Insecurity

by ASimpleArchivist

Summary

You're Smokescreen's first human charge, and his first true human friend. Smokescreen isn't sure if you like him. You're not sure how to alleviate that - except you are. (Check out the playlist "Destiny Child's Destiny Girl" on 8tracks, which I put together for this fanfic!)

Notes

Set just after "Legacy", changed just slightly so that Optimus didn't get Alpha Trion's message right away.
I was looking through Ao3’s tags and was sad to see that poor bb Smokescreen doesn't have a /Reader tag, so I thought, 'Hmph! I'll fix that!' So, yeah. This sunshine child needs some love, and dammit I'm going to give him some.
Smokescreen, if absolutely nothing else, was sure of himself. He was secure in his physical prowess, his quick thinking, his ability to come up with strategies that the Decepticons are hardly able to anticipate. He knew his value to Team Prime was couched in their exasperated affection for him, despite the mistakes he'd made - he'd more than made up for them with the victories he'd helped them win. He'd helped Optimus Prime acquire the fabled Star Saber, after all!

But the lull in Decepticon activity that had immediately followed their explosive victory was extremely suspicious in nature. Ratchet suggested that they were attempting to avoid Optimus' Star Saber assisted wrath. Bulkhead said that Megatron was probably pissing himself just at the thought of Optimus possessing such a devastating weapon. Optimus just told them that they should be grateful for the window of time that they could further acclimate Smokescreen to human culture, however small it may be.

That's how he met you, actually.

Jack had warned him about speeding, like he had been for the past two days. But the barren stretch of sizzling highway had seemed clear for miles, and Smokescreen had been itching for some action. He was a young mech, and young mechs needed to blow off steam regularly, lest they implode under a short amount of time. So, really, it hadn't been his fault when you yourself had been speeding across the intersection.

A full head-on collision was narrowly averted - fortunately, Smokescreen had adjusted to his alt mode's breaks in lieu of his need for speed - but the dangerous dent in your rickety old car was substantial. The nasty split in your forehead and the resulting concussion had kept you under for several hours, even after Ratchet had taken extra measures to insure your recovery. Optimus had pulled Smokescreen aside, even into another section of the base, and frankly that was the closest that Smokescreen had ever seen Optimus get to infuriated. The lecture he gave the younger mech almost melted the paint off of Smokescreen's frame, the Prime's words harsh and dangerously low. Smokescreen had never felt so small in his comparatively short life.

When you'd woken up, dazed and half-stoned from the painkillers Ratchet had acquired from June, you'd honestly believed you were hallucinating when Optimus introduced himself and thus relayed the Autobots' story and circumstance. These two story titans were mind-meltingly unrealistic at best, creatures derived straight from a science fiction cartoon at worst, but once Optimus had actually let you touch his hand the reality of the situation had sunken in, hard and fast. Your face had gone frighteningly pale and you'd looked from 'Bot to 'Bot with mounting terror. That is, until Jack and Raf showed up. Bumblebee had taken them to get food from town, and once you realized you weren't about to be dissected by giant metal aliens you'd relaxed substantially.

You seemed like a nice kid, to say the least. Jack and Raf gave you a rundown of how they'd met the Autobots (through no less dangerous means, by far, in all honesty), and told you that their third counterpart had earned herself a spot in detention (again). (They'd gotten you a burger, considerately, and Smokescreen could've sworn that you'd inhaled it in less of the amount of time it took for him to blink. Ratchet later told him that that was a side affect to hospital-grade sedatives.) And while the three of you ate, the two boys soon had you relaxed and laughing as they relayed some of their less than lethal misadventures.

So, as night encroached upon the world outside, and once Ratchet had given you a final, scrutinizing once-over to ensure you were not, in fact, going to collapse and seize due to an unseen cranial wound, Optimus had instructed for Smokescreen to drive you and Jack and Raf
home. Smokescreen had yet to speak to you at that point - though what else should one expect? What could he have said? 'Hey, I'm the one that almost pancaked you and gave you a concussion. What's your astrological sign and favorite color?'

Needless to say, the ride back to Jasper City was awkwardly quiet. Smokescreen dropped Raf off, then Jack (and despite his lack of outwardly visible optics, he didn't miss the look the older boy sent you as he hopped out of Smokescreen's driver seat). He had sat there a good, long minute after that, because you didn't speak. And when he'd shifted his rear view mirror to get a better look at you to make sure you were all right, your entire demeanor had sent a fresh slag ball of guilt roiling in his tanks. Your shoulders were hunched, your hands grasping your arms as your thumbs rubbed rhythmically against the soft material of your shirtsleeves. Your eyes were downcast, your mouth tightened and entire expression alluding to discomfort.

Smokescreen had never really been good with apologies.

"Hey, uh..." Smokescreen ex-vented slowly as his engine shifted into idle. "You're going to have to tell me where you live. I can do a lot of things, but reading minds isn't one of them."

His voice had startled you, apparently, because you jumped so violently it actually shook his entire cab. You'd stared at his rearview for a long moment, your eyes wide, before you'd looked away and whispered your address so quietly that he almost didn't hear. It was almost as though you were afraid of raising your voice just above that soft, timid undertone. Smokescreen, at the time, believed it only to be due to his (literal) run-in with you earlier that day.

So, he'd driven you home, opting to take the smaller, back roads instead of the freeway. And, deciding to swallow his guilt and pride, he'd started apologizing. He didn't recall ever feeling so bad in his life, and once he started talking he found that he couldn't stop. His remorse tinted every syllable that left his radio conduits, but the more he spoke the more you seemed to relax. It was when he started deprecating his lack of responsibility and self-control that you actually spoke up, still quiet but somehow firm. You'd told him that it was partially your fault, too - you had ignored the stop sign and hadn't looked before going across the intersection, so the wreck was simultaneously both yours and his fault. The blame wasn't solely his, and he shouldn't feel completely bad about it.

He hadn't realized how much he'd actually wanted to hear your forgiveness until you said those words, and the weight that rolled off of him when you did was immense and borderline euphoric. He'd cracked a joke about speeding, one Jack had told him the previous day. You'd laughed. Smokescreen decided that he liked your laugh.

He'd finally pulled up to your driveway, and he decided that it had been far too soon as you hesitated, your smile falling as you realized he'd parked in anticipation of your exit. He'd opened the door for you, and had apologized one last time before telling you how nice it had been to meet you. You'd returned the sentiment, a small smile lifting the corners of your mouth, before patting the headrest of the drivers seat in farewell and stepping out of his cab. He'd closed the door, and waited until you got up to your front door to shift into drive. You'd turned and waved, and he'd flashed his brights in return before pulling away from the curb. That night, he'd asked Bumblebee, Bulkhead, and Arcee what it was like to have a human companion. Strictly out of curiosity, he'd said. The next morning, right after he'd woken from recharge, he'd walked into the main room to find it was buzzing with activity. Optimus and Ratchet were poised in front of the main computer screen, engrossed in what looked to be a massive wall of extremely complicated code. Bulkhead, Bee, and Arcee were in conversation until they spotted him.

"Where've you been?" the ex-Wrecker'd asked him, jabbing him lightly in the side. "We've been
waiting for you!"

"For what?" he'd asked, blinking slowly. His processor was, admittedly, still rebooting from recharge.

"Your new responsibility," Optimus had said, and when the younger mech turned, he saw a light expression on the Prime's face plate - a stark contrast to the simmering disapproval that had been in its place the day before. "I am assigning you to be our new human charge's guardian."

Smokescreen's optic ridges had furrowed in confusion.

"Curbside duty," Arcee had told him, almost amused. Why were the elder Autobots so suddenly mirthful? They'd seemed very close to using their recently acquired spark extractor on him for almost wiping out a human's spark, and now they all looked like they were refraining from laughter. What had happened?

"It's not that complicated, don't worry," Bulkhead had assured him. "We pick up the kids and drop them off at school in the morning, then pick them up after school and bring them home or here."

"O...kay." Smokescreen had shifted nervously, the sudden weight of a new responsibility finding its place and settling on his shoulders. "That doesn't seem so hard."

Bumblebee had butted in then, a series of enthusiastic beeps and whistles translating roughly to a reassurance that he would get used to it in no time. You would, too. Probably.

"I...don't know about this, guys," he'd said hesitantly, stepping back a little. "She didn't seem real enthusiastic about me."

Bulkhead snorted. Bumblebee elbowed him sharply. Arcee was fighting a smile.

Smokescreen sighed, agitated, having been kept in the dark long enough.

"Okay, what happened? You guys were this close to pitching me in a slag pit last cycle - what's changed your mind?"

"You are obviously unaware," Optimus said, his optics flickering in barely withheld mirth, "but you left your wide-band open while returning the children to their homes last night."

Smokescreen froze, and there was the distinct sound of his cooling fans kicking on.

"I-I didn't realize," he said, his voice shrinking, along with his dignity. "Jack must've jostled it while messing with the radio."

"Your apology was as impressive as it was prolific," Ratchet called over his shoulder, and Smokescreen felt heat crawl up into his face plate when he saw that Ratchet was smirking, too.

"And," Optimus added, "just as admirable. I believe that you have constructed a firm foundation upon which you will be able to build a strong friendship with our new addition."

Smokescreen, now for a loss of words, was only able to nod, wishing that his fans weren't so loud, Primus!

"Ah, it's okay, rookie!" Bulkhead guffawed, smacking the younger mech good-naturedly. "It's happened to the best of us. And, really, we were impressed with what you said. The ex-Wrecker beamed, almost looking proud. "It takes valor to scrape the ground like you did. No wonder she forgave you so easily!"
Arcee rolled her optics before shifting with a blur of motion into her alt mode and flashing her headlight impatiently. "Come on, Bulk. We don't want the kids to be late."

Bumblebee and Bulkhead both shifted in response, and as Smokescreen followed suit, he suddenly felt that same ball of guilt and shame build up in him, only lodging itself in his vocal processor this time, instead of his tanks. He hadn't wanted you to feel as though you had to forgive him out of obligation or anything similar - you hadn't had to, but you had, and he suddenly wondered why. He'd almost killed you, and it had only taken a few (a lot) of words for you to forgive him? Why did it seem so unlikely all of a sudden?

With a shaky ex-vent and the loud rumble of his engine turning over, the young mech followed the three older Autobots as they cruised out of the base. He forced the thoughts away, telling himself that he would make an attempt to make it up to you. He didn't want you to feel like you were being forced to do anything.

It was pleasantly cool, that morning, despite the fact that the sun was already peaking over the far horizon of tall rock monoliths. The sky had a smattering of clouds, and there was a gentle breeze passing by. Jasper City was waking lazily, and Smokescreen didn't have any troubles meandering through traffic to the suburbs where you'd directed him the previous night. He stopped alongside the curb in front of your home, his engine shifting into idle as he waited.

A few minutes passed slowly, and he started to worry that you had already gone to school without him knowing when the front door opened and you stepped quietly out, easing the door shut. You turned, but when your gaze fell on him your brows rose in evident surprise.

"Smokescreen," you greeted, amiable but confused as you walked up to him. "What're you doing here?"

"Ah, well..." He opened his passenger side door, proffering the seat. You paused only a moment before stepping in and setting your backpack down on the floorboard. "Optimus assigned me to be your guardian, what with your involvement with the Autobots now. Just like how Jack and the others have Arcee, Bulkhead, and Bumblebee. Safety against the Decepticons, and whatnot."

You relaxed, nodding in understanding. "Jack told me about it, I just didn't figure..." You paused, then shook your head and smiled. "Anyway. Good morning."

Smokescreen kicked his engine into drive, trying to ignore how his fans kicked in for the second time that morning. "Morning. Now, can you tell me where this 'school' is located? That's the one thing the others didn't tell me."

You laughed a bit, buckling your seat belt and securing it across your chest as he pulled away from the curb. "Don't worry, it's easy to find."

So, as the young mech drove you pointed out where to turn. He listened to your directions, but half his processor spaced out in thought. You'd seemed...happy to see him, after he'd clarified why he was there. That'd thrown him off. Maybe you honestly had forgiven him wholeheartedly.

Your chatter shifted into how your morning had been, what you'd eaten and how your dog had given you the worst puppy dog eyes in protest to your departure. Maybe that's why you had shut the door so carefully.

After a while, the roiling slag in his tank finally forced him to say your name, interrupted your story. "I'm sorry, I just...I know you said you forgave me last night, but I just wanted to make sure that it's true - not that I'm saying I think you lied, I just-"
You blinked owlishly, confusion on your face as you waited. He ex-vented just as he pulled into the school lot.

"I really am sorry that I hurt you, and if I scared you," he confessed sincerely. "But I don't want you to feel like you have to forgive me or something. I understand if you don't want to, I just..."

He parked on the end of the row, and his side view mirrors twitched subconsciously as he searched for words.

He ex-vented again, suddenly tired. "I've made a lot of mistakes lately," he admitted. "I'm...new to Team Prime, and it seems like every time I turn around I'm doing something wrong. I just want to help, and I feel like everything I try to do to help just gets me in trouble. I...I just don't know."

Your hand fell on his dashboard and you directed a gentle look at his rear view mirror. "It's okay, Smokescreen, I completely understand. I make mistakes, too, but all you can do is learn from them. Be patient, and listen to what the others have to tell you. I can tell that you honestly want to help, and that's admirable. The Autobots should be thankful that they have you. But...just take it slow. You'll learn how to fit in in no time flat, I guarantee it." You smiled encouragingly. "Just give yourself time to adjust and learn."

Smokescreen struggled for words, his engine sputtering far too loudly for his comfort. You seemed to notice and you grinned knowingly before shifting to unbuckle yourself.

"Thanks for the ride, Smokescreen," you said, grabbing your backpack. He opened the door for you, but stopped you by saying your name quietly. You looked back at him expectantly as you stepped out.

"...Thank you, I..." He wished he could smile while in his alt form, he really did. "I didn't know how much I needed to hear that 'til now. Thanks."

"No problem. Just don't be so hard on yourself - it's the others' jobs to teach you." You smiled at him. "I guess I should expect you to pick me up after school?"

He felt relief roll the guilt off of him in one fell swoop. His engine revved in time with his joy, and his headlights flickered as he shut the passenger door. "You can count on it, Firecracker!"

You laughed and waved, and while Smokescreen pulled away from the lot and drove back onto the freeway to return to base, he could swear that he'd seen you flush at the nickname. He decided that he quite liked your blush.

Maybe being your guardian wouldn't be so bad after all.
I thought this was longer...turns out it's mostly just dialogue/rambling. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯ This is also long overdue, so apologies for that. Hope you enjoy anyway!

An agonized wail echoed throughout the empty expanse of the hangar, bouncing off the metal walls and reverberating throughout the entire missile silo. Smokescreen's helm was lowered between his knees, his servos clutching at his face plating as he prolonged his cry of mourning.

You popped a chip into your mouth, not sparing the youngest 'Bot even a glance. "I told you not to go in that room."

Whatever had possessed Smokescreen to start playing the god-forbidden combination of horror and puzzle games was beyond your comprehension. Maybe one of the other kids had introduced them to him, or maybe he'd discovered them himself (he did have a habit of surfing the web in his insatiable curiosity about human culture). Either way, he'd quickly become addicted to the concept, and was now suffering the consequences. You were really starting to wonder if it was good for his health, because he'd used mass conversion to shrink down to nigh-human size (a whopping seven feet) just so he could play the game he'd ordered online (courtesy of his combination of piteous pleads and watery [how?] puppy-dog eyes and your bank account) - the game which he'd been playing for the past three hours. Surely that wasn't good for his body.

Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately), the other Autobots were nowhere to be found in the base. Optimus and Ratchet were out scouting for energon several miles north of the base due to a faint reading and Bulkhead, Arcee, and Bumblebee had all taken their respective charges out for the day, which left Smokescreen on groundbridge duty. A punishment, of sorts, because Optimus had caught wind of the youngest 'Bot not restraining his rather nasty habit of speeding through Jasper and running red lights (typically with you or Jack as passengers, which, of course, did not go well with the Prime at all).

You almost wished that you'd had the foresight to inform Optimus of Smokescreen's developing hobby, just so you wouldn't have to lament the pounding headache you now had from Smokescreen's frequent, verbally expressed frustrations.

"I...I almost had it," Smokescreen whined, shaking his helm slowly. The bold, red print blinking 'GAME OVER' over and over again seemed to taunt him. "I...almost..."

"Are you going to stop now?" you inquired neutrally, looking over at him with a quirked brow. "You've been using your subspace for a while now. Isn't it bad for your body?"

Smokescreen sighed passive-aggressively, dragging his digits down his face before sinking into the back of the couch. "Nah, I feel fine. I can go on for a little while longer."

About three weeks have passed since you first met Team Prime, and you've become well acquainted with them at that point. You'd gotten to know Smokescreen quite well, and were very familiar with his behavior - including his tendency to immerse himself in anything he may endeavor to do. Including, apparently, video games.
You bit at your lip, studying the way his optics glared at the screen before snatching up the remote controller when he reached for it. The youngest 'Bot whined in protest, sitting up and leaning towards you to take it back, but you held it far enough away that he couldn't get to it.

"Take a break, Smokescreen," you told him. "You've been at it for an hour without stopping."

His mouth twitched into a scowl. "No, I've got it, I'll get it this time, just let me-"

"No." You shifted to your feet, stepping away from the couch as you gave him a firm look. "Get up and stretch, go back to normal size. A break will be good for you."

The white 'Bot narrowed his optics at you. "I told you, I'm fine. Give the controller back."

A wicked idea began to coalesce in your mind as you looked at his reclined form, and your eyes shifted over to the stairwell leading down to the main floor. Smokescreen seemed to perceive your thoughts and he sat up slowly, saying your name cautiously. "...don't you even think about-"

You bolted for the stairwell, clutching the controller in your hand. Smokescreen made a grab for your arm, but you dodged out of the way just in time to leap down the first segment of stairs. You jumped down the rest, and you barely hit the floor before you heard your guardian shout your name again. His pedes hit the concrete with metallic clanks, and you darted towards the corridor leading further into the depths of the base.

"If you want it, come and get it!" you called giddily over your shoulder, not daring to look back. You knew he would probably be able to catch you effortlessly, even while so small compared to his normal size.

You ducked into the massive hallway, still hearing his pursuing footsteps surprisingly far behind you. A wave of excited determination washed over you and you sprinted towards the T-section at the end of the corridor.

"You can't hide from me!" Smokescreen hollered after you, but all he heard was a laugh in response right before you disappeared around the corner.

The lights were dimmed in this section of the base, as it was rarely used for anything other than storage. It worked in your favor, fortunately, as you were able to hide amongst the shadows obscuring the little niches between each massive door. You came across a ventilation shaft and, hoping for the best, you tucked the controller into the crook of your arm before tugging firmly at the grate. Surprisingly, it gave, and you staggered back unexpectedly. You landed roughly on your backside, grunting as you did.

Smokescreen rounded the corner, skidding to a stop and, notably, back to his normal size. He must've mass converted again. Maybe that was why he strayed behind so long.

No matter. You had a vent to dive into.

You did so just as he called your name again. His heavy pedesteps followed you, rattling the edge of the vent as you shimmied inside. You shivered, feeling the cool air brush gently past you. You could hear the faintest hum of the fans working somewhere around the corner. It was surprisingly large - big enough that you could sit up while only barely hunching over. It was too small for Smokescreen, however. Perfect.

Once you were what you deemed to be a safe distance away, you wriggled around until you were facing Smokescreen's rather agitated face. You recognized the gleam in his optics, however, and grinned maniacally as his mouth twitched in his efforts to restrain his expression. His optical ridges furrowed and he scowled playfully, rolling his shoulders.
"Don't make me come in there," he warned, though you could hear the smile in the seemingly exasperated words. He shifted, displaying his open servo. "Give the controller back, and we can both walk free."

"Hmm..." You stroked your chin thoughtfully, fighting a smirk as you looked about airily. "I'm not sure what you're talking about, man. What controller?"

"Come on, squishy, I changed back. What more do you want?"

You scooted back for safe measure, watching as he eyed the vent walling you in.

"I want you to give the games a rest, okay?" you bargained. "You'll strain your optics."

He snorted. "We're not like you fleshies, all right? I can go all day."

"Not with half of your mass shoved into a pocket dimension. I thought I heard Ratchet warn you against prolonged use."

"Ehh, the old 'Bot worries too much. I'm fine!" Smokescreen said, jabbing a thumb at his chassis. "I can handle it!"

You gave him a stern look.

He groaned. "Ugh, fine! You leave me no choice."

Before you could ask him what he was doing - or, better yet, warn him against it - he shoved his arm into the vent. He made it all of about five feet, most of his servo and part of his forearm plating, before there was a ear-splitting metallic screech. You saw his digits wiggle in an attempt to feel out the inside of the vent before falling limp in defeat. His arm twitched back, but did not budge. You heard him murmur a soft 'oh, no'.

"Smokescreen?"

"Uh...don't panic, but-"

"...Please don't tell me you're-"

"-I think I'm stuck."

Silence fell, and the weight of the situation fell upon you rather quickly.

You groaned, pressing your palm into your forehead. "I can't believe this."

"Me neither."

"I'm never letting you play video games again."

"If we make it out of here alive first."

A long pause drew itself out between you.

"...I sincerely hope no one needs a ground bridge," you muttered, "otherwise, they're screwed."

"I sincerely hope that my arm doesn't lose circulation and fall off."

You gave his servo a flat stare. "I sincerely hope Ratchet won't kill us both."
You could practically see Smokescreen's wince. "Nope. He's going to kill us. He'll mount my helm on his console." He made a sound of lament. "And just when I convinced him to let me use the Phase Shifter..."

You sighed, pressing a palm to your face and falling back to lay down in the vent. You did your best to ignore the chill and threw your arm over your eyes. "I hope he kills you first, so I at least get some satisfaction from this."

"You're the one who hid in the vent in the first place!" Smokescreen cried indignantly, his arm jerking against the metal slightly and causing a horrible shriek.

You winced, but ignored it in favor of sighing serenely once more. "And if Ratchet doesn't kill us, Optimus will."

The junior Elite Guard groaned regretfully. "Oh, no...he's never going to let me out of the base again..."

"Or he might boot you out. Both are equally as terrifying."

"If I go, you go. You got me into this mess."

"You're the one who refused to take a break!" you retorted. "You seriously need to start taking care of yourself, it scares me sometimes when-" You froze, realizing. You flushed. "I - I mean, it just...you should...be more careful. You know. Outside of the base and inside. You're important to the team, and...the last thing they need is you getting hurt by...something like this."

A long, awkward silence drew itself out between you two, and you nibbled at your lip. Wow. That had sounded...stupid.

"Uh." Smokescreen's digits twitched visibly, and you heard him shift slightly outside the vent. "Thanks."

"You're welcome."

"No," he said, "seriously. Thank you. That's...it's good to know that someone cares."

Your expression softened, and you had half the mind to touch his servo. "Smokescreen, we all care about you. Just...not all of us are good at showing it, that's all."

He laughed a little, at that. "If Ratchet cares, he's pretty good at hiding it."

"He's..." You pondered the right word. "...he does care. He just hides it because he's a doctor. He can't let his feelings for others get in the way in case he has to make a decision."

"...I can understand that," Smokescreen mused, as though not having thought on it before. "Though he could be more careful with the wrenches he throws."

You, too, laughed. "If you'd stop messing with his stuff, he'd stop throwing them."

He paused, then said with a noticeably downtrodden tone, "I'm just trying to help."

You smiled gently and, not resisting anymore, reached out to grasp his digit gently. He twitched beneath your touch, as though he wanted to squeeze back. "I know. Just keep doing your best - keep trying. And...maybe tell Ratchet you want to help, next time? Or offer it, at least, before you touch anything."
"...Yeah. Yeah, that's probably a good idea." Smokescreen twisted his servo so that your hand fell into his palm. He clasped his digits loosely around it, the metal warm and smooth against your flesh.

A comfortable silence fell, and you would almost call it peaceful. You closed your eyes, settling against the side of the vent in an attempt to get comfortable. You...really didn't know when any of the other Autobots would get back, but you hoped that it would be Bulkhead, Bumblebee, or Arcee. Ratchet would not take this well.

"I can't believe you were foolhardy enough to do something like this!"

You owed fate a favor, apparently. And, apparently, fate had a cruel sense of humor, on top of it.

It was just your luck that, not even five minutes after you and Smokescreen had fallen quiet and had accepted your fate, you'd both heard the distant crank of the secret passageway leading to the Nevada desert outside. It had been quickly followed by the dual scrape and groan of smooth transformations, and you'd heard Ratchet and Optimus call out inquiries as to where you two were. Smokescreen had hesitated, obviously debating on whether he should preserve his dignity or hone up to it and ask for help, before sheepishly calling back. You hadn't seen Ratchet's face when he'd rounded the corner in the corridor, but it must've been priceless to an outsider.

An outsider that wasn't actively being lectured by said curmudgeon medic.

Ratchet growled softly, gritting his dentae as he finished up on the dents in Smokescreen's forearm plating. "You're just lucky none of us were attacked by Decepticons - or, worse yet, MECH. Had we needed a groundbridge, it could've resulted badly."

Smokescreen winced, both in response to Ratchet's hard words and the equally tight grip on his wrist. "I know. I'm sorry."

"You should be," the medic grumbled. "And you're even luckier that none of your energon lines were pinched. It could've resulted in losing function in your entire servo."

Smokescreen's doorwings drooped even further than they had been as he sighed dejectedly (which was an impressive feat in and of itself - they were almost falling off of their hinges). "I know. I am sorry, really."

It really hadn't taken long for both the Prime and his medic to free their youngest addition. Optimus had pried the ventilation shaft's edges apart (with his bare servos, no less - you forgot sometimes how terrifyingly strong he was and yet was still so gentle-natured) so Ratchet could tug Smokescreen's arm through without further damage. The glossy white paint had been scratched off, exposing the shiny metal plating beneath and leaving streaks in the ventilation shaft behind. You'd crawled out, embarrassed face flushed heavily with shame. Your tentative smile had done nothing to ward away the scowl imbedded on Ratchet's faceplate as he'd grabbed Smokescreen's uninjured arm and had dragged him towards the hangar. Optimus, as neutral as ever, had regarded you with a faintly sympathetic but puzzled expression nonetheless before you both had followed the simmering medic.

Not one to tolerate seeing the youngest 'Bot down for long, you worried your lip and leaned further over the railing overlooking the medical bay. "It was my fault, Ratchet. I started it," you said earnestly. "I shouldn't have been so stupid. I didn't consider what could've happened."

The medic raised his narrowed optics, mouth taunt and dentae bared as though about to toss you a retort as equally disapproving, before he paused. He glanced from you, to Smokescreen, then
back again, before his ruffled plating lowered and his shoulders fell with his very long, very tired ex-vent.

"Just...let's not have a repeat of this incident," he said finally, all the irritation drained from his voice. His welder fizzled out and transformed back into his servo, which he flexed experimentally before releasing Smokescreen's wrist. "Understood?"

"Understood," you and Smokescreen said in unison, and you both moved away quickly before the medic could change his mind about the relative ease with which he had let you go. You saw Optimus shift over to stand closer to Ratchet, murmuring something that while his natural resonance carried his deep timbre, did not carry his words.

Once a safe distance away, Smokescreen looked up to you with an unreadable expression before reaching up to you. You crawled into his open palms, rubbing gently at the one that had been trapped. He moved towards the corridor, his unspoken destination obviously being his quarters.

"I'm sorry," you murmured. "I was stupid."

"I was stupid, too," he replied. "We okay?"

You smiled softly, patting his thumb. "We're okay."

Fortunately, Smokescreen's berth was comfortable for long-term use, because if it weren't, you'd both be in a bad boat. Smokescreen's cuddle sessions always lasted longer than he might've intended.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!