Assumptions, Omissions, Lies

by ElnaK

Summary

John Reese doesn't particularly believe in honesty. Lies of omission aren't lies, they're just
omissions. Lies can be white. Assumptions don't always have to be corrected. Honesty is
important, but it doesn't have to be absolute.

And, finally, knowing about someone isn't the same thing as knowing someone.

All the things, important or not, that John never said, didn't correct, or twisted a bit, just
because that's what he did.
So... I'm rewatching the show (again), like, for the... fifth time? Or sixth? Not sure (I started it less than a year ago, when it was already finished, and now I'm just going back and back and back and... you get it. I'm obsessed (especially by John).

And I decided, why don't I collect quotes from various conversations between him and the others and add the thoughts he never said out loud? Yeah, I know. I'm crazy.

Also, you might see some things that aren't canon, without being against canon. You can go and take a look at my other PoI works, especially the crossovers, and you'll see I'm staying true to my vision of John.

And finally, I'm taking the relationships as they make sense TO ME, staying faithful to canon as I can but filling in when I found the obvious explanation didn't satisfy ME. Which means, brotp for Rinch, very strong relationship without romance for Careese, antagonistic then unsaid Team Rocket friendship, sibling Mayhem Twins, etc...
**PILOT**

**Joss Carter:** "You don't learn how to fight like that in the regular army. So, what were you? Special Forces? Delta?"

Both. Neither. A bit of the two. And more. He passed by so many branches of the US armed forces, sometimes even he thinks it's a bit ridiculous. Not that it matters so much, in the end, where and with whom you learned how to kill. What mattered was that you could. That you did.

**John Reese:** "Seems like the only time you need a name now is when you're in trouble. So am I in trouble?"

Of course he is. He knows that the detective won't lose any time in getting his fingerprints – he's going to let her, too. Then he'll end up in jail, and the CIA will hear of his continued survival. Considering they had him terminated, a few months back, he doesn't doubt what's awaiting him then. But even for that, he doesn't need a name.

**Joss Carter:** "Of course, some other guys I knew, they'd done so many evil things, they felt like they needed the punishment. That sounds more like your story?"

Not particularly. Of course, he's not proud of everything he did, but it isn't like most of it wasn't necessary – he does have doubts about certain assignments, though, but he won't tell the detective that. Just like he didn't tell her his real name. He isn't really a forthcoming individual.

**Harold Finch:** "You don't owe me anything, Mr. Reese. That's the name you prefer, isn't it? I know you've had several."

The fact that the man doesn't use his real name could mean two things: either he doesn't know it and is skillfully not admitting it, or he does know, but thinks John will be more amenable to working for him if he doesn't hear a menace in the exact knowledge of his original identity. Well. Two can play this game, right? He isn't going to deny or confirm anything. Let the stranger wonder about his reactions.

**Harold Finch:** "I know exactly everything about you, Mr. Reese. I know about the work you used to do for the government. I know about the doubts you came to have about that work. I know that the government, along with everybody else, thinks you're dead. I know you've spent the last couple of months trying to drink yourself to death. I know you're contemplating more efficient ways to do it."

He frankly doubts that the man knows absolutely everything about him, but at the same time, he can't deny that the stranger knows more than most people do. Some might even say that he knows enough, if not all. John, though, would argue that, so far, the stranger knows a lot about him, but that doesn't mean he does know him. There's a difference there, a difference that matters.
Harold Finch: "You need to know what it would be like to be forced to listen to someone get murdered, and not be able to do anything about it."

As if he doesn't already – Finch probably doesn't realize what exactly being the kind of agent he used to be entails, even if he thinks he does. On top of that, there were the times from even before... But that is another matter altogether.

Harold Finch: "It's the truth. You left the government because they lied to you-"

Not quite, no. He left because they put a bullet in his stomach and sent an airbone missile to make sure he didn't live through it, just in case. He also left because after that, obviously, there isn't a way he can possibly trust them not to do it again – that's called compartmentalization, and John's very good at it. He understands the need for secrecy, the necessity to keep some things quiet. It doesn't mean he's willing to die for it, especially when he didn't do anything to deserve a death sentence.

Harold Finch: "I recognize, Mr. Reese, that there's a disparity between how much I know about you and how much you know about me."

That's an understatement if John ever heard one. That's also one of the reasons why he has to stay. To figure out how much Finch actually knows about him, about his past, without letting the limping man understand that he might not have all the pieces of the puzzle. John needs to make sure that the few things he has left aren't in danger because of the man. Finch, for now, seems to be doing something good, and John might find a place in this crusade, however futile it can be in the long run. That's enough for him – it'd be another story if the man was someone bad, but he's also staying to determine that – for now.

John Reese: "The slow way. Cultivate a relationship to allow you to earn the asset's trust."

Which is more or less what he's intending to do with Finch. Of course, he doesn't doubt that the older man already suspects as much. John doesn't particularly mind the paranoia. If it was too easy, he'd think it suspicious.

John Reese: "Well, neither do I, but if someone has to have them, I'd rather it was me."

Not exactly true. He does enjoy a good weapon – the skills needed, the accomplishment, the efficiency. But unlike most criminals, and an important number of other unsavory people, he doesn't like shooting people for all that. What matters right now, is that sometimes, you just have to, or you end up being the one lying dead in a morgue or a ditch. Which wouldn't do, if Finch really wants him to save numbers.

John Reese: "Take you, for instance. You're holding that thing sideways. You can't aim it, and two, it'll eject a shell casing right into your face."

Well... The last part isn't exactly, completely true – that is, it wouldn't be so serious if John wasn't
about to make sure that happened by twisting the thug's hold on his weapon. Which he totally intends to do. So technically, yes, in this case the guy is going to get the shell casing right into his face. That's what aiming a weapon at a stranger could earn you, from time to time.

**John Reese:** "But I don't know if I can protect Hansen. I can't see the whole picture."

He is good, yes. But he isn't bulletproof, and he can't be everywhere at the same time. Finch has to understand that even a skilled operative can't work miracles. Sometimes, one piece of info could make the difference between a death and a life.

**Lionel Fusco:** "It's Oyster Bay. Glad you like it. You're gonna be here a long, long time."

Yeah, he had recognized the place. Oyster Bay hadn't changed much in twenty years, and John does remember working a case here once or twice, back in the day, when he wasn't yet who he is now. Not that Fusco needs to know he used to have a badge too.

**John Reese:** "I don't particularly like killing people, but I'm very good at it."

He doesn't particularly mind killing them, either, but for some reason saying it out loud tends to make people think he's a psychopath. The truth is, if he doesn't have a choice, if they deserved it, John isn't going to lose any sleep over their death, even if it happens by his hand. He might regret having had to, but he won't regret doing it. He's just being practical about it – he isn't sure if that's a psychopathic tendency, or something else, but he acknowledges he has a problem. Well. At least he's trying to make the best of it, unlike most killers.

**John Reese:** "I don't have any friends. I don't have any family left either."

False. But do you really have a family left when they don't even know whether or not you are alive? When you can't go to see them, because it's just better for everyone – except for you, but does your comfort really matter? It's false that he doesn't have any family left, but he guesses it's kind of true too. And even if it wasn't, it's certainly not Stills' business.

**Harold Finch:** "Sooner or later both of us'll probably wind up dead."

Again: when you have nothing left to yourself, can you really say you are alive?
GHOSTS

Harold Finch: "And, Mr. Reese, we'll meet on my schedule. Not yours."

Well, Finch should have thought of that before hiring a highly paranoid – not as much as the older man, obviously, but still a former CIA agent – operative. It might be one of the reasons John is prodding at the limits put up by Finch, too; the man needs to be reminded that if he is flexible, it is by choice, not by obligation. Moreover, the numbers won't wait for Finch's schedule.

John Reese: "Took it off your friend Stills."

And there also is the fact that John is used to walking inside a precinct with a police badge. As a CIA agent, he had more than once needed information, and not all the ops he was on were such that he could ask politely. And before that, once upon a time... He had had a badge just like Stills’ – his own. But that was long ago.

John Reese: "That's how I would have done it."

Though the CIA never had him kill a family like that. The Agency might not be perfect, and sometimes the missions were dubious, but there was a limit. No agent would have believed that a child needed to be terminated alongside their parents – the parents, maybe, but not the child, and certainly not before the child. So no, he hadn't ever had to do something like the Whitakers' murders... But on a purely practical point of view, that is, to fake an execution followed by a suicide, yes, that's how John would have done it.

John Reese: "And if I speak too loudly, say the wrong thing?"

Not that he will. But he does feel it necessary to remind Finch that he could. That there will be consequences, if the man tries to play him. He also wants to know what Finch's reaction would be. It's important to assess how far the man is willing to go – with Snow, John hadn't thought he'd be ordered to kill Kara only to get rid of a problematic witness, but it had happened. He hadn't had any illusion that the Agency would hesitate to terminate either of them if they were found to be traitors, but he hadn't thought there was a possibility they'd just get rid of them. And now Kara is dead, and John is supposedly dead too.

John Reese: "Find out where I can hire one."

He has some ideas, of course, but the city probably changed a lot in two decades. Still kind of the same, but not exactly. The local fixer isn't the same as the one he used to know back then. He'll have to ask Fusco.

Solnick: "I get it. You're like me. A killer. A genuine bad guy. Then I don't have to explain to you what happened to those people on that boat. You already know."
Of course he knows. He is a killer – maybe not a "genuine bad guy", but he knows these people as if he were one of them, so close enough. John does what needs be done, and he doesn't do it for the money. The means to these ends are the same, bad guy or man of necessity. What he wants are the specifics, and Solnick knows that too.

**John Reese:** "You're gonna need to trust someone."

He isn't going to pretend he's the best guy in the neighborhood, morality wise, but he's certainly the one who can keep Theresa alive. Most genuine good guys don't have the necessary skills – and that's why the world needs people like John. He's a compromise.

**John Reese:** "Sorry."

Or not. Someone who hired a contract killer to get rid of an entire family wasn't someone John was sorry to hurt a bit. Especially when the only reason behind the action was money. But he was a sarcastic little shit, so...

**John Reese:** "You've been asking a lot of questions about me. It's time we sat down face to face."

Which doesn't mean he's going to do it. At most, he's acknowledging her quest for intel on him, the fact that were the situation different, he would sit down face to face with Joss Carter. But the situation is such that she'd come with an intervention team, and he can't afford to let himself be jailed. If she can't figure it out herself... But John knows she'll still come. She has to. And that, his white lie and her obligation, that will allow Theresa to be safe.

**Harold Finch:** "Trust? That's not something I come by very easily. I have my reasons."

Finch is saying that as if John doesn't have the very same urge to keep to himself. As if the CIA hadn't launched a missile at him less than a year ago, even as he had been a trustful agent. Trust isn't something John gives out easily either – but it's alright. There is trust, and trust. For now, he gives Finch the former – trust in his skills, and perhaps even in his motivations. But he keeps the latter to himself – he's only an employee, a hired gun, and he knows it. He's simply reminding Finch that he's aware of it too, by making the man admit it out loud.
MISSION CREEP

**Harold Finch:** "*Just like you.*"

He won't comment. Even if it's true that he has his fair share of medals and commendations, he usually doesn't think about it. It's not as if he could wear them, not without going back to the people he used to be – one of them isn't even supposed to be a hero anymore, not with the setup John orchestrated before faking his own death. He's still a fighter, yes. But he's not much of a good soldier anymore.

**John Reese:** "*Over there they grow up fast... or they die.*"

He was already grown up, him, when he enlisted. He didn't die – but now, he's old. In a way.

**John Reese:** "*I don't know. You're the genius.*"

Not that he's stupid. In fact, he's even pretty intelligent. He could probably figure it out, given time. But Finch is more intelligent, and pretending the contrary would only make them lose time. Being intelligent is also about letting the right people handle the parts of the op they are the best at.

**Sam Latimer:** "*What kind of skills?*

The kind the man is looking for. But so much more than that, too. Latimer probably wouldn't want to know, if John told him the exact array of his skills. So he settles for the ones the guy cares for.

**John Reese:** "*I prefer to work with people who know the area.*"

If he's going to do something illegal, he'd rather do it with people who can minimize the collateral damages.

**John Reese:** "*Thanks. You won't regret it.*"

Of course he will. But John's not going to warn him ahead, is he?

**John Reese:** "*Big fella's got it tattooed all over his arm.*"

Which is not the first reason he knows, but is the reason he allowed himself to mention it – since he could explain. It's always best to keep it simple. Don't complicate things when you have an easy answer right before your eyes.
John Reese: "Killing in battle, in combat, is one thing. Killing someone up close... Someone who can't fight back, that takes a different sort of killer. And Joey's not one of them."

And Joey's not one of us, is what he really thinks. People like John, able to kill even in cold blood, are more dangerous than Joey will ever be. The question being, from here, whether or not these people would kill an innocent in cold blood, or only someone who deserves it. John always tried to be one of the latter.

John Reese: "That's one of the things you learn over there- In the end, we're all alone. And no one's coming to save you."

Something you learn when you're on the battlefield, certainly, but it's true everywhere else too. If it's the end for you, no one will get there in time. If it's not... John's father went and made sure it wasn't the time to go for four people, many years prior. But by doing that, John's father also made sure it was his time to go. No one is there to save the savior.

Banker: "It's the knowledge economy now. Time to use this, my friend."

John is intelligent, and has a lot of knowledge on many things – unpleasant, for the most part – really. That's what got him in the CIA. But he's not sure the banker would appreciate it if he made use of his knowledge right now, on him. So he'll just go for a head-butt.

Straub: "Yeah, even your sneaky little earwig. Hey, it's not a problem, is it?"

For a moment he wonders if he should have left Straub to deal with the police, back in the mob gambling joint. If not for his "sneaky little earwig", the guy would be dead, or a killer, by now. Ungrateful brat.

John Reese: "She loves you, Joey. Just tell her it's gonna be you and her now. Just you and her."

He said that to Jessica, once. Then the Towers fell. But for Joey, the Towers have already fallen.

Joss Carter: "And that is how this ends. Sooner or later, I'll lock you up. Or find you bleeding out somewhere."

What the detective doesn't realize is that there is no jail time waiting for John. If she locks him up, the CIA will walk in, and he'll be killed... or, if he's lucky, he'll end up in a black site prison that definitely doesn't work within the Geneva Convention. And of course, he can't tell her that, because that would only bring the wolves on his trail faster.

Jessica Ardnt: "You wanna be brave? Take a risk. Tell me to wait for you and... Say those words and I will. It would take real courage, wouldn't it?"
It isn't about courage. It's about keeping the pain to a minimum for Jessica. Even if it's at the cost of his own happiness. She can't understand that, though. She doesn't know what he is capable of. And it's better that way. Even if he is the one she blames.
Harold Finch: "If you'd like a raise, Mr. Reese, all you have to do is ask."

Not particularly, no. What he needs is a field partner, to make sure at least one person will be up and fresh when something happens, but he guesses that's not something he can exactly ask for. It's not Finch's fault that he's physically limited, and hiring just any stranger is not on the table.

John Reese: "Had to make a pit stop."

Some things simply aren't told out loud, especially if it was a dead end. Finch'll figure it out.

John Reese: "Guy likes to mark his own territory."

Something John doesn't really understand, even if he does know why people like Benton do it. Personally he keeps his place neat, rather impersonal – did it even before the army, the CIA... Even if he had a few personal things, which he doesn't, he certainly wouldn't put his own face everywhere in the flat. It's untasteful, and definitely a giveaway of what matters to Benton.

John Reese: "He's not the first person who's tried to kill me."

What matters is that Fusco didn't succeed, and, more than that, that the corrupt cop hadn't really wanted to succeed to begin with. It doesn't mean he won't try again, certainly, but John can work with that. He wouldn't get anywhere if he got angry at all the people who tried to kill him at one point or another.

Harold Finch: "Your detective is a nice pet to keep, Mr. Reese, but sooner or later... he'll bite you back."

Of course he will. Or at least, he'll try. But the reason Finch hired John is to deal with the things the older man can't do himself. Securing assets, and making sure they don't turn on him, is part of those things. It's a lot like what Finch does with John himself, and sometimes, John wonders how often the secretive man thinks about the fact that he could bite him too.

John Reese: "Lots of crooked cops in this town, Lionel. It's not gonna be hard to find another one just as useful as you... with less baggage."

He doesn't intend to do that, of course. But he will, if he needs to. And it's better to keep the cop in the dark as to how much he doesn't care about what happens to him. It's better to let him think there is a danger, if he doesn't play by John's rules. Because that danger is still a potentiality.
**John Reese:** "Finch, she's a doctor who saves lives. She doesn't know what it's like to take one. It'll destroy her."

It didn’t destroy him, not really. But that's because saving someone has always been at the cost of someone else's life for him – perhaps there hadn’t been anything to destroy to begin with. He had started that way. She hadn't.

**Megan Tillman:** "And then I saw him a month ago. And it all came back."

When John saw Peter Arndt again, he beat him senseless and abandoned him in a mexican prison. But he guesses he can't say that out loud, can he?

**Harold Finch:** "I will refrain from asking how you know that."

Despite all he knows, Finch is so innocent sometimes, it's almost cute. Of course John knows how to get rid of a body with lye. That used to be part of his job.

**Lionel Fusco:** "You're supposed to take them out."

He's not supposed to do anything – he didn't make a promise, now, did he? And also, these words prove one more thing to John: the detective still hasn't understood who he is. He doesn't kill lightly. Never did, never will. He kills when there is no other choice.

**John Reese:** "He's being released. Why?"

He knows the answer already, of course. He has seen it happen too many times, long ago, when he sported the same badge Fusco does. But even if he knows, it still baffles him.

**Lionel Fusco:** "What's stopping me right now from making some noise, getting you arrested?"

Probably the fact that Fusco'll end up in jail too if he does. That is, if John doesn't kill him before that – not that he would, but, Fusco can't be certain of that.

**John Reese:** "I told you, you're not the only dirty cop in town. I called in a favor. It's time for a change of scenery. You're gonna be doing something else for me. And, Lionel... Don't do this again."

Because he's not willing to kill the man doesn't mean he won't do it, if he's not left another choice. Besides, Fusco is hardly an innocent. He might deserve a second chance, and John is alright with letting him have a third, to let the lesson sink in, but he won't get a fourth.
**John Reese:** "I know all about Andrew Benton. I know all about you, Megan."

He doesn't know "all" about either of them. But he does know what matters here, and that's enough.

**Megan Tillman:** "Is that what happened to you?"

No. he never had that most important part to begin with. There was nothing to be broken in him. But there had been just enough to be revealed by that first kill.

**John Reese:** "She gets to keep her memory of you."

His own brother didn't get to keep his memory of John.

**Harold Finch:** "What are you gonna do with him?"

John wonders if Finch will ask him not to do it, if he doesn't answer. He wonders if the man is the kind of man who can't condone murder, but doesn't feel particularly guilty if he can pretend that he didn't know. The older man had been about to let Megan Tillman pursue her revenge, thinking the world would be better off without Benton, after all. The only reason he hadn't was because John had pointed out that even if the doctor deserved closure, even if Benton deserved to be killed, Megan Tillman would have become her own victim too. But perhaps Finch had simply not thought of it, and hadn't expected John to care.

**John Reese:** "But the truth is... People don't really change, do they?"

People will always stay themselves, even if they can change, in a way. They stay true to their own potential, as much in evil as in good. They can decide to be better, or allow themselves to be worse, but they don't change. Especially not if they aren't willing to.

**John Reese:** "Which do you think I'll regret more- letting you live or letting you die? Andrew... Help me make a good decision."

It's not really a demand. John just wants for the man to feel the terror, because he does know what he'll be doing with Andrew Benton. He won't let him live, and he won't let him die. He'll let the man to rot in jail – even if not for the crimes he has committed. Next to Peter Arndt. For the rest of his life. Andrew Benton won't be dead, and he won't be alive either. He'll be a prisoner.
JUDGEMENT

Harold Finch: "No question is ever innocent from you."

Of course some questions from him are innocent. Though John won't promise this one is, or that he will not carefully remember or analyze the answer. Later on.

John Reese: "He lost the woman he loved. Probably threw himself into his work to cope."

He'd know what he's talking about – but with Jessica, he didn't have a job left to throw himself in. Not until now.

John Reese: "Looks like he's got quite a collection of enemies."

He knows the feeling. But unlike the judge's, John's enemies don't have anything to threaten him with, nor do they know where to find him – that he's even alive.

Harold Finch: "The machine did not send us the wrong number. If it says that judge Gates is in danger, then he is."

He doesn't deny that, but it doesn't negate the threat on the son for all that. And maybe, maybe the data the Machine worked on was ambiguous to begin with. What if the SP-9 never specified which Gates was the target, or at least not next to an electronic device? What if... Finch's Machine sees a lot, John realizes, but it can't see absolutely everything. Moreover, the way it has to communicate the irrelevant numbers to its creator is restrictive. He'll have to be careful in how to interpret the numbers, in what the Machine considers enough info to prevent maybe more than one death.

John Reese: "You have two questions right now. Who are you and where is my son? Which one do you wanna focus on?"

The answer is always the second one. Now he'll just have to hope the first question – to which he can't answer – won't distract the judge. That the man's desire to know everything won't stop him from accomplishing the one thing that matters.

Samuel Gates Sr: "They said no cops, no FBI."

They always do, and the judge should know better. Yet even if he doesn’t, it's not important. John's not the former anymore, hasn't been in a long time. As for the latter, John used to be a federal agent, yes... Only the kind of federal agent more likely to put a bullet in your head than arrest you.

Harold Finch: "I want to save that boy as much as you do, but remember, Mr. Reese- we don't need
"a judge asking questions about who we are and what we do."

Perhaps, but the crusade Finch is on? It needs priorities. What matters more? Their own safety, or the survival of the innocents? John will do the best he can to ensure the former, but not at the cost of the latter. Besides, Finch can always hire someone else if John gets compromised. It's not as if he didn't know how not to talk.

**Lionel Fusco:** "All I know right now is you pissed off real police, my friend. She's not going to stop till she got you."

Yeah, he knows that kind of cops. It makes him laugh whenever they pretend it's not personal.

**Samuel Gates Sr:** "You don't know that."

Of course he does. And the judge knows just as well, with the job he's doing. Professional kidnappers don't do things halfway. Sam Gates might pretend he doesn't know, because it's his son's life on the line, and such things tend to make you hope stupid things, but John won't. Pretending won't bring the boy back.

**Samuel Gates Sr:** "Yeah? Well, maybe you're not enough. Maybe I should call those officers back and tell them the truth."

And here comes the moment the distressed parent tries to back off, to ask someone else for help, destroying everything the professional has tried to do, and not giving the other professionals enough time to intervene. It's too late to go to the police now, there isn't enough time left for them to be able to do anything. But it's alright. The judge only want someone to blame if things don't go well. John won't let that happen... And even if it does, well... It's not as if he can't take the blame.

**John Reese:** "The longest it's ever taken me to break someone is 16 hours. You don't look like you're going to set a record. Want to talk?"

He's not going to torture the man himself. He will make him hurt, yes, but that's hardly torture considering what happens on the field, out there – Kara was the one handling the torture. John, himself, prefers to keep it... cleaner. You don't need to go to extreme lengths to get something out of a common lowlife.

**Samuel Gates Sr:** "You had your chance. I'm not playing games with my son's life."

He isn't either. But what the judge obviously doesn't realize is that there isn't such a thing as one chance a player, in that kind of game. That you need to bring your effort to an end, because there won't be another solution. At least, not one with a happy ending.

**Drost:** "I've got a family. You going to kill them too? Because he will."
John won't let it come to that. But there's no point promising such a thing, because obviously, the man is too afraid of his boss to believe he is more than able to take him on. He doesn't have time for pointless persuasion. So he'll get the intel another way.

Jarek Koska: "The operation's burned. Shoot them all."

The number of times someone said this about him... He's still here, though.

John Reese: "You don't need to say anything. I'd prefer it actually."

Keeping a secret is sometimes more helpful than trying to repay a debt.

Harold Finch: "Try the eggs Benedict, Mr. Reese. I've had them many times."

Good. Finch seems to have realized that while telling John this might reveal something about him, it's not like the operative will be able to use that info to nefarious ends. Maybe Finch won't let him know about him, but that doesn't mean he can't know him, as a person.
Zoe Morgan: "No small talk, no questions, just stay in the car, and you keep your eyes on the road. We'll settle up at the end of the night."

This is so much like old times. No questions, discretion. Except for the tip. Well, half a tip, for now.

John Reese: "I don't have any things I care about."

No things he cares about. Some remnants of others lives, scattered where he can't go and see them, better preserved that way, since no one will ever be able to follow him to them. Things he'd like not to lose... but not so important either. People, though. Not numerous. But they are all out of reach – dead, or thinking he is dead, or...

John Reese: "Only reason you buy a gun off the streets so it's untraceable."

He'd know.

John Reese: "Nothing worth mentioning."

Not that he talks about things that are worth mentioning either.

Zoe Morgan: "And to answer your question, no, I hate jazz."

He'd smirk, if he could. That answer in itself tells him more than if she had allowed herself to admit that yes, she likes jazz. First possibility, the music at her place was a gift and she really doesn't like it, but it's sentimental. Second, she doesn't reveal anything about her preferences out of principle. Third, she does it only to see if he will call her on the lie, just in case her driver broke into her place – that'd be paranoid, but John really isn't one to comment. Fourth, she really doesn't like him. Maybe a bit of the four answers. Well. It's not a problem. He's only playing his part, here.

John Reese: "It wouldn't be hard for someone working at a pharmaceutical company to make murder look like natural causes."

It's not hard for him either, but his point is that you don't have to be a professional killer to be able to do such a thing, when you're an expert in the right field.

Harold Finch: "You know, before we... before I found you, the numbers haunted me. I never felt so helpless in my entire life. And I know I can't get justice for all of them, but the possibility of having just one..."
It's more than the eggs Benedict. It's honest. It's important. Now John knows he can trust Finch on his motivations.

**Harold Finch:** "This time, when you find her, try not to lose her."

If it wasn't Finch, he'd probably retort that it's easy to criticize when you're not the one doing it. Or rather, he'd want to, but wouldn't either way, because John never speaks up. But this is Finch; there's no malice in his words.

**Zoe Morgan:** "I know how all the pieces of the city fit together. I know all the players. I know all the angles. And then there's you. You know, I don't understand you. And I don't like things that I don't understand."

She's right, in a way, with her wording, even if she probably doesn't realize yet what she said exactly. There are the players, and the angles. And John isn't one of them, and he doesn't have one of these. He has his reasons, of course; but no angles. And he doesn't play with the lives he tries to save. Zoe Morgan has yet to realize what he does exactly. And that's why she doesn't understand.

**John Reese:** "I thought everyone had an angle."

...He liked her well enough before that. But maybe he can like her even more – if she's still able to choose her priorities, even while working her angles. If Zoe Morgan doesn't only fix problems, but also decides which ones she won't fix.

**Zoe Morgan:** "To do something illegal."

She certainly does know how to get his attention.

**Zoe Morgan:** "Probably one of those guys that can get out of anything with a paper clip. Where did you learn this stuff?"

Several places, actually. The CIA, sure, but not only. Not something he's going to share – not something she's going to resent him for, either. She and him, they are somewhat similar. They know when not to ask, and not to resent a lack of answer. A long story will do.

**Zoe Morgan:** "Bad move, lieutenant. If I can't trust you, I have to destroy you."

And if she doesn't, John might go and do it anyway. He'd have understood if the policeman had simply wanted to get rid of someone who thought they could have him break the law because he owed them, but it clearly wasn't the case.
Zoe Morgan: "Of course it is."

Except his name really is John. Weird how no one ever seems to believe him on that point.

John Reese: "Given your choice of career, doesn't seem like much of a stretch."

Not the real answer, of course. As always, the Machine has to stay a secret. But it's not a lie for all that. Zoe Morgan's activities as a fixer do come with an inherent danger.

John Reese: "I know almost everything about you. I know you grew up in a nice house in Yonkers. I know your dad was a city official till he got snared in a corruption case. I know you spent the rest of your childhood in a little apartment in Queens with your mother. About the only thing I don't know about you is why you started doing whatever it is you do."

Once again, he knows about her. Doesn't mean he knows her. What drives her, he can guess, but he can't be sure, not unless she tells him.

Robert Keller: "This moral crusade doesn't suit you. The Zoe Morgan I know is reasonable. Knows when to make a smart play."

John wonders if this is the moment when he gets to see what kind of "reasonable" Zoe Morgan is. The one who works for themselves only, or the one who knows when to forgo the angle and to privilege what truly matters?

Samuel Douglas: "Government uses it for lethal injections. Stops a heart in minutes. Quite humanely, really."

Yeah, he knows, thanks. Used it a number of times himself. The fact that he recognized it should have tipped Douglas off, but well – if it's used on him, John prefers something that drags on, that gives him longer to save himself; if it's to use on someone, he'd rather use something quick and painless.

Harold Finch: "You should be more trusting, Mr. Reese."

Quite a laugh, coming from Finch. It doesn't matter. Maybe Zoe can be trusted, maybe not. So far, she's on the list of people John likes a little better than most, but it doesn't mean she won't choose herself if it comes to that, if she really has no other choice. He wouldn't blame her much if she did, too. It doesn't matter. John's job is to make sure that the last opportunity doesn't crash like the first did. And anyway, he's more of a see-first-trust-later guy.

Zoe Morgan: "About two seconds before I slipped you the paper clip."

And that is the proof she is someone he can depends on: when the situation is truly bad, her instincts
are not only concerned with herself. She knows how to save herself, and if she can, she tries to save the others too.
Harold Finch: "Yes, I imagine espionage was a much safer choice, Mr. Reese."

At least then he knew someone might always be gunning for him, and he has the skills to keep it under control. A high school teacher doesn't even think about the possibility. But yes, John gets Finch's point.

Lionel Fusco: "I'm not sure how you usually do what you do, but I'm looking for a guy, and I could use some help. He's a witness, saw a Russian mob hit go down."

He almost tells Fusco, once again, that's he's not working for him, but still, he listens. And he's right to, because if there's once thing John can tolerate from Fusco, it's asking for help saving a life.

(Charlie Burton): "Doesn't seem like I've got a choice."

Oh. Logically disturbed by the current events, but not completely against being helped by a stranger. For once the number doesn't almost get themselves killed because they don't trust him and demand an explanation when there's obviously no time to get into the specifics. He likes that.

Harold Finch: "Do you need me to call in a distraction?"

Finch is getting better at this game. At first, he hadn't even agreed to take an active part in the rescue of numbers, aside from information gathering. Now he's volunteering. He understand that, as skilled as John is, he can't be everywhere and do everything – that there's a higher chance of success if he has a partner ready to act whenever necessary.

(Charlie Burton): "I don't believe in them."

Well, a little faith right now, especially in cellphones, would have been welcomed.

(Charlie Burton): "The Russian mob is after me, friend. They've got people on the inside. If I testify, I'm dead."

Considering the recent events, Charlie Burton is dead anyway, even if he doesn't. Most criminals don't want you to testify, but they still kill you even if you keep silent, in case you'd change your mind. No safe way out on that one – the CIA sometimes did the same, but obviously, no one ever acknowledged it out loud. Those were the few shady missions John still has doubts about.

(Charlie Burton): "Going to the cops here is like playing Russian roulette."
There had been a time when hearing that would have gotten to him, but it doesn't now. It's not that he doesn't believe in the force anymore. It's just that now, he knows: there are black sheeps everywhere, like there are perfectly good people everywhere.

**John Reese:** "I'll get you to a police officer you can trust."

He could get Charlie Burton to Carter, but she's a tad too enthusiastic about sending John to jail... And Fusco asked first. While the man might not be the purest detective out there, there's no doubt he'll do what needs to be done. If only because John has him on a leash.

**(Charlie Burton):** "Thank you for saving my ass, John."

It's nice to be thanked, for a change.

**John Reese:** "Don't do it. I'm telling you, now."

...And they're doing it. Why don't anyone ever listen to him?

**(Charlie Burton):** "You learn all this in hero training?"

More like survival camp. And assassin training. Not exactly what makes a hero.

**John Reese:** "That's the second time today I've heard that. It's funny. You remind me of him."

Trying to do good, to change the future of the kids he teaches, but way in over his head.

**Will:** "Edmond's cool- a survivor, you know? Even though he got his revenge, some bad stuff still stuck with him."

John'd know. Revenge helps – the culprit isn't out here, enjoying their freedom as if they deserved it – but it destroys at the same time – the past is still there.

**John Reese:** "It's a bad move to insult your hostage taker, Laszlo. Keep your mouth shut, or I'll shut it permanently."

He doesn't want to have to, he swears, but God help him, he won't hold back if the guy endangers them again. He's had his warning.

**Laszlo Yogorov:** "Hey, what are you- corrupt P.D., gun for hire?"
Sometimes John does wonder if he has "cop" written on his forehead.

**Laszlo Yogorov:** "*You're in the middle of a situation that you don't even understand.*"

No one ever understands a situation fully while living it, he wants to say. There's always a variable you don't, no, you can't know about. Besides, that's what he agreed to, when he took Finch's job offer.

**Carl Elias:** "*Don't make me shoot you, John.*"

So that's what it was. The reason why Charlie Burton was perfectly cooperative, and at the same time reasonably doubtful. The reason why the teacher hadn't simply broken into a panic – John had been too delighted having to deal with a cooperative number for once, that he forgot to see how suspicious such a cooperation truly was.

**Carl Elias:** "*I thought about killing you, John. But I realize that that would seem ungrateful. Besides, how do you take the life of someone so talented? I could really use a guy like you in my organization. I wish you luck, John. If you stay out of my way, I'll stay out of yours.*"

Good to know he wasn't completely wrong on the man, though. Elias is completely driven by his desire for revenge, that much is true, but at the same time... There are some values left in him. Which doesn't mean he's a good guy for all that. It almost makes John not regret saving his life.

**John Reese:** "*And how many of those numbers will come up because we saved one man's life?*

The responsibility is on him, too. John is the one who saved Carl Elias today, not Finch. And maybe that's the reason why Finch doesn't want to admit that sometimes, killing someone is the only way to protect numerous other people; he's not the one shouldering that blame.
John Reese: “Relax, Finch. It's just tea. I haven't guessed your favorite color yet.”

Besides, this kind of personal knowledge is particularly useless. John might be getting closer to knowing Finch, but he still doesn't know a thing about Finch.

John Reese: "Spycraft 101. This is an alias. I've used dozens of them."

"Reese" is one, for example, and Finch knows that. Most aliases don't even mean anything. They're just shells, with a name and your face. Then there are the ones who matters, those that have history... John has a bunch of them, too, and each one is another wound in his side.

John Reese: "If it was anything like the ones I used to bury, IDs, weapons, definitely money."

He still has stashes all over the country, actually. But he can't use any of these IDs, now. The CIA would notice immediately. And the two or three identities he has that aren't linked to the Agency... He can't touch them either. It would be too dangerous.

Kara Stanton: "No, you're not. The ID NCS gave you didn't pass muster, so you're nobody, which means I get to name you."

Ah, well. It's not like he's losing his true name, here. It's not like he has a real name to lose, either.

Kara Stanton: "We know about the ex-girlfriend."

If that's all she knows about, he doesn't feel particularly threatened. He never tried to hide Jessica, after all. And the people he keeps to himself... It's not like he'd ever get near them.

Kara Stanton: "Like I told you, you never go back."

He doesn't have anything to go back to.

Agent Heinlein: "And he will kill again. I don't know who you are or how you know to be here, but this is just the beginning."

The guy is good at being silent, but is he a good fighter too? And, that aside... Isn't it always so?

John Reese: "The car crash. She died in '87, the same year he disappeared. And I know a staged accident when I see it."
It's enough to want revenge. Some people, like himself, don't care much about what happens to them, but what happens to the people they care for... Whoever Ulrich Kohl is – someone who wants to end those who ended him, or someone who wants to end those who ended his wife – he is here for revenge. Perhaps just like John did for Peter Arndt.

**John Reese:** "She was his wife, and she betrayed him. To a man like Kohl, that makes her just as much a target."

If Kohl isn't like John. If he is... But John won't take the chance.

**German Ambassy liaison:** "Stop. We have diplomatic immunity."

Yeah, right. Because diplomatic immunity ever saved someone from physical assault.

**John Reese:** "What's your plan, Kohl, hmm? You gonna kill her, too... Your own wife? You don't have a plan, do you?"

He's almost certain, by now, that Ulrich Kohl is the same as him. Able to do a lot of things... But not to plan the murder of an innocent. Maybe to pass himself off as the bad guy... Obviously to leave a trail of bodies of those he considered responsible for an innocent's death... But not to plan ahead the murder of the woman he did all this for. The problem being that even so, John can't be sure of what Kohl will do when he'll be face to face with Anja Kohl. Even if he didn't plan to kill her... He's almost sure that Kohl is like him. Only almost.

**Ulrich Kohl:** "They all laughed at me when I learned to use these needles. They didn't laugh for long."

He isn't laughing.

**Ulrich Kohl:** "I don't care for your name."

Refreshing, in a way – if he wasn't about to be tortured, that is. Torturers who wants your name usually use it as a way to break you, to show you they can even get your name. Even if it doesn't matter to your mission.

**CIA agent:** "We sent all of our intel in the pouch to Langley last week."

The intel, maybe. But not all the facts. And certainly not all they got on the man. He can tell when someone's not telling the truth – even if he can't always tell you on what part they're keeping quiet.

**Ulrich Kohl:** "Nobody enjoys taking life."
Wrong. Some people do. But John can tell it's not Kohl's case. Just like it isn't his. But Kohl won't hesitate, if he has to. Just like John wouldn't.

**Ulrich Kohl:** “They said, 'your country needs you.'”

No matter the country, no matter the era. And perhaps, it's true. Their countries needed them, or whoever else accepted to do the deed. It doesn't change the fact that, in the end, they are making killers out of soldiers – he can't help but think that, in his case, they just allowed him to be the monster he already was.

**Ulrich Kohl:** "Even the blackest heart still beats."

John doubts that Kohl had the blackest heart in the world, but he doesn't say anything. There are worst monsters out there – people who enjoy being monsters – than the two of them. Then again, perhaps these people don't have a heart to begin with. Perhaps it's the fact that John and Kohl decided to do what they did, even when they don't enjoy it, that makes their hearts black.

**John Reese:** "You're not a monster to her yet. It's too late for you and me, but she could have a normal life."

To disappear in the darkness... He made that decision more than once. Jessica is one of these. And while it didn't give her a good life, he's not foolish enough to think she'd have had a better life with him. Different, surely, but not better. Jessica never became Anja, because he left beforehand.

**John Reese:** “Fusco, untie me.”

Of course, the corrupt detective could take the opportunity to get rid of him... This is probably the last test, then. What will Fusco do?

**Ulrich Kohl:** "I wouldn't have hurt her. I never had a tomorrow."

He was right about Kohl, then. They are the same.

**John Reese:** "How did you know I'd shoot?"

He had known he'd shoot, of course. He does what's necessary. He kills when there is not other choice. He doesn't hesitate – but Kohl couldn't know that, and if John had hesitated, he'd have seen that Kohl's weapon wasn't loaded. Kohl would be alive.

**Ulrich Kohl:** "They took everything I had. But part of me survived. It was... Her."
John wonders what that says about him. He doesn't have a child, him, and they still took everything from him... But at the same time, they never went and told what remained of his family, of his friends, what he had become for them. Unlike Kohl, the memories of him remained in a few people's minds, untainted by the CIA – of course, it doesn't mean these memories are good for all that...

**John Reese:** "*You didn't even question them."

He's not questioning the killings, he realizes. Just the way it went down. Perhaps he does fit here.

**Kara Stanton:** "*Anonymous source- Very reliable."

Obviously. Because "anonymous" and "reliable" rhyme together.

**John Reese:** "*I always thought I'd die in a place that didn't know my name."

Maybe not even his alias. Under a name that didn't know his place. Because he doesn't have much of a real name, not anymore. Anja Kohl, at least, knows where her husband lies, even if it's not under his own name.

**Harold Finch:** "*I thought we already were."

Maybe, but for two dead men, they do tend to influence the lives of many people.
Lionel Fusco: "What the hell are you doing here?"

Well, for once, nothing except walking and unexpectedly finding a crime scene. He does happen not to be doing shady things all the time, you know?

Harold Finch: "I'm sorry, Mr. Reese. The machine detects acts of premeditation."

It's better than nothing, John supposes. But it won't resurrect those who never made it even on the irrelevant list, no matter how great the Machine is.

Harold Finch: "Didn't know you cared."

It's not exactly that he cares, or, at least, no more than for any other number's family. He'll do his best to keep everyone alive, like always. If Carter dies, it's also her son who suffers. But aside from that, John mostly thinks it suspicious that Finch didn't tell him absolutely everything about Joss Carter as soon as they got the detective's number; after Judge Gates and his son, both endangered but only one number coming down, Finch should know better. It's almost as if Finch is trying to keep him... at a distance, perhaps, from the current number. John doesn't know exactly what to make of it.

Harold Finch: "Almost got it."

But almost is never enough, for someone who doesn't have field skills. If Finch is caught...

Harold Finch: "As you know, I collect rare books, Mr. Reese. 180-gram vinyl and a Xerox Alto when I can find one."

He almost smirks, as Finch acknowledges John's investigation on him. The two of them are putting limits, what's alright to discover about the other, what doesn't exactly matter, even if it does, but in another way... They're making progress, trusting each other about personal details if not with relevant information.

John Reese: "Fusco's into dolls?"

He broke into the detective's place a while back, and he thinks he'd have noticed.

John Reese: "Impressive lady. Honest to a fault."

Which can be a problem, because this kind of people tends to think they're always right, and while they might often be, the few times they aren't... But it's still a good thing. Mostly.
**Harold Finch:** "And then there's Elias- Ruthless killer, organized crime boss, who's already taken a shot at her."

Speaking of which, it's a bit weird, considering. Elias is not the one who usually holds the gun... but perhaps the retired detective was too much of a personal case, perhaps that's the explanation. Still...

**Harold Finch:** "What will you do if she catches you?"

He'll trust Finch to get him out, and, if nothing can be done, to hire someone else to do the leg work. But, more to the point, John can't go around choosing who he'll save and who he won't. If it's uncomfortable for him, but not endangering to, say, national security, he'll do it nonetheless. Carter wants to stop him because she thinks he's doing whatever he wants and that the lives he saves are only collateral advantages; if he decided to let her be killed, that'd become the truth.

**Lionel Fusco:** "You know something I don't?"

He doubts the detective wants him to start an exhaustive list right now.

**Lionel Fusco:** "Whoa, wait a minute. I can't be involved in something like that."

Let's say he can't be deeply involved, but he will get involved enough to get intel. That's how it works: Fusco doesn't do what he wants, because he is dirty to begin with, and John doesn't get him in more trouble than the man can deal with on his own, unless there's an emergency. Keeping the extremes at bay is the better way to deal with an asset; if you ask too much of them, they always draw back at the worst time, and John can't have that happen with Fusco.

**John Reese:** "Finch, I don't like the looks of this."

There's something wrong, something that doesn't fit. Carter isn't the kind of cop to simply walk to someone, even if it's obvious they're not exactly clean, and start something like that – yet again, John is forced to remind himself that the detective, even if she follows the letter of the law, knows how to hold on a grudge, how to pursue someone until it's too late. She's doing it with him, and while she's not completely wrong to consider John a criminal, one day someone might die because she'll be keeping him from doing his job... He doesn't like to think that, maybe, Detective Carter could be unreasonable about some things, but he has to consider it. If only to make sure it isn't the case.

**John Reese:** "Maybe she's like us. Trying to prevent something bad from happening."

Which makes it all the more ironic that she can't keep herself from trying to send him to jail.

**Lionel Fusco:** "Yeah, thanks, look, I'm just saying, if she wasn't around, it would probably solve a
lot of your problems, now, wouldn't it?"


**Harold Finch:** "Carter's going to the Kovachs' house. He's armed, sounds extremely agitated. Reese? Where are you?"

No time to answer – here, it's not about Carter. It's about Kovach's wife. Her murder might not be premeditated, but she still doesn't deserve to die.

**Joss Carter:** "I'm not the one who's hiding. Look, you keep playing God, and sooner or later, an innocent person's gonna get hurt. I can't let that happen."

There's a number of things he wants to say in answer to that. That he's not hiding, even if he isn't surrendering himself to her, not from her at least; and she can't do anything to protect him from the CIA, even if she thinks otherwise. That he's not playing God, but playing against the odds. That he'd like to see her sitting on the same intel as he has, that someone's going to get hurt, and he'll know even if he doesn't intervene. That, if she continues going after him, she might become the very reason the innocent person she's talking about gets hurt. That he can't let that happen either – but he won't do what she wants, because he'd rather deal with the fallout of her getting in his way than with the consequences if he gives her one too many hints.

**John Reese:** "Elias can't kill a cop without permission. Run this up the chain of command. Permission's been revoked."

It will never be given again. He's taking that responsibility. Someone has to. Someone who has the means to make it a reality.
**NUMBER CRUNCH**

**John Reese:** "*Where did you come from?*"

He hasn't heard Finch arrive, and from someone with the man's reduced mobility, it's something. So John wonders if perhaps he doesn't know all the in and outs of the Library.

**Harold Finch:** "*I did sense my privacy being invaded.*"

Finch should know better than to let any evidence in the Library, though.

**Harold Finch:** "*What plurals usually mean. More than one.*"

Thanks so much, Finch. He couldn't have guessed that alone – what he wants to know is if the plural has a specific meaning here, or if four completely unconnected people are going to need their help today. Because if that's the case, then John will need to cook up a way to handle the four of them separately, and that won't be easy.

**Harold Finch:** "*Claire Ryan's number came up first if only by a millisecond.*"

Is Finch being literal here, or is it only a figure of speech? Does it mean anything about the way the Machine sends the number to his partner? He needs to keep it in mind, to see if there's any usable info to deduce out of it.

**Harold Finch:** "*Speaking of privacy. Careful what you look for, Mr. Reese, or you might find it.*"

Finch says that as if anything he has done could horrify John. Or worse, make him scared of the crippled man. It's hilarious – John's not saying Finch absolutely, definitely can't be someone bad, only, he knows a thing or two about doing horrors, and the worse he could discover would be that his current employer is in fact a bastard. That would only make him angry. Played. But if it's the case, he'd rather know and put an end to it than pretend everything is alright. If it's not, he doesn't see what could terrify him so much. Besides, he needs to know – not everything, but enough. And no one can determine how much is enough except him.

**John Reese:** "*You said the machine would give us the number and time. It didn't."

It's the first time he doesn't get there on time to even try and save a number. He'd almost prefer to be able to blame himself, a failure on his part. Because this means nothing could have be done anyway.

**Lionel Fusco:** "*You didn't kill her, did you?*"
Why do people always assume he's the killer? - true, he killed more than once, but he doesn't exactly go around and murder people for fun, does he?

**John Reese:** "I know she won't, because you'll throw yourself in front of the bullet."

He's not asking for so much, really. Fusco should be able to prevent things from going that far; it's his job, after all. And if John was the one trailing Paula Vasquez, and there was no other way to save her, he would throw himself in front of the bullet. Except he can't be everywhere, and this time he has to rely on Fusco.

**Wendy McNally:** "Hi. Can I help you?"

Uh. Abort mission. Now – seriously, he doesn't have the time to get his hair cut, even if it would allow him to keep an eye on the young woman directly. If someone comes in and tries to kill her... John is able to fight in about any situation, but if he could, he'd avoid going hand to hand with his face full of shampoo. So, abort. Now.

**Wendy McNally:** "I'm sorry, but I'm not letting you back out on the street looking like this."

Abort mission failed.

**John Reese:** "You lost her and she weaponed up? You better stick to your... day job."

Alright, Fusco might not have volunteered for this, so it's a bit unfair, but nothing tells John that the corrupt detective really tried either. Maybe he did. Maybe he didn't – John doesn't have the time to dwell on it, considering his own mark slipped away too. She didn't buy a gun off the street, at least.

**John Reese:** "Finch, are you okay? Harold!"

Finch, in essence, is a civilian. In hiding, perhaps, and not the usual civilian, but a civilian. He doesn't have the instinct to report, to tell his partner he's fine, John tries to reason. Just like he didn't have the sense to keep away from the exploding stroller when he knew he couldn't have gotten there in time, and even if he had, Finch was in no physical condition to get away soon enough. Finch is a civilian, and that's why he's not reporting... or he's seriously injured – dead. If he is...

**John Reese:** "Finch. You couldn't have saved him. You have to let it go. We have to concentrate on the ones still alive. Wendy and Paula."

It's true for him too. Later, John will find a way to blame himself. Later. For now, he has to put it on the side and focus, or he'll lose the two others too.
Harold Finch: "Paula's online footprint is miniscule, so she's either the paranoid sort or she likes to fly beneath the radar- Both of which I can relate to. But I-"

Civilian. Sometimes John almost forgets, because Finch kind of seems to know what he's doing.

Lionel Fusco: "Yeah, right. Hi to you too. Like I was about to say, there were two sets of prints on Jamie Hallen's car."

That's one of the things John likes about Fusco as an asset. The guy might not be perfect, but he knows how not to question certain things, at least not until they're dealt with.

Paula Vasquez: "We're not telling you anything, till we know who you are and why you're following us."

Sensible enough... Considering the situation, not the most efficient approach, though. But he likes it better than being yelled at, run away from, or even shot at when he's only trying to help.

(Dayne): "I know, I know, but the thing is- is my phone just died and the kids are getting kind of scared, so if I could just use your phone? I- I'll pay for the call."

Too many coincidences, eh? These things do happen, of course, but never when someone's gunning for the house residents on top of it – if it did, then the unlucky guy would be really, really unlucky. Your car broke down, your cellphone's dead, the kids are scared, and you stumble in a dangerous situation? That's called being cursed.

John Reese: "At least they took the money for a reason."

Perhaps not the most sensible thing to do, but well... Civilians might know better, intellectually, than to take money from a drug deal just because it's laying there, yet that doesn't mean they actually realize the extent of the danger. Someone who does something stupid because they need the money isn't the same as someone who does it only to be able to buy an expensive pair of shoes; these people, at least, have other worries balancing out the danger, and an excuse not to think about it more.

Wendy McNally: "We were worried about you."

He's not sure if she's completely honest here, but it's a nice change of pace.

Wendy McNally: "It was wrong. We knew it was wrong. We should have... called 911, and walked away."

At least she's acknowledging it. Most people wouldn't.
Criminal: "Come alone- No muscle- If you want your friend to live."

Damn. Muscle's here already. And John is really, really bad at pretending he didn't hear what he did – he's good at pretending he's not here, though.

Joss Carter: "Maybe you can come in here, help me explain some things."

He's not stupid, thank you. And she knows that, too. She's mostly trying because she has to.

Joss Carter: "Wait. Thank you... For saving my life."

There's something wrong, here. John would like to believe she means it, and maybe she does, but there's something... He watched Carter long enough. She wouldn't thank him for saving her life as long as she believes he's doing something wrong, as long as she wants to catch him. She's too black-and-white for that. And she won't change her mind so easily about him – maybe he's thinking too much about it, but still. It sounds like there's a silent apology in there. Probably because she'll continue to pursue him despite everything. Right?

John Reese: "I thought you were nice."

It's not that he doesn't know women can be villains, or even simply lethal. But he does tend to see them first as a potential good person, then as a potential threat if proved otherwise. Unlike what he does when confronted to a man.

Mark Snow: "Time to come home, John. Slate's been wiped clean."

Impossible. On their side, as on his. It's not that he resents the CIA – maybe he does, a bit, but not to the point of wanting revenge – or that he can't trust the Agency to do what's necessary anymore. He can. Only, he can't trust them with his life, not after last time, and even if he could, he shouldn't. Because they wouldn't trust him not to want revenge. Impossible. And Mark knows that.

Harold Finch: "They got to her."

He wonders about what they told Carter, exactly. That he's broken? That he's a monster? That it's not his fault, he's not a bad guy, but his morals got skewed along the way? That he did this and that, as if they hadn't ordered him to to begin with? That they're only doing this for everyone's sake, his included? It doesn't really matter. Carter's not to blame; after all, she doesn't know him.

John Reese: "No. You stay away. Don't even risk it."

It's not even that he isn't worth it. Just that it's too dangerous – and if they're both taken, who will be
left for the numbers?

**Joss Carter:** "Go."

Something's breaking in Carter's mind, he can tell. He's not sure in what manner, but he knows what: her certitude about how the different parts of the story fit together, now that she saw Finch / Burdett with him.
Harold Finch: "Stitch him up- No questions asked- and you can be a doctor again."

It's not that the CIA didn't take care of its agents – the Agency did, as long as the stitching didn't cost more than a new trainee would, because the months at the Farm are expensive and not everyone makes it, and because the best agents are those with experience, and you can't become experienced if you're left to die. It's not... It's just that Finch really thought about this. About what might happen. About what John's life was worth.

Ernest Trask: "Okay. Here are the keys. You need anything, my number's on that lease. The name is- Well, you know."

It's almost like listening to a broken record. Also, Trask is a curious man, who asks questions – doesn't prod for answers, but still asks. As if he's reminding people who he's supposed to be, as well as fishing for who is what and how. Then again, Trask is a super. It's good for him to figure out the boundaries of all his residents.

Harold Finch: "Not that I don't share your concern for the woman who tried to hand you over to the CIA."

Carter didn't know any better, that's all. She's not a bad person for all that.

John Reese: "I'm not here to rest, am I?"

Good news. John doesn't do idle. Never did.

Harold Finch: "Don't you have anything to unpack?"

The few things he cares about are far, far away. In places he can't reach, so that they're kept safe. So that no one can link them back to him. The rest, he can do without.

John Reese: "Oh, no. I'm- I'm good for now."

That little smile, that sympathetic attitude... John guesses his efforts to get closer to Finch – not especially to trick him, betray him, but simply because it's easier to work with someone you can trust – are paying. But right now he'd prefer if it hadn't resulted in this situation. This... gift.

John Reese: "You know, Trask may seem like a harmless bag of wind, but I've been fooled before. If he bought a gun, I'd just like to know why."
He hasn't been fooled often, but it happened. And he doesn't want to take the risk. Maybe Trask has a harmless reason for the gun. Maybe not. John's not someone who blames others for having firearms, it'd be hypocritical, but he's not going to dismiss the fact either.

**Harold Finch:** "*Somehow I doubt that's what alerted the machine.*"

Doesn't keep him from watching, if only for a moment, before looking away. Well. Now John knows his employer is truly a human being.

**John Reese:** "*Maybe he's about to snap and kill his boss?*"

A few weeks earlier, Finch wouldn't have given him that look. The I-can-sense-the-obvious-irony-in-your-words,-Mr-Reese look. They do have become used to each other, uh?

**Ernest Trask:** "*I haven't seen damage like this since hurricane Opal trashed my yacht. Looks like somebody went at this with a hammer.*"

Woops. Spot on assessment there, though.

**John Reese:** "*Harold, get out of there now. Finch, did you get out of there? Finch?*

He absolutely needs to teach Harold to listen and to report, when he's out there – yeah, John doesn't do it all the time either, but John can kill or incapacitate anyone who comes at him if he's caught.

**Harold Finch:** "*I feel like a rat in a maze. How do you put up with this?*

Habitude, mostly. Not questioning absolutely everything while on the field can save lives, even if you can't walk in completely blind either. But also the fact that he knows he can trust the one on the other end of the phone call. That, regardless of the larger picture, Finch's goal is to save the numbers. And for that, he needs John alive. If he can keep him running free, he will. Finch might not trust him completely yet, but he trusts him with the numbers. And so John trusts him to be a competent tech partner.

**John Reese:** "*Well, I have used a computer before.*"

Because he's not a bloody genius hacker like Finch doesn't mean he's completely illiterate either. The CIA taught him how to do a few things, to begin with, and even if they hadn't, he'd still be able to conduct an Internet search. He's not hopeless.

**Harold Finch:** "*Please, stop.*"
Alright. He might be indulging himself a bit, making Finch uncomfortable with all the poking in the eyes and everything else. But he does have a point. Finch doesn't like to use violence, but it doesn't mean he shouldn't know how to last long enough, if he's attacked, for someone to come to his rescue. Being strictly anti-violence is foolish. And Finch isn't a foolish man – he hired John to do the dirty work, after all, since he couldn't do it himself. Except John is... incapacitated at the moment, and Finch keeps wanting to intervene nonetheless.

Harold Finch: "And I think Lily's been spied on enough."

He won't comment on that.

John Reese: "Don't eat in the field, Finch. Never know when you'll have to move fast."

He could pull that off, but Finch certainly can't. First, he wouldn't be able to outrun the angry owner after trying to leave without paying.

Harold Finch: "Now you know how I feel."

Except John knows how to defend himself, and he can run to get there fast if he needs to.

John Reese: "Yeah, I'm just sick of being cooped up and, uh, staring at screens all day."

He's starting to complain aloud – not much, mind you, but he does, and he can't deny that. It can mean two things: one, he's really, really not made for this; two, Finch's not the only one getting comfortable with this partnership.

Ernest Trask: "Please... I love this job. And I do care for Lily, but not like that. Not like that."

He really would like to believe him. John's good at reading people, and everything tells him to believe Trask. But because he's good at this, it also means he tends to overlook the possibility that the person in front of him might be an even better liar than he is. So he'll need proof. Or at least a plausible explanation.

John Reese: "He's in Witness Protection."

Trask wasn't that subtle about it, either, and that explains why John's bullshit-o-meter hadn't reacted, but since the man's true identity seemed... fantastical at best, he guesses it's not such an issue... Two ways to go around WITSEC: never look back and mention anything, or make everyone think you just enjoy telling stories.

John Reese: "Be honest, Finch. There is no machine, is there? It's just you."
He doesn't believe that, of course... Not entirely, at least.
LEGACY

**Joss Carter:** "I looked for a "I'm sorry I got you shot" card, but they were all out. I had no idea what Snow was capable of... That he'd actually try to kill you."

More like she unconsciously hadn't been willing to consider it, that in some specific, particular conditions, the CIA would order a hit on its own people. She certainly doesn't have a problem imagining what John is "capable of".

**John Reese:** "Why did you contact me, Carter?"

He'd like to think she wants to do something good, for everyone. That's almost a given, really. Carter is a good person. The problem is that she's also strong-willed, and much too idealistic to agree to anything less than perfection, at least to begin with. She didn't call to say sorry; she's not the kind of people who need to clear their conscience. Especially since she's convinced she didn't do anything wrong – Mark did, not her. Maybe she thinks she should have seen it coming, but it doesn't make it her fault for all that. She wants answers, that much is clear; she always did. Answers to help her make her mind. She won't before she knows more. Only, if he tells her more, and she decides to continue pursuing him, then she'll endanger everything. Not only John's life, but Finch's too. The Machine's existence. Her own life, perhaps. Does she only want to try and reason him with her higher moral convictions? As if morality alone did anything in this world. It's necessary, but it can't be the only thing in consideration.

**Joss Carter:** "I'm a cop, which means I've got rules. Rules that can't be broken."

He likes her, really. And her heart is in the right place. But were he a vindictive little shit – which he isn't – he'd point out how hypocritical that statement is, when she's sitting right in front of him. Breaking rules.

**Joss Carter:** "Why me?"

She's asking that as if she let him any other choice.

**John Reese:** "You have your rules... And you have the chance to save a life. It's your choice."

He won't sugar-coat it. He won't force her to do something she doesn't want to. But she needs to have her eyes opened, if she insists on pursuing this endeavor. She wants in? They have rules too, and these are not always the same as hers.

**Harold Finch:** "She can never know about the machine."

Finch's saying that as if John was one to babble...
Harold Finch: "Well, that's a step in the right direction."

He's not quite sure it's the right direction, but it's the only one he can see that actually leads somewhere.

John Reese: "I appreciate your concern about my ass, Lionel, but I can handle Detective Carter."

And certainly not the way Fusco is thinking about, since the portly detective knows nothing of Carter's change of heart. It's a good thing, though, that Fusco is reporting to him willingly.

John Reese: "Thanks."

There, a proof that he knows she's still getting used to what they do. A proof that he appreciates it.

John Reese:

"This could get really complicated. They're assets. The less they know about each other, the safer they'll be."

Telling Fusco would be one thing, security considerations notwithstanding, but telling Carter is simply out of the question for now. She'd draw back immediately if she understood that he had Fusco, formerly a dirty cop, planted in her precinct to keep an eye on her. John needs to prove that what they are doing actually matters, before he can consider even thinking of letting her know. That is, if there wasn't a safety factor thrown in there too.

Harold Finch: "Someone other than you?"

No, Finch, he's reporting that he's the one tailing Andrea Gutierrez and he thinks it's mildly suspicious and alarming, why?

Harold Finch: "Yes? I'll be there as soon as I can."

The urgency in Finch's voice, carefully controlled but still present, gets his attention. John won't ask, of course – he will, but he won't press for an answer. But he will make sure there isn't something serious here. Mostly because Finch might think he knows what's important, what is private, but John is the one with experience in having a partner. In what your secrets can cost the others, even if it's theoretically not their business.

Joss Carter: "What, you looking to beef up?"

Hardly. Besides, bodybuilders aren't exactly inconspicuous. Being 6'2 is bad enough as it is.
Andrea Gutierrez: "Um, no, not at all. It's just I thought you were a clear-cut civil case. The unicorn I've been looking for... Like the perfect man."

John's been called a lot of things, and "the perfect man" might have been one of those... But an unicorn is definitely a first.

John Reese: "Very manipulative. Secretive. We've had some personality conflicts."

He's not blaming Finch for that, to be frank. But he needs to be aware that John's not oblivious to the manipulation. That he only backs down if there's something more important happening.

Andrea Gutierrez: "Everyone deserves a second chance."

But you can't force them to take it.

Harold Finch: "Could be our friend from last night decided to take the day off."

Sure. And John's a unicorn. Oh wait...

John Reese: "So much for not dropping any bodies."

Well, he'd argue that the guy did everything for it to happen. If anything, he dropped his own body; John has little to do with it. Carter will still get angry at him. As if things always went smoothly, even in her job. As if people always cooperated, especially as he doesn't even have a badge.

Joss Carter: "You stole a dead guy's wallet?"

He's not going to report John, is he?

John Reese: "I thought I was talking to the guy who's shaking down his parolees for their legit pay."

He's not saying all parolees are good guys – then again, ordinary people in general aren't all good guys either – but if you stop them from even having their second chance, they don't exactly have a choice to be a better person, do they?

Joss Carter: "I know how to do my job, thank you."

Well John knows how to do her job too, and she seemed happy enough complaining about his methods, so he figured he could remind her why exactly he couldn't be the one doing it, and why he had framed Galuska into landing in the box, in her care, to begin with.
Andrea Gutierrez: "Let me stop you there, John. I don't date my clients or ex-cons. Been there, done that. This is Andrea 2.0 you're looking at. Plus, I need your money. And I like my guys not quite so... Better looking than me."

What can he say? She's so much fun to tease, he's not even ashamed.

Andrea Gutierrez: "I was taught it's okay to make mistakes, and I believe everyone deserves a second chance."

"Mistakes" being the key word here. If they don't even consider it a mistake, they don't deserve a second chance – Andrea saw this, and now she's here, trying to be a good person. Some people don't ever see it.

John Reese: "You said you couldn't do anything illegal. You didn't say anything about me."

He's testing the waters here. Noting what makes her cringe, and what doesn't. He'll probably go with plausible deniability on most accounts, if they continue this cooperation. If she's not willing to work without him bending the law along the way, but still wants to know everything... Well. It simply won't work.

Andrea Gutierrez: "So you were never in jail?"

Not in this country. Not under this name. Not for a long time. Not for something I was responsible for – he'll settle with the first one, just so that she doesn't bolt out and through the door in fright and suspicion.

Andrea Gutierrez: "I wanted to be. Terrence was given a drug test the night he was arrested, and it came back negative. Galuska and the department of corrections conveniently misplaced it. I never got a copy of the report."

He's pleased to hear she's not naive. She knows to give a chance, but not to disregard absolutely everything suspicious. That, not only Galuska can be a problem, but it doesn't mean for all that that her client is innocent. Sometimes there aren't any good guys in the story – it's not the case here, but it's not any less true.

Joss Carter: "It's my job. And I didn't even have to shoot anyone to do it."

That's low. John didn't shoot anyone lately, and they are hardly in the same situation. He doesn't have the authority to keep things low, he can't afford to announce himself, and he arrives before anyone dies, which means there's still the possibility of them being killed. Carter either handles more civilized people in a secure location most of the time, or she ends up on a crime scene where the victims are already dead. Completely different.
**Harold Finch:** "Thanks for that newsflash, Mr. Reese. Here I was planning to move at a sloth-like pace and get myself captured."

It doesn't keep Finch from telling him the same thing when their roles are reversed, and John, unlike his employer, has no problem with a limited mobility.

**John Reese:** "You're not the only one who believes in second chances."

He got one himself, and even if it doesn't mean he's free of his past, he can make it matters.

**John Reese:** "As soon as I get some answers."

If only because Finch having even one acquaintance, means there is one more way to get at the man. To track him. To discover what they do. Because Finch ran off during a case today, and John still doesn't know why. Who says he won't do the same again, in a problematic situation?
**ROOT CAUSE**

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes

**John Reese:** "Hello, Finch. Billick and I just came to an understanding."

Actually, Mr Billick wasn't willing enough to get to a verbal understanding, so they skipped ahead to a physical one. But, good enough.

**John Reese:** "You ever crave a more conventional life, Finch?"

He doesn't, not really. He doesn't want a house in the suburb and a white picket fence... But he would appreciate a wife, children, even, that he could trust with what he does, without having to tell them too much, for fear of endangering them. What he wants, in fact, is to be able to live all the identities he has had, to speak to the few people who matters, without it being dangerous for them. To be allowed to be himself, no matter how many himselfs he has, into one person.

**John Reese:** "Judging by the way he was acting with his family, they have no idea."

He wonders if that's what he'd look like, if he was living conventionally on the side.

**Pawn Broker:** "Look, pal, take your junk and clear out, all right?"

Bad move here. No one likes their personal stuff to be dismissed like that, and for a man who's forced to let it go... Not that he'd know. John's personal stuff is locked away, out of reach. Safe.

**Harold Finch:** "What about Detective Fusco?"

It's almost endearing, the way Finch has to try and keep Carter out of their business as much as he can, when you think he was doing the same thing with Fusco... until Carter started working with them. Oh well. Finch will get used to her too.

**Harold Finch:** "Can is made of aluminum. Its dimensions are perfect for capturing wi-fi radio waves."

So stake-outs with Finch involve fabricating tech equipment from scratch... John guesses that's fair, considering he can cook up a weapon with almost anything in a matter of seconds.

**John Reese:** "Looks like Powell's fortunes may be turning around."

He's wondering if, one day, they will have a number who will just fall out of the list on his own,
because... Because he won the jackpot, because the situation surprisingly resolved itself, and there would be no more danger. It would be nice, if a waste of time, to see that sometimes, things go well.

**Harold Finch:** "Carter said he applied for a firearms license- A rifle."

Stupid to ask for a license only in order to kill someone, but John knows that desperate people don't care about what comes after – they may have thought about it, but still won't try to hide it.

**Gala Greeter:** "Sir, you need to come through the main line."

He can appreciate a proper security, really, but it does tend to make his job more difficult when the security isn't enough for all that...

**John Reese:** "You'll think of something, Finch."

He trusts Finch's ability to find a way. Simple as that. Also, someone needs to be here anyway.

**John Reese:** "Fooled us... And your machine."

He's allowed, he thinks, a small measure of doubt. The Machine might be great, but it certainly can't be perfect... And even if it wasn't fooled, John needs Finch's reassurance, if only because no one knows how the Machine works better than its maker.

**Harold Finch:** "Different skill set than our hacker, so... Different people?"

Not necessarily, but the odds are this is a team. One can be a proefficient hacker and a skilled marksman, of course... But it's rare, and they usually aren't as good in both domains as they could be, even if they can be very good nevertheless.

**Joss Carter:** "You. I thought I could trust you. Your partner said I shouldn't worry about Powell. Then he goes and shoots a congressman. And now the feds brought him in to my precinct."

And there it is, the relentless accusation. The way Carter complains when they ask for her help, and blames them when they don't. If there's one thing that makes him cringe about the detective, it's the fact that she seems convinced she could have done better, they should have done better – but she's only started working with them, and John understands. She doesn't trust them yet. It's normal.

**John Reese:** "In frame jobs, the decoy usually doesn't make it. If they're not taken out at the scene, they're eliminated soon after... Staged to look like a suicide or accident."

The CIA wasn't that keen on using innocent civilians as decoys, of course, especially as they might
have to explain it to someone higher up at some point, but the Agency was hardly adverse to using a less innocent person to take the fall. Besides, it's always easier to make someone look guilty when their hands aren't clean to begin with. And well, if you take out a bastard after the frame job, who's going to feel bad about it, right?

**John Reese:** "Wait a minute. Specialist? She? Finch?"

Bringing someone in at this point... Then again, the way Finch said it, it sounds like he should know... Like the fact that the specialist is a "she" should tell him more... But for now he has to focus on keeping Powell alive.

**Scott Powell:** "Why would anyone want to do this to me?"

Oh, they don't. They have nothing against Powell himself. They simply don't care that he doesn't deserve any of what's happening right now. But John feels it would be cruel to say that out loud.

**John Reese:** "Yeah, I know what it's like to live inside a lie. I've lived there for so long, it feels like there's no way out. But there always is."

At least there is when it's only the first level, like where Powell is. People like John, they can't back out without involving the people from the previous levels, without endangering them. There's still a way out, of course, but it comes at a great cost. Powell doesn't need to know that, though.

**Scott Powell:** "Are you going to promise me that they won't kill us too?"

John doesn't make promises he can't keep. Which is mostly why he doesn't make promises at all, because no one can ever be sure that they will be able to change things. You can promise to try your best. But that's about it if you still wish to be honest.

**John Reese:** "Actually, I do. Of course, in my case, it was true."

Jessica never knew, no. But there were others – few, but important nonetheless. People whom he had left behind with the memory that he was a killer. It isn't important that he isn't only a killer. All that matters is in spite of everything else, he is a killer.

**John Reese:** "He needs this, Carter."

It's not that Powell wants to talk to his wife, or that he's sulking. It's that if he doesn't, the man will probably break down, and then John won't be able to guarantee his safety. He literally needs it.

**Zoe Morgan:** "Glad I could help. Although there is a matter of payment. Buy me a drink?"
That's what he likes with Zoe; she doesn't need him to speak to know his answer. And even if she pretends everything is for sale, she still knows what's really worth it.

Chapter End Notes

I've seen Careese shippers disregarding John's relationship with Zoe (and I'm not saying it's a romantic one either) because he didn't answer her invitation, and I was like, what? Since when does John say things out loud? Since when do you have to speak up to do something? (Also, one of the reasons I can't see Careese as something romantic is that John always needed to spell things out for Carter or else she ended up concluding he was going to do something stupid or bad 50% of the time. Like she couldn't even consider he might not be about to murder someone as a way to solve a problem)
Alright, so, for this one, I'm taking a lot from crossover headcanons that are canon-compliant, but obviously not canon. You can find most of them in my OSs collections Missiong Books (long story short, John used to be cop for a few years by the name John Sullivan before he found his mother's killer and ended up in WITSEC, before the army. He has a non-identical twin brother, and never went back home to keep him safe), and the one about the trumpet is me crossovering PoI with yet another Jim Caviezel movie, "Angel Eyes", considering it could be an alternate universe where John's WITSEC identity went another way. So yeah, it's not canon. But it's canon-compliant.

Harold Finch: "Only the paranoid survive- Sage advice."

It's always fun how Finch seems to think John isn't paranoid enough as he is – though he has to admit he isn't on Finch's level of paranoia.

John Reese: "Even with the library offline?"

Another piece for the puzzle, then. Finch doesn't receive the numbers through the Library. If the man has kept his official access to almost everything, the Machine isn't connected to the Library anymore... Or was it programmed to use other means should the network here be compromised?

Super: "What it looks like- One of my tenants got shot... About a week ago. Older kid- Travis McGrady. Damn shame. Real good about paying rent on time."

John's not sure if that's a way to say the super is only sorry that the rent might not be paid on time with the next tenant, or if that's the way to compliment a young man he didn't really know.

Harold Finch: "Why would they want to talk to you?"

First, because he can't land them in any official trouble, considering he isn't an official anymore. Second, because a large part of his job is to make people want to talk to him even when they don't, and he's really good at that. The trick is to find the right incentive.

John Reese: "You don't have to give me a name. Just point me in the right direction."

Never ask for too much. If the subject doesn't seem willing to go that far, downgrade it a bit. Make it look less like snitching. More like giving directions, for example. If someone asks, she just told you about that particular place, where the guys you're looking for tend to hang out coincidentally.
**John Reese:** "*Never said I was a cop.*"

Granted, he hasn't exactly say he isn't one either, and even that last sentence doesn't say anything for sure, but people love to jump to conclusions. And it's downright useful in a number of situations.

**John Reese:** "*Saw you play the trumpet. I'm guessing you pawned that too. You any good?*"

John used to, a long time ago. Kids all have their hobbies... until something happens, and either they stop, or they decide to go on living with what they used to love doing before. John stopped when his mother died, and never went back to it. He doesn't want Darren to be forced to stop too.

**John Reese:** "*And here you are, mixed up with the thugs. So you tracked down that Brick kid. You think that's what your brother would have wanted you to do?*

Not that John's brother hadn't wanted him to stop obsessing over their mother's killer, or that John had listened to him. But John was the older brother, if only by a few seconds, and he had waited to be adult before going on a hunt. Even if he had let revenge consume him... he hadn't been reckless about it, not like Darren. Besides, the kid wasn't like John. Getting revenge by killing the killer wouldn't make him better again.

**John Reese:** "*Darren, this is Detective Fusco. He's a... friend.*"

It's not necessarily false – more complicated than that, surely, but kind of true all the same – but it's the first time he says it out loud. And Fusco's here to hear it too. Not that the detective will think it true, not with their actual relationship. But still.

**Darren McGrady:** "*Yeah, a ronin. It's like- It's like a samurai with no master. Technically, you should have killed yourself. That's the code. But instead you're out wandering the land, helping people. So now I'm paying you to help me.*"

For something the kid found in a comic, it's not so far from the truth. Not exactly it, but not far.

**Darren McGrady:** "*You can't stop me from going after them. But I have a better chance with you there.*"

When John said the kid was clever... Children who can figure that out right away are a problem, because they don't actually give him a choice, except knocking them out and locking them away while he takes care of the problem, which he'd rather not do. John hopes the others will be able to see that – they won't, because they never do, but it's not like he cares much about their misguided judgment. They aren't the ones trying to handle a kid who's too intelligent and stubborn for his own good.
Darren McGrady: "The cops know about this, or they just don't care?"

Some don't, some do, and take a share. It's not difficult hiding a discreet criminal activity when you have the right dirty cop working with you.

Harold Finch: "I'm not sure I'm in favor of your troubling arrangement with young Darren."

Well, Finch should have been there when said arrangement came up, ready with another solution, but he hadn't been. So John had had to get by. If Finch doesn't like it, then he'd better be available next time.

Darren McGrady: "That means your master tricked you, told you to kill bad people that really weren't. A lot of ronin ended up that way."

John's not sure he was actually given missions like "killing bad people that really weren't", because even the CIA had standards. They could make mistakes occasionally, of course, but they tried not to go too far... Yet, he's almost certain some of his missions were killing bad people that weren't really that bad. They deserved something to happen to them, probably... But maybe not death. Maybe not what he had been ordered to do.

John Reese: "The higher up you go, the harder it gets to tell the good guys from the bad."

Mostly because the higher up you go, the more intelligent they become. They don't display their less pleasant tendencies. And also because, in the end, no one is only a terrible person. Some killers are perfect family men. Some corrupt politicians genuinely want to fight against cancer. Just like good guys aren't perfect.

Joss Carter: "That boy is a minor. You're responsible for his welfare."

He's not going to tell her that if he doesn't help the kid, the kid will help himself, and get into trouble nonetheless. Without anyone to protect him, to be "responsible for his welfare". She wouldn't want to hear it anyway.

John Reese: "Do you really think Andre would believe your story? If I were Andre, I'd assume you stole every dime. I'd send people in to find it, then kill you. So the only way you're gonna survive is if you come back with every last dime. So who killed Travis McGrady? Right now your life is worth a half a million dollars. $20,000 of it... Up in smoke. Where's the gun, Curtis? $50,000 of your life up in smoke."

Kara was always the one doing the torture. Doesn't mean John can't get what he wants. Right now he's not even hurting the guy, physically or psychologically. He's simply making sure that the thug's situation can only get worse... unless, of course, he takes Andre out before that.
John Reese: "Then what, hmm? Go after Andre's bosses... The corrupt cops and the politicians that let them operate? You won't be able to stop until you destroy everyone you blame for taking your brother's life. It won't bring him back. You'll just wind up in jail or dead. Do you think that's what your brother wanted for you?"

One of John's biggest flaws is revenge. But even so, he never made the mistake of blaming people for things they didn't do. He always knew exactly why he was going after someone, and how far that allowed him to go, not to get lost in his vengeance. It's a part of why he's not exactly like everyone else, why he's so efficient... Why he's still alive and free. Why Darren won't make it if he continues on this road.

Harold Finch: "In other words, the idea of letting a 14-year-old hire you to avenge his brother has backfired?"

He'd argue that he tends to forget how not like him people can be. How they let their feelings eradicate common sense, when he always knows if he can do it or not, with his level of skills – notwithstanding his continued survival, which doesn't matter much anyway. He thought, for a time, that Darren would get it. That, if the kid wouldn't let it go, he'd still choose a clever way to go at it. Not with a gun, when he never even shot someone; something clever, slower, maybe, but still efficient. But evidently Darren isn't John. Which is a good thing, except that it'll get him killed.

Darren McGrady: "Someday you'll find a home too."

He smiles, and doesn't say he already has one. Even if he can't, even if he won't go back.

Lionel Fusco: "This guy spent so much time being someone else, he probably doesn't know who he is anymore."

It strikes a cord, obviously, because Finch's not the only one in that case. Except John never hid behind his aliases; they are him, but he isn't only them. A name doesn't mean that much, not to John. But to Finch, whom he suspects never to have really allowed his aliases to completely be a part of him, and yet allowed himself to live through them, it's certainly another story.

John Reese: "You know, Lionel... You could have been a good cop if not for a few bad choices."

The man can still be, he suspects, but it's not what he needs right now. Which makes him remember his own past. He could have been a good cop too, if not for a few bad choices, he guesses. But revenge has always been his worst flaw, and he doesn't regret it. Even if it hurts, sometimes.
John Reese: "As usual, Finch. The more they are dangerous... The closer I want to be to them."

It's not like he isn't the most dangerous of them all, most of the time...

Neil Vargas: "Mike, Mike. Hold up, brother. Kid's done enough learning for tonight, Mike."

True, the kid was getting on John's nerves too... John wouldn't have assaulted the guy anyway, since he's, you know, the newbie on the team. He needs to get accepted. That aside, it's a bit too much. Almost like Cahill was angry for more than the obvious – meaning, being an idiot and possibly a part-time junkie who could get everyone killed if he doesn't lay off. Perhaps Cahill is particularly violent, and not exactly in control.

Harold Finch: "Homeowner's last name is Tulley. He's a police officer. John, you've got to stop Cahill."

Something's not right, this doesn't make sense – but John knows he doesn't always have the time to wait for things to make sense if he wants to save a life. The most he can hope for is that he won't make a mistake.

Kara Stanton: "In the marines, they taught us the fastest way to clean your weapon was to shoot a couple people with it."

He knows, thanks – though Kara doesn't know he was taught it too, and he intend to keep it that way. That aside, he wants to point out the fastest way isn't necessarily the best way.

Mark Snow: "He's government. Tried to sell something of ours to the Chinese."

Well, look at that. Asking actually got him answers.

Mark Snow: "Don't forget you're behind enemy lines. You get caught here, you're on your own."

Except it doesn't really matter, behind enemy lines or not, because the rules don't matter. What matters is whether or not the shit you got yourself into is too deep for an efficient rescue without collateral damages. It's true behind enemy lines, and anywhere else too.

John Reese: "Risking his life is what he signed up for. We play this wrong... We could do more harm than good."

The problem when you want to help someone who's undercover, is that they rarely trust anyone
anymore, especially not someone new. They have to, or they don't survive.

**Daniel Tulley:** "No one followed me. I just... needed to feel normal."

John never allowed himself that luxury, or not since a very long time, at least. Never really needed it. Craved it, perhaps, and he would have liked it too, but it hadn't ever become an actual need.

**Lionel Fusco:** "Those guys don't exactly trust me anymore. I've been getting some good collars lately too. Even got a commendation."

Commendations are something John let go of a long, long time ago. As for Fusco, the detective decided he couldn't have them the day he fell for Stills' schemes. John isn't against letting him taste it again... But it can't become a need.

**Neil Vargas:** "Fine, fine. Tell you what. How about I give you a little something extra, okay? Just for you? Yeah?"

And that means he won't get to walk out kill-free tonight. Carter's going to have a field day. Sometimes he thinks of just letting himself get killed with a card saying "I didn't try to defend myself or someone else and now here I am" in his jacket. See how she likes it.

**John Reese:** "Puyallup, Washington."

He still wonders, from time to time, why Marshal Patterson didn't change his place of birth alongside everything else – except his first name, but that's probably because he's lucky enough to be called John and not, say, Alistair. Puyallup, on the other hand, isn't a widespread place. Maybe the marshal thought he'd need at least one more anchor to his old life...

**Neil Vargas:** "No one's going anywhere until I know which one of you is a rat."

The irony being that an undercover cop isn't a traitor, since he was never loyal to the gang to begin with. Oh wait. That's John's case too. Two rats. Not one.

**Daniel Tulley (Michael Cahill):** "He's lost a lot of blood. Think he'll make it?"

John saw a lot of lethal wounds, and he can tell this one is it. He mostly did the tourniquet to give some hope to the kid, and because you never know what kind of miracle can happen. He did it, because that was better than to let the kid know he was going to die and no one even cared enough to try and prevent it. He did it because while the kid isn't a saint, John doesn't like to be cruel on top of pragmatic.
Neil Vargas: "If that were true, I would have gotten a call from my guy and you'd be dead."

Well, yeah, he's lying. But that's what an active undercover cop would say right now, and if he doesn't play the part, they might suspect he is not said undercover cop.

Daniel Tulley (Michael Cahill): "Who the hell are you? I know you're not a cop."

The police is better organized than to have two undercover ops on the same gang without the others knowing, after all, or else nothing would ever get done. The NYPD has flaws, and the paperwork is a bitch, but you can't say they're stupid.

Daniel Tulley (Michael Cahill): "Hey. Let's get one thing straight. You don't know me."

Maybe not, but he knows about him, and he knows about going undercover, and he knows cops.

Kara Stanton: "What's the play here, John? We're gonna kill this guy? Dissolve his body in a bathtub full of acid? Or are you just scratching an itch? His name is Peter. He's 37, makes 175,000 a year. Is he a good guy or a serial killer? I don't know. But either way, he'll take better care of her than you could."

He knows. That's why he left her in the first place. Because he can't take care of her, not like she deserves.

Kara Stanton: "See, you look like the rest of these people... But you're not like them anymore, are you?"

Sometimes he even wonders if he was like them to begin with.

Kara Stanton: "I get it. Believe me. First time I rotated back, I went straight home to my family. I sat outside in the rental car for three hours, just watching. And I realized I could tell them everything that I'd seen, everything that I'd done, and they wouldn't understand a single word."

This is why she doesn't get it, though. When John went back home the first time, he didn't hesitate. He walked in, and he didn't even bother thinking about telling Frank anything of what had happened. Then, when he wasn't able to come back anymore, he never even tried – there was that one time he left a warning to his brother about the dirty trick his captain was about to pull on him, but that had been only to keep Frank alive. Frank hadn't even realized that was him. With Jessica, he could still see her without it being a danger to her life... He wasn't going to, of course. He was only here to leave with the knowledge that Jessica would probably sit just where he had been only a few minutes before.

Joss Carter: "Your version of a lucky day is being shot and lit on fire?"
His version of a lucky day is having someone to botch the shot deliberately, and someone to pull him out of the fire before he gets fried. He doesn't always have efficient and willing partners to play their part.

**Harold Finch:** "Mr. Reese, I'm not sure we have time to save them both."

What's certain is that they don't have any time to spare. If he leaves now, he might be able to save Tulley and still have the time to keep Fusco alive, whereas he might not make it to either of them if he hesitates. What's certain, too, is that Tulley is closer and more urging.

**John Reese:** "I wouldn't do that."

Hello, Ray. You might not remember me. But I do remember you.

**John Reese:** "You do and the company will ruin your career. And that's if you're lucky."

Well, maybe not. Depends on the agent in charge. But it could happen. And the risk is high enough, that Tulley has to know before making a decision. Or rather, the risk is kind of low, but if it does happen nonetheless, it can go very far.

**John Reese:** "At least I'm not late."

Or, you know, dead. Dead people hardly come to rescue you.

**Lionel Fusco:** "My hands are dirty, always will be, huh?"

John's not the right person to complain about that, really. He might never have been corrupt, but his hands sure as hell are dirty, and he never pretended they weren't stained with blood, dried or not.
**RISK**

**Harold Finch:** "No. The cuff should shiver on the shoe, not break."

Amen. The Finch has spoken. Seriously, though, the older man seems to enjoy dressing him up a bit too much.

**Harold Finch:** "Here's a start although it doesn't really matter. Banking is mostly looking clever and wearing the right clothes. And we've managed the second part."

It's wonderful how Finch can compliment someone and insult them at the same time. He's basically saying he trusts John to be able to "look clever", but that for now, it's not the case.

**Harold Finch:** "He's also not fond of heights. I thought rooftops were your domain, Mr. Reese."

And here John thought playing with money was Finch's domain... If he is going to exchange roles, Finch might as well get a taste of it too.

**Harold Finch:** "You're a quick study, Mr. Reese."

That's why he was so good at his job for the CIA: he doesn't only manage to look comfortable in almost any skin, but he also learns enough to actually get what the people he's about to infiltrate are talking about, in no time. He's not an expert, of course, not after one night, but he actually gets it.

**John Reese:** "I'm familiar with the case."

Like, you know, he is one of the people behind Virtanen's fall. Not that Saunders needs to know.

**Harold Finch:** "I wouldn't be so sure about that. Someone like that, the win doesn't concern him. It's the rush."

John never really understood these people, who lived for the adrenaline. Of course, he had learned how they reacted, how to deal with them, and he understands that they see it as an incentive, he can even appreciate the rush, but he doesn't intellectually understand why. It's not his reason to act. Never. He's more of a necessity guy, himself. He does things because no one else will.

**Adam Saunders:** "You ever play Russian roulette?"

He can't say he has, not exactly. People usually played it for him. Either because Kara was the one threatening someone, or because the enemy had him at gunpoint and wanted him to talk. But yeah, he knows how it works.
Harold Finch: "The rent on this place must be a staggering. Maybe that's why he doesn't have any furniture."

That's rich, coming from him. Finch can be surprisingly cheaper at times, considering how wealthy he is.

Paul Ashton: "Adam here prefers to keep his wits about him at all times. I hate that."

That, on the other hand, is a state of mind he can fully understand. He's quite fond of it too – except when his employers try to kill him and the woman he loved is dead because he didn't get there in time and he doesn't have a reason to go on anymore, but that's different.

Victor: "There he is, Mr. Big Shot. You know how many clients I had to apologize to today when they found out I put them in a stock you shorted?"

And here comes the drunken idiot who wasn't clever enough to understand something and so starts blaming those who did... John really wishes some people could stop being morons about the responsibility in their own actions, sometimes.

John Reese: "This looks like a little more than sleeping your way to the top, Finch."

As the other man said, Adam Saunders is in it for the rush. And that, that's not what an adrenaline junkie does. Acting without a care for the consequences, on the other hand... It's more that the young man is sleeping with his boss even though she's his boss, than because she's his boss.

John Reese: "Hope you got a receipt, Finch."

Then again, the man can probably spare the hundred and so of millions he gave to Baylor Zimm. His bank account doesn't seem to have a bottom.

John Reese: "We have $150 million on the line. We'd like to know everything, Adam."

That line is easy to deliver. Reason aside, that's exactly the mindset of the CIA: with what is on the line, we have to know everything, and we'll be the judge of whether or not what we discover matters to us. An approach John can understand. Even though he never said absolutely everything to the CIA.

John Reese: "We were almost roadkill last night. I'm getting tired of playing around."

Going undercover is fun enough, but traders can be a pain in the ass, and he'd really like to have someone to shoot at if there's a new attempt on Adam's life.
John Reese: "No, but I did save your life."

Which should buy him some good will, even over his initial lie, right? Good will which would enable him to save the kid's life, again.

Adam Saunders: "Yeah, but he was family. I didn't think anything of it."

He understands, kind of. Him, he always thought about the consequences when he did something for his family. He just never cared more for the consequences than for his family.

Harold Finch: "Mr. Reese, we have many safe houses in the city where Adam could be taken."

But the kid needs to be reminded that with his attitude, he can fall fast, hard, and low. If he's even still alive. Moreover, whoever is after Adam certainly won't come looking for him here.

John Reese: "Oh, uh, just don't touch anything in her cart."

You never knows what lurks in there. And it's private.

John Reese: "Adam's friend."

What a friend. With friends like that, the young man doesn't need enemies.

Adam Saunders: "See, how did- How did it get to this? I mean... I earned everything that I achieved in my life."

Because life is hard, and not always fair. Because people don't always get what they deserve, both for the bad and for the good guys. Because some people don't care about who they crush in their quest for power and / or money. Because even without human greed in the equation, things still don't always happen for the best anyway. You can be a good person and terribly ill. You can try to save others and die in the situation you were trying to resolve. Things aren't always perfect... Yet they aren't always bad either.

John Reese: "And you found one... An uncle who spent his life slaving over a food-truck counter... For you."

You don't always get the attention of the people you want, even if they should pay attention to you. But the others, those who do care about you, you can't dismiss them just because it's not their attention you want. You have theirs, at least. The best thing to do is to appreciate it.

Harold Finch: "Ever try to catch a falling knife, Mr. Reese?"
He's pretty sure he's not supposed to answer « yes » at this one. Even if he actually did catch the knife that one time. Not the point here. The point is that it's possible... if you have the skills and enough time to use them. Or, in this case, enough money to cushion the fall, which Finch obviously does have, and someone who knows what to do with it.

**John Reese:** "*John Rooney, Assets."

Currently, the assets he really, really wants to use are his muscles. If the guy who ruined entire families gives him the slightest reason to...

**Joan:** "*Who's looking after you these days?*

John knows Finch is listening. But that's not much of an admission anyway, it is?

**Carl Elias:** "*Hello, John. It's been a long time.*

Someone who's ready to ruin so many lives just for money is disgusting. Someone who does it only to be able to conduct their revenge... It can be terrifying. John needs to know how far exactly Elias will go for his vengeance. How much potential damage control he's looking at.
Joss Carter: "Don't tell me you're here for Moretti. How did you know he was being released? Should have guessed. Whenever you show up, trouble's right around the corner."

Sometimes he'd like people to acknowledge that he shows up because trouble's coming, and not the other way around; that he's there to help, and not the reason everything goes to hell.

Harold Finch: "The numbers don't wait in line, Mr. Reese."

Of course they don't. But as it is, John would like to point out that if their little team takes too many numbers at a time, they probably won't save anybody at all.

Harold Finch: "Mr. Reese, I think I have a situation."

He's not particularly surprised. And he can't come over to sort things up, because as it is, he also has a situation going. That's what happens when you bite off more than you can chew.

John Reese: "What do you mean by "rash"?"

Finch's mild vocabulary is a bit misgiving, in this case. The man's definition of "rash" is probably much lower than John's, but at the same time, Finch always downplays everything when it comes to talking about it. No point pretending that "rash" can't be a wide variety of things.

John Reese: "You think Carter can piggyback the police investigation?"

She'll probably complain, but hell. That was in the – unwritten, unsaid – contract she signed – not – when she decided to be part of this.

Harold Finch: "Be serious, Mr. Reese."

What? That's a valid question, which one of the two is the father. And if Finch doesn't want him to use baby speak, he shouldn't have kidnapped a baby to begin with.

Joss Carter: "No, you won't. She's dead."

He's almost said something to defend himself, thinking Carter is, again, trying to keep him from doing his job, but he has to admit that yeah, that's a solid reason for him not talking to Claudia Cruz.

John Reese: "I don't think Bradley Petrosian was sleeping with Claudia Cruz."
Weeeell, the youngster could possibly be bisexual, but...

**Harold Finch:** "*It's still a grenade.*"

Well excuse him, but he hadn't expected the need of childproofing for his arsenal. Finch is the only one, aside from himself, who's even supposed to come here, and somehow John doesn't see him as someone who plays with grenades on a daily basis.

**Harold Finch:** "*When? After the whole place is blown up? You know how I feel about guns.*"

Well Finch's not the one risking his life out there each time someone brings a gun to the fight, is he?

**Nicola Petrosian:** "*What are you gonna do, torture him? You've tripped the silent alarm. The police are gonna be here in five minutes.*"

As it is, John knows that. He's not dumb enough to think such a house doesn't have at least a silent alarm. The thing is, he doesn't care. First, because the Petrosians would have a fun day trying to formerly complain against a man with no identity and without having to talk about Leila. Second, because he doesn't need five minutes.

**Adnan Petrosian:** "*How could you do such a thing?*

It's ironic, coming from the man who had an affair and an illegitimate child to begin with, but still – John guesses it's better than having done what his wife has. There are grades even in how low you can fall.

**Gang member:** "*So kill me, but I still don't know. Your baby's gone. Whoever he was just handed him over. Even he couldn't tell you. So go ahead. Shoot. No one knows where she is.*"

The worst is that this scumbag is saying the truth. He hates it when criminals are clever enough to not even put themselves in a situation where they could actually do something. That way, they can always say they really can't do anything. It's not their fault. They don't know. They can pretend, because they refused the knowledge.

**John Reese:** "*I'm all out of moves, Finch. Risk is all I've got left.*"

He's all for an alternative, but if he isn't given one... He doesn't like it, but it's Leila's life on the scale.

**Carl Elias:** "*You did, didn't you? But you also broke up a little family reunion that I had planned. That was you, wasn't it? Honest to a fault.*"
John knows a few people who would laugh at that statement. It's not like pretending otherwise would make Elias forget, so he doesn't see the point of denying it.

**John Reese:** "I know you're aiming to take over this city, but to control it, you need rules. People start targeting children, there are no rules. No winners."

It's about Leila, yes. But not only. If Elias wants to last in this city, he has to put down a few rules. What isn't allowed even amongst the lowlives. John's not even talking about fighting those who do the unforgiveable, but simply not protecting them. Handing them out. Because if everything's allowed, then people will eventually rise against Elias... or a newcomer with even worse methods will step in, no morals to stop him, and Elias will be surprised by what the world has come to. By what he allowed it to become. And that surprise will end in death.

**Mexican gang member:** "You'd just shoot me."

Not wrong. Except he will shoot the man anyway.

**John Reese:** "Don't do this."

It's useless, he knows it. But what else can he say?

**Carl Elias:** "We both win, John."

Do they, really? It's easy to think so, when you stand on the other side of the line.

**Carl Elias:** "You were right. I would never harm a child. But then I knew you wouldn't either."

If only. John would like to think so too, except he can't. He can't, because he has. He wasn't in his right mind, back then, and yes, the medicine was making him a bit... single-minded. But that's not an excuse. They are still dead. He still killed them. He migh not be entirely responsible, but that won't bring them back.

**Joss Carter:** "You say there was no choice, but there was, John. It's called the police."

And how exactly does she see that playing out? Him, in an interrogation room, them interrogating him and not believing a word of what he says, not until it's too late for Leila. Maybe he could have handled it better. Surely he had made mistakes. He isn't denying it. But Carter doesn't get the right to pretend it's all so easy.

**Joss Carter:** "I can't do this anymore. I can't. You and your friend. I'm sorry."
That, at least, he can understand. He hopes she will change her mind. But he can understand.

**John Reese:** "Be nice to have a child. Children. Think that'll ever happen? Probably not. Our line of work."

He tried, once. It ended badly.
IDENTITY CRISIS

John Reese: “Never understood why people put all their information on those sites. Used to make our job a lot easier in the CIA.”

Of course, if it was only about what you prefer to eat, your favorite books and the number of dogs in one's life you think is perfect, it's not really a problem. Of course, it can be used against you, like by taking the place of your favorite delivery guy, but it's nothing compared to what people sometimes put on the Internet – short of their passwords, just about anything. John can understand putting some information on a site... but all of it? Certainly not.

Harold Finch: “You know, Carter's issue isn't with you, Mr. Reese, it's with your methods... Our methods. Not to mention the fact that you gave up a witness under her protection and nearly got a cop killed in the process.”

That's weird, thinking that someone's issue isn't with him per se. He's pretty sure most people don't even bother seeing past the actions when judging others. Still, Carter wouldn't have liked it better if his and Leila's bodies had been found, frozen to death, instead of him giving up for once.

Harold Finch: "I suppose I should thank you for making them evacuate the building."

The way Finch puts it makes it clear he shan't expect any actual thanks. Then again, John doubts the older man would have liked to explain why exactly he was hiding in "Jordan Hester"'s closet.

John Reese: "We're still going to need an extra hand."

There's Fusco, of course. Except Fusco's already working on HR, and just as John can't be everywhere at the same time, Fusco can't do two jobs at a time. John doesn't want to simply replace Carter, it's not so simple really, but if he can't get her to change her mind, it might come to that.

Lionel Fusco: "Nice job handing Moretti over to Elias."

The problem with Fusco is that the man's so full of dry sarcasm and shitty experience you can't even snap back, because he already knows that sometimes you just don't have a choice.

Lionel Fusco: "You got me doing undercover work for HR. Now you want me to do above-the-board stuff too? Make up your mind."

He'd like to have that option.

John Reese: "'Jordan'? Are you on a first name basis already?"
For someone like John, it wouldn't exactly be a problem... But Finch isn't John, and while the man is strongly misanthropic towards the whole of humanity, he's also disturbingly naive whenever he ends up face to face with an actual person. That, and Finch can't defend himself if he's wrong.

**John Reese:** "Or she knows you're tailing her, and she circled back for a closer look."

For now "Jordan" doesn't seem to be the bad one, but that's not one hundred percent sure. And even if it was, Finch isn't exactly discreet when tailing people – being tailed is alright, but the other way around... If "Jordan" decides to call the cops because a strange little man is following her around, that'd be just great.

**John Reese:** "Never mind. Laptop's not password-protected. Guess he's not as careful as I thought, Finch. Okay, not seeing any secret accounts full of drug profits or messages about business. To give you more leverage and control- And since when do seasoned drug dealers need how-to tips from the Internet?"

Something's wrong here, deeply wrong. The "Jordan Hester" he's tailing looks like the real deal at first glance, but as soon as you take a closer look... It just doesn't add up. If he was supposed to be a small-time dealer, the looks might do it, but here it's the big boss they're talking about... Now that?

**John Reese:** "Boss, boss, the cops are outside. Everybody grab what they can."

He kind of likes confusing everyone, actually.

**Jordan Hester:** "I mean, have you ever hit bottom? I never realized how far down I could go."

John'd be a happy man if his personal low wasn't any lower than Hester's, but that's not the case. It's terrible, of course, that the man was dragged so low by life, but all in all, it could be way worse.

**Jordan Hester:** "I don't want to kill anybody. I just want my identity back."

That's the answer of a man who will accept any alternative. That's an answer John can respect.

**John Reese:** "It's a terrible plan. But I like it, so let's do it."

Terrible, mostly because Jordan Hester obviously doesn't have the skills to pull it off. But hey, John's here now, and that's right up his alley.

**John Reese:** "Finch, what's going on?"

This. This is the freaking reason he insists for Finch to at least learn self-defense.
(Jordan Hester): "After all... I'm a better Jordan Hester than you've ever been."

More efficient, perhaps. But efficiency never implied goodness.

John Reese: "Try this one instead. Your name's not Mary either. It's Tara. You can run along. Nice mug shot. Impressive rap sheet too. Arrests for shoplifting, forging checks, insurance fraud. Torched your own name by the time you were 23."

Tara Verlander had started very low, despite what "Mary" liked to pretend. She had only gotten smart on the latest years – very smart, he has to admit, but it doesn't erase her past mistakes. John, him, hadn't made that mistake, not even when he was younger.

Lionel Fusco: "Am I under with HR, or am I working cases with you?"

As if the cop hadn't liked doing something good in between two HR shitload "missions".

Harold Finch: "Come on. Ask me anything."

Except it would destroy the trust John has slowly managed to build between them. Oh, sure, he's looking into "Harold Finch", but Finch knows it. Under any other circumstances, Finch can defend himself. Even if he doesn't see the blow coming, he can recognize it for what it is. In this state, however... The older man probably wouldn't even notice. Not until the next day, and that, he wouldn't forgive. There's no point in John knowing everything that matters about Finch, if Finch stops doing this. Besides, Finch would have probably said something suspicious, by now, as he doesn't seem to have much of a brain-mouth filter left, if there was really something John should be wary of.
Harold Finch: "Meet the heads of the five families. Caparelli. Zambrano. Grifoni. Basile. Gianni Moretti Jr. Moretti's son. Junior took over when Moretti went to prison. Unless all these men suddenly decided to turn on one another, I think it's fair to assume that they're being targeted."

Well to be fair, even if they have decided to turn on one another, John guesses that still counts as being targeted. Just, by each others, not by a single individual. He guesses, too, that maybe they could be pushed against each others by someone remaining in the shadows. It would save time on the cleaning up... but not on the preparations.

Harold Finch: "I know they encouraged a certain moral flexibility when you worked at the CIA, Mr. Reese, but I like to think that we're reaching for a higher standard."

Which is kind of ironic, when John thinks back to Megan Tillman. To how Finch was at first alright with letting her kill Andrew Benton. Or, at least, alright with pretending it wasn't their business to stop her. He's not saying that Finch isn't, indeed, reaching for a higher standard. Just that the man himself can be pretty judgemental, when it comes to shortcomings he himself presented at some point or another – not that John is in the place to judge, considering his own flaws.

Harold Finch: "An apology might go a long way, Mr. Reese."

First of all, Carter isn't even willing to listen to said apology. Second, while John might apologize for the way things turned out, while he might even admit that he could, perhaps, have done better... this isn't what Carter wants – if she was willing to listen – in said apology. What Carter wants is something he will not apologize for. The detective wants him to apologize for not having called the police when it became too much, instead of resorting to asking Elias for help. She wants him to admit that there was a very specific, very lawful, better way to deal with the situation. Something he doesn't believe to be true – would the police, other than her and Fusco, have even listened? He doubts it. Especially as they'd have asked why, and how he knew about the Petrosians, about the baby, about everything. A question he couldn't have answered, an answer that they wouldn't have believed. And John will not apologize for something he doesn't have to apologize for – he will feel sorry, yes, and he will probably blame himself, but he won't pretend that the world is fair and an easy place to live in.

Harold Finch: "Are you certain this is the best course of action? Mafiosi don't take kindly to people who approach them... Unannounced."

Most people John has to deal with don't take being approached unannounced kindly. He's learned not to let it hurt his feelings when they try to shoot him on sight, thanks for the concern.

Carl Elias: "We're more alike than you'd like to admit. Both killers in our own right."
Oh, John doesn't deny that part. He has, after all, a problem with revenge. But unlike Elias, he never let his own need for revenge hurt innocent people – no more than what's unavoidable, at least – and he certainly hasn't ever let it claim a life outside of the scope of his revenge.

Joss Carter: "I guess you should know, the FBI has a new task force set up in your honor. They think you're working with Elias."

Obviously that'd be the answer they come up with! Then again, if he was investigating someone who did exactly what he does, without knowing the person, and without the right context, John guesses he wouldn't believe them to act out of good intent either, so...

John Reese: "In war, you need to be able to coerce your allies every bit as much as your enemies."

That's why they're allies, and not friends. Besides, it's prudent to even have something on your friends – as long as you don't ever use it. Simply because you can't have trust without a bit of respect. And respect implies a bit of fear. Not necessarily in what the other will do to you if you betray them, but in what they could do to you, and yet have decided not to.

Harold Finch: "I'm not certain I meant that as a compliment."

Finch doesn't need to tell him that. John knows. But he'll still take it as a compliment.

John Reese: "You have my word."

And here goes his resolution not to make promises... But it's not unexpected, really. It's difficult not to try and offer comfort, when it's personal. When it's to someone you actually know. He only hopes he will be able to do what he promises.

Harold Finch: "I'm sorry I'm not much use on this end of things. Look... Show me how to fire one of these and I can help. I'll... Create a distraction, I suppose, or..."

He knows Finch doesn't mean that he will actually fire a gun at someone, even if he has to. But it's surprisingly pleasant to hear that the man would go so far as to at least pretend to threaten someone, or even shoot in the air – just to use a gun, even if not on someone. It tells him that they definitely walked out of the employer/employee relationship, into something that's more equal partners ground. That, just as John is making compromises, Finch is starting to understand that sometimes, he has to make compromises too. That being said, Finch's offer is more likely to get the older man killed than anything else, so that's a no.

Don Moretti: "You here to rescue me? Or shoot me?"

He's not even here for the man, he's here for Taylor Carter. But since he's here, and Moretti is here too... Well. Rescue or shoot. It mostly depends on the man's intentions, at this point. After all, John's
policy is to rescue first, and shoot only if he's not given another choice – which doesn't mean he will hesitate either.

**Joss Carter:** "Good to know you keep your promises."

Good to know this particular promise was possible to keep, he’d rather think. Because it could have gone sideways, and he’s perfectly aware of that. Which is why he hates making promises.
John Reese: "What's wrong?"

People don't call him when nothing's wrong – he made it that way.

Jessica Arndt: "You said that, in the end, we were all alone."

These are not words he wants to hear in her mouth. He left her so that she wouldn't have to understand – at least, not before a very, very long time. He left her because she deserved better. She shouldn't be saying these words – his words.

Joss Carter: "It all comes down to a matter of trust, the foundation of any healthy relationship. I just need to know where this is headed."

Trust is also believing in the other, even when they don't tell you everything. Believing that, perhaps, there's a good reason. He has a good reason not to tell her everything. That, and he doesn't know where this is headed either, so he'd have a hard time telling her.

John Reese: "We are. You're taking care of the shooter, and I'm making sure the cheating boyfriend doesn't get hurt. Looks fine to me."

Well it's not like he could have gone back in time to be able to tell her about the case before the cheating boyfriend got roasted by his actual girlfriend, is it? Also, doesn't this work nicely as a reverse situation? Usually he's the one doing the aggressive part of the job, while she berates him for not being protective enough.

Harold Finch: "And after all that talk about honesty."

Pot. Kettle. Besides, Carter is the one who talked about honesty first, not him.

Harold Finch: "Did I mention what our number does for a living? Tommy Clay works for Grayling Armored Services. You'll be a trainee working under him, and today is training day."

Oh Joy.

Tommy Clay: "You almost look like you know what you're doing."

He certainly does know what he's doing, way better than this amateur. He probably protected a few things that were worth ten times what they're driving around with, in the past.
**Tommy Clay:** "Hey, relax, Johnny. That's not a toy, you know. You could kill somebody with that thing."

Yeah, that's exactly the point. That's why the guy shouldn't be doing things this stupid. Clay is lucky John is the one doing this job, because he's past the "shoot first, ask later" stage. Most people who know how to use a gun don't have the discipline to stop themselves from firing when put in a seemingly stressful situation. Also, he could kill them without a gun, no question asked... but he doesn't think they'd like hearing that.

**Mark Snow:** "You don't have any family, Reese."

Not that Mark knows of, that's for sure – and, in a way, he really doesn't have a family left, but that's another thing altogether.

**John Reese:** "You're telling me to kill my partner?"

Obvious problem aside, he's mostly asking for confirmation, not because he doesn't get what Mark means, but because he knows how the CIA tends to be very vague in their orders, and it can come and bite you back in the ass later, because you didn't ask for clarification – he's almost certain it's also a way to guilt the agents, by reminding them that they didn't actually need any help getting to that conclusion, by making them saying it out loud. But he could be wrong.

**John Reese:** "I care about HR, Fusco, not the money. What you do with it is your business."

Fusco does risk his life in this business, after all. And there's no better way to keep an asset happy – enough – than by not being a tyrant about unnecessary things.

**John Reese:** "Something like that."

Clay probably doesn't want to know what kind of experience John actually has, as it is.

**Kara Stanton:** "And I thought you weren't listening."

He's always listening. Questioning doesn't make him unable to do what's asked of him. He's the kind of person who questions the thing, but still does the thing – in spirit, at least – if it needs to be done. Sometimes you have to act.

**John Reese:** "It's okay, Harold. I'm still ticking."

Like a device. Like a tool that does its work, without asking question, without questioning its purpose – who still acts even when questioning. Why? Because someone – something – has to. It
goes on working, until it can't anymore. And then it gets repaired, and it goes back to working. John wonders how many times he can be repaired, before he breaks into pieces – one more, at the very least.

**Kara Stanton:** "He said he wanted something for the pain."

It's during moments like that that John remembers that Kara does have a conscience. He might not always agree with the conclusions she gets out of that conscience, but he can't deny she does care. In a way.

**John Reese:** "Well, at least you got your nice Louis Vuitton bags."

She might not have been the one to pull the trigger, but she still agreed to go with a man who killed his friend for money – a friend she knows too. John guesses that's what irking him about the girl – that she acts as if she is innocent of everything, when she isn't.

**John Reese:** "You have no idea who you're dealing with."

These wannabe criminals... Always thinking they got the upper hand. As if being cleverish did it all. There's such a thing as experience, to begin with, and they don't have it. Tommy Clay doesn't have that. He thinks he saw the true face of humanity, just because the world is unfair, but he's so naive...

**John Reese:** "I think we're still here."

No matter the changes, some jobs just never die out. Just like prostitution is sometimes called the oldest profession, assassination – and any other kind of doubtful missions – will never run out. Why? He's not sure. But if he had to guess, it would be because technology can always be switched off; that's when you call in human workers.

**Ashley:** "Shut up."

The usual answer of those who don't want to hear the truth. As if them not hearing it would change the way the world works.

**John Reese:** "First time you shot someone? First one's hard."

He doesn't remember his first one. That is, yes, he remembers, but not really. What he really remembers, is that he hadn't felt anything – none of the things he should have felt at that moment. No guilt, no remorse. It had been necessary, and he hadn't needed to justify it to himself. And that... That had scared him more than anything else.
John Reese: "We stopped Tommy from getting away with murder."

Sometimes it's the best you can do. That way, at least, Murrey's murder wouldn't be silenced. That way, at least, Clay's wife and child wouldn't have to live with the knowledge that their husband and father was a criminal and still out there. Tommy Clay would still be a criminal, of course... But he wasn't out there. They wouldn't have to worry about him – for him, or because of him; probably both.
MANY HAPPY RETURNS

Chapter Notes

It's a while, I know, so a little reminder: in a totally canon-compliant (but not canon) way, John's actual last name is Sullivan. You'll see why I points it out again.

Harold Finch: "Anyway, I think you've earned some time off. Especially today. Or did you think I didn't know? Happy Birthday."

He's staring, he knows – doesn't matter, after all that's basically his default setting. Birthday... It's not exactly right, and certainly not important. But for so many years, no one bothered wishing him a happy birthday, to the point that he, of all people, had almost forgotten it. Of course, he knows the date of his birth. He hasn't forgotten that, no – he has simply forgotten that to most people, it actually means something. That it used to mean something to him, too.

Harold Finch: "I respect your privacy, John."

Or he pretends to, which wouldn't surprise John. Because if it's possible that now, Finch doesn't monitor him all the time, he doubts it was the case during the first months, back when there wasn't even a layer of trust between them. It's alright. It's better than if the older man simply threw his knowledge in John's face every two minutes.

Han: "As I recall, John, you don't make any move you're not sure of."

It's more that he doesn't make any move without a clear understanding of the risks, of how much it could potentially cost him. But, close enough.

John Reese: "She said she would wait."

John can't ask, won't ask – but for now, all he can think of is that perhaps, Jessica ended her life. That he wasn't there soon enough to stop her from doing it. He has no idea why she would do that, but her words, the last time they spoke...

John Reese: "You were risking his cover by even approaching him."

A marshal, of all people, should know that – never mind that Finch isn't actually a CI, because that's entirely not the point.

Harold Finch: "When I was first building the machine, I kept seeing the same numbers come up- a
week, a month, six months apart. Usually women. At first I thought it was a mistake. How could anyone's life be repeatedly threatened? And then I realized... They were living with the person who would eventually kill them."

Was Jessica one of them? It's all he can think about.

**John Reese:** "Show them what a real monster looks like."

Not to say that these men aren't monsters – they are. But him... He's a worse one. They are the small fry, who prey on the ones who are closest to them – who are the easiest to torture. Real monsters, on the other hand... while some of them also prey on the innocents, their most definite feature is that they aren't afraid to hunt down other monsters.

**Harold Finch:** "And then maybe you can explain the wisdom of antagonizing an entire law enforcement agency."

Finch's saying this as if he doesn't already have a few of said law enforcement agencies on his back.

**John Reese:** "Leave the laptop now, Harold. And get out."

He knows that Finch probably has the wrong idea – like for Andrew Benton – but he won't correct him. And he won't let him come. First of all, because if Finch comes with him and tries to talk him out of it, John will probably get irritated, and as a result get more likely to change his mind about Brad Jennings – and not in the way Finch wants. Second, because while he does intend to send Jennings to Mexico, he might very well change his mind once he sees the bastard again.

**John Reese:** "Finch, you hired me to take care of these things. You don't like how I do it, hire someone else."

He knows, again, that Finch has the wrong idea. But his point still stands, and he doesn't appreciate that Finch had decided to sidebench him, thinking he knew best. He didn't. Especially not without past proof of a weakness from John's part.

**Brad Jennings:** "You've never been in love, have you? Really, truly in love?"

Oh yes, he has. Two times, probably. And both times, it ended badly. Both times he walked out, because they deserved better. Both times, he threatened someone to protect the one he loved. None of these times he pursued them like Jennings has done. So, yes, he has been in love. And Jennings will soon be able to discuss it with Peter Arndt, forgotten together in Torreón Penitentiary.

**Joss Carter:** "This can't end like New Rochelle."

Except Carter doesn't know how New Rochelle ended. She thinks she does. She doesn't – not yet.
**John Reese:** "That I'll do what needs to be done."

Because if he doesn't, who will? There isn't always a good, legal solution. If there was, he'd still be a cop, not a dubious vigilante with a suspiciously dark past. He's there to take care of what people like Carter can't deal with.

**Peter Arndt:** "Sullivan sends you?"

Oh, the irony in that question.

**John Reese:** "Good question. Haven't known the answer for a long time. I know who I was. I was the guy who left her behind. You know why? The real reason? Because I thought she deserved someone better than me. I thought she deserved someone who would look after her... Be there for her. I thought she deserved someone like you. So I don't know. I was hoping you could tell me."

She did. Jessica deserved all that. She deserved someone so much better than him. Except she had apparently gotten worse – no, not really; he still was the bigger monster. But John, at least, would never have threatened her life. So now, he guesses, he is the one who was wrong. The one who allowed her to be killed by his "better" replacement.

**John Reese:** "See... when you find that one person who connects you to the world... You become someone different... Someone better. When that person is taken from you... What do you become then?"

People don't change, he's sure of that. They always remain in their own potential. But having that one person... It had allowed him to become the better version of himself, the best his potential had to offer. Now, what was he? Now that he didn't have a reason to try and be the best version? Now that she was gone?

**Harold Finch:** "What I know, Mr. Reese... Is that New Rochelle happened before we started working together. And because of that, there was nothing that either one of us could have done."

That's not an answer, of course. That's Finch not admitting it out loud, that Jessica had been a number. And somehow, that's the most John suspects he can take right now. Because he doesn't think he'd be able to deal with a confirmation – a confirmation that, had he been there sooner, had he already been working for Finch... he may have been able to save Jessica.
Lionel Fusco: "Yeah, well, unless you got an address, I'd say that we're both striking out, huh?"

He'll let that one pass, because John knows how it is to be told you haven't tried hard enough by someone who has yet to even try. By someone who thinks they can do so much better, without actually having done anything yet. And, if he does find something that Fusco missed, then he'll rub it in the detective's face.

Harold Finch: "We need to meet, Mr. Reese. We've just received another number."

He can see that, yes. He's, after all, right behind Finch, spying on him for more intel. He saw what just happened. And what happened is that Finch got a phone call on a public phone. Which makes him wonder if someone else receives the numbers and relays them to Finch. But that doesn't sound like Finch's paranoia when it comes to the Machine. So he wonders what that was all about.

Harold Finch: "Well, they can't all be babies and mafia dons."

What about baby mafia dons? Or mafia dons' babies? That would be interesting, for sure...

John Reese: "That nice young lady had a .45 pointed at me under her desk. There's a guard and a spin lock on the main door. This isn't a financial firm. It's a SCIF. Sensitive compartmented information facility. Secret government installation designed to protect classified data. Peck's no financial analyst either. He's a NOC, some kind of spy."

Peck's no ordinary guy, then – boring, maybe, but certainly not ordinary.

John Reese: "So how do we spy on a spy?"

He has enough experience dealing with active agents to say it's a hassle, but analysts...?

Harold Finch: "And since every office runs on caffeine, all we have to do is hide a camera and transceiver inside a shiny new coffeemaker, wire it to send data out through the electrical system, then wait for them to plug it in."

Breach of secrecy by coffeemaker. Now he's truly seen everything.

John Reese: "Peck's an intelligence analyst, and from the sound of it, a damn good one."
Sometimes he really appreciates that Finch doesn't ask him how exactly he can do some things, like, say, evaluating the performance of an analyst, when he's supposed to be a field agent – meaning, no expert on the subject of data analysis. Perhaps the man truly does know more than he lets on about his past, or Finch thinks it's common knowledge and/or that John's more clever than he lets on.

**John Reese:** "*Not calling it 'human interaction' might help.*"

Not that John is very good at it either, but he, at least, can manage a normal conversation. It's deeper connections that he has trouble dealing with.

**Joss Carter:** "*It was 'the principle of the thing.' At least, that's what Peck said in his meticulous, 78-page brief he sent the judge."

John can do obsessed, too, but he still thinks it's somewhat more... normal, to obsess about revenge or saving lives, than about a speeding ticket. Maybe not healthier, but certainly more normal.

**Ed Johnson:** "*Under executive order 13526, your security clearance is suspended, pending investigation. You're hereby placed on administrative leave, effective immediately.*"

He can understand the prudence of such a decision, he truly can. They can't let a possibly unreliable person work for the NSA. But as someone who got shot and almost bombed after having been accused of treason because someone wanted him – and Kara – silent, John can also tell what's going on here, and it's not good – or fair – for Henry Peck.

**John Reese:** "*Finch, I know a government trained assassin when I see one.*"

The problem being that said government trained assassin probably figured him out too, for the exact same reason.

**Joss Carter:** "One of Peck's neighbors called 911, said they saw two men fighting in his apartment. Is everything okay?"

Well, no one died yet, so John guesses it's not so bad, for now.

**Harold Finch:** "*But as I found out myself, the people I've entrusted it to are more... Ruthless than I anticipated.*"

Which is why Finch needs someone like John – not only for the physical aspect of the job, but also because the former CIA agent knows how far people can go, without necessarily assuming that they will go that far. Because John Reese has been part of it. Finch, on the other hand, knows that, and at the same time, doesn't know that. Even now, he doesn't fully realize. Paranoid, and idealist at the same time. An odd combination.
**Harold Finch:** "I believe Mr. Peck is planning to break into the NSA."

And people call John impulsive – not that he wouldn't do it, if he were in Peck's shoes, except he, unlike the analyst, has the experience and the knowledge necessary not to get himself killed in the process.

**John Reese:** "Finch? You're not gonna like this."

Going to the police is not so bad a choice... Except in this case. In this case, it'll keep Henry Peck alive for a time, but not in the long run. After all, it's the system he's trying to fight, even if he doesn't realize that fully yet – and the police is part of the system.

**Harold Finch:** "I suppose we can count our blessings Detective Fusco isn't the inquisitive type."

Had Carter been the one in that interrogation room, she'd have actually listened, and probably understood – she may not have believed it all, but she'd have understood enough, about the Machine, about John and Finch's secret. John had thought, at the beginning of all this, that she wouldn't want to believe if he told her the truth... But if the information came from someone else, someone unrelated to Finch and him, then it'd be another story altogether.

**Fox:** "Never asked."

Of course he hasn't – and even if he had, what are the odds that he'd have been told the truth?

**John Reese:** "Okay, Peck, let's get you out of-"

...And the guy's gone. Obviously.

**Grace Hendricks:** "Um, that's Harold, my fiancé."

He's not entirely sure of what this all means, but he can already tell it won't be pleasant. Because if there's one thing John doesn't doubt about all that Finch has told him, it's that everyone believe the older man dead.

**Harold Finch:** "People- Well, people other than Grace- have always been a mystery to me. I failed to recognize the lengths to which they would go to protect the machine, to control it."

John doesn't have that problem, really, but in a way he can understand. He has stopped expecting anything out of people a long time ago. Not that he don't believe they can't do good things, nor that he doesn't hope that they will do the right thing – but he's just not surprised anymore when they don't. He doesn't expect anything – the bad as much as the good – out of anyone. He just goes with it.
once it happens, whatever "it" is.

Chapter End Notes

To be clear, the thing about John knowing a good deal of things that you might not expect from a field agent... It's just that in my headcanon (crossoverish) he spent some time undercover as an analyst (see The Prisoner, 2009) for a mission, which had him learn a few things (he's still no expert, obviously). And because I find John does know a lot of things (even when Finch is the genius in this partnership, though it's still visible), and is probably very intelligent, if not in the same way (or as much) as Finch. Things that Finch sometimes takes for granted, while he arches an eyebrow when John knows obvious-assassination-things...

...Was that clear?
Soooo you'll probably notice a lot of not-canon (but, again, canon-compliant) things in one particular moment of this "chapter". That's basically me giving you a quick summary of the things I've hinted at before, concerning John's past (you know the drill, with John and Finch, don't ever assume anything they said out loud is the truth, not until you've seen proof - let's take John's sessions with Iris: I'm sure there was a great deal of the truth in what he said, but I wouldn't be surprised if he edited some things out, just enough that he could actually talk about it, without endangering anyone, or himself). You can find most of it (haven't finished writing it all yet, obviously) in some of my other works: Hope lies in a shallow grave (only the first chapter for now, but hey, that's background if nothing else), You always leave the villain (the time of his... failed marriage) and most of my OSs collections Missing Books.

As you might remember, those things also come from Jim Caviezel's other roles, that I've adapted to fit into PoI (and with each others) so if you recognize anything...

John Reese: "She's a lot prettier than Fusco."

Not that it's particularly difficult to be a lot prettier than Fusco. Fusco just isn't pretty. This young woman, on the other hand...

(Hans Friedrickson): "I've been open. I laid myself bare to you."

Clingy... and melodramatic. If this turn into a greek tragedy, he wouldn't be surprised – greek tragedy usually entail one – possibly more – murder, the occasional suicide, and a good deal of barely justified revenges.

Lionel Fusco: "Yeah, I know the target. You do too. It's that lady shrink you asked me to look into. 48 hours and she's dead."

Oh. For a moment John thought Fusco was implying something about him having something to do with it. Like, it's happening because of him, of a possible connection between him and the target, that Fusco just found out about – he'd like to say it's impossible, but it's not; at best, it's unlikely. There's a reason he stays clear of the very few people he has left.

John Reese: "Rooney. I'm a- a consultant. It's complicated. Not really important."

Complicated certainly is the word. Not really important, on the other hand... not so much.
(Caroline Turing): "You're highly observant, hypervigilant, aware of your surroundings."

Why, that's exactly what he's been aiming for. Thank you for appreciating the performance – no, but, seriously, it's not exactly easy to let what he always hide back onto the surface. He has spent so much time and effort into not looking hypervigilant while still being so, he's just a tiny little bit worried that allowing – forcing – himself to let it show will also result in other things coming through... Things that he'd rather not let anyone see. Especially not a therapist.

Harold Finch: "Tread carefully, Mr. Reese."

Because he totally intended to be open and honest with Caroline Turing, yes. He should probably start with his father's death during that fire, when he was eight. Then go on with his mother's murder, back when he was thirteen. His foster mother's accident and consecutive death four years later. The fact that he went and enlisted under a fake name to get away from it all, and somehow ended up as one of these soldiers suffering from side-effects because of a problematic medicine, which cost nine civilians lives, and had him ditch said fake identity. How he's not particularly bothered with the act of killing. That he came back to NYC and joined the police, to find his mother's murderer, which ended up with him on the irish mob's hit list, a slit throat – not his, obviously – and relocation into WITSEC. That "John Rykes" enlisted again, to the Marshals' displeasure, found love and quit just before 2001. That he left her and enlisted, again, because of that. That he somehow and secretly investigated defective bulletproof vests during his time as a Delta Force sergeant, under yet another alias, and managed to get married during that time, only to be found out as that-guy-who-murdered-nine-civilians-in-Salvador, for his unborn child to be killed when they went after Claire, for the trial to go south – partially because of his own choices, but not only – and for him to fake his death while pretending to be the villain to his widow – and no, he's not getting his words mixed up here. Then, of course, there is the matter of him becoming a CIA executioner, of the CIA launching a missile at him to silence him. And now he's a vigilante criminal who spends his time saving innocent people – and shooting kneecaps. Ah, maybe he should mention that he hasn't seen his brother in, oh, about twenty years, not since WITSEC, in fact, and there's a high chance Frank believes him dead? Caroline Turing would probably label him as a very problematic pathological liar. Even he can't always believe that's his life, after all.

Zoe Morgan: "Good to hear you're getting some help, but I don't think there's a woman out there alive that could fix you, John."

He's trying not to react to her use of the word "alive". After all, Zoe doesn't – couldn't – know. She's just more perceptive, more in tune with him than most. She guesses... and he's not going to confirm.

(Caroline Turing): "John, I- What are you doing here?"

Probably freaking her out, to begin with.

(Caroline Turing): "Will these help to produce an adrenaline response?"

Why do science people always need to make it all about science? Of course there's a scientific explanation behind everything, but sometimes you just need to go with "it'll make you feel better".
John Reese: "I promise... I will tell you when it's time to panic."

In other words, he won't. Whenever someone panics, things get out of hand. It's never time to panic – though, obviously, you can't always help it.

Harold Finch: "I know you're good at stealing cars. How do you feel about helicopters?"

Well, for some reason, he doesn't have even half as much experience. Probably has something to do with the fact that people don't usually park their helicopter on the street for him to steal.

John Reese: "Who said I had issues?"

Not him, that's for sure. He does think he has issues, but he'd never say it out loud. Mostly because he's aware of them, and able to live with them – unwilling to part with them, perhaps, too.

John Reese: "Actually, they're after me."

He hopes that'll make her feel... better. Kind of. Having crooked cops after you is one thing, having the freaking FBI on your ass is another. And, well. Assassination Targets Club.

(Caroline Turing): "The guys who were trying to kill you or the guys who were trying to kill me?"

Well sorry. Next time he'll wait until there's no one trying to arrest or to off him before coming to the rescue. Obviously that might result in him not being there on time to save the number, but you can't have all the advantages and none of the drawbacks, can you?

(Caroline Turing): "I diagnosed you as paranoid."

She's not exactly wrong about that. Except he does have reasons to be paranoid.

John Reese: "I have to say, Harold, we've been working together for some time now, but you continue to surprise me."

Not only can the man hack, but he can also think on his feet – figure of speech, because Finch's most likely behind a computer's screen right now, but you get it; Harold Finch can have ideas when they need it, that's what he means. John's not complaining, that's for sure.

John Reese: "Trust is complicated, Lionel. For example, I'm sitting in a police car with one cop who tried to murder me and another who spent six months trying to lock me up. So you'll forgive me
After all, Carter and Fusco didn't trust him right away, just because he told them to – to be fair, he
didn't say that to Fusco. They gradually came to appreciate that, maybe, he's doing some good. If
they get to take things one step at a time, he gets to do it too. Especially since being careless in who
he trusts could cost him a lot more than it might cost them.

**John Reese:** "He's in danger now because he was working for you. So you're gonna help me get
him back."

It's not that he refuses to continue without Finch, or that he's doing it only because of Finch, far from
that. If there was no hope to save Finch, he'd probably go on – not right away, of course, not without
some anger, or some grieving time. But she barely took Finch, and if she took him, it's not to kill him
right away. There is still time for John to act, for him to retrieve his friend. He deserves to be given a
chance, if anything. And Finch... Finch is just like another number. Even if his life doesn't matter
more than another number's – that's left to discussion, but anyway – it still matters just as much as
any other life. He deserves a chance to be saved, just like anyone else.
What gets at me with a lot of PoI fanfics is that John is often depicted as completely submissive to Finch's will, and / or losing his calm whenever something happens to Finch ( do you know how hard it is to find a fanfic that's not entirely about Shoot, thus almost erasing John out of existence, or Rinch, where he's almost always completely OCC? I do. )

And I'm like, have we watched the same show? Sure, he gets a bit more tetchy when something happens to his friends ( not only Finch, btw ), and yes, he mostly follows Finch's direction, but John is hardly a whining useless little soldier.

**John Reese:** "*I have a lead, but I need you chasing down every other angle.*"

He's slightly aware that he may be focusing a bit too much on Root right now. That, perhaps, he's having tunnel vision. It can't not help to have someone else look at the problem... or rather, at the parts of the problem he can't focus on right now, because he's the one going after Root. If anything, he's focused on that. A bit too focused, yes, but he can't help it. It's personal. Still doesn't mean he's wrong.

**John Reese (quoting Harold Finch):** "*I gave you a job, Mr. Reese. I never said it would be easy.*"

He apparently works better with Finch's snide remarks, even if the man himself isn't there.

**Lionel Fusco:** "*Frankly, I'm not sure I want to find out what you're like without his direction.*"

Only slightly more murderous, he promises – no, seriously. He only goes along with what Finch says when he actually agrees on some level with the older man, Finch could testify. He admits that he isn't always right, which is why he allows Finch to "direct" him. But he also knows that Finch isn't always right either. But that's not the matter here. The matter is that Finch has been taken, and deserves just as much help as any other number. The matter is that Finch is his friend, and what kind of friends don't even try to save each other?

**John Reese:** "*He didn't want me to find him if anything went wrong. He just wanted me to keep rescuing people. People like you.*"

What about Finch? Isn't the man a person, too? Shouldn't he get rescued, too? Or at least, shouldn't he be given a chance, too? What had the man been thinking, when he had encoded-or-whatever the Machine, telling it not to even try? Scratch that, John knows what Finch had been thinking. The older man had thought saving everyone meant not saving him in particular, as if he wasn't part of
"everyone". For the genius he is, Finch sure has no grasp of the concept of nuances – of the various levels to react given the situation. Always, black and white. Even while playing in the grey areas of about everything.

**Aryan guy:** "So who are you?"

The answer's kind of obvious, really. Got a cop's badge, but not a cop. Able to spot the weapons in the room, the suspicious behavior, and to deduce correctly what was going on. He's obviously someone who knows shit. Someone they shouldn't want to have to deal with. But they're also obviously idiots, so...

**Leon Tao:** "Look, you seem- well, crazy, but highly capable. I just need you to take me to my car. You owe me that much."

"Owe"? What is it with people, always thinking everyone and the world itself owed them something? If at least it was about having the decency to help, but no, it's always about an imaginary debt that give them all the rights! Normally he'd be a bit more accommodating, but not today. Today's he's angry, worried, and on a schedule. So pardon him if he snaps back a little.

**Leon Tao:** "8 million. Hey! Look, I didn't plan on stealing, at least not at first. I had a legitimate job at Bear Stearns. Then the recession hit and we all get axed, so I take a job at this little startup. Took me six months to realize I was working for the corporate arm of the Aryan Nation, laundering profits from their meth business. You wanna call that greedy? I call it payback."

He doesn't call it anything, but if he called it something, it wouldn't be greedy, it'd be idiotic. You don't try anything like that unless you know you can make your way out if things turn sour, which is clearly not Leon Tao's case. John, perhaps, could have pulled it off – nevermind that he wouldn't even be in this situation – because he's able to defend himself, to disappear in a whisper. But not Leon Tao. This is not greed. It's sheer stupidity.

**Lionel Fusco:** "You know, I'm thinking about charging you overtime."

He'd probably have something to say to that, if it were a normal day. It's not.

**John Reese:** "Like I told your associate, I just want to find my friend. See, I don't have many friends. Just the one, in fact. Okay, maybe two. So here's the deal. You give me Leon and Detective Fusco here- you can even leave the gag on- and I'll go peacefully."

See, Fusco was worried about him being a terror without a finch on his shoulder to tell him what not to do, and yet here he is, offering a peaceful solution – that he knows they won't take, but, hey, that's hardly his fault. Trying to save – relatively – innocent people yet again. Even when he doesn't have the time for this.
John Reese: "I guess I get my workout in for the day."

He knows the blow is coming, and he could probably do something about it, but he saw the malinois, and there's a better way. A way that's less likely to end with the aryans assholes having the time to react and to fire at Tao, Fusco, or him. And if that's at the cost of a bruise-to-be, well... John knows his choice.

John Reese: [Whistles]

Well. Three friends, he guesses.

John Reese: "You're a sweetheart. You just need a better name."

If Kara was here, she'd probably make a joke about John being a sweetheart too, despite the threatening exterior – bleeding martyr and all that, she used to say about him when she tried to get a rise out of him.

John Reese: "I'm running out of time to find my friend, and I've only got one lead left, so you're gonna try very hard not to get killed while I look into it. Do you understand?"

He's really, really not in the mood. Leon Tao should even be grateful that he's saving him at all.

John Reese: "Yes, he's dead, Leon. Very dead."

Maybe that will get the man to finally realize what could happen to him very soon – even if Root's not his personal enemy – what could happen to John's friend, and why he doesn't have time for complaining.

Leon Tao: "There is no one better, except maybe this hacker. She's an artist. There's nothing to track her, there's nowhere to even begin."

John knows Finch himself has had no results tracking down Root, so he can believe Tao. It doesn't make him any less irritated.

Joss Carter: "Corwin's case file is missing. Digital records have been corrupted and the ballistics report. Tech support says the system has a bug."

John knows that kind of sabotage too well not to be almost absolutely certain that it wasn't a "bug".
**John Reese:** "Do the math, and figure out a way to bend your rules, 'cause he's my friend. He saved my life. Understand? And I won't do this without him."

He's slipping, he's aware. But Finch's own rules are being ridiculous, and the older man certainly won't be saving himself anytime soon. And it's not even John being selfish, it's him assuring himself some stability – assuring that he'll be up to the task when the next number comes up. He can't do everything alone, and he needs his friend. Why? Simply because everyone needs some kind of stability, some kind of reason not to fall back into depression – and his friends are all that John Reese needs. But he needs that. It's not being selfish – it's being fair to Finch, and to himself, for once.

**John Reese:** "Pick on someone your own size. Or someone a little closer to it."

Yeah, about that...

**Titus:** "You're an embarrassment to your race."

He'll take it as a compliment, thanks. Now, if he could just find a way not to get murdered by a ridiculously overgrown neonazi, that would be perfect.

**John Reese:** "Yeah, I wasn't losing. I was just resting."

He might be lying a bit here. Just a bit, like, he could probably have found a way to get rid of the bastard... but not without suffering even more of a beating beforehand.

**Leon Tao:** "Your friend... I hope you find him. He's lucky to have you."

He hopes, too. And he can't help but notice that while Leon is firstly concerned with himself and his own problems, it doesn't stop him from acknowledging John's problems – that, yes, Leon Tao is a little bit selfish, but not entirely egocentric.
Joss Carter: "Look, I need to know where you're getting your information."

Carter can't know that, obviously, but she doesn't "need" to know, not in this case. Knowing wouldn't change anything, because there is nothing to deduce out of the source. Also, he doesn't have time, neither to explain to them "where" exactly he's getting his intel, nor to convince the detectives he'd be telling the truth. They'll have to do without.

John Reese: "I need you to stay here, Lionel, and find out who's messing with the case."

This time the detective can't complain that he's given unimportant jobs.

John Reese: "And if I do, the bathtub will-"

No bathtub – which, in a way, is not so bad, considering the normal size of a bathtub, and John's size. He doesn't fancy getting all folded up in order to fit in... No sleep tonight, anyway.

Joss Carter: "I don't know what you just did, but this is not the way-"

He let her try her way, heard it wasn't working, and went his way. That's him respecting Carter's ideals, and yet being effective. It's a life in the balance, here, not only the answer to a murder.

Brian Frey: "It wasn't the first time he followed her home, but they can't prove a damn thing without a body. Then one night, me and my brother paid Cody a visit."

He can't say he doesn't know the feeling – revenge was, is, and always will be his biggest flaw. He'd probably have done – had, did, and would do – the same thing... Only, there's always a limit, some line to define what you could do out of sheer belief, and what you were allowed to do out of certainty. Him, he always stopped at harming innocent people... But what if you are persuaded the one in front of you is guilty, when he actually isn't? John is quite an efficient judge of that – guilty of what is another question, but guilty of something, that, yes, he can always say – but not everyone is.

Cody Grayson: "What do you want me to say, man, that I cut her up, dumped her in the swamp? Ain't nothing you can do this town hasn't already done worse."

Well maybe it would have helped if the guy hadn't started smarting out at the police, when he was actually innocent of Hanna Frey's disparition. Nothing says "guilty" more efficiently than being a cocky little shit when interrogated.

Joss Carter: "Making friends, huh?"
They started it.

**Barbara Russell:** "No, he was a good man. It was just a mistake."

One mistake, two mistakes, and soon enough everybody is an innocent little angel. Besides, not all sexual predators are also drug dealers. Not all murderers are gruesome, undereducated assholes. Some monsters even do good things in their lives, genuinely at that. John’s a good example of that. Such things, though, don’t balance each others out; they simply exists together inside one human being.

**John Reese:** "Maybe- maybe Russell took her, but she escaped. She got her revenge."

That’s something John would do, in Hanna Frey’s place – not because he thinks he’s worth a revenge, but because someone else could become a victim if he didn’t act. It doesn’t really matter what was Root’s reasoning, in this case, not now, at least – John is pretty sure it was only pure revenge on her part, and he won’t begrudge her that. What matters is that it could lead him to Finch.

**Barbara Russell:** "They just arrive from all over the country. No note, no sender. Like someone just wants to be cruel."

There’s no "like" in this sentence. Someone does want to be cruel. That, if nothing else in this situation, is something John can heartfully comprehend.

**John Reese:** "She’s not done yet."

He learned a lot from the CIA – from his short time in the police, even – but that was only honing a natural skill, so to say. John is really, really good at seeing the lie, at knowing when something isn’t said – but people hide so much, so often, it’s not always an useful skill. This time, though...

**Frank:** "Think it's time for a rematch. Don't think you're gonna sucker punch me again."

Well, too bad. He's already doing it.

**Joss Carter:** "Why is there a crossbow on the bed?"

Ah, damn, Carter's back. He’d have liked to keep the crossbow – no, seriously, not the most inconspicuous weapon, but cool as all hell.

**Joss Carter:** "Only child. Her mother died about ten years ago. So Sam left town, was never heard from again. If anybody's Root, it's gotta be her."
There. That's why he took Carter along – because John was so focused on getting to Root, that he didn't see the possibility that she isn't Hanna Frey. He went with one plausible explanation, and neglected the rest – which, by the way, still got him closer to Root. He does know where to go... But thanks to the detective, he can think more clearly.

**John Reese:** "Tap code. Finch... Really?"

For a man who's not expecting any help, Finch sure does do what he can to be found.

**Harold Finch:** "I really didn't intend for you to come and find me, Mr. Reese. There are other people that need your help."

Maybe. Except that, even if Finch... even if Harold decided he wasn't, the older man still is part of those "people". And he did leave a message in tap code.

**John Reese:** "Harold, meet Bear."

Right, he's going to have to explain the dog...

**Root:** "I wanted to thank you... for finding my friend Hanna... giving her a proper burial. I won't forget it."

If only it could stop here. If now that Root's revenge has been entirely carried out – it didn't end with Trent Russell's death, but with the truth being revealed – she could decide to change. Not even becoming someone good, not even stopping her criminal activities entirely, but simply... Simply being a bit less inhumane. But it won't happen, will it? Root isn't going to see reason, not now, not anymore. John knows that. And that knowledge takes away any sympathy he could have for her.

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