

[Content: Primeverse, References to abuse, Neutral Starscream, sassy teenager]

Chapter 1:

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It once had been a construction site. Had been was an important designation ever since the government had shut down the building. Supposedly, it had been for unsafe foundation-laying practices, with the bonus of off-books hiring and wage theft. Alexis suspected the former with a grudgingly simple reasoning: The U.S. government wasn't particularly well-known for protecting worker's rights. At least not any more than they had to for the sake of reputation.

She had come to the abandoned site before. There, she avoided prying eyes. Folks regarded the place with suspicion—everything from radioactive waste dump to visitations from aliens was jawed about. She wouldn't be surprised if the government (or, more likely, the very yokel locals who suspected foul play) dumped garbage there—radioactive was pushing it. And some of the claims of military jets pulling close fly-bys sounded legit—or at least believable.

As she sidled across a concrete girder towards several half-formed walls she snorted. Alexis had come here previously as a dare, another time as part of an underage party. This was the last place she really wished to be, but it was the only one left that promised shelter without the overbearing pressure of others. People would always recommend the same thing—"Are you *sure* you can't stay at home?", and "Aren't your parents worried?", and worse yet "You'll miss your parents soon enough—it's better to just go home."

At the end of the girder she dropped down into a pit—a pit that was to be a sublevel, or maybe a maintenance tunnel. Currently it housed truck-high piles of gravel, stacks of peeling and grayed two-by-fours, pieces of snack food wrappers and the huge, darkened entrance to the most finished structure, the only one with a complete roof.

Her own problems had forced the wacky conspiracy theories out of her mind. She entered the shadows of the concrete block and had those thoughts reversed.

There was something inside already, something big. Huge; the shape leaned up against one of the walls, coming up past the one-story mark even in its crouched position. The dark made several faint patches of reddish light on its torso stand out even clearer, more ominously.

She had been about to say something, something like “Who the hell left this crappy excuse for a Halloween decoration in here? Ooo, it has red LEDs, *scaary!*~” when the form let out a deep groan. And Alexis had been about to laugh that off too. Except the eyes opened.

It had eyes. Red eyes, much brighter than the faint patches of light on its abdomen, much too bright to possibly be the result of a tech-savvy prankster. She noticed with a nervous swallow they were also much *angrier* than those of an immobile prop, glaring down at her figure outlined plainly by the exterior light.

“Sup,” she blinked, rooted in place but too dazed by the reality of this to be afraid. Yes, indeed, there was a *creature* staring her down. A building-sized, spiky, red-eyed, metallic-looking creature. With a disconcerting and grumpy slant to its heavy brows.

A long moment passed in which the giant thing and Alexis both blinked several times. The creature’s brows raised very slightly.

“Do what?”

Its voice was just as huge as it was, resonating against the surrounding walls; it was just as raspy and abrasive as she imagined it would be as well.

For a second Alexis pondered running for it while the thing was still confused. The size of it, though, meant she would not get far if it decided to give chase.

“Uh, ‘Sup.” She repeated; the thing tilted its head. “As in ‘what’s up’. You know, like ‘how are you’, but faster?”

With a mental wince, she considered that reply had been sent out with too much sass attached than was wise. The thing sat up straighter and loomed over her.

“And why would you ask *that*,” it snarled, bringing its hands closer to the light and revealing the fact they were tipped with razor-like claws, “*human?*”

“Uhh...” she shrugged, watching the points of its talons with healthy wariness, “Common courtesy?”

“Really,” it seemed to scoff, baring silvery teeth in a snarl as it leaned back into its original position. For a second its red eyes widened, one brow lifting as it stared into empty space. As its gaze shifted back to her Alexis wondered why she hadn’t run yet once again.

“This place was abandoned by humans,” it mused, “So why are you here?”

“I could ask the same of you, man.” She winced in real-time now. Maybe this thing hadn’t torn her apart yet, but the first things flying out of her mouth seemed the type of stuff to encourage the thing to use its talons. Backchat was probably the worst possible thing to approach monsters with.

“That’s nothing that would concern you,” Alexis thought she detected a hint of defensiveness from it. It straightened up with claws held out, wings that had been folded and hidden against its back flaring out. For a second it started to reach, as if to grab her, but faltered, “How dare you even ask. I could have killed you twice over already. I will ask again—*what are you doing here.*”

Her composure failed. The next auto-quip never made it to her lips and instead she choked, eyes watering. For some reason she still felt a hot wave of shame at the thought someone might see her cry—even if that someone was this big, metal... something.

“Speak, human,” it rolled its eyes, one set of claws digging into the concrete in impatience, “What’s wrong with you?”

There was no stemming the waterfall of tears at this point. Alexis sank to her knees, face tucked to the side and nuzzled into her jacket collar, hands trying desperately to hide her reddened face. Of course, she couldn’t see the creature’s reaction, but at the sudden onset of sobbing it jolted, brows twisted in panic and confusion.

“Wh-what?” Alexis flinched at the sound of rubble grinding as the thing stood and again at the vibrations of it stepping closer. “Stop making that *noise.*”

Of course, its demands were fruitless. Stupid demands to make, really. Made

even more so as Alexis picked up the metal straining as it leaned down, and the warm huff of breath that gusted across her back.

“Stop crying!” Its insistent growls came at a more strained tone. Alexis peeked through watering eyes and was stunned to see a spiny kneecap bigger than she was settling against the gravel before her. The segmented digits of taloned hands hovered at her eye level, debating on whether to be turned up, or turned down. “*Stop*. Stop crying, for the love of Primus—” the gravelly voice hitched and cut off, returning after a beat at more of a murmur, “Just stop crying. Stop crying and calm down.”

It took several moments of forced stoicism for her to suck in several hasty, deep breaths, steeling herself and letting her tears drain away into dried, salty streams down her cheeks. For those several moments, the metal monstrosity was hovering overhead, shocking her with its newfound patience. As she looked up with a slight hiccup she caught an obvious hint of anxiety in its expression and air.

“Done?” it said, to which she slowly nodded. With a sigh that ruffled her hair and made her flinch it stood. Alexis eyed its strange feet as it stepped away. It walked on its toes, supported by three struts. The one on its heel reminded her of a shoe’s heel... She squinted. Not quite, but close. Weird shape for a foot, all the same.

“Let’s try this again,” Her gaze snapped back up to its eerie red eyes watching her from across the building. “I will admit by first attempts at communication were... a little aggressive.” It seemed to appraise a crumbling concrete block near it before deciding to seat itself on top—its long claws lacing together and settling in the space between its knees, “Would you mind telling me what brings you here?”

“I...” she choked, still not fully back to her stable self. “I don’t really have a reason.”

“None?” Its brows lowered, clearly suspicious.

“W-well, I did wanna get indoors.” She invented, “For shelter, y’know.”

“Ah.” The glaring red eyes blinked several times, straying across the empty chamber to where it had been slumped when she entered. They flicked quickly back to her, “As am I,” it said with a hollowness that made her instantly know the thing was not entirely honest, “I, too, require shelter.”

“So what now?” Alexis swallowed quickly, mouth uncomfortably dry despite her exterior boldness, “What are you going to do to me?”

“What am *I* going to..?” Its brow raised up, its claws unlacing to allow it to run one across its pointed chin, “Your phrasing implies you think I will do something to you.”

“You threatened me.”

“Idle threats—the byproducts of frustration,” it waved a hand, dismissing her worries with a somewhat unpleasant smile. “But in all seriousness, I see no reason to harm you currently. I will do *nothing* to you.”

Her body relaxed visibly, but her mind was still ticking, alerted by the hints of untrustworthiness in the creature’s mannerisms. She got to her feet, knees feeling only slightly stronger than pudding as she staggered to the opposite wall. She tucked herself into a corner, hoping that taking up less space lessened her chances of sparking this metallic thing’s ire.

“Well then...” the tone the creature had taken now surprised her—awkward and edging closer to genuine, “Since it seems both of us intend on staying in this place, perhaps we should introduce ourselves?” The girl was leery of sharing any personal details with something huge, inhuman, and potentially dangerous, but she shot a curious glance its way. The thing cleared its throat and straightened up.

“I can go first,” it offered, smiling in a way that looked more like a tooth-gritting grimace, “You may call me Starscream. I am a Cybertronian, er, a mechanical life form...”

“You’re a robot?” She blinked, reappraising the thing’s appearance for what she’d missed. Starscream held back a sneer poorly, a mouthplate showing a sliver of his denta for a moment.

“*Mechanical life form* is more accurate, but sure.”

“What kind of a name is ‘Starscream?’”

It—or, rather, he—seemed to glare at her, alarmed that *this* was her question.

“A noble one, that’s what.” Alexis caught a hint of a pout on his face a

moment before the giant mech countered with a sickly sweetness, “I suppose you think yours is better?”

“Yep,” she huffed. “But I don’t think I should tell you my name. I don’t trust you.”

“Come now. I told you mine already.” The mech blinked rapidly, eyes wide and cheated. “Name and nature is all I divulged. I know already you are a human—so tell me what your name is!”

At the height of his order he raised one talon, and while it was probably an unconscious gesture it frightened her the same as a threat.

“A-Alexis.”

“Come again?”

“My name is Alexis.” She curled her knees tighter to her, hot and oppressed and uncomfortable as hell, “There, are you happy?”

“No, I am not.” He watched her a moment, servos tensed. “Please do not start that crying again.”

“You’re a jerk.”

Starscream’s mouthplates twisted up strangely, helm pulling back a bit as if he’d been struck. Expecting a snarky response, she closed her eyes and tried to tune out. She didn’t need anyone else’s bullshit and bad-mouthing—least of all that from a giant metal alien that she was still having a hard time accepting *existed*.

“Hmmf.” The mech grunted, thoughtfully, which the girl took to mean he hadn’t had a cruel enough comeback and was responding for the sake of it. “Well, there are worse things to be. Given my current state, yes, your assessment is very accurate.”

Quiet descended on the skeletal building, interrupted at first by just the strange, low huffing of the huge mech breathing and a few faint liquid noises. A steady pattering picked up and built until it drowned out those sounds; it was raining.

“Hmmm,” Starscream hummed again, drawing Alexis’s attention. “Seems you were lucky to have found this shelter.”

“I wouldn’t say that.”

“Come on, I *am* trying here,” he rolled his eyes, posture slumping with a harse metal shifting. “You would be in poor humor too if you had gone a week without a good refueling.”

“Er... refueling.”

“I am *hungry*.” He clarified, growling with a deepened intensity. “Extremely hungry.”

“I-I see...” Alexis kept her eyes on the giant, not eager to know what qualified as “food” to this mechanical life form, but fearing that human beings were possibly on the list. She hugged her legs tighter. “Must be pretty bad.”

“It’s exhausting,” his brows furrowed, completely missing the nervousness in her voice.

“The *worst* part is that I know where a sizable energon store is,” Alexis jolted, not expecting his rant to continue. And was it ever a rant—“It’s practically under out feet at this very moment! I can’t risk breaking through to access it either—I would end up destroying it.”

“And the only entrance to this store is so *small*, since it was you organics that—”

Starscream’s optics widened, something clicking together even in his energon-starved mind. Alexis bit her lip at the mech’s sudden silence, eyeing him stroking the tip of his chin and the small beard-like spike attached to it.

“I really can be quite the fool,” he said with a chuckle. To the girl’s horror he turned his head back to her wearing a wide, devious grin. “The answer to my problem has walked right in on me.”

Alexis pushed herself upright against the wall behind her, eyes wide but too alerted to danger for tears. Starscream had also stood, striding towards her with a much springier gait. Her gut screamed at her to run, but she knew she had nowhere to go. One step of his was thirty of hers. He would catch her.

The mech slowed to a stop close by, peering down at her pressing herself back

against the concrete. His optics shone with giddiness.

“*Alexis!*” He practically chirped her name, head tilted gleefully as he watched her, “No need to cringe like that. I only have need of your help with one tiny thing.”

She shut her eyes as he stooped, praying he would at the very least end her quick—if that was indeed what he wanted.

The flat edge of a claw patted her head. Almost gently. Her eyes shot open, already full of confusion.

“I assure you,” he grinned, amused by her perplexed expression, “if you retrieve some energon for me we will have a *much* better time of it.”

“Energon..?” She squeaked, recovering the nerves to reach up and shove his uncomfortably heavy digit away.

“Yes, the most essential and basic fuel of Cybertronians,” he explained, his expression and tone borderline-amiable, “Our most desirable source of energy and growth.”

“Giant robot chow?”

“...Sure.” He shrugged, “Call it what you like, so long as you get some for me.”

“And why should I do that?” She frowned, “Pissy attitude or not, I’m not fetching this stuff for you for nothing.”

Starscream’s eyebrows and wings twitched. The girl was sure she’d just aggravated the moody temper once again, but to her relief his servos relaxed and his optics half-lidded in musing.

“Are you *bargaining* with me?” he chuckled, chestplate puffed out slightly.

Alexis simply nodded, unable to tell if he was holding back outrage and offense or was simply toying with the idea of obliging her out of whim.

“Very well,” the plating on his legs and hindquarters clanked and ground against the floor as he sat, small chunks of rubble that happened to be under him being crushed to sandy dust. “Only seems fair. You get me what I need, and I get you what you need.” He offered a talon, despite it being bigger than her, “So, what do *you*



need?”

“Hmm,” There were plenty of things she needed about now, and none of them seemed like things a huge alien robot could bring her. A stable household, a sober family, or perhaps some emotional security. But then, it was probably best to ask for something relatively paltry, since she doubted he would follow through with the trade anyways. “Probably the same thing as you: Something to eat.”

“Err...” Contrary to Alexis’s thoughts this seemed a tall order for Starscream, “I will need more specifics on that. I’m not very familiar with organic, er, fuels?”

“Well, a double cheeseburger with some fries sounds nice about now,” she gave a snorty laugh, “Shouldn’t be hard to find that. Just any fast-food joint.”

“You want me to steal a meal for you.” The mech’s optics lit up in a teasing grin as the human huffed further.

“I mean, I wouldn’t if I had money.”

“I’m *joking*, lighten up,” his grin broadened, “Either way, you will get your cheeseburger.”

“*Double* cheeseburger.”

“Yes, of course.”

“With extra onions. And *jeee*-zus, make sure they don’t put mayo on it. So gross.”

“Y-yes, I’ll try to remember that.”

“French fries, too. It’s way better with French fries.” Alexis smirked, stunned by how much her demands were affecting the haughty mech. That mech raised a single brow.

“Getting pushy, are we?” he snickered, “Just remember, you still will owe me that energon after all this.”

“Fine.” She shrugged, her smirk falling, “It’s what I signed up for.” She wished for a moment she were tall enough to slap the smug look off his jerk face. Oh well—such is life; some jerks it does not pay to slap.