

At first, today seemed like a normal scavenging mission. Find parts to maintain the bunker, that's their usual MO. But, little did an avid blacksmith know that he would encounter something he's never quite seen before. Quartz already has most of his haul- he's just doing a final sweep of the area when he spots an old chest that he looked over earlier. He reaches down to open it, only to hear something rummaging around the inside of it. It's enough of a ruckus for Quartz to go on guard. Is there a drone in there?

"What the-?"

When it rattles again, Quartz takes out his gun, pointing the barrel at it. If there *is* a drone in there... well, he'd be a fool to not at least check it out.

"I'm openin' the chest- come out nice an' easy, and I won't have'ta start shooting ya!"

He throws the lid open, but when he looks inside, he doesn't find what he's expecting to see. Instead, he stands there confused, as there appears to only be leftover scraps in here. Nothing out of the ordinary to be seen. Quartz switches between vision modes, but either his visor is on the fritz or he was imagining the whole thing.

"Damn... gotta remind meself to ask Jazz for another tune up. Haven't gotten a diagnostic scan in ages."

He starts taking the most useful pieces of junk, but as he clears everything out, something suddenly latches onto his hand, biting down hard. It's so jarring that Quartz reels his hand back.

"FUCKIN' HELL-"

There's a good bite wound on his finger, a little oil leaking out as it heals. Quartz nurses the finger before looking in the chest. There, growling fiercely at him, is a small four legged creature. Its little nub tail wags low, lips curled back in a snarl. At first glance, it looks like your average drone, just tiny. With fluffy white fur and long, blue hair. Also wearing a little coat and glasses, for some inexplicable reason. It takes a freshly killed robo bug and retreats through a rotted out hole in the back of the chest. Quartz blinks dumbly for a second before everything registers in his processors.

"What... what did I just see? Get back here, ya little gobshite!"

He seeks revenge for the bite, pulling out everything to find this little creature, who ducks and weaves effortlessly through all the clutter. It's to the point where Quartz doesn't really care about the noise, content to break things if it gets him closer to his would-be attacker.

"Yer gonna pay for that lil' nip, get over 'ere!"

He eventually corners the thing, noting the state of it. Its fur is matted in some places from old oil stains, its tiny jacket in tatters and its miniature glasses cracked on one lens. It growls at him again, ready to lunge should things come to that. To be honest, Quartz is more or less just curious about it, but that doesn't mean that nasty bite isn't worth the punishment!

"Ha- got ya now!"

He goes to lunge for it, but it's too quick. The small thing darts between his legs, Quartz falling over from the force of his lunge. He lands in a pile of junk that collapses on top of him, his tiny terror racing out the open doorway behind him.

"Oh, that smarts... ugh!"

Quartz climbs back up to his feet, not forgetting his haul as he chases the little drone out of the building. It sped away out of sight, but on closer inspection, there's a small trail in the snow.

"You're not gettin' away from me that easy..."

It takes some time, but he tracks the critter underneath a broken bridge. The snow ends where the bridge blocks it from falling, so he has to look around until he hears it. The telltale sound of squeaking nearby. Quartz turns to look for the source of the sound, and he sees it. A small crate with a tarp over it. As the tarp flaps in the breeze, he can see more than one of those little machines in there. Knowing they haven't noticed him yet, Quartz keeps as quiet as possible as he approaches the crate. As he draws closer, he sees the dead robo bug, and something extremely tiny and poofy lapping up the oil leaking from it. A baby? Nearby, that same furry assailant from earlier rests, while a gray haired one of similar size attempts to groom the blue haired one. It doesn't seem to be doing much, unfortunately. The more he watches them, the less angry Quartz feels.

They're so cute!

"Ugh, I can't believe I'm doing this..."

Quartz hisses to himself, taking out a can of oil from his bag that he filled earlier. He comes back with some kind of makeshift dish to pour it into, and when he returns, he doesn't try to hide. Instead, he walks slowly and calmly up to the crate. When he gets close enough, he can hear growling from inside- as well as a few pitiful whimpers as the gray drone picks up her baby, retreating to the back of the box. Quartz makes his intentions known.

"It's alright, little ones- pipe down! I know we got off on the wrong foot before, but I've come with a peace offering for ya."

He places the dish down, moving a safe distance away. It takes a little bit off time, hearing soft churrs as the older pair communicates with each other. Then, the gray one pokes its head out, ducking back in a few times before it gathers the courage to leave the safety of its meager home. It nervously looks between Quartz and the dish before drinking from it. It puts a smile on Quartz's face. Over the next few days, he continues to return to the crate, leaving a dish out to feed them. It warms his heart when he finds it empty each time, and they happen to not live that far from the bunker. The blue one remains elusive at best, but the gray one begins to warm up to Quartz's presence. It's been allowing him to get closer and closer, and it even begins to wag its fuzzy nub tail when he shows up. It isn't until the night it comes up to greet him that his heart is set on them.

Coming back for what feels like the second week in a row, Quartz sets out the dish like normal. The gray puffball pokes her head out again, and after lifting her baby up to drink from it, it looks at him with a kind of longing that he hasn't seen before. Quartz speaks softly, trying to comfort it.

"What's the matter, little one? Not hungry, are ya?"

That's when it starts slowly walking in his direction, hesitating whenever he moves, nub tucked between its legs. It meanders back and forth, unsure. It takes one final gesture from Quartz to get it to finally come over to him.

"It's okay. I'm not gonna hurt ya. Cross my heart."

The gray drone's eyes sparkle when he says this, brimming with tears. It keeps the same slow pace as it closes the gap between them. The blue one emerges right as this is happening, watching with keen alertness as the gray one hops up on Quartz's leg. That's when it begins to whine, pawing at his chassis to be held. Quartz has to bite back his own emotions as he witnesses such an intimate show of affection.

"Aw, sweetness... c'mere, I'll hold ya!"

Gently, he scoops the gray puffball up, placing it on his lap. It's then that he notices it's a girl, as her whining gets louder as she nuzzles into his tummy. Quartz pets her, feeling how damp her puffy coat is. Her hair and fur is so tangled and messy- it's enough to make a grown man cry, crimson tears falling down Quartz's visor.

"Oh, you poor thing..."

He hugs her to his chest, and that's the moment the other one charges out and starts yipping at him. It comes dangerously close to biting his foot when the kinder of the two wiggles out of his grasp, yipping back at it. It gives Quartz just enough time to yank his foot back, feeling helpless as he watches the two critters fight.

“Woah, hey now- there’s no need for a spat!”

They argue for a few minutes before the baby begins to whine, the blue drone looking back at it. A silence falls between the two furry parents, the one with the long silver locks staring defiantly at her partner. The bespectacled one huffs, trotting over to pick up the baby in its teeth. It brings the young one over, sitting in front of Quartz and waiting. Confused, he looks at the friendly one in his lap, watching her smile up at him and squeak happily.

“Do ya want me to take yer baby?”

She stands up and wags her tail, giving him joyful yips in response. Putting two and two together, he lowers a hand, the blue one scowling at it before carefully placing the squirming baby in his grasp. When he feels how soft the baby is, Quartz lets out a gasp. This guy looks so small in his palm!

“Oh my goodness- he’s so precious!”

He delicately pets the baby’s back with one finger, the baby chirping with content when he does so. Then he sets him on his lap with his mother, the mom scooping her little one up and sitting on the baby to keep him warm. When the baby falls asleep, that’s when Quartz makes up his mind. It even calms the blue one down, as it lays at his feet. There’s no way in *hell* he’s leaving them out here!

“Alright, that does it- I’m takin’ ya home! I will *not* have ya livin’ out in this cold!”

He takes the mom and her baby in his arms, the blue furry friend below growling at his sudden movement. But, the most she does is gnaw at his ankles as he leaves the crate behind. The junk dish, the wet bedding, everything is left in the snow as Quartz marches back with them to the bunker. When he returns, it’s to a concerned Nia and Jazz, who’ve been wondering about his whereabouts.

“Quartz, you’re back! I was starting to wonder if-”

Nia holds her thought as she sees his new companions. She’s confused by what she’s looking at at first, but that slowly melts into a silent, burning adoration as the silver haired ball of fur pips at her.

“Oh my gosh... where did you find these cuties?!”

Quartz isn’t afraid to explain, knowing this has been a long time coming.

“They were living out in some ratty old crate outside when I found them- the blue bugger bit me, then led me straight to ‘em! I’ve been feeding ‘em the past couple o’ weeks to see if I could get ‘em to like me, and sure enough, they’re real friendly! Come, come, you can give ‘em a wee pet.”

He holds out the momma, only for Nia to light up when she sees the baby nestled in her fur.

“Is that a baby?! Oh, they’re so cute!”

Now that both Quartz and Nia are smitten on them, it doesn’t take much to convince Jazz to let them stay. Even though he detests the idea at first.

“I don’t know, honey- who knows what these things are? To be honest, I’m not a huge fan of letting random fuzzy robot animals just run around the bunker.”

But, when Quartz tells him about the planned playroom he has in mind for them, Jazz begrudgingly allows it to happen. From there, Quartz allows them to stay in his room for the time being. He sets up a little bed for them next to his own, keeping them away from his blacksmithing equipment to keep them comfortable. He leaves them in his room after giving them a much needed bath and a brush, and when he returns, all three of them are huddled up in a fur pile. P, the one he braided the hair of, snoozes with her pup, Buddy. F4, the grumpy one who’s still not sure about the new strangers yet, stays awake as she grooms her sleeping partner. She stops for a second when Quartz walks in, acknowledging him before continuing. At the very least, they’re all resting soundly.

“You’ve got quite the family, eh? I know y’ don’t realize it yet, but we’ll take good care of ya. You can mark my words on that!”

Quartz beams at F4, and for the first time, she wags her nub before drifting off to sleep. Clean, warm and well cared for after years of struggling to survive.