down your racing thoughts into something coherent enough to call a plan B when the hiss of the door once again opening breaks your concentration.

Silas has re-entered the room. Fujiyama follows close behind him but scuttles over to Shao Shao’s bed like the garbage beetle he is, and begins to disconnect the IV’s. Silas seems to be coming your way, but stops in the middle of the room and tilts his head upwards, ignoring you completely. You feel a little left out.

“Is she ready?” he calls up to thin air. You assume there’s a speaker or something just out of sight and that he’s not that particular brand of insane.

Silence. Silas raises an eyebrow.

“I repeat: Is she ready?”

More silence. Silas almost looks lost staring expectantly up at the ceiling. You feel a pang of secondhand embarrassment.

“I repe-”

He’s abruptly cut off by the sharp crackle of static, followed by a slew of electronic shouting, 8-bit sound effects and a canned “FINISH HIM.” He almost stumbles in surprise. The pang of secondhand embarrassment becomes a wave. You snort.

“I’m sorry!” comes a tiny, panicky female voice. “I couldn’t switch the-”
“WHAT did I tell you about installing the emulator on our system?”

“You said to not to.”

“WHAT did I tell you about playing while you’re clocked in?”

“You s-s-said to not to-”

“Send in the fucking robot!”

A squeaky “Yes sir!” is all that makes it through before the mic cuts off, and the dull roar of the massive door you had presumed earlier to contain massive skeletons slowly opening fills the room. The light from behind is blinding, casting the tall, lithe, imposing figure it reveals in dramatic shadow.

Your heart jumps in your throat. Not because the figure is at least 16 feet high or has neon yellow slits for optics, dark purple plating arranged in such a way to suggest a provocative female ninja costume, complete with mask, and is, as far as you can ascertain, an actual cybertronian. No, you’re going into cardiac arrest because Silas actually has an expression on his face and it’s the smuggest, shit-eating-est most manic shark-grin you’ve seen outside the fossilized mouth of a megalodon.

“(y/n),” he begins, gesturing grandly at the fucking robot in question. “Allow me to introduce our prototype, otherwise known as Nightbird.”
“We thoroughly violence until spaghetti your dental thank you.”

Chapter Notes

Okay so the reason this is so late is because this chapter got to be 36 pages long before it was even finished and I had to portion it into two or it else it entirely ruined the flow. Sorry about the wait. pls enjoy.

Nightbird may just be simultaneously the most infuriating, aesthetically pleasing, and sexually confusing thing you’ve ever seen

She looks cybertronian. Whoever designed her clearly knew what they were doing. But whoever designed her was clearly also the kind of person who spent most of their free time watching bootleg hentai they bought from out the back of a van. Animated porn with low production values is one of the few places where “robot” “ninja” and “shameless fanservice-y sci-fi pinup” could possibly come together other than your own mind, and while you had underestimated your captors intelligence before, you sincerely doubt that they’re psychic.

“Beautiful, isn’t she?” Silas says, his shark grin still in place, though somewhat lessened, probably at the prospect at having to sell this cheesecake murder-bot as “beautiful.” “The design and color scheme may come across as a bit...over the top, but she’s flawlessly recreated from reverse-engineering technology and genetic samples your “family” handed over to us.”

You decide Silas is, in fact, psychic. If you had the appropriate mental finesse you would try to drive him to insanity by sending him images of Optimus’s dick in every angle you’d ever seen it from and playing every glamrock song you’ve ever heard in reverse at full volume until his nose starts bleeding and his eyes roll back in his head.

Nevertheless. There are likely over a hundred words the English language has to offer to accurately convey the shock, horror, awe, and disappointment you feel having witnessed your worst fears come to fruition. Not only had criminals acquired cybertronian tech, quite possibly from a rotten deal your friends had made in a desperate bid to save your life, they had managed to cobble together an entire alien body out of it. But as you’d done before, you find yourself relying on the most basic, universal markers of your native tongue to relay your emotions.

“Fuck.”

Nightbird’s optics widen. She in-vents rapidly, a shocked gasp almost, and kneels down to your level, face hovering inches from yours.

“Hello!” she says brightly.

You could roll your eyes. You could laugh hysterically. But you’re too exhausted to do either.

Instead, you giggle. This cosmic joke has gone on long enough that it’s come full circle and you think it’s funny again. That or you’re having a long overdue breakdown.
Silas, having witnessed the bot’s enthusiastic greeting at the behest of the four letter word, furrows his brow.

“This...explains... a lot.”

You almost start giggling again, but your attention is sharply diverted as Nightbird extends a servo, then a single digit, and gently presses it against the side of your face. She withdraws it immediately, as if shocked by the sensation of human skin. Provocative war machine or no, there’s been a palpable change in her. A steel mask currently covers most of her face, obscuring her expression, but the way her optics crinkle in the corners gives you the impression that she’s actually smiling behind it.

Your heart feels weird. You tell yourself to ignore it.

She extends her index digit again, this time to slowly lift your hand. When you squeeze it in response she lets out a surprised noise that, hadn’t you known better, you’d identify as a squeal.

Your heart feels weirder. You beg yourself to ignore it.

“Fuck.” you repeat, softly, raising your other hand to trace the metal rivets of her servo. “My name is (y/n).”

“Hello!” She says again with absolute sunshine in her voice. “Glad to do the meeting! Am inquiring to responsible female entity you are?”

“Um,” you start, having no idea how to respond to this turn of events. “Yes?”

Her eyes grow to the rough size and diameter of dinner plates. Her mask twitches. You’re pretty sure her bottom lip or whatever she has under there is trembling.

“Glad to do the meeting!” she repeats, a few decibels short of shrieking. “Excruciating experienced time periods!”

Your heart is measuring a 99.9 on the weirdness scale and is trying to claw it’s way out of your chest. If you look past the suggestively arranged plating to suggest a skimpy impractical shozoku hiding a voluptuous pornstar-tier figure, there’s something undeniably innocent about her. From the curious way she cocks her helm to the impish show of amusement as she inspects your body(she’s started running her digits through your hair in a petting motion and has yet to stop) she radiates an almost childlike sense of awe. You don’t even realize your trying your hardest not to let your maternal instincts kick in until you realize your eyes are actually watering when you look into her optics. Her almond shaped, impossibly wide, glittering golden optics that make your heart feel like it’s being falcon punched through your back and out your chest, and...and..

“Subconscious proximity elevation!” she says, more subdued this time, folding your hands between her ludicrously oversized ones and awkwardly, gently pressing her forehead against yours. “Witness forerunner person together?”

Oh no.

She’s adorable

“Atari-” Silas looks over his shoulder, presumably at the overhead speaker. “Would you mind
explaining something to me?”

A pause. The crackling, static laden response of the call button being pressed and held several times without speaking. “Yes...?”

“There’s over seven thousand languages actively spoken on earth, five hundred dead languages, sixty fictional but entirely functional ones, and innumerable derivative dialects of all of the above.” he slaps a palm over his face, gritting his teeth. “And you made her primary language ENGRISH?”

Another long, drawn out pause.

“I...I did, sir.”

“Why?!”

“...I thought it was funny, sir.”

Silas then proceeds to verbally flay the girl who may or may not be named after a video game console alive. It’s a several minute affair and you stopped listening after the 30 second mark. The ever present reminder in the back of your head informing you that you are kidnapped, strapped down, and have had your vital fluids fed into a unenthusiastic stranger pricks at the your neck, but your fried-egg of a brain is in no position to be tugged in two directions. Not with this adorable death machine petting your hair and triggering your hormones

“You are familiar responsible person.” she says again. “Correct derivative happiness dispense.”

You give your brain a solid five seconds to pick something comprehensible out of this word salad before giving in with a heavy, good natured sigh.

“I don’t know about all that.” you say. “Why don’t you just call me (y/n)?”

“(y/n?)”

“(y/n).”

“Witness forerunner person together?”

“I...” you trail off, wanting to be honest, having no idea how to be honest, having no idea what in the fuck she’s talking about but vowing to do nothing to wipe away the smile you can see in her eyes and can only assume is on her face.

“Sure.” you tell her sincerely as you can. “As soon as we get out of here, we’ll go do that.”

Nightbird looks like she might cry. Your feel an unexpected weight in your chest, not only because you have no idea how or when that will be, but also because you’re doomed to adopt every metal alien organism displaying neotenous traits you come across for the rest of eternity.

(y/n), astronomer, robot enthusiast, mutant science experiment and spacemom extraordinaire, coming to a galaxy near you to f**k your dads and adopt your children.

Not exactly what you dreamed about becoming when you grew up, but aside from being kidnapped and milked for alien blood, your life is pretty awesome. You could’ve turned out way worse. Like,
say, a sweaty asshole mad scientist, a poorly dressed mercenary willing to have her vital fluids replaced with energon for money, or the psychotic blackops recruiter who hired the other two.

“So, um, Nightbird,” you struggle to come up with some way to pump her for information without garnering the attention of your captors, though you doubt they’d be able to understand her answers in the event of her success. “Can you tell me where we are?”

“Not residedent at the ideal habitations.”

“You can say that again.” you blow a stray strand of hair away from your face. “But if we want to get to the, er, “ideal habitations”, we’re going to have to find a way to get out of here.”

“Assisting familiar beings to have offered?”

You scrunch your face in thought. “I don’t think we’re gonna get much help. If we want to leave it’s up to us.”

She grips your hands, precious face set in the sternest expression she can muster. “We can the upmost expectancy of you for deliverance!”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

She nods. “Trust for not misplacing in responsibility being. Tenacity!”

You bite your lip. Her unwavering confidence in you is endearing. And borderline absurd, considering she just met you. If she’s willing to place this much trust in someone on the sole basis that she doesn’t know you then you can only guess at what kind treatment she’d experienced at the hands of these sociopathic fuckjobs. Your resolve hardens to diamond-like proportions. You are leaving and taking her with you.

“Okay, let’s just back up a little bit.” you say, weakly putting your hands up in a “whoah slow down” gesture. “What can you tell me about the "Unideal habitations?""

“Are not ideal.”

You roll your eyes. “Can you tell me what it looks like outside this room?”

“Are cubicles with the un-familiar female person, not responsibility. Information physical protective indexed.”

Some girl programmed fighting moves into you. Not concrete, but it’s your best guess. “Have you ever spoken to anyone outside of here?”

“Frequency with before the taking, frame insertion preceding.”

Used to talk to someone before you could move. “What did they say?”

“Multitudes in the eloquence of the calming, literature positive!” she says brightly.

Not a clue.

“If you’re trying to pump her for information about where we are and how to escape, you’re out of luck.” Carnac the Magnificent aka Silas says with a stoic-side eye. “She was activated in the facility
and she never left.”

You almost panic, but the feeling of stupidity for believing they wouldn’t overhear you subdues the adrenaline. You narrow your eyes.

“Maybe I’m just trying to find out where your office is so I can shit on your desk and piss in your coffee.” you spit back.

“The line to shit on my desk is five miles long and you can piss in the coffee all you like. Mister Fujiyama made it and I can’t tell the difference.” he says, throwing a not so subtle glare at his companion.

You can’t help but hate Silas slightly less. Maybe it’s because you’ve never allowed him to hold your infant son and thus feel less betrayed. Maybe it’s because he carries himself with the air of someone who knows they’re a morally bankrupt shitbag and isn’t insecure about it. Maybe it’s because Fujiyama honestly reminds you of a snail.

Either way, you find yourself reserving most of your hate-lazers for the shorter, sweatier of the two shitbags as he oozes over to to your roommate and does weird mollusk things like take her pulse and remove the last few wires taped down to her skin.

“You’ve been briefed about this part ShaoShao, correct?” Silas asks as Fujiyama helps her out of the bed and onto her feet.

“Yeah.”

“You understand the risks should re-materialization not occur?”

“That means I die, right?”

“You can only hope. Are you ready?”

“I have to use the bathroom.”

Silas ignores her, turning to Fujiyama. “How are her levels?”

“The subject’s levels are within the correct parameters.” He says without looking up. “15% plasma, 85% energon.”

ShaoShao doesn’t seem to be as disturbed by his proclivity to not refer to her as human, but then again Shao Shao seems to have the emotional maturity and character development of a cold poptart.

“So we’re ready to start.”

“I’d prefer her to be at 90% energeon at least.”

“We’re ready to start.” Silas repeats flatly. “Nightbird, brace for fusion.”

Start, Brace, Fusion. You don’t like the sound of any of those words. Heck, what with all the bonding you’d almost forgotten you’re with the kind of people who would absolutely want alien tech to build a sentient mech suit. You should have known, what with her design being reminiscent of a 70’s gundam with tits. Said gundam with tits reminds you by hastily retreating from your
bedside, snapping back into a standing position and going rigidly still.

“So I just go and touch her, right?” ShaoShao says, throwing an almost-worried look over her shoulder.

“Once you hear the ringing and the vibrations start, yes.” Fujiyama answers. “Just initiate intimate bodily contact.”

The room goes deadly silent, the gentle tapping of her bare feet against the tile floor echoing thunderously across the room as she closes the short distance between herself and the bot. You can only watch with baited breath as Nightbird kneels down to her level, and ShaoShao grabs her metal face with her hands, and pulls her in for a cool, entirely passionless kiss.

Nightbird’s optics go wide. Your eye twitches. Fujiyama seems as dumbfounded as you are. Silas groans loudly and pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Why...are you kissing her?”

“You said to make physical contact.”

“By touching her chassis, or her servo, or, I don’t know, anywhere else!”

“Why won’t kissing work?”

“Just fucking do it!”

She shrugs, but complies, latching onto her torso like a spider splattered on a windshield. You expect a seam to open somewhere on her frame to reveal a cockpit, somewhere she can be piloted from. No such opening appears, but ShaoShao’s body does take on an eerie yellow glow. The longer you stare the more the outlines of her body blur and the less real she appears. It takes you a moment to register that you’re not hallucinating or going blind, but that she’s actually dissolving into her.

“So far so good.” Silas says, as if he weren’t witnessing someone phasing in and out of psychical reality before him. “Now, hold position until fusion stabilizes. You should be able to tell when you’ve fully integrated.”

“We have no way of telling when they’ve fully integrated.” Fujiyama interjects.

“Well, then we’ll find out.”

Nightbird, who had been taking this all with statue-esq posture and thousand yard stare, begins twitching. Then convulsing.

Then screaming.

“Failure to be enjoyment! Negative on actions!” Nightbird peals in the cheeriest plea for help you’ve ever heard.

I don’t like this, please stop.

You clench your fists. Mama bear opens her eyes.
Fujiyama pushes his glasses up with his index finger. “This is why I recommended waiting at least 90% energo—”

“-Give it time.” Silas says, watching with his factory-default expression as ShasoShao clings to Nightbird’s chassis mid-molecular-disintegration and Nightbird writhes on the ground.

“I don’t think this is working.” shouts the barely-there mercenary over the static-filled cries of pain.

“Be halting the integration process!” says the sexy, over the top, scared out of her mind ninja-bot. “Please thank you!”

*Stop it. Please.*

You grit your teeth. Mama bear bares her fangs.

“If we continue at this rate there’s a very good chance the subject will experience complete disintegration without fusion ever occurring.” says Fujiyama.

“If she does disintegrate then we’ll know exactly what we can’t do.” his straight-faced companion reassures him. “If she does we’ll consider it a learning experience. We have at least three backup patients lined up for treatment.”

“I want the other half of my payment in advance.” Says the molecularly-challenged ShaoShao with the faintest suggestion of emotion in her voice, namely panic.

“PLEASE to be halting integration process!” Nightbird shrieks. She’s fallen to her knees, rapidly-inventing, coolant leaking from the corners of her wide, frightened golden optics. Those optics find yours and you feel ice fill your lungs. “Familiar responsibility person, can be assisting?!”

Mama bear is roaring, but with your body weak and drained of most of it’s fluids all you can do is lie back and let her rage flow through you. It fills the cavities where your blood used to be, where veins once were, but it offers no strength. Your body has betrayed you.

No.

Your body hasn’t betrayed you. You’re not dead yet. You can still move, still breathe, still think. And until you’re incapable of all three of those things, you can still fight.

Something stirs within you. You recognize this feeling. It’s the same selfless energy you felt with Rumble, with Bee, the same vibrations coursing through your being. You know what this is.

You take a deep breath, close your eyes, and reach out into the aether, grasping for the hand of the only other female anything you’ve known to be tenacious as you are.

“Elita...”

You trace the IV line in your arm with your eyes, to the ceiling, where it’s secured by a pulley-like device, then back down to the bed where ShaoShao had lain. Her end is disconnected. It’s close
enough that you can reach.

“Give me the strength-”

Your headboard, which is part of a standard-issue-hospital bed frame, is built of hollow steel bars, which you tie ShaoShao’s end of the line to and double-triple-quadruple knot it.

“To do something as stupid-”

You rip the IV out of your arm. You wrap both hands around it in a death grip.

“And baddass as you would.”

And pull down as fast and as hard as you can.

You miss seeing your captor’s expressions as the force of your now-up-right bed flings you like a flapjack out of a frying pan and whizzing past them, but if you could you’re sure it would be underwhelming. You’ve seen all three of Silas’s and snails don’t have proper mouths. Either way you’re not too troubled by it. Your flightpath has landed you directly into the lap of the writhing Nightbird, and in doing so sent ShaoShao and most of her particles flying to the other side of the room. There’s a wet cracking noise and that’s probably not good but you can’t pay attention to that, not with the rolling, pulsing energy blossoming from within you, pulling you outwards-in to the teary eyed-ninja bot who’s shaking in silent agony as she hold you in her arms.

Something clicks, latches, snaps into place behind your heart. You feel as though you’ve just opened a door into the most humid, muggiest summer night. The sensation envelopes you, gentle in it’s embrace. You’re cocooned by it, swaddled in it’s soft heaviness, and you put up no resistance as it draws you into the earth.

Fusion. You think hazily as the same unearthly yellow overtakes your skin, and you watch as your body evaporates around you. Brace for fusion.

You’re reduced to pure consciousness now, or, at least, you think you are. You’re a few thousand nameste’s away from enlightenment, so you’re understandably horrified. You’d give in to pure terror, but thankfully there’s something in the darkness to latch onto. Something that seems to suggest the previous test subject, though having no outward indication of belonging to her. Guess not all of her particles went with her.

But as you close the distance between yourself and the something’s floating in the void, you come to understand that they’re not simply particles, but memories. They play behind your eyes before you have a chance to turn away.

It’s a lightening-fast montage of the most recall-worthy moments of her life, which is depressingly oblique. Moving when she was very young, making friends with a boy in a hayfield. Moving when she was six, catching frogs with other children. Moving again. Getting a bo staff for her sixth birthday. Learning how to use the staff. Hitting her instructor so hard in the back of the head he faceplants and doesn’t get back up. Moving overseas. Beating up the neighboor’s kid with a the same bo staff.

There’s more you’re sure, but your blurry porthole vision is redirected and funneled back into nothingness. You hover like this for a moment, caught between consciousness like a fly smashed in a screen door, until you’re plucked from above by your crumpled gossamer wings, and throw outside.
Nightbird’s memories hit you like you hit the ground. With a a tumbling, galloping *whoosh* that would break your bones were you not a weightless invertabrae.

They’re short. Understandably so, just images of your face, being spoken to by a pubescent japanese girl, presumably the one responsibly for programming her with the engrish. A particularly horrific one of her being crammed into her current body, feeling the frame close in around her, cruel and artificial limbs grafted to her like a mechanical marionette. The same girl playing mortal combat on an emulator on her computer, then later, Silas chewing her out for installing unapproved applications on her desktop. The first few lines of “Ashes to Ashes” accompanied by the atmosphere of dreamy excitement.

“A *David Bowie song where there’s no rational justification for having a Bowie song.*” you think dimly. “*Well played universe, well played.*”

The memories melt away, and you find yourself embodied once more, facing your newly requisitioned charge. She stands there, several yards across from you, a lake between you both, it’s steely grey, mirror reflective surface broken by the warmest, gentlest rain. Steam rises from her slouched frame, helm hung in despair as she weeps.

You place one foot in the lake, and then the other. You don’t sink. Either it’s that shallow or you’re walking on water.

“Viewing in your capacity was desired.” she says softly.

*I wanted to see you.*

You keep walking. As the distance between you closes you realize she’s not longer the steel giantess of the waking world, but your height exactly.

“Presented to us undesirable circumstances however.”

*But not like this.*

Her mask falls away. The softest suggestion of metal lips are pursed and twisted into a grimace as she clutches her helm and sinks to her knees.

You begin to run.

“Do possible of the assisting?”

*Can you help me?*

You’re tearing across the lake now. You’re soaked, there’s rain in your eyes and you can hardly see through the fog but that doesn’t matter. What matters is that she stops crying.

“With able to you are a create them cease?”

*Can you make them stop?*

She’s going to stop crying because you’re going to *make* her stop.
“Witness forerunner person together?”

???

The closer you get the blurrier reality gets, the outline of your body softens and everything that’s quintessentially you recedes around her, recedes in a brilliant spray of light until there’s only the you beyond your perception left, the pulsing white hot bright core that makes up everything you are and will ever be. And it’s face to face with her core.

“It’s gonna be okay.” you tell her, and you mean that, because it IS going to be okay. “I’m going to make this okay.”

The resonance from earlier reaches a crescendo, then abruptly drops. Drops to a low, humming purr pulsing between your temples. You let go of yourself, and allow the surrender of spirit into flesh as your body molds itself around you.

You flex your fingers. You breathe. You open your eyes.

Fujiyama and Silas look down at you, disbelief, mystification, and another unidentified emotion in their faces as they give you breathing room, for once, and keep a healthy distance. You understand why as you use a servo to brace yourself against the floor and force yourself upright onto your pedes.

That unidentified emotion is fear. Fear because the raging maternal ursine in human form and their timid metal kunoichi death machine are now the same person.

“Mother of god.” Silas mouths.

You smile at them. The kind of genuine, good natured smile you give to someone that’s about to be completely, unequivocally fucked and absolutely deserves it.

“I am going to kick your shit so hard you’re going to have to put your face through a pasta strainer to find your teeth.” you say.

“We thoroughly violence until spaghetti your dental thank you.” is what actually comes out of your vocalizer.

Close enough.

You’re going to need some time to figure out how to work around your speech impediment to make yourself more clearly understood. But that can wait. You need to get used to your new body. Testing your motor skills sounds like a good place to start, so you do. By picking Dr. “Your plan is backfiring” Fujiyama up with a single servo and pitching him like a softball in the opposite direction.

The thud his body makes when it impacts the wall isn’t as loud as you’d expected, but there is a crack. Probably his back. Probably going to need several surgeries and years of physical therapy when he regains consciousness, if he ever does.

Silas doesn’t shake, or show any visible signs of distress, but that’s what you’d come to expect of the asshole GI Joe inspired mannequin posing as a human. His voice, however, does hold the very basic tenors of stress and anxiety as he backs towards the door and shakily addresses the ceiling.

“Atari, send in the autoroopers.”
“How many, sir?”

“All of them.”

“All of them?”

“D-did I fucking stutter?” he stutters.

Alarms blare overhead. The ground shakes. What sounds like a migrating heard of buffalo rushing in your direction can be heard, if those buffalo weighed several tons and were bipedal. An entire army of massive humanoid robots stampede into the room. They’re roughly cyber birçok design and form, if whomever designed them was basing everything off of a few blurry candid shots they’d seen in passing. As clumsy and half baked as they looked, they do, however, have guns, and plenty of them, and they’re all pointed at you.

“We have you surrounded. Do not attempt to move.” the foremost one says in monotonous, but perfect english. You’re kinda jealous.

You would expect your combined fears to be manifested to their extreme and hold you both captive, but they don’t. Instead they float cloud-like above your head. Reachable, but recessed, a fog in the distance. And right now you stay under the fog, minds crystal clear and objectives unanimous. Which is getting the fuck out of here. If that means plowing through a robotic army in an adorable sentient mech suit, then so be it.

This is insanity in a large dose. Which means you need a song.

Aside from hijacking the overhead microphone or coercing your captors to perform acapella this seems unlikely. Your best best is probably behind the one way mirror, which you turn into a two-way nothing as you plunge your fist into it. The glass shatters, revealing a teenage girl, and most likely the Atari you’d heard so much about, wearing noise-canceling headphones and completely immersed in the fighting game she’s playing on one of the work monitors. You stare for a moment, nonplussed, before gently tapping her on the shoulder.

She swivels around on the chair so fast she falls over. She looks up at you. She screams.

One of you must be fond of her, because the faintest pangs of guilt and sadness course through you as she goes tearing to the other side of the room and dives behind the water cooler, the force of which tears her headphones from the port, allowing the game music to play at full volume.

“TEST YOUR MIGHT”

You feel a surge of confidence rising in you that only the 8-bit power ballad of the Mortal Combat theme could possibly bestow. A sweet, honest smile that melts into a fangless wolf-grin spreads behind the battle mask that snaps into place.

“TEST YOUR MIGHT”

You turn back to face the battalion of mechanized solders before you.

“I know you guys probably aren’t sentient or anything, but I’m going to give you one last chance to leave.” you tell them.
“Am knowledge in your person-braining but retreating solution has offered.” is the jumbled reply that comes out.

The lead autoroper looks at its nearest companion. Then at Silas. Then at you. Then initiates open fire.

“**MORTAL COMBAT!”**

The thunder of over a hundred rapid fire guns shooting at once drowns out your battle cry as you go charging head first into the fray, but you really don’t care. Considering your luck with the vocalizer so far a suggestive, hi-pitched moan probably came out instead. You’ll be sure to remove Atari from her hiding place and have her fix your hilarious speech impediment before this is all over. And also thank her for imbuing her love of fighting games into your processor, because the flying jump kick you deliver full speed to the first bot sends both him and every subsequent bot behind him sailing into the wall with enough force to shake the entire building.

Heck, this might actually be fun.

The barrage of bullets continues. They sting, but don’t hurt badly enough to hinder you. Your metal body can take it. But it’s not your body, so you err on the side of caution, push your urge to plow through the troops Terminator-style and weave out of the line of fire. You search the room for anything to put between you and the hailstorm, and see your flipped over bed. You make a rolling dive behind it, grab both ends with your servos and turn it sideways, using it as a battering ram to bulldoze another five or so soldiers into a corner, pressing with all your might until you can hear the *snap crackle pop* of cracked plating, broken circuits and crushed helmets.

This is stupid easy.

The remaining autoroper are making no show of fear or exhibiting any sort of avoidance behaviors, so you feel safe in your assessment that they are not, in fact, sentient. You ex-vent in relief, before grabbing the leg of the nearest one, swinging them through the air in the style of an olympic hammer throw, and knocking everyone within a 30 foot radius down flat on their aft.

Too easy.

There’s only a few left, which means you’ve got wiggle room to showboat. You snap the leg off one of the deactivated frames, brandishing it like a javelin, and reclaim the other bed to use as a one-handed shield. You’re one noble steed short from being knighted. That doesn’t stop you from charging, spearing the remaining autoropers with the leg of their fallen brethren and skewering them into the wall like a high-tech-deep-state-funded-shish-kabob.

You’re getting worried.

Maybe you shouldn’t be. Maybe this is Optimus's luck kicking back in. Whatever it is, you intend to finish the job without further ado, and make massive, intimidating steps towards Silas, who has taken cover behind a pile of discarded medical equipment with an unconscious ShaoShao held bridal style in his arms. Whither or not he intends to use her as leverage or simply take her with him, you can’t be certain. But you are certain that, having witnessed your surrealistically upbeat massacre, he’s going to be far more enjoyable to work with.

“*So, here are my terms. You contact my robot family, tell me how to fuse out of this adorable mech*
suit, and I’ll only crush half of your body. I’ll even let you pick which half.”

“Be agreeable to contract, connect familiar responsibilities, undo enchanting armor embrace, compress section of your choosing.”

Silas sneers. “You’re more tenacious than I gave you credit for, I’ll give you that much. But I haven’t played my last card.”

“Then play it asshole.” you say, confident in both your ability to handle the ace up his sleeve and his inability to properly execute it.

“Action the anus.” comes your voice, as you narrow your optics at him, grinning snidely behind your mask.

He narrows his eyes right back.

“Nightbird, eject her.” he says in a low, even voice. “Or there will be consequences.”

Another pause. You raise your optical ridge. Silas swears under his breath, makes a motion as if to address the loudspeaker, but then, thinking better of it, turns to the remains of the one-way mirror.

“So god help me don’t tell me her override command is in engrish too!”

“.....”

“ATARI-!”

“You told me not to tell you, sir!”

He flounders. He opens and closes his mouth several times. It’s almost cathartic to see someone else imitate a suffocating fish in their struggle for the rhetoric of words, for once. Cathartic enough that you ignore the pang in your chassis at the fact that he not only said override command, but that he used the exact same phrase Soundwave had once used.

“Be stopping the action...or consequence occurrence.” he tries.

Tries, in the loosest sense of the word. Being forced to speak in such a manner had clearly sucked some of the thunder out of him.

You set your improvised shield down, lazily spinning your legsword in circles before driving it into the ground inches away from his feet. He nearly falls backwards, and that’s nice, but you’re still on edge.

“Conditionally to you are a no stopped it moving to hurt!” he tries again with more gusto.

You pick up a dismembered mechanical arm and chuck it at his head. He ducks and narrowly avoids it.

“Myself am moving to held you are accountable!”

There’s a very large part of you that wants to simply watch Silas talk like an early Godzilla dub for
the rest of the day. But an even larger part of you wants to err on the side of caution. This gravy train could derail at any time and you’re riding the rail car as is so you’re gonna pull the curtain on this surprisingly entertaining shitshow and finish leaving by whatever means necessary. Which right now probably(hopefully) necessitates snapping Silas’s neck.

“This would do be consequences!” he shouts, face beet red.

Your heart and her spark simultaneously jump into your collective throat. Your frame freezes.

*The show must go on.*

Your body betrays you for the second time today. Flashbacks to your fight with Rumble, when Soundwave had uttered those very same words, kept at bay in your collective mind breech the surface of your consciousness. There’s pain. Old pain but still *pain* and the cold terror of losing control of your body the same way he’d lost his.

This is your memory, your regret. And it triggers a schism.

The ringing begins again.

Silas blinks, stupefied that the last phrase actually worked. He’s momentarily at a loss for how to proceed, but it’s only a moment before he regains his composure, and along with it an unadulterated countenance of smug.

“Nightbird-” he repeats, shark grin back in full force “-eject her.”

The process of forcibly dividing a singular entity into two can best be described as being dragged behind a truck naked and sunburnt through a field of broken glass. The sensation is beyond pain. It would be *euphoric* if not for the knowledge that it had been enacted by your enemy. Knowing that Nightbird endured multiple iterations of this torture before your rescue makes it unbearable. Reality bends as your mind and body are torn from hers with all the grace of a cesarean section performed without anaesthesia, and you phase back into the material plane naked, shaking and helpless.

Helpless and *angry*. Angry you’d been thwarted so close to the finish line, angry you hadn’t divided this smug asshole into several smaller assholes when you still had the strength to do so. But moreso than that, angry that you’d failed the one sentient being worth saving in this shithole.

Nightbird remains still, rendered an attractive subservient colossus to the untrained eye, but you know better. You’re close enough to see her protomass tremble beneath her plating, see the panic in her unmoving optics. *You can feel her fear.*

She’s been rendered captive in her own frame. And you let it happen.

“Nightbird, come.”

She takes one step forward, then another, her graceful movements belying the internal war she wages with her own body.

“Sir, I know this is a bad time,” comes a squeak from the remains of the observation room as Atari nervously pokes her head out. “But our location’s been compromised.”

“The timing actually couldn’t be better.” he says, turning to the bot, who has come to a standstill
beside him “I want you to carry this for me.” he says, ushering ShaoShao’s unconscious form into her waiting servos. “And I want you to follow me.”

She obeys without question, trailing behind him to the door where she’d entered, where the autoroopers had come in. He pauses to shout into the office, where Atari is rummaging around in a blind panic.

“While you’re still in there, activate the ground bridge.” He sighs. “Set the coordinates to our ...” he clicks his tongue as he makes up his mind. “-fourth safehouse.”

“What about Dr Fujiyama?

“Leave him”

“I...what?”

“Leave him. We don’t have time. Getting Nightbird safe out of here with us is our top priority.” he hisses. “And set it to detonate it on the way out. We’ve got blueprints. We’ll make another.”

“But sir, we can’t just-”

“This-” he cuts her off, gesturing rigidly at the bot “-Is the perfect fusion of human and alien technology. This is the future of warfare as we know it. This is our key to victory when the cybertronians get tired of fucking our women and go Mars Invaders on our asses. There is one of her. That-” he says, jabbing a thumb backwards where Fujiyama’s unconscious body lies. “-is a sociopath with a ph.d. There’s millions of him.” He looses an exasperated sigh before rolling his eyes and continuing forward. “Nightbird, follow me. We’re leaving.”

She shows no hesitation, no outward signs of struggle, but she does make a strange, hiccuping noise as she throws her helm over her shoulder, in what must have been a massive victory against her own programming. Those wide, sparkling golden optics are watering freely. She retracts her mask.

“(y/n)! Do not do the leaving!” she pleads. “Do not do the leaving THANK!”

Your heart turns to lead, and drops through your ribcage, out your chest, and onto the floor, where a pack of rabid labmice devour it.

“Why does her vocalizer still work?” Silas mutters under his breath, or you assume he does. You can’t hear him over the sound of the desperate, primal scream rising in your throat.

“Nightbird, fight it!” you screech, voice shrill and cracking as you throw every shred of your strength into crawling towards them like a half-crushed insect. If there’s even a fraction of a chance she can break through you’re going to scream until your lungs give out. “Don’t listen to him, you can stay here! DON’T GO!”

If you could have two memories wiped from your mind forever, it would be the sight of her face, broken and sobbing incomprehensible gibberish as she disappears down the corridor. The second one would be the grin Silas throws your way, leaking nuclear fallout levels of smug, before he disappears with her.

You scream. A low roar that escalates into a full blown banshee screech when you find you cannot, in fact, summon the strength to beat your fist against the ground in rage.
*Damnit.*

You slam your forehead against the floor as a compromise.

*Damnit.*

The self destruct countdown has five seconds left, and you’ve used what little strength you had left face planting in to concrete. You can’t even make a desperate crab-crawl to cover. You can only lay there, naked, broken, and furious beyond belief as the cool digital female voice finishes counting down to zero.

*God fucking damnit.*
Frankie says Relax

Chapter Summary

Oh my goodness I desperately need a different word processor a03 doesn't recognize the formatting and I have to go back and punch all the html in

Explosions, as it turns out, don’t actually explode. In fact, you don’t hear anything at all. Maybe a pneumatic whoosh, but that may very well have been your brain ad-libbing for you, as apposed to allowing the reality of the situation to set in.

It’s honestly, truly silent. There’s white light, a curtain of searing air that goes over you, into you, through you. Your skeleton feels like a oversized tuning fork that’s been swung by a MLB player against the side of a brick building.

You can only shut your eyes and hope you’ve got enough main character shield left to spare your life as the aftershock tears through the building. You can feel your hair burning. Shrapnel and chunks of concrete the size of your head go whizzing by. One of them grazes your cheek, the other smashes into your elbow. You hope the scars are badass. You hope you’ll live long enough to see if the scars are badass.

You’ve got shellshock. You almost appreciate having your ears ring from something other that electro-magnetic-fuckery for once. It teeters out after about a minute. For a moment, you’re worried you’ve actually gone deaf, but the comforting sound of screeching metal as someone tries to punch their way inside gives you reassurance. Then fear as a giant metal fist perforates the wall. Then euphoria as the hand that broke through proceeds to tear off the entire wall, and you realize that giant metal hand belongs to a giant metal alien.

Your giant metal alien.

Your jaw hits the floor as all 18.5 tons of furious steel titian tears through the wall, bringing a malestrom grade blast of blizzard wind in behind him. There’s snow on his helm and shoulders, frost lies latticed on his plating and icicles have formed on the blade of his battle axe as he stands there like a massive nordic berserker, the perfect, unstable fusion of hostile majesty. There’s no pause as he breaks forward, attention eclipsed on some unseen foe in the wreckage. You’re almost glad you’ve slipped his line of vision, because you’ve seen starving wolves less focused than this and those narrowed optics are colder than the winter sky outside.

But when you let out the weakest, most pathetic version of his name your dry throat and burning lungs can manage, and he jerks his helm to see you, those optics melt. From a January midnight to an August sunset in a fragment of a second.

“(y/n)” he ex-vents, turning a 180 and forcing his way through the debris, ambient temperature of the room rising with every step he takes in your direction. By the time he’s close enough to touch the bitter cold has given way to midsummer warmth.

You changed the seasons with your voice. You might actually be a greek god. You're naked and
shaking and bleeding, but you’ve never felt more powerful in your entire life.

And it’s towards that midsummer you reach, crawling on your hands and knees to meet him. Your knees are scraped and there’s broken glass embedded in your palms but that doesn’t matter. Everything you’ve been through, the coma, the trials, being crammed back into a physical body to wake up in a setting befitting a body horror novella doesn’t matter. All of your suffering up until now is rendered null and void, because he’s here.

You can see him, you can smell him, you can touch him and wrap your weak organic arms around his hand and hold it for an eternity.

Which may be sooner than you’d like. The tips of your fingers have barely scaped his palm before he recoils. Violently.

From a starving wolf to the wide-eyed rabbit it chased, you can hear his shallow, rapid venting, hear the cogs in his processor seize. Your jaw drops. You blink.

What the fuck.

“What the fuck.” you whisper, too confused to feel anger or hurt from his reaction, too exhausted to ask why he suddenly looks at you like a wounded animal, why he’s already back up on his peds and backing away.

His lips move, are, you think they do, his mask shifts slightly, just enough to let your know he’s at least mouthing your name, but you can’t hear over shouting of what you desperately hope is other autombots. The Calvary has arrived. You should probably at least give all the king’s men at least a cursory glance but your eyes remain transfixed on the big metal elephant who’s suddenly displaying all the symptoms of acute murophobia.

The shriek of metal tearing metal breaks your transfixion as the one-bot doorway becomes a multi-bot chasm. Someone is punching knife-shaped holes in the wall and howling like barbarian. That someone is Ratchet. Your heart leaps in your throat as a blur of red and white comes barreling into the room and taking the wall with him with all the grace and composure of a toro lidiado fighting bull.

“Ratchet-” comes the heavy, rolling voice of an unfamiliar calvary member as the bull removes the metal debris caught in his horns “Please don’t-”

“Please don’t what?” he spits back with absolute venom in his voice.

“Please don’t kill anyone.”

“Give me one good reason.” he seethes back after casting the last shred of twisted aluminum siding over his shoulders.“Give me one good reason not to eviscerate these miscreants!”

“We’ll, they’re not here, for starters.” comes a lighter, much smoother voice. “Or if they are, they’re in multiple pieces.”

“You have to be fragging kidding me .”

It occurs to you then, that you’ve never actually seen Ratchet properly upset. And now that you have, you don’t think you’ve ever seen anyone as upset as Ratchet. The bull comparison isn’t too far off, he’s producing steam due to the cold temperature as he vents rapidly, the pupils in his cerulean optics are constricted to pinpoints, heck the chevron could even be likened to horns. Something within you says you could probably play matador if you tried, but you’re honestly just as upset as he
is, and more importantly, you have no cape.

The conversation continues. You can hear Ratchet yelling as the bot with the deeper voice tries to talk him into helping him search the debris. You’d listen further but Optimus, who, having taken a moment to compose himself and temporarily shove whatever meltdown he was having under a cool facade, kneels back down again to speak to you.

“Please...disregard my action earlier.” he says unsteadily, knowing full well there’s no way you’re willing to do that. “What has become of your captors?”

“They...they're gone.” you say, staggering.

“Gone?” he asks, flat disbelief in his voice.

“They escaped.” you continue. “Exploded. Warped. I dunno. Through this giant portal. Called it a groundbridge. They set it to detonate right after they went through.”

Silence follows. Optimus’s optics twitches. Maybe. You might just be having a stroke. You hope you’re having a stroke because the alternative is that he’s stressed to the point of involuntary body movements and having seen him in berserker mode once before that’s bad news for everyone within a hundred mile radius, which you happen to be in. He makes a motion, raising his servos, and you’re not sure if he intends to claw at his face or burry them in it. He aborts the gesture halfway, choosing instead to stare wearily at the wall behind you.

“They... have acquired more of our technology than we previously believed.”

You swallow hard. “So...you guys didn’t sign it over to them in some shitty legal contract or-”

“I do not know what they have told you about the circumstances leading to your incarceration, but please believe me, (y/n), this was not our intention.” he says, hints of cold fury peppering the calm in his voice. “You were kidnapped.”

“I mean, I figured they were full of shit.” you say, more timid then you’d like.

“They offered us help for your-” he grimaces and grits his denta as though the word itself causes him physical pain. “condition. We were deceived.”

You don’t want to see him like this, servo clenched so tightly over his chassis the glass of his windshield cracks. The hurt behind his optics a savage creature, housed in a cage built for something far less powerful. He rebuilds the wall best he can, no doubt in an effort to spare you concern, but the bricks won’t stay for long, and you can hear the beast clawing from the other side.

You *are* relieved that they weren’t naïve enough to throw whatever tech they asked for at them in a blind *shut up and fix my human* panic, but that does little to comfort you, considering they still have it. Which could mean anything from unnervingly competent decepticon trickery to an autobot traitor. All of which feed into your hypothesis that his main character shield has been compromised.

You’d like very much to not worry about that right now. Fortunately, the situation at hand offers a plethora of other panic-worthy problems. Like, say, Optimus’s *complete and utter* inability to touch you, or the haunted look in his optics melding into a distant, wounded one when you whisper a warbly attempt at his name again, hand outstretched and reaching for the side of his face.

“Ratchet.” he says, voice a forced neutral as he recedes from your touch, eyes reaching towards the rubble in a play to appear as though he’s *not* avoiding yours. *You can’t do subtlety hun. You can’t.*

“Please... attend to (y/n), I know not the state of her injuries, but they look severe.”
Ratchet, who had been elbow deep in the rubble, turns his head, optics darting from Optimus, to you, then back to Optimus. An expression of anticipated disappointment falls over his face as he makes his way over and presses the charred bundle of melted wires and steel he’d been holding into the other mech’s servo.

“The box is almost obliterated. There may be something salvageable inside but it’s melted shut. I have no means of opening it without risking destroying the contents here but if we bring it back to base—”

“Is it possible there was any sort of memory backup stored on an external system? They seem to have implemented at least some of their own hardware into the controls.”

“It’s possible, but I haven’t had a chance to—”

“I will search the wreckage.” he cuts him off again. You feel a sharp, needle-fine pain in your heart. “Please see to (y/n).”

He walks off, without so much as a backwards glance. Ratchet watches him, optical ridges tightly knitted and eyes narrowed in a sort of resigned sadness. You want to scream, but that requires a level of energy you just don’t have right now. Instead you half sob, half whine, which ends in a coughing fit.

Ratchet has no such reservations about touching you, because you’re in his servos and off the ground before you’d caught your breath. So that means he’s going to carry you back. Naked. Not that he hadn’t already seen you naked right before you seizure’d your way into a coma. You’re glad the sight of your naked body doesn’t trigger a trauma response in him, but this still has connotations and it’s bad. Your bare ass is freezing against the metal of his palm and you can already tell he’s using ever molecule of willpower in his body to not look, but you repress that. There’s other things to scream about right now.

“Where’s Bee?” you ask, suddenly remembering you never got a straight answer out of anyone about where your son is. “Oh god where’s Bee?!”

Ratchet flinches, and that’s all that’s required to take your panic from nuclear to atomic.

“Oh shit.” you breathe. “Oh shit oh fuck oh shit you don’t know where he is do you?”

“Bee’s fine.” Ratchet assures you with a sort of restrained gruffness that totally isn’t working.

“You flinched.” you accuse him shrilly in your panic. “Why would you flinch if there wasn’t a problem oh fuck me—”

“I did not flinch, I just—”

“-I want to see him!” you cut him off. “Right this fucking second!”

“We can see him later—”

“-Why not now?!”

“Because we’re in the middle of a warzone in the Antarctic!” he finally snaps. “Calm down!”

You blink, You blow out a breath.

“Okay that’s a pretty good reason.”
“Ratchet ex-vents slowly, as if he’s trying very, very hard not to roll his optics. “We’re fine. You’re fine, at least, you’re not dying.” you let out a breathy snort as you come down from hyper ventilating. “We’re all accounted for. Everyone’s fine.”

You wrap your arms around as much of your body as you can. With the blind terror receding you find yourself wondering how many degrees below zero it actually is.

“Why...why are we in arctic?”

“Antarctic.” Ratchet corrects you. “And as for why, it’s likely because this continent has little in the way of official claim when it comes to government due to it’s remote location. So it was an ideal place for those— he shudders, you think. He may very well just be shaking in rage. “-Butchers to carry out their agenda.”

Butchers. At least he finally hates them as much as you do. You’re still going to have a very long talk with both of them about not trusting garbage humans, and maybe also how to identify garbage humans, and heck, when this is all sorted out you and Chip can hold a power-point presentation and force the entire Ark to watch.

“Okay next question:” and Ratchet does lose his battle against patience and rolls his optics. “Where are my clothes?”

He raises an optical ridge. “You expect me to know?”

“I mean, like, I had them before the fusion but when I re-materialized they were gone. I don’t know if that means they still exist as free particles in Nighthbird somewhere or-”


A sharp, stabbing pain shoots down your chest just at hearing her name thrown back at you. “The sentient mech suit they made out cybertronian tech and genetic samples you “gave” them.” you say with finger quotations.

Ratchet regards you with weary, sympathetic optics unbefitting of the scowl plastered on his face, before loosing a heavy sigh, pinching between his optics and chevron as he squeezes his eyes shut.

“At some point very soon, we’re going to need to sit down and have you give us a detailed report on exactly what went on in this slaughterhouse, and we’ll do our best to catch you up to speed from our end. But right now, (y/n), I’d be extraordinarily grateful if you could limit your questions to ones I actually have answers for.”

You open your mouth again, only to bite down on your tongue just as fast. You’ve got just shy of a trillion things to talk about that don’t involve questions at ALL. But as you study the expression on his face, stress, weariness, some sort of bitterly restrained ecstasy(probably from having your naked form cradled in his servo), you realize your open air data dump is going to have to wait for a more appropriate time. When exactly a better time is to recount your adventures with your postmortem sons and Optimus’s dead wife in the realm of the robot gods is going to be, you don’t know, but considering the mood and settings you’d woken up, re-materialized, and then exploded into, you get the feeling it’s going to be a lot further off than you’d like.

Your insides twist as you turn your briefly turn your head towards the rubble, where Optimus and two unfamiliar autobots are carefully pulling the remains of a massive circular structure out from under the collapse ceiling.

“Why won’t Optimus touch me?”
He says nothing. You figure that’s his way of telling you this falls outside the paradigm of "questions he has answers for". You hold out for thirty or so seconds before giving up on a response entirely. In lieu of that he holds you closer to his chassis, and you can feel his servo squeeze ever so slightly tighter around you. A dry ball forms in your throat.

Prumus help you, you need a distraction. So when harsh coughing peals out from the other side of the room you think you hear heavenly choirs singing. Those divine cacophonies sharply drop off into dirges, however, when one of the autobot’s you don’t recognize pulls aside a gross fusion of melted autorooper remains and the hospital bed frames to reveal a hacking, wheezing, blackened with soot and ash human form.

That human turns out to be none other than Dr. "How the fuck are you still alive?" Fujiyama.

You could scream. You could laugh hysterically. You could shimmy your equally ashy and soot-covered self down Ratchet’s leg, limp the 100 or so feet between you, and make good on your lofty ideas of manufacturing a living room set out of his flesh.

That is, if there’s anything left of him, once Optimus has finished incinerating him with his optics. You’ve seen enough nature documentaries to know what a big cat going in for the kill looks like, and he’s at least 100 times more focused than that. Now isn’t really a good time for anything, really, but it’s an even worse time to be turned the fuck on, even more so that you recognize the intensity in his gaze from having it lain on you.

"Fujiyama-" Optimus begins, and you don’t known if he dropped the prefix intentionally or not, but the effect is decidedly savage nonetheless. "I would not bother getting up, were I in your place."

Was that a threat? You’re not sure. The one issuing it IS the kind of person who would show genuine concern for the wellbeing of someone who had completely and utterly screwed him over, but to be fair, you’d only seen him face to face with someone who had screw him over once. Which had ended in a titanic intergalactic fistfight, and the offending mollusk is about 35 feet shy of his last opponent.

Fujiyama, for his part, looks like a gazelle surrounded by a pride of lions. But unlike a nature documentary, you’d never seen an animal torn between trying to escape and just acknowledging how thoroughly fucked they are and giving up. He seems to have settled on a sort of cold terror, resigned to both the fact that there is no chance of escape, and that he lacks the fortitude to put his fear aside in any meaningful capacity. He shakes endlessly to compensate. You can smell the sweat from here.

"I..." he fumbles. "I...there is...they will-

"Your partners have left without you. You have no chance of escape, and any further attempts to deceive us in any capacity will be met with severe consequence." Optimus emphasizes, and holy hell that is a threat. "I would highly suggest you cooperate in our efforts to locate your cohorts and retrieve all they have taken from us."

"We have taken nothing from you. You have no claim."

There’s a sudden, collective silence. A saying comes to mind about how to not underestimate a cornered rat, since they’ll bite in fear, and how the last stages of the hunt are most dangerous, etcetera, etcetera. However you can think of no such eloquent ploy for snails, and the only person in the room who could seems far closer to stepping on him. Nontheless, Fujiyama seems to be making an attempt at a final stand, as he raises to his legs best he can( what appears to be shrapnel from one of the autoroopers pedes is speared through his thigh, ironically enough) and stares skyward, his
glasses dirtied to the extent that it’s impossible to tell who he’s looking at. Though, if the hair raising on your back is any indication, you can assume those, oozing, simple oscelli sensory organs are staring directly at you.

Everyone’s jaw drops in unison. Everyone but Optimus, who hides his awe and disgust under a well worn blanket of dry civility.

“We were given power of attorney for her in the event of her incapacitation, as her family. You breached the terms of our agreement and your possession of her unconscious self became felony kidnapping when you moved your base of operations without our permission and ceased contact.”

“You were given power of attorney over a person that doesn’t legally exist.” asserts the snail. “(y/n) perished when a meteor hit her outpost lab. Marissa Fairborne is a fake identity cobbled out of a comic book character. What we have here-” he gestures grandly towards your stupefied self “is not legally defined as a person. She is not human, she doesn’t exist, we performed experiments on a ghost.”

Were you less stupified, you may have actually taken offense at that.

“We had no binding contract. You surrendered her into our hands on nothing but our word. We have done nothing wrong.”

“Nothing wrong?” and this time it’s Ratchet stepping in. “You see nothing wrong with lying, kidnapping, wanton medical experimentation, and torture? You promised help. You promised you’d do everything in your power to save her life, and you exploited to the fullest extent of your twisted capabilities. We trusted you!”

“Did your subjects trust you too, doctor?”

A jolt runs up Ratchet's spinal strut, and you're close enough to feel it.

There’s a finite amount of blind fear and panic the human brain can handle in any one day. Fujiyama, for his part, seems to have reached his limit. Maybe it was being betrayed by his partner in xenocrime. Maybe it was having his magnum opus’s fledgling flight blow up in his face. Maybe it was having the ground bridge literally blow up in his face. Either way, Dr. “has finished loosing the rest of his shit” Fujiyama seems to have finally cracked, and dissolves into a laughing fit, clutching his head with both hands and sinking to the floor on his knees.

“What did it feel like, the first time you played god?” he asks through a break in his maniacal giggle fit. "Were you as scared as I was?"

You weren't sure Ratchet's pupils could contract any further, but they do, fluttering and whirring in and out of focus like a camera lens as he stares wide eyed and frozen at his addresser.

“I was terrified, at first. I thought I would be stricken down, or drop dead. But I didn’t. The idea that I could do such a thing, and there were no consequences beyond what another living being could inflict on me, that thought scared me. There was no higher power to stop me, other than myself. And I have never been in control of myself.”

"Why...are you telling me this?" Ratchet manages finally.

“We have coalesced with your rivals, and they have proven far more willing to share their knowledge. Both their own, and what they had gleaned from your faction.” The beginning of a smirk plays on his shaking lips. "I know about the Iaconian funded experiments you spearheaded.”
Ratchet opens and closes his mouth. In all the time you've known him you've never seen him so thoroughly flabbergasted. You don't like that word, you don't like what you're seeing and you really don't like where this is going.

"Those experiments...were incomplete."

"They were complete enough to show that you are no different then me."

The tension is so palpable you start shaking again. Or, you think you do, there's reverberations rolling through you bone deep. Little do you realize, it's vibrations from Ratchet's vocalizer emanating through his frame as he snarls in rage.

A flat “what” is all you mange to get out as docbot carefully places you on the floor, charges over, slams his pede down next to the man hard enough he’s knocked back off his feet, and plunges a blade inches away from his face into the wall next to him.

There’s yelling, probably from the other two autobots, probably worried their medic is about to recant the cybertronian equivalent of a hypocratic oath. And you can’t really blame them, the way Ratchet’s frame forms a lethal cage around the man he could decapitate him by venting too hard.

Part of you really wants to enjoy this. After all, this is Dr. "has lost all sense of self-preservation" Fujiyama's head on the chopping block here. But as validating as it feels to finally have at least one of your friends share your contempt for this sapient mollusk/garbage human chimera, some nagging part of you refuses to allow it. Maybe it's the sight of your gentle giants treating someone your size with the ferocity they’d face another titian with. Elephants shouldn’t concern themselves with mice, or what not. Maybe it's because you’d honestly rather kill Fujiyama yourself, and feel left out.

Either way, you look helplessly at Optimus, fully expecting him to throw himself in between the two, order his medic to stop or at the very least call out his name in a threatening but concerned manner. But he doesn't. His frame is poised as though he's ready to move, but there's a placid conflict etched into his face. He's stalling. Which poses two equally frightening possibilities:

- His titanium moral compass has failed him, and he doesn’t know what the right course of action is.
- He knows, and he’s trying, and failing, to make himself care enough to do something about it.

Your insides twist further.

"You can spin your sorry rhetoric whichever way you like, Doctor." Ratchet huffs, removing the blade from the wall with a resounding kashink and a spray of rubble, much to your and everyone else's relief. "You and I are nothing alike."

"For you of all your kind to call me a butcher-" Fujiyama simpers in an almost sing-song tone.
"What's it like to look in a mirror, autobot?"

There's a finite amount of stress, teasing from mad scientists and surfacing repressed memories any one bot can handle in a day, and Ratchet has reached his limit.

His optic twitches. He lifts his pede. You awkwardly cry out in a mixture of disgust, panic and poorly disguised jubilation as you mentally prepare yourself to see Dr. "Is going to be the first human/autobot casualty" Fujiyama reduced to a massive bloody footprint on the floor. You brace for the screaming gurgling, and the snap crackle pop of crushed bone.
"~Relax, don't do it~"

Instead, you're greeted with the haunting synthpop strains of *Frankie goes to Hollywood* played at at least five times it's intended volume, and Ratchet's war cry reduced to a startled squawk as a massive yellow blur grabs him from behind and pulls him away nanokilks before impact.

"~When you want to go to it~" blasts through the wideband of a third unfamiliar autobot restraining the surprised but still violently resisting medic. He's shorter than the rest, though not by much, and honestly a bit of a beefcake. You wished you hadn't noticed that. You really, REALLY wished you hadn't noticed that, because he's also yellow, the yellowest thing you've ever seen, and he's making scratchy, warbling static noises in irritation as he sets the medic down, noises you actually understand clear as day and...

*What.*

He turns to face you, wide, sky blue optics looking directly into yours, first in confusion, then in *elation.*

*The*

He scoops you off the ground. You cling to his thumb for dear life since his servo is shaking almost as hard as you are.

*Fuck.*

You open and close your mouth several times, using every last one of your poor, defeated braincells just to utter a nearly inaudible whisper.

"Bumblebee?"

There's a pause, then a burst of nervous, sheepish, *exhilarated* electronic garble.

"*Hi mom.*"
An automatic function

Chapter Summary

Oh fug I'm so sick of looking at this thing here have it I'm sorry it took so long pls enjoy

In the precious few moments you had to hear yourself think during your excursion, you had not, in fact mentally prepared yourself for change. Which would have been a good idea, in the event that your coma spanned more that a couple days.

Even if you had, however, the idea that your son, who you had last seen roughly-toddler sized sleeping in your arms, is now 16 feet tall, probably wouldn’t have been one of them.

Now, you’ve been around the cosmic block a couple times before. You’ve seen some shit. You’ve experienced some shit. You are the unchallenged lord and master of shit handling in a lighthearted, laid back, well adjusted manner. Had this shit been presented to you unprecedented by the laundry list of other shit you had just recently finished addressing, you may very well have been able to deal with it in a dry but humorous manner and ultimately file it away in the hall of shit records under the Dewy Decshitimal system.

But your coping mechanisms have become, bluntly put, shit and in the five or so seconds you’ve had to take in Bumblebee’s new form, you realize you cannot, in fact, handle this.

“I can’t handle this.” you say matter of factly. “Bee, put me down, I’m about to have some sort of breakdown and I don’t want to do it all over your servo.”

Bee spares you a nervous look before reluctantly setting you back down onto the ground, in the manner of someone releasing an insect that had just stung them while trying to maintain their composure. He beeps worriedly.

“Look, I know this is probably a lot to take in, but if you can just calm down-”,

“I am calm, I just...” You trail off, losing the will to maintain your facade before finishing your sentence. “No, I’m not calm. You’re right. I woke up naked having my blood drained in the middle of Antarctica and you’re 16 feet tall. Why would I be calm? Why would anyone be calm? I am miles beyond the threshold of calm.”

“(y/n),” Optimus begins wearily, and damnit even now the sound of his voice triggers enough serotonin production in your brain to start taking the edge off. “We are fully prepared to explain ourselves once we return to base, and you are more appropriately... embellished.” his optics flit down your body and you know he’s referring to your clothes, or lack thereof.

“(y/n),” you snap back, vaguely aware of how ludicrously bitchy that sounds(and is). “That sounds like something a calm person would do, and as we have already established, I am not calm!”

Optimus furrows his optical ridges. Bee seems to still be struggling to not identify you as an
aggressive invertebrate. Ratchet is the only one who shows genuine concern on his face, though he’s quick to replace it with a situation-appropriate scowl.

There’s a lot of crap that you can and have handled, and you’re not sure exactly why this is the thing that’s set you off. Maybe it’s just the straw that broke the camel’s back, or maybe you hinged more security than you realized on your role as a parent with the one child you hadn’t irrevocably fucked up on, and while you’re not entirely sure how you’d fucked this one up, it appears you’ve indeed done so. Either way, having Bee as a small sparkling to come back to and coddle was the load-bearing cornerstone of your sanity, and now, having no shred of normalcy to cling to, you’ve begun to melt. Wither or not you can do so in a quick and orderly fashion or wind up in a puddle of goo wicked witch of the west style remains to be seen.

“Bee, I’m sorry—” you start quickly, and boy do you mean with the hurt in his big, sky blue optics. You choke a little. “I just...I can’t...why are you even HERE?!” you throw your hands out in lamentation. “Why are you even in the rescue party? Why aren’t you at home making crayon drawings god fucking dammit.”

There’s a long, awkward silence, a long awkward silence you ignore. You’d pierce it if not for the large green autobot coughing politely to interject.

“Uh, he’s a scout... m’am...?” he answers, with an upwards inflection, clearly unsure of how to address you. "Naked raving lunatic” and “NOT FINE” are both acceptable pronouns. “And he’s been one for some time.”

Your eye twitches. You look at Optimus for the first time in your entire life with something other than stars and hearts in your eyes. Only the faintest flashes of alarm show in his expression before returning to his new zero-sum blank slate, and he stares with the same intensity right back. Lion, meet a very, very pissed off sheep.

“You let him... be a scout.” you state flatly.

“I have.”

“He comes on missions with you.”

“He does.”

“You let him come on missions with garbage humans and explosions and FIRE where he could DIE.”

“He has proven himself to be very capable—”

“I don’t care HOW capable he is!” you cut him off, gesturing violently with pointed finger at your bouncing baby boy, who has narrowly avoided hitting his helm on the ceiling recoiling from your scream. “He’s not even a year old!”

There’s a burst of exasperated electronic babble.

“Actually I’m thirty. In earth years, I mean.”

You look at Bee. Then at Optimus. Then at the green bot who looks like he’s trying as hard as he can to become invisible. You sink to your knees. You pull some of your hair out.
“I can’t handle this.” you tell the floor, hyper-ventilating. “I can’t handle this!”

Ratchet is the first to make a move towards you. “We can proliferate about this later. Right now I don’t know the full extent of your injuries, and we need to get you back to base for a thorough exam.”

“Is the base even in the same place or did we move it to Vegas or some shit?” you spit back. “Does Vegas still exist or did decepticons go all planet of the apes on the entire country? Where’s the statue of liberty? Is New York still around? Can I still get bagels oh fuck.”

“We did move the base, but not to Vegas.” the unidentified blue and pink autobot says coolly. “As for bagels, I’m pretty sure I saw Miko throw one at the back of Jack’s head before I dropped him off this morning.”

You don’t know who Jack and Miko are, but knowledge of their novelty bread flinging antics does little to quell your fear. Blue bot, for their part, shows genuine concern beyond their obvious frustration but you can’t put your meltdown aside long enough to thank them for caring.

“Who even are you?” you snap back. “Bee, is that your girlfriend or something?”

Bee responds by dropping the melted piece of debris he’d been holding and staring at you like you’d grown two heads. Blue bot slaps a servo against their helm.

“Boyfriend?”

He throws his servos up, and spits out a line of static so garbled even you can’t understand it. You figure he did that on purpose, to imply an explicative. That’s clever. You’re so proud of him right now.

“Bumblebee, calm down.” Optimus says finally placing a firm hand on his shoulder. “That misunderstanding by no means functions as an insult, even if it were intended.”

“I know but....I... I just-” another incoherent static burst “-I’m humiliated!”

Optimus blinks.

“Hello humiliated.” he says without pause. “I am your sire.”

Bumblebee’s optics twitches. He grabs the sides of his helm with his servos, and goes tearing back out of the bot-sized hole in the wall and into the frozen landscape outside. You, meanwhile, look at Optimus as if he’s grown two heads, while Ratchet pinches the bridge of his helm and the green bot looks like he may have blown a gasket trying not to laugh.

“My apologies.” Optimus says after a beat. “It...has become nearly an automatic function at this point.”

*

Three hours, one trip through their groundbridge and a pitiful excuse for a debriefing later (It’s not the 80’s anymore) your ordeal is finally over, and you can relax, once again, under the cold light of an
operating theater on a medical berth as Ratchet fusses over your chop-shopped body in a smaller, more cramped, much less private infirmary, in an underground bunker they’d been relocated to. Optimus looms behind him, holding the metal railing serving as a room divider in a death grip with his optics glued to you, his presence offering the comforting ambience of a restless bull elephant restrained with a single thread of twine.

Aside from that, there’s something you find almost comforting about the sterile environment now. That probably suggests worrying things about your psyche, but hey, you’d traded in hot stones and scented candles for space age medical equipment and canisters of bioluminescent liquid long ago. Heck, the low constant, metallic creaking of what you’re assuming is old ww2 era mechanical equipment shrieking in agony at being woken from it’s slumber could almost substitute for soft jazz. You’re one mud mask and happy ending away from a bone fide spa experience.

“Fusion, you say?” comes the cool voice of your titanous metal masseuse. “You’re telling us you merged with her on a molecular level?”

You flinch, the sting of cold metal against your skin a welcome distraction from the cold metal going through your skin as a hand half the length of your body sutures one of your many ghastly wounds shut. Given, it’s actually a series of intricate metallic vibrissa he’d installed under the panels of his servo specifically to treat micro abrasions in cybertronians(and conveniently enough, human sized wounds) but you’re still left marveling at how Ratchet’s touch glides so smoothly and feather-light across your body. Which, again, serves as a nice distraction from the pain.

You’d told him absolutely no sedatives/local anesthetic/even mild painkillers because fuck you that’s why. Considering you’d spent the last 30 years unconscious he’d obliged with no more than a raised optical ridge and an understanding sigh. You’re beginning to regret that now, but admitting that requires admitting your stubbornness had got you nowhere and right now you’re too stubborn to do that.

“Yeah.” you say, biting on the inside of your cheek. “I mean, that sounds like what they were talking about.”

“But you can’t confirm it?”

You snort. “I touched her, I vibrated, I watched my own body disappear into hers, and then we kicked an entire army’s worth of ass as a singular entity, but no, I can’t confirm it.”

He rolls his optics. “I suppose I can assume whatever organ responsible for secreting your snark remains functional.”

You are not even halfway done secreting snark for the day, but Docbot doesn’t need to know that. You sigh.

“We became one person.” you say, softer now, barricading the storm of emotions even beginning to recall the experience brings to the outer reaches of your mind. “I don’t know how it happened, but it did.” you crane your neck uncomfortably to see around his arm to make eye contact. “This isn’t some sort of cybertronian body function you guys never told me about because I never asked, is it?”

“It’s not.” Ratchet tells you, finishing the final stitch with an uncomfortable whirring kashink, pausing only momentarily before moving onto another wound. “There have been things...similar to it-” the pause, the wary split second inflection in his voice wakens suspicion in you, but you toss it over the barricade with the storm. “-but off the top of my helm, I can’t think of anything. Plus, taking
into account that both you and another organic were involved, and...well-” he sighs bitterly. “-I’m at a loss.”

You blow out a breath. “So they’ve actually engineered something past your understanding?” you ask nervously.

Ratchet scoffs. “Only because I’ve been deprived of everything but the most basic of information! If I had any sort of documentation, a video clip, a C.N.A sample, even a fragment of her plating I’d be able to dissect those butcher’s work in a manner of nanokilik.” despite the discomfort and tension a smile crawls over your lips at your friend’s show of pride. You oversensitive sonovaglitch. “But...for the time being, as reluctant as I am at admit it....yes. It appears so.”

Great. So you’ve got nothing to go on. More than that, Nightbird is still out there getting god knows what done to her by garbage humans and the costumed fetish freak mercenary because you failed to save her and will have no idea how to save her for the foreseeable future. Wide, glittery golden optics flash behind your eyes and you swallow hard. You don’t even try to throw them over the barricade, or look away. You just allow your mind’s eye to glaze over as you’ve done with your physical ones so many times before when you’ve wanted to disappear and utter a silent apology, followed by a silent promise to bring her back with you and furnish her hab-suite with furniture made from garbage human skin.

So, with that neatly tucked away in the corners of your mind, and beneath your heart to cause some sort of bizarre psychological problem later, you turn to the bull elephant, who’s digits drum endlessly along the rail in his grip.

“I’d like you guys to catch me up to speed now, if you don’t mind.”

The bull elephant regards you warily, not doubt struggling to ascertain exactly when and where to start, and how much processing power he should allocate to the problem when clearly that power would be better spent on pretending he’s not worried. Ratchet alleviates the problem by answering first.

“How quickly do you want the information, what format, and how would you like it delivered?”

You wrinkle your forehead in though. “As fast as possible, from most horrific to least, and with blinding sarcasm.”

He rolls his optics. “Right then. Your planet is the corpse of an evil god, whom we murdered to keep from transforming and ending your civilization.”

You’re not even going to begin processing that right now. “Okay.”

“In doing so Optimus forgot who he was and joined the decepticons ranks. We had to send one of the human children to Cybertron to retrieve his memory.”

“....Okay.”

“Optimus was stricken by the cybonic plague, and in order to obtain the cure we had to plunge into Megatron’s mind, who was in a coma at the time. Bumblebee volunteered to use a cortical physic patch to pilfer his processor for information. He returned from the mission unscathed, but was briefly possessed by Megaton himself-”
“Please stop telling me things.”

Ratchet sighs. Optimus, who had endured the last couple of sentences with an expression like an adult dog caught chewing an expensive shoe who should know better, also sighs, and covers part of his face with his servo, shooting you a sidelong, apologetic glance.

You clutch your own head. You don’t want to think about Bumblebee in danger. You don’t want to think those other things either, but you definitely don’t want to think about your son being possessed by robot satan. That and you’ve lost the will to be angry at Optimus for putting him in harms way, considering he’s an adult on your planet, at least. He’s a big boy. He can make his own decisions.

“So what else did I miss?” you say whilst counting the cracks in the ceiling, eager to change the subject.

“Thirty earth birthdays, five plating upgrades and a bot-mitzvah.” Ratchet says with an absolutely straight face.

You blink.

“You made that last one up.”

“I did.”

Optimus, who, after the ill-timed dad joke had yet to utter single word, finally speaks.

“Raising him without you was....difficult.” he says with a drawn out pause that tells you plainly it was beyond difficult. “It was not without joy, but there were many occasions we were...sorely remiss for your help. Such as the time his carassius auratus perished. He mourned Mr. Bubbles for nearly a decacycle, and refused to accept another creature into his care afterwards.”

“I’m surprised you remember his name” Ratchet hums, withdrawing a small, prehensile probe, used to judge the depth of the incision beneath your armpit. You know there’s supposed to be an artery there somewhere. Or used to be. You shudder violently.

“....We held a private memorial service.”

“I’m sorry.” you choke out. “I mean, I’m not sure if I could have made that any better, but....I should have been there.”

“You were.” Ratchet continues. “I mean, you weren’t conscious, but you were here. We kept you with us for the majority of your...situation, though you were moved to a more inconspicuous location when we switched bases.”

Try as you may you can’t shake the image of your unconscious body shoved in a closet, perhaps with boxes stacked around it and a dead plant, only to be discovered by the occasional janitor or nosy autobot. You snort.

“...Thanks.” you hiss through your teeth as the next set of stitches punches tiny, unnoticeable, but still totally painful holes through your skin. The pipes creak again, louder this time. “What else did I miss?”

“Well, as you may have been able to surmise, we’re not in the Arc anymore.”
“No shit.”

“The original team that landed here has split up into several divisions, along with other autobots who arrived here by other means later on. We now have bases set up around your world with different duties and assignments, some of which are very heavily involved with human affairs. Undercover.” he adds in hastily.

“Is that what happened to Ironhide?” you ask dully. “And the other two stooges?”

Ratchet desperately fights the beginnings of a smile. There’s nothing from Optimus. you grit your teeth.

“They currently operate out of Los Angeles. Jazz, Sunstreaker and Sideswipe have a base in New York, as for the other human members you helped recruit, they were mostly re-assigned office positions.”

You try to imagine Astoria behind a desk. You can’t. You then try to imagine her bent over a desk with Powerglide on the other end. You can. But you wish you hadn’t.

“What happened to my cat?” you ask, trying to clear the image from your mind.

Ratchet flinches. Anyone else would have accidentally caused a lesion in addition to the ones they were trying to fix, but aeons as a healer has steadied his servos to supernatural levels of stillness. He makes a noise like he’s clearing his intake before hesitantly proceeding. “He and Ironhide grew very close in your absence, and when the split occurred he requested Neelix come with him.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I’m not. Bumblebee missed him greatly, however, which is why we wound up with Mr. Bubbles to begin with. It’s been while since I’ve had contact with him, or his faction. I assume he lived out his natural lifespan in his company.” He pauses when he sees your face, which must be on the verge of crumbling. “I...I am sorry.”

Great. So your cat’s dead too. That’s fine. You’ll just add it to the list of stuff to ugly cry about when you have your next breakdown.

You swallow at the ball in your throat. Then choke on it as Ratchet slides a cool metal instrument into a particularly ghastly wound on your abdomen. The pipes screech this time, their loudest yet, as though they vocalize the agony your show of bravado won’t allow you to.

“I know it’s uncomfortable-” he starts in that calm, cool, but also slightly agitated bedside manner that tells you he’s as frustrated as you are.

“-Uncomfortable doesn’t cut it.”you pant, biting the inside of your cheek

“-But if you manage to stop fidgeting for a whole ten seconds, then I’ll give you a lollipop.”

“You don’t have lollipops.” you huff back.

“I do and they’re laced with pre-war high grade.”
You shut up and stop fidgeting.

The cold pressure subsides, and you look down to see a thin line where the wound once was, nearly indistinguishable from the rest of your skin. “I’ve got two more sutures to do, one on each of your wrists, and we’re done.”

The promise of candy imbued with the sense-dulling power of a handle of tequila and a punch in the face has you feeling effectively placated. So you man up, grit your teeth, and, and totally don’t look away like a total pussy as he sews up the (mostly bloodless) hole on your wrist.

You don’t fidget, and you’re awfully proud of yourself for that. But you do cry out this time, a sharp “Ha...!” when the metal pierces your skin. They must’ve had the tube in here the longest, or inserted it the most messily, maintained it the worst, or all of the above because holy hell it burns. You screw your eyes shut, burying your face in your shoulder. A high whine rises in your throat that you’re not going to let turn into a sob since you’re not a wuss, but it’s promptly drowned out by the whining, screeching, screaming as the pipes reach a crescendo as metal parts from metal and you realize it isn’t the pipes and never was.

Optimus had been slowly crushing the railing between his servos the entire time, and during your last cry of pain, he had torn it in half. Which in itself was an impressive but understandable show of absentminded strength. The fact that he’d also ripped the concrete wall it was welded to off the ground however, may be cause for concern.

He regards the twisted metal and concrete in his servos with a sort of detached surprise, blinking several times, before turning to both you and Ratchet, who’s jaws have dropped in unison.

“My apologies,” he says slowly. “I did not intend to exert so much force. I must excuse myself.”

He lies the wall segments down carefully on the other side of the room, in a surreal show of gentleness, before making his way to the door.

“Docbot,” you start softly once you’ve relocated your jaw. “Do you still feel like answering questions?”

“Feel like or feel obliged to?”

You pause to allow him to finish his work on your other wrist, taking care to keep your mouth sewn shut this time (and briefly consider asking him to do so surgically) he releases your hand, and you let it fall to your side.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Ratchet’s optics linger on the doorway after Optimus’s departure for a moment too long, until it closes with a pneumatic whoosh, and they flit back to you. He furrows his optical ridges, mouth set in an uncomfortable frown that wordlessly conveys ”I don’t have the energy to tell you and you don’t have the energy to listen.” that hangs in the air between you both.

“As I’m sure you’ve been able to gather-” He says with a deep-chested sigh. “-Optimus has not been the same since the accident.”

In the paradoxically lulling, frantic energy of it all you’d almost forgotten. Forgotten that despite the in-character-off-color banter you’d come to expect they’d both seen some serious shit and your
sudden re-introduction into their lives would not instantly remedy it.

“While spreading ourselves across your planet sounds like a tactically sound move-” he says, making his way over to a supply cabinet and procuring an oversized confectionery that glows a deep, ominous orange. “-It was initiated because there were those among our ranks who had...difficulty in dealing with the change.”

He presses the lollipop into your hands, and you don’t hesitate to shove as much as you can of it into your mouth because that is depressing as hell.

“Ironhide took it the hardest. He was the first to vocalize his discontent, and once he broke the ice others soon followed. It was Jazz who eventually suggested we split up, Primus bless him, mostly in an effort to save face and keep things from getting ugly.”

You bite off a chunk of the lollipop and chew it. Work damnit work.

“Bulkhead and Arcee, while fiercely loyal, never worked with him directly while on Cybertron, and didn’t experience the change firsthand, so they had no adjusting to do, so to speak.”

You wonder if the lollipop will work faster as a suppository. You’re not sure if you want to find out with docbot watching.

“Hookay, so, uh, medically wise, tell me how fucked up I am from having those goons play operation on me.” you say in a desperate bid to change the subject. “Like, on a scale from 1 to 10, with ten being I’m actively bleeding to death.”

“Three. It would be two if I more thoroughly understood your species aging process, or your...lack thereoff.” It then dawns on you that despite your gratuitous physical injuries your face remains glowing(literally) and wrinkle free, you seem to have escaped the ravages of age and delving into that probably warrants an entire thesis worth of conversation you don’t feel like having now. Ratchet, thankfully, seems to be of a similar mindset as he offers his servo, which you cautiously climb into.

He then retracts the plating on his forearm to reveal a separate interface next to his usual vital monitor, which, to your astonishment, seems to exist for the sole purpose of monitoring your vitals. “You’ve lost a lot of fluids, but your body had compensated for it exceedingly well. In fact, now that you’re conscious, and given a chance to recover without being-” he shudders. “-farmed, you may experience an excess in energon production, which will likely result in radically shortened recovery period.”

“Cool.” you say flatly. “Does that mean I get to throw on my ninja suit and resume comic-book ass kicking as normal?”

“While I certainly don’t advise it, and would prefer we take things slowly until I’ve had a few days to check over you and get a better idea of how your new new body operates, light “ninja activities” should be acceptable” he says, making air quotes with his digits.”

“Wonderful.” you say with flat sarcasm. “I’m sure Fowler will be thrilled the single remaining adult human member of the Arc will be able to slide back into their fake identity right away.”

“After the schism, we’ve actually been referred to as “Team Prime”.” Ratchet corrects you. “And while I took the upmost care in packing your belongings before the move, I’m afraid you might have
to procure a new wardrobe. Neelix became immensely protective of the clothing you left behind, I imagine due to the olfactory residue, and it went with him when he left with Ironhide.”

You whimper a little, not just because your entire wardrobe now consists of a flimsy hospital gown, but mostly because that’s the fourth saddest thing you’ve heard today. Your heart aches. You hug your knees, remembering the feel of his stupid furry face against your stupid face. There’s something dangerously close to tears in the corners of your eyes, but you bite your lip and press it down.

“Fuck.” you say softly. “That’s the fourth saddest thing I’ve heard today.”

“Considering the drop in temperature and your state of dress...” Ratchet begins, rather awkwardly, as he reaches into his subspace and produces the fuzziest, eye burning-est polka-dotted fleece blanket you’ve ever seen in your life. “-I suggest you cover yourself with this until we’re able to acquire more appropriate frame coverings.”

You wipe the corners of your eyes, because you’re allergic to missing your cat and gratefully accept the blanket and swaddle yourself until you roughly resemble a silk moth pupae. “Thank you.” you sigh in relief, having removed at least one source of stress. “So...since Optimus...” needs some space. “-is busy and it’s probably inappropriate to share a bedroom Bumblebee, where can I pass out for the night?”

“Well, there is a couch in the common room the children use that you could recharge on until we can set up a hab-suite.”

“Is it clean?”

“I believe I just informed you that the children use it.” he says with a shudder. “I have yet to do a bacterial swab and I don’t want to, but considering the amounts of half eaten organic fodder I find lying around it...”

You grimace. “Is there another option?”

“There is. I could also resume vehicular mode and have you rest inside my cabin, which I am perfectly capable of heating and could more easily track your progress, until I am certain you’re stable.”

Your heart skips a beat. You’re 99.9% positive that offer comes from a place of compassion and for a moment you seriously consider it, but the way his optics linger on you just a little too intensely keeps you from being at ease.

“I think I’m okay.” you say nervously, recalling your last ride with Optimus and having no foolproof way of differentiating his sensitive equipment from his sensitive equipment. “I mean, I can’t imagine it’d be comfortable for you to recharge like that.”

“I experience few, if any noticeable differences between recharge in vehicular and root mode.

*That’s not why I think you’d be uncomfortable.* “I’m fine.” you say with the firm assertiveness of a wet sponge. “Honestly, you can probably set me down.”

He doesn’t move. He doesn’t reply. You feel a gush of air from his mouth, as if he were beginning to speak but thought better of it. Your heart sinks when you tilt your head up to see him, lips set in a flat line, cyan optics half-mast and impossibly soft.
"I know it hasn't even been a full vorn since we landed on your planet, but it has been a very, very long thirty years without you." he says, barely audible as he cradles you against his chassis. "Please... just let me take care of you."

***

It's nearly an hour later when you finally found the courage to excuse yourself.

Ratchet had set you down, you’d made painful small talk, (painful only in the sense that you really, really wanted to leave) time had done nothing to harm the rapport between you two and conversation, no matter how much tension filled the room, came easily.

"Did Sunstreaker gently love the last vcr we had into a million pieces?"

"He did and he still buys them from online auctions and raids yard sales with a holomatter avatar modeled after Thin White Duke."

You’re still not quite sure you actually heard that combination of words come out of his mouth. But that’s roughly when the highgrade lolipop had finally kicked in, and you’d spent at least thirty of those minutes face down on the medical slab listening to what you thought was talk radio, which turned out to be Ratchet swearing loudly while trying to stomp out a fire. You’d seen no remnants of the blaze when you could sit up without your head spinning and didn’t inquire further.

You’d paused at the door before you left. The entirety of your experience in the realm of the primes itched at the boundaries of your awareness, and you considered dumping at least some of it off on him, just to release the pressure on the valve, but soon after he’d reached into one of the cabinets, procured a cube, made no effort whatsoever to mask it’s contents, and threw it back like a shot. You figured there’s at least three more where that came from, so you marched yourself backwards out of the door. And fled.

No more than a minute of stumbling down the dimly lit hallway and you found yourself int he common room, which also functions as the communications hub. It’s almost empty. You figure Arcee and Bulkhead are on “curbside duty” as they’d put it and watching over their respective charges. You also assume that’s where Bee went, and would be too busy keeping vigil to spend any time with you. That is, if he even wanted to after you’d humiliated him earlier.

Optimus remains there alone, pouring over a map of MECH locations, both known, suspected, and destroyed (As indicated by the cheerful flaming skull and crossbones, You assume one of the technologically-inclined human children had something to do with that.) You’d tapped on his foot. You’d nervously cleared your throat when he turned from the screen to peer down at you. And found yourself at a loss for words.

"I’m sorry.” you wanted to say. "I’m sorry you had to raise Bumblebee alone, I’m sorry your size changing shapeshifting dick put me in a coma, I’m sorry you were tricked, I’m really pissed that you trusted Fujiyama and you let Bee be a scout but mostly I just missed you. Please talk to me.”

“Guh.” you say with literic ingenuity.

He gives you a long, frustrated look, the kind that tells you there’s a thousand words on the tip of his
glossa and he refuses to say a single one.

“I am sorry, (y/n), but I am unable to part from my work at the moment.”

You really should have seen this coming. nothing says intimacy issues like breaking your partner’s pelvis and putting them in a coma. And while you can come to terms with that, you’re still brilliantly blind-sided by how much his internalized pain is hurting you. Optimus’s shoulders had never been cold before. And it, bluntly put, sucks.

So here you stand, dressed like a colorblind nomad, picking through a cardboard box of your severely outdated belongings in a repurposed underground missal silo, the faint mechanical whirring your only company. It’s textbook sad, heck the box even has a faded “ride side up” arrow pointing in the wrong direction on the side. You’re just missing an emotive piano sonata or a violin solo. The ambient, methodical clacking of Optimus’s digits cross the keyboard will have to do. He’s since re-immersed himself in his search and hasn’t acknowledged your presence further.

A ball forms in your throat. You’ve got at least a graphic novel’s worth of adventures in the astral realm to relay to him. You want to tell him about the twins, the labyrinth, the sick ass bossfight, Elita, and oh, how your heart crunches painfully inwards on itself just remembering her name. But while you could probably throw a piece of the broken mirror ball and hit him on the back of the helm with it, he may as well be miles away from you.

You stomp that down, and shake your head. Enough with the victim mentality. You’re alive. Optimus and Ratchet are alive, you missed a quarter of a century of Bee’s childhood, but he’s also alive. Everyone is alive and you’re grateful for it, so it’s time to pour the liquor out and call the cops on this pity party.

You toss the mirror ball in all it’s mangled hideous glory in the trash, throw out the stupid costume you’d bought to go with it(Then, thinking better of it, retrieve it, since it’s currently your only clothing), turn the box upside down, shake it, then break it down in an orderly fashion to be put in the recycling like a responsible relic of a bygone era.

And that’s when you see the bear.

A stuffed bear. A stuffed bear wearing a fez with button eyes spaced just far enough apart that you can’t tell if it’s wall eyed or just having a really good time. You recognize it as one of the many Astoria had dumped off on you for Bee. You kneel down to get a better look, cardboard still tucked under your arm.

It’s a pretty big bear, probably came off the top shelf of the prize rack where the stuff you shouldn’t be able to win for any reason ever collected dust. Back when you’d first presented it to him he couldn’t wrap this arms around it and make his servos touch. Now it’s roughly the size of his thumb.

"You missed 30 earth birthdays, five plating upgrades and a bot-mitsvah."

It then occurs to you that in the span of your short, highly unusual life, you’d wound up raising two children. And had never seen either of them grow up.

You drop the cardboard. You pull the bear into your arms in a deathgrip, bury your face in it’s soft, dusty faux fur and rock yourself slowly back and fourth on the floor, humming the refrain of Major Tom under your breath, blinking away tears from the corners of your eyes.
Least Volatile

Chapter Summary

Has it REALLY BEEN SINCE SEPTEMBER FUCK ME

pls enjoy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Your last few days of adjusting had been nice. Aside from being a shell shocked time traveler in a strange land and adjusting about as effectively as a goldfish in a saltwater aquarium to the current decade, it’s been pleasant.

Your mutation due to energon exposure had not stopped, slowed down or been otherwise hampered by your three decade long dance with somnolence, and your transformation (so to speak) had continued on unfettered. The inability to consume human food and not needing to use the bathroom was old news, but now your bones had apparently begun integrating metal alloys alongside the calcium, your body emits a constant low hum, and when it’s dark enough the places on your body where the skin is thinnest (namely eyes, collar bone, joints, and nether regions) now give off a faint unearthly blue light.

But aside from becoming a human glowstick, the most jarring side effect by far is your newfound, and extreme, sensitivity to the bot’s EM fields.

On your first night back, having fallen into a fitful sleep with the fez-sporting teddy bear in a death grip, you had a nauseating nightmare which basically amounted to swathes of yellow and purple lights flashing behind your eyes and blind panic. You’d finally broken free from it’s clutches in the wee hours of the morning, and given the middle finger to any further attempt at rest. You laid face down on the couch with your head buried in a pillow for god knows how long, until stricken with the curious sensation of having had a handle sewn into your back that intertwined seamlessly into your nervous system. And then, subsequently, had it yanked.

After the shock wore off, you lifted your bleary head to see Arcee strolling into the room. Silently. You offered an awkward “Hi” and the face she made before returning it, mild disbelief and surprise, suggested it was more than your imagination.

When the handle is once again pulled, though more softly, and in a distinctive downwards fashion, Bulkhead has entered, stretching his helm and neck joints and making painful noises to accompany it, but wishing you a cheerful good morning nonetheless.

Bumblebee came in next. Despite all odds it seems he had, in fact, grown into a morning person, because he doesn't just walk in. He says nothing, his footsteps are no more alarming than that of his teammates, but he may as well have announced his presence with a band of trumpets and a royal entourage The handle has been set aflame, the fire is spreading down your back and someone has injected liquid sunshine in your veins.
For a moment, the sleep deprivation is gone, the anxiety is gone, all of your fear and worries have evaporated, and you feel like you’ve just woken up from a 12 hour nap and snorted powdered rainbow. Everything is bright and beautiful because everything is your son.

“Hey Bee!” you squeal, throwing your hand over your head to wave frantically while simultaneously throwing the bear to the side, dismounting the couch and scrambling over to the railing. It turns out you can only do three of those things, because in your enthusiasm your foot slips and you land face-first on the floor.

Fortunately, you had not managed to throw the bear far, and it had mostly broken your fall. That doesn't stop Bee from emitting a burst of panicked static and running over to your side.

“Can you be more careful, please?” he asks, genuine in his concern, but your own humiliation, and your fear that you'd only humiliated him further by proxy, prompts you to end the exchange with a sheepish “Sorry.”

You asks him where his father is before he has a chance to awkwardly shuffle away. He gives you a hesitant, uncomfortable look, before gesturing towards the workstation.

Optimus had not moved an inch since you last closed your eyes. That low, persistent grinding beneath the handle that you'd taken for a stress-induced tremor in your back was actually his field. A chugging, uneven rhythm, like a boxcar on a railroad with a loose wheel. That can't be healthy. You know fuck all about how a healthy field should feel but you know that's not healthy. He hadn't recharged all night, and lord knows how long it's been since he recharged before that.

Your stomach twisted. You should probably say something. You're going to say something and snap him out of that trance even if you have to put him in another, phobia-induced one by touching him. You grit your teeth, summon the strength to force yourself from your seat and hopefully make it down the stairs without kissing the floor again. But right as you've established solid footing you nearly lose it again as the handle is grappled, pinched, dropped, and promptly grappled again in the span of three seconds. You have no idea if that's an improvement or the opposite, but it knocks the breath out of you either way.

"What in the PIT do you think you're doing?!"

Ratchet, unlike Bee, is not a morning person. He is, in fact, so very much not a morning person that no version of him across the infinite span of realities is, was or will ever be, a morning person. His field hurts. Not even in the straightforward way, but in a scratching, prickly, itching-an-insect-bite-when-you-know-you're-not-supposed -to-kind of way

Optimus, having achieved an almost zen-like state of zombification, continues his concentration, unfettered by the medic's protests. That is, until Ratchet walks over and physically grabs his shoulder.

He reacts exactly as you expected he would. With a jolt, a rapid whirl-around and backing himself away so violently he nearly falls aft-backwards onto the keyboard. In any other situation it would have been comedic, but your heart only sinks further.

"Sorry." Ratchet says gruffly, though genuinely after a moments pause. "Or I would be if there had been any other way to snap you out of it."
Optimus vents rapidly as his cooling fans kick into action, bringing up a servo to press against his helm. "I did not realize there was anything I required... snapping out of."

"Of course you didn't. That's what happens when you force yourself to function on less than six hours of recharge."

Optimus blinks, slowly, the faintest show of guilt flashing behind his optics.

"I have not yet had the opportunity to recharge at all-"

"You-" Ratchet sharply gestures towards the hallway housing the hab suites. "-berth. Now."

"I have not yet completed my-"

"If you don't march your sorry aft back to your room this instant I will kick it there myself!" he snarls. "This is the third night in a row you've missed recharge. As the chief medical office I am ordering you to sleep. And if I come back there three breems from now and find you doing anything but I will have you sedated, do you understand?!"

You expect his mouth to fall open, for him to throw his servos up, to show any sign of surprise, but his face remains stoic. His shoulders do slouch slightly in a show of exhausted relent, and he looses a heavy sigh as he turns away from his station, at long last, and towards the hallway.

Which happens to take him directly past you.

He looks like the walking dead, pedestepps graceful even in this state, more marionette than reanimated corpse, but the blank, unseeing stare he gives the floor with his helm tilted downward is still far from alive. You swallow nervously, biting your lip, wondering exactly what kind of necromancer-tier bullshit you're going to have to pull out of your ass to drag him kicking and screaming back into the realm of the living.

He raises his helm from the floor briefly as he passes by. His optics meet your eyes, and for a moment, there's a change. Faded blue is once again brilliant cobalt as recognition flashes behind them, like a beacon sighted in a sea of dust. They soften, and crinkle ever so slightly as the gentlest, weariest smile spreads over his lips.

You smile back. At least, you're pretty sure you do. After all, you can only look at a steel angel's face for so long before your own goes numb and your heart goes soaring off into the stratosphere.

He leaves while you're trying to pull it back into your chest. Your eyes are still glued to his back and you want nothing more than to go tearing off after him as fast as your little mouse legs will take you, off to a quiet and dark place where you and your elephant can touch and rest without words. But that would require a return to where you'd left off, to where he wasn't terrified of his own embrace and you weren't too defeated to convince him otherwise.

For now, you're left with little option other than slumping back down on the couch. And finding something else to preoccupy yourself with.

"(y/n)" comes the voice of your welcome distraction as Ratchet comes up to the railing, optics narrowed analytically. "Can I safely assume you experienced adequate recharge?"

He's close enough you can feel his venting against your skin. The warmth of it flushes pleasantly
against your face, and curiously enough, the moment you've subconsciously had a chance to register the sensation as "nice", the clumsy fingers slipping against the handle recede, replaced by a firm, but comfortable hold, like two tightly, trusting, intertwined hands.

You grin. You can't help yourself. "You assumed correctly." Aside from the nightmares and tossing and turning and waking up every ten minutes.

He smiles back. There's a warm jolt trickling down your back. "At least I can count on one of you to take care of yourself. Though considering your less than ideal sleeping situation, I'm surprised you managed to get any at all."

There's a hint of bitterness in the last part of his sentence, one you're pretty sure isn't par for the course with his general crankiness. If you had to hazard a guess, it probably stems from turning down the offer to pass out in his cab last night. The hold on your field had digressed in quality from secure to slippery once more as he sighs deeply and turns away. You try your best not to think about it, and search for an appropriately engaging distraction to carry your mind.

Bulkhead had disappeared almost as suddenly as he'd come, peeling out through the bot-sized base exit, somewhere towards the city limits of Jasper. Arcee and Bumblebee, after perusing the fruits of Optimus's tireless search of MECH's ulterior locations, had located several points of interest, and set forth on their respective wolf hunts. You're glad he'd left the room, because for a moment the urge to wrap your tiny mouse hands around his metal throat and throttle him for making your baby boy a scout is overwhelming. Your hands are still twitching, but logic kicks in before steam starts coming out of your ears. He is, at least by most cultural standards on your planet, a grown-ass man, and if he retained any of the stubbornness you saw blossoming in him as a sparkling then Optimus probably couldn't have stopped him if he wanted to.

That does little to quell the fear rising in you throat as he and Arcee vanish into the whirling cerulean iris of the ground bridge before you'd had so much as a chance to marvel stupidly at the technology.

Ratchet had retreated into his lab, which doubled as the primary infirmary and also the other half of the common room, so he hadn't so much disappeared as he had made himself unavailable. He wobbled slightly as he walked, and his optics didn't seem to be blinking in stereo. You suspect despite his berating of Optimus for skipping out on sleep he hadn't fared much better. That or he'd once again pulled the cybertronian equivalent of pouring tequila in his cherios.

Both of those possibilities are pretty grim, so you leave them under the couch as you get up, stretch your screaming back and neck and retrieve a solitary cube you'd left on top of the television set for breakfast. There's also an unopened soda can lying among the discarded ones. Off brand grape flavor. Curiosity gets the better of you and you pour a third of the can into your cube. It tastes like carbonated ass and rocket fuel but so does your life.

So you drink it. It's artificially sweetened swill and alcohol but it's still missing something. Like rust shavings, paranoia and a constant uninterrupted stream of bullshit war stories. All of which Inferno, Red Alert and Ironhide would have provided. You miss your three stooges. You miss your cat. Hell, you miss Sunstreaker. You'd had enough of the goblin king during you out of body adventure to last you the rest of your life, but you could probably stand a few hours of glam rock and nervous xenophobic insults to cover up a celeb crush if it meant something to do.

"Yo Rip Van Winkle!" comes a completely unfamiliar high pitched voice from somewhere below. "How was your 30 year nap?!"
Something to do had come in the form of the three highschool students Bulkhead had delivered right to your figurative doorstep. *Thanks dude.* Three high school students you'd only been briefly warned about by Ratchet, are obligated to spend the entire weekend at base for safety reasons, had no homework, and came equipped with a four pack of redbull tallboys, three video game consoles and enough junkfood to feed a small army. The one who had heckled you has an electric amp tucked under one arm and a guitar case strapped to her back.

You swear under your breath. You summon the short and sarcasm laden briefing Ratchet had given you on the three to the forefront of your mind. You wonder exactly how many combinations could possibly exist for his liquor cabinet and if you could solve it before resorting to homicide.

The one with the guitar, pigtails, and no shred of tact had wasted no time bouncing up the staircase and inspecting you with a suspicious eye. "You don't look like you're in your 50's. I mean, neither does my mom but she's had a *lot* of work done." she makes mock slicing gestures with an invisible scapula and slicing noises to emphasize.

"Miko Nakadai. Fast moving. Fast talking. Frequently endangers herself and others. Likes loud music and Bulkhead. Volatile." you could guess at what he'd actually meant by "volatile", considering her course of action had steered immediately into giving you a history/sociology lesson from the late 80's to present day. Mostly by explaining the internet. You had un-enthusiastically accepted with a "what could go wrong" attitude.

Which is how you'd wound up spending the last three hours watching compilations of videos sutured together from other videos to achieve a surrealistic shock-comedic effect. Miko had found them hilarious. You had found them too eerily reminiscent of the way Soundwave communicated to find them anything other than creepy.

"Wait, so you've never even *heard* of a youtube poop?"

"I haven't" you tell her for the third but what felt like the hundredth time that day.

"But you've been back for like, a whole day and a half already. What about a *vine*, you have to have seen a-

"No Miko, I haven’t seen a vine. I don’t know what lemon party or goatse are nor do I understand what the fuck a “meme” is. “you growl, slapping a hand to the side of your face. "The last time I saw a computer was 1985 and we used them for important things, not...whatever the fuck I'm looking at."

"Important things huh?" Miko says, cupping her face in her hands in a sarcastic gesture of rapt attention, and narrowing her eyes. “Today we use them to break down cultural and class barriers with abstract humor and uncensored information exchange. But naw, I’m sure whatever you used them for was totally more important.”

You open her mouth to thoroughly school her on how important your (admittedly primitive) computer usage for collection of astronomical data back in your outpost lab was. You then close it, upon the realization that datapads absolutely qualify as computers and the last time you used one was to eavesdrop on a xenophobic conversation Sunstreaker and Mirage were having and to flirt with Optimus.

"Lay off Miko." The oldest, dark haired boy calls over from the couch, brandishing a second controller like a plastic LED olive branch above his head. "Most adults who were *awake* for the last
30 years don't understand all this stuff."


“So... you’re like Captain America then?” The youngest, bespectacled child chimes in for the first time that day. He’d been so quiet, methodically punching away at his laptop you’d almost forgotten he was there. “Just missing a huge chunk of time and feeling really out of place?”

Rafael Esquivel Least volatile. Can be helpful in managing problems with earth software. Is friends with Bumblebee.

If Raf had hit the nail on the head any harder he’d have broken the hammer. You scrunch your face as you test the comparison in your head. Solid. “Yeah. That’s a pretty good way of putting it.”


You’re grateful Bee isn’t here to hear that, but still remiss because right now Jack and Raf are the only things standing between Miko and you crushing her windpipe, and they’re too distracted giving her the look(tm) . Which, to your dismay, is more disappointed than shocked.

Oh my god.

“Okay, hold on, we have no way of knowing that’s what happened.” Jack says far too quickly after a cautious glance in your direction

“Optimus said, and I quote, “She was injured during an "encounter."” Miko groans, rolling her eyes. “We all know what that means. I’m not dense.”

“You’re also not very sensitive.” Jack says, accentuating sensitive with a smack to the back of her head. “It doesn’t matter how obvious it is, you don’t just go around saying stuff like that!”

On one hand, maybe it's a good thing that they knew. Considering the amount of interest your other teammates had shown before the accidents, and your directive to write the robot kama sutra, sharing information like this, rather than covering it up, is a big step forward. Especially considering the age of your new teammates, their curiosity is probably best approached with tact and honesty. You’d explained your angle to Optimus back with the original human crew with this exact logic. You can hardly be upset.

On the other hand, you’ve now acquired enough humiliation to sustain yourself for at least two or three more karmic cycles and if you’re going to be spending the next few lifetimes as a brainless mollusk or sea cucumber to make up for it you’d rather start now.

"-I mean they even called her Bee's mom, and 'bots don't grow on trees, Jack." Miko continues nonplussed. "I mean, I don't actually know where they grow from or how they make new ones-

"However they do it, it's none of our business."
"None of our business yet. What if they make more? What if we have to start babysitting? Or, uh, bot sitting, or-scap. What do they call babies again?"

"They're called sparklings." Raf answers with the smallest twinge of exasperation in his voice. "Or, at least that's the closest possible english translation. Speaking the actual word would require the use of autotune for a human voice to say."

You're starting to like Raf. You'd thank him if you weren't currently scanning your surroundings for something to kill yourself with. You weren't even sure you could be humiliated even further, but now that Bee's been dragged into it, and you're feeling his second hand embarrassment firsthand just thinking about it, that's probably another cycle in of itself. Whelp. Let's get this sea cucumber shit over with. At least it's a relatively quick three lifetimes. *Live fast, die young and have a symbiotic relationship with a fish that lives up your butt.* Hell, you might even make it back in time for Bee's 31st birthday or a fourth plating upgrade.

You've whittled your options down to either smashing your head into the tv set or crafting a noose out of the wires Raf had left protruding from his carrying case. But before you can make your final decision the boy in question, who seems to have taken concern at how quiet you'd gotten, takes advantage of Miko's sudden absence (She'd vacated the couch some time ago to make a visual point by forcing an empty soda can into a cardboard tube, which had subsequently split.) and scooches over to you.

"Wanna see something me and Bee have been working on?"

"Sure." you reply loftily. You're still deciding which knot to use until he shoves the laptop into your lap and hits play.

It takes you a moment to realize what you're looking at. At first glace it's footage of some random (admittedly attractive) young man with electric yellow blonde hair dancing in what appears to be a corner of the common room of the very base you're in now. And by dancing you mean first degree murder because he is absolutely *killing it*. You've never see a human move like this. At least, not one with bones. It's not until you reach a brief blip in the video where the dancer's body seems to freeze and temporarily flit in and out of existence to you realize it's not not a human at all, but a holomatter avatar.

"Is....is that Bee?" you ask, disbelief in your voice.

"It is. Raf says. "He can really tear up a dance floor, and by tear up, I mean literally. We broke a lot of stuff. It didn’t take long for Ratchet to get mad so we started working on this-"

He minimizes the video player to reveal a bunch of windows and what might be a compiler filled with programming language gobbledygook you absolutely don't understand.

"This is great!" you say with the pure-hearted enthusiasm of a confused grandparent. "I can really see the effort you two put into the...thing."

Raf spares you the "*are you fucking kidding me*" look of disdain most tech savvy children would give to a geriatric like yourself. "This is an emulator. There’s a lot of games for humans now that let you play by tracking your movements and keeping score with a real dancer they green-screened during development. Only Bee is way too big to play, the game’s face recognition is pretty glitchy with the holomatter avatars, and mass conversion is kind of a bad idea with energy supplies so low."
So I'm just re-calibrating it so it'll recognize a sixteen foot tall player. But... please don't tell him yet." he finishes on a sheepish note "It's a surprise."

Your jaw drops.

"That's... really thoughtful and considerate of you Raf." you say, feeling warmth spread throughout your chest. And blinking back tears, because this is easily the happiest you've been all day. Not only had Bee finally managed to acquire a human friend, he'd acquired the absolute kindest and most perfect one in existence.

"I really hope he'll like it." he says, pushing his glasses back up on his face. "I know he's been pretty stressed lately.

Gee I can't imagine why. You compress the humiliation before it has a chance to flood back up. Chronic worry and fear you're a pro at ignoring. But embarrassment is a new beast. It goes down lukewarm to the front of your chest and makes itself at home. You'll have to find some way of evicting it later.

"So... I know you can communicate with Bee." you start out warily. "Can I ask how?"

"Well..."Raf begins after a thoughtful pause. "I guess it's a lot like how you two do."

You blink.

"You what?"

"Well, okay, not exactly, but probably close. I can hear some of the frequencies Bee uses to talk that the other bots can, but humans can't. So I get almost everything he says, except for some of the adjective strings, but I'm working on that."

"How?"

"Kids my age can hear a bunch of things adults can't. When human ears aren't fully developed they can usually hear past the upper auditory limit, which is 20khz. So I can still hear him most of the time."

That makes sense. It also explains at least some of how you're able to hear him yourself, although the nuts and bolts of exactly how your psychic connection i.e. "bond" with him had developed aside from using "energon exposure" as a blanket statement remains unresolved. It also, unfortunately, leads to a rather depressing realization.

"So that means as you get older, you're not going to be able to understand him anymore." you say, cautiously, sinking disappointment in your chest at the prospect of Bee losing the ability to talk to his friend.

"Yeah, but we're already working on a way around that." Raf smiles brightly. "Ratchet's helping me design some custom hearing aids that will let me hear into the ultrasonic spectrum, so I'll be able to talk to him no matter how old I get."

You feel a glimmer of genuine hope for probably the first time since having your soul forced back into the meat puppet you call your body. You sigh happily. "That's really cool Raf."
“Isn’t it?” he says a little too fast, a flash of excitement behind his bespectacled eyes. “I’m glad you think so. Jack and Miko are fun, but they don’t really want to listen to me about this stuff. Actually, mostly only Bee and Ratchet ever want to listen to me about it. And even Bee can get tired of it pretty fast. When it comes to the um, more technical side of things, I mostly only have Ratchet to talk to.”

The universe punctuates his statement for him as a frustrated yelp peals across the room from the vicinity of the lab, followed by the distinctive thud of servos being pounded on a keyboard.

"Ratchet-" Raf calls over his shoulder. "Do you need help?"

"I mostly certainly do not require help!" he barks back.

Raf looses the tiniest little sigh and rolls his eyes. "Do you want help?"

A pause. Then finally.

"If you honestly have nothing else to occupy your time with, then perhaps you could attempt repairing this confounded overly complicated earth based operating system I've been forced to utilize."

"It's Unbuntu, Ratchet, and it's as simple as they get." Raf says quietly under his breath, but a good natured smile covers his face nonetheless as he folds his laptop, tucks it under his arm and hops off the couch.

You follow him on foot down the winding staircase and into the lab, where Ratchet is still mumbling under his breath. He has what, to your untrained eyes appears, to be a something akin to the messaging system he'd enabled on your personal datapad decades ago, though the interface is in english and clearly meant for humans.

"What's the problem?" Raf asks.

"The problem is that I sent a message to Ironhide for the first time in a stellar-cycle this morning to inform him that (y/n) had finally woken up, and instead of replying in text with a human alphabet he sent me a glyph as an image that this derelict machine is refusing to let me open!" he snarls, optics still set on the screen.

"You got a message from Ironhide?" you almost squeak, fists clenched in excitement. "Holy crap, how's he doing? How's Inferno doing? Did they ever convince Red Alert to start taking his meds?"

Ratchet whips around so fast he knocks a wrench off the desk, which thankfully clatters to the floor a safe distance from you and your equally squishy companion. You still flinch.

"(y/n)-" He begins, tempering his voice. "-If I had known you were coming, I would have offered to carry you. Your injuries-"

"-Are already healing at an accelerated rate." you quip back. "You yourself said "light ninja activity" was acceptable."

"I would prefer that you allow me to preform a brief motor skill and muscular-skeletal assessment daily before you engage in any activity at all. Not to mention your sutures, which I haven't even-"
"I walked three hundred feet, Ratchet."

He squints at you, jaw set in a firm line, though eventually relents with a sigh, before turning his attention back to Raf.

"Would you like to sit on my shoulders for a better view? The both of you?" He asks somewhat deflated. "Normally I wouldn't suggest it, but if you insist on helping-"

"Sure! Raf replies brightly, clambering into his offered servo. It's a tight fit, but you manage to squeeze in next to him before he gently deposits the two of you on either side of his helm. It's been a while since you'd sat like this with Ratchet, any bot really, but now that you're actually 25 dizzying feet off the ground and clutching his plating for dear life, you can honestly say you missed it. There's something uniquely intimate about piggybacking on a giant that genuinely enjoys your company (and has the reflexes to catch you should you fall).

"Okay, so it looks to me like it just saved as the wrong file extension when you downloaded it." Raf says, pointing with his outstretched arm. "This should be an easy fix."

"Alright then."

"Just go back to the download link, right click "save as-"

"Mhhmmm-"

"-And pick "jpeg."

"Okay..."

"Now go to the file location and just click on the thumbnail."

There's a pause filled only with the ambient clatter of his digits dancing across the keyboard. You can feel his shoulders tightening beneath you as he leans forwards, squinting at the screen, and huffing in frustration.

"Where did it go?" he mutters. "I did everything you said, why isn't it in here-"

"-Because it's still in the Downloads folder. You're in My Pictures. You haven't moved it yet."

Ratchet swears under his breath on a frequency you're pretty sure Raf can still hear. Nevertheless, he ex-vents in relief as he locates the image at long last, clicks on it, and allows it to load.

Then, after a brief inspection of the single glyph it contains, proceeds to drive his fist into the desk.

"Sonovaglitch!"

"Wow." Raf says flatly.

"I... don't get it." you say after a brief pause. You recognize it, having seen it a number of times when accidentally receiving messages unintended for your eyes, but can't attach a meaning to it.

"He told Ratchet that he doesn't really believe him and needs proof." Raf says. "I think."
"A more appropriate translation in English would be "You're full of shit." Ratchet seethes between his denta. "And in the most childish way possible."

"It's a derivative glyph." Raf explains. "Like, advance pictorial slang. See this?" he says, gesturing towards the right of the image, which is comprised of a vertical rectangle and a solid sphere dotting the top, reminiscent of a lowercase "i". "In it's original form, before it was widely used, this used to be a representation of Solas Prime. And over here-" he gestures to the left of the image. "-used to be her using her forge. It was taken from a mosaic of her using it to craft the other artifacts. People began using it as a stand alone image to mean "to have completed a massive undertaking" or "to endeavor on something great." Some 'bots started using it sarcastically to imply the one who initially used it was blowing his accomplishment out of proportion, or just straight up lying, and the reputation stuck. Then they started editing the picture so that Solas was doing ridiculous things, like building a block castle or stacking energon cubes. Eventually it was simplified into just the suggestion of a figure, and the two blocks."

"So basically it's a meme." Miko says, having materialized out of thin air while you weren't paying attention. "You guys never told me you could speak in meme!"

"That's because we don't." Ratchet snaps back. "That is without a doubt the grossest oversimplification of our language I have ever had the misfortune of hearing."

Miko doesn't give Ratchet the courtesy of allowing him to finish before she's scurried off to (loudly) demand Bulkhead teach her how to say "Frosted Butts" and "Loss" in cybertronian. He sighs. Raf sighs. You're somewhere between being too confused to comment and trying to figure out an equally obnoxious way to respond to your favorite trigger happy-cat stealing cock-blocking douchebag.

"He said he wanted proof, right?" you start slowly. "Do we have a way of sending him a picture?"

"Naturally." Ratchet replies, still pinching the bridge between his optics and fore-helm.

"Then send him one of me." you offer, smiling and extending your middle finger. "Like this."

He raises an optical ridge. "That would be highly inappropriate." he begins, the faintest hint of a grin threatening at the corners of his mouth "...And, considering the circumstances, absolutely warranted."

"I have an external HD webcam in my bag." Raf offers. "Or we could use Miko's phone."

Ratchet opens his mouth, probably to once again take a verbal dump on human technology and lament about being deprived of a homeworld alternative, but a sharp bleep emanating from his left arm cuts him off. The plating flares open to reveal the screen used to track vitals. He furrows his brow.

"We'll have to continue this discussion later." he says, plucking the two of you from your perch on his shoulders like fingerpuppets and setting you back on the floor. "Optimus has been out of recharge for over an hour. I'm going to see if I can't persuade him to go back to sleep on his own, and if not, make good on my promise from earlier." he slaps a servo to the side of his helm, digging his digits in hard enough to scratch the metal. "I swear, if he's back there fiddling with that blasted prism again-"

Part of you feels like you should run off after him, and at least try to mediate the following encounter. The other part of you knows very well that if Ratchet is bent on aggressively sedating Optimus then there's little you could do to stop him.
"Oh, and (y/n), if you must insist on scurrying around the base, then please do so slowly." he says, throwing a glance over his shoulder. "I know you might be feeling fine, however-

"I know, I know, the sutures, my skeleton, yadda yadda, I'll be careful." you say, rolling your eyes.

"I know you will." He vents heavily, though a soft smile weaves its way onto his lips, a swathe of calm flitting by behind cerulean optics. "Thank you, (y/n)." he says, with an almost melodic timbre in his voice. "It's nice to have someone with enough sense to listen to me. And Raf, thank you for your help."

Raf blurs out a scratchy, warbling something you couldn't repeat if you tried.

"Ah ah," Ratchet tuts. "That's Polyhexian. Use Iaconian dialect."

Raf produces a noise that sounds marginally less painfully than the first one. You can only assume both of them had been variations of "you're welcome."

You turn to him once Ratchet has disappeared down the hallway leading to the hab suits.

"Well someone's been taking their cybertronian lessons seriously." you say, resisting the overwhelming urge to pull this small precious science person into you arms and never let go ever.

"Thanks." he says, cheeks flushed slightly. "I've been practicing really hard. Bee's helped me out a lot. He thinks it's really cool that I'm trying to learn his language, since he can't really speak mine."

You think Raf might actually give you diabetes if you touch him. You make a mental note to don a pair of gloves before hugging him.

“So... are you actually are his mom?” he ventures after a beat, nervously.

You blow out a breath. "Yeah. I am."

“Um...but you’re human.”

“I was. I mean, I am, but there was this accident and I wound up getting a energon into places it really shouldn’t have been—" and you realize mid speech exactly how bad that sound. “During a fight, I mean.” you elaborate before your face has a chance to flush. “And it mutated me pretty bad, and...” you trail off, too tired to explain the bio-chemistry behind your techno organic origins. You sigh, placing a weary smile on your lips. “I adopted Bumblebee. His carrier got hurt really bad before he was born and she died. Bee was born way too early because of that, and he was really sick, but because of how I mutated, I was able to save his life.”

Raf blinks. “Wow. That’s crazy. I mean I’m really glad you saved Bee, but what are the odds of something like that even happening?”

“Pretty much zero.” you say, smile intensifying. Unless you’re within a five mile radius of Optimus.

“Okay, so your not his carrier, which is like birth mom, but your still his mom.” Raf says slowly, clearly trying to register this to memory. “So...is Optimus really his dad? Or...uh-”

“Sire.” you say helpfully. “And yes, he is.”
“And you’re his girlfriend?”

“Yes. I am.” you say, narrowly avoiding choking on air. "Though I'm surprised you guys didn't figure that one out too."

"The bots don't really talk about that kind of stuff." Raf says. "They never made it a secret or anything, and if we asked a question they'd usually answer, even if it was cryptic. We sorta knew you were one of the bot's girlfriends, but we just didn't know who. We honestly thought it was Ratchet for a long time."

Your mouth falls open. You do choke a little this time. "You... did?" you ask unsteadily.

“Well, he always got upset when you were brought up, and one time when he had a really bad day and Miko called him docbot, he just kind of lost it, told her to never call him that again. He apologized, but later he told me that's what you used to call him. We just kind of put two and two together. But it looks like we did it wrong. “

You close your mouth to oprevent further choking. This does nothing however for your heart, which is trying it's damnedest to snap in two.

“Me and Ratchet are..” you begin, pausing, because "just friends" doesn't cut it. It implies that Ratchet is somehow less important to you because your relationship isn't romantic, and that couldn't be further from the truth. “...He's... really important to me. But our relationship isn't the same as the one I have with Optimus.”

"So you two are still really close?"

Your entire life with the medic thus far flashes before your eyes. It's 45% fantasy movies, 5% coffee, 50% metaphysical whackjob science and 100% "I trust you with my life and the lives of everyone I care about."

You simply nod in reply. "Yeah."

Raf looks like a lightbulb just went on in his head for how brightly he's glowing in his eureka moment. "So that's why he says your name differently!"

You cock your head to the side. "Differently?"

“Jack and Miko can't even hear it, so I think it's like an accent.” Raf replies.” I know in the version he and Optimus use the most, there's way more layers to everything, like descriptions, but they don't always put them there intentionally.” he says, pushing his glasses back up on his face. “They just kind of happen so when they're feeling an emotion the corresponding adjective string will just slip out with the rest of the word unless they try really hard to stop it. Kind of like a dog wagging it's tail when it's happy, or putting it's ears back when it's upset. They don't have a lot of control over it.”

You find yourself thinking back to the last conversion you had with Optimus before the seizure hit,
"They had to stop using it because it doesn't let you lie." you say, heart constricting at the unfairness of a language going extinct because it forces the truth. "But I'm really glad he's teaching it to you. It's..." you trail off, recalling the sweet nothings woven from static and steel choirs whispered into your ear. "...It's beautiful."

Raf nods. "It's really cool, and kind of hard not to notice when they slip into it. I don't know a lot of that particular dialect yet, so I don't understand what words he's actually saying. But I don't always need to, since it's supposed to sound the way it is, like how "quack" is the sound a duck makes but also the word for the sound a duck makes."

"So when they say something like "awesome" or "wonderful" then the word itself actually sounds that way."

"Yeah." His expression shifts to a sort of resigned apprehension that seems years beyond his young face. He averts his eyes. "Which might be why he only ever does this when he's around me, or thinks no one else is listening."

"Did he do it just now?"

"A little, but I think he was trying to downplay it since Bulkhead was close by. When it's just us, it's much more pronounced."

You swallow hard. You bite your lip. You hear every last cell in your brain shrieking at you to not inquire further and to drop this immediately. And you ignore them.

"What does it sound like?"

"Well," Raf begins, eyes once again flitting back up to yours. "When he says your name...it kinda sounds like music."

Chapter End Notes

If you're at all interested this is the dance I envision Bee absolutely destroying the floor to.
The dreams are getting more vivid.

What had begun as the palest pastel swatches of purple and yellow have erupted into brilliant mandala fractals of glittering saffron yellow, elephant gray and indigo simmering endlessly in a sea of black. There’s apprehension, a mounting burbling surge of *don’t want this* and *why the fuck am I here* with a pinch of *stop touching me*. You can smell feathers, clear, clean, having-never-once-touched-the-earth-feathers and feel them against your face. Your PoV switches endlessly between the role of an overhead observer, as if watching a stew come to boil, and some undetectable spice the recipe hadn’t called for folded into the miasma.

The fractals form the loosest, most abstract representation of a bird, which you also are. The transition between the two is most relatable to hanging of the outermost horse on a carousel spinning at 90 mph.

“*I’m really nauseous.*” you tell yourself, the bird.

The bird says nothing.

“*I think I’m going to vomit.*”

The bird says nothing.

“*You’ll vomit too.*”

The bird blinks. The bird opens it’s mouth.

“*WUB WUB BZZZZZTTZTVUPVUPVUPVUPWUB WUB BZZZZZTTTT.*”

You bolt upright on the couch. You grab the nearest bag and vomit into it. But that’s okay because you’re pretty sure it’s Miko’s backpack and she’s also the one responsible for the noise.

You’d dozed off on the couch. Not surprising, considering the quality of sleep you’d endured last night. You cluch your head, groaning as you screw your eyes shut. Even now the afterimages of the bird flash dappled behind your eyelids in all it’s psychoactive glory. Experimentally, you leave them closed for several seconds.

The image remains. That’s not good. But thank god it’s also not the most pressing matter you have to deal with.

“*Whoops, sorry.*” Miko says in a genuinely apologetic fashion, sliding the headphones off of one ear as she turns to look at you sheepishly. “*I forgot to plug them in before I hit play.*”
“That’s...fine.” you say blearily. You don’t know where that multicolored pulsating trainwreck was headed, but she’d probably done you a favor. Not that she needs to know that. You rub the corners of you eyes, looking ruefully at the ruined backpack, a fresh wave of guilt washing over you. “I’m....sorry about your stuff.”

“Oh don’t worry about it.” she says, waving a hand dismissively. “It was Jack’s anyways. Hey, now that you’re up, which one of these sounds better to you?”

She rips the earphones off her head and crams them onto yours before you can protest. You’re impressed by her speed and finesse. Irritated, but impressed. From what you’d heard most of her free time was spent narrowly avoiding death-from-above scuttling under the feet of giants after stowing away on missions with Bulkhead. Catlike reflexes(and her jolly green guardian’s silent prayers) are likely the only reason she’s still alive. Honestly, there’s probably more that the two of you have in common than you’d care to admit.

Like, for instance, her current choice of music. Both tracks, actually. Which, put bluntly, sounds like getting spit-roasted by both Optimus and Soundwave in a tin warehouse.

There’s grinding, chugging, heavy bass and electronic whirring and pistoning that mimics his ambient body noise in the throes of interface so thoroughly you’re having open-eye flashbacks. It’s pure symphonic sex and taking all of your willpower to keep a straight face and continue breathing normally.

“What the hell is this?!” you say finally, ripping the headphones off your head and wiping the hair out of your flushed face.

“Dubstep.” Miko says simply. “I thought more of the bots would like it, considering all the “robot noises” it uses” she says making air quotes. “But most of them get irritated or nervous when I play it out loud or ask me to stop, so I stick to the death metal when it’s my turn to dj.”

“Gee, I can’t imagine why.”

“So I’m guessing you don’t like it either?”

“I didn’t say that.” you reply a little too quickly, as though you’re not already making tentative plans to convert every track you can get your hands on to a file type your datapad will recognize. “In fact, uh, that last one-”

“Electric pussycat or five hour boner?”

“Um, you know what I’ll just take both.”

“Music pirating?” comes a disembodied voice from somewhere in the vicinity behind you. “That’s the most unpatriotic thing I’ve seen today. Then again, I didn’t wake up until noon. Pulled an all-nighter. Again.”

Having recognized the voice, you freeze in place. Even if you hadn’t, that kind of white-picket fence-apple-pie-tier pontificating can only have come from exactly one person, and that person is-

“Fowler.” you say, eschewing the holy shit sitting on you tongue for the sake of the children. The very same children who illegally pirate songs like five hour boner. You give him a once over. Then
another. Then another.

“I know what you’re thinking—” the far older, far more tired, no less despotic man begins. “But we don’t all get the privilege of a 30 year beauty sleep. Some of us age. Some of us get stressed.. Some of us get tortured by giant metal stiletto wearing freaks and still have to come into work because they used up all of their sick days in physical therapy from the last time they got run off the road by a ‘con.”

You don’t have enough time left in the day to help him unpack all of that. “I wasn’t thinking that at all.” you lie through you teeth. “You look—” you struggle to come up with a nicer alternative to old and out of shape. “-Old and out of shape.”

“And you look like a goddamn glowstick. Where’s Prime?”

“....Uh...” you say, having not anticipated a burn of that size, or any burn at all, for that matter, but also because you’re not sure not sure. The odds that he’d gotten back up to continue his search are about the same as the odds that Ratchet had made good on his promise to shoot him full of robot tranquilizer. If it’s the latter, and Fowler intends of rousing him from his drug-induced slumber, then you’re going to have a problem. The kind you’re going to solve by introducing your thumbs to Fowler’s eye sockets.

“I don’t know.” you say, sighing heavily. “But if he’s asleep, we’re not waking him up. At all.”

“On whose authority?”

“Mine.” you say flatly. “He hasn’t recharged in four days. He’s not having a meltdown on my watch.”

Miko “ooohhhhs” appreciatively at your candor. You shoot her a wilting glance.

“Is that so?” Fowler looms over you, hands on his hips in his most authoritarian don’t fuck with me stance. “Who died and promoted you to acting CMO?”

“Nobody died and Ratchet would agree with me.” you say, abandoning your spot on the couch to get to your feet and meet him dead on with your best I am absolutely going to fuck with you stance. “Look, Fowler,”

“It’s “special agent” Fowler now.”

“Special agent -missing-a-testicle-if-he-wakes-Optimums-up-Fowler-” you continue in the most even-keel voice you can muster. “I am not trying to make your job any harder. What I am trying to do is give a very hardworking, very stressed out loved one a break.” you let out a long, shaky sigh. “Let’s not make an issue out of this.”

“Is that a threat, mama bear?” he says, taking a step forward. Not to be intimidated, you narrow your eyes and also step forward. Now you’re uncomfortably close, but if you back up to adjust your body posture in any way that would be showing weakness. So you’re stuck. fuck.

“If it has to be.”

Your noses are nearly touching. This is awkward. Miko is silently mouthing “finish him!” Fowler’s not breaking eye contact. You hope Jack has a spare backpack, because you think you might throw
up again. He’s not saying anything and you probably went way over the top actually threatening a federal agent and if he’s actually offended enough to make an issue out of it that’s just going to make MORE work for Optimus and shit shit shit—"

“As inclined as I am to retaliate with the full force of my authority—” he begins, loosing an exhausted sigh as he breaks eye contact. “It is ludicrously refreshing to see someone care this much.” he accentuates care with a hearty slap to your back. “Damnit (y/n), I think I actually missed you.”

Stricken from kodiak killer to Care Bear in the span on a single sentence. Your resolve wanes from the unexpected compliment and the nausea as you recoil from the slap, but the battle might not be over yet and if need be you’re prepared to turn the care bear stare on this patriotic hardass until he starts shitting rainbows.

“And while your overbearing over-protectiveness of your significant other is as admirable as it is excessive—” you’re certain Fowler had not actually intended the pun, but you groan loudly anyways. “-he’s the one who contacted me.”

You raise an eyebrow. “He what now?”

“He’s been calling me nonstop since you woke up. Wanted to speak in person. Doesn’t really trust any of our communication links or anyone on my team other than me right now.” he sighs, suddenly looking every bit as weary as he previously claimed to be. “And I can’t exactly blame him.”

For the first time he regards you with something other than his trademark “get out of my and by extension America’s way” in his eyes. It’s a soft, reproachful sort of calculating. It might actually be sympathy.

You’re not sure how to respond. He is, after all the one responsible for introducing you and everyone you love to Dr. “dead man walking” Fujiyama to begin with. He’s also, however, the kind of man with enough respect for his faction, government, and country to power a neutrino star and would stop at nothing to personally wipe any blemishes off their names with his own two hands. After Optimus, Ratchet and you, he probably has more reason to hate the man than anyone else.

But this goes beyond an “enemy of my enemy” unspoken implication, closer to a “I understand this is partially my fault and I’m taking care of it.” but not quite. It looks like he actually feels sorry for you outside professional boundaries and that’s as endearing as it is worrisome. You add it to your subconscious anxiety laundry list and banish it to the back of your mind as he continues.

“So, if you wouldn’t mind pulling you papa bear out of hibernation for me, gently,” he adds with soulful tact “I’d like to trade some information with him.”

“You won’t have to. He’s already up.” Jack says, ascending the staircase. “He’s over in the lab with Ratchet.”

All of that bravado for nothing. You give Fowler a reproachful look, which he doesn’t even bother acknowledging as he pushes past the dark haired youth and down the staircase. You follow him, wordlessly.

“Miko, can you pass me my phone charger? It’s in my backpack, front compartment.”

You pass Folwer and bolt the rest of the way down.
You both round the corner to where the majority of the bots have assembled. Both Arcee and Bumblebee have returned. You’re surprised you didn’t hear the ground bridge activating. Probably because it occurred while you were actively heaving your guts out. Liquid sunshine spreads though your veins before Bee and you even make eye contact, and when you do, there’s a rapturous few moments of warm, empty bliss hanging in the ozone between you both, before your fears and doubts have a chance to bubble back to the surface. You raise a hand weakly to greet him, smile weak, but honest. He returns the gesture, a soft whoop escaping his vocalize in acknowledgement.

You should be paying more attention, but half of your focus is spent on observing the tangle of energy signatures around you. Individually they had been fascinating, if not a little startling. All together it creates a miasma of sensations, not all of them pleasant. In fact, aside from Bee’s, most of them aren’t pleasant. From the high, anxious humming that you suspected was the lone femme to the agonized locomotive chugging you knew to be Optimus and every nervous frustrated level in between, it’s maddening. You have no idea how they can stand this. Then again, you’re not sure how you’re standing this, but you are. Painfully, breath by breath you are, watching with gritted teeth and straining eyes as Folwer (who had jumped up on the giant alien keyboard to compensate for the height difference) makes violent hand gestures at the screen before him.

It's a map. Six maps, actually, satellite imagery in updating every three seconds or so. As far as you can figure, this is what Optimus had been pouring relentlessly over for the past 24 hours. Having exhausted every lead they had on MECH’s secondary bases and safe houses, he’d begun scouring the entire planet in real time.

Your heart plummets. He must be tired. So fucking tired. However much recharge he’d gotten, it surely could not have been enough.

Fortunately it seems there had been a break, however small. Bee and Arcee had not come back empty handed. Sequestered deep in the jungles of Cambodia they’d detected unusually high levels of titanium alloy in the soil, but the density of the surrounding forest had discouraged them from investigating further. This, coupled with the aerial imagery showing no signs of anomalies had caused them to write it off as a coincidence, though they’d reported it nonetheless. When the report had reached Fowler, and prompted him to investigate for himself, he found the imaging grid for those particular coordinates had been set in a loop, and had been in fact refreshing the same image for the past two days. To add insult to injury, the change hadn’t been made by an external party, but had in fact been perpetrated on the very computer he’d used to check the grin to begin with.

“A mole.” Folwer grits his teeth. “Sweet Lady Liberty’s tits if my boys can’t find them I’m putting on the gas mask and smoking this rat bastard out myself.”

Unfortunately, those weren’t the only coordinates that were being duped. There’s a least ten more locations that they know of and more still that they suspect. How many cover something of interest and how many are red herrings is anyone’s guess. What it all boils down to is that most of the maps he’d been scouring are in fact, inaccurate. And with no further leads, there’s little option but to stay put while Folwer plays exterminator.

There’s no noticeable change in Optimus’s expression as he receives this information, but you can tell by the way his shoulder’s sag, the constant methodical chugging of his field has slowed to a low roar that he hadn’t rolled with the punch dealt. He’d taken it head on without even bracing for impact. Your heart claws at the inside of your ribcage.

You slink back against the wall, sliding down the the floor. This is shit. 100% Factory-grade-made-in-America-steel-cut-shit. What makes it even shittier is the knowing that somewhere out there
a sweet, young, *totally innocent* metal kunoichi is getting god-knows-what done to her by garbage humans you failed to dispatch. Her cherubic steel face flashes behind your eyes. You swallow hard. If only the fusion hadn’t destabilized. If only you body hadn’t given out on you, she could be here now acclimating to normal life by watching you hurl into backpacks. Part of you is appalled that this entire catastrophe was orchestrated by the species you share most of your DNA with. The other half logically reassures you that decepticons probably had at least *something* to do with this, and that the only difference between asshole robots and asshole humans is a couple billion years and 20 vertical feet. Squishy or steel, assholes are the problem.

At least, that’s what you tell yourself, fighting visceral disgust as the huddle breaks apart, with Optimus vowing to monitor the few coordinates they knew to be accurate for updates, and Folwer promising to keep them updated as he goes about constructing his mouse trap. Arcee had been slowly inching her way to the edge of the room the entire time and slinks out the second the dismissal is vocalized. Ratchet drags a protesting Bulkhead into the infirmary (he’d injured himself driving over a curb when he went to pick up the kids and hadn’t noticed until he started leaking energon on the medic’s pede.)

This leaves you, Optimus, and Bumblebee to hover awkwardly in each other’s presence. Though none more awkward than Bee, who looks back and forth between the two of you, tapping the index digits of his servos together. He seems almost nervous, as if garnering up the courage to ask something. You’re on the verge of breaking the silence and calling him out when a breathless, excited Raf does it for you.

“Bee!” he calls out in between panting, running as fast as his tiny legs will allow him.”I just called my mom, she gave me permission, I can go!”

“Go to what?” you ask before you can stop yourself.

“It’s... *a dance off.*” Bee admits reluctantly, and you suddenly understand why he’d been so antsy. “*Tonight, in the next town over from Jasper.*”

“Well, it’s the qualifiers for the dance off.” Raf elaborates. “The actual competition doesn’t start until next month.”

“It’s only a 40 minute drive from the city, 35 if we leave from here.” Bee embellishes. “*The last competitor goes on at 8:15, we’d be back way before curfew.*”

“That is not advisable, I fear.” and the sinking disappointment in Bee’s field as Optimus turns away from the console to address him is like having a bucket of lukewarm pudding dumped over your head.

“What? why?”

“Curbside duty is one matter, but an excursion outside of the the city limits is another one entirely. I’m afraid I cannot condone such an activity at this time.”

Bee gives you a helpless look. You’re not exactly sure why and momentarily assume he’s expecting you to say something humiliating again, and merely bracing himself for impact. But after the uncomfortable lapse into silence continues, it dawns on you that he might actually be expecting you to *intervene*. Confusion and apprehension wash over you like lukewarm pudding as you weigh the mental stamina require for you to overrule the objection versus the amount of mental stamina you actually have left. *You’re running on empty.*
You bite the inside of you lip, returning the helpless look in full.

“It’s alright Bee.” Raf says plaintively. “We don’t have to be there in person. If you give me a few minutes, I can find a livestream, we’ll probably even have a better view than if we were there in person.”

Bee lets out an angry, frustrated warble, somewhere between “it won’t be the same” and “I didn’t want to just watch.”, but his anger is immediately tempered as he locks eyes with his young friend, and he allows himself to be placated with a reproachful whoop and flick of his doorwings.

“Thanks.”

“You don’t have to thank me, I want to see it too.” Raf smiles, hopping off his seat with his laptop in tow. “C’mon, let’s go back to your hab suite so we won’t get distracted.”

You stand there, statuesque and fighting the feeling that you’d somehow fucked up as they leave. You briefly ponder about how you haven’t actually seen Bee’s hab suite, and then wonder if you should. It’s probably full of typical adolescent things, like pinup posters and dirty magazines. A lightening fast flash of panic goes through you as you contemplate how growing up on earth could have affected his journey through puberty. What if he’s got blueprints in there, or pictures of disassembled toasters, oh god. You throw your arms out halfway down the rabbit hole, refusing to delve deeper, but this does bring a rather pressing issue to light.

Your parenting experience is mostly relegated to infants and toddlers. You have no idea what to do with a teenager.

Not only that, he’d just watched you stand by like a clueless idiot as Optimus made a decision on both your behalf. One that you don’t necessarily disagree with, but still seemed excessive. And you didn’t say a word. He saw you do that and could doubtlessly sense it coming from your field. Isn’t it bad for children to see their parent’s disagreeing? Should you have voiced your opposition for the sake of voicing it? Does he have a closet of utterly spent VCR’s next to a cardboard cutout of Thin White Duke?

“Sucks to be Bee-” Miko says, snapping you out of your downward spiral. “But I don’t know what he was expecting.”

You blow out a breath as Miko once again unwittingly saves you from yourself with tactless abandon. “Are you stalking me?”

“No.” Miko says, jabbing her thumb backwards over her shoulder at Jack, who is gingerly holding his backpack with rubber gloves like the hazmat material it’s become. “We need to make a quick trip to the bookstore. His mom is picking us up.”

You cringe again. “Jack...man...I’m so sorry.” you say, finally fessing up.

“It’s alright.” He says. “I get it. You’re sick. I mean, you might not be sick, but you’re not normal, and now your even less normal than that.”

It takes you a moment to decide that’s not an insult. Jack looks over his shoulder, casting a sympathetic gaze in the direction Bumblebee and Raf had vanished into. “Optimus is usually really fair, but...it must be tough having someone in that position as a dad.”
“How is “no fun” fair, exactly?” Miko rolls her eyes. “Fair means means you can wiggle the rules a little. Fair means you know how to cut loose. “Remember what Arcee said? “Primes don’t party”

“That’s not true.” say say before you can stop yourself. “He wasn’t always like this. He used to steal ice cream trucks and go to drive in movies and throw cocktail mixers and dance.” and there’s definitely some bitterness hanging off the end of the your sentence that doesn’t go by the pair undetected. He can be fun damnit.

Miko blinks. “Are you sure we’re talking about the same guy?”

You honestly don’t know anymore. The urge to slam your head into the nearest wall overwhelms you like lukewarm pudding, but you take a deep breath and set it aside, because as soon as these two leave you are going to change this.

You’re going to talk to him.

Not for nothing, you do have a lot of legitimate things to discuss. Like say, a heartfelt parent-to-parent conversion about how your 16 foot tall metal son is doing. Or how you spent most of you coma in the realm of his gods playing dungeon master with his dead wife, who was also coerced into arranging your coma in the first place. Considering he probably spent the last few decades beating himself into a bloody pulp for said coma, and everyone within a 50 mile radius is reeling from the effects of his misery, the latter is probably top priority. And also, unfortunately, the more difficult of the two to approach.

And by difficult, you mean you have no way to prove any of it ever happened. You grit you teeth as the realization dawns on you. Optimus has proven accepting of at least some aspects of the metaphysical fuckery that encompasses your life together(namely the uncanny luck, or currently, lack of) and from what Elita had told you of the matrix and position of Prime there’s a deeply spiritual aspect to the other half of his life. Still, something of this caliber is hard for even you to accept, let alone vocalize to someone in the fragile state he’s in.

Maybe, maybe you can just touch on it. Just tell him enough to let him know that it wasn’t his carelessness that put you there, that even if it hadn’t be pre-ordained that you don’t hold it against him at all and you’d gladly suffer far worse if it meant holding him again.

“Yeah. That’s good. All that mushy stuff.” You think clenching your fist, resolve solidifying within you. You’re gonna do it. You’re gonna talk to him. You’re gonna lay all his fears to rest and drag him right back on board the squishy-lovin’ express, and then you’re gonna talk about your son, maybe even convince him to let him go to that dance off for bonus good mom(TM) points, and then later you can all go see a decepticon-free movie at the drive though and laugh about the entire ordeal while cheesy uplifting music plays.

Hell, it’s been 30 years. You’re way overdue for a date night.

“And an easy win.” you tell yourself as you march forward. Robot god owes you that much.

He’s still hovering over the screen, but his optics are different. They lack their previous intensity, a direct result of learning his current method of searching had been rendered largely obsolete. Still, his expression remains intent and ready as he now stares through the screen, one servo resting splayed over the keyboard, the other fidgeting endlessly with some sort of bright twinkling object, flitting in and out of view as his digits glide endlessly over it’s surface.
“Hey.” you squeak.

He doesn’t move. He must’ve lapsed into a daze again.

“Um, hello?” you squeak louder this time, more chew toy than mouse.

Still nothing. You furrow your brow.

“Optimus?”

Your only response is the ambient hum of the base, the cacophony of millions of electronics, human and cybertronian alike singing endlessly, voices reaching an uneasy harmony in their endless aria.

You’re growing too frustrated for poetic sentiment. With a low growl you take off one of your shoes and hurl it at the side of his helm.

It hits him on the audial fin. You, recalling exactly how sensitive they could be, and then watching him flinch so hard he almost jumps, are regretting your design before then shoe even finishes dropping to the ground. There’s a pun in there somewhere, but as his alarmed optics dart over to you, you’re too busy feeling like shit to find it.

“Sorry.” you say, face crumbling in remorse as you begin the trek to recover you footwear, which has landed between his pedes. “I tried getting your attention like three times but it didn’t work.”

“It is I who should apologize.” he says, reaching down and gingerly picking up the show by the laces. How he managed such a nimble action with two digits the size of baseball bats leaves still leaves you in awe. He drops it into your waiting hands, taking care to leave a generous distance between his outstretched limb and any part of you. His servo may have shaken the slightest bit as he pulls away from you, but it’s probably your imagination. “What is it that you need?”

“Nothing.” you quip, far too fast. “Wait, no, I mean, something I uh...” You pause mind sentence, floundering. Well this is off to a good start. You’re not even sure where to begin. You should have rehearsed this. You shouldn’t have to rehearse this because this is Optimus and you’re supposed to feel comfortable around him even if you are discussing delicate subjects but you still should have rehearsed this and shit shit shit-Primus help you, you need a distraction. Fortunately, one is provided in the form of the glimmering sphere he holds.

“What’s that?” you blurt out in your struggle.

He brings his attention back sharply to the object in his other servo, as though he’d forgotten it was even there. He says nothing, but instead lowers it down to your eye level. It’s roughly the size of a globe, but resembles the menage a troi’ lovechild of a rubix cube, a stained glass Tiffany lamp and a chandelier.

“I....recognize this...” you begin slowly as memories trickle out spring-like from the bedrock of your mind. “But I’m not sure from where.”

“It is called a “inlustris prifma” he says. “It is a simplistic puzzle game.“
Simplistic. Sure. You blink, the bright array of lights already leaving pastel smudges of color behind your eyelids. “That’s an awfully Latin-sounding name for a cybertronian object, isn’t it?”

“It is...” he continues with a reluctant sigh. “It has recently come to my attention that many of your languages and cultures have been heavily inflicted by my people’s...” he sighs again. “...meddling in the past. It is perhaps the most apparent in Grecian-Roman civilizations and to a lesser extent Egypt. It seems I cannot turn my head without learning yet another way in which our species have become entangled with one another.”

That’s actually pretty cool. Complicated, but cool. You’re no archaeologist, but you’re sure don’t have enough time left in the day to finish digging that one up. You file it away right next to “your planet is actually the corpse of an evil god” and press on.

“So where’d it come from?”

“‘I created it.’

“You made this?” you say in disbelief. “How? Optimus, this is beautiful.”

“It is a reconstruction, based upon blueprints catalogued in my library. I do not believe there to be any existing models outside of Cybertron.” he continues, voice heavy with fatigue. “It is most typically considered a sparkling’s toy that serves a secondary, sentimental purpose in that it is meant to be kept for life or passed down to one’s own offspring, or that of a close friend’s. If memory serves, Ratchet provided Bumblebee with one that he...permanently disassembled.”

Your memory conjures the image of said prism moments before falling prey to Bee’s pudgy servos. Ratchet’s had a warm, rustic feel to it, with earthy colors. The scheme here is crisp, sharper, more winter moonlight than autumn sunshine. Greens, blues, teals and purples married with slate gray interplays, a sort of arctic mysticism in theme. It honestly wouldn’t look out of place on a 70’s prog rock album cover.

“This one’s less...”antique” thought.” you say, and there’s definitely a joke in thee about Ratchet’s age you don’t feel like finding right now. “Like, I dunno, more modern.”

“Having had no extant models on which to base the aesthetic, I was given opportunity to incorporate my own.” he says, rolling the prism between the tips of his digits, regarding it with the soft, almost paternal pride of a satisfied artist. “This resulted in a less traditional appearance, though, admittedly, I am pleased with the outcome. I have spent much of my spare time embellishing it. It has...proven to be a most welcome distraction.”

From the absolute fucking shitshow my life has become - goes unsaid. you bite you lip, but continue undeterred. “How does it work?”

“As of right now there are over one hundred outcomes with ten thousand possible combinations to unlock them.”

You wish you hadn’t asked. He seems to sense this as your eyes glaze over. “In order to complete the first combination, simply align the lights into four solid colored lines along the sides.”

You spare him the have mercy on my simple squishy brain look you know is plastered on you face and focus on the bedazzled torture device in you hands. You swallow nervously, but force yourself to at least try. There’s a sort of nervous intimacy in the act, molding the crystalline object between
your hands while exercising the upmost caution to not touch his, least you send him into catatonia once more. It occurs to you that this is the closest you’ve come to physical contact since you last interfaced, and while that realization could cripple you with depression you choose instead to find solace in it.

You’re close to him. He’s calm. And for that, you’re grateful.

Pleasant surprise surges through you as you, despite all odds, slide the last indigo segment into place along it’s brethren, completing the solid colored streaks along the sides. A big, doofy grin spreads over your face as an electronic, instrumental version of _Modern Love_ peals out from inside the orb.

“Bowie huh?” you ask, mouth ajar in uncomfortable combination of shock and a candid smile.

“I must admit, I have not been exposed to the full spectrum of earth music, and the margins of my experience are rather narrow,” he begins “But of what I have heard, he has become my favorite. Though, I suspect it is largely from how closely I associate it with you.”

Your bottom lip trembles. You have no idea how to respond to that. “So, every time you solve it, it plays a song?”

“Correct. Though, that was merely the simplest combination There are others, increasing in complexity from herein. The next one...” he trails off, choosing to demonstrate with his digits rather than words, which, even slowed down to a crawl for the sake of you human eyes, is dizzyingly fast. He stops at a sort of four-way-checkerboard pattern, the orb emitting a brilliant spray of moving light as the first few notes of _Ziggy Stardust_ spring to life.

Something in the back of your brain clicks, and deja vu sucker punches you while you lay mesmerized by the aurora-like beams spilling from the puzzle and dancing on the surface of his plating. You’ve heard this song more times than you can count, but a memory from the trial resurfaces with such intensity you can almost see it superimposed over your waking eyes. You’d gotten your ass kicked to this song, but more importantly, _everything else that happened during your coma._

You’ve grown tried of sitting on this knowledge. Yes, it’s going to be difficult to divulge this information, yes it’s going to be hard talking about his dead wife, especially considering the nature of your experiences together(and you find you face heating up at the mere _thought_ of the memory.) Yes, you’re nervous as hell. But as you watch the light swim across his face, like sunshine glinting off moving water, precious contentedness in his optics as he drums his fingers across the orb’s surface to the music, you find that somewhere in the midst of this brief calm the jagged grinding of his field had smoothed out once again into the gentle, thunderous roll of ocean waves.

You want to swim in that ocean again.

“Optimus...” you start quietly.

When his optics flit back up to meet yours, so deep and so warm you forget how to breath again. With the rise and fall of his venting in tandem with your own, you almost don’t have to.

“I...um...” you choke on your words, faltering under his gaze. “I wanted to ask, uh...”
“Take your time.”

Thee it is again, That sleepy adrenaline paradox his voice induces. You exhale, gathering your thoughts.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve had a moment alone—” you begin. “Like, a REALLY long time, and there’s so much I wanted to ask you. And tell you— boy howdy have I seen some crazy shit. ‘- and I’m sure there’s stuff you wanna talk to me about too, and I was hoping maybe we could...I dunno, go for a drive or something?”

“....No.”

It’s the softest, easiest “no” you’ve ever heard in your life, but it still feels like getting slapped in the face with a mallet. You're taken aback, but regain your composure long enough to get angry.

“Why?” you ask, trying to bite back some of the venom you know had slipped through.

“It is too dangerous to leave the base at a time like this.” he says, recoiling from his kneeling position to once again regard the screen in front of him. “If we receive any word regarding MECH’s location, we must be ready to respond immediately.”

“Look,” you start, breathing through your nose to keep yourself calm. “I know I probably missed a lot what with being unconscious for thirty years, and I'm not asking you to explain any of that right now but—” you swallow hard, tilting your head upwards, staring nervously at the back of his helm. “You've been kinda distant. Actually, extremely distant. “

“I have been...busy.” he says, and while his field has already returned to the painful rhythm of earlier, there’s another, palpable change this time. A secondary layer, wrapping around you both like a cold, wet blanket. “Please, understand, this by no means indicates that I do not wish to spend time with you. It is merely that...” he trails off momentarily, once soft expression hardened to steel. “I have made an irredeemable error in allowing them to escape with...Nightbird—” the emphasis on her name is jarring, as though the very utterance of it causes him physical pain. “-And until she is returned to us, I will unfortunately remain largely unavailable.”

Returned to us. Well, at the very least, it looks like he’s on board with the idea of adopting her. And maybe teaching her how to turn garbage humans into lampshades. Probably gonna have to put in some work for the last one. That gives you hope, however small.

“I’m worried about her too.” you say. We’ve been through some shit together. “I don’t like it either but right now there’s not a lot we can do other than wait. So, if we’re stuck waiting, I thought it might be nice if we could do it together because damnit I missed you.” Your voice doesn’t crack and you’re very proud of yourself for that. “So, maybe we could..I don’t know, go somewhere quiet and sit for a while.”

“As I already explained, we take far too great a risk leaving the base at this time.” he repeats, having once again begun the fruitless task of sifting through the maps. “Nor do I believe it to be advisable to relinquish my vigil here.”

Like a broken record. You let out a defeated sigh, resolve waning. “We don’t have to go that far. They could contact us through the com if there was a break. “

“I do not believe it to be safe.”
“I’d be safe with you.”

His fingers stop moving. His servos fall away from the keyboard. He turns to face you and for ten agonizing seconds he says nothing, optics a perfect medley of hurt and exhaustion.

“If the past thirty cycles are any indicator to judge by- “he begins, voice far, far too quiet. “-It would seem that you are not. “

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You gave up.

More appropriately, you lingered for a minute or so after his last sentence, words you lacked the courage and energy to vocalize sitting on you tongue, before shutting you mouth and walking briskly down the hallway. You’d passed the entrances to several hab suites, before coming across a supply closet.

Recalling how the last one you’d frequented back on the Arc had served as a training room(and subsequently, the first place you’d made robot whoopie in) you thought perhaps there might be something non flammable, toxic, or explosive inside you could use to repeatedly plant your fist into. When it refuses to open, however, and you find there’s a password protected lock preventing it from doing so, you try at least ten different variations of “eat shit”, before giving up once more and throwing a punch at the door itself.

It connects harder than you’d expected, with a muffled but satisfying thoom. It’s almost enough to make up for the broken skin on you knuckles and the reverberations though your bones. Almost.

“And here I though you were the one person I could trust not to intentionally injure themselves.”

You whip around to see 26 vertical feet of medically trained sass staring directly down at you. His mouth is set in a firm line, but the corners of his optics crinkle in well camouflaged amusement.

“Sorry.” you say, nursing your stinging hand. Even now your glowing blood had already begun to clot, and the pain has largely receded. “I just...needed to get in there.”

“Of course you did.” he says, rolling his eyes, though he does kneel down to punch the correct code in. “I have your old datapad lying around here somewhere. When I find it, remind me, and I’ll send you the passwords for all of the supply closets.”

“Why are they locked to begin with?”

“O rings and liquid nitrogen tend to go missing, and before you ask no, I don’t know who’s doing it or what in Primus’s name they’re doing with it.” he says, stepping back as the door slides open. “Now, what exactly was it you needed?”

“Something to punch that’s not a door.”

“Mhmm” he brings a servo up to his chin thoughtfully. “We do normally keep a small surplus of training dummies on hand, though I believe Arcee recently obliterated the last one.”
“Great.” you growl, throwing your head back in frustration. “Then could you find something in there to put me out of my misery? I want it painless, but messy.”

“That’s awfully inconsiderate, considering I’ll most likely be the one stuck cleaning it up.” he scoffs. “May I suggest a less violent compromise?”

“Sure.”

“While I was in the infirmary after I’d finished patching up Bulkhead,” the emphasis on the last half of his name leaves you largely suspicious the adjective strings for oaf and clumsy had slipped through. “I overheard Optimus turning down your proposal. If you feel so inclined, I could take you for a drive in his stead.”

You blink.

“What.”

“A drive, (y/n), a brief excursion from our current location, perhaps with an additional recreational activities.” he deadpans. “You’re not the only one in desperate need of a change of scenery.”

“I know what a drive, is Ratchet.” you huff. “I mean, what exactly are you proposing?”

“That we go to a secluded location a reasonable distance from the base and imbibe moderate quantities of high grade.”

“You...want to get drunk.” You say slowly. “That’s...pretty straightforward.”

“I said moderate. And are you implying I’m not normally honest?”

“No.” you say a little too quickly. “I just....” know you’re an alcoholic and drinking alone with you seems like a bad idea. “Won’t we get bored?”

“I have downloaded an entire digital library of films and have implemented a projector function in my alt. mode. So in the event that we grow tired of each other’s company-” he adds with biting sarcasm “We can occupy ourselves with those.”

“All fantasy?” you hazard a guess.

“Naturally.” the faintest hint of a wry smiles weaves itself onto his lips. “I’ve made many additions in the last three decades. There are a few I’ve been itching to show you.”

“I’m not going to pretend I don’t like that idea.” you begin, putting your hands up in a slow down gesture. “But isn’t this directly disobeying orders?”

“As I understand it, he declined your request to go out with him.” he continues after a thoughtful pause. “He never explicitly ordered you or I not to leave. Furthermore, you’re not actively part of our military unit, and as such fall outside the line of command.”

You can’t really argue with that logic. Still, this doesn’t feel quite right. “I mean, you’re not wrong-”

“I am also aware that your species is prone to a condition known as “cabin fever” which inhibits
normal brain function and decision making capabilities.” he continues. “As CMO, it is my duty to take measures to prevent this sort of ailment. Even if Optimus had officially mandated we not leave, medical matters fall within my jurisdiction and I can technically pull rank.”

You also can’t argue with that logic, but you’re starting to wonder if he’d started drinking before he got here.

This is probably a bad idea. You don’t have time enough left in the day to even begin counting the ways this could go wrong. But there might be a silver lining here. Ratchet did help raise Bee in your absence, he’s probably the second best person other than Optimus to talk to about it. That and he’s the one who spearheaded the supernatural discussions to begin with, so you could infodump about your misadventures in the realm of the Primes too. Yes, he’s got his problems, yes he might have a badly disguised crush on you that he’s dealing with poorly, but he’s also your best friend.

You missed him too. Holy HELL you missed him.

“Okay. I’m sold.” you sigh, throwing you hands up. “You can rescue me.”

He chuckles good naturedly. “This hardly qualifies as a rescue.”

“This is absolutely qualifies as a rescue.” you argue. “Tonight you’re my knight in literal shining armor. Take me away. Sweep me off my feet.”

Ratchet’s optics light up. He actually smiles. That same, knowing, content, borderline mischievous smile he gives you when you’re working on some ridiculous whack-ass meta theory that only makes sense to you two. It’d been so long since you’d seen it, you’d almost forgotten what it looked like. And right now it looks like a good invitation to a very bad time.

“Then by all means, my lady.” he says, collapsing in on himself and giving physics a shaky middle finger as he reverts to his altmode and pops the passenger side door open. “Your chariot awaits.”
This is fine. You tell yourself as you keep a lookout down the hallway while Ratchet temporarily disables the security notification for the base’s emergency exit.

We’re not doing anything wrong. You console yourself yet again as your friend waves you through the door with frantic whispers to “hurry up, slag it!” out into the desert outback, late afternoon sunlight burning your eyes for the first time in three decades.

Optimus won’t be upset, you repeat as the two of you peel off the tarmac like the rebellious curfew breaking high school kids you’ve suddenly become. The irony that the actual high school students you’d been tasked to watch had left to acquire (clean, much to your embarrassment) study supplies and get home on time isn’t lost on you, however, as fresh waves of guilt, anxiety, and oh god we fucked up wash over and degrade you into a fidgety, anxious mess.

“Would you stop squirming so much?!?” Ratchet snaps after the fifth or so time you’ve dug your nails into the seat cushions. “I can feel that, you know.”

“Sorry,” you say quickly, prying your fingers loose” I just...I don’t even...oh god what were we thinking?”

“I believe I already explained my reasoning and do not intend to repeat myself.”

“He told us not to leave.”

“He said nothing of the sort.”

“He didn’t have to say it outright-”

“Epp epp!” he tuts. “One more word and I’ll turn myself around and dump you off at Mrs. Darby’s hospital and have them perform a human psych evaluation on you.” his rearview mirror tilts down at you, the rough equivalent of shaking his head. “For you of all people to be this concerned about breaking rules, which, by the way, we are not doing-” he emphasis. “What’s gotten into you?”

“Me!?” you reel from the accusation. “What’s gotten into you?”

“Three and a half cubes of highgrade.” he says without missing a beat.

You open your mouth. You don’t close it.

“Are you...are you drunk driving?” you say, dumbstruck. “That’s... illegal. We’re breaking the law.”

“I said three and a half cubes. Do you have even the vaguest concept of the volume required to incapacitate me? I am merely experiencing a mild buzz.”

“Buzzed driving is illegal.”
He growls in frustration. “Fine. If you’re suddenly so insistent we abide by traffic statutes-”

You let out a strangled yelp as the seatbelt comes coiling like a serpent over your chest and lap and slams you back against the seat, locking itself into place.

“-Riding without a seatbelt is also illegal. And we don’t want to be breaking the law.”

You respond by choking.

“And for that matter, we’re going 40 miles over the speed limit.”

Your eyes flit over to the speed gage, which hovers squarely at 50 mph. The last sign you passed said 60.

“No we’re not-”

The gas pedal floors itself and you’re thrown back once more as he accelerates to 90MPH.

“Going 20 miles over the speed limit isn’t just a ticket-able offense, it’s a felony.” Ratchet quips calmly as if he isn’t careening at breakneck speed down the highway while you hyperventilate “That is unless-” he pauses to allow his sirens to whir to life.

“-You’re a registered emergency vehicle!”

Ratchet probably isn’t registered, but you’re going to let that one slide. “This isn’t even an emergency!” you squeal at the top of your lungs.

“Oh no (y/n) I believe it is.” he says gravely “You yourself said this qualifies as a rescue operation. I am rescuing us both from a severely stressful situation so-” he rolls down the windows, the force of the wind smacking you in the face harder than reality. “-as your physician I am writing you a prescription to cut loose.”

That is, without a doubt, the cheesiest thing you’ve heard in three decades. Cheesier still in that he’s just flipped the radio on and the refrain of Bon Jovi’s *Bad Medicine* tears through his speakers, though it’s nearly inaudible over the wailing of the sirens.

“Your love is like bad medicine, bad medicine is all I need~”

“Are you kidding me?” you shout over the low roar of age tempered dairy product

“Not a fan?” you watch helplessly as the radio’s scan button presses itself.

“~Doctor Doctor, can’t you see I’m Burnin’ Burnin~”

You’ve been in Italian restaurants serving less cheese than this.

“Can you just-”

“He’s the one they call Dr. Feelgood
“He’s the one who”I make you feel alright~”

There is less cheese seized yearly by customs than in this cab right now.

“Ratchet for fuck’s sake.”

“I need a doctor, doctor, To bring me back to life.”
You are now lactose intolerant. Secure in the knowledge that you can no longer handle dairy products of any sort, you start giggling. Then laughing. Then cackling, full blown wicked witch of the west-style cackling. You can’t breath, your face is bluer than normal, there are tears rolling down your cheeks. You are screaming. You shove the entirety of your upper torso out of the window and continue screaming, 90MPH wind in your face. The seat belt constricts protectively around what little of you is left in the cab, which is comforting, though not nearly so much as the realization that he’s laughing too, every bit as maniacally as you are.

You stay like this until the wind in your open mouth and nostrils makes you choke, and you recoil back into the seat. Panting, tear streaked face numb and endorphins rushing though your veins, you’re only dimly aware of the way the seat belt secures a little too tightly down the middle of your chest and the seat, unusually warm, curves around your ass and thighs. Only this time, you make no effort to ignore it. You just don’t give a shit.

You continue not giving a shit until he pulls into what appears to be an abandoned gas station and restaurant. You roll to a stop next to a sign that had once said “Give your ride high-quality lead,” but the years had eroded the paint on “quality” and most of “high” away so that it now reads “Give your ride head.” That’s enough double-entendre to make Fowler blush thirty years ago and to make you slam your head against the window, much to the chagrin of your ride.

You exit the passenger side door with the grace of an arthritic antelope, stumbling forward until you meet a cement pillar for balance, latent giggles from the exhilaration of earlier still bubbling up from your throat.

“It may be too early to tell, but the initial reaction looks promising.” come his voice behind you as he resumes root mode. “You seem to be responding well to the treatment.”

You snort.

“Are you ready for the second phase?” he says, crouching down to maneuver under the canopy, one servo on the edge and the other lax at his side, digits drumming restlessly against his leg. Optics teal floodlights piercing the growing darkness. Poised like this, ready to relax so hard there’s no relaxation involved whatsoever, you stand immersed in the shadow of his silhouette, suddenly very aware of the 20 vertical feet separating you two.

You swallow nervously.

If Optimus is a big cat, and Elita is a wolf, then Ratchet is definitely a bull.

He lives in a state of restrained agitation, aware of his strength and energy and wages a constant battle to curtail it. And curtail it he does, given his ability to temper such unstable force and channel it into the gentlest pair of metal hands to ever close a wound.

In this, you’re at a loss of how to proceed cautiously. There’s no hunting drive to flee, nor fangs to be wary of, but another danger entirely.

Unpredictability.

You’ve been prey before, and in that, knew what to expect. Knew when to struggle, when to fight, when to freeze, fall limp and give in.

But you’ve never been a matador. And this dance is as foreign and alien to you as the giant mechanical toro liadio relinquishing a human-sized cube of high grade from the tips of his fingers into your waiting hands.
“I’m not going to force you to drink it.” he says after a moment as you stare blankly into the cup, orange fluorescent liquid illuminating the darkened air around you. It smells like standing your ground while it crumbles from under your feet.

“You don’t have to.” you say, pressing it to your lips and draining half the cube in one swallow. 

_Ole’, motheFucker._

It’s like fire. Notes of what your human palate would have identified as cinnamon, cayenne pepper, unsweetened chocolate and _a roundhouse kick to the face_ dance on your tongue. Your mutant techno-organic palette, however, suggests adjectives like like iron rust, charcoal and vivacious static, and also a kick in the face. Blunt head trauma, it seems, is a universal constant when it comes to getting smashed, no matter what planet you’re from.

“Holy shit.” you murmur.

“I take it you find it pleasing, then?”

“It’s a bit strong,” you say as though you weren’t describing a liquid curbstomp. “Don’t get me wrong, it’s really good, but I’d like to not pass out.”

“Give it here, I can cut it with something a bit softer.”

He sweeps it from your hand before you can protest. You watch in stunned silence as he removes one of the pump nozzles from it’s holster, and proceeds to fill your cube back to the halfway point with gasoline.

“If we use earthling bar culture as a standard, then this would equate roughly to a “rum and coke” in alcohol content.” he says as he hands it back. “At any rate, it should effectively slow the rate of hi-grade absorption into your system.”

You stare at the cube. Then at the gas pump. Then at a waiting Ratchet.

“Well?”

Your shoulders sag in defeat. You’ve become a human glowstick, actively humiliated yourself six times in front of your son and your boyfriend of 30 (non-consecutive) years is estranging you out of fear for your own safety. If there were ever a time to drink gasoline, it’s now.

So you do exactly that. It’s far more mild now, the gasoline has mellowed it to a point where you could probably chug it if you wanted. _But let’s err on the side of caution._

“Now then, I believe I mentioned this before, but the projector function is integrated into my headlights, so I’ll need to revert to my altmode to utilize it.” He says matter-of-fact-ly. “You are more than welcome to watch from the comfort of my cab. In fact, to get the most out of the viewing experience, I’d recommend it.”

_The bull enters the arena._

That makes sense. It’d be like a drive in movie. But, as you’d just established, the unpredictability factor IS a factor. And, considering just how tightly his interior curled around you only moments ago, you recall in the case of most cybertronians with ground vehicle modes, the interface array winds up located somewhere under the seat. _It makes too much sense._

“It’s nice out tonight.” you say, because it IS warm and the dry air feels good against your skin and
even if there were any mosquitoes they wouldn’t touch your glowing alcoholic alien blood with a twenty foot pole. “Is there any way we could...watch it while your in root mode?”

*You forgo the paseillo, and ready your cape.*

The flash of disappointment across his face is exactly that. A flash. If you hadn’t been looking for it, you wouldn’t even know it was there. So it’s a grimace. A smoothly compensated for grimace as he bring his servo up to his chin in thought.

“It would be far less visually appalling, but we *could* watch it on my datapad, if we can find an external power source.” he says, after a long pause, reaching into his subspace to procure said pad, which, while tablet sized to him, is the size of a 90 inch flat screen to you. “I failed to charge it before we left.”

That sounds like a wonderful, if not surprising compromise. “ External power source? Like an electrical outlet? An EARTH electrical outlet?”

He snorts. “Do you honestly think in the three decades we’ve been marooned here I wouldn’t have constructed a functional converter for the most commonly used energy source on your planet?”

“Aside from coming up with whack-ass meta theories based on movies I don’t know what you do in you spare time.” you say, already clambering though one of the busted windows. *And day drinking. But let’s not go there.*

“Don’t believe me? I don’t even require your rudimentary electricity delivery system! “ he calls from outside the building. “Get me fifty pounds of *solanum tuberosum* and we’ll have our own organic battery!”

“You don’t have to charge it with a potato, Ratchet.” you say distractedly, warily taking stock of your surroundings, which, judging by the amount of broken bottles, used condom wrappers and decades old nudie mags, is now either a high school aged sex retreat or a drug den, original purpose notwithstanding. You choose where you plant your feet with extra caution.

“If I’m to be perfectly honest, it was Rafael that introduced me to the idea.” he calls from outside. ‘Not that I wouldn’t have eventually come up with it myself.”

“Of course you would.” you answer with as little condescending candor as possible as you retreat further into the building. One of the unexpected bonuses of of being glow in the dark comes to light, literally, as you use the thin skin between your fingers, wrist, and the back of your hand to light your path. *The breaker has to be in here somewhere.* You find it near the ladies restroom and a palette of orange soda that might be as old as you are, and flip it.

There’s a whine, a loud, low mechanical groan and showers of sparks from at least two overhead lights as life whirs back into the building. And as the light from the flashing neon sign reading *The flogged Lady* complete with animation of a buxom woman cracking a whip illumimates the catwalk and tables with ceiling-to-floor poles, you realize you are, in fact, at an abandoned strip club. *Classy.*

You pick your way through the debris back outside to find Ratchet MacGyvering the datapad into an external outlet, which he’s ripped nearly a foot out of the wall. He sits half crouched, braiding metallic wiring with his digits, the play of his fingers mercurial to you and yet so effortlessly careful you can’t tear your eyes away. As he finishes, he takes the rough, frayed end, places it in his open
intake and crimps it with his *denta*. The result is straight edge perfection, could-have-been-done-with-a*-laser* precision and he did it with his mouth.

*Holy shit.*

Your bite you lip. But that’s just to keep your mouth from falling open.

The rest is a speedy affair as he sutures the rest of the wiring in, and he seats himself cautiously beneath the canopy. You take you place next to him leaning you back against a support beam. The warmth radiating from his frame, still not fully cooled down from your high speed joyride is welcoming. But you’re not enjoying. it. You’re not enjoying it *so hard* you have to keep your eyes glued to the screen to distract yourself from *how awful it is.*

“It may appear to be a children’s movie at first-” he begins as your last three *NOT ENJOYING IT* braincells scream in relief for the distraction. “-but it was always intended for an older audience, and has fallen victim to a phenomenon known as the “Animation Age ghetto.” a suddenly guilty look washes over his face. “Had I been...aware of such a thing I would have reconsidered showing it to Bumblebee and one of his young friends when I first discovered it.”

You would find the idea of Bee and his unfortunate companion suffering childhood trauma from an animated film about rabbits highly amusing without the guilt and years of stolen motherhood weighing it you down. Your bottom lip starts trembling. You’ve already established you’re not a pussy,so it’s probably another stress induced tremor. You stop it anyways by pressing the cube against it and taking another generous swig.

“Ratchet... can I ask you about Bee?”

He shifts uncomfortably, probably bracing for the inevitable conversation and whatever preconceptions he has about it to follow. But the unmistakable flash of pure *warmth* that flashes though his field and back to you at the mention of the younger bot’s name more than makes up for it.

“What about him?”

*What about him indeed.* You’re not exactly sure how to phrase your question

“I...is he normal?”

“In what sense?”

“Like-” *did he grow up alright without me.* “Did he hit all of his major milestones so far? Is he doing alright, for a teenager?”

“For a prematurely born cybertronian who finished the latter half of his gestation in electro-magnetic surrogacy by a mutated human, was rendered largely mute, and raised on an alien planet by a Prime, a well-meaning assortment of soldiers, random humans and ME-” he inhales sharply “-he’s doing exceedingly well.”

You swear softly under your breath, a relieved smile forming on your lips

“We has never had trouble making connections with humans, especially children. If I recall, that was a primary concern of yours.” he pauses thoughtfully. “He’s had many friends over the years, he still does, and he makes new ones wherever he goes.”

Sober you would be tearing up at this revelation. Drunk you is still tearing up, but she at least has the gumption to not give a fuck.
“That’s awesome,” you admit with a laugh. “I couldn’t have hoped for better. Here I was so worried he’d be messed up, and it looks like he didn’t even need me.”

“Didn’t NEED you?!” he snaps “He hardly functioned without you! Carly and Astoria took alternating nights singing him to sleep every night for the first five MONTHS, and when they were unavailable Raoul would cover for them, because of this the first functional audio file he ever patched through his wideband into his vocalizer was Smooth Criminal. “ He gives a disgusted sigh. “Me and Optimus tried our best, but he simply refused to go into recharge without a human around.”

You promptly shut your mouth.

“After the, ah, schism, for lack of a better word-” He continues tactfully “-We had to keep dropping him off with Carly and Spike, even after they produced their own offspring. Which, by the way, is the other unfortunate child who was exposed to this movie at the impressionable earth age of six. Daniel had nightmares for months.”

He shakes his head. You stare lasers in you you cup.

“Bee absolutely needed you, we just managed to get by with the help of those around us. As Optimus said...we were sorely remiss for your help. We needed you.” he pauses with the cube at his intake, venting softly. “I needed you.”

The bull paces along the outlier of the querencia. He paws the ground.

You hold your tongue. Partially because you’re not sure if you should address a remark that heavy or just accept it as a compliment, but mostly because the image of Optimus and Ratchet trying, and failing to soothe an infant Bee to sleep while you were busy taking a preemptive dirt nap is seared into your minds eye. You drain your cube to the 3/4 mark. It warms your chest, but does nothing to loosen the vice around your heart.

But vice or no, you can’t stay here for long, can’t leave the last sentence out of his mouth hanging because your silence could be taken as an implication in of itself. So you need a diversion.

Fortunately, such a diversion comes on screen, as one of the animated rabbits experiences seizure like contortions during a psychic fit in which he watches the field his warren lies under flooded with blood. What the actual fuck.

“What the actual fuck.” you say flatly.

“Too grusome?” He asks. “I could switch it to something more lighthearted, if you want.”

“No it’s fine.” you narrow your eyes at the screen. “But, this is sort of a deviation from your normal stuff, isn’t it?”

You pace with him, in the opposite direction. This is both your ring, and you know it well.

“Only marginally-” he responds lazily. You not sure if the awkward silence had only been awkward on your end, or if the dulled response is due to his freshly refilled cube. This makes four and a half. That you know about. “-but due to the supernatural themes and origin story it still fits the genre.”

Genre. The deja vu comes sliding back in hard. You swirl the liquid in your cube, making a tiny alcoholic hurricane in the center, memories of your collaborative brainchild bubbling up to the surface.

“And speaking of genre-” says the bull who is clearly practiced in telepathy “I believe the last
occasion we watched a film together was indeed the last time I used the device.”

A shiver goes up your spine and into your head, which Ratchet needs to get the fuck out of this instant. You throw him a bewildered look. “You’re telling me you haven’t touched that thing in thirty years?”

“If by “touched” you mean “utilized in any meaningful capacity”, then no, I haven’t.” he sighs deeply. “But it continued to render accurate predictions. I simply could not find any way to use them to our advantage.”

You raise an eyebrow. “Why’s that?”

“They remain far too accurate to discount as coincidence, but there’s simply not enough information present to model a course of action on them. That, and after your...incident, they became increasingly bleak. Eventually they served the express purpose of making me lubricate myself in paranoia, so I stopped consulting it altogether.”

The idea that you space-age tarot deck had amounted into nothing more than an infinite anxiety generator for its co-creator is depressing, but not so much as the knowledge that everything went to shit while you were writing a thesis on the inside of your eyelids.

“I cannot ascertain for certain that it was your coma that caused the change in our luck, Optimus’s reaction to it, or another factor altogether. “He sighs. “But...things got bad after you went under, (y/n.)” he punctuates by finishing the last of his drink. On to cube number five. “The device used to work sheerly by being in close proximity to him, on account of his fortune, but now...I just don’t know what happened. We lost a lot of people, humans and bots alike. I kept waiting to see how it would benefit him, thinking every new loss would somehow complete the puzzle, but if it did I could never fit the pieces in.”

“And if that were not dire enough-” he sets his drink down long enough to reach into his subspace, where he procures said device, and slides it into your waiting, several sizes too small hands. “-the morning we were informed MECH had not taken you to a hospital as promised, but to the middle of Antarctica, moments before we received word, I was stricken with the urge to use this thing for the first time and three decades, and this is what it came up with.”

Your fingertips dig so tightly into the pad it dents the metal.

“Team Prime learns the hard way not all humans can be trusted.”

You look at the pad. Then at Ratchet. Then back at the pad.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“That’s not all. Tell it to generate a new prediction.”

You do as told, and feel your mouth go dry as the exact same phrase flashes on screen once more.

“That would mark the tenth time in a row it’s done this.”

“What does it mean?” you ask weakly.

“Well, if we continue the assumption that we are, in fact, in a movie, or perhaps more accurately at this point, a television series-” he averts his optics, loosing a long, soft vent. “-Then one could surmise that we are still in the same episode.”
“This shitshow isn’t over yet.”

“I think...” you begin, pressing your face into the palm of your hand. “-I need another drink.”

He snorts, a show of relief in the abrupt change of conversation as he plucks the empty cube from your grasp and tilts his flask into it. He fumbles as he pulls the flask away, and the cube nearly slips from his digits. You grit your teeth.

“I can cut it myself, thanks,” you say, plucking it from his servo before he can protest to assemble your cocktail “And speaking of cutting-”

“I do NOT need to be cut off.” he snaps “I simply made the mistake of dispensing it with my left servo.”

“Mhhmmm” you say, topping of you drink with a last few pumps and replacing the nozzle.

“I’m serious,” he presses, narrowing his optics. “Surely someone with your observational prowess would have noticed we’re not all ambidextrous, but tend to have dominant servos, much like your species?”

“I’m sure you do.”

“I’m telling the truth.” he continues, the faintest hint of exasperation in his voice. “Our biology may be compatible with some forms of your technology, but it is not a perfect corollary. Our processors are not computers. They cannot be copied, backed up or saved. They mimic the function of organic brains almost perfectly, although comprised of different compounds.” he shakes his helm.

“Admittedly, it took me some time to come to terms with this, but we share more similarities than we do differences. Introducing cybertronians as robotic was probably a mistake, but there wasn’t a proper euphemism in your language for our kind.”

That’s really interesting. And also sort of emotional. “You’re awful eloquent when you’ve had enough to drink.”

He growls, low and frustrated, but there’s a spark in his optics belaying the gesture that doesn’t leave. He sets down his cube and brings his servo, several times the size of your head, to your face.

“Look at this. Look at your own hands.”

You raise an eyebrow, but set your own drink aside, and raise your opposing hand up slowly into your view.

“Despite the aeons gap in our evolution, despite how many millions of light years between our planets, despite the size difference, the organic flesh and living metal-”

He presses his servo flush against your hand, and the quietest, barely-there gasp escapes your lips as the cool metal curves into the warmth of your palm.

_The bull charges without warning._

“-We are functionally identical. “

Something in your field spikes, like being blown over by a strong, unexpected wind. You know he felt it. He probably is the wind.

“Identical, y-yeah” you say pulling your hand away after a moment. It’s like separating velcro. “I was thinking the same thing last time I turned into an ambulance.,”
The horns pierce your cape. You throw it down seconds before you can be gored.

You expect him to scoff, to roll his optics in expiration. Instead, they glow, cerulean embers twinkling in the dark. That’s just it, (y/n)” there’s thousands of stories and accounts, some of them very credible, in every culture across your planet since the dawn of recorded history of humans changing into other organic forms.”

You, still preoccupied with removing the velcro from your palms, are caught blindsided. “Wait are you...are you talking about werewolves??”

“Werewolves, weretigers, werejaguars, werebears, and many others. And these forms are not equivalent to the amount of mass a human body would have started out with, some would require the addition or subtraction of your base mass, in some cases quiet substantially.”

“What...are you getting at?” you ask weakly.

“I suspect humans, under ideal conditions, are capable of transformation as well.”

A flat “what” is all you manage to get out.

“And I believe the method may not be that far removed from how we utilize transformation. For example, you do not currently have the physical mass equivalent to that of a grizzly bear, but, hypothetically, if you had access to a dimensional pocket via means not commonly known by your species or detectable by normal means, you could conceivably subterfuge you mass THERE to alter your form.”

Your head starts to spin, but stops upon the realization of how not weird that hypothesis actually is. You bleed glowing blood, heal super fast, don’t age, can sense electro-magnetic fields to a terrifying degree in addition to having sprouted one of your own, and managed to briefly fuse with the voodoo doll equivalent of a cybertronian. Hell, Elita had told you you’d become molecularly unstable. Werewolves are probably the most down to earth, least supernatural thing Ratchet has ever brought to the scientific round table. Werewolves are like finding a pubic hair in your coffee. Unusual, but not unheard of.

No, the reason you’re dizzy is because the surge of affection you feel for Ratchet is so strong it would have knocked you ass backwards were you not already sitting down. You’re not even halfway through the movie and he’s already given a plausible, and considering the circumstances of your life, completely accurate explanation of lycanthropy. Warm fuzzies are exploding in your chest in a non-furry way because right now there’s no one on earth you’d rather go howling at the moon with. You missed this fragging whackjob.

You trip on your own cape. The bull would laugh if he could.

“You’re saying I could turn into a bear.” you say, ear to ear grin betraying your deadpan tone.

“T’m saying it’s a possibility. “ he continues on, as if unaware of the ludicrous euphoria he’s incited in you. “And while you may not be capable of restructuring yourself...yet, we’ve yet to see the full extent of the effects energeon has on your form. Even while you...slept-” there’s careful emphasis on that word “-your frame underwent considerable changes.”

The warm and fuzzies simmer down into cool and pricklies. You frown.

“Some time before you awoke...” the drop in his tone is sudden and serious. “Your unconscious body sent a ping to Optimus.”
You choke on your drink. Some of it comes out of your nose. *It burns.* “It...did?”

“Several times,” he goes deathly quiet, helm tilted downward, tapping a lone digit against the side of his glass “The first time it happened he was right by your side, thought he was glitching, came and tore me out of recharge to look at you.”

Your heart can only break so many times before your chest goes numb, so this time it’s your throat that clenches up. You grit your teeth, wondering how many times you’ll have to tell yourself it’s not your fault before you’ll actually believe it.

“It happened on several more occasions, though this was roughly around the time your health began to rapidly decline. He received several more while your body was with those...butchers.” he shudders as it rolls off his glossa.

Memories of your time with said butchers flood back to the surface. You briefly consider repressing them, and replacing them with an appropriate fabricated one, but can’t decide between spring break at the polar ice caps or taking an internship as a middle eastern date farmer.

“You’re saying....I managed to talk to him somehow while I was there, unconscious?”

“In essence, yes...however, it gets far more complicated, since it was your body that sent the ping, rather than your conscious mind ”he says thickly, choosing his words and tone with caution “From what he divulged, he was able to actually experience brief periods of what went on.”

You give up all hope of repressing, mostly because you don’t want Optimus to be the only one saddled with an experience this shitty but also, unfortunately, because you’re probably going to need every shred of information you can pilfer from both of your minds if you want to close the curtain on the shitshow starring Dr. “still somehow relevant” Fujiyama and his merry band of psychopaths.

“So he saw me fuse with Nightbird?”

There’s a reaction in his field that’s every bit as negative as it is unexpected. It’s a jolt, a violent, dark, angry jolt, though immediately compensated for by clamping his field back down around his frame. It hugs him so tightly now you can hardly feel it at all. You’re reminded of a turtle retracting into it’s shell. A vengeful, mad-as-hell turtle.

“No. You were missing for a period of four weeks, and the last contact happened roughly three days after you went missing.” he says, cold fury in his voice. “Everything we know about the energon farming operation, the fusion process and Nightbird has come directly from you. We knew only of the betrayal before your testimony, we had no idea of the atrocities that were taking place.”

There’s enough guilt in his optics to choke a horse. This does, however, offer at least offer additional context for Optimus’s multi-faceted intimacy problems. Not only had he put you in a coma during lovemaking, in his attempt to remedy it he’d subjected you to horrific medical experimentation, unintentionally aided in the creation of a hybrid war machine and had a first row seat to watch it from.

You feel sick. Though that could also be from the alcohol, of which there’s also enough to choke a horse. You feel so bad that he feels so bad but right this very second you feel even worse that his reaction to it all is to ice you out.

“So this is why he’s locked himself away.” you say, bitterness oozing off of every last word, which doesn’t go unnoticed by your companion.

"While I don't believe the odds of success with his current method are high enough to justify his
continued vigilance, and would much rather him spend that time in recharge...or at the very least, with us,” he adds softly, almost under his breath. "Retrieving Nightbird is extremely important. Make no mistake, if I had even the faintest idea where they were keeping her I would travel there on fragging pede if I had to to bring her back.” there actual fury in his voice.” “But...with the amount of information we have right now, there's very little we can do, and until further notice I maintain my position that we should be trying to keep each other calm and sane.”

Despite the primal rage welling in you at the horrible things they could be doing to your precious ninja bot right this very second, you’re forced to agree.

“-Which, in the continued interest of maintaining our sanity, is why I feel compelled to ask if there’s anything else you wish to divulge to me while we have the chance.”

Giant metal Freud is once again, spot on. You’re one fainting couch and smelling salts away from a full psychoanalysis. You turn your attention momentarily back to the screen you’d only been half watching. The protagonist had been shot during a failed raid on a farm, and his brother, the psychic, is receiving news of his death.

“The black rabbit serves Lord Frith, and does no more than his appointed task.

“No...Hazel’s not dead.”

You stay silent. You’d bitten your tongue when he explained how their luck took a nosedive while you were out. Ratchet is hands down the craziest person you know and you’re not sure even he’s going to buy that your coma was pre-ordained by robot gods and Optimus's dead wife, let alone your more intimate endeavors. You might have to settle on an abridged version for now.

“Actually yeah.”

He cocks his helm, as if surprised that you actually took him up on the offer, but remains politely silent.

“I saw some shit while I was out.” you say plainly. “Some serious shit.”

“What manner of feces did you witness?”

“The mythical, realm of the robot gods, talking to dead bots kind of shit.”

He says nothing, but his optical ridges do furrow, beckoning you to keep going.

"Extremely long story short, there was a trial."

“And?”

“And I failed it. Well, no I passed it but I also FAILED it even though she said the objective was changed halfway on me so I did the best I could so I still technically passed, but actually failed.”

“She?”

You try not to remember “she.” Try not to remember the smell of sweet girly metal and the feeling of her soft servos on your skin, because that’s just going to spike your heart rate and raise your body temperature and you know Ratchet can sense it. You lose the nerve to explain, considering you yourself don’t even have an explanation. “M-my guide” you stay unsteadily, cursing the return of your stutter. “She ah, was with me for the whole thing, even when I couldn’t see her. Said the whole point was to see how I’d react in an un-winnable situation, like, knowing success wasn’t possible.
Apparently I at least did that right.”

He, thankfully, eschews mentioning the change in your bodily status in favor of a thoughtful silence.

“A test of character when faced with certain defeat.” he says. “Like the Kobiyashi Maru.”

You blink. “The what now?”

“An almost identical concept from a television series Rafael watches frequently.” he hums in thought. “In the show, however, the human protagonist managed to win by reprogramming the situation before he entered the simulation.”

“Yeah, well I didn’t get that chance.” you interject bitterly. “I tried playing against the rules, and it almost, almost worked, but...the bird exploded. so I had to give up and sit down and spend some quality time with her, knowing she was going to get smashed or shot out of the sky no matter what happened and just try to make he comfortable and enjoy the time we did have together.”

“I may not have experienced this firsthand, but from all indications it seems that the goal was to make the best of the situation. Which you did.”

“But I still lost. “ you vent. “I still lost and the bird still exploded and I still woke up giving those sick fucks exactly what they needed to build a sentient mech suit that I couldn’t rescue and Optimus is terrified of touching me and...” you choke, balling your hands into fist. “…and Bee is sixteen feet tall. Bee is sixteen fucking feet tall. He’s a grown ass man Ratchet. He’s thirty. I missed everything!”

You smash your fist into the ground as everything comes tumbling out. You’re hypeventilating. You’re loosing you grip on the situation and the more tightly you grip the weaker your hands grow. You can’t do this forever...

“None of those things are your fault, (y/n).” Ratchet says severely. “And you are sorely mistaken if you think I’m going to sit idly by and let you believe so.”

“I know they’re not.” you say quickly, as though you actually believe it. You dig you fingers into the red earth beneath you, idly grinding the dirt into dust in your palms. “I just...this never really bothered me before, considering you all have a good two stories or so on me, but...damnit Ratchet, I feel so freaking small.”

He ex-vents, optics narrowed analytically, mouth set in a firm line. He’s silent for a beat, you can almost hear the cogs whirring in his processor.

“You know that’s nonsense. For as long as I’ve known you, you’ve proven insurmountably formidable for your size.”

“For my size-” you bite back bitterly.

“Have you ever sat back to take stock of what you have accomplished? You fought off Soundwave twice, grievously injured Motormaster-”

“-Optimus is the one who killed him-”

“-And I’m not convinced that you wouldn’t have found a way to finish him off even if he hadn’t showed up. You also defeated an entire battalion of MECH’s autoroopers-”

“I didn’t even use my body for that one.”
“But it was still you! I…” He blows out a breath, rethinking his strategy, before leaning down to bring his face level with yours.

“I want to show you something.”

You watch skeptically as he retracts his servos to reveal his dual blades, glinting wickedly in the pale moonlight.

You look at the blades. You can see your own reflection in them. It looks tiny, like everything else about you.

“These are nice.” you start slowly. “You didn’t have these before, did you?”

“I did not.” he ascertains. “As our luck degraded and supplies dwindled, I began searching for a weapon that required less energon to use. These have proven a most effective replacement, considering the miserable ammunition turnover rate of my blasters.” he shakes his head.

You frown. While Ratchet had never taken the same-borderline fetishistic pleasure in weaponry as some of his comrades, it still seems really unfair that he’d been forced to trade them in. “That...really blows. I’m sorry.”

“I’m not.” he brandishes the blades carefully within your view. “Look more closely.”

You squint your eyes. It’s then you notice the outlines in the middle of the blades, they’re not solidly forged pieces of metal as you’d once thought. But as you trace the seams, you realize they’re not seams at all, but a smaller pair of knives, used as a base that had been blended into the surrounding steel. And you recognize them.

“Are those...are those my old ballistic knives?” you ask in disbelief.

“They are.” he says, his voice low. “In fact it was the ferocity you’d shown in using them that gave me the inspiration to begin with. Though...I suppose I owe you a new set of weaponized cutlery.” he finishes on a sheepish note.

While you were busy being unconscious he studied the blade. A aeons old alien robot warrior doctor was impressed enough with your skills to remodel his combat style after you. You are being flattered into a dimensional nexus. This is insanity in a large dose.

“Now, I rarely have a chance to utilize my knifeplay skills- “He accentuates with a frustrated sigh. “-But, regardless of whither or not I’m out the battlefield, or sequestered behind the infirmary walls, it’s cathartic to have a reminder of what I’m fighting for.”

The horns are lowered once more.

You’re suddenly very grateful for the fact that you’ve imbibed enough to warrant a moderate to hard buzz, because if not you would have probably burst into tears. You have no idea what to say to that.

“I have no idea what to say to that.”

“You don’t have to say anything.” he says, softly. “I’m just grateful I finally had an opportunity to show you.”

You’ve tripped on the cape, cut yourself with your own sword, the picadores have left the ring. You were not prepared for this.
You’re dizzy. Your head is spinning and your face is flushed and it’s not the hi-grade, goddamnint what you’d give for it to be the hi-grade.

“I think I’m gonna fall over.” you mumble.

“Then sit down before you hurt yourself.” he says, retracting the blades and offering his servo to steady you into an upright heap on the ground. You wind up sprawled into an imperfect V somewhere between his legs and inner thighs. You are effectively in his lap. A sudden breeze begins to pull at you, caressing your face with the warmest of tendrils in the cool night air. You’re trying very, very hard not to enjoy this.

It’s the tercio de muerte but you’re the one loosing blood.

It then dawns on you that if you’re trying so hard not to enjoy this and still managing to do so, then if you didn’t try, you’d be euphoric. You would be loving this and that understanding drives you into panic. A blind, full blown, enjoyable panic.

No. Nonono.

“Your heart rate has doubled.” he observes almost loftily. “And I’ve noticed a sudden spike in your blood pressure.”

No fucking shit. “Is that right?” you ask, nervously biting your lips.

“I have briefly studied a primitive form of organic communing known as “scalp massage.”” he says. “It’s purported to have a wildly calming effect. I could demonstrate, if you’d like.”

No. Oh god no.

“Why not.” you say shakily, lost in the anxious miasma of your own thoughts and the roar of blood in your ears as you body trembles around you. He runs his digits through your hair, rattling on about the the number of nerves in human hands and how it roughly corresponds to the amount of sensor models in the default cybertronian servo(he made a point to differentiate, since clearly he’s had his upgraded, considering his line of work). You once again find yourself stupefied by how delicate and feather-soft the play of metal fingers the size of your arm can be, but you’re more stupefied that it’s actually working. Tension is bleeding from your body like a fire hose. You’re calm.

“Is it working?” he asks. the wind is stronger now, still warm, but suspenseful, carrying the promise of rain.

You look the bull in the eye, covered in lance wounds and banderillas but no weaker than he was at the start of the fight. He’s going to charge.

Your heart is still in overdrive but every other part of you has slowed down to a an almost comatose lull. You have never been this calm. You have literally been in a coma and it pales in comparison to this tranquility. You are transcending, Ratchet is a bodhisattva waiting to lead you to Nirvana, and you see no reason not to follow him there.

The wind is now a gale, carrying thunder, and the sharp bite of static. There’s a storm coming.

You throw down your sword and embrace death.

“It’s working.” You tell him.

Sweet Primus no please no.
He brings the servo not entangled in your hair to cup the side of your face, and the calm allows you to instinctively lean into it. His thumb brushes the underside of your chin, tilting your head backwards. Your eyes meet his optics upside down, blazing cyan filled with quiet warning. You’re fully aware of the unpredictability, but there’s trust couched within, and it’s the trust that bleeds though. You know him. You might not know what he’s going to do, but you do know he’s not going to hurt you.

You give into that familiarity, letting it seep into every crevice of your being, your world comes to a screeching stop as the power surges, and both the gas station lights and the data pad flicker on and off. You both share a look of fear and confusion before the deathly silence sets in.

For a moment, you wonder if you’ve passed out, but the ringing building in your ears convinces you otherwise. Something deep inside your chest unclenches, then blossoms out, shotgunning up your spine and out through your back, until met with an equal, unrelenting something that mingles as easily as it pushes back.

You realize it’s not the wind you felt, nor the call of an approaching storm but his field. It had rolled over you like thunderclouds while you were too busy bullfighting to even notice, and now you’ve walked headfirst into a hurricane. You need only brace yourself now. You don’t have to breathe anymore.

It takes you several attempts just to speak, the pressure both within and outside your chest so great. “Did...did we just-?”

“Merge?” he finishes for you, weakly restrained jubilation in his voice. “It would appear we have.”
Your initial, instinctual reaction to the merge, as it had been the other times, is to simply let it happen. To let the tendrils of tropic wind and storm warning lap at your skin and caress your face. Allow them to move though you. Surrender, as you’d done before.

But there’s no surrender here. Optimus’s field had been like a tidal wave, washing over you and pulling you under without question. Ratchet’s is strong, yes, but steady, like feeling the undertow while wading. You know if you get in deep enough leaving won’t be possible, but the warning is there. Where Optimus’s came without abandon regardless of your decision, his gives you a choice. You can either walk back out onto the beach, or venture further into the water, armed with the knowledge at some indeterminate point you won’t be able to swim out.

You create a third option, and lie down where you stand in the surf. If the water takes you here, then so be it. Though the longer you stay in the more you realize it’s not the ocean at all. The currents aren’t water, but wind. Maelstrom heavy, powerful enough to create a hurricane but gentle enough to pull you in and cradle you, which is where you hover now.

You’re not sure how long you both stay like this, his digits entwined in your hair, your hands pressed against the servo that cradles the side of your face, optics and eyes locked in mutual, nervous awe.

“Why did this happen?” you ask finally, the hollowest pangs of anxiety in your voice. You’re still drowning so thoroughly in the calm you can’t muster the strength for fear. “We weren’t even interfacing. We weren’t even going to-” you cut yourself off at that one, floundering. “I...I mean-”

“I know what you mean-” he says a little too quickly. “And I don’t know either. This shouldn’t be possible.”

You’re not sure if that qualifies as over the top dramatic, self depreciating, or all of the above. It’s not like you don’t trust him with your life and everyone’s around you. It’s not like he’s unattractive, far from it. Age had merely served to embellish, to draw attention to his handsome features, the fine lines crinkling at the corners of his optics only let them shine more brightly. Not like he doesn’t have the steel body of a greek god, considering the smooth, muscular protomass you’d catch glimpses of in the gaps of his plating and- you’re going to stop yourself right there.

“You’re being a little rough on yourself.” you say defeatedly, once you’d resolved yourself to knowing that he isn’t merely capable of detecting spikes in your heart rate or your shortened breath,
he can feel it.

“No, I mean it really shouldn’t be possible. This doesn’t just happen. Most ‘bots live out their natural lifespans without ever experiencing one.” he relays, his face falling as he withdraws his servos from your head to stare at them in disbelief. “Fields can, and often do interact, especially during interface. But a true merge is exceedingly rare. Do...do you know what this means? It’s understandable that you could do so with Optimus, since yours so closely mimicked Elita’s, but it shouldn’t be able to meld with mine.”

There’s actual pain on his face as he stares at his shaking hands, a medley of existential crisis and joy from earlier, though it seems the crisis is slowly claiming victory. “This...can’t possibly play into his luck. I don’t understand. This...this doesn’t benefit him at all.”

A bitter breeze of guilt blows though you, both of you, and you’re not sure who it came from, but that hardly matters. It catches in your lungs, ice cold. You whimper from the sensation as he gasps.

“Look, I don’t really understand it either,” you start “But, couldn’t it just be that we’re so comfortable with each other?”

Warmth erupts from him, as he turns his optics back to you, but is immediately torn away by tendrils of anxiety and doubt. “I only wish it were that simple, but that fact remains that compatibility to this degree is experienced by less than 5% of the population. For this to have happened, with you-” he buries his face in his servos, swearing softly under his breath. “-It has to play in somehow. Unless the luck is no longer functioning as it once did, or if we’re now somehow working in direct opposition to it.”

Both of those things are way too scary to even think about right now. So you sweep them up in a neat little mental dustpan, dump them into the trash heap that is your subconscious, and focus on the more cheerful, mystical component of this shitshow. Namely the part where you’d given a giant middle finger to the universe, for once, and energetically bonded because your shitfaced best friend decided to pet you while watching a creepy film about psychic rabbits at an abandoned stripclub.

“Maybe....it doesn’t have to fit in.” you suggest, proceeding with extreme caution. “Maybe this just happened because it’s supposed to.” his optics flit back down to you, cerulean searchlights silently asking for any shred of reason you could possibly give, and you’re suddenly so glad you don’t need to breathe. “Maybe it’s just because...I dunno-” you force yourself to go on, downcast face flushed and heated. “-because I just trust you so much?”

His optics go wide, and as they do, something rockets down your spine. Realization, Shock, Confusion and Self-loathing, all hopelessly blended together into a single chord. The nerves in your back are an acoustic guitar string someone has strummed far too hard.

“Trust?” he says, which quiet accusation. “You trust me?”

The field has become unsteady, cold front meeting hot air. The string is plucked again, hard enough to crack the wood. It’s pulling you apart from one another.

“Uh...yeah. Of course I do. I just didn’t realize how hard I did until now, and...maybe that’s why it happened.”

“You shouldn’t trust me that much.” his face is crumbling. “You shouldn’t trust me at all.”
There’s wind spiraling in the opposite direction now, battering you from all sides, pulling you in every direction at once. You lunge without thought, reaching blindly, trying to find some part of him, anything to hold onto in the storm. If the musician continues to play like this you’ll break.

“I don’t DESERVE your trust.” he seethes, optics squeezed painfully shut. “I’m not worthy of it. I’m a pit-slagged tornado! How could someone like you ever trust me?!”

The string gives way, and snaps in half. You’ve come apart at the seams. The winds tears you both into a thousand pieces. If pulling your hand from his servo had been like velcro, separating your fields is like pulling the teeth and fingernails out of your soul. It’s meticulous, precise, gently pry-your-fingertips-away-from-mine pain, and it strikes you that even on the cusp of a meltdown he’s still exercising the upmost care not to hurt you. But it still hurts. Everything hurts because he’s right in front of you but he’s gone.

“Ratchet what the hell are you talking about?” you keen, falling to your knees, digging your fingers into your scalp, tears in the corners of your eye. Why would you do this. Why would you give me this just to rip it away?

“Reading material you brought back for Bumblebee when he was a sparkling.” he growls, getting unsteadily to his pedes, using the gas station roof to balance himself. “About a sentient tornado who befriends a human while causing wanton destruction to the town they travel through.”

You remember it vaguely, having read through it several times. It was a popup book, and Bee especially seemed to enjoy pulling the tab that caused the bakery to burst into flames. You remove your hands from your head long enough to throw them out in front of you in a gesture of utter bewilderment. “I’m no doctor but I think I can tell when you’re trashed. We’re cutting you off.”

“No you don’t understand-” he vents heavily, “-It’s a perfect metaphor. I hurt everyone around me without even trying. Everyone within a 50 mile radius gets caught up in my bullscrap, Primus forbid they actually CARE about me, they’re sucked right into the eye of the storm. I hurt everyone, wither I try to or not. I’m actively hurting everyone. I brought you here with the intention of doing something to hurt everyone even more, not matter how hard I try to convince myself, or you otherwise!”

Those last words linger as though they’d been written in smoke in the air. It’s hard to believe less than a minute ago you were laying in his lap, heart and spark locked to the same rhythm. His field is cold, clamped so tightly against him you can hardly feel it but you don’t need to feel anything. The guilt and shame is etched into his face.

“I’m not worthy of your trust, (y/n), I have not been entirely forthcoming. You don’t know everything about me.”

“Ratchet you are 40 gajillion years old nobody knows everything about you.”

“I mean I haven’t been honest with you, smartaft!” he snaps back. “There’s so much I should have just come forward with, regardless of how you’d feel about me afterwards.”

You sigh uncomfortably. You hadn’t expected him to actually vocalize it, but considering the turn this night had taken, it that was probably a pipe dream on your part. “You didn’t really have to” you say, still in disbelief that you’re at long last addressing this. “You kinda did an awful job hiding it.”
“Not that-” his voice cracks, there’s no less pain in it, even now. “Primus knows you can see that from orbit! This... is another matter entirely. “he removes his servos from his face, giving you a long, mournful stare. Which, after fifteen or so seconds, is starting to make you very uncomfortable.

“What are you-”

“I’m savoring the look of confusion on you face, before it turns into loathing.”

You growl in frustration “Can we cut the self-depreciating bullshi-”

“I’m certain you recall Fujiyama’s accusations against me, when we came to your rescue?” he cuts you off.

You furrow your brow skeptically, somewhat surprised. “I recall. Do YOU recall that he’s a garbage human and that nullifies his opinion on everything ever?”

“He wasn’t that far off. In fact, he was right. He could sense one of his kind in me. He could smell my insides rotting away just like his.”

“Ratchet, please, just shut the fu-”

“The supplies, information, and research MECH acquired for their sick means did not come from us. We did not offer them any in exchange for your safety, nor did they pilfer it from our records. They received it from the Decepticons. Most likely Starscream, who must have stood something to gain from forging a deal with them. He in turn must have pulled them from Shockwave’s files.”There’s a long, pregnant pause. “...Who in turn, stole it from me.”

He punctuates by slamming his fist into the ground, snarling, optics screwed shut. “ It’s my fault!”

He’s clearly drunk. Miserably drunk and nobly taking the blame for an ordeal so far out of his hands it may as well be in the next galaxy. Boy do you have a type. But that little nugget of self-awareness is going in the trash compactor of your subconscious along with all the other stuff you wish you hadn’t realized tonight. Also, somehow not only had his previous cube been drained, another one had shown up and been emptied in the span of five or so seconds you looked away. You’re impressed. Overwhelmed with fear and concern and “stop hurting yourself” but impressed.

“Look, they'd take the information off the back of a cereal box and use it for nefarious purposes.” you say, rolling your eyes. “Them finding your research doesn't make you culpable in any way. The distance is so vast between you and those sick lying fucks, so don't you even dare think about taking the blame for this.”

“Do you remember when I told you so many years ago, that Soundwave’s cassettes weren’t brought into the world the usual way?”

Oh good. This again. It’d been almost a full week (in your time anyways) since you’d given the entire Rumble fiasco any thought, aside from him being one of the first things you think about in the morning, and the last before you fall asleep at night. If this trauma was a museum you’d be given a lifetime pass and had a plaque with you name on it in the gift shop. You have every inch of the exhibit memorized. You could put the curator out of a job.

“I do...” you say warily, the waking of old grief and anger grows ice cold at the pit of your stomach

“You said they were engineered.”
“Yes...due to the efforts of a sociopathic mad man masquerading as an autobot medic...And some other pit-spawned idiot named Pharma.”

You’re not sure who Pharma is, but you’re sure he’d be as fed up with the self-hating pot shots as you are. Ratchet referring to himself as a sociopath is some over the top bullshit. But, more importantly, what the actual fuck.

“Okay...so you helped make them.” you begin slowly, slamming your emotional gate shut and padlocking it in order to do damage control with your overly inebriated friend. “I mean, look, I sorta always had a suspicion, but -that doesn’t exactly make you a, uh, sentient tornado.”

“I’m afraid what I did in order to do so over-qualifies me as such.” the look he gives you is full of more fear and loathing then the entire city of Las Vegas. “My original partner throttled me at the very idea and left before we were even given the green light to begin testing.”

“Original partner-?”

“Wheeljack.” Even smothered by adjectives of guilt and sorrow he cannot stop a stray glyph of immense affection slipping through, and the result is sung like a dying mechanical songbird. “He pioneered the technique of altering frames beyond the typical bipedal and vehicular forms. I wanted to use this as a basis, to create weapons, living weapons that required no ammunition and would heal and recharge as if they were part of the wielder’s body. They WERE a part of their body.” he stills his shaking servos. “It was his idea to base frames off of megafauna from a planet several galaxies away, and he only heard half of my pitch before he threw me against the wall and questioned my sanity.” a dark laugh escapes his vocalize as he shakes his helm “How could I not have known better...”

“Oh, that’s whack, Ratchet, “ and probably a little more third Reich than you’d care to compare him to, but you push forward regardless. “But designing weapons was sort of your job, and I still don’t necessarily understand all of your biology but if your bodies can sustain that kind of stuff then it doesn’t sound that bad.”

“It wasn’t just our frames, nor protomass. If it were limited to such an area I could forgive myself. But the process involved direct tampering with sparks.”

Sparks. An organ that, despite having an entirely different function, seems to fill the same metaphorical function as the human heart. Though that seems to be more or less a translational or linguistic hiccup. “Okay, like...I know you need sparks to live, but I’m not exactly sure what they do. Are they more like a brain, or-”

“No, a spark is a containment of our physical essence. It’s what makes us us. You can remove the spark from it’s frame, completely separated from the processor, retain no memories whatsoever and it would still be you. The closest possible analogy I can think of in human terms would place it somewhere between base personality components, and your spirit, or soul.”

Might as well lay you out and staple you down to the linoleum, because you are floored.

“As you may imagine, it was very difficult to find volunteers...” he trails off. “There was at least one autobot who went through successfully after I left the program, but if he still functions I haven’t heard from him. When we were given the permission and funding to begin, we were also given test subjects. All of them war prisoners. Soundwave... was patient zero.”
Let’s upgrade that to hardwood floored.

“As I already explained, merging is not commonplace. Merging outside of a sparkbond is risky at best. Forcing a merge is exceedingly dangerous. Procedures working near or directly within the spark chamber itself are among the most dangerous to perform in a medical setting. Spark bonded couples, however, are capable of exposing their sparks to direct physical contact with one another in acts of intimacy.” he wrings his servos, expression wistful and a million miles away. “It is an intense, beautiful experience when shared between consenting partners.”

You peel yourself off the ground just to stare at him, dumbstruck.

“Soundwave....was your partner? “

“Soundwave was not my partner...” he says, impossibly quiet. “...And Soundwave... did not consent. “

Your world stops for a second time that night, though less of screeching halt and more like the rolling stop of a freight train elapsed over several hours. You can hear every gear, every piston, every cog in the machine that is the reality around you shutting down. You might have actually exited space time.

You want to say something, anything, because even though he’s not looking at you you can feel his anxiety climbing like wildfire at both your lack of response and his own bracing for whatever reaction would eventually come. He’s burning from both ends and you’re not qualified to operate a fire hose.

“What.” you say, after what must’ve been a full hour in your dimension, though probably only a minute max for the rest of creation. “What.”

“He did not consent.” He says, ex-venting rapidly, optics constricting to pinpoints “What we did, what I did, for all intents and purposes...it was-”

What.” you say once more, as, in lieu of finishing his sentence, he falls to his knees and purges.

There’s a lot of it, he’d probably been drinking all day. You wonder how much it takes just to get him to normal now, and part of you is very, very concerned for your functionally dysfunctional alcoholic friend and also feeling guilty for encouraging his drinking in any way shape or form. But it’s buried beneath the bedrock of “what’ and “what’ and “oh god what.” and far too distant for you to even conceptualize as an emotion, let alone words.

No, right now, your tongue is lead, your entire body is lead, and the shitstorm of this reveal is the smelting pot converting you to a molten liquid state.

“Okay,” you say dryly, because lead in any state doesn’t experience emotion. “...Then what happened?”

“Both the other medic and myself, we took turns exposing our sparks to him, so that neither of us would be exposed long enough to suffer adverse effects. It had the intended effect. His spark fractured. Several times. Over a several stellar cycle period. The fractured pieces were then placed in artificially cultivated protomass, coded specifically for the smaller, altered frames that would become the weapons.”

This serves to explain a lot of things. Say, like why Rumble and Frenzy even full grown had only a
foot or so on you. Or how Rumble had managed to subterfuge his mass to become small enough to fit into your VHS while he was in your care. Compact and space-saving. Heck, you’d be able to see the appeal behind it, that is if you were a emotionally detached whackjob.

“Then what happened?” you repeat verbatim.

“We were successful. They integrated flawlessly into the frames, and were able to non-verbally communicate with the host spark. Except, we needed a way for the bond to remain stable, and not turn into sheer psychological spite and resentment due to the nature of the...fissuring process. The substance that bled out of Soundwave, and later infected you, is a heavily diluted version of a substance known as “Dark Energeon.””

The voice wavers “It is...essentially, the blood of Unicron.”

The blood of a dead god that is also the core of you planet is surging through you veins. Oh, what you’d give to go back to werewolves right now.

“We didn’t know what it was until very, VERY recently, and certainly didn’t have a clue back then when we experimented with it. Only that it provided a substantial increase in strength, and those infected with it seemed to be able to communicate with one another telepathically. When diluted with enough normal energon, it didn’t cause the dependency nor the degrade of psyche that it did in it’s raw form. It served to force a connection that until then could only be formed via biology or deep intrinsic trust, such as between sparkmates, or sparklings and their creators. Considering the trauma involved in the spark schism, we needed a way to ensure the....”weapons” would remain bonded. We theorized that diluted dark energon would force such a bond. And....it did.”

“We were be all means successful. They functioned together as part of the same body, it seemed as though we’d completed the project beyond expectations. That was, until they started displaying personality traits. They weren’t supposed to be sentient. They weren’t supposed to develop personalities.”

“Then what happened?” asks you, the lead parrot.

“The eldest, Frenzy, was the first to begin displaying these traits. When he wasn’t docked, he would do things that made no sense, acting in ways that provided no visible benefit to either him, the other symbiotes or his host. He would find objects, take them apart, throw them, arrange them in patterns. He wasn’t trying to escape, wasn’t even trying to irritate or annoy either of us. He was doing it simply because he found it to be pleasing. He’d sneak out of the enclosure, find random, often useless items of interest and bring them back to his host just to show him. And with each new fracture, with each new symbiote brought into being, while Soundwave lie unresponsive after the procedure, he would...attend to them. Show them how slip out undetected, to disassemble and arrange things as he did, he would even...embrace them when they showed signs of distress. He often displayed this response to Soundwave himself. He was immensely protective of him. But, he was supposed to be. He was designed to be a biological weapon, after all, but, there’s no way to describe his behaviors as anything other than compassionate.”

You could, conceivably, stop him here. And if you tried hard enough, pretend you’d heard nothing beyond Steve the Sentient Tornado. At the very least you could assign arbitrary justifications for everything that comes out of his vocalizer from this point forward, make it palatable to yourself the second you recognize it. Find some way to set yourself back on the path to the gentle hurricane that had held you just moments ago, stop him while some part of you still trusts him.

But, in the manner of most people watching a slow motion trainwreck, or in your case, presented with the gristy origin story of your dead son and your best friend’s involvement with it, you remain
where you stand. And silently pray that flying debris from the wreckage will decapitate you.

“The fifth time we tried to initiate a fracture, Soundwave was weak. Very weak. We didn’t wait long enough for his spark to heal from the last one. I...protested, for what it’s worth, but Pharma proceeded anyways. Frenzy could see how much duress he was under, and halfway through the merge, he attacked. Tore the entire left half of his face off and destroyed his arm. To this DAY I have yet to see tenacity that comes anywhere close to his. We were not able to pry him off, so Pharma...disassembled him.”

You’re reminded of how easily Frenzy was able to remove his head and pitch it around like a softball. Fortunately lead you has lead knees, which prevent you from falling to them and screaming.

“The other symbiotes had override commands installed afterwards, to prevent other...losses...” he has trouble continuing. “We....tried to salvage the last fractured spark, but he was so weak, and Buzzsaw ultimately lasted only a week before his protomass rejected the frame, and he...came undone.” he blinks. “It hold the distinction of being the most horrific image I currently have in my processor.”

He buries his face in his servos once more. “Halffspraks aren’t individuals. They’re part of a greater whole. They’re completely dependent on their host and therefore not sentient. One could even compare them to a parasite.” he sighs heavily. “At least...that’s what I told myself. What I still tell myself, first thing when I get up in the morning and the last thing before I slip into recharge at night. I'm not certain why I do it. It never helped. Not back then and not now. Perhaps because it's what Pharma told me, right before he threw Frenzy's lifeless frame in the incinerator. 'They're parasites, Ratchet. Parasites’.”

His servos are shaking as he peels them from his helm, revealing that thousand-yard stare you sorely wish you weren't accustomed to. “I wanted to believe him so badly and I thought if I just repeated it, like a mantra that maybe I could fool myself into accepting it. But I can’t.” his voice cracks. “I can’t.”

On one hand, Ratchet is partially responsible for your son(s) even existing to begin with. On the other hand...there is no other hand. Just an empty, profusely bleeding hole where your trust had once been. You could probably suture it shut, it’s not like he lied. He simply wasn’t forthcoming with his history as a mad scientist. And at least he feels bad about it. That’s enough reason to bring things back to the status quo, right? That’s enough to at least begin to repair the bridge with, right?

Right. You can’t even muster the three brain cells it takes to repeat “Then what happened”. There’s nothing there. Nada. So you and your two(2) remaining cells have no choice but to wait in agonized silence for him to continue.

“Fujiyama was right, to know there is no higher power stopping you, to draw the line for you, it is the most terrifying freedom.” He laughs darkly. “Where was Primus when we raped Soundwave? Why didn’t he stop us? Why didn’t he stop me? Why do I have to draw the line? I don’t know when to stop! Ask anyone! Ask Wheeljack!”

You might, someday. Heck, you might even find this Pharma guy and Dr. “Has a pretty accurate read on other mad scientists” Fujiyama and sit them all down for a nice AA style meeting on ethics. You can work out who to turn into a lampshade later.

“I left the program shortly after. When the hospital was raided and Soundwave and his remaining symbiotes were freed, they learned everything. I have no idea how much they were willing to trade to MECH, but from what we know, I can only imagine they’re trying to force the same sort of bond
between their creations and the humans chosen to pilot them.” he makes a low, distressed noise, somewhere between a cough and a sob “If Optimus and I hadn’t been so naive...”

Optimus functions as a shepherd’s calls to bring at least a portion of your lost flock of braincells back to the pasture, enough to at least allow you to construct something other than a regurgitated prompt.

“Did Optimus know about any of this?” you ask, only dimly aware that normal you would have felt twice as betrayed, but lead you knows no such sensation.

“I know what you’re thinking (y/n), and no, he is blameless in all of this. He knows only of my involvement in some morally ambiguous research, but nothing more.” the quietest, most miserable little gasp of unfiltered sorrow slips from his vocalizer, and while no longer connected the distinct thwump of his field surging as he speaks of Optimus reverberates though your spine. “He didn’t pressed. He never did. He has always afforded me far more support than I have ever been worthy of.”

“Ironhide perhaps knows more than anyone else we are currently in contact with. Later on, he was involved in a rescue attempt to free members of the Lightning Strike Coalition from Shockwave’s lab, and in doing so, witnessed the effects of our stolen research firsthand. You, however-”He vents shallowly, two, maybe three more times before speaking again. “-You are the first to know me as the monster I truly am.”

So you’re his sole confidant. That’s pretty flattering, actually, and it makes sense. Being a medic, he hides everything from anyone anyways. He can’t exactly tell his patients his thoughts and fears, can’t even justify relaying a crappy day to them, let alone relieve the pressure valve on his deepest, darkest secrets. The fact that he’s doing so to you is honestly a massive compliment. You tell yourself this. And you mean it, even while you fan the flames for the funeral pyre you’ve placed your old relationship with him on.

“You’re not...you’re not a monster.” you repeat, voice hoarse from inhaling metaphorical ash.

“How am I NOT a monster?” he snarls back. “Here we are in the middle of the worst crisis we’ve had since the war started and I can hardly function, I stay up for cycles on end wallowing in my own misery because I don’t know which one of you I'm jealous of anymore!”

Which one of you. The admission that you may not be the only one he’s pining after hits you like a brick. The realization that he is in all likelihood referring to Optimus hits you like the right hook of a 6’4 300 lb career boxer, who is also made of bricks. There is not, however, enough emotional energy within your entire multidimensional self to even begin to address that. A soft retching noise comes automatically from your throat to compensate. Neat. You wonder what other bizarre reactions your body is capable of on autopilot, but you stopped being lead a while back and your humanity threatens to return at any moment. So you need to move along.

“Ratchet, you're drunk.”

“I know I am, but I’m also-”

He doesn’t get to finish, as he keels over and heaves his tanks out for a second time that night.

There’s a very real part of that that wants to get down on the ground and join him. But right now, you’ll keep your nausea. It’s giving you something to focus on, keeping you grounded. Without it,
your soul might have actually rage quit and left your body to collapse in the luminescent vomit.

“You...must hate me.” he coughs, voice coarse and raw.

“I don’t hate you Ratchet.” you say, unsure that you even remember what hate feels like.

“You should. I do.”

“You did what you had to, Ratchet.”

He doesn’t respond. Optics heavy and half lidded, regarding his own reflection in the glowing liquid pooling beneath his dipped helm, the scene would be worthy of a watercolor painting if you didn’t know what it was. “A lot of things are nice without context.” You think. There’s probably enough mental fortitude left within you to repress this memory and cover it with something else, or at the very least convince yourself his actions were as justified as you’d told him they were. Hell, you could probably even divorce the merge from any context whatsoever, remember it as a stand alone moment of intimate euphoria with a trusted friend.

But appealing as that option is, it’s essentially an exercise in dishonesty. And there’s been enough of that tonight. So you’ll just throw it in the space behind your eyes. It’s gotten crowded back there, enough so that you actually have to shove your conscious brain aside and function like a zombie until further notice.

“Let’s go home, Ratchet.” you say with sagelike calm. “It’s late.”

He put forth no resistance as he transforms, popping the passenger side door open for you.

“I think it would be a good idea if you let me drive.” you say, sliding over into the driver’s side seat.

He doesn’t protest. He shuts his door. The seatbelt automatically fastens around you. It hugs your waist a little too tightly, and the strap between your breasts refuses to lie completely still. And, you ignore it, despite the lingering heat in your lower belly you sincerely wish had never kindled to begin with.

“Ratchet...” you ask plainly. “Please stop.”

“Mmm still concerned...your safety.”

You blow out a breath, but offer no further input. The fight is long over, you both lie bleeding in the middle of the ring. You adjust the review mirror, disengage his parking break, slide him into reverse and pull out of the gas station.

That you had come so close to letting the bull run you down makes you sick. That part of you still wants to be run over, as you remember how it felt cradled in those warm crosswinds, makes you scared.

El empate

***

It’s nearly three in the morning when you get back.
Ratchet had stopped to purge once on the way back, once right outside of the base entrance, and once into his personal wash racks on the way back to his quarters. His knee joints had given out from under him during the last one, and he went down hard onto the floor, face-first into the regurgitated high-grade.

It had taken every iota of your strength to move his gargantuan helm the three or so inches require to maneuver his intake away from the puddle so he wouldn't in-vent his own vomit or god-forbid suffocate, and you find yourself covered head to toe in the raw, glowing liquid for your efforts. Any other day you'd have gagged at the smell, but you are far, far too tired to be disgusted, and instead scramble your tiny self up to the nozzle and turn the ice-cold water up to full blast.

He doesn't get up, not immediately, and it takes another minute of punching, kicking, and shoving to get him to open his optics again. And when they do flutter open to see you drenched in freezing water, tearing your ruined jacket off and wiping your wet hair from your face he lets out a soft, defeated chuckle.

“I've had this dream before. he says, voice muffled from the spray of water and his proximity to the floor. “But when I reach out to touch you, you disappear. “

“You're not dreaming Ratchet.” you sigh.

“No, I'm not.” he says, shuttering his optics again. “Because when I am, I'm not the one bent over on the floor.”

You swallow at the ball in your throat. Gonna let that one slide docbot. “We need to get you into your berth.”

He laughs again, and mutters something that between the hiss of the water and his low volume is pretty much inaudible, though given the direction of the conversation you suspect it's an invitation to join him. You wonder exactly how much of this he's going to recollect in the morning, considering he had just explained that cybertronian brains were almost functionally identical to human ones and any memories he retained of tonight would probably be a foggy, uncollected mess.

You weigh wither or not to spare him the embarrassment of recounting his end of the conversation while he drags himself one pede at a time to his berth, still dripping wet. He flops down on his back, and it takes another minute of kicking and yelling to convince him to roll over on his side, least he purge in his sleep. You manage to pull the corner of the enormous mesh sheet and drag it, covering him from the waist down before your exhausted body gives out on you and you drop, wet, cold and shivering besides his chassis.

A minute. You'll give yourself sixty whole seconds to catch your breath, to let your heart slow down, to let some of the feeling return to your numb limbs.

“Please, don’t leave yet.”

A sliver of cyan light pierces the darkness as he opens a single, unfocused optic. You crane your neck backwards to look at him, far too tired to will your body to sit upright. He takes your silence as license to continue.

“I want to tell you something.” he says, words gushing from his vocalizer so softly you have to strain your ears to hear them. “-while I still have the courage...(y/n).”
Your chest constricts so painfully you gasp. Not from exhaustion, injury, nor the leviathan levels of stress you currently endure, but because the entirety of your name from his lips is melody.

Thirty whole seconds.

“Go to sleep, Ratchet.” you say, ignoring your body's screams of protest as you force yourself upright to crawl off the berth, clamber down onto the floor and walk the twenty or so yards between you and the door.

The last few feet, you run.

It's completely silent in the common room of the base. Optimus is no doubt either shut up in his quarters watching tirelessly for any sign of Nightbird. Arcee and Bulkhead are probably in recharge, and god knows where Bee has gone to, though after the thorough embarrassment he’d suffered at your expense he’s probably done everything in his power to disappear. You can only hope he's doing something fun and safe, like spending the night at Raf's. Or street racing. Hell as long as he’s not actively engaged in combat you’d be happy.

You ascend the stairs, step by agonizing step, throw yourself on the couch, and stare blankly at the tv. You wonder if Bee remembers watching any of the movies with you and Ratchet all those years ago. You also find yourself wondering if you d have gone within a hundred feet of Ratchet if you knew then what you knew now, much less sit next to him and try to soothe him from his nightmares.

It's then, illuminated only by the sliver of moonlight peaking through the ceiling entrance, you see the coffee pot. The one Ratchet had somehow procured and learned how to operate in order to lure your sleep-deprived self out of Bee s room for your late night/early morning movie viewings. Out of all the things he could've brought back from the Ark, he d saw it necessary to bring this.

A coffeepot. Your coffeepot, which, after a brief inspection, you pick up and hurl at the adjacent wall with all of your strength, where it shatters, the spray of glass shards almost magical in the faint light.

You throw yourself back on the couch and scream into the cushions, punching and clawing at the fabric until it tears beneath your hands. You scream for Rumble. You scream for Frenzy. You scream for the others you've never met, young and terrified and weaponized against their will. You scream the hardest for Soundwave, who had lost the children forced on him, lost Rumble in more ways than you had.

If only you'd known. You might've gone with him.

If only you'd known.

And when you’re all screamed out and lie heaving among the shredded cushions and stuffing, stale, dusty air burning your lungs you spare a final, whimpering sob for Ratchet.

He had earned his nightmares.

And you’re sure, the second you close you eyes, you’ll join him there.
A miserable pile of secrets

Chapter Summary

sorry for shortness euhghg

You know you’re dreaming. Knew from the macabre watercolor landscape that had painted itself behind your eyes the second you’d closed them. Knew even before your body had finished shutting down around you, and bid whatever nightmares that were to come to do so without abandon, and with open arms. *Come at me bad dream bros.*

So it’s little surprise that when the purple haze floating around you in the twilight of the English countryside forms the loosest shape of a lapine and unfolds glittering golden almond shaped slits to gaze plaintively into your soul.

“This is what you get for drinking, watching *Watership Down* and repressing emotional trauma in the span of an hour.” *In English?* you beseech the rabbit.

“My heart has joined the thousand, for my friend has stopped running today.” they say in a voice that your brain both demands and refuses to assign a gender to.

You winkle your nose. You haven’t had dreams about small furry animals and shapeshifting dream entities for a while, but as your heart reaches out into the aether you find no shred of Elita’s presence. Disappointment seeps in, and leaves your aching chest empty.

“Do you know me?” they ask, sweet pangs of familiarity dripping from their voice and into the void within you. There’s warmth. You’re less empty now.

“Yes...”you say with a sureness that isn’t your own. “I know you.”

“I want you to follow me,” they tell you, the words themselves beckoning you into action. Your legs, all four of them, move without will.

You catapult yourself in after them, though a forest of dead trees and black glass. The sky above more brilliant and starlit than you’d ever seen in the waking world, but offers no illumination. The only light comes from the ambient glow of your guide’s body, and those wickedly yellow eyes, flitting in and out of view like golden searchlights.

“Follow me.”

The forest has become a tunnel around you. You move faster, bouncing off trees and rocks, careening though the living landscape that bends and breathes around you.
“Follow me.”
You’re flying, your paws still move but you’re flying, voyage serene even at breakneck speed through the tunnel, because it is a tunnel.

“Please, I have something to show you.”

The tunnel opens up into a room, a room you recognize. To a couch you recognize, over an unconscious tangle of limbs, blankets, and shredded cushions. Wait.

It takes you longer than it should to realize it’s your unconscious body passed out on the couch. You watch with detached curiosity as the rabbit alights upon your lap. You’re not even attached to your lap right now but you can still feel the warmth radiating from them as they nestle between your sleeping arms.

You open your eyes. There’s no rabbit, but your hands and your lap are warm.

Experimentally, you close your eyes. The darkness last for only a moment, before they re-materialize in your arms.

You open your eyes. They’re gone. You close them. They’re back.

You haven’t woken up, but you’re not dreaming either. Or perhaps you’d never actually fallen asleep to begin with.

Either way, this is bad.

You sit up. You stretch your limbs. You scoot yourself to the side of the couch, pick tufts of shredded cushion filling from your hair, and get up. You’re going to get breakfast. You’re going to walk around the base, check things out, and push though the numbness that has encapsulated both body and mind at the primal, wordless knowledge that today is going to suck legendary levels of ass.

The first thing you notice, is the sudden lack of noticing. At least, on a communicative energetic level. There’s something dampening every frequency around you and pulling you into an indistinguishable miasma of leave me alone and fuck this. Something you’d later come to identify as the “sucksmagentosphere.”

“Genius,” you think. Because it has to do with electro-magnetic fields. And suck. A thick, iron gauntlet’s hold on every wavelength coalescing around you, guaranteed to drag anyone mired into their own unique brand of irritability, anger, and despair.

The “sucksmagentosphere” (you’ll change the name before receiving the Noble for discovering it) permeates throughout the base that morning, and despite the general aura of restlessness and unease radiating from just about everyone in the vicinity, you’re almost certain you know who it’s radiating from the most, other than yourself.

Said source had returned to his post sometime before you opened your eyes, his own glued to the screen, his centurion’s vigil broken only by the constant play of his digits across the prism in his left hand. He had probably retreated to his quarters only to continue his search away from prying, concerned eyes. He probably also hadn’t recharged, or if he did, nowhere nearly long enough. There’s a sort of cold comradery in your shared sleep deprivation, but the grinding, sickly chug of his over-stressed field, observable even through the miasma, prevents you from gleaning comfort from
your brother in weary, unrested arms.

The grinding is joined by a cold, limp, slippery grip as the third sleep deprived musketeer stumbles into the common room. Optimus may be the source of the sickly flow, but Ratchet is a close second. He might even be first, if his hangover hadn’t significantly impacted his field’s reach. Dim, half opened cerulean optics meet your eyes. You turn away, biting your lip so hard you taste blood in your mouth.

But the sucksmagnetosphere(tm) does have an upside. It has allowed you to, in fact, asses that you ability to bury emotions is at all all time low. Case in point, Arcee had walked in with the trepidation of a bather testing the temperature of frozen water. She’d stepped into the shattered remains of your coffeepot on accident, raised an optical ridge and cocked her helm in your direction.

“What’s this?”

“A pile.” you said flatly.

“Of?”

“Secrets.” you seethed. “A MISERABLE PILE OF SECRETS!”

She’d put up her servos in a placating “whoa okay” gesture and backed away, slowly.

So with your options(and patience) whittled down to the nub, you’re forced to try a different approach. Namely, time management. If you can’t avoid outbursts, you’ll have to schedule them.

It’s with that resolve you bounce off the couch, down the stairs and over to Optimus’s station, with a fake smile that probably looks every bit as painful as it feels.

“Morning!” you chirp like a strangled song bird. “Boy, you’re up early. Want me to get you a cube?”

It takes him almost a full 15 seconds to respond. Clearly you fall somewhere behind his search and the illustrious pinata in order of importance.

“No...thank you.” he responds finally, without so much as averting his optics. “I do not require sustenance....at this time.”

“Okay!” you quip cheerfully, making a note to scream about it exactly half an hour from now.

You skip/drag yourself past his station, towards the med bay. Past the med bay, with any luck, hoping beyond hope that if you do so quickly enough you’ll escape without notice right down the hallway and find a supply closet to do your screaming in.

“(y/n)...” comes a rough, gravelly, totally hung over iteration of your name before you can disappear down the corridor.

*No such luck.*

“What’s up?” you peal, spinning around on one foot to face Ratchet, who is bracing himself against a support beam to stay upright, face half buried in the privacy curtain that closes off the operating theater.
“I...have very little memory of last night.” he says quietly, inaudible almost even to you though the muffle of the fabric. “I can’t even recall how we got back here. And as much as it pains me to ask, I want to know if I did, or said anything...completely out of line.”

You don’t have to scream internally, because you’re going to do that externally 29 minutes from now. You are, however, now going to have to break something. Preferably after the screaming. You swallow hard. Fragments of last night’s conversation ricochet off the inside of your skull like bullets, but you smile like you brain is made of kevlar. It’s not. “Nah man, you went out like a light.”

He blinks. “I...I did?”

“Yeah man. We got back safe, no worries.” you give him a thumbs up.

He sighs deeply. “You have no idea how relived I am to hear that. I was quite sure I’d at least said something reprehensible, though, I suppose I could just chalk that up to nightmares.” the scream welling up inside your chest is silenced by sheer willpower alone, and the promise of inanimate object destruction in the near future. You bite your lip again. There’s probably going to be a scar. “However, I did remember our conversation by the supply closet yesterday, and happened to stumble upon this as I was leaving my quarters this morning.”

He reaches into his subspace to procure a datapad. Your datapad, which he presses into your hands.

“I put the combinations for all of the closets in your notes. I only ask that you...use discretion in whom your share them with.” he says in a tone of voice that clearly tells you nobody. Except Maybe Rafael. “Other than that, it remains in pristine condition since you last used it.”

“Thanks!” you say brightly, holding the pad up to you face and skipping away. The password, Sunnywantstofragthegoblinking84 still functions and you’re hit with an 80’s flavored blast from the past strong enough you taste poprocks and betamax residue on your tongue. All of your old messages are saved, including one(1) message from Optimus that had remained unread for 30 years. It might be nice to find a quiet corner to scroll through them, reminisce about how fun things were before everyone’s shit got fucked. There’s tears in the corners of your eyes, but that can be resolved by breaking yet another small object. Or one medium sized object. Maybe two medium sized objects, since your perusing has lead you into the pictures folder, and the first image is one of Bumblebee curled up next to your cat back when they were both small enough to fit in your arms. You don’t have enough time in the day or breakable objects to cope with this.

And speaking of time, or, more accurately, timing, Bee’s could not be any worse.

He walks into the common room and comes to a complete screeching stop about 50 feet shy of the center, probably sensing the sucksmagnetosphere. Which is good. You don’t want the explosive midmorning sunshine of his field tainted, no matter how embarrassed or bent on avoiding you that sunshine is.

“Morning Bee!” you say, willing the tears to suck right back up into the corners of your eyes. To compensate, they’ve widened to the proportion of dinner plates, you’re still smiling way too hard and gritting your teeth in concentration. You realize how absolutely whack you must look a few seconds too late when greeted with his uneasy stare and a hushed line of static.

“Are you okay?”

You’re actively dying in a fire of your own making, but Bee doesn’t need to know that. Your
straighten your face as best you can and wave it off. “I’m fine. Peachy-keen. No need to worry about me Honeybun.”

Honeybun.

The world slows down around you. Arcee turns her helm, Bulkhead has stopped mid step, hell, even Optimus has momentarily stopped fiddling with the illuminus piranha. It’s then in the lull of the time warp you realize you may have, in fact, severely humiliated your adult son in front of all of his peers for a second time.

“...Honeybun?” Bee asks after a second’s pause. “Peachy-Keen? Honeybun?!?”

You open you mouth. You close it. And you don’t bother allocating the brainpower necessary for shame and guilt, because you’re going to hurl the fire extinguisher at the wall exactly 45 minutes from now.

“Haha whoops, sorry.” you say dizzily, breaking eye contact, and shuffling (you’d spent the willpower to skip on re-absorbing your tears) merrily towards the far end of the ground bridge control, where a small cubby allocated for cleaning supplies resides. Primus help you, you need a distraction, and he’s blessed you with one in the form of the shattered coffeepot.

You hope he’ll grant you another favor, and allow you to sweep up the miserable pile of secrets in a dustpan before Ratchet can see. Unfortunately, you realize the path from his quarters to the med bay would absolutely take him past it, and he has, in all likelihood, already seen it. He’s probably gonna ask about it. You’re probably gonna lie again. You hum cheerfully to yourself, wondering if you could somehow move your scheduled screaming/breaking/hurling session to five seconds from now to save some time.

You kneel down to sweep up the glass, and pause upon seeing the rabbit from before perched on top of the pile.

“This please follow me.”

You swear softly. Your eyes aren’t even closed this time.

“I’m busy.” you mumble under your breath. You continue on nonplussed, sweeping through them and depositing the shards neatly in the nearest recycle bin. No reason to let a hallucination put a damper on your morning.

You put the dustpan back. You feel lightheaded, ravenous and nauseous all at the same time, so you should probably get some fuel in you. You’d left a small supply of you-sized cubes next to the tv in the human playplace, so you whip around and begin the agonizing trip up the stairs, head pounding and sweating profusely. You wind up climbing the last few on all fours, doggy style. Bee shoots you a worried glance, as does Ratchet. You don’t even look to see if his optics linger too long. You just assume. You’re going to take it out on the tv later. Sorry kids.

“This please follow me.”

The rabbit now sits atop the pile of cubes next to the television. You reach out anyways and pluck one from under them.

“I’m trying to eat breakfast.” you say, puncturing the seal and draining it halfway in one gulp. It
nearly comes back up, but you power through it.

The rabbit gives you a long, suffering look as you drink.

“Fuck.” they say sadly.

You spray your cube out. You look back at the rabbit, watching in disbelief as they blossom outwards into themselves like the reality-fucking origami creature they’ve become until a small, twinkling purple bird stands in their place. A bird you recognize. A bird that, up until now, you’d only seen on the other side of the cosmic veil in the realm of the Primes.

*The Super Important Mysterious Thing.*

“Fuck.” you say weakly, as you lose your grip on the cube, collapse into a writhing mess on the floor, and the world goes dark around you.

You come to in the very glade you’d failed to wake from earlier, though rays of sunlight now pierce the canopy of trees and a cool wind blows through your semisolid self. The S.I.M.T. flutters in circles around your head, peppering her song with cheery profanity. The light glinting from her metallic violet wings blinds you, and you raise a hollow hand to shield your eyes. Then, realizing your eyes are incapable of taking UV damage in this dimension, use it to slap yourself in the face, groaning softly.

Then, much to her, and your own surprise, burst out laughing.

You’re not even scared this time. Not because you know what to expect (although you strongly suspect whatever metaphysical fuckery to come will involve David Bowie somehow) but because this is honestly the most relief you’ve felt since waking up. Collapsing into a seizurific fic has historically been a positive experience for you. You get to see your dead children, who still think you’re cool, you get to have non-life threatening sex with an Optimus that isn’t terrified of touching you and Elita’s there, with her smartassery and nature loving nerdom and strong girly arms that you’re totally not thinking about melting into. Honestly, if this is a round trip ticket back to the realm of the Primes, then you’re jumping on board. Heck, you’re taking the pilot at gunpoint if he so much as thinks about turning the plane around. You can wake up in another 30 years, when Fowler’s in a nursing home and everyone’s got their collective shit back together.

“Fuck!” Chirps your beloved round trip ticket.

“Hell yeah man.” you reply loftily. “Let’s do this. Send me back to the robot god’s glamrock hellhole. I’m ready.”

“Aid requesting to the female responsibility person!”

You freeze.

Wait.

“Active in excruciation! Thank you respond!”

Wait.

“Desire strongly you present! Ask to be removed from location!”
There’s no way.

You cup the teeny bird in your shaking hands, bringing her closer to your disbelieving face.

“What?” you ask weakly, more declaration of awe then a question. “What?”

“Thank for the helping please!” she bleats once more, as the wind pulls her from your arms and she dissolves into billions of glittering fragments sparkling in the sunlight.

You fall to your knees, the world accelerates around you and you’re flung so far forward you’re nowhere, until your astral body snags like a kite in a treetops to a dead stop.

You’re solid once more. And now that you are, you realize being solid sucks. Being solid is the worst thing ever. It’s terrifying. Because it’s no longer the sun blinding you, but cold, artificial light, and it’s not the wind pulling her from your arms, but heavily shadowed, heavily covered figures. Human figures. And her singing grows weaker and it’s not your arms they tear her from and... and...


And that’s exactly what you do, thrashing wildly, screaming until your lungs burn, not out of agony but because you can hear her crying, and she’s not a bird.

Oh god she’s not a bird.

For the second time in your life, you see through someone’s else’s optics and cry out in broken english through someone else’s vocalizer.

“Nightbird.” you whisper the moment your collective agony recedes long enough to let you speak, “Oh god Nightbird.”

“Esteemed Deity Nightbird.” your shared mouth translates for you.

“Female familiar responsibility person.” she responds, vocalizer breaking with static.

There’s a smattering of foreign language the humans in the room exchange after a pause, which you somehow understand clear as day.

“Did...did she power herself on?”

“That’s not possible, she was placed in artificial stasis.”

“Is she dreaming? Can she actually dream?”

“Of course she can’t, don’t be ridiculous.”

“Then what the hell is she babbling about?”

It’s with some trepidation you realize that you’re speaking aloud. Both of your conversations are being carried on though her own lips. You narrow your optics at your observers. “Eat shit and die.”

“Consume excrement and perish!”
Their expressions are worthy of a renaissance oil painting, and your first instinct is to continue insulting, but on second thought, your keep your end of the voicebox closed. There’s an uneasy line between thinking what you want to say and actually saying it, but if you go slow enough, concentrate hard enough, you should be able to toe it.

“Can you still hear me?” you ask cautiously.

“Possible in the understood.” she says out loud once more, much to the confusion of those around her.

“Can you talk quietly, like I’m doing?” you plead gently, extending tendrils of yourself invitingly over the divider of nonverbal communication.

There’s a pause. For a moment you think you may have lost her.

“With able to you are a heard my currently?”

You blow out a metaphorical sigh of relief. Then release a metaphorical scream of agony because whatever those foreign fucks are doing to your helm hurts. This must be why you’re strapped down. You can’t see what’s going on but things are being plugged in and pulled out and peeled off and sutured in and all of it sucks.

You both manage to find a dark nirvana between the momentary lapses in sensation. You plant all four limbs there and hold on with everything you have, trying to gain enough of a foothold to pull her in with you. If you want any chance of finding out where she is or how to save her, you’ll have to calm her down first, no matter how insurmountable a task that might be, considering she’s currently suffering a lobotomy without anesthetic.

“Nightbird, honey,” you start as calmly as your racing mind will allow you to form words from your alphabet soup of a brain. “Where are you?”

“Currently located in the unideal.”

“The unideal habitations, I know- “ you pause, Mustering the strength to speak through the blinding fear. “Can you show them to me? Show me as much as you can.”

“Constant excruciating in the actions! Difficulty of the viewing!”

“I know it hurts. I’m sorry. But I need you to be brave for me. Can you be brave?”

A pause. The longest split second pause of your goddamn life.

“Boldness acquisition for the female familiar responsibility person.”

If you had a face right now you’d be in tears.

“Okay. Good girl. I know it hurts, but I want you to focus on looking around. Look at everything you can, keep you optics moving. I want to see everything you’re seeing.”

You observe placidly as she slowly turns her helm around the room, every breath, ex-vent painfully magnified. You focus as had as you can on not focusing, trying to take in an panoramic view of your
surroundings, soaking every detail of the whirlwind of commotion around you. Less eye spy and more Where’s Waldo. You’re not even conceptualizing what you see, just trying to assimilate as much raw data as possible. Retain as much of it as you possibly can, because god knows how much time you have before your game is forced to an early end.

“Good morning,” comes the unenthusiastic greeting of one of the men in the labcoats, setting a sandwich down as the door is briskly opened and swung shut. “I trust you’ve been sufficiently prepped?”

“I’ve been stripped naked, showered, had my blood drawn and been paid, if that’s what you mean.”

“I only needed to know one of those things.” says the man. “We’re ready to initiate fusion.”

Your early end comes in the form of one douchebag-costume-party-fetish-wearing-mercenary. Cold anger, along with cold fear, soars through your collective veins.

Shao Shao Li.

The cold fear turns to warm fear, along with panic. Blind, helpless, please-god-don’t-let-them-do-this-to-me-panic.

“Refrain armor embrace thank you!” your shared body begs around you. “Be the refraining!”

“You’ve got her strapped down this time right?” Shao Shao asks.

“We had her strapped down last time.”

“Strapped down with something that actually works. I don’t want to be sent flying into the wall again.”

You both convulse against your confinement, unintentionally answering her question and sending your sparkrate into the stratosphere.

“If she gets loose again we have permission to use the override command.”

“No you don’t.”

“Okay, but it’s an option-”

“We’re on a schedule-” the other man reprimands, tapping his watch impatiently. “And I’d rather not have Silas come in here and chew us out again. So unless you have a good reason to keep delaying, I’d like you to go ahead and initiate contact.”

“I’m getting paid by the hour now-”

“Just fucking do it!”

“Please be the refraining!” you both shout once more. You didn’t think she could actually get anymore scared, but the terror that grips you both as the dark haired girl straddles your body and once again resumes it’s unearthly yellow glow is beyond coherent description. The fear itself has become a force of nature, shoving a crowbar between your two consciousness and prying them apart through sheer brute force. You can only reel in silent agony as your soul is ripped from your body
and flung back into the space between stars. But not before you’re able to hear a final, static laden
desperate plea rip from her vocalizer.

“Female familiar responsibility person! Request the helping! REQUEST THE HELPING!”

The link is severed, you’re crammed back into your body with all the grace of a fork shoved into a
running garbage disposal, and you’re screaming before you even open your eyes. The saliva foaming
out of the sides of your mouth has blood in it, you’re inhaling it, you’re coughing and sputtering and
your lungs are burning but you’re still screaming because fuck everything that’s why.

There’s several pairs of optics attached to several faces your blurry vision won’t allow you to
identify, but at least one of them is Optimus probably and you can hear Ratchet yelling not to touch
or move you from somewhere out of sight. You relax, momentarily, remembering where you are.
Then, remembering where you aren’t, promptly continue screaming.

“I KNOW where she is!” you choke out once you remember communication requires words. “I
know where she FUCKING IS!”

“Who-?”

“Nightbird!” you snarl. “They’re FORCING her to fuse again and I can see her and it hurts it
fucking hurts!”

And just like, that the veil of the sucksmagntosphere is lifted, pierced, eradicated. Mostly by
Optimus’s field, mostly by it exploding like thousands of tiny needles in all directions. Pain, pain,
didn’t need any more PAIN.

“How....can you see her?” Optimus asks after an appropriate amount of stunned silence.

That’s the stupidest question you’ve ever heard but that’s probably just the seizures, fear, and stupid
stupid PAIN talking.”How the fuck can I NOT-?”

“Please, (y/n) “ he’s using the deepest, calmest vibrato in his words you’ve heard yet. “We cannot
understand you. In order for us to do that, you must calm down.”

You pretty much used this exact line of logic verbatim with Nightbird under a minute ago, so you
can’t argue with that. Moreso, despite his voice, the look in his optics is completely, utterly terrified.
Maybe even more than Nightbird. You’ve had enough secondhand fear to last a lifetime in under a
minute, so you summon willpower from exactly nowhere and force your breathing to slow down,
force your racing mind to produce coherent thought.

“I...I dunno. Like how when we were fused. It’s probably BECAUSE we were fused. I could see
through her optics, we could talk to each other, I could see the room she was in, the people who had
her strapped down.” you swallow thickly. “I...tried calming her down enough to get her to look
around...and it worked, but then Shao Shao fucking Li showed up and she’s gonna force her body
into hers again and...fuck FUCK-”

“I applaud you for thinking clearly under such duress.” Optimus begins. “Is there anything you can
remember that may denote a location?” If it’s any consolation, his expression has changed for
probably the first time in 30 years to something other than “constipated static.” The downside is that
it’s almost breaking to him to do so. You can see the desperation in his eyes, and bitterly can’t help
but think this is the first time in days he’s actually paid attention to you. "This is what it takes, huh?"
“Let me think...” you say, palming you forehead, throwing that bitter little nugget in the storage locker. Right now, feelings of insecurity and abandonment aside, you two have the exact same goal and perhaps the exact same ferocity to get there. You pull the experience back up in your minds’s eye, warily towing the line between memory and visualization, least you start projecting and the concentration cements false information into your conscious mind. The lamp, the stupid overhead lamp with the stupid painful bright light and the stupid door opening to reveal ShaoShao stupid Li, stupid labcoat technician number 1 putting down his sandwich to greet her, stupid labcoat guy number 2 putting stupid plugs inside your head jabbering away stupidly.

You grimace in frustration. The words you once understood beyond the boundaries of language become foreign once more in you mind, unintelligible the harder you try to remember it, until it degrades to stupid, aggravated yelling.

Stupid aggravated Russian yelling. You pull your mind’s eye up to the door, the lettering is decidedly ruskij alfavit, as are the badges hanging from lanyards on the men. There’s a bear in a fez eating potato pancakes and playing Tetris near the back wall but that’s probably your unhelpful brain supplying the visualization for you.

“They were speaking Russian.”

You can almost hear the fluorescent humming from the metaphorical lightbulb that goes off in Optimus's head.

"One of the locations I recently marked under suspicion of being tampered with is a remote area of Siberia." he says, making a beeline for the terminal, selecting one of the cameras and bringing it fullscreen. “I have witnessed a rabbit remaining in place for over ten minutes in an open clearing. Considering they are small prey animals I found both the location and it’s inaction to be unusual.”

Sure enough, a lone rabbit stands statue-esque in the middle of a field, bright mid-morning sunshine glinting off it’s unmoving back.

**Mid morning?**

You squint your eyes. “How long was I out for?”

Ratchet clears his throat. Ineffectively. His voice still hovers somewhere between “gravely” and “hungover cement mixer”. “Your seizure lasted for approximately three kliks. In fact, it was in the upper range of.”

“So it’s still morning here?” you cut him off.

“Earth’s sun is still posi-”

“What does the clock say, Ratchet?”

He groans, rolls his optics, then cringes, as though the action had caused him physical pain. It probably had. “Your planet’s primitive time measurement system declares it to be 9:00 AM.”

“Then shouldn’t it not be morning there?” you ask gesturing flatly towards the screen.

Ratchet’s optics widen. He slaps a servos over his face, swearing softly. "Of course...I neglected to
factor in... your planet’s...primitive time measurement system. There should be a ten hour difference.”

“So 7:00 PM over there.” you murmur, the image of the first stupid labcoat technician putting his sandwich down flashing back up behind your eyes. “One of them was eating dinner.”

“If we are to assume the events you witnessed are taking place in real time-” Optimus begins, at long last stowing the prism in his subspace and freeing his left servo for what you assume is the first time in years.”-Then I believe we have enough relevant information to proceed.”

You grit your teeth. Your seizure wasn’t enough to get him to put the illustrative pintrest away, but this is. It’s not like you’re not foaming at the mouth(literally) at the chance to rescue Nightbird, but your righteous determination doesn’t quell the anger welling within your chest. You’re pissed off.

“Ratchet, do you have a lock on the coordinates?” he asks, proceeding to cock his gun and snap his battle mask into place. Now you’re pissed off and turned on.

“I do.” he replies, groggily making his way over to the switch.

“Activate the groundbridge. Arcee, Bulkhead, Bumblebee, we’re going in.”

“Shall I contact Agent Fowler?” Ratchet asks.

“If you must. I intend to proceed regardless of his input.” and that’s probably the politest version of “I don’t give a shit.” you’ve ever heard. “I entrust you to see to (y/n)’s injuries, and expect an update if her condition changes.”

So that’s it. He’s just gonna talk about you in the third person, roll out of here gun’s blazing wild west style and leave you here to pine all alone (hungover nightmare factory of a medic nonwithstanding.) That’s not gonna fly. And you’re gonna do everything in your power to let him know that’s not gonna fly or, barring that, show him. You open your mouth, about to tell this giant alien Lone Ranger that you are absolutely playing Tonto or at LEAST Silver on this ride along and not gonna sit here on your ass like a UV reactive southern belle, but something in his optics when he finally looks at you stops you cold in your tracks.

Up until now, you’d ridden the assumption that his tireless pursuit for Nightbird was an excuse to avoid you AND his repressed feelings of guilt all wrapped up in one neat little package. You’d ridden it like a stolen racehorse over state lines. But the desperation etched into his face sets you down a different path, a detour around the mountain of emotional baggage he either can’t or won’t clear. It’s painted in those cobalt canvases, starry and midnight blue, and so very, very desperate.

“Please, let me fix this.”

This isn’t an excuse or a distraction. It’s a completely misdirected apology.

The flood of sudden understanding that breaks over you as the gates open washes the bitter flotsam away, leaving only sympathy in it’s wake. Sure, it’s a redirected attempt but he’s attempting it nonetheless “Sorry for the sex coma here’s a new daughter to make up for it.” Honestly, this is the next best thing to having never been in a coma to begin with. When this is all over you’ll have to get him something to show your appreciation. Like a mug that says “1# dad/boyfriend/truck on it.”

Wither he says it or not, your goals align. Wither he’s sutured that goal to a hundred and one little reasons for doing or not doing things that all involve you doesn’t matter, because the end result is something you both agree on. *You’re bringing her the fuck home.*

Warm fuzzies, along with brilliant resolution erupt within you. You’re going to compromise on a quantum level. You’re going to put all of this shit aside and pull off the heist/rescue mission/mass homicide of the century. You’re gonna smash garbage humans and rescue a sweet sentient mech suit and maybe even though a party afterwards. *This is gonna kick ass.*

“We’re really gonna bring her back?” you ask with warbling voice and watery eyes “I mean, like back here with us, to stay?”

“We are.” he replies with such sweet, deep reassurance, fierce determination in his eyes. To your disbelief, he stretches out a single, shaking digit, and presses it against your palm. His frame trembles endlessly to compensate and he withdraws it before a whole second has passed, but that does little to eclipse the fact that he actually touched you. ”I promise we will not return without her.”

You might need medical attention after all, because you swoon so hard the edges of your vision go black. Your elephant may not have gotten over his fear of mice, but he’s trying. Damnit he’s trying. Thankfully, the adrenaline rush activated by your entire nervous system initiating Mama Bear protocol trades your shaking legs for sturdy, also shaking legs. Shaking with courage.

“Ohay,” you say, fire in your eyes and probably what’s left of your human bones. “Let’s bring our baby bird home.”

“It is far too dangerous for you to accompany us. Remain here with Ratchet.”

...Or not.

You’re not really sure what you expected. Heck, 80’s Optimus wouldn’t have wanted you anywhere near the frontlines, post 2010-ish Optimus probably has tentative plans to graft bubblewrap to your skin or put you in a giant hamster cage. You’re not even angry, not really, but as you watch them disappear though the self contained wormhole, filled with enough orphaned, directionless resolve to power a neutrino star, and Bee shoots you a last, sympathetic glance before going through, your resolve finds direction. The desire to *not be lame in front of your son.*

Sitting back on a highly dangerous mission is one thing. Letting Bumblebee see his dad tell his mom to stay put and have her *listen* is a whole ‘nother ballpark on another planet three galaxies over.

“Ratchet,” you say plaintively. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“For doing something this stupid.” you say as you go tearing off into the ground bridge before his jaw even finishes dropping.
“No socket, don’t pop it.”

Chapter Summary

This was supposed to be part of the last chapter but I got impatient and whacked it in half.

pls enjoy

You pop out on the other side, blinking as though you’ve walked into the sun(and you have) but it’s more from the fact that you brain still hasn’t caught up with your body about how stupid the thing you just did was. You’re still not sure if you actually just did what you did. You threw yourself through a self contained wormhole. You defied orders. You’re not actually part of this military unit and therefore don’t fall under his command but you still defied orders.

But more importantly, does Bee think you’re cool yet? He looks more stupefied than anything, but that’s okay. You’ll take dull surprise over second hand embarrassment any day of the week.

You console yourself. Elephants don’t give orders to mice, and if they did, they wouldn’t have to follow them. Because they’re mice. Revved up, hellbent on rescuing their adopted baby bot mad as hell mice, but still mice. And that’s exactly what you tell yourself to keep yourself standing tall as you scurry beneath the feet of the elephant, who fixes you with a gaze too surprised to be reprimanding or disappointed.

“I told you to remain behind.” Optimus says sternly.

Normal you would have pissed themselves and crumpled into a pile of guilt and shame. Sleep deprived, hungover, pressured-into-impressing-their-son and absolutely DONE you has no such reservations.

“Y-you did.” you stutter, but your legs remain locked firmly in place, and you’re very, very proud of yourself for that. “You’re also fucking insane if you think I’m going to sit on my ass while you rescue her without me.”

He spends no more than a second processing your display of insubordination before bringing a digit to his audial fin. Probably to contact Ratchet. Probably to reactivate the ground bridge to send you back though, which you are definitely not going to allow.

“You need me.” you say, voice so solid and unwavering it causes him to pause. “I’m the one with the link. I can see her. If we lose her again-” those words sear painfully rolling off your tongue. No. Not gonna happen. “-Then I’m you best shot at picking the trail up again.”

“She’s got a point,” Bee chirps in agreement before Optimus has a chance to respond. Arcee and Bulkhead shift uncomfortably. You need to not care about that.

“Very well,” Optimus concedes wearily. “Bulkhead, since you have more experience then the rest of us in caring for... unexpected additions to our party, you are responsible for (y/n)’s safety.”
Arcee lets out a cough that sounds suspiciously like “Miko.” Bulkhead looks nervous, but offers his servo nonetheless, (his non-shaking servo, you notice ruefully) and you climb in. He handles you like a priest would a holy relic, with as much practice as there is reverence. He’s clearly used to this. “Thanks” you say a little sheepishly.

“Don’t worry, Bulk can do this in his sleep.” Arcee says with a sigh of relief, probably because she hadn’t been picked, as he places you on his shoulder. Out of all the shoulder’s you’ve ridden on his is easily the most steady. His movements and posture are calculated, every step is chosen with care to take the smoothest stride possible, and he does it as naturally as venting. Impressive. But there’s other things to focus on, like, say, finding the entrance to MECH’s auxiliary chop shop hidden somewhere in the middle of this forest.

That suspicious looking grassy knoll is probably a good place to start.

“Keep an optic out for anything unusual.” Arcee says, her practiced tracker training coming out full swing. “Uneven grass growth, hollow trees, fake rocks, anything that might be hiding a control panel for the entrance way.”

You keep one optic out, but also the other one on Optimus, who, after giving the suspicious looking mound a brief once-over, retracts the servo on his right arm, equips his gun, and fires no less than ten explosive rounds at it without so much as a second thought. You wonder if he’d received those from Ironhide. You wonder what other weapon upgrades he may have undergone during your dirt nap, but also what the fuck.

“That....works too.” Arcee says flatly as the smoke clears, and reveals a door roughly the height of a two story building beneath the twisted metal shell and smoldering vegetation.

“I suggest we proceed quickly.” Optimus says flatly. “They may have detected our presence.”

Is that sarcasm? You think it might be. You also think, as you proceed riding atop the shoulder of a giant metal death machine headfirst into a rescue mission lead by your giant metal boyfriend and son, that you might actually be having fun. Heck, you’re a hard rock anthem and ridiculous one liner away from an action packed b movie grindhouse film as is.

“Since they already know we’re here-” Bee interjects “Can I play some music?”

Optimus comes to a sudden stop. He turns his helm, raises his optical ridge and gives Bee the sternest, dadliest are you kidding me look he can muster with 75% of his face obscured. You cringe inwardly.

“As I believe the earthlings say-” he proceeds with a completely straight face and level voice. “Lay it on me man.”

Your jaw drops outwardly. Bee turns on his wideband and plays a scooped guitar riff that, after a moment, you identify as the beginning of ACDC’s Thunderstruck. Despite the heaviness of the situation you suddenly feel very, very proud of both your boys.

Arcee and Bulkhead exchange glances like they’ve just seen a ghost and are questioning both the ghost’s and their own sanity. You’re not. You know this ghost. It’s the ghost of a laid back dad-bot and you are ecstatic to have him come back and haunt your ass.
You wonder if the mere virtue of your presence had caused this partial reversion. You hope so. Not just because he genuinely seems happier this way, but also because it makes you feel powerful. You might be roughly the size of a soft pretzel to him (and about as malleable) but his theoretical reaction to your flow of emotions like a bird in the wind would essentially make you a beast master. Or a lion tamer. Or a Scandinavian deity closely associated with felines. That last one sounds good. Bulkie’s cool and all, but right now you’d rather be riding your big cat into battle like the norse love goddess you’ve totally become.

~I was caught
In the middle of a railroad track

You’re not even fifty feet into the entrance before frightened, screaming people are flooding out in every direction. It’s like walking into a swarm of bees. Actual bees. The explosive rounds had done more than reveal the entrance, it seems, because there’s smoke coming from some of the rooms, the sprinkler systems have been activated, and pieces of the ceiling are falling down in chunks. There’s probably been some structural damage. You worry briefly about the safety of the possibly-not-garbage humans thrown into the mix, but figure they couldn’t have possibly been stupid enough to construct an underground base with no emergency exists.

“There’s no emergency exits!” screams a possible garbage human. “We’re all going to die!”

Or not.

~I looked round
And I knew there was no turning back

Your party continues down the corridor, just barely dodging wave upon wave of terrified goons weaving between and around their pedes. At some point the cacophony of screams and yells of those verbally voiding their bowels had been joined by the blare of an alarm, and the thunderous shuffle of hundreds of metal feet. You experience brief deja-vue, having heard it last time you shared bodies with you ninja bot, and look up to be totally not-surprised at the small army of autoroopers that has amassed to block your path.

~My mind raced
And I thought what could I do?

“Halt-” comes the empty, mechanized voice of non-living metal “You are not authori-”

Optimus finishes his sentence for him. With his fist. He then finishes every other concurrent sentence by ripping his head straight off and using the blaster of his other arm to blow in the face of every autorooper within reach. Exactly ten of them fall to the floor, deactivated, within the span of five seconds.

~And I knew
There was no help, no help from you

Holy shit.

Another throws it’s fist, which Optimus catches, crushes, then with the same arm judo-throws them over his shoulder and onto the ground. Hard. The force of the collision shatters their optical visor. Not to be deterred even in it’s death throes, it raises it’s armed servo and aims at his helm, but is
effectively glock-blocked when he slams his pede into it’s throat. It’s optics flicker, it’s arm goes limp, but not before Optimus takes the blaster and uses to shoot the next in line point-blank in the face.

Holy shit.

He fires it until the telltale *click click* of an empty magazine stutters through the gun. He wastes no more than a second looking at in in disgust, before slamming it into the face of the one attempting to sneak up behind him, pistol whipping them with sufficient force to dislocate their jaw and send it flying across the room and into the wall with an satisfying clunk.

*Holy shit.*

You can’t help but feel a little left out of all the action as you watch the heads roll. After all, you’d been the first to single handed-ly decimate a battalion of these knockoff cybertronian meatsuits. But you’ve got no giant metal body to commandeer, so you resign yourself to watching from afar.

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*Sound of the drums
Beating in my heart*

And, try as you may to stop yourself, *drooling* a little from afar. Now is really bad time to notice exactly how handsome your estranged boyfriend is in the heat of battle, but damn does he look badass, damn does he look good with that mask on, and *damn* if the sight of him venting rapidly, splattered in energon and holding a freshly eviscerated spinal strut *predator-style* doesn’t turn you into a pile of goo. Knowing the mechanical body he pulled it from was never sentient to begin with means you can fantasize about it alone later guilt free. Which, realistically, is probably *all* you’ll end up doing.

You do you best to keep you mouth clamped shut, but you might’ve actually let out a moan. Which is humiliating enough on it’s own, but being on Bulkhead’s shoulder right next to his audial receptor is some next level shamelessness. Thankfully, he’s too busy laying the pain on his own opponents to have noticed, or to have given you an awkward side eye at your lack of self control.

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*The thunder of guns
Tore me apart*

Not that he really needs to. You’re sure both Arcee and Bulkhead are vicious, talented warriors in their own right, but you’ve seen them with you own eyes in active combat exactly twice, and both times they’d spent most of it with lost, dumfounded expressions on their faces. But that’s okay. They’re mostly here to offer witty commentary.

“Wow.” Bulkhead says after a momentary lapse in the action. “That’s...wow.”

Or not. You can’t really blame them, considering the circumstances, but but their movements slow down and they succumb to dull surprise as the carnage continues around them. Probably remiss for a glass of lemonade and a recliner chair to watch Optimus finish *mowing the goddamn lawn* from.

The scariest part is that he’s not even *mad*. This artificial army is no more than water he swims though, jungle brush to cut through, hot fucking butter to slice though. “A *perfect analogy,*” you think, as he’s quite literally cleaved the last one in half like a log of clarified dairy product. It’s at this point you rescind your divinity. You were never the god here. *Silly human. Pagan deity references*
are for alien death robots.

~I was shaking at the knees
Could I come again please?

You shoot a glance at Bumblebee, mildly concerned by the amount of bloodshed he’s being exposed to. He’s might be an adult nearly twice over on your planet but he’s still not even a year old by Cybertron standards. And while you’re sure he’s seen his fair share of homicide you can’t help but feel you’re racking up bad mom (tm) points by letting him watch, let ALONE participate. These beings share the collective sapience of a longneck clam but this still probably falls somewhere between letting him play CoD or actively encouraging alcohol consumption on the spectrum of bad parenting. But the absolute glee you see shining in his face mirrors you own at this (almost) family friendly violence orgy. He returns the same doofy, ecstatic grin you feel spreading over you own face. He emits an excited burst of static that, while not followed by words, speaks clearly for itself.

“This is so cool!”

He’s right. You need to stop being so worried, and allow yourself to be placated once more by this kickass show of metal bravado. If this is how the universe dictates you three bond then so be it. This is quality family time.

~You've been,
Thunderstruck

With some effort, Optimus pulls his fist from the chassis cavity of the last of the tin soldiers. He allows the limp fame to fall from his grasp, standing momentarily still in the smoldering massacre aftermath. The scene is worth a thousand words, none of them properly conveying how badass it is. Nor do they properly convey your confusion, and ultimately, dismay, as the mist lifts off the battle field and the realization that you’ve hit a dead end sinks in.

“They cannot have evaded us once more.” Optimus says, emphasizing cannot in a way that tells you and everyone else he’s challenging reality itself. “There is nowhere for them to have fled to.”

You don’t exactly lack the candor to call the gods out on their bullshit, but your glowing beacon of hope grows as dim and obscuring as the smoke pluming around you. But before the light is extinguished completely you see crawling from out of the corners of your eyes and from one of the rooms a possible garbage human. Scooting and around on his hands and knees and coughing his lungs out. The smoke inhalation must be getting to him. You feel a brief pang of worry, followed by more nauseating deja-vue, because you recognize him as one of the men in your vision, namely the one responsible for giving both you AND Nightbird a painkiller free lobotomy.

“That guy” you flounder, pointing angrily at the confirmed garbage human. “I saw him. He was plugging stuff into my, uh, her...our head...”

In the 0.5 second gap between the words “That” and “guy” Optimus has planted his pede in front of the man hard enough to break the tiles and through at least one layer of concrete. The ground shakes. The garbage human wasn’t on his feet to begin with, but they come out from under him anyways.

“We have encountered a dead end.” he states blankly “And require your help circumnavigating it.”

“Ah...” replies that guy. “Uh...”
“Skazhi mne, kuda oni poshli, ili ya razdavlyu tebya, kak zhuka, ty kusok der'ma” Optimus repeats in unintelligible but probably perfect Russian your brain refuses to translate for you. You don’t need to speak any language, however, to somehow find that attractive as hell. You might have a new kink. Looks like you’ll be fantasizing about that later too.

That guy’s blood drains from his face, he briefly makes the sign of the cross and thanks the powers that be for the sphincter strength to not soil himself as he scrambles over to the dead end, presses his hand into a blank portion of the wall, and uncovers a seamlessly hidden panel with a large green button, which he punches with increasing desperation until the electronic groaning of gears whirring to life fills the air. You watch in disbelief as the wall, the false wall, promptly falls away.

It opens out into a massive tunnel, more like an underground highway. Likely used for motor vehicle transport until the moment they got their hands on groundbridge technology. The fact that they had no option but to use it is reliving, in that it almost certainly implies they have yet to manufacture another portable wormhole after detonating their last one in a closing “fuck you” ceremony”. It also, unfortunately, suggest that Nightbird, in addition to being a toddler strapped into a death machine, is also capable of transformation. You don’t have enough fingers to count the ramifications of MECH possessing that kind of high-speed stealth technology, so you settle for metaphorically shitting yourself.

And maybe physically shitting yourself. The road itself seems to have bottomed out into a labyrinth of pipes, concrete, crumbling brick walls, eliciting a boiler room/Gotham city aesthetic. A winding, nauseating maze that’s so much like your dreamworld journey you can almost see the watercolor trees superimposed on top of the urban decay. But before you can even say “Fuck this whack ass synchronicity bullshit.” Optimus has given the order to transform and roll out. Apparently, during a discussion you were too busy having open eyed flashbacks to pay attention too, they’d gauged the tunnels length to be too long to traverse on foot.

Follow me. You can almost hear the rabbit saying.

You’re shunted into the passenger side seat of Bulkhead’s cab with surprising fluidity. The seatbelt’s snapped snugly over your torso before you’ve finished blinking.(None too tightly, you notice bitterly) You can’t even remember the last time you rode in a car that didn’t want to play grab ass. It’s kind of nice. Boring but nice. Or, it would be if he hadn’t accelerated from 0 to 60 in the span of 6 seconds. The blood rushes to the back of your skull, closing your eyelids is an olympian sport. You might actually be melting into the seat.

“What-” you manage though numb lips.

“Sorry...!” he blurts out, both struggling and sheepish. “I’m just trying to keep up.”

Follow me.

He’s not lying. You’re not certain what the top speed of a Peterbuilt 379 is supposed to be, but Optimus has clearly exceeded it. Then again, most semi’s run on diesel, not a 10-30-60 mixture of en ergon, misplaced guilt and unleaded paternal rage.

Please, I have something to show you.

There’s light at the end of the non-metaphorical tunnel. The rabbit has led you to a rat. A smug ass trapped rat.
A smug-ass about-to-be-in-a-120mph-head-on-collision-with-40-tons-of-righteously-pissed-18-wheeler-fury rat. Everyone else has stopped and resumed their altmode, sans Optimus. He’s blaring his horn, but other than that offers no indication that he isn’t going to turn this garbage human into smugass roadkill. Silas makes no move to avoid him either, and remains standing directly in his path. You cringe. You don’t know what will happen if he does get hit. His bones might actually liquefy. You wish you didn’t want to see that as badly as you do.

Somehow, in a move that you’re sure violates the laws of physics for anyone that isn’t a very upset main character, he transforms at the last second, and skids to a stop in front of Silas before rendering him a smug ass smear on the pavement.

“Where is she?” he asks, voice tempered thunder as he aims his gun directly at his face.

“She?” Silas cocks his head.

“You know who I’m referring to.”

The wolf grin on Silas’s face could kill plants and small animals. “If you mean the machine we constructed from the sample you so generously provided us with—”

“-She has a name.” Optimus cuts him off, snarling. “Tell us where she is.”

“Or what? You’ll force it out of me?”

His answer is silence, and a low whine, that, after a moment, you identify as the sound his blaster makes while it’s actively charging.

“It would not be wise to tempt me further.”

The time for civility is clearly over. Right now he is a norse god bent on delivering lightning powered fury and you pity the mortal idiot enough to stand in his path. Silas, however, like most mortal idiots, remains oblivious to the divine force ready to fuck his shit up six way from Asgard. You, oddly enough, are torn. You’re pretty sure want him dead. But you’re not sure if you want Optimus stepping over his own moral event horizon to get him there even if you fully disagree with where that horizon lies. You’re no proto-germanic goddess OR liotamer, but you still don’t want this big cat becoming a man eater, knowing he’s the kind of lion that would never forgive himself for tasting human flesh.

“And what if I do? As I recall, upon landing on this planet you made an oath to never harm humans, and you’ve yet to break it.” the smirk on his face has reached nuclear holocaust levels of smug. “At least....not with your hands.”

Nevermind. He’s catfood.

“I don’t know what passes for safe sex among your kind but I’d have thought someone in your position would exercise better judgement. Is there no cybertronian equivalent of “No glove no love?”

His optic actually twitches.

“Though, I suppose in your case, “No socket, don’t pop it” might be more appropriate.” he
continues. “Or, “Cork your pump or you don't hump?”

You swear softly under your breath.

“Canvas that trailer before you nail her?”

This bitch ‘bout to get Thunderstruck.

“Contain that viper before you pipe her? Wrap it in foil, before you check her oil? Put a fucking condom on?”

That’s it. He’s dead. He’s gone. This is gonna rock. Justice is served. You only wish Dr. “Not here right now” Fujiyama could witness his partner in mollusk crime meet the almighty salt shaker in the sky. That and Nightbird. It would only be fitting she witness the demise of those who had caused her so much pain. Considering you’ve both pretty much agreed to take her in, it’s important you demonstrate to her that bad things happen to bad people, and if the universe won’t do it then her new parents absolutely will.

Your giddy maternal excitement gives way to confusion, however, as you realize you still have no idea where she is.

Your answer comes in the form of 2.5 tons of giant metal kunoichi hurtling down from the ceiling, right on top of Optimus and in a death-from-above-move straight out of Mortal Kombat, uses both her pede to kick him aft backwards and propel herself to the other side of the room, skidding to a stop in stereotypical shinobi pose.

You’re almost waiting for the end boss title to appear in jagged, bold font in front of her crouched form as she rises slowly, badassily to her feet, wielding a glowing, ominously humming bo staff not unlike a double ended lightsaber except cooler.

“I am received remainder of currency after you are a die.”

And that’s when you remember she is, in fact, fused with a off money-driven-fetish-party-attending-mercenary fuckjob with a lifetime of experience in marital arts.

Oh shit.
Solving a problem

Chapter Summary

Please mind the "graphic depictions of violence" tag.

Um Maybe don't read this in public.

Saying you enjoy giant robot battles is an understatement.

The three times you watched Optimus in battle with your own two eyes had, in fact, been the sensory apex of your experience as a human being. Seeing the metal man you love (but never quite summoned the courage to say so) lay the pain on either non-sentient or deserving asshole opponents wrapped in the protective blanket of main character shield is the happiest, most exhilarated, most alive you’ve ever felt. It’s seconded only to making sweet, sweet electric love to said man, no matter how ill-advised that may be.

However, seeing him face off against a child soldier being forced to fight against her will with the structural integrity of his luck (tm) in question, is decidedly less satisfying. It is still, unfortunately, badass as hell. He’s back on his pedes, gracefully, like the highly trained predatory feline he is, and manages to dive into a rolling dodge moments before she can dynamic entry him into the far wall with a high flying jump kick.

He unsheathes his energon axe to block a blow aimed directly at his face with her bo staff. The friction between the two energy weapons as they collide creates a resonance that distorts the very air around them with a distinctive, crackling thum. Looking directly at it makes your eyes water and leaves spots in your vision. Tendrils of electricity leap from the contact point with ever increasing frequency and volume until the two are forced to part, jumping backwards, least they’re struck by the lighting of the feedback.

You wish this was less cool. Nerve wracking-don’t-want-either-of-them-hurt-cool but still cool as hell. Your inner 12 year old is screaming in joy while your outer grown-ass adult is screaming in terror. Silently.

Arcee is shaking in place like a doberman waiting for it’s attack command. Bulkhead’s in position like a confused but well meaning linebacker. Bumblebee, however, is the first to actually vocalize anything.
“What should we do?”

“What should we do?”

“Continue to shield (y/n) and detain Silas. “ he grunts, narrowly ducking under the swing of her leg in a roundhouse kick. “Prevent him from escaping. Do not under any circumstances let him out of your sight!”

Both Bee and Bulkhead immediately line the laughably small garbage target between their cross hairs. Arcee does as told, but keeps her optics on Optimus.

“If we both take her, there’s no way she can-”

“No, as we discussed-” he pauses, blocking a punch to the side of his helm with his fist “We can’t risk hurting her!”

“Hurting her?” laughs the garbage-target. “Tell me, do you fear breaking a shovel? Hitting a hammer too hard? She’s a tool. A perfectly engineered tool. Even if she falls within your superfluous standards of life, you’re hardly holding your own.”

Silas seems to have even less self-preservation instinct than Dr. “Almost-got-squished” Fujiyama, if that were at all possible. You’re starting to hope of the bots will take a page out of Ratchet’s book and at least consider stepping on him.

“Admittedly, it took some...restructuring of our program with how to proceed, we were never able to get our cybertonians to accept a T cog, or to emulate sapience like your structure so flawlessly allows.” he continues “But thanks to the generous donation from Miss Marissa-“ he gestures towards you. “-we’ve not only made our biology compatible with yours, we’ve reconstructed your biology and improved it. By all indications, This should be a perfectly matched fight, and you’re still losing!”

Perfectly matched your ass. This is a two on one fight and one of them is essentially ten different mortal combat characters with 0 fucks or sense of self preservation because they’d hijacked someone else’s body. This is the hand to hand combat equivalent of entering tournament play with a modified rapid fire controller you bought off ebay. It’s not expressly forbidden in the rulebook but neither is being a cunt. This is 31 flavors of unfair and everyone’s lactose intolerant. Couple that with the fact that Optimus isn’t fighting to the full extent of his ability but falls somewhere between restraining her, letting her win, and trying not to die and you’ve got a slew of imperfect metaphors fit for the meta-made-for-tv- movie you’re currently in.
“Not only is ShaoShao a martial arts master in her own right, we’ve programmed hundreds of different fighting styles from all across the globe into her processor, both armed and unarmed. No combat experience necessary. A child could use her!”

Somewhere between the words programmed and child something in Optimus’s filed has changed. Bloomed into thousands of tiny flowers of uninhibited rage. He isn’t given the license to act on it, sadly, as he’s still dodging blows, still desperately struggling to get and retain enough of a hold on her for...god knows what. You hope he has a plan because you sure as hell don’t, other than your original one to make a lampshade out of Silas’s skin.

“We’ve broken down your genome into a programmable language compatible with our technology in a manner of weeks.” gloats the lampshade. “We’ve reverse engineered your bodies to be faster, stronger, and pilot-able. We’ve built a better cybertonian than your robot god ever did!”

That strikes a chord, and the change in the air is palpable. Arcee has gone from attack dog to rabid dog, Bee is noticeably twitching, heck, even your current gentle giant loose a low growl. Optimus, despite his auxiliary position as space pope, wastes no attention on the sacrilegious dumpsterfire, so completely and utterly focused on the kunoichi currently throttling him the rest of the world may as well not exist.

“It will be easier conditionally to you are a give up on.” comes ShaoShao’s deadpan, emotionless threat through metal lips. “Myself am required to restroom use.”

Optimus pries her servos from his throat, looks her dead in the optic, and says something in unintelligible, echoing cybertronian that, while less than two syllables long could have been a symphony sung by steel angels. If sound were bullets they would ricochet between your bones. Like crystal drums stuck with a sledgehammer, painful in it’s struggle for grace. You’ve never heard anything try so hard to be beautiful.

Apparently, neither has Nightbird, because she freezes. Or, she would, if not for her pilot’s overwhelming desire to be paid and use the bathroom. Her optics do go wide, tears springing up in the corners to well over and spill down her face. So close. You have no idea what he said or how he said it, but it’s the most progress you’ve made thus far.

“Nightbird-” he says, as though the utterance of her name causes him physical pain. “Nightbird, please stop.”

Something within her has clearly stirred at whatever he spoke with such reverence before, but her body remains steadfast in it’s human driver’s assault. She throws a 1 inch punch at his chassis that
sends him reeling several steps backwards, though not before an agonized cry rips from her vocalize. *She wants to stop. Oh god let her stop.*

“Nightbird!” it’s desperate this time. “I know you’re still in there. You can fight this-!”

You’re biting your fingernails so hard they bleed. It’s starting to look more and more like Optimus does not, in fact, have a backup plan, and if he did, isn’t going to get the chance he needs to put it into motion. You honestly have no idea what to do. Typically your gameplan for these kind of things involves evoking sheer maternal fury or bursting into song, and neither of those options seem applicable right now. But then again, neither does anything else. She does, in fact, have a massive connection to the S.I.M.T., one of her first memories that fell upon you when you were fused was hearing *Ashes to Ashes.* Bowie might not work every time, but if this isn’t insanity in a large dose, then nothing is. It’s not like anyone else has a better idea. Or *any* idea, other to stand with their guns awkwardly pointed at the garbage human and their thumbs up their aft.

“Bulkhead-” you start, mind made up. “-Put me down”

He looks at you like a child that had just been instructed to chuck his pet hamster out the window.

“Um, I’m not sure-”

“Nobody is. But I have an idea-” you say, not willing to wait for a response, shimming off his shoulder down his side and leg like a rhesus monkey clambering over a jungle gym and bolting over to the war-waging pair. You keep what appears to be a healthy-but-probably-isn’t distance between yourself and the titans as you cup you hands over your mouth and shout.

“Optimus, do you know the lyrics to Under Pressure?” you ask, resolute in your reasoning that no being capable of singing along WON’T sing along.

Optimus looks at you like you’ve grown two heads and both of them are screaming something only marginally insane.

“I...do...have...his entire discography...memorized.” He grunts out intermediately as an answer, ducking away front the swing of her staff.

“I need you to sing it with me!” You say, aware of how ridiculous this sounds while the words
actively leave your mouth. “This is too stupid to not work! Please, just trust me!”

You search his face, expecting disbelief at best, fear you’ve lost your mind at worst, but find neither. Only a cool, collected reliance. Trust oozes from his optics. You’re asking him to do something verifiably whack but he *trusts you anyways* and starts to hum the beginning in a low, quiet falsetto without so much as a blink.

He didn’t even question it. You force back the tears and swallow at the ball forming in your throat because you need it to *sing*, damnit.

“Um ba ba be, Um ba ba bey-!” Your ability to effectively scat sing while dodging death-death-from-above *is* absolutely going on you resume ”-De day da ,Ee day da, that's okay!”

“It’s the terror of knowing, what this world is about-” he pauses only to avoid the end of the bo aimed at his head in a spear-throw. “Watching some good friends scream-”

“Let me out!” you finish for him as he rolls into a tackling dive to dodge her kick.

“Hope tomorrow, get's me hiiiigher-” you call out, forcing every last ounce of energy out of your lungs even as your resolve fades. You wonder briefly if this was, perhaps, too stupid to work as he barely manages to block her last stab at his throat. It’s taking all of his strength to keep her at bay. But before either of you have a chance to throw in the metaphorical towel, she slows down mid-swing, a far off, misty thousand yard stare glimmering in her optics.

“Why can’t we give ourselves....one more chance....” she begins very, very quietly, and in *perfect* english. “....Why can’t we give love, that one more chance.....”

She jumped ahead a few verses, but that’s okay. Holy *fuck* is that okay. You share a split second, bewildered, albeit knowing glace with Optimus, cautious elation rising in your chest because *it’s working*.

“Why can’t we give love, give love-?!” you shriek, going for double or nothing. If your vocal chords snap or diaphragm explodes then so be it.

“Give love!” she peals back, optics wide “Give love, give love, give love-!”
You shoot a few helpless glances at Bulkhead and Arcee, who are looking on in stupefied awe. Stupefied SILENT awe. This is a group performance guys c’mon. But that’s okay, because they still have a job to do, namely keeping their guns locked on Silas’s head. And his expression, as he watches your impromptu musical number undo the programming on his billion dollar war machine, is priceless.

“'Cause love’s such an old fashioned word,” Optimus continues as her grip weakens, and she falls away from him, stumbling backwards. “And love dares you to care for The people on the edge of the night.”

“And love dares you to change our way of caring -” she croons though her anguish as she crumbles into a heap on the ground, shaking violently as her frame glows an incandescent, unearthly yellow. “-about ourselves.”

“This is our last dance!” you shout running over to her side, where she continues to spasm, humming along even during the throes of the fusion timing out, and the form of ShaoShao fuck you Li re-materializes on the floor. “This is ourselves-”

“Under pressure-” she squeaks, weakly, a shaky, shuddering bright as sunshine and happy to see you mess.

“Female familiar person!” she peals, righting herself with enormous effort and stumbling towards you, though not before using the last of her strength to grab her nude, semi-conscious pilot and chuck her across the room, where she collides with the wall and slowly slides down with an uncomfortable squealing noise.

She stumbles in her attempt to get to you, right into Optimus’s arms. Her face runs the gamut from surprise, recognition, and then ecstasy as he turns to him, throws her arms around his shoulders and pulls him into the cuddliest, baby monkey-est hug outside of an orangutan sanctuary. She nuzzles her helm into his chassis, squealing in absolute rapture.

“Forerunner person!” she babbles. “Finally are witnessing! Gratitude of exceeding the proportions!”

Her gratitude is absolutely exceeding the proportions, because there’s tears running down her cheeks that aren’t from pain and holy shit you have never seen someone so happy. And Optimus, you didn’t think someone’s expression could melt and crumble at the same time, opposite sides of the spectrum crashing into each other and coalescing perfectly on his face. His servos shake briefly, only briefly,
before he pulls her into an embrace of equal ferocity.

His lips move, and the same ringing, melodiously bleeding words from earlier gush out. You still can’t make out what he’s saying, but it reverberates though the room, beating a drummer’s percussion through your veins and bones. You’re sure they’d echo harder still if not eclipsed by glyphs of grief and guilt, but they have the effect of framing the notes that are audible, like a lone flower blooming on a dead vine. It’s a sound painting born on a canvas of pure relief. And, as you’d already vowed, you’re going to do whatever it takes to keep him there because relief, his relief, is worth anything to you.

“Are not want additional increments at unideal habitations.” Nightbird says, golden eyes wide and pleading. “May I come resided with a forerunner and all responsibility persons?”

You let out a nervous sigh, wondering exactly how much of your mind and ShaoShao’s managed to leak into her’s during the fusions. That’s gonna be about as fun as a smorgasbroad of shit to pick out and dissect. You’ll probably need a stiff drink before, during, and after. Or a therapist/brainsurgeon, someone who’s actually qualified to sort out that roadmap of dicked up circuitry. You’re sure Ratchet could refer you to a good robot therapist. Heck, if it works out maybe he can take a crack at you. And Ratchet. And Optimus. That could get pricey, you should probably see if they do family counseling. You can think about that later though, right now, watching papa bear bot bond with your new cub has you too busy d’awwwing at a quantum level to care.

“Yes,” Optimus says softly, so softly as he cradles her in his arms. “We’re taking you home.”

You might actually die from estrogen poisoning, of which you’re currently producing enough of to ovulate into the next galaxy. Which probably isn’t good timing. You’d like to get her settled in and maybe wait another three decades before producing the braincells capable of even beginning to think on that subject. And on that note-

“Bee!” you shout, leaping into the air and waving your hands like an idiot. “Get over here and meet you new sister!”

Bee blinks. He nearly jumps in surprise, but seems to think better of it in the interest of keeping the garbage human under his scope. How responsible of him.

“New sister? Are you kidding me?”
“Nope. We’re adopting the *hell* out of this one.” you’re grinning so hard your face hurts. Arcee and Bulkhead should meet her too. If those guys aren’t a vodka aunt/beer uncle power duo waiting to happen you don’t know what is. They are, unfortunately, still on active duty keeping Silas from scuttling away, however, so on second thought, that might have to wait.

“Cannot wait successful! Anticipatory over-stimulate!” she squeals, “Would like to be seeing the Douche Iron, and the Nelix person!”

After a 0.5 second gap in which you discern her to be asking about Ironhide and your cat, you simultaneously laugh and choke back tears. She definitely got at least some of your memories, though wither that’s from the fusion or her time as the S.I.M.T you’re not certain. Whelp. You don’t currently have the heart nor mental facilities to tell her about kitty heaven.

“You know what? I’ll do you one better.” you tell her. “We’re getting a kitten.”

This time, Bee does jump. “A kitten? are you serious?!”

“Yes a kitten and yes I’m freaking serious.” you blow out a breath. “Or an old cat. Whichever one we get more attached to. We’ll go down to the shelter as soon as this is over and pick one out.”

A soft, disconcerted noise comes from Optimus’s vocalize. Confusion, realization, then shame come over you in succession as it occurs to you that you just made that decision public without any of his input. Considering the anger from him doing exactly this on your behalf is what propelled you to break protocol and jump though the gate to begin with, that’s totally not cool. You don’t want Bee seeing that. You especially don’t want young, impressionable Nightbird seeing that.

“Oh, that is-” you start, back peddling like a rear-facing Lance Armstrong in the Tour de France. “If your dad is cool with it?”

“At this point I am willing to accommodate a leopard or bengal tiger, if that’s what you wish.” he sighs, shaking his head, an exhausted smile weaving over his face for the first time in decades.

Your heart might actually be a brick of c4 set to explode. You’ll just have to tread lightly and try not to detonate it ‘till you get home, or at least to the nearest petstore to pick up supplies. And speaking of catfood-
“What are we gonna do with him?” you say, jabbing your thumb over at Silas, who has yet to utter a single word or change expressions since the spell breaking duet.

Optimus’s servo twitches. You think he’d might actually sprout fangs and make good on the extended metaphor from earlier if not for the intense disgust plastered on his face. *This meat's too decomposed to eat.* “We will allow Agent Fowler to take him into custody.” he narrows his optics. “I would highly recommend you make no attempt to escape.”

Silas doesn’t exactly look scared. He *does* look like he knows he’s lost and everything’s fucked. It’s not much different than his other expressions, and a casual observer wouldn’t be able to tell, let alone relish it. You, on the other hand, are using it to top hot dogs. This shitshow of a cat and mouse game has gone on long enough, though. Time to put the vermin back in it’s cage.

“Say hi to Fujiyama for me, you rat bastard.” you sneer.

“You know what they say about cornered rats, don’t you?” Silas says with the quiet dignity of a dead man talking big shit.

“Consume excrement then perish?” Nightbird offers helpfully?

“They bite.”

You frown. This rodent might be toothless right now, but you know ominous foreshadowing for some godawful point in the future when you see it. Nevertheless, that’s a problem for future you. Current you is just going to enjoy this.

“Am enjoy exchange of feces dialogue with pain person, but hasten to ideal habitations?” she asks brightly. “I’m the excitement!”

Optimus, like you, must have become familiar enough with her speech patterns to translate the last statement as “Can we go home? I’m excited!” and the bloom of warmth peppered with what you can only describe as *mischief* creeping through his field as a smile weaves over his face is almost enough to knock you ass backwards in surprise.

“Hello excited,” He begins with a completely level voice “I am your-”
A muffled *bang* cuts him off mid dad-joke. Nightbird seizes, *screeches*, then topples forward. Your skeleton, still half asleep in the recliner chair of your totally relaxed body, doesn’t try to jump out. It’s in fact with great effort on your part you actually summon the willpower to be bewildered enough to look around. It’s not until you finally look backwards to see the garbage human holding a thin remote, almost, almost concealed beneath his sleeve, thumb still pressed against the red *fuck you* button, does it occur to you what has happened.

Silas, being the living embodiment of sore loser, had activated a self destruct of some sort, which seems to have been wired somewhere between her central fluid pump and spark chamber, seeing as it has effectively destroyed both. The rat, it seems, has regrown his fangs. That godawful point in the future is *now*. Present you and future you are the same person and neither can register the raw reality of the situation. The transition from sweet reunion mode back into sheer panic just isn’t initializing, you hover in serene limbo, emotions several miles behind your body.

It takes the gentle *plup plup* of hot energon spurting out from her stripped chassis, the sensation of it splattering against your skin and the ground *shaking* as Optimus falls to his knees with her in his arms to drag your brain screaming and kicking back into your body and let you know this is, in fact, *real*.

The world slows down around you. You're only vaguely aware that Bee is screaming something unintelligible at Silas and has the tip of his gun pressed into his *face*. Optimus is desperately com’ing Ratchet, that Arcee is telling him they’re too far underground to reach him by radio and Bulkhead has begun punching *through the wall* to get outside in an attempt to remedy this. But you’re focused, hazily focused on the sheer horror of the scene unfolding before you to take any stock of your surroundings. Namely Optimus cradling her weak, profusely bleeding frame with one arm, the other pressed against his audial relay, quietly mouthing “*No.***” between contact attempts.

Nightbird’s attention is torn, between you and the liquid gushing from her chest. She presses her servos awkwardly over the open wound, fruitlessly trying to stave the flow. She regards her own hands, painted in fresh blood with a sort of detached curiosity.

“This is bad, isn’t it?”

You can’t speak. You know enough about spark chambers to know that hers is totally destroyed, and with the fuel lines severed her spark won’t be able to support itself in this state. She’s bleeding out.
“Committed action of the wrong?” Nightbird asks in suspended panic. “Apology!”

_Did I do something wrong? Sorry._

You hear just enough conversation to understand the walls are impossible to smash through without bringing the entire tunnel down around you. Numbers are thrown around, concerning speed, distance, time it would take to drive back though the tunnels, wind back through the bunker and out into the Siberian forest, and how none of those things matter if she can’t even move, let alone transform long enough to drive out. None of this logic seems to have reached Optimus, who still intermediately calls for Ratchet between his murmured prayers to Primus to undo this.

You’d join him, if you had any concept of who Primus was or even a shred of belief that he might give you a second chance with your baby bird. It’s too soon to have her ripped from your arms. She can’t fly yet. She’s not old enough to leave the nest. She didn’t even get to hatch on her own _goddamnit._ The comparison unwittingly brings memories of your time with the S.I.M.T brilliantly to mind, including Elita’s somber parting admittance once you’d left the dungeon.

_“The trial was a test of character. The whole point was to see how you’d act with your options whittled down to the nub in a no-win-situation.”\_

Fuck.

_“You did everything you could and when you couldn’t win, you made the best of it.”_

Fuck.

“Optimus,” you say slowly, letting out a long, withheld breath. “It’s....it’s not working.”

The only indication he gives that he’s heard you is a lighting fast flick of his optics before they dart back to the mangled mess of a child in his arms.

_“Ratchet can’t get here fast enough, and even if he did, there’s nothing he could do.”_ you say, enrobed by a suffocating calm that isn’t your own. “She...needs us.”
He says nothing, venting fast and shallow. You know he’s listening, somehow you’re able to feel the peace that has covered you extending it’s reach to him.

“What-” he asks finally, “-would you have us do?”

You close what little distance you had between you three, place your hands on either side of her helm, and tilt her face towards your own, smiling.

“Hey hun,” you say as softly as you can.

“Unable to comprehend happenstance.” she says, weakly. "Require explain!”

_I don’t understand. What’s happening?_

“There's...gonna be a big change soon.” you move your hands to her servo, wrapping your arms around it and squeezing as hard as you can. “But we’re all gonna be here when it happens.”

“I are the absolute fearful!”

_I’m so scared._

The terror in her voice could shred your soul, and later, from memory, you’ll let it. But right now those claws recoil from the serenity burning supernova bright within you.

“It might be scary. But you’re a big girl, and I know you can be very brave.” you tell her. “You showed me earlier, remember? Can you be brave for me again?” you look hopefully at Optimus. “For both of us?”

“You are not to be the leaving?”

_You’ll still be here?_
“No...” and this time it’s Optimus’s low, shaking voice that reassures her, pressing her tightly against his chassis. “We are staying right here. With you.”

“See?” you say brightly, leaning into the embrace, painting your entire upper body in energon. “We’re all going to do this together.”

“Myself am highly pain. It are does hurt.”

*It hurts so bad.*

Those claws come closer, but are scalded by the flames. *Not yet.*

“I know, but it won’t for much longer. Lets do something else until then. Can you sing with us?”

“We wish execute voicing?”

“Yeah. Just sing along with us. We’ll keep going for as long as we need to until it stops hurting.”

She blinks, collecting herself through the pain, her eyes a pale fire compared to the starlight of before. She retracts her mask, and you’re greeted with the sweetest, most precious metal face you’ve ever seen. The claws latch within you, and it takes everything you have to fan those embers back into flames.

“You said you had the entire discography memorized-” you say, looking over at Optimus. “How do you feel about Starman?”

Your not sure how much longer the calm will stay secured to him, his optics are glass ornaments set to shatter, but he replies regardless.

“It feels ...most agreeable.”

You take a deep breath, forming your own little time bubble, own little pocket dimension that exist solely for the three of you. And in the midst of the chaos, begin to sing.
“Didn't know what time it was and the lights were low-oh-oh, I leaned back on my radio-oh-oh," you start, voice low in your effort to keep it steady. “Some cat was layin' down some get it on rock 'n' roll, he said-”

“Then the loud sound did seem to fa-ay-ade, Came back like a slow voice on a wave of phase ha-ay-aze” she responds. “That weren't no D.J. that was hazy cosmic jive-”

It’s sung once more in perfect english, and in the sweetest, most static laden little voice you’ve ever heard. You look expectantly over at Optimus, covering your helplessness with a waiting smile.

You can almost physically feel him shunting all of his auxiliary power into keeping his voice steady, “There's a starman waiting in the sky, He'd like to come and meet us, But he thinks he'd blow our minds,”

“There's a starman waiting in the sky-” you continue where he trails off. “He's told us not to blow it, Cause he knows it's all worthwhile-” Try as you may, you voice cracks at the high part. You hope she won’t mind.

“Let the children lose it, “ she peals quietly, so quietly at the refrain. “Let the children use it, Let all the children boogie.”

You can feel parts of you heart begin to shrivel up and die. She sounds like an angel, which is fitting, considering she’s more than halfway there. The ball in you throat threatens to suffocate you as you silently plead for Elita’s forgiveness. I’m sorry. I’m sending you another one. At least she won’t be alone. She’ll have two big brothers and your mama bear goddess to look out for her.

“There's a starman waiting in the sky,” Optimus repeats. “He’d like to come and meet us-”

She parts her lips, mouthing the refrain, but no sound escapes. It’s at this moment her servo goes limp in you arms. Her optics, glittering, golden, bright as the sun optics, flicker before burning out completely. A final gush of air slips through her vocalizer, warm on your face.

She’s gone.
How long the three of you stay like this, frozen, fossilized, flung out of space time, you don’t know, and you don’t care. You’ll gladly stay here until the universe ends, because as far as you’re concerned it just did. The vacuum between eternities is deafening in it’s silence, save for a lone, snide cackle that builds into a low roar of laughter.

“It’s a shame, really-” Silas begins, “But now that we have the blueprints, we can always manufacture more. Though, finding another source of diluted energon may prove time consuming, and expensive.” he pauses thoughtfully, “Not everyone is willing to choke on alien cock for free.”

You exhale slowly, closing your eyes, just for a moment. You relinquish your hold on her arm, letting it gently fall to the floor, get to your feet, and turn to face him.

And you go absolutely apeshit.

You’re on him before you even know what you’re doing. You have no strategy, no gameplan. All you know is that Silas is dead and you killed him. The reaper has written you a blank check and he’s cashing it. His eyes widen in surprise before his shark grin has had time to catch up, so you wipe it off his face (permanently) by shoving your fist so hard into his mouth you punch the back of his throat and feel his smile shatter around your hand. You free your hand by planting your foot into his ribcage and slamming him backward hard enough bile sprays from his mouth, along with blood and loose teeth as his head collides with the concrete floor.

He’s still trying to talk around the knuckle sandwich he’s currently deepthroating, surprisingly coherent with a mouthfull of tooth slushie. You’ll have to find some other way to shut him up. Like blunt head trauma. Grabbing his shoulders and slamming him repeatedly into the ground while screaming like a goddamn banshee should do it.

“-she wasn’t even-”

“FUCK YOU!” You cut him off, slamming his torso down, his head bouncing off the concrete like a pool ball.

“-when we started she was.”

“FUCK YOU!”
“-less complex than a smartphon-”

“FUCK YOU!”

You punctuate the last one with a punch to the side of his face. It breaks his cheekbone, and at least two of your knuckles, but you don’t care. You’ve also cut your knuckles on his broken teeth, but it’s a small price to pay to rid the world of his smug ass grin for good. He lunges for your throat, you catch his hand with your own, throw your elbow and pull his wrist backwards over your arm until it snaps and the severed bone protrudes from his now limp arm.

Some far off part of your mind acknowledges exactly how impossible this should be. This man is three times your size with the muscularity and upper body profile of a lowland gorilla. You don’t now where this strength is coming from or how you’re able to throw him around like a ragdoll. This must be a benefit of finally unleashing Mama Bear. You two have become so intertwined you hadn’t even noticed her surfacing. You’re glad she’s here. You finally have license to do bear things. Like eat this motherfucker’s face and shit it out in the woods.

He seems to have given up on talking, at least, there’s mostly just grunts of pain and exertion as he struggles under you like a beached whale. A jacked, highly trained, probably dangerous under normal circumstances beached whale, but these aren’t normal circumstances. He’s so far out of the water he’s in the woods. This is bear country. May as well grow some mutton chops and call you Captain Ahab because this fish is getting Moby-Dicked

You’re not out of the water yet though. While you were busy manning the harpoons he managed to slip up from between you and pull himself upright to his feet, but as he steps over you, you latch onto his leg, dig your teeth into the back of his knee and don’t stop biting until you feel the distinctive *pop* of a tendon severing between your teeth. But you don’t stop there, you clamp down, throw your head back and tear his hamstring out with your mouth. He shrieks, he falls over, and still somehow has the presence of mind to brace himself with the function-less stump of his right hand, and reach with his left into a small holster above his boot. A knife. A ballistic one, and oh, what you wouldn’t give for your duel wielding set right now to go Iron Chef on this asshole. The clock’s ticking, however, there’s not enough time to whip up a crowd-pleasing culinary masterpiece to flambe’ his ass with. So you condense your recipe, lunge for the weapon, unsheathe it 0.5 seconds before he can, and jam it into the base of his spine.

He’s never going to walk again. But that’s fine. Neither is Nightbird. His legs aren’t going to be the last thing you take from him. With his remaining intact hand he manages to push himself from the floor, just enough to narrow his still somehow infuriatingly smug eyes at you. How he’s able to smirk with a busted mouth is beyond you. So it’s a pleasant surprise when you throttle him with both hands and add a concussion on top of his concussion by introducing his head to the pavement once more, his right eye actually pops out, dangling like a paddle ball on a string from the socket.
He stops trying to get up. You take this as your cue to slowly rise to your feet. Chest heaving, head spinning, blood dripping from your hands up to your forearms, caked on your face and hair, saliva foaming at the sides of your mouth. You look like a rabid animal and Silas is the maggot filled roadkill you’ve dug face-first into. He’s not a corpse yet though, and the spark of sheer insecure, complex-driven rat bastard shines in his remaining eye.

“Space...whore....”

You respond by driving your foot into his groin so hard he skids several feet away. He probably is paralyzed from the waist down because all he does is wheeze in response to the pressure.

The knife slides in your grips, you roll it over in your hand, drumming your fingers along the base while you calculate your next move. The ball’s in your court, or, more appropriately, the whale’s on the deck. Your next decision is wither or not to find someway to end this marine asshole mercifully or to let him suffocate under his own weight.

A sad, strangled, electronic vocalization from somewhere behind you breaks you from your concentration. You don’t even need to turn around to realize you just made absolute sushi of this cetacean in front of Bumblebee. An evil, deserving, but still totally sapient and capable of feeling pain cetacean.

You stay put. You don’t need to see his face to know there’s probably terror in it from seeing the revenge obsessed fisherman/grizzlybear you’ve become. You expect it, prepared for it. But when you turn around to meet his big, sky blue optics widened in a miserable who the fuck are you stare, it’s still a hundred times worse. You knew you couldn’t keep his life sunshine lollipops and rainbows forever, you know he’s a grown-ass man at least on this planet, you know he’s seen so much worse. And that still doesn’t make this okay.

You hold your breath, allowing bitter tears to pool in the corners of your eyes, allow the absolutely warranted, absolutely deserved absolutely righteous anger to flow freely within you, let it flow out and ooze from your pores and fingertips. You exhale. Someday, somehow, you’re going to cross this invisible line. You’re going to cross it at 120MPH like it’s the photo finish at the Indy five fucking hundred.

But it’s not going to be in front of Bumblebee.

"Do we have a way of contacting Fowler?" you growl, not by intention, but because you’ve inhaled enough blood that isn’t your own it’s changed the pitch of your voice. You spit some of it out. "I want this self righteous piece of shit out of my face."
Said shit piece narrows his remaining eye.

“What changed your mind?” he asks finally. “Afraid you’ll wind up just like me?”

“No.” you say, letting the knife fall to the floor in a symbolic display of moral superiority. “It’s because my son is watching.”

“Let me guess, if he wasn’t here, you’d eat my face off?”

“I’m still on the fence about it.” you answer honestly.

“How could you...possibly consider that thing your child?”

You sigh, throwing a longing glance up at your two story tall metal baby boy. The palest rays of sunshine bleed though his field, even now.

“The same reason I don’t consider you human.”

You seem to have touched a nerve. A metaphorical one, this time. “How could you throw your entire species under the bus for them?! The moment they get tired of using you as a human electrical outlet they’ll toss you out like the trash you are, and then they’ll cyberform our planet to replace the one THEY blew up! You really think they’re better than us? At least earth is still in one piece!”

That sounds like some Decepticon-tier bullshit. Earth is also technically the corpse of an evil robot god, but it ruins the theme to bring that up right now. “I don’t give a shit what the Decepticon’s endgame is and I don’t care. These guys are family. My family. You can think that over while you’re getting your mangled butt fucked serving a life sentence for murder.”

He starts laughing again. Mostly just wheezing. He might have a collapsed lung. If he doesn’t, you’ll collapse it for him if he keeps at it.

“How many strings will they have to pull just to pin a kidnapping charge on me?”
You don’t even legally exist.” he croaks “You really think I’ll be tried for murder? Nobody outside of this room considered that prototype alive.”

Your eye involuntarily twitches, and you inhale so quickly you choke on air.

He’s right. Nightbird doesn’t qualify as human or cybertronian under the law. He won’t be executed. He might not even be put away for a substantial amount of time. Heck, knowing how your government works he’ll probably get off on a technicality so he can work for them. In all likelihood, he’ll eventually be set free. He killed her and he’s going to figuratively walk.

Unless you do something about it now.

You exhale slowly, kneel down without taking your eyes off of him, and pick up the knife.

“Bee? “ you say thickly, swallowing at the growing lump in your throat. “I need you to look away.”

Silence. Your resolve falters. You squeeze your eyes shut in frustration.

“Why? What are you- “

“Bee please. ” your voice cracks “I don't want you to see this. “

He doesn't respond immediately, giving you a long, uneasy look. You hold your breath.

You release it in a trembling sigh as he finally turns his helm to the wall, and you turn back to the bruised, bleeding, mangled mess of a human beneath you.

Silas narrows his eye(s) at you, the muscles constricting around the empty socket on the right.

“You wouldn't. “

You want to fire back with a clever quip or one liner, but doubt your ability to keep your voice steady. Your hands are shaking hard enough as is, a condition that doesn't go unnoticed.
“You can’t. You’re shaking just thinking about it.” He scoffs, but you don’t miss the hint of panic bleeding through as you lay the blade across his throat, watching in morbid fascination as the jugular bulges out from the pressure, dusty blue against deathly pale skin. You feel nauseous. So nauseous. With mama bear in hibernation and the adrenaline receded from your veins, leaving your nerves frayed and sober, this decision is yours and yours alone to make. What you wouldn’t give for the resolve to drive over the edge, guns blazing instead of tiptoeing like this.

“If you go through with it, you’ll end up right where I am!” he reminds you, making no effort to hide the desperation in his voice. “Now this is murder!”

The anger that blossoms in your chest spreads through your limbs and moves your body for you.

You're crossing the line.

“I'm solving a problem.” you tell yourself as you drive the tip into the jugular, lean your weight into your arm, and sweep the blade across his throat. “Solving a problem.”

In hindsight, it would have been better to tell Bee to cover his audial receptors.

You spend a split second admiring his lung capacity as blood leaps at your face from the incision. In his final moments, Silas proves his life may have been better spent pursuing a career in music, because his wretched, gurgling screams are deafening.

Maybe it's because you assumed someone like Silas would face death with silent defiance. Maybe it's because you hadn't excepted someone with a slit throat to be capable of screaming at all. Either way, you find yourself stunned, and at a complete loss at what to do next. This is not a quick death. This is not a humane death, and if you required any further verification that this series of events is no longer following a movie script, it's evident in how long this is taking. You can only stare in wordless, frozen terror as the nightmarish sounds produced in this man's death throes resonate off the walls.

Somewhere in your panic-stricken mind you come to the conclusion that maybe you hadn't made the slit quite deep enough, and so you throw your weight into the blade and continue to saw, white-knuckling your grip on the handle until you hear a wet cracking sound, and feel the give of cartilage parting beneath you. You push further still, ignoring the thrashing, ignoring the spasms, until greeted with a spray of bright red blood, splattering on your face, your chest, your torso, everywhere. The gurgling quiets. The thrashing stops. A final spasm tears through the body beneath you. Then
The stillness you'd found yourself desperately anticipating does nothing to quell your nausea. Your stomach lurches as you examine his face. Pale, bloodless, pupils dilated. He'd died with his eyes open, disbelief etched into his expression, and it strikes you that he looks more human now than he'd ever appeared while living. For a moment, you consider closing his eyelids yourself, but decide better of it. That was a sentiment reserved for beings that possessed a soul, and he'd thrown the last shred of his aside five minutes ago.

Bumblebee is no longer facing away as you'd asked him, though after the screaming you hadn't really expected him to. You can't bring yourself to look him in the face. Arcee and Bulkhead regard you with slack-jawed astonishment, hilariously ill fitting on the faces of centuries old warriors. You reason they'd either never seen a human expire, or watched one kill another.

In that respect, it was probably the rough equivalent of watching two mice tear each other to shreds. And you would be feeling impossibly naked and mouse like beneath their scrutinizing gaze if your eyes weren’t glued to the other end of the room.

Optimus still cradles Nightbird's limp frame in his arms. He hadn't looked up. Not once.

You made the right choice.

"Problem solved."

It's with that conviction you get to your feet, drop your knife, wipe some of the blood out of your eyes, politely turn to face the wall, and vomit.
Echo

Chapter Summary

Hey guys I feel like I should warn you I cried so hard I puked twice just planning this chapter.

If there were ever a time for a frontal lobe lobotomy, It'd be now.

You don’t need visual memory. You don’t want it. You would, in fact, be willing to chop off your right leg and give a million non fun non-robot blowjobs to get rid of your posterior parietal cortex right this exact second. If you weren’t so sure your screaming body couldn’t get back up again, you’d get down on your knees and beg Primus to burn your eyes out of their sockets.

Not that that would help. The sight of Optimus cradling Nightbird’s limp frame as he carried her back to base, and the ensuing look on Ratchet’s face as he relinquished her into his arms, is going to be seared into your soul.

“You.... will require an autopsy.” Optimus says mechanically. “In order to understand the extent of the knowledge MECH was able to acquire.”

Ratchet trades utterly lost looks between you both, before his face crumbles entirely, optics begging for forgiveness he wouldn’t allow himself even if you were capable of giving it to him. The bloom of guilt and sorrow in his field tears through you and rips at the pain in your belly. The nausea hadn’t quite faded, and your stomach lurches hard enough you stumble. You can’t tell if you’d been made that much more sensitive to his energy fluctuations since the merge, or if he’s just that upset. Either way, every aspect of his being, physical and beyond, gather together in bitter matrimony to scream I could not be more sorry.

You couldn’t deal with that. Not now. So you stared at the floor and walked forward, one foot in front of the other until you’d hit a wall, where you slumped down, and continued to stare. For how long, you’re not sure, though it’s long enough for Ratchet to vanish with the deactivated child, and for Optimus to simply vanish. The other two warriors had slipped out soon after, likely as incapable of offering meaningful sympathy as you are of accepting it.

Bumblebee had been the last to leave. You felt his optics on your back for what seemed like hours, and for all you know it could have been. Fifty percent of you is convinced you’ll split in two if you don’t throw yourself at him and never let go. The other fifty knows that anyone you feel parental
instincts towards inevitably dies, and is perfectly content to stay put and experience complete mitosis to spare his life.

When he does leave, you’re left to your own devices, waiting on tears you can’t force. The sucksmagnetosphere had only grown stronger, overwhelming, suffocating grey, aside from your brief sojourn with Ratchet. It keeps you from reading your OWN feelings, let alone anyone else’s, and dangles catharsis just out of reach. They’ll come, and they’ll be awful, but right now they’re above the clouds and you’re nailed to the ground. You'll just have to bide your time until the storm breaks.

You’ve fallen into sort of a soldiers lull, drowsy in the knowledge the situation can’t actually get any worse. The battle you’d lost has been over for hours, and without rage and anxiety to fuel your meat gundam you realize how truly tired you are. You could probably sleep even, if you could close your eyes for five seconds without seeing her face, frozen right at death. That will be in you nightmares for lifetimes to come, you’re sure. You hope you come back as something with less complex eyes, like one of those cave fish, but knowing your luck it’ll be a mantis shrimp.

So there’s nothing to do and no way to sleep. There’s no reprieve, your last braincell bounces around the inside of your skull like a pong ball complete with the eight bit boop sound effects. Fluctuating endlessly between “fix this” and “stay put”, stop and go with absolutely no instrument of enacting change to lay hands upon.

“Ashes to ashes, funk to funky
We know Major Tom's a junkie
Strung out in heaven's high
Hitting an all-time low”

There’s no actual lyrics, but your mind immediately supplements them for you as the instrumental strains of “Ashes to Ashes” shred the silence.

Bowie is the absolute last goddamn thing you need right now. It takes you a moment to realize you are not, in fact, hallucinating again, but that the irritated pinfish, having been left on the floor next to one of the control consoles, had gone off of it’s own volition.

You hadn’t even seen Optimus remove the prism from his subspace. Then again, you hadn’t seen anything beyond the floor in front of you for the past few hours either. This does, however, provide the confusing implication that he’d intentionally left it there, either because he didn’t want it on his person, or, knowing your feelings toward it, to intentionally torture you. It probably isn’t the latter,
but it is driving you out of what’s left of your mind, so with monumental effort, you get to your feet and walk over to it, half hoping you’ll be able to find some way of turning if off without smashing it, half hoping you won’t.

It doesn’t stop when you lay your hands upon it, but it does, to your surprise, condense itself from beach ball to snow globe size in a fraction of a second, allowing you to pick it up. It has the self awareness to finish bleating out the last few notes before you hurl it at the wall. Even MORE surprisingly, you still find yourself fighting the urge to do so.

Something stirs within you. Maybe it's because you actually experienced closure, in the form of brutally murdering the garbage human responsible. Maybe it's because you've spent a good deal of time dealing with the dearly departed, and knowing that they're a mere grand-mal seizure and a medically induced coma away has robbed the concept of death of its sting. For whatever reason it may be, you're emotionally strong enough right now to be mad, and you've experienced your last giant cold shoulder.

It's time to get some answers. Primus has dropped an instrument of change right into your lap. Sure, he didn’t give you any sheet music, but you can’t read it anyways. What you can do is fake your way through the first half of the song and keep your fingers crossed through the rest of band practice.

You get to your feet. You march yourself down out of the common room, down the hallway, and to the door of his hab-suit. It occurs to you that you don’t actually know the combination for his room on this base, but before you can punch the door in frustration, it, sensing your proximity, slides open on it’s own.

He hadn’t even locked it. Either he’d forgotten, or he was hoping you’d come in of your own accord.

You shake your head. Enough with the private eye shit, enough with the guessing, assumptions. Enough with the secrets. You’re gonna ask him yourself.

“You left something,” you say upon walking into the room. “Maybe it’s low on battery or something, I dunno, but it's been going off on it’s own.”

He’d been sitting on the edge of the berth, starring at the opposite wall until your arrival. When he turns to address you, and sees the interpretive pintrest in your hands, he looks as though he’d been kicked and then spat on.
An awkward silence hangs in the air as you move towards him.

“I-” he hovers, mouth ajar, as if ready to say more, but thinks better of it. He closes his mouth. “-Thank you. For returning it.”

He takes it from your outstretched hands with violently shaking servos. You frown. So much for the progress.

The silence returns, no less awkward.

“You didn’t tell me it could shrink.” you say with no effort to hide your desperate straw-clutching, anything to spur the conversation forward.

“I designed it to adjust to the size of the user.” he says, visually proving the point as the prism peals outwards in on itself three feet larger like a fourth-dimensional lotus.

The silence remains and is now taking remedial classes in social cues. Your elephant, returned to full blown phobia mode settles into catatonia once more with the illiterate princess in his hands, methodically moving the sparkling walls beneath his digits. Anger burns within you. You wish it didn’t, since the motion required to solve it is probably the only thing keeping him from rusting. Without interference, he’d probably be content to do exactly that. Thankfully, interference is your middle name and you’re not going to leave this room until you’ve talked at least some sort of resolution into your damaged giant.

You’ll do what you have to, to convince him it’s going to be okay, even if you haven’t quite finished telling yourself that yet.

“Optimus-” you begin. “-This isn’t your fault.”

He gives no indication he’s heard you. The embers flare, promise of a fire returning. You hold your breath. You are going to be sensitive.

"Look, This sucks. This really, really sucks ." you grit your teeth painfully hard on the last one, choking back a sob. "But we did everything in our power to save her, and when we couldn’t, we
made the... *transition* as easy as it could be.”

He continues to work on the prism, laser focused. The flames crackle, some asshole threw a paper plate on the fire. You exhale. You are going to be level.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. We didn’t do anything wrong. We...we fucked up as softly as possible. Nightbird died surrounded by the closest thing she's ever had to a family.”

He slides the last line into place, and a dazzling aurora of colors flash in synchronicity, as the beginning notes of *Starman* hang in the air. You’ve never been pissed at a rainbow before, but the campfire is now a full blown bonfire and the same pyromaniac dick that threw the plate just chucked an entire can of kerosene at it. The last thing you need right now is Bowie, but the second-to-last thing is that *Inlustris-fucking- Prifma*. The bonfire is now a wildfire and Smokey’s hibernating for the winter.

"Would you PUT THAT THING DOWN-"

"-I made it for her."

The wildfire remembers it’s corporeal form as a human and extinguishes itself in a moment of sheer confusion. You look at the prism and then back at him several times, opening and closing your mouth before finally settling on a flat ”What.”

“I constructed this with the intention of giving it to her...when she arrived.”

"You made it for Nightbird...?"

He flinches as the words leave your lips.

"That is the name *they* gave her.” he says flatly, as if he understands you don’t *know better* but can’t help himself. “They were not within their right to grant her a designation.”

You raise your eyebrow, more than a little worried. It seems like he’s been planning this adoption longer than you have. That isn’t exactly out of the realm of possibility, it would make sense. If he’d
hinged the resolution of all of his problems with you on this exact event playing out correctly, then his sudden moroseness is understandable. Worrisome, yes, but totally understandable, and you’re willing to put in as much work as you need to as slowly as you need too, even while you process your own anguish.

You take a deep breath. You’re frustrated as hell, but you’re gonna stay calm. *Stay calm for him.* You’re so busy being calm, in fact, you hadn’t even noticed him setting the prism aside to pull a datapad from his subspace that, after a moment’s contemplation, he shakily presses into your hands.

There’s a fullscreen image on the faintly illuminated screen. You squint, not entirely sure what it is you’re seeing. Your best guess is some sort of highly detailed cybertronian blueprints. Whatever filter had been used to process it was set to highlight the circuitry to a blinding degree. You squint your eyes, they burn if you look in any one place for too long, so you keep them traveling over the screen, unable to make sense of it.

Maybe you’d been looking at it wrong. You turn it sideways. Nothing.

You turn it upside down. Nope.

You set the pad down and back up several steps, letting your eyes un-focus, then crossing them, because if this isn’t an alien print straight out of a *Magic eye* book then you don’t know what is.

*Can’t see shit, Captain.*

“What am I looking at?” you say finally, at a complete loss, returning to you first guess. “Are...are these blueprints?”

“That...would not be an incorrect translation.” he says after a pause than spans eternities. “This remains the clearest image of her before they gave her that frame.”

Something’s wrong. Your heart plummets. There’s a part of you far far away that’s beginning to wonder if he’s sitting on the edge of the deep end, and you don’t want to push him there. “Why do you have Ni-” you stop yourself. “Why do you have *her* blueprints?”

Another pause. He buries his face in his servos, quietly chanting equal parts curses and prayers under his breath.
“Echo...” the harmonics part from the name like a chrysalis shed too soon, sending the syllables wet and naked to soar through the air, and when they reach you they roll through bone deep. “The name I gave her was Echo. I apologize, for making that decision on both our behalf, but I was unable to confer with you in your condition, at the time.”

It takes you a moment to realize you’d heard him say this before. You recognize this haunting bloodless resonance from when he’d pleaded with her in the throes of their battle and once more after she’d broken free and jumped into his arms. His voice cracks with the effort to make it pronounceable, bleeding loss and gone from every frequency.

A full five seconds pass before your ears stop ringing long enough to hear yourself speak.

“**You named** her?

“I did.” he says at last. “I chose that name, because the first message she sent me through the bond was a clip of your voice.”

*Name. Bond. Your voice.* It seeks context almost as hard as you’re trying to divorce yourself from it. The engine is revving and stalling at the same time. You pick the datapad up once more, turning it to it’s original position in your hands, scrutinizing the picture, the grainy, black and white and-

These aren’t blueprints.

The realization ricochets off the inside of your skull, mind forming a madman’s map between the lines drawn by the bullet’s trajectory and the lines of the circuitry, all converging in the center to lead you to the absolute shittiest conclusion possible.

This is medical imaging. Of a tiny metal body.

This is an *ultrasound*.

“The stasis we placed your body in sent the entire process into hibernation, though it did not stop it entirely, and it was not until nearly thirty years later it had progressed to a point where...I was able to receive a ping. She repeated a song, one I’d heard you using to sing Bumblebee to sleep. “
Oh no.

“It seems your mutation due to the energon exposure had transformed you to the extent that we became genetically compatible. And when you experienced the heat cycle...” he trails off, struggling to simply continue. “…I would have taken precautions, had I known. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined this possible.”

It can’t be.

“I... became withdrawn. Spent so much time with her, both of you. I would... read to her, sing for her, she always responded most readily to your favorite kind of music. She’d get excited sometimes, I could feel her move within you. I was... overjoyed. I should not have been, given the circumstances, but she gave me hope. “

Fuck this.

“Your health began to decline rapidly as she grew. We were forced to make a choice between terminating the carrying cycle to spare your life or deliver you to Dr. Fujiyama, who promised help, told us he’d collaborate with your world's leading medical experts to find a compromise. Ratchet protested, citing your distrust, but I ultimately made the decision to surrender you. I did not see the betrayal coming. To that end, you were correct, though by the time we had realized it was a trap, it was too late.”

Fuck this.

“They found a way to sever my bond with her. But not before they tore her from you. I was able to... hear her crying, and briefly see your unconscious face before they took her away. “

His hands slips away, fall into his lap. He turns to face you, and you immediately wish he hadn’t, because those sky blue optics are clouded by tears and for the second time that day you feel pieces of your soul schism off and flee, and this time you don’t give chase.

“I intended to wait until we had her safely in our custody before revealing this to you, and as such commanded the silence of the others on this matter. But Echo... was our daughter.”
And you’re left with the loss of equilibrium that comes only with having every single mental and emotional stressor devouring you drop off and die in unison. Your conscious and subconscious become one as they drop all of your emotional baggage to fall into a pile at your feet in a moment of sheer no.

“Oh god...” you murmur, squeezing the edges of the pad so tightly it cracks “How...she... No. No. No.”

The pieces fall together. You’d never once stopped to think why it was she knew all of Bowie’s songs, having assumed his music was a hallmark of the universe fucking with you. Never stopped to think there could be a reason for it. Never stopped to wonder where those brief blurry memories of being grafted into a frame came from or why she’d trusted you so readily, why she’d thrown herself into his arms.

He’d known her too. While you journeyed with her in the paracosm he spoke to her as she slumbered beneath your heart. She knew both of you and had tried her damndest to tell you so.

“Am inquiring to responsible female entity you are?”

Are you my mom?

“Do not do the leaving!”

Please don’t leave me.

“Witness forerunner person together?”

“Can we go see dad?”

As badly as you want to burn the lone picture of your child into your eyes, you can’t look away from him. That metal face was not designed to break, and when it does it’s like watching a star die. As dark and vast as it is intimate. And much like a devastating celestial event you can only watch in helpless awe as he catches fire on the edges of the atmosphere and falls to earth in front of your eyes.
“I do not understand-” he begins, hazily. Aeons of practice had tempered his voice, and it remains steady even now as his frame convulses and tears run freely from his unblinking optics.”-Where I have gone wrong, to allow such an event to transpire.”

He’s referring to the luck, you’re sure, or lack of it. You don’t know what to tell him. How do you explain to someone who’s spent their entire life in fate’s favor, using it only to commit acts of kindness that you can do everything right and still lose? How did any of this happen to begin with? How the hell are you supposed to fix this now?

Your first instinct is to apologize, even though that makes no sense. Tell him its not his fault, tell him to stop shaking. Tell him everything is going to be okay, like he’d done for you so many years ago. Your second impulse is to throw yourself at him and let the raw physical contact do the talking for you, considering he can’t break further, let him finish shattering in as much as you arms you can fit around him. The third decides neither of those things are going to work because you can’t even blink without seeing Echo’s face or listen to you own frantic breathing without hearing her voice. That sweet, warm, sunny frequency that had been full of adoration and trust until her last breath.

Stay calm. You’re in full blown disaster recovery mode now. You can here to repair this bridge, not burn with it. Just stay clam. Really, that shouldn’t be too hard, this reveal doesn’t even change that much, considering you wanted to take her in anyways. Except this does mean that it’s partially your fault she ever existed to begin with and Optimus went through all of this without you, alone, and...oh.

This actually changes a lot.

Try as you may, you can’t fight the image of him speaking to her through your comatose body, of him and Ratchet fighting over a double or nothing bid to save both your lives, and-You swallow around the ball in you throat -and that’s okay. You ‘d already set aside time to break later. You’ll just reserve a special spot for those.

“Perhaps if I had held your and Ratchet’s reservations in higher regard, this would not have ended so tragically.” he continues. “If we had simply terminated the cycle, you both would have been spared this suffering. I am... fully culpable in my lack of foresight, your selflessness blinded me to the concept your species could even be capable of such cruelty.”

You’re suddenly very glad you actually finished killing Silas Though without direction the rage within you coils back on itself and manifests as physical pain in your entire chest cavity.

“I became so withdrawn after you were placed in stasis, it caused dissension among our ranks, and
rifts began to form. I am to blame for the dissolution our faction, unable to motivate them as I once had. We had reached....a lowest point amid low points when she was discovered. It felt as though I had seen daylight after a lifetime of darkness.”

If only Silas and Fujiyama and every other garbage human could see him now. You almost wish they could, because anyone with a shred of a soul to lay claim to would shatter at the sight of this ancient being who had lived through aeons of war, watched his entire planet die all while maintaining a sagelike calm finally collapsing under the loss of a single life.

Your eyes dart between him and the picture and back, hoping that somewhere between them magic words will appear out of thin air telling you what to say and how to say it. But nothing comes. Panic lashes at your mind and the pain pulses in your chest but that’s okay. Just stay calm. And breath. And fucking say something.

“With our numbers as a race so devastatingly low, that this happened in the midst of our war...It gave me hope, that maybe Bumblebee wouldn't be the last of our kind ever born. But now--”

“He doesn’t have to be.” you blurt out, and you can’t even begin to handle the ramifications of what you've just said, but right now you don't say anything, anything in the world and mean it just to get his optics to dry. “We can try again.”

The weight of those words could crush the mountain you're trying to climb, and they don't go unnoticed. There’s a glimmer of something behind that broken mask, even if it is just sheer confusion.

“I am afraid we may not get another chance--”

“We'll make another chance.” you cut in, gesturing wildly with your hands “This shitshow of a war can only go on for so long before something gives and when it does we’re going to come out on top. “and wow, you've said that with such conviction you almost believe it. “Then when the dust finishes settling, or just settles enough that we can see then...we’ll take it from there. We’ll figure it out.”

“You are under no such obligation to remain with me, to that or any other end.” he vents heavily, breath hitched in somber apprehension. “In light of these circumstances, I would understand... if you wished to leave.”
Your arms fall to your sides. Your mouth falls open. Any doubts you had that he isn’t *completely insane* fall to the floor.

“*You think I want to leave you.*” you say flatly.

“The situation has changed drastically since we first started our liaison. I have very little to offer you, in terms of safety or a comfortable life.”

“You think I want to *leave* you?” you repeat “What in the everliving *fuck* makes you think I’d do that?!”

“Your involvement with me has caused you nothing but hardship.” he continues. “You had aspirations of your own among your kind, and they were taken away from you.”

The response to that falls equally between *I was never gonna be an astronaut anyways, That all changed when Rumble showed up, and I don’t care.* You open and close your mouth several times before giving up. “I don’t care.”

“You body has been irreversibly tampered with because of our blood.”

“I don’t care.”

“You saved my son's life nearly at the expense of your own.”

“He’s *our son* and I’d do it again in a heartbeat.”

“And I nearly killed you again while we were *intimate.*” His voice cracks “I stole thirty years of your life by *touching* you.”

“ I don’t *care.*”

“How could you not care?” he demands, level voice finally breaking, disbelief and self-vengeance etched into every word. “When you have given endlessly and I’ve only *hurt* you? How could you
You freeze. On the outside. On the inside you’ve gone full blown Chernobyl-grade nuclear.

“You gave me a family. You gave me Bumblebee.” you snarl, no longer trying to hide the venom in your voice “And you tried to give me a little girl, damnit, you tried! You tried everything you could and fuck you for thinking that’s not enough!”

You’re hyper-ventilating. You’re sobbing in rage, furious that he had the audacity to even think about blaming this on himself. "Just fuck you!"

He says nothing. You’ve never seen him in this state before and yet you know exactly what you’re looking at. It’s someone who never expected the selflessness and kindness they give to be returned having it thrown back in their face. It’s an absolute martyr seeing a mirror for the first time. This is two forces of benevolent nature smashing heads and locking tusks and you didn’t set out to be the elephant to his elephant but if that’s what he needs you to be right now then so be it.

“You wanna make it up to me?” you hiss, eyes narrowed. “Fine. Do it by not hiding. Give me all of you. The not perfect parts, the broken parts, the parts that need help. Not just the knight in shining armor crap. I’m not a goddamn princess, I’m a lightning rod. I’m here to at least try to absorb half the bullshit that hits us so you don’t have to go at it alone.” you choke, throat raw and burning. “I don’t ever want to hear you talking about yourself like that again. You did everything you could. The only thing you ever did wrong was trying too hard to protect me from you.”

He blinks, petrified in the beam of savage sunshine oozing from every pissed off pore on your body.

“You...wish to stay...with me?”

“This is the last time I’m gonna say this Optimus,” you growl. “I’m not leaving unless I’m dead, and maybe not even then. So until that happens there’s no force in this asshole universe strong enough to keep me from standing by your side or sitting with you in the dark.”
He looks at you with the silent compassion one would reserve for the hopelessly insane. Wishing so
dreadfully you weren’t crazy, but since you are, infinitely grateful he’s head nurse at this particular
asylum. It’s working. You did it. Maybe magic words didn’t manifest themselves from the aether, but
you made do without them. The tears have stopped. You’re sure they’ll be countless more and that’s
fine because you’re gonna be there for them too.

“If there is one more thing I feel I still must apologize for-”

“Don’t-” you cut him off, deep warning in your voice.

“It is for being so distant with you. I wanted to hold you. So badly. I...could sense that you wanted
this too...and not affording you that comfort after all I had put you through made my spark feel as
though it would shatter. But I feared harming you once more, and I allowed this fear to overwhelm
me and drive further a wedge between us.”

“It’s okay.” you mumble, anger that you’d ever been mad to begin with eating at you. “I mean yeah
it hurt like a bitch but I understand.”

“I could have dealt with it more effectively. I could have sought help. But in between the
disagreements I suffered with Ratchet and the general decline of his condition, I did not feel
comfortable taxing his already distressed facilities.”

“It’s okay.” you say, wincing as you try not think about how bad his alcoholism must be if Optimus
noticed it right this exact second. “He’s extremely strung out and- I wouldn’t trust him right now
either. “- I get it.”

“I should have searched elsewhere, explored other options, instead of allowing it to progress to the
point that I feared physical interaction of any kind-”

“I said it’s okay.” you huff. You’re gonna say it as many times as you need to until he gets it, until
you stop feeling the urge to throttle your past, bitter-touch-starved self. “Optimus I-” the pit in your
stomach grows colder still, stark contrast to the heat lapping at your face for having ever been angry
at him. “- touch me.”

Fear flashes through his face, through his field even now, covering you both like a blanket. There’s
enough resolution burning within you to tent the energy, keep it from smothering you, reinforce the
walls with boxes and stuffed animals, build a pillowfort from it.

“You...are seriou-”

“Dead serious. Right now. I’m not going anywhere.”

He gives only a hitched, choking exhale in resolution, before swallowing his fear and extending a quavering servo. You’re never been more proud of him, even if he has he’s seized up mid-way. You don’t wait for him to finish, rushing in and grabbing his thumb with both of your arms, wrapping your body around his palm. You can feel his fame lurch, his spark pulsing wildly out of control.

“Look at this.” you say. “Look at me. You’re touching me. You’re touching me and I’m not gone. I’m not hurt.”

He ex-vents slowly, strangled, followed by a sigh in acceptance.

“I’m right here.” you tell him. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Are you certain...” he asks after a moment, “That you are really here?” his optics are misty, far off. You don’t think he’s being poetic. Between the stress and the lack of recharge he might actually be delirious.

“Yeah. I am.”

“Will you still be here if I recharge?” he asks. “I am...doubtful of my ability to remain conscious much longer. It has been...some time since I have slept.”

“I’ll still be here when you wake up.” you assure him.

“If you are not...if this is yet another dream...I do not wish to awaken this time.”

Oh hell.
“Me neither.” you answer with more honesty then you care to admit. “Tell you what, I’ve had some pretty awful sleep myself lately. We’ll recharge together.”

He regards you with a sweet security, though you’re not sure if it’s trust in his optics or the weariness is too great to afford him the luxury of disbelief. After a meaningful pause he at long last surrenders into your promise and allows himself to recline on his side, his hand cradling you even as it turns to adjust to his new position. He pulls you ever so gently towards his frame, and you wind up curled in the crook between his throat and chassis. You can feel his venting at your back, the pulse of his spark, having slowed down to a distressed, exhausted oscillation. The ambient hum of his gigantic frame is not the welcoming acoustic cave you so fondly remember, but an anguished steel canopy of ailing sonance. If a merge were possible to calm him further you’d do it, regardless of the risk. There has to be some way to ease him into recharge beyond a tranquilizer, employing such a tactic after days running on robot-adrenaline might kill him.

“...I do not wish to impose, but-”

“-Anything.” you cut him off so quickly your voice cracks. “Anything you need.”

“Would you be willing to accommodate...a musical request?”

If all he wants is to hear you sing, you’ll serenade him until your lungs give out.

“Which one?”

“The track that played when we first danced together. Or...more accurately, immediately afterwards, when Ratchet cut in. I recall briefly wishing that it had been the one I brought you out onto the floor with.”

You think back to all those years ago. It could have been yesterday, to both of you really. Three decades is a heartbeat in his lifespan and you’d missed most of yours.

“As the world falls down?”

“Yes. If you wouldn’t mind.”
You couldn’t not mind any harder. You’ll be his canary/nightingale/songbird of choice if that’s what he wants. You’ll sing as long and loud as you need to lull him to sleep in your empty nest. Your heart crunches painfully inwards on itself. You push past it, look away from the broken eggshells and begin to sing.

“There’s such a sad love, deep in your eyes A kind of pale jewel, open and closed within your eyes, I’ll place the sky, within your eyes,“

“Thank you.” he murmurs, hardly above a whisper.

You continue, unwavering, “There’s such a fooled heart, beating so fast, in search of new dreams, a love that will last, within your heart, I'll place the moon, within your heart.”

His venting has slowed down, his optics, already half lidded are now slivers of cobalt light.

“As the pain sweeps through, makes no sense for you, every thrill is gone, wasn’t too much fun at all, but I'll be there for you.... as the world falls down.”

You go through the whole song, growing gradually quieter with each line until the last verse is whispered. His venting has been even since the middle, the last traces of light have vanished as his optics close fully, but you finish for posterity’s sake. You trace the lines on his face with your eyes as you mouth the last words silently. He’d look peaceful, if not for the faint illumination of the tear streaks staining the plating. The effect paints a serene misery. You take a small comfort from the fact that as least his body can begin healing itself, and hope he finds refuge in the few moments of dreamless sleep all beings are afforded before the nightmares kick in.

He won’t be alone, though. You roll over, shut your burning eyes, try to calm your racing mind down long enough to join him. Emotion lies thinly barricaded behind your eyes. The fence won’t hold for much longer. It can wait until you’re asleep, though, manifest itself as an endless stream of horrific dreams. “You’re a lightning rod, remember?” At least one of you needs to be strong right now. You can do this.

You set the datapad aside, and in doing so, unintentionally bring it out of sleep mode. You frantically pull it back into your hands, against your chest, trying to cover the light, least it rouse him. Your curiosity gets the better of you, however, and you tilt it just far enough away that you can see the screen.
Without your brain actively trying to not perceive the picture, it’s actually relatively clear. Your eyes have adjusted, they know what they’re seeing, know the outlines, the tiny curled servos, the suggestion of shut optics on a smooth face. It’s almost too clear. You can kind of make out the outline of nubs on her helm that would have been audial fins. If they were already visible at this stage, then they would have been long.

She would have had his audial fins.

Your lower lips starts trembling. You bite it, focusing as hard as you can on the pain. You turn the pad over, set it down, breathing in though your nose, and our through your mouth. You can stay calm if you keep breathing. Stay calm for him. The tears can wait. Just keep breathing.

A knot settles in your chest. You can focus on it. You close your eyes.

“...(y/n)...” comes your name, sung in the softest melody.

Fuck.

You exhale rapidly.

"It’s okay to go to sleep.” you say quietly. “I told you, I'm not leav-"

“-I love you. “

...

Just keep breathing

You choke.

Just keep breathing
The air is forced out of your lungs in a strangled sob.

*Just keep breathing*

You dig your fingers into the sides of your head, curling your body into a ball.

*Breathe*


“-I love you too.”

You cry harder than you've ever cried in your life.

**Works inspired by this one**

Volve Ex by ToriGamingMCW, *tell me everything you know about optimus prime [DISCONTINUED]* by ironiccowboykink

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