Shaw’s Army

by madlaw

Summary

Shaw’s been taken by Samaritan. Root’s going to rescue her no matter the consequences.

The story is pretty much canon compliant through If-Then-Else. But then it takes a darker turn. Please read the tags.

Let me know what you think. I hope you think the journey worthwhile in the end.
The First Step

Chapter Summary

“Glasses? What are you doing here?”

Finch looks up to see Fusco staring down on him. “That’s a very good question detective.” Fusco rolls his eyes. “Why is it you people can never answer a simple question without going all mysterious? Come on, wonder boy’s inside.”

Root never believed anything would come between her and the Machine. She also never thought she could feel so achingly bereft as the moment Harold refused to help her keep searching for Shaw.

But long before she found either of them, Root made her way in the world on her own terms. She’s brilliant, tenacious, and ruthless. She allowed herself to be tamed because she finally found a being not susceptible to the bad code riddling the world. One capable of making perfect choices. An upgrade to human beings.

But when she fell in love with Shaw she found something even more amazing. They function as a binary program transformation system, first parsing, then fixing and improving each other’s source code. They branched and merged producing a new and more elegant program.

At least that’s how she tried to explain it to the Machine. But although She understands the neurological composition of love, pheromones, dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin, oxytocin and vasopressin, She does not understand the paradox of love...its supreme freedom with bonds stronger than death. She does not understand the all-consuming physical pain in Root without Shaw.

While recovering from her wounds, Root begins to sketch the outline of a plan. One that will bring Shaw back to her and destroy Samaritan. One the Machine and Harold cannot ignore.

A few months later, John walks into the subway and finds Finch at his laptop muttering to himself. He looks bedraggled, like he hasn’t slept in days. “Finch.” He looks up startled. “Mr. Reese.”

“Well look there is Mr. Reese. The Machine has noted certain ‘anomalies’ for lack of a better term, but has been unable to identify the cause.”

Reese pauses and asks the next logical question. “What kind of anomalies?”

Finch sighs. “That’s the problem Mr. Reese. What the Machine sees is a decrease in Samaritan’s effectiveness. It seems someone or something else has risen to oppose it.”

John looks at Finch but when he doesn’t elaborate he asks the obvious. “Is that a bad thing?”
Finch cocks his head in thought. “That depends on whether the aim is to defeat Samaritan or replace it.”

The next day Finch arrives at the subway with Bear. As they walk towards the subway car Bear starts to whine and sniff, almost as if searching for someone. Finch looks around but doesn’t see any cause for Bear’s behavior. He probably smells a rat on the tracks.

Later that day the Machine alerts Finch to a new nautilus sign, but Finch is puzzled. The coordinates land on the shadow map. Why would Samaritan lead a potential recruit to a blind spot? It also seems unlikely Samaritan would reuse the same puzzle.

Finch decides to investigate, suspecting it may be Claire Mahoney trying to reach out. When he reaches the location he finds Claire. “Claire? What's happened to you?”

She has deep bags under her eyes and her clothes look like she’s been sleeping on the street. Torn, dirty, and smelly. “The people behind the Nautilus game were worse than anything I could’ve imagined. They used me. But with your help, maybe I can break free.”

Before Finch can reply, a sniper takes a shot at Claire, clipping her shoulder. “They found me! Please help me!” Finch helps her but balks at installing a USB drive purportedly containing a chunk of Samaritan’s core code. Claire pleads ignorance of the entity by which she was recruited.

In Claire’s desperation to convince him, she calls him by name. Since Finch never told her his name, he realizes his caution was merited. Claire realizes her mistake and pulls a gun. Two cars with Samaritan agents arrive, taking Finch into custody.

On the highway, two vans hem the cars together, forcing them onto an off ramp. A team of ten wearing masks and armed with assault rifles rescue Finch after a brief fire fight, but Claire is killed. Finch’s sedated before he realizes it and wakes in front of the 8th precinct.

“Glasses? What are you doing here?” Finch looks up to see Fusco staring down on him. “That’s a very good question detective.” Fusco rolls his eyes. “Why is it you people can never answer a simple question without going all mysterious? Come on, wonder boy’s inside.”

Finch updates Reese. “Unfortunately, my phone and laptop are now with Samaritan.” Reese raises his eyebrows in concern. “Not to worry. I feared it might be a trap. There’s nothing on them that could lead Samaritan back to us.”

Back at Samaritan headquarters Greer’s surprised to receive Finch’s computer and phone. Claire was always ambitious. It seems she attempted to execute a plan of her own design to advance in the ranks of Samaritan’s soldiers. Greer smiles. “The poor girl actually thought she could succeed in capturing Harold Finch on her own. What arrogance.” Martine laughs.

<TAKE THE ITEMS TO RESEARCH FOR ANALYSIS>
Root walks through the compound her keen eyes observing everything. Dust kicks up around her and she feels sweat trailing down her back. The sun is brutal today and there’s no breeze to alleviate the heat. She nods to the men and women she passes on the way to her office.

She stands still for the biometric scan and then inputs her code. The key code changes daily and only three people besides her have access.

It’s nothing more than a square box with a bathroom and no windows. One side is taken up with a bank of computer servers and a single laptop. Daizo, Daniel, and Greenfield are working on their own laptops on the other side of the room.

“Any progress?” It's a question she asks at least once a day. Daniel stops what he’s doing and looks up. “We’ve eliminated several of the possible locations we’d considered, but we haven’t found her.” Root just nods.

Over the last few months the boys have realized Root is not the person they knew. There’s no laughter in her eyes. It’s been replaced by a cold and calculating look, constantly assessing and reevaluating options.

Only Daniel is truly unafraid of Root. Despite all he’s done and all he’s seen, Daniel possesses an untouched innocence. He believes Root will never hurt him no matter how many times she tries to make him understand. She will sacrifice everything and everyone to find Shaw.

Their group has grown from a few dozen to almost a thousand. They started out as a guerilla force, but now they’re more like an army. Root liberated their current compound from a group of anti-government survivalists. Little did they know Root is a bigger threat to the government than they could ever hope to be.

She leads well. With focus and strength. But no one is allowed close. She eats and sleeps alone and is always armed and on her guard. Every waking moment is spent evaluating new intelligence, considering options, and executing operations, which she leads herself.

So far they’ve eradicated three Samaritan bases. Every Samaritan operative is eliminated. Root takes no prisoners for both practical and personal reasons. She can’t afford to divert resources to guard and feed them and the risks increase exponentially to her operation if someone were to escape and inform Greer of her location.

It’s also people like them that allow Samaritan to thrive and grow. In truth most of them would not surrender even if given the chance. Samaritan guarantees to take care of their families if they die. If they’re captured Samaritan will eliminate them and their families get nothing.

She thought the Machine would attempt to thwart her efforts, either because Root’s prioritized finding Shaw over the Machine’s mission or because her methods involve the unequivocal execution of her enemies. But She remains silent and un-involved. Root would persist regardless but she knows it will certainly mean her death, and more importantly failure, if the Machine decides to oppose her.

She’s had a lot of time to think over the last few months. She’s developed a sense of value to her life separate and apart from her service to the Machine. She’s grown more cautious and less impulsive in her fights. In part because she no longer has the Machine whispering in her ear and in part because
she intends to stay alive. Finch was right. There's more to look forward to than death.

She will find Shaw and then she will convince her once and for all they belong together. But even if she doesn’t, Root will not leave her again. She will stay by her side and accept whatever Shaw can or wants to give. She shakes herself loose of her thoughts and decides its time.
When you find that one person who connects you to the world, you become someone different. Someone better. When that person's taken from you, what do you become then?

The subway smells like gun powder and dog. It’s cold. Root’s surprised to find she missed it. But memories of spending time here with Shaw are too painful and she refocuses on her mission.

“Ms. Groves…I am so relieved to see you’re well.” Hearing Finch’s voice, Reese steps out from the subway car where he was cleaning his gun. “Root.” His face remains impassive, but there’s a smile in his eyes.

“Hi Lurch. Harry.”


When you find that one person who connects you to the world, you become someone different. Someone better. When that person's taken from you, what do you become then?

Finch walked away from Grace, but she’s alive. He keeps up with her life and makes sure she’s safe and happy. Reese and Root don’t have that luxury. Reese lost both Jessica and Carter. His actions in the wake of his losses were not any different from Root’s now. He certainly isn’t going to judge her for them.

“I have a plan. I need you both to help me.” Finch looks at her warily and Reese just waits.

“I’ve uncovered the location of all of Samaritan’s key server farms in the US. So far there are only a few overseas. I have the personnel and the resources to destroy them. But I need people to trust. I need you. I need you both.” Reese looks at Finch. “Ms. Groves…what do you mean destroy? Is the Machine helping you?”

Root sighs and looks at him cynically. “By destroy I mean raze them to the ground. I'm also in the process of developing a virus to deploy at Samaritan headquarters, which will eradicate it from any networked device in the world. It’s time to be proactive instead of reactive. We need to take the fight to them.”

Before she can answer his question about the Machine, he’s distracted by a tone from his computer. He looks down and sees a message. “>HELP HER.” No one is more surprised than Root. But she’ll think about it later. Right now she needs to convince Finch.

“Ms. Groves I’m not sure this course of action is prudent.”

“I have almost a thousand men and women at my command. I recruited them using the app the Machine had me develop. I inseminated a virus in the computer Claire retrieved for Samaritan. When it was busy trying to trace you, a polymorphic virus was uploaded to its system, which gave
me the server farm locations and personnel files.”

“So Claire was a tool you employed.”

“Yes. She thought Samaritan had sent her on a mission to entrap you.”

“It was your people that rescued me.”

“Yes.”

“Did you have Claire killed?”

“Yes. If she revealed her belief Samaritan had sent her on the mission, it would have alerted it to the duplicity and it would have likely discovered the virus. I couldn’t take the chance of that happening.”

“Ms. Groves your actions represent a moral attrition I cannot excuse. No matter the motive, you murdered Claire. I cannot be involved and I urge you strongly to reconsider how far you’re willing to go to find Ms. Shaw.”

“So come work with me and help ensure it doesn’t happen again. It’s not just about finding Shaw. I need your help with the coding Harry. We can defeat Samaritan together.” Finch looks extremely troubled and adamant. Root’s not surprised. His self-righteousness is nothing new.

“Samaritan has virtually unlimited resources. Governments working unwittingly at its behest. Operatives around the globe protecting it. You know how many we had? Five. Six if you count the dog. And that includes Sameen. But now I have an army.

So what are you going to do Harold? Keep hiding? Work irrelevant numbers? Allow Samaritan’s influence to spread until it covertly controls the world? Do you really think humanity will be better off? We’ve tried it your way for years. We failed. In fact, your way is what allowed Samaritan to come into being. If we had killed one person, the Congressman, Samaritan wouldn’t exist. But now you want to wipe your hands like Pontius Pilate and refuse to accept responsibility for what you’ve done?”

Harold looks away from her, but doesn’t respond.

“You can’t stop what’s coming Harry. I once told you the future was racing towards us. Well it’s here. You set events in motion when you created the Machine. You started this war in more ways than one, but I will finish it. With or without you.

I’ll come back tomorrow and you can let me know what you’ve decided…Bye John.” Root turns around and leaves without another word, Finch staring after her.

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Reese considers Root’s proposal. “I think we should help her.” Harold looks surprised. “Mr. Reese, Root has regressed. She’s unpredictable. Her willingness to hurt others makes her as dangerous as ever. I’m not sure we should enable her. If we do, how will we be any different from Samaritan?”

“Well, we can continue to hide or we can fight. She’s going to keep looking for Shaw regardless.
We can be there to influence her or we can leave her to her own devices. Root doesn’t want to replace Samaritan. She’ll leave the Machine to work as you see fit.

But if Shaw is dead, Root will burn everything and everyone to the ground. Do you want to see what a vengeful Root will do? Especially when you can prevent it? You guided her back from the darkness once, you can do it again.”

Finch is far from convinced. “Mr. Reese she murdered Claire…just a few days ago. We’re not talking about her distant past. And I am sure there will be many more deaths before she’s done.”

"You're right, there will be death. Most of the deaths will be Samaritan operatives. But even if they are just obeying orders, they're responsible. Our friend is gone. By taking orders without question, those operatives have caused the deaths of hundreds of innocents. Remember the bomb Greer set off in the courthouse? All the people executed when Samaritan came online because they wanted to expose the truth? They deserve what's coming to them."

John’s said all he’s going to say on the matter. Finch will have to decide for himself.

Root returns to the hotel she booked near the subway. It’s dingy but clean.

She’s not sure if she wants Finch’s help. Dealing with his self-righteous bullshit might be more trouble than it’s worth. But there’s no doubt his coding skills will be extremely useful. He did build the first artificial super intelligence after all.

She feels drained emotionally and physically. The emotional roller coaster won’t end until she finds Shaw, but she needs to address her body’s physical needs before she becomes a danger to Shaw’s army. That’s how Root refers to the people she recruited to find Shaw and end Samaritan.

Shaw’s army is not an all purpose fighting force. Their existence is limited in duration and scope. They have two specific goals. Find Shaw and destroy Samaritan. Once that’s done they will be disbanded, free to live their lives in peace.

Leading also involves more than strategic battle planning. She needs to keep her troops motivated and engaged. She spends huge amounts of money providing the best food and accommodations possible in the middle of nowhere. She also provides the most technologically advanced weaponry. It’s the best way to ensure they do not become demoralized.

Thus far Elias and Dominic have been able to obtain all the necessary hardware. Their access to the illicit arms trade makes them extremely effective.

She throws herself on top of the bed and her mind inevitably returns to Shaw. She will find her or she’ll leave nothing but scorched earth in her wake. If she’s dead, Root will have her revenge and then end it. She will not live without Shaw.

Although the Machine sent Finch the message to help her, She has not communicated with Root. Root’s not sure she wants Her to. She knows Shaw was never comfortable with Root’s relationship with Her and she considers, not for the first time, whether she wants to remove her implant.

Root’s certain she will choose Shaw over the Machine every time. That’s what she’s been doing ever since Shaw was taken and that’s never going to change, no matter the consequences. Whether
that means she will cease to be the analog interface or not is uncertain. She never thought she would be indifferent to the question. But all she can think about is Shaw. She decides to wait until she finds her. If Shaw prefers it, Root will remove the implant.

She orders food to be delivered from Shaw’s favorite local steakhouse. She has a steak and baked potato. Although she only eats half of it, she needs the protein. When she’s done she goes downstairs and gives the rest away to the first homeless person she comes across. She doesn’t have to walk far, he was across the street. She returns to her room to try to get some sleep and eventually drifts off into a troubled slumber.

As usual she dreams of Shaw, but they’re not comforting. It’s always a variation of the same. Shaw on the floor in a pool of blood. Shaw tortured by Martine and Lambert. Shaw at Samaritan’s mercy. She wakes up gasping a few hours later. There’ll be no more sleep tonight.

As Root showers she considers what she’ll do if Finch refuses to come work with her. She has a backup plan, but she’d infinitely prefer not having to use it. But she will if it comes to that. If she blows Finch and Reese’s cover, they’ll have to turn to her for protection. There will be nowhere for them to hide. It will also provide Finch additional motivation to help Root with the code. If only to save Reese’s life.

She knows if…actually when…Finch discovers her betrayal he will never speak to her again. But if she has Shaw it won’t matter. If she fails it also won’t matter. She won’t be here to care.

She checks in with Daniel. “Anything new?” She can tell by Daniel’s hesitation there’s nothing to report so she doesn’t wait for verbal confirmation. “Tell Dani to increase the patrols until I make it back tonight.” She hangs up without saying goodbye.

Dani and Cal are in charge of security and training. But there are now too many fighters for them to be able to manage alone. Plus their background in law enforcement only goes so far. Root needs the skills of someone with a military background. She needs Reese.

His service in the army and subsequent work for the CIA gives him a unique combination of skills. Not only can he organize and train a military squad, he can also train a select few for spec ops. Grice and Stanton have the necessary skills as well, but she doesn’t trust them with training or command decisions.

Although Grice is loyal, she simply does not know him well and is unwilling to risk compromising her search. Stanton, she knows, is only loyal to the money. Had she known up front she would never have recruited her, but now the only way she can let her go is in a body bag. Contrary to Finch’s belief, she does not make those decisions lightly.

Which is why Collier and Blackwell act as her shadow. They are assigned to every mission with Stanton. If it comes to it, Collier and/or Blackwell will kill her. They are zealously committed to their cause.

Zoe and Harper continuously uncover critical intelligence, but they operate overtly even when they stay in the shadows. Their lives are always at risk. It will take just one of Samaritan lackey’s suspicions to expose one or both of them. They need people to gather information covertly.

She needs someone to act as her general so she can focus on the search. There’s no one she trusts
more than Reese. Plus she’s tired of being alone. Despite all their differences, Reese and Finch are family. She needs them more than ever.

She knows she’s been stalling. It’s time to face the music. It’s already 7am. Both Reese and Finch are probably at the subway already. Reese gets up at dawn every morning. He says he never got out of the habit after he left the army. And Harold seems to always be at the subway. Some days Root’s sure he sleeps there.

She takes a deep breath and gathers the few things she brought with her. As she walks through Chinatown she realizes she misses the city. The restaurants and grocery stores where you can get any type of food at any time of day or night and you can always find people out and about no matter what time it is. She even misses the smell of exhaust constantly shrouding it.

Sometimes when she was lonely and still had the Machine, she would walk around and She would tell her about the people passing by. But that was the past. She needs to focus on the future and maybe one day she can come back here with Shaw.

When she walks into the subway, Bear greets her eagerly. She bends down to pet him, but even he’s a reminder that Shaw is missing. Shaw loves Bear and it’s the one love she’s not afraid to show. Shaw would spend hours playing fetch and walking with him in the park.

She looks up and Finch is staring at her somberly. “What’s it going to be Harry? Are you in or out?” Although she’s pretty sure she already knows the answer.

“I’m sorry Ms. Groves but how can I go with you when I know with almost absolute certainty that bad things will happen?” Predictable.

“Bad things will happen regardless Harold. The question is, are you gonna let them happen to your friends?” Guilt is the last weapon in Root’s arsenal. If this doesn’t work, plan b might be inevitable.

Reese walks in before Finch responds. He’s carrying a bag. It’s the type he and Shaw use for weapons. “Finch. Root.” His greetings are always succinct. If he elects to speak in complete sentences it means he’s deadly serious.

“Hey John. Harold was just about to give me his final answer.” Like Root, Reese expects Finch to refuse her request. Despite his belief people can change and learn from their mistakes, he’s never managed to escape his dogmatic nature.

“I’m sorry Ms. Groves. The answer is no.” Root turns to leave without another word. But the words she hears next cause her to pause and turn around.

“I’m going with her Finch.” Finch looks shocked, although not as shocked as Root. If she has Reese she doesn’t need plan b. He doesn’t say anything else. He spoke his peace yesterday. He heads toward the exit with Root following.
Tick Tock

Chapter Summary

As they turn to walk back to her office, they both hear a voice behind them. “I want to know what qualifies her to tell us how to fight.” John turns immediately and starts to move toward the ignorant young man. Trent. He’s an excellent soldier and a good leader but he has so much to learn. Starting now.

But if there’s a lesson to be taught, Root will be the teacher.

Chapter Notes

Shaw makes her first appearance in this chapter and there is explicit detailing of the torture she’s currently being subjected to...see the tags. I’ve blocked it off with two underlines at the start and at the end so if you want to skip it you can. To summarize that story line, Shaw's being psychologically tortured and she's not sure how much longer she can hold out.

Please let me know what you think!

They walk in silence to Root’s jeep and drive away. Root’s not sure where to start. “Thank you.” John cocks his head. “He’s wrong,” he says simply. “Read me in.”

Root tells him about the army. “I need you to take responsibility for training and command decisions in the field if I’m not there or unreachable. I also need your counsel John. Not just for battle strategy.” She knows John understands what she means. He nods once.

“I’ll leave you to develop your own opinions about the people now in key positions. I don’t want to bias you and you might see something I don’t. It’s completely at your discretion to keep them or find new people.

But John you need to know some things are not negotiable. Finding Shaw comes first, every Samaritan operative must be eliminated, and no one leaves us without a body bag.” She knows she doesn’t have to explain further. Reese doesn’t answer right away and Root’s glad he’s taking time to consider her words.

“I’ve killed a lot of people for much less worthy reasons.” They stop a couple of times to refuel and grab something to eat and arrive at the compound before nightfall.

Shaw doesn’t remember how they got her out of the stock exchange or even the first few days
afterwards. She’s sure it was touch and go for awhile since she was shot four times, once in her gut. She wakes in agonizing pain strapped to a hospital bed and attached to monitors and IVs.

Her first word is Root. Just saying her name out loud is comforting. But they immediately pump her full of morphine again. They keep her so high she's hallucinating. In her more lucid moments she realizes by the time they’re done with her she’ll be addicted. Withdrawal is going to be a bitch.

She looses all track of time. Her mind weaves a fantasy world with Root. Always Root. Sometimes other people appear but they're never as vivid. Root flirting, smiling, touching. And talking, she's always talking. But in the alternate reality Shaw doesn’t push her away, she pulls her closer. Seems to work out better. She’ll have to remember that if she survives.

She can tell they’re weaning her off the morphine because she can think clearly for the first time in weeks, maybe months. Her first thought is still the same. Root. Her bullet wounds are mostly healed and she isn’t in such agonizing pain. But she’s already in withdrawal and she knows what’s coming won’t be pretty. She’s nauseous and experiencing periodic muscle spasms.

But apparently the real fun is only just getting started.

A Samaritan lackey comes in and looks at her. She’s still pretty effectively strapped to the gurney so all she does is watch. He injects something into the IV and she feels herself drifting. When she comes to she’s dressed in white scrubs and she’s in a block shaped cell, approximately three feet by six feet although the ceiling is probably 20 feet high. The walls are smooth with no windows and everything is creamy white. The only thing in the cell is a white plastic bucket which is clearly the toilet.

The room must be soundproofed because all she can hear is the sound of her breathing and the periodic screeches that bombard the room. *No rest for the wicked.*

The door doesn’t have a knob. She’s not sure where it is since no outline is visible.

After what she can only guess is a few hours, two guards come in with food. White rice on a white paper plate with water in a white paper cup. The water infused with a protein powder so it too is white. They don’t even give her a spork to work with. Smart. She can think of several ways it would be useful in her escape.

The guards are dressed completely in white. They wear footwear designed to muffle sound so their steps are barely discernible. They don’t speak. *Maybe they practice Santeria.*

It almost comical. Their eyes are mostly shielded behind a white transparent coating. *Or maybe they were in charge of wardrobe for Gravity.* Shaw would laugh if she didn’t understand what this is and how effectual it can be. Most likely will be.

She immediately begins to plan her escape. She needs to do this while she is still relatively strong. She can take two guards in her sleep. She waits, staring at the door and planning her attack. Eventually the door quietly opens and a different set of guards walk in with her food. She lunges at the one closest to her and receives the shock of her life. Literally.

The shock is so strong it drives her to her knees instantly. She looks up and spots a cylindrical fixture in the corner next to a tiny camera (white). It seems like the shock emanated from there. She tries to stand up and receives another shock. So she stays put until the guards leave. She tentatively stands and no shock is forthcoming. *I guess I’m free to move around the cabin.*

She studies the device. No doubt it’s a Samaritan invention. *Patent pending.* With a 20 foot ceiling
though she can’t exactly reach it. Shaw doesn’t do panic but if ever there was a time, this is it. Oh yeah and the artificial light never goes out, although at least it’s dim. *Probably a 40 watt bulb.* She’s noticed the temperature never seems to vary. It’s around 75 degrees.

Greer is trying to break her with sensory deprivation and isolation. Shaw was trained by the marines to resist this type of ‘white’ torture before she was stationed in the Middle East. It’s particularly common in Iran. The fact Shaw doesn’t feel the way other people do will help her. But over the long term everyone breaks. Everyone.

Her confinement during training lasted two weeks and it’s the worst thing she’s ever experienced. Some of the spec ops guys washed out and were discharged. It’s worse than being shot, electrocuted, burned, or cut.

Most people have never been so close to walls in their entire life. Shaw’s been in tunnels that were roomier. At first you pace. When you get dizzy from the pacing you lean on a wall. After a few hours you sit. It feels like you’re being physically held…in a coffin. After a few days in absolute silence the average person breaks.

Shaw estimates she may be able to hold out for three months and then she’ll bang her head against the wall until she’s too damaged to be of any use.

But survival comes with its own price. Discipline will be key. She needs a routine.

Exercise will help. The cell gives her just enough room so she can do pushups and sit-ups. But to fight the silence she’ll need to talk to herself and after awhile that causes its own problems like paranoia, disordered thinking, panic attacks, among others.

If they decide to interrogate her periodically she’ll be able to hold out longer. It’s a paradox. But the interrogations by necessity involve sound, touch, movement. *Somehow I doubt I’ll be that lucky.* Samaritan has time in abundance and unlike human beings it doesn’t suffer from impatience.

Shaw’s not one for praying but it’s true there are no atheists in fox holes. *Root if I ever needed one of your ‘just in the nick of time’ rescues. This is it.* Shaw knows Root will come. She knows Root started looking for her immediately and she will not stop until she finds Shaw. The only question is what will she find when she gets here?

Shaw starts with pushups.

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Root’s losing patience with Reese. They need to be able to carry out coordinated attacks simultaneously to find Shaw soon. It’s been weeks. Time is running out. Root feels it in her bones. She needs to find her. But Reese says he needs more time to get everyone through even basic training. They’ve only taken out another seven of Samaritan’s bases, with dozens still to go.

Root sees the door to her office open and he walks in looking haggard and by the look on his face he’s not bringing good news. Root gave him access to every room in the compound and everyone now understands he’s second in command.

He really has taken on a huge amount of the responsibilities Root previously shouldered and it’s allowed her to focus on analyzing any intelligence that might lead to Shaw’s location. It’s unfair to blame him for the slow progress. He’s just one man trying to turn 1000 average people into an
army. From what Root’s seen they’ve come a long way already. Better than she could have hoped really.

But she needs to make the impossible happen. She’ll find a way for Shaw.

“Root.” John slumps into a chair in front of her desk, which is unusual for him. Even in the worst of times his posture’s usually straight, like the stick up his ass. Uncharitable Root knows, but she tries not to take out her frustration on anyone, knowing it’s important to keep up morale. So rude thoughts are all she has.

“Oh John, what’s up?” Root’s stopped calling him Lurch and Big Lug ever since he gave up his life (such as it was) to find Shaw. Although occasionally she still calls him wonder boy. (Stole that one from Lionel.)

“I’ve been focused on advanced training for the last few weeks with about 100 of the most promising recruits, while Dani and Cal focused on the basic training. I think they’re ready. We should be able to hit 10 smaller bases simultaneously right away.” In essence they have the equivalent of an army company but he knows Root’s preference for not using military terms.

Root shoots up. She was wrong. He did come bearing gifts. “I’ll narrow down the most promising bases right away.” John looks at Root. She’s paler than ever and her already lean frame has gotten skinnier. John knows she’s probably down to 5% fat and physically stronger than ever thanks to their daily sparring. But she can’t go on like this much longer.

She’s sleeping only four or five hours a night holed up in her office looking for any trace of Shaw. Her only breaks are for sparring and the jogs she’s been taking around the base. Root was never much for running but Shaw runs (ran?) every day and she says it makes her feel closer to her.

John’s had to stop her several times from going out on covert intelligence missions and he’s only succeeded by playing on her need to find Shaw. She’s simply too well known to even the rank and file of Samaritan’s operatives. John knows Root understands the danger and it’s only her desperation to find Shaw that sometimes overrides her brain.

“Root, Daniel and the boys can do that. He knows just as much as you do about Samaritan’s operations. I need you to come evaluate the sections for yourself. I want you to meet the leaders of each since you’ll be in command of the missions.”

John doesn’t really need her, although it’s a good idea, but he knows it’ll help alleviate her stress and put her in a better mindset to go out in the field. She insists on going with one of the sections even though he keeps trying to dissuade her. But short of drugging her, there’s no way for him to stop her.

Plus he can’t keep her drugged for the days it will take for each section to reach their target. Even if he held her back initially, she’d just follow. If he drugs her in the field she’ll never forgive him and that will have long-term consequences he’s not willing to risk. He can’t help if he’s dead and heaven help them if Root goes off the deep end. She’s already teetering on the brink.

Root sighs but agrees. “Fine. Let me give Daniel the update and the parameters he should focus on.” It’s better than John expected. He waits for her to finish with Daniel and they walk out to the training field he’s been using for the elite (term used loosely) sections.

“Let me get the officers up here.” His tone is polite but firm and the ten officers (basically sergeants but he has to call them something!) walk over immediately. Root looks askance at the title but doesn’t say anything.
She’s not surprised to see Cal, Dani, and Grice among the group, but is shocked to see Stanton. John knows the issue with her and its unfathomable he’d appoint her to lead one of the teams. They will be discussing it shortly. She doesn’t care if she’s John’s former partner. His only loyalty should be to their mission.

Root only knows the rest of them by sight. She personally recruited them, not trusting anyone else to do the job, but there’s too many of them to remember specific details or facts. She already has Greenfield working on a dossier for each of these men and women. She will review them all personally before they leave over the next few days.

The departure of the sections must be staggered. Both to not draw attention to their compound and to have each team arrive at the target site shortly before the planned attack times. It significantly decreases the chances of something going wrong.

She nods at them and then explains the exact nature of the missions. “Each of you will lead a section targeting a Samaritan base. Every room must be cleared before the facility is destroyed.

You will search carefully for Sameen Shaw first, eliminating every person you come across. Every one. If you jeopardize our mission by leaving anyone alive you will answer to me.

You were given several pictures of Shaw when you were recruited. I know some of you know her personally, but for those who don’t, take them with you. Needless to say if you find her, her safety becomes that section’s only priority.

Once she’s out of the immediate line of fire, contact me instantly for further instructions. Finding her is the only instance, if necessary, that you may leave a base without eliminating everyone or destroying the compound.

Every Samaritan operative you come across must be eliminated. If, in your discretion, you believe someone may have information pertinent to Shaw’s location, you will secure them and contact John immediately. He will conduct the interrogation wherever you are.

Under no circumstances are you to bring anyone back to our base. No one else. Ever. If you find Martine, Jeremy, or Greer you will contact me immediately after you have secured them. You have their pictures as well.

You all know the risk your taking. I know your motivations for being here are probably different from mine and John’s, but no matter the reason, I will be eternally in your debt. Some of you may not be coming back, but no one will be left behind. You will not be forgotten and these are not empty words. I know most of you don’t have families, but if you do, they will be taken care of for the rest of their lives.

Both John and I will be accompanying a different section each. We will decide later which ones. You will be given your target when it is time to depart. Please update your sections immediately and prepare for deployment. John’s right sometimes it’s just easier to use military jargon. I won’t tell him that though. Direct any issues to John. Thank you.”

Reese is impressed. Root struck the exact tenor necessary to instill confidence in the officers.

As they turn to walk back to her office, they both hear a voice behind them. “I want to know what qualifies her to tell us how to fight.” John turns immediately and starts to move toward the ignorant young man. Trent. He’s an excellent soldier and a good leader but he has so much to learn. Starting now.
But if there’s a lesson to be taught, Root will be the teacher. She grips John’s arm to stop him.

Root walks over to him and the rest of the officers make room. “Trent right?” He nods arrogantly. Root smirks but it doesn’t reach her eyes. Reese knows that look and Trent is about to be schooled. “I’m going to throw a right cross at you, use your momentum to turn you around and choke you out. I can’t make it any easier for you. You’re going to try to stop me.”

Trent’s look definitely says Root’s a fool. “Ready?” Trent nods. They’ve drawn a crowd and a loose circle forms around them.

Root throws a right cross. Trent tries to block the punch with his left hand but he’s too slow and only manages to deflect so it hits him on his cheek bone instead of the side of his head. Root’s entire body was behind the punch and Trent can’t help but twist his upper body to the right.

Root pushes him the rest of the way with her right forearm, immediately bringing her left around his neck and locking her arms. Trent struggles trying to dislodge her arm with his hands but within a few seconds he’s out cold and Root cushions his fall to the dusty ground.

There are some murmurs from those watching but no one dares to laugh.

Root didn’t maintain the hold for long and she knows he’ll come around in a minute. He comes to and shakes his head as if to clear it, bracing himself with an elbow on the ground. There’s blood dripping down his face from Root’s punch. Root crouches next to him. “You okay?”

He nods yes sheepishly, too embarrassed to speak. “Good, because we’re not done.” She helps him to his feet.

Grice smiles and shakes his head. He was trained by Shaw and he recognizes the combination Root just used. Shaw would be proud.

Trent brushes himself off as an excuse to not meet anyone’s gaze. “What did you learn?”

It obvious he doesn’t know what she’s looking for. “Uh…to think before I speak?” He smiles ruefully. Root just shakes her head and rolls her eyes. “What you should have learned is not to waste time trying to break a choke hold with your hands.

You can also throw yourself down or to the side, more than likely bringing your opponent with you. Maybe you knock the wind out of them and follow up with an elbow to the nose. Or maybe just run.” At that Root hears quiet laughter.

“If you’re strong enough, and no Trent you’re not, you may be able to flip your opponent over your head by tucking into yourself and using your back muscles as leverage to pull.”

Trent’s looks upset but he also looks like he’s listening. “Any one of those alternatives beats flailing your hands uselessly at the arms around your neck.”

Root proceeds to trounce him at the target range until she’s satisfied he’s learned his lesson. Hopefully now he understands the more you know the more you realize you know nothing. Root
loves Socrates. He was so succinct.

She walks away from the training field with a small smile, John next to her. “You earned a lot of respect today. They're willing to die for you.” Root looks at him sadly. “I’d rather they fight for Shaw.” John gives her an understanding look.

She goes back to her office without stopping to change. Daniel looks positively cheerful. “Tell me you found something,” Root asks but doesn’t dare to hope. He starts talking so fast, she struggles to keep up, only understanding every other word.

“They day Shaw was taken Samaritan kidnapped a trauma surgeon from a nearby hospital” He’s out of air and gasps, taking a deep breath. But before he can start up again Root grips his arm gently. “Daniel slow down I can’t understand what you’re saying.”

He takes a few seconds to settle his breathing and starts over. “The day Shaw was taken Samaritan kidnapped a trauma surgeon from a hospital only a few blocks away from the stock exchange. The feeds in the surrounding areas show him being shoved into a car at gunpoint.” Root can’t help but interrupt.

“But the feeds from the stock exchange were corrupted.”

Daniel nods. “Yes, the ones inside were. But the Machine analyzed all the feeds in a five mile radius from the exchange looking for anomalies and tracked the car. It stopped across the street from the exchange.”

Root blurts out with another question. “What do you mean the Machine?” Daniel looks at her, puzzled. “The Machine’s been helping Daizo analyze all the feeds everywhere in the US for any hint of Samaritan activity…I thought you knew.”

Root realizes she can deal with the Machine issue after she learns what Daniel’s so excited about. “Daniel did you find Shaw?!” Daniel hesitates and Root’s heart drops. “Maybe.” Well maybe is more than they had this morning. “Where?”

“At a manufacturing plant in a small town upstate. Maple. The Machine tracked the doctor when he was taken from the exchange. He was on the feeds being shoved back into a different van and that’s where he ended up that day. She did not find any specific feed showing Shaw and She lost sight of the van on the outskirts of the town because camera coverage is almost non-existent.

But none of the feeds showing the roads to and from the town show anything suspicious, though I suppose they could take her out in the back of a truck or something but the Machine deems it unlikely considering the gravity of her injuries.”

“Daniel. What did the Machine say was the likelihood that Shaw is in Maple?”

“87.33%”
White Torture

Chapter Summary

‘I brought you a sandwich Sam.’
‘You think that’s going to make me forget you drugged me?’
‘Yes.’
‘Shut up and give me the sandwich already. It better not have any mayo.’

Shaw develops a routine. At first it’s hard to follow because she’s still suffering the effects of the morphine withdrawal. She has flu-like symptoms and an unrelenting headache. She can’t stop sweating which is causing dehydration. Her heart feels like it’s beating out of her chest and she’s sure she’s had at least one seizure. She does not receive any medical care. Eventually the symptoms abate and she feels better but now her body is weak.

She sticks to her routine. She does 100 pushups, then 100 sit-ups. She jogs in place until she exhausts herself. Then she recounts in excruciating detail her missions and time with Root out loud just to hear the sound. Although she spent a lot of time with Root, eventually she runs out of missions and tries to remember ones with the Marines or the ISA. But those don’t seem to hold her attention long and generally she’s back to Root. She thinks about all their time together and tries to remember every corny, annoying, inuendo-ridden line Root’s ever uttered and the things she thought in response but never said.

‘I read your file and I’m kind of a big fan.’ I have no clue who you are, but I have to admit you’re hot.

‘And just when we were starting to really connect.’ Trust me. We’ll get another chance soon.

‘Did you miss me? Actually yes.

‘I suppose I could be making it up.’ Somehow I don’t think you’d lie to me.

‘The only thing I know for sure is I need you.’ Well, you’ve certainly got my attention.

‘Safety first.’ Somehow I doubt being with you would be safe...then again I like danger.

‘I knew you’d come back for me.’ Well I wanted to make sure you didn’t run out on me again.

‘I couldn’t make you look bad if I tried.’ Right back at ya...

‘I love it when you play doctor.’ You’re my favorite patient.

‘You miss me between drug deals?’ Actually, yes and you look hotter than ever.
'Thanks for being my travel buddy on these errands.' *My pleasure.*

'Yummy as that sounds, you won't be joining me.' *But I'd rather be with you.*

'And as much as I'd love some girl talk...' *Come on, I've missed you. Give me a minute at least.*

'Are you in Shaw?' *Yes, but I wish I was in you instead.*

'Stay the course Sameen.' *As long as you're on it with me.*

'Use your words.' *Only if you let me use my tongue on you later.*

'Didn't know you cared Shaw.' *I've cared for a very long time, but then you know that.*

Looks like someone crawled in under the fence.' *I'd crawl anywhere for you.*

'Admit it, you were worried about me.' *Fuck yes. You should've known I'd come for you. I'll always come for you.*

'I'll do yours if you do mine.' *I'm going to hold you to that promise.*

'For what it's worth, I really like the new look.' *You're looking pretty hot yourself.*

'Check Angler, maybe find a match.' *I already have a match, you.*

'But for now, I need you to make me look good.' *That's too easy.*

'She has a reason for everything. Even if sometimes it requires you to act like a well-adjusted member of society. Trust her.' *I don't. But I trust you.*

'Kiss, kiss to you too.' *If we had time for kisses my tongue would already be in your mouth.*

'No burning questions?' *Yeah, Will you come fuck me tonight?*

'That's what I'm here for.' *I can think of better things to do with our time and they all involve you naked and saying nothing but my name.*

'The Machine wanted me here.' *We finally agree on something.*

'I mean, not hood and zip-ties in a CIA safe house with 10 hours to kill hot. *Nothing will ever be as hot as that.*

'I just couldn't bear it if anyone hurt you. I mean, besides me.' *You're the only one with permission for that.*

'But a line like that would never work...' *Your lines are the only ones that interest me.*

'How's your date?' *You're the only one I date.*

'And is that why you came to see me?' *Yes. You're what I care about most.*

'Look on the bright side, Sameen. I'm pretty sure you just sold your last tube of luminizer.' *I have some ideas for all our free time.*

'So while you may not be scared about what could happen to you the next time, other people are. People who care for you.' *I care about you too.*
'Two hands are better than one." *Only if it's yours.*

'We know it would be impossible to keep you locked up. Against your will, anyway.' *You can lock me up anytime. I'll be good.*

'How's my favorite prisoner?' *Missing you. And worried as fuck you'll get hurt.*

'How's it hanging Sameen?' *If you were here and I was strapping...*

'I do need a favor.' *Anything for you.*

'Hey sweetie, you busy?' *Never for you.*

'Can't a couple of gals take a little break from work to catch up?' *Sure, it we're about to die, you're the one person I'd want to talk to.*

'We're so good at this together. You're gonna realize that someday.' *I already know.*

'Sameen, if you even think I'm gonna let you...' *I love you.*


Then she admits all the things she wishes she'd told her.

*I don't know what to call it but when you're gone there's a weight in the pit of my stomach that doesn't go away until you're back.*

*When you're with me I feel calm in a way I never do when you're not.*

*I get a physical pain in my chest when you're hurt.*

*I want to kill anyone who hurts you.*

*I don't want anyone touching you except me.*

*I like to make you smile.*

*No one's ever made me laugh like you do.*

*Sex with you made me realize everyone else was doing it wrong.*

*I don't mind sharing my food with you.*

*I have fun with you.*

*You're my favorite person to be with.*

*I don't mind when you touch me in public.*

*No one else is allowed to call me Sam or Sameen. From you it just feels right.*

*Whatever I am is yours.*
Afterwords, if she can sleep, she does. She lies on her stomach and closes her eyes, resting her head on her folded arms. It’s the best way she’s found to escape the unrelenting light. Shaw’s always been able to fall right to sleep anywhere. But she’s also a light sleeper. She startles awake every few hours when the screeching comes.

Every single time the guards open the door she tries to escape and without fail is electrocuted by the device in the ceiling. But the shocks provide external stimuli and are helping her stay grounded. The irony does not escape her. Every once in a while they bring her a bucket with sudsy water and a wash cloth and she cleans up. Those days are better, but they’re rare.

Shaw’s good at being alone. Always preferred it. But now she feels something’s missing and she looks and looks and looks but can’t find it or figure out what it is. Intellectually she figures this might be loneliness.

She realizes her mind is slipping when the hallucinations start. At first they’re intermittent and she’s able to distinguish them from reality once she snaps out of it. But those moments of lucidity get shorter all the time.

‘Come on Sameen let me stay the night. You just removed a bullet from my shoulder. Are you really going to kick me out?’
‘One night and you’re sleeping on the couch.’
‘I’m too tall for the couch. I’ll just end up tearing my stitches and you’ll have to sew me up again and I’ll have to stay longer…’
‘Just shut up and get in bed already.’
‘One inch closer and you’ll be sleeping on the sidewalk.’
‘You’re no fun Sam.’
‘Just shut up and go to sleep Root.’

‘I brought you a sandwich Sam.’
‘You think that’s going to make me forget you drugged me?’
‘Yes.’
‘Shut up and give me the sandwich already. It better not have any mayo.’

‘I’m going to taste every inch of you Sameen.’
‘Promises, promi…fuck yes! Right there.’
‘I always keep my promises Sameen. To you anyway.’
‘Shut up, lick more.’

‘What were you thinking Root?! You could’ve died.’
‘I didn’t know you cared Sam. But I’m fine.’
‘Then why are you bleeding on my couch?’
‘I needed an excuse to see you.’
‘Shut up and take off your shirt. Don’t say it…just fucking don’t!’

She’s distantly aware the door opens but she doesn’t move. She’s waiting for Root. The guards
leave her food.

‘Where’ve you been Root? I’m starving!’
‘You know I’m not your personal servant, right?’
‘Whatever. What’d you bring me?’
‘A protein shake, you’re losing too much weight.’
‘What?! Those suck.’
‘Drink this now and I’ll get you a burger later.’
‘Shut up and pass it over.’

‘Sameen you need to stand up.’
‘I’m tired.’
‘Let’s go for a walk.’
‘Shut up and go away.’

"Sir, it’s been 15 weeks. Much more and she’s likely to have a psychotic break. She’s barely eating or moving and she hasn’t tried to escape in over a month. She’s lost a dangerous amount of weight and muscle mass.” Greer studies the monitor and seems satisfied. “Quite true, Stewart. It’s time to transition Ms. Shaw to Phase 2.”

Martine decides to take sadistic pleasure in escorting a broken Shaw to the pre-op room. When she opens the door, Shaw doesn’t move. She’s huddled in a fetal position in the corner of the room. Martine grabs her arm and she screams hoarsely and tries to pull away.

“No! It’s burning, it’s burning…” Martine thinks Shaw’s crying but when she looks there are no tears, just the sounds associated with weeping. Shaw’s so weak and emaciated Martine has no trouble dragging her out of the room.

As Martine hauls her down the corridor, Shaw loses consciousness. Martine checks her pulse and it’s thready. This isn’t nearly as fun as Martine thought it’d be. It’s just a pain in the ass.

“Mr. Greer, the patient will not survive surgery in her current condition. She needs nutrition and hydration. I am also still concerned about implanting a neural device so close to her brain. It may lead to brain damage or death.”

Greer seems unconcerned. “We’ll give her a couple of weeks and I’m sure she’ll be right as rain. Ms. Shaw is quite the fighter.”

Shaw’s allowed a shower for the first time in months. But she’s hypersensitive to the feel of the water on her skin, a consequence of the sensory deprivation. It hurts and she keeps ducking the spray so they put her in a bathtub instead. She still struggles but she’s so weak it’s just an inconvenience as opposed to an actual hindrance.

The sudden freedom from her cell causes sensory overload and her panic attack is so severe they sedate her. When she wakes again she’s in a pale yellow hospital room with a lot of windows. The sun filters through almost sheer curtains dimming the natural light in the space. She closes her eyes tight. The light hurts.

As the sun sets, she opens her eyes again. A computer is monitoring her vitals continuously and an IV drip is delivering some type of fluid. From her medical training she knows it should be some type of nutrition support. The room is quiet except for the silent hum of the a/c unit.
Shaw sees movement out of the corner of her eye but when she turns nothing is there. But someone is coming. She can hear footsteps outside her door. She huddles in a fetal position trying to make herself as small as possible, maybe they won’t notice her. Time passes and no one comes in but she hears the constant footsteps approaching, approaching, approaching…

She knows they’re waiting until she looks away from the door to come in, but she’s not going to let them catch her off guard. Suddenly she sees Root sitting in a chair across from her bed. “Root! What are you doing?! They’re coming, hide!” But Root just smiles. Shaw looks back to the door, sure the handle’s going to move any moment now. Shit. But when she glances back, Root’s gone. She breathes a sigh of relief. At least they won’t get her too.

Root freezes for a minute and then springs into action. She rushes out of her office. John runs after her and realizes she’s heading to the armory. Before she reaches it, John catches up to her. “Root. Stop. You need to think this through.”

Root yanks her arm out of John’s grip. “She’s there John. I’m going to get her. Now.” She’s trembling. After almost two years of waiting for this exact thing, she’s not sure how she feels or how to react. She just needs to movemovemove…"

John wraps his arms around her gently. It’s clumsy and stilted but it’s the only thing he can think of to do. “Root. We’re going to go get Shaw. We’ll leave today. But first we need a plan. We have one shot at this Root. If we fail, we may never see her again.”

Root stops trembling gradually and steps back nodding her head. “You’re right…” She turns and walks back the way she came. John’s not sure she’s completely there, but it’s a start.

A few minutes later they’re huddled in her office discussing options. John instructs the sections to stand down. Their only target now will be Maple. Once they have Shaw, they’ll resume targeting the other bases.

After a lot of arguing and screaming, mostly by Root, they agree on a plan. John and Root will go into Maple undercover. John still has his police credentials and Root’s cover will be as his partner. Their goal is to confirm Shaw is actually being held in the town and locate her.

The Machine tells Daizo Samaritan bought the defunct mill and converted it to some kind of tech company. Daizo’s hacking into their system now to try to find some trace of Shaw and also creating false employee records for the hand-picked team that will accompany Root and Reese.

Grice, Dani, Cal, Collier, and Blackwell will pose as the new employees. A new section, under Trent’s command, will be stationed outside the town should reinforcements be necessary. They can’t afford to risk detection and a huge force would be harder to hide so close to the town.

The team gathers in Root’s office. “This is a search and rescue mission exclusively. We need to locate Shaw and bring her back safely. We’ll kill only if necessary to accomplish our goal. We will take care of the facility in Maple another day. If Shaw’s not in Maple we will leave quietly and return here to regroup.

Everything before now has been a game. But this mission, this is as real as it gets. All of you know and respect Shaw. Some of you owe her your life in one way or another. That’s what Shaw does. She protects. Now we need to protect her.
John is her brother in every way except blood. She is my reason for existing.

I started this campaign to find her and bring her home. John gave up his life and abandoned a dear friend to find her and bring her home. So when I ask you to put her safety above your own, I understand the sacrifice I’m asking you to make.

John and I will give our lives to save her and I ask, should it come to that, and we both die, please bring her home safe. Daniel will know what to do then. If any one of you feels any hesitation whatsoever about giving your life for hers then stay. Please.”

She whispers the last word and it sounds like the plea it is. She looks each one in the eye and no one looks away and no one hides. Root’s sigh fills the room.

Reese steps in, giving Root a chance to compose herself. “Blackwell, make sure you pack your sniper rifle. Trent, get the section ready to move out. Grice will help you. Make sure they’re well-armed and test all the communications equipment. We can’t afford any mistakes.” As an afterthought he adds, “Have them take the missile launcher as well.”

Root needs her best and most trusted people with her, which include Collier and Blackwell. Stanton is no longer a problem she can contain. When John’s done giving orders, she pulls him to the side.

“John, we need to talk about Stanton.” John sighs, but he knows Root is right. “Do you trust her? Because I don’t.” John has been observing Stanton since he arrived at the compound. He made it a point to seek her out and get to know her again.

She seems to be engaged and dedicated to the fight, but John knows better. He can see her constantly assessing and working the angles. She’s made it a point to befriend those close to Root to gain access to more detailed information.

Not that she’s necessarily disloyal or colluding to betray them, but she doesn’t care about anyone except herself. She doesn’t care enough about a cause, this or any other, to be truly committed.

He knows what Root will do if Stanton can’t be trusted. But he won’t risk Shaw or the mission against Samaritan for Stanton. He looks at Root and shakes his head. Root nods once and walks off. “Wait Root. I’ll take care of it.”

But Root’s not going to let him do it. Regardless of where they’ve ended up, she was John’s partner. She saved his life more than once. She knows he will always feel conflicted when he thinks about this moment. She won’t make it any harder. “No John. I’ll do it.”

Root finds her sitting on a bench observing Trent and Grice. Root walks over and Stanton speaks first although she doesn’t look up. “Any particular reason why you benched me?”

Root stares at her. She’s pretty but not beautiful. She’s smart Root knows, but not nearly as clever as she thinks. She’s also dangerous, but not nearly as dangerous as the woman standing before her now.

“I don’t trust you.” Stanton stands slowly and looks at her. “So where does that leave me?” Root looks at her, emotionless. “You’re a liability I can no longer afford.” Before the last word is out of Root’s mouth, Stanton lunges at her.

Root expected the move and sidesteps deftly, using Stanton’s momentum against her and throws her to the ground. Grice looks up at the sound and immediately heads over, Trent and a few others following.
No one except Root and Reese and the guards on duty are allowed to carry weapons in the compound. But as Root walks towards her, Stanton pulls a knife. Root almost laughs. Shaw was a marine and she trained Root how to fight with a knife. This is going to be fun. Root could just shoot her, she is armed (always bring a gun to a knife fight) after all, but that hardly seems fair.

So instead Root immediately moves at a 45° angle to Stanton’s body and pulls her own knife from her hip. She’s taller and her reach is longer so she can afford to take a step back, putting herself out of reach of Stanton’s blade, while staying within striking distance.

Out of the corner of her eye, Root sees the men getting closer intending to intervene. “Stay back boys. I’ve got this.” Her voice is almost joyful.

She watches Stanton’s obsidian eyes, looking for that glimmer, that slight movement saying she’s ready to lunge. Root crouches slightly, keeping her balance, ready to bounce back. She eases forward on her right foot and she sees the moment Stanton realizes Root is toying with her.

Root smiles wide, a maniacal look on her face. “I promise it won’t be easy for you—a slice here, a missing ear, a gouge there, one less eye, and then a nice deep slice across a tendon or artery.” Stanton can’t hide the fear in her eyes.

Root actually laughs and it’s clear it makes Stanton nervous. Sweat forms on her upper lip and her top is clinging to her chest like a participant in a wet t-shirt contest.

Stanton has a reverse grip on her knife with her right hand, her left held high and wide away from her face. Root almost feels sorry for her. Her wrist and throat are exposed as are the knuckles holding the knife. A simple disarming slash and Root can end this in three seconds. But where would the fun be in that?

Grice studies Root. The minute it looks like she’s in any danger he’ll just shoot Stanton. Otherwise, he’ll have to hide from Shaw (he knows she’s alive—nothing kills that cat) for the rest of his life. He was in the midst of preparing for deployment when this fight started so he’s armed, but for now he waits. He doesn’t want to have to hide from Root either.

Shaw taught Root well. Her chin is slightly tucked to protect her throat and her knife leads at the front, at-the-ready, providing a pointed shield. Her left hand is up for defensive action, but her wrist is turned inward, removing the lethal target of the wrist—so if that hand does get slashed, she’s still in the game. It also serves as a shield from a throat or face-slash.

Root’s getting bored waiting for Stanton to make a move. She thrusts quickly, slashing Stanton’s right ear almost delicately. Stanton hisses. Before she can bring her knife hand around Root’s already gone, circling.

A bright red trail of blood runs from Stanton’s ear to her throat and disappears in her shirt. Root doesn’t give her time to blink before she thrusts again almost severing her ear and swiping across to jab at her eye.

Stanton falls to the floor gasping, her ear dangling from her head like an obscene member, blood gushing from her eye. She’s on her knees her knife lying impotently in front of her. Her blood is pooling in the dirt and she’s going into shock.

Root meanders around her slowly and wraps her left arm around her forehead, forcing her head painfully to the left. She whispers into Stanton’s still intact ear. “I always keep my promises,” and thrusts her knife deeply, then slices across both carotid arteries. It’s actually a merciful kill. She’s dead in seconds. It would have taken much longer to bleed out if Root had opted to slit her jugular
The only sound is the wind rustling a tarp used to cover a weapons crate. The men look at her with a mix of awe and fear. Root throws the knife away in disgust (with the blood or with herself she’s not sure) and looks at Grice somberly. “Make sure she’s cleaned up before she’s buried with respect.” Grice nods his head.

Root strips and throws her clothes in the garbage before getting in the shower. She knows there was a moment during the fight where she was enjoying herself. The hot blood spurting, red and thick. The smell of iron in the air.

She thought she’d buried that part of herself deep away from the light of day. She could lie and pretend Stanton left her no choice. But Shaw taught Root never to lie and Root taught Shaw the lies she tells herself are the ones she never really believes. (They were still working on it.)

But the truth is far uglier. Root could have disarmed her easily and killed her quickly and relatively painlessly. But she wanted to hurt someone, anyone, to exorcise the demon she’s felt clawing inside of her since Shaw was taken.

Root cries silently, watching the blood from her body diluted in the water swirling down the shower drain. She hopes John can forgive her because she’s not sure she’ll ever forgive herself.

Greer observes Shaw on the monitor. There is, of course, a camera in the room. “I sincerely hope you managed to get some rest my dear Sameen. You’re going to need it.”

Shaw knows enough to understand she’s on an operating table. Her heart’s beating out of her chest and she gasps. There’s a doctor hovering over her shoulder and Shaw’s breathing hard. “More irrigation please.” Shaw breathes even harder. “Soon you’ll forget it’s even there. You might feel a tiny pinch. Almost done. Just stitching up now.”

Greer and Lambert watch as the operation’s completed. “It appears the operation has been a success,” Greer concludes smugly. The doctor looks up at him. “Sir, implanting an electronic microchip this close to her brain stem is incredibly risky—” But Greer doesn’t let him finish. “Thank you, Doctor. I expect Ms. Shaw to be much more accommodating from here on out. Time to begin phase two.”

Lambert’s curious. “Sir, what was the purpose of the white torture if we were going to implant the chip anyway?” Greer looks at him like the cat that’s captured the canary. “To break her down and make her brain more susceptible to the new neural circuits the chip is meant to create…Samaritan has thought of everything I assure you.”

When Shaw wakes again, Greer is in the room. He’s alone and seems unarmed. Shaw’s still too weak to do anything more than turn towards him. “Ah, you’re awake Ms. Shaw. I’m happy to see you survived the surgery.”

Shaw starts to speak but her voice is gravelly. She clears her throat and starts again. “What have you done to me?” Greer smiles primly. What Shaw wouldn’t do to slice that grin right off his face.
“You should be thankful Ms. Shaw. Samaritan is going to make you normal. Won’t that be wonderful?” Shaw doesn’t give him the satisfaction of answering. “You see the chip in your head will allow me to control certain regions of your brain. With the push of a button I can stimulate the area of your brain, for example, that tells your nerves you’re feeling great pain…or great pleasure.”

Shaw feels a sense of euphoria and suddenly nothing hurts and she feels like she’s floating. After a few minutes it’s gone and she looks at Greer. “We can also make you feel love, sadness, or guilt, or loneliness, as well as many other emotions. Eventually your brain will develop new neural circuits, which will in turn manifest in behavioral changes. Samaritan will fix you my dear Sameen.”

Shaw looks at him and the venom glaring from her eyes is unmistakable. She speaks slowly. “I am not broken.” Greer looks at her as if she’s a naïve child he’s humoring. “I would venture to say the people in your life would disagree. Instead of the cold and aloof person they know, they’ll have someone who can love them back. I suspect Ms. Groves in particular will be so pleased.”

Shaw stills. “Fuck you,” and turns away from him and closes her eyes. The sense of utter euphoria returns and she tries to fight it but it feels so good after all the pain she’s suffered. A vague thought fights to break through.

She knows this chip’s purpose isn’t meant to teach her to love or to ‘improve’ her. They want her to feel so they can control her and use her against her team and the Machine, against Root. But she’s drawn back under before she can figure out a way to fight it.
Dead Men Walking

Chapter Summary

But Wick yanks her towards him, grabbing her ass while pressing his body up against hers. “Don’t be coy. I don't like coy.” A blinding rage rises in Root. No one touches her body like that except Shaw. No one. She pushes away and punches him before she’s thought it through. He falls unconscious to the floor.

They arrive in Maple late in the afternoon. John uses his Detective Riley cover and Root’s undercover as his new partner, Detective Alice Ginsburg. As they walk around, John suggests Root ask the Machine for a clue. Of course, Root already has, but to no avail.

They decide to head to the police department to examine security footage from the tollbooth leading into town. Responding to the police chief’s questions, Root and Reese explain they’re investigating a murder in Manhattan and the suspect fled to Maple. Root turns on the charm and the smarmy police chief ‘call me Wick’ agrees to show her the footage. Root examines the footage while Wick rambles in the background at one point mimicking gun cocking with a part of his anatomy she really doesn’t want to think about.

“One piece of footage is corrupted. I'm gonna need to take a look at the hard backups.” Wick looks at her suggestively. “The DVDs are locked in storage. You want them, you're gonna have to let me in on the case over drinks.” Root offers vague reassurance. “Well, sure, if I can find the time.” But Wick yanks her towards him, grabbing her ass while pressing his body up against hers. “Don't be coy. I don't like coy.” A blinding rage rises in Root. No one touches her body like that except Shaw. No one. She pushes away and punches him before she’s thought it through. He falls unconscious to the floor.

Hearing a grunt and a thud, Reese rushes into the chief’s office thinking Root might need help. Instead he finds the chief unconscious on the floor while Root searches the backups for the corrupted file. John's impressed, although now they’re really on a time clock. Someone’s bound to notice he’s missing and the deputy knows they were the last people with him. Root drugs him, buying them a few more hours. They stuff him in the storage closet, locking the door and taking the key. Hopefully no one will think to look for him there.

Root finds the missing footage and realizes the truck entered Maple and never left. She turns the monitor towards John. “Shaw's still here in town.” Not wanting him to see the desperation and anxiety on her face, Root turns back to the computer whispering, “Hold on sweetie. We're close.” Her tone indistinguishable from a prayer.

John looks at Root and realizes for the first time, “You really are sure she’s alive.” Root sighs and explains about Schrodinger's cat. “There's a cat trapped in a box with something lethal. There's a 50% chance the cat's been killed, but until you open the box, there's no way to know one way or the other. Quantum physics says before you open the box, the cat isn't dead or alive. It's both.”

Asking the obvious, John wants to know, “What about after you open the box?” Somewhat resigned, but far from discouraged, Root answers him, “Reality collapses back onto itself. Cat's either alive, or it's dead.”
Actually listening to Root, John realizes her connection to Shaw exists as something beyond simple attraction, the whole greater than the sum of its parts, their belief in each other impervious to the vagaries of a chaotic universe. “Well, we're gonna see reality soon. But you don't bet against Shaw.” Root looks at him and without hesitation responds, “No. Nothing kills that cat.”

The conversation with John makes Root briefly consider the possibility Shaw’s dead. Of course it’s possible. In a quantum world, a particle does not just have to take one path at a time; it can take all of them simultaneously. So if we’re surrounded by an infinite number of parallel universes that, on some level, we are experiencing in their totality, then there’s a universe out there in which Shaw’s dead. But Root’s damned if it’s going to be this one.

If Shaw’s gone, the term scorched earth will prove to be a euphemism for what Root will rain down on everyone responsible.

Now that they’re sure Shaw was brought here, they need to figure out their next step. “We need to find the doctor.” Since the doctor was kidnapped from Manhattan, chances are slim he actually lives in town. They’re going to have to ask around without alerting Samaritan.

“John, I think it’s time you and I considered relocating to Maple. It seems like such a great place to settle down and raise our kids, don’t you think?” It takes Reese a moment but he realizes what Root’s suggesting. They head to the local realtor’s office.

“Hi, my name’s Lindy, how can I help you?” Lindy’s smiling so sweetly, it makes Root grind her teeth. But she plasters on a smile. Root’s an expert at charming people. “That would be great Lindy. My husband and I are looking to relocate to Maple and we wanted to look at some properties.” Root wouldn’t have thought it possible but Lindy's smile widens. “Of course. This is such a great town and now that the factory’s up and running again lots of folk are coming back.” Perfect. This allows Root to naturally segue into their reason for being here.

“Oh, has anyone relocated here recently? Maybe we could talk to them and see what they think about the town.” Lindy seems eager to help. “Sure, as a matter of fact, a doctor from Manhattan just rented a place right outside of town. Doctor Rouse. I’d be happy to call him for you.” But Root and Reese can’t take the risk of alerting the doctor. They might as well call Greer to pick them up.

Root looks at John in resignation. “No Lindy, we can’t let you do that.” Lindy looks confused right until the moment Root sticks the needle in her arm.

“Shit, we’re leaving a train of bodies in our wake Root. We need to find Shaw and get out of here.” Root shrugs. It’s not like they had a choice. She hacks Lindy's computer and finds the address.

Bursting into the doctor's house, Root interrogates him at gunpoint. His name is actually Victor Haskell. “Please, they’ll kill me.” Root doesn’t have time for this. “I’m going to do a lot more than kill you if you don’t tell me where Shaw is right now.” She shoots him in the leg for emphasis. He starts crying and babbling at the same time when Root points at his other leg.

Reese just watches. He has to admit Root gets results. Haskell tells them about the medical facility hidden in the factory and confirms he treated Shaw's gunshot wounds. The factory’s run by a woman named Leslie Thompson. Root shoots him in the head.

They set out to find Thompson. They manage to locate and kidnap her. Her phone reveals nothing, but Root knows she can rely on her “people skills” to extract any useful information Thompson may possess.

She pulls out a medical drill from Haskell’s medical bag which she took from his house. She thought it’d come in handy if Shaw is injured. But this will work too. She approaches Thompson
menacingly. Turning on the drill, its buzz loud in her ear, she turns to Thompson, “Your people used this on our friend. Where is she?” The look of rage on Root’s face terrifies Thompson. With the drill centimeters from her head, Thompson screams and breaks. “I saw her. I saw the brunette woman. Please don't do this.” As Root turns off the drill, Thompson can’t talk fast enough. “They were taking her into the factory. I can help you. I can help you get inside.”

As Root looks at Thompson, it’s obvious she hates the person she’s become. *Or maybe this is just who I've always been.* It doesn’t matter which. For Shaw, she’ll be anyone she has to be and cross any line she needs to cross. Root looks at Thompson with disgust. “Thank you for telling us. Honesty is always the best policy.” If Thompson knew Root, she would know the lilt in her tone was not a good sign. But she doesn’t, so she has no clue what’s coming her way.

Without further ado, Root proceeds to drill a hole in Thompson’s hand as she screams. In no hurry, John leans forward and lightly touches Root’s hand, stopping the drilling. But he immediately backs up, letting Root continue the questioning. Root holds the loudly buzzing drill in her hand once more and leans into Thompson’s face, “Final question. You lie, this goes in your skull. When you saw our friend... was she alive?” Thompson gasps, nodding her head, “Yes.” Satisfied, Root stands up and turns off the drill.

As she attempts to calm herself, Root looks at John. He has no idea the loyalty he earned by demonstrating he’d go beyond any limit to help her find Shaw. Root can’t express it verbally, the reality so immense it can’t be reduced to words, but she will forever be in his debt. Looking at her solemnly, John lowers his head slightly, and then leads Thompson out the door.

Root drives Thompson and Reese to the factory, where Thompson talks them past security. Root’s death threat while smiling sweetly was probably unnecessary, but Root wants to make sure everyone is having fun. While Root hacks the security system, John opens one of the many boxes sitting on conveyor belts on the factory floor. The boxes contain microdots. Root knows they’re most likely invisible GPS trackers. Samaritan will have constant location data on everything with a microdot.

Thompson leads them to the medical area, but she doesn’t have access. Reese finds Grice and the rest of the team who are already in the factory. They arm themselves and mask up. Root doesn’t bother. Everyone knows who she is and she wants Greer to know that she’s coming for him. Unfortunately the security on the steel door leading to the medical area is the old fashioned kind. There’s nothing to hack, the hinges are on the inside, and it’s impossible to pick such a thick and heavy lock. They’re going to have to blow the door. Luckily the medical ward is located in the back of the building away from the actual factory. Plus the noise of the machinery should mask the sound of the explosion somewhat. Grice molds a small amount of C4 and places it over the lock on the door. They take cover and detonate the explosive.

The second the doors fall, they move into the room beyond, quickly eliminating all resistance. They’re using silencers and noise suppressors. They need to eliminate all targets before anyone gets a chance to notify Greer or call for backup.

Collier and Blackwell stay behind to ensure no one follows them in and to guard Thompson. They need her alive until they’re sure she’s of no further use.

As they search Root discovers the factory’s real project. She finds the neural implants normally used to prevent seizures in people with epilepsy or brain damage. The implants have transponders attached, allowing them to relay information to Samaritan.

Root realizes Samaritan wants to study humans at the electrochemical level. She looks at Reese. “It thinks we’re pets.” Reese shrugs. “Pets don’t carry guns.” Root’s sure they implanted one in
Shaw. That's why they didn't kill her. They wanted a guinea pig.

They split up to search more quickly. Root comes across an office and shoots the occupant as she stands. Maybe a doctor if the white lab coat means anything. It’s not like they’re wearing name tags. She stops to search, hoping to find any data on the implants. They’ll need a way to remove Shaw’s.

Root briefly thinks it was rash to kill Haskell since he at least had some experience with the chip, but it’s not like Samaritan picked him for his skills. They just kidnapped the first random doctor they came across.

She pushes the dead woman off the chair and sits at the computer. The woman was logged in so she doesn’t even have to hack the system. There’s no time to analyze the material but Root finds an entire directory pertaining to the development of the chip. Root uses her gun to smash the side of the computer casing and quickly removes the hard drive.

Dani and Cal methodically clear the rooms one by one, eliminating everyone they come across. Some are wearing scrubs. They must be in charge of caring for the ‘patients.’ Dani corners one in a storage closet. She’s not armed. The woman’s trembling and backs up until she’s against metal shelving and runs out of space. “Where is Shaw?” Dani asks. The woman starts crying and shields her face with her hands. “Please, please don’t kill me.” Dani takes a deep breath; she needs this woman to calm down if she’s to be of any use.

“I’m not going to kill you. What’s your name?” The woman doesn’t seem reassured but she calms down enough to answer. “Terry.” Dani gives her another minute to compose herself. “Terry, where are they keeping Shaw?” A look of awareness comes into her eyes. “She’s in a room at the end of the hall.” Something occurs to Dani. “Are you her nurse?” The woman nods yes. Dani radios Reese. “Reese I have her nurse in the northwest corridor.”

“I’m on my way.” Reese finishes clearing his area quickly and finds Dani. “She says Shaw is being kept in a room down the hall. Here’s her key card.” Dani managed to get answers to some questions while she was waiting for Reese. “Stay here and keep her with you.” Dani understands it means ‘don’t kill her.’ Grice appears in the doorway. Reese turns around quickly and looks at him. “Come with me.” He doesn’t call Root right away because he wants to know what condition Shaw is in first. In case he needs to prepare Root.

The door Terry directed them to has a window. Reese looks in and sees another nurse bending over the bed. He waits because he can’t get a clear shot and he wants to make sure he doesn’t shoot Shaw if it turns out to be her. The key card will probably beep and he also doesn’t want to alert the nurse to his presence until she’s clear from the bed. He can’t tell what the nurse is doing because her back is to the door. They wait what seems like forever, but is actually closer to five minutes. The second the nurse turns around, Reese’s through the door, Grice right behind. He shoots and she gets two shots center mass.

When she drops, Reese gets his first look at the bed. It’s definitely Shaw, but not her at the same time. She’s thin. Very thin. When she looks at him, there’s no recognition in her eyes. She looks almost…afraid? But Shaw’s not afraid of anything.

“Shaw?” he whispers. She seems skittish and he doesn’t want to alarm her. “No, no, no, please no…” It’s so low Reese almost misses it. “Shaw it’s okay. We’re going to get you out of here.” Her eyes dart everywhere as he moves closer. She starts to scream. “Just get it over with. Death is preferable to putting up with you minions.” Before he can stop her she tears the IV from her arm and falls off the bed, skittering underneath it and rolling into a ball. She rocks back and forth her hands gripping her head.
John backs out of the room. He radio’s Root. “We found Shaw. She’s alive, but you need to get here now. We’re in the northwest corridor at the end of the hall.”

Root doesn’t answer because it’s like her brain short circuits for a second. Then she’s out the door and running. When she gets to Reese she tries to push past him but he blocks her entry to the room. “Root, wait! You need to know what you’re dealing with.” Root pushes against him, but Reese is stronger and he’s not budging. “John, get the fuck out of my way. It’s Sameen. She needs me.” Root realizes it’ll be faster if she lets him say whatever he’s trying to tell her so she stops trying to push past him. “Root. Shaw freaked out when she saw me. She thinks we’re here to kill her. She’s under the bed. She’s afraid Root.”

Root looks at him impassively. “Get out of my way John. Or I will shoot you where you stand.” Reese looks into her eyes and slowly gets out of her way. She walks into the room slowly. Shaw’s not under the bed. She’s huddled in the corner furthest away from the door. Root moves closer and crouches down in front of Shaw. She can reach her but she doesn’t touch her. She whispers. “Sameen…” Shaw just scrunches into herself harder. “Sam, it’s me...Please…sweetie look at me…”

Reese observes from the doorway. He calls Collier. “Eliminate Thompson and bring the truck around to the back of the factory. Try not to draw attention to yourself. It may be possible to get away from here before anyone realizes what’s going on.”

Collier shoots Thompson and Blackwell looks at him in surprise. “Stay here. Make sure no one gets by you. I’m going to get the truck.” Blackwell nods.

Shaw knows this is just a trick. It’s not the first time Martine’s tried to convince her she’s Root. She knows Root’s dead. No one’s coming for her. It’s been too long. Maybe months, maybe years.

But when she hears the word sweetie, almost like a breath, soft and full of affection, she looks up gradually. Martine never called her sweetie. They didn’t know… “Root?”

The despair coupled with the reluctant hope in Shaw’s voice breaks her heart. But Root can’t break down. They need to get Shaw safe. “Yes, Sam…it’s me.” Shaw uncurls her body a fraction but doesn’t move closer. “It can’t be. Root’s dead. When are you going to give up this game Martine? You’re here to hurt me again.”

Root almost recoils at the thought. “Sameen. I will never hurt you. Please. Trust me.” Root’s acutely aware every minute they spend here increases the likelihood they’ll be caught and have to fight their way out. But she’s not traumatizing Shaw anymore than she’s already been. She radios Trent but doesn’t take her eyes off Shaw. “Move to position tango.” Trent responds immediately. “Affirmative, moving now.” If they end up having to fight their way out, Trent’s section will be here in minutes.

Root promises she will find Greer and his lackeys. They’re dead; they just don’t know it yet.

“I won’t do it you know.” Root looks at her in confusion. “You won’t do what sweetie?” Shaw shakes her head no repeatedly. “I won’t betray Root. You can’t have her. It doesn’t matter how long you keep me here. It doesn’t matter that she’s dead. I still won’t tell you.” Tears slowly trickle down Shaw’s face and Root's heart breaks all over again. “Sameen…I love you…Please come with me. No one will hurt you again.” Root stretches out her hand.

Something on the floor catches her attention. Blood. It’s trickling out from under Shaw. Her eyes dart up. “Sam, are you hurt?” Shaw almost smiles, right before she keels over. Root catches her before her head hits the floor. “John! She’s hurt!” Reese radios Dani. “Get that nurse in here
now!” He’s at Root’s side in a heartbeat. Shaw slashed her wrists. The scalpel lies next to her on the floor. It was hidden underneath Shaw’s leg. That’s why she was scrunched into herself. She wanted time to bleed out. The entire time she was stalling.

He rips the sheet off the bed and tears two strips, quickly making two make-shift bandages while Root holds Shaw’s wrists, trying to stop the bleeding. Reese has been in combat and he’s experienced at making do with whatever you have at hand to stop bleeding. He quickly replaces Root’s hand and ties the bandages tightly around one wrist, then the other.

Dani pushes the nurse into the room. Terry freezes for a second, but her medical training kicks in and she quickly opens a drawer pulling out more bandages and rolls of gauze. She works with Reese to wrap Shaw’s wrists again and again until they run out of both.

Root’s compressing the pressure point on the inside of the folds of Shaw’s elbows, which also helps slow the blood flow to the wrists. She’s cradling Shaw’s head in her lap and won’t get up. “Root, we need to go. We can treat her more effectively in the truck.” They weren’t sure what condition they’d find Shaw in so they equipped the truck like an ambulance, complete with stretcher.

Root lets Reese pick up Shaw. He cradles her to his chest and Root stands up. She looks at Terry. “You’re coming with us.” As they head to the back of the factory, it’s obvious some employees have gotten curious about the people coming through the factory but no one says anything or tries to stop them.

They get Shaw to the truck and Reese and Root ride in the back with her, along with Terry. They start an IV immediately. Grice is driving them out of town and all Root’s thinking is ‘too slow, too slow, it’s too slow.’ She wants to yell at Grice to speed up but she knows they need to be inconspicuous, especially now that Shaw’s with them.

“John, we need to get her to a hospital.” Reese looks at her calmly. “No. Even if no one’s discovered the mess in the factory yet, it’s only a matter of time. They’ll be looking for Wick soon and that alone will put Samaritan on notice. There will be agents crawling all over that place. Real agents. Not the inexperienced jar heads we just wiped the floor with. We need to put as much distance as we can between us and that town. All while staying away from major thoroughfares with cameras.”

Root sighs resignedly. John’s right. The only way to keep Shaw safe is to get her back to the compound without detection. “She can’t die John…she can’t…” Her words may not reflect it, but Root’s praying and Reese understands. “Root.” Root seems to be going in to shock. It’s common in the aftermath of a battle, especially when you’ve had to tend to the wounded. The adrenaline deserts you and suddenly you drop and all you remember is the blood. So much blood. Reese slaps her lightly but firmly on the cheek. She jerks her head up.

“Shaw is safe. All she needs now is fluids, monitoring, and stitches. Isn’t that right Terry?” Terry looks terrified but nods her head yes. “What Shaw really needs now is you Root. She just needs you.” When they get far enough away to verify no one’s following, Reese radios Trent.

“Pull out.” He knows he needs to take charge now. Root’s not thinking straight. He radios ahead to the compound and has them prep the infirmary. They have several doctors and nurses in the group and Shaw will get the care she needs. Physically anyway. He’s not sure what those monsters did to her brain or how they’re going to fix it. But Root will find a way. Of that he’s certain.
What I Know

Chapter Summary

I know when you roll your eyes at me but don’t look away it means you’re fighting a smile.
I know you love the feel of the snow on your skin because it reminds you of your father.
I know you regret it every time you walk away from me.
I know it annoys you that I can keep up with you because I’m taller.
I know you punish yourself every time I take a bullet.
I know you try and do small things for me just to make me smile.
I know when you tap your foot when Finch talks, it means you disagree, even if you don’t say so.
I know you hated it when Finch had me committed.
I know you trusted me from the moment we met, despite everything that came after.
I know you believe in me.

As they flee Maple, something occurs to Reese. “Root, can they track Shaw?” It’s possible the chip sends GPS coordinates or a microdot is concealed somewhere on her body. Reese is about to have Grice pullover, but Root’s stillness stops him. She doesn’t seem worried.

“I equipped the truck with a signal jammer so we’re safe for now. But I didn’t think of the compound.” Root calls Daizo. “Daizo we found Shaw, but they may be able to track her. I need you to form a faraday cage around the infirmary…We have the materials. I’m sure there are builders and engineers in the group. Get me Alex.”

Alex has been an asset from the minute she recruited her. She’s an innovative thinker. She doesn’t accept limitations. She decides the result she wants then works backwards. She sets aside all preconceived notions about what can be done and what can’t be done. Then she figures out a way to do it. She’s not only outside the box; to Alex there is no box.

By the time Alex gets on the phone Daizo’s already told her what Root needs done. “Alex, how much time will it take?”

“I already have Jack gathering all our engineers and builders. I know we have a few welders. Do we have the conductive material necessary?” Before Root answers she hears Jack in the background telling her he already has people retrieving the copper plates from storage.

“It won’t be pretty but we can have a make-shift cage by the time you get back.” Root releases the breath she didn’t know she’d been holding. “Get it done…and Alex…thank you.”

As Root gets off the phone, Shaw stirs. The first person she sees is Reese and she starts to thrash. She’s not actually restrained; she’s only secured by the stretcher straps around her feet and torso. Root immediately bends over and holds Shaw down by the shoulders firmly. It’s a tight fit in the truck so it’s the best she can do. “Sameen…sweetie…it’s me. You’re going to be okay, no one is going to hurt you.”

Shaw looks at Root and her eyes are wild, but she stops struggling. Since her arms weren’t restrained her flailing caused one of her wrists to start bleeding again. “Root…is it…really you?
They said everyone was dead. That you never got out of the stock exchange.”

Shaw voice is low and confused and it makes her seem so small. Root’s not sure how to handle this version of Shaw. Root’s still bent over her so Shaw whispers in her ear. “We need to get away or they’re going to kill us.”

Root looks up and taps on the divider to get Grice’s attention and signals him to stop the truck. “John, take Terry and get out.” Reese hesitates. “Have everyone except Grice get out and wait for Trent. You two can ride up front.”

Reese looks at Shaw. “Root, that’s not a good idea.” But Root stares at him fiercely. “She will never hurt me. Regardless, she’s in no condition to hurt anyone right now.” John nods. He knows it’s useless to argue with Root when it comes to Shaw. Those two are a law unto themselves.

Root looks down at Shaw and slowly removes her arms from her shoulders. She gently caresses Shaw’s face with her hand and places a kiss on her forehead. She feels Shaw breathe in deeply. “You smell like her.”

But Shaw knows Greer is just fucking with her, probably stimulating some part of her brain with his little black box. But still. Even Shaw couldn’t explain the way Root smells with words. So how can they recreate it so exactly? It’s not her soap or shampoo. Root’s skin always smells clean and sweet…like home.

Root sighs a little, but she can’t help but feel her heart swell. Shaw’s here and she’s alive and that’s all that matters. “It’s really me Sam. I’m here. You’re safe with me. This is not a trick.” It’s obvious Shaw wants to believe. Root has always been able to read her and there’s a small glimmer hiding in her eyes.

“Sameen, is there anything I can do or say to help you believe me?” Shaw scoffs but she’s thinking about it. “The first time we slept together, what did I whisper in your ear?” Root remembers but she pauses because it takes her breath away that Shaw would remember too. “I’m going to taste every inch of you.”

Still could be a trick Shaw knows, there were cell phones in the safe house. But they searched for cameras at the time and there were none. They also never brought their cell phones into the bedroom so even for Samaritan, it would be kind of hard to be able to know.

This next one will be harder. “The second time we slept together you freaked out. Why?” Root smiles at the memory. “I wouldn’t say I freaked out exactly…” But Shaw’s waiting for the answer. “You told me 'you taste like trouble, but your scent is like salvation. I’m not sure if you’re going to destroy me or deliver me.’”

If there’s one place Shaw believed without doubt Samaritan couldn’t infiltrate it was the library. They were also in a faraday cage. There’s no way anyone but the two of them would know what was said. Root could have told someone, but it seems unlikely. It wasn’t often Shaw let her feelings escape and Root treasured every moment.

“Sameen 20 questions aren’t going convince you I’m real. There’s always a possibility any specific moment in time was captured and stored somewhere. But I know you. More than anyone else, ever. So let me tell you some of what I know.” Shaw cocks her head. This might actually work.

“I know when you roll your eyes at me but don’t look away it means you’re fighting a smile. I know you love the feel of the snow on your skin because it reminds you of your father. I know you regret it every time you walk away from me. I know it annoys you that I can keep up with you no matter how
fast you walk because I’m taller. I know you punish yourself every time I take a bullet. I know you try and do small things for me just to make me smile. I know when you tap your foot when Finch talks, it means you disagree, even if you don’t say so. I know you hated it when Finch had me committed. I know you trusted me from the moment we met, despite everything that came after. I know you believe in me.”

Shaw sighs. “That’s enough. This has to be real; no one could possibly replicate how much you annoy me…or how well you know me.” Root’s smile reaches her eyes for the first time in months. “You’re home Sameen. Trust me.” Shaw still looks wary although she’s calmer.

“Did you get the box?” Root’s puzzled. “The box?” Shaw knew this was too good to be true. “It’s what Greer uses to control the chip. To control me.” Root’s brain starts racing considering all the options. She knows destroying the box won’t fix the problem. They can just build another one. They have to get the chip out of Shaw’s head as soon as possible.

“Root as long as I’m alive I’m a danger to you. You need to let me go.” Root doesn’t know if Shaw means let her go away or let her finish the job she started and kill herself. Either way. “Not gonna happen.”

Now Shaw’s definitely convinced. Root would never let her go. This time Shaw’s determined not to stubbornly refuse her help. This time the sacrifice is unnecessary. “Okay. Then how are we going to get the devil’s hardware out of my brain?”

But Root’s already talking…“I am not going to let you…Wait. What?” There’s a small smile on Shaw’s face. “I’ve spent the last…well I’m not sure how long…being tortured. I fought…but they broke me Root…the only thing they couldn’t take was you. You…are the only reason I’m here right now.

So I’m at least going to try…working together so maybe I can get my life back. Actually I’m not sure I want my old life back, but at least a life. With you.”

Shaw’s sitting up by now and Root leans in to hug her, but Shaw flinches. “I uh…I was isolated for a long time, touching anyone…” Root smiles even though her eyes are shining with tears. “Whatever you need Sam, just let me know. No matter what I’m never leaving you again.”

Yep. Definitely Root.

Her conversation with Root leaves Shaw exhausted. She’s pale and Root knows she’s lost a lot of blood. She’ll probably need a blood transfusion in addition to the stitches. Root can’t stop looking at her. She has to stop herself from touching every inch of her body. Shaw loses consciousness again.

She radios the compound. “Daniel have Daizo look at our records and see if we have a plastic surgeon with us. Also we need blood donors. Shaw’s AB so she’s a universal recipient but I don’t want to take any chances. Only allow donors with type O to give blood. Where’s Alex?”

So far Daniel hasn’t said a word. He knows Root needs to put an order to things or she feels she’s losing control. “She’s with the engineers. The room is ready, but they’re testing it to make sure no electronic signals can get in or out.” Root’s relieved.
They arrive at the compound just after nightfall. Shaw hasn’t regained consciousness but her pulse is steady. They pull the truck right up to the infirmary doors. They bring Shaw in on a stretcher and John moves her to a bed.

The plastic surgeon, Mark, is already there and so is Derrick, the trauma surgeon. They need to stitch Shaw’s wrists before they give her the transfusion. Root steps into the hallway but stands so she can see inside.

Terry’s brought in and she’s obviously terrified. She’s only alive because it may comfort Shaw to see someone familiar. Then again it may just convince her she’s still in Samaritan’s facility. Root walks over and studies her carefully.

“How long were you her nurse?” Root asks impatiently. “A little more than a year.” Terry’s doing her best to answer but it’s obvious she’s terrified, as well she should be. “Did you hurt her?” Root moves closer. “No! I took care of her.”

“It didn’t occur to you something was wrong? Something wasn’t quite right?” Root’s gets right in her face. “I just thought she was mentally ill. She would talk about a computer and people coming to get her. She thought something was in her brain, but her surgery was to remove a benign brain tumor.”

Root can spot a lie even in pathological liars who believe what they’re telling you and this woman was hiding something. “Did you have other patients?” Root can see the woman relaxing, starting to think maybe she’s safe.

“No.” Root looks at her incredulously. “They said it was a new facility and patients would be transferred slowly,” Terry stutters nervously. “Why do I think you’re leaving something out Terry? Believe me when I tell you, lying to me is a very bad idea.”

“Mr. Greer. He came to see her weekly. Sometimes I needed to sedate her afterwards. She would pull on her restraints and call the same name over and over again. Root.” Root feels it like a physical blow and asks her next question very slowly.

“Why was she restrained Terry?” Root can see Terry’s brain working a mile a minute and she’s struggling to find an explanation that will make sense. But in the end she just looks defeated. “I don’t know.”

“I’m sorry…I’m sorry…I knew something wasn’t right. There were guards and security everywhere and they kept taking brain scans. Her incision kept opening up and never quite healed. I tried to ask, but I was afraid.” She bursts into tears.

“Did you get to go home at night Terry?” Terry’s not sure where Root’s going with this but it seems like a safe enough question. She nods yes. “Then why did you keep going back?”

But Root doesn’t wait for an answer. “Grice lock her down. I’ll deal with her later.” Root wants to see what Shaw wants to do and how she feels about the woman.

Mark steps out of the room. “The cuts were clean, almost like they were made with a scalpel.” Root interrupts him. “They were.” It looks like he’s going to ask why but changes his mind. “Well it made the stitching easier. There should be very little scarring if any.

Derrick’s giving her the blood transfusion now. His examination didn’t discover any recent injuries. But Root she has scars all over her body. They don’t look recent though. The one behind her ear is the only one that’s probably been there only a few months. It looks like a surgical wound poorly
Root’s heard enough. She knows every scar on Shaw’s body. If any are a result of her torture over the last two years Root will know. “Thank you Mark.” Mark knows he’s being dismissed. “I’ll be back tomorrow to check on her.” Root gives him a small smile.

Reese has been standing by quietly. Now that they’re alone there are things they need to discuss, decisions to be made. “Root you’re exhausted. Why don’t you get cleaned up and get some rest.” Root’s look clearly communicates how that’s the last thing that’s going to happen. Reese didn’t think she would listen but he felt he ought to try.

“I’m going back to Maple.” Root thinks he’s lost his mind. “No. You’re not. We can’t risk losing you. I need you here, especially now. You could be caught or followed back here.” She knows Reese is going to be stubborn by the way he sets his chin. “If we can find the box, it may help us understand how that chip works and how to get it out of Shaw.”

“John, please trust me. Things happened so fast I forgot. I found the files documenting the development of the chip. The hard drive is in my vest. Give it to Daizo and have him download them to my laptop and bring it to me here. Let me go through the data and see if there’s anything there that can help us. Then we’ll talk about Maple.”

Reese’s relieved. Maybe they can get that thing out of Shaw. “I’m doubling the patrols until further notice. I’ll rotate shifts every two hours. I don’t want anyone getting sloppy or complacent. Tomorrow I’ll develop a new training regimen. Now that we have Shaw, we can focus on ending this once and for all.” He doesn’t wait for Root to respond.

Root steps back into the infirmary and Derrick looks up. “I gave her a couple of units of blood. She’s going to be fine. I’m also running a tox screen. I think they were drugging her.” Root tries to give him a small smile but she just can’t. Shaw’s alive but she’s far from fine. “I’ll leave you alone. Call me right away if anything changes.”

Root calls Jack and asks him to bring her a few things.

An hour later she’s showered and changed. She used the shower in the infirmary. There’s now an armchair next to Shaw’s bed and Root’s quietly analyzing the data she recovered. The boys are also working on the files. She looks up every few minutes just to make sure Shaw’s still there.

Daniel brought her some food but she couldn’t bear to eat even though she knows she’s near collapsing from the exhaustion and the stress. A little while later the door opens and Reese walks in quietly. He puts a sandwich and a glass of juice in her hands. “Eat. Or I will sedate you.”

Root starts to argue, but he’s right. She takes a tiny bite of the sandwich and a sip of juice. “I’m going back to Manhattan tomorrow night.” Root looks up shocked. Reese rushes to reassure her. “I’ll be back in a couple of days. We need Finch. He can help with the chip.”

“What makes you think he’ll come now?” John looks away. “If he’s the man I think he is, he won’t abandon Shaw. But one way or another he’s coming back with me.” Root knows how much Reese loves Finch. His refusal to help them hurt him deeply and his silence over the last year even more so. “Okay but check in every four hours or I’ll send a search party.” John gives her a small smile as he leaves.

Root drifts off and when she wakes a couple of hours later, Shaw’s not in the bed. She starts to panic as she searches the room. She finds her asleep in the bathtub a blanket clutched in her hands. It’s too much. Root can’t keep it together anymore.
The tears start slowly but soon she’s sobbing on the floor. How much more can she take? Is she crazy to think they can win this war? Should she just take Shaw and disappear?

She looks up when she hears her name. “Root?” Shaw’s sitting up and looking at her. Root’s not sure what to say first. “Sameen…why are you in the bathtub sweetie?” Shaw looks uncomfortable. “I woke up and there was too much space.” She doesn’t say anything else and Root doesn’t push.

“Do you want to go back to the room? Or we can stay here, that’s okay too.” Shaw looks so uncertain, so lost. She hesitates and then steps out of the tub. Root stands up and wipes her face. They walk back to the room and Shaw immediately sits in the arm chair her arms around her knees.

Root doesn’t want to crowd her but she pulls the lounger closer so she’s facing Shaw. “Is there anything you need right now Sam?” Shaw huffs. “I have no fucking idea.” Root can’t help it, she laughs. Shaw gives her a small smile.

“So where are we?” Root takes a deep breath and explains. It takes a while and Shaw listens without saying a word. When Root’s done, Shaw cocks her head. “So you raised an army to fight Samaritan?” Root shakes her head. “I raised an army to find you.”
Chapter Summary

"We need to figure out how to remove it. It's never been done before; unfortunately you’re the first one to have it implanted.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “Of course I am.” Root almost laughs. It's just so…Shaw.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little short, but I wanted to write something a little hopeful for the holiday...

Shaw’s not sure what to say. She knows Root loves her. She’s known for a long time. But an army? Who does that? She feels a type of warmth suffuse her body, but she’s not sure what it means or how to process it. Her heart’s beating so hard it hurts. Is it something she would feel ordinarily? Or is it a side effect of the chip?

She’s not sure. But Root doesn’t seem to expect any specific response. She’s just waiting patiently, a serene look on her face. Root never pushes. She always lets Shaw process in her own way, in her own time, without making her feel defective because she doesn’t react like other people.

“They locked me in a three by six room for months…maybe longer. Everything was white. The lights never turned off. The temperature was always the same. No one talked to me. No one touched me. There was no sound.” Root inhales sharply and tears spring to her eyes. Along with a rage she didn’t know she could feel. But she stays still, this is not about her.

“So I talked to myself. Mostly about you. Well, pretty much always about you. I’m still…not sure why. But long before the chip, all I thought about was getting back to you. I knew you wouldn’t give up. I knew you would find me. But…I’m still not sure what it means.”

Shaw seems to be struggling, so unsure…and Root wants to destroy everything and everyone who ever hurt her. “That’s okay Sameen. You don’t have to…” Shaw knows Root means it. Even if she never figures it out, it won’t matter to Root. Not because she doesn’t care, but because…she just lets Shaw be Shaw and that’s enough for her. It’s always been enough for her.

“I’m really tired. Will you…” Root smiles. “I’m not going anywhere Sam. Sleep. I’ll be here when you wake up.” Shaw stands up and lies down in the bed slowly. After a moment she reaches out and Root holds her hand softly.

Root waits for Shaw to fall asleep before she lets herself relax. She lays her head on the bed, not wanting to let go of Shaw’s hand. She’s not sure how much time has passed but she’s jarred awake by a blood-curling scream.

Shaw’s having a nightmare and she’s curled up in the fetal position. Root’s not sure what to do. One of the guards rushes in but she tells him to get out. She stokes Shaw’s forehead gently. “Sam…
it’s okay…it’s okay. I’m here. It’s just a dream…Come back to me…”

Shaw’s shaking and comes to slowly. She’s gasping and shivering. “It’s too cold…” Root wishes she could reach the thermostat without getting up…Shaw has a death grip on her hand and she doesn’t want to let go.

But coincidently she hears the fan turn off.

“I’m right here Sameen. Breathe with me…” Shaw slowly calms down and Root hands her a glass of water from the nightstand. Shaw leans up to drink it and then collapses back on the bed. She doubts she’ll be able to get back to sleep. She’s terrified she’ll find herself back in the box and realize this is just an illusion. An army? Isn’t that a little much even for Root? This can’t be real.

Root sees the struggle in Shaw’s eyes. She can’t blame Shaw for being confused and unsure. Everything was so dramatic and rushed; compared to everything she endured it must seem too anticlimactic to be true.

“Sam, do you want to shower? I have your clothes.” Shaw thinks about it and gets up slowly. Root brings some clothes to her. Shaw takes them and looks up quizzically. “These are my actual clothes.” Root smiles. “All your stuff is in your bedroom. Here I mean. In your bedroom here.”

Shaw looks a little panicky and Root rushes to reassure her. “Don’t worry Sam. We’ll take it slow. For the moment you can’t leave the infirmary anyway. We need to figure out how to remove the chip safely.” Shaw nods and turns towards the bathroom.

Root slouches down into the chair with her laptop and continues to review the files on the chip. It really is cutting edge technology. The chip interfaces with the neural system; it’s basically a brain-computer interface. The technology has been around since the ‘70s but it’s still in its infancy. Or at least it was until Samaritan.

Due to the cortical plasticity of the brain, signals from the chip are handled like natural sensors. Because it lies in the grey matter, the chip produces the highest quality signal possible, but it’s prone to scar-tissue buildup.

Eventually the signal will weaken or cease altogether as the body reacts to the foreign object. But Root’s not going to wait around for years in hopes the chip will deteriorate. They need to get it out. Although the files suggest brain surgery akin to a tumor removal, it’s never actually been done. Shaw is the first person to have the chip implanted.

Root looks up realizing she hasn’t heard the water running. She approaches the bathroom. Shaw left the door open so she stands in the doorway. Shaw’s leaning against the sink staring off. “Sam…are you okay?”

Shaw looks at her blankly. “I don’t know.” Root gets closer, stepping into the bathroom. She plugs the bathtub and runs the water…hot like Shaw likes it. When the tub is halfway full she reaches out. Shaw looks at her hand for a second then takes it and allows herself to be guided into the tub.

Root turns to go but she hears her whisper, “Stay.” So she does. She sits on the floor next to the tub and grabs the washcloth, lathering it up with soap. She reaches in and starts to rub Shaw’s shoulders. Shaw relaxes into her hands and Root washes her body reverently.

When she’s done she grabs the shampoo and washes Shaw’s hair, using the shower wand to rinse it. Shaw doesn’t say anything the entire time and Root respects her apparent need for silence. When she’s done, she pulls the plug and Shaw stands up.
Root hands her a towel and walks out to give her privacy.

Shaw comes out of the bathroom dressed. Root looks up from her laptop and smiles. “Hey.” Shaw gives her a small smile and sits on the bed. She looks at Root earnestly. “I’m not used to sound anymore but I don’t want the silence…I know it doesn’t make sense.”

“Sameen, it makes perfect sense. Do you want me to talk to you?” After a moment Shaw nods yes. “What do you want to know?” Shaw shrugs. Root starts talking. “John’s here. He left his job and Harold and came to help me find you.

Daniel, Daizo, and Greenfield have been helping me develop a virus to destroy Samaritan. We managed to upload one of our programs and we were able to get the locations of all the server farms and the personnel records.

We were analyzing which locations were more heavily staffed and where medical staff was stationed. In the end, the Machine helped Daizo and led us to Maple…to where you were being held.”

Shaw cocks her head and Root waits. “You said the Machine helped Daizo. Why didn’t it just tell you?” Root sighs. She wishes Shaw wouldn’t have asked but she’s not going to lie. “It stopped speaking to me.” Shaw raises an eyebrow in question. “It told me to stop looking for you and I…I just couldn’t do that.”

Shaw thinks about it. She’s sure Root’s risked her life repeatedly in the search for her and she’s probably lucky to be alive. But Shaw can’t bring herself to fault her for it. She would have done the same.

“Thanks…” Root looks at her wonderingly…”I would have never stopped…” Root can’t help it, tears roll down her cheeks quietly. “I know Root. I knew. I knew you were looking for me. I waited for you.”

Shaw’s sigh comes from deep inside and Root fights to stay still when all she wants to do is hold Shaw and never let her go.

“When they finally let me out of the box, they implanted the chip. Greer used to come and taunt me. I felt the most excruciating pain I’d ever felt. It was always the same. He wanted to know about your relationship to the Machine.

How you talked to it. Where it was. Sometimes he’d flood me with pleasure. Hoping I’d trade information on you for relief from the agony.”

Root feels a physical pain in her chest. “Sameen…why didn’t you just tell him? I mean you didn’t know where She was anyway, but why didn’t you just tell him about me?”

Shaw looks offended. “They wouldn’t have let me go no matter what I told them. They’d just find other ways to use me against you. It was the only thing I had to hold on to. I can’t believe you’d even ask me that. Would you have turned on me just to save yourself some pain?”

Of course not. Shaw knows the answer to the question. “I’m sorry Sam…for a lot of things.” The anger leaves Shaw as quickly as it came. “There’s nothing to be sorry for Root. You found me.”

Root looks at her miserably. “I’m sorry I asked you for help that day. I’m sorry I left you. I’m sorry it took so long to find you…”

Shaw tugs on Root’s hand and hugs her to her chest. She’d thought it’d feel awkward and strange,
but Shaw finds it just feels right. Like coming home. Root feels overwhelmed to finally have Shaw in her arms again.

“We knew what we signed up for Root. It could’ve been any one of us…” Root lays her head on Shaw’s shoulder and whispers quietly. “That’s what I thought too. Before I lost you. But I was wrong. Without you nothing matters.”

Shaw’s not sure she disagrees anymore so she doesn’t answer. After a while she needs space and pulls away softly. Root lets her go and falls back into the chair. “Tell me about the chip.” Root sighs deeply.

“Well, you already know what it does. We need to figure out how to remove it. It’s never been done before; unfortunately you’re the first one to have it implanted.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “Of course I am.” Root almost laughs. It’s just so…Shaw.

“So what’s the plan? Don’t try to tell me you don’t have one because I know you Root. So spit it out.” Root debates with herself, but she decides she’s not keeping anything from Shaw. They’re in this together. “I’m going to find the scientists who developed your chip and then figure out how to take it out without turning you into a vegetable.”

Shaw snorts with laughter. “But you like vegetables…” Root’s just so happy and relieved…she doesn’t think about it and leans in to capture Shaw’s lips with her own. Shaw stiffens and Root pulls back immediately. “I’m sorry Sam…I just…”

But after a moment Shaw pulls her back and claims her mouth tenderly. Root caresses her upper lip with her tongue and Shaw opens her mouth to draw her in…it’s familiar and new and overwhelming and comforting and so many things Root can’t even begin to parse them.

They draw apart gasping for breath. “I missed you so much Sameen. There were so many things I wished I’d said…I wished I’d done…” Shaw gives her a small smile. “Root, I always knew. You let me know in a million ways. It’s what I hung on to.

If anyone should regret things left unsaid it’s me. I shouldn’t have pushed you away when I knew I wanted you near. I just couldn’t…maybe still can’t…understand… You move me. Its annoyance and anger and comfort and funny…just…don’t give up on me okay?”

Root shakes her head ruefully. “Uh, I don’t think there’s any danger of that. That’s your army outside these walls…”

Shaw still can’t quite wrap her head around it. “Will you lie down with me?” Shaw asks shyly. Root’s answer is to crawl into the bed. After a second Shaw climbs in after her and Root spoons her like they’d done so many times before.

Root’s heart is bursting but she doesn’t want to overwhelm Shaw so she tries to lie still. But Shaw can feel her heart beating against her back and Root’s trembling although she’s trying to hide it.

Shaw thought it’d be too much. Even with Root. She thought she wouldn’t be able to stand someone on her skin, holding her, in her space. But Root just feels like an extension of herself.

Shaw spent so long wanting her near and her body’s welcoming Root’s like they’d never been apart, so she goes with it. She wraps Root’s arms around herself and they both drift off, keeping each other’s nightmares at bay, sleeping more soundly than either one of them had in a very long time.
Root smiles. “Only Sam…please try not to shoot anyone who doesn’t deserve it okay?” Shaw gives her a smirk. “Well that’s all relative isn’t it?” Root laughs. That’s the first authentically Shaw thing she’s heard since the rescue.

Chapter Notes

I believe time in captivity changes Shaw. (I extended the time to make is feasible for Root to raise an army.) So I’m trying to capture those changes in a way that still reflects Shaw’s core personality. Let me know what you think…I’m always open to suggestions and they have a while to go yet.

Root wakes before Shaw and for a moment she’s confused. Then she feels a warm body against hers and it all comes flooding back. Shaw. Shaw is here, with her. She looks over and watches her, peaceful as she sleeps. There were no further nightmares last night for which Root’s grateful. Shaw really needs the rest. As for what else she might need, they were going to have to figure that out together.

She slips quietly out of bed, thinking Shaw might be uncomfortable at their position when she wakes. But Shaw’s awake a few seconds later before Root can even make it to the bathroom. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you Sam.”

Shaw looks confused for a minute and then she remembers. She was rescued. Root rescued her. If she can trust anything her mind tells her anyway. “It’s okay. That’s probably longer than I’ve slept in…well…forever. When I was in the box, they had an alarm go off every few hours randomly so I never really got much sleep.”

Shaw looks uncomfortable with the admission so Root doesn’t press. She gives her a flirtatious smile instead. “I aim to please…” Maybe to someone else it would seem inappropriate or insensitive, but to Shaw it was the perfect thing to say. She rolls her eyes but doesn’t look away.

“Sam I have a few things I need to take care of but I’ll be back soon.” Shaw looks positively afraid? Root’s never seen this look on her before so she’s not sure how to interpret it. But she senses calling attention to it will only make Shaw retreat into silence.

“I just have to set a few things in motion. I wish you could come with me, but right now the infirmary’s the only place they can’t track you.” Shaw doesn’t respond.

“There’s a handset on the nightstand. We don’t use cellular for obvious reasons, but I have the other one if you need something before I come back.” Then Root decides to do something Reese would absolutely kill her for, but she instinctively knows it’s the right thing for Shaw.

She reaches for one of the guns she’d put on the table last night when she got into bed with Shaw.
It’s actually Shaw’s nano. She’s kept it on her body at all times since Shaw was taken. It felt like keeping a piece of Shaw with her. “Here. The clip’s full and a round’s chambered.”

Shaw hesitates. She hasn’t held a gun since the stock exchange. But, assuming the gun’s real, it’s something Root would definitely do. Shaw takes it and it feels awkward in her hand, but she finds herself breathing a sigh of relief. Maybe she’s safe after all.

Root smiles. “Only Sam…please try not to shoot anyone who doesn’t deserve it okay?” Shaw gives her a smirk. “Well that’s all relative isn’t it?” Root laughs. That’s the first authentically Shaw thing she’s heard since the rescue.

Root leaves with a smile plastered on her face and goes in search of Reese. She finds him in her office. He looks up and immediately asks, “How is she?” Root stops to think. “It’s going to take some time, but really better than I thought. Don’t send anyone in there though, she’s armed.”

Reese looks at her incredulously. “What!” Root expected this reaction so she’s not taken aback. “I knew it would make her feel safer. She needs a reason to start trusting us.” John starts to walk out of the room. “John, it’s not up for debate. I left guards at her door. They have instructions to not let anyone in but me. Not even you. You’re just going to have to trust me.”

John knows no matter how much time he’s spent with everyone in the compound and how much respect they might have for him, they are all without question loyal to Root. Short of physically disabling the guards, which he is unwilling to do, they will not let him see Shaw.

“Root, we can’t be sure what they did to her. Or whether she’s a danger to us. We need to be careful.” Root listens patiently but Reese can tell nothing he’s saying is reaching her. “She will never hurt me and I trust her. You should too after everything she sacrificed for us.”

It’s not that Reese disagrees with her, but he knows what almost two years as a prisoner can do to a person. From what little he saw at that facility, he has no doubt Shaw’s mind was pushed to the limits and that’s what he’s afraid of, not what they did to her physically because she’ll recover from that, but what they did to her mind. That, he’s afraid, won’t be so easy to fix.

Root moves on, as far as she’s concerned the discussion’s closed. “Daizo, I need you to start working with the files I stole from the facility. We need to track down every person involved in developing and implanting the chip.” Daizo nods and gets to work, giving Daniel and Greenfield specific tasks.

Reese can’t help giving one more caution before he walks out. “Be careful Root.” Root smiles at him like he’s a child who doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

“Let me know the minute you find anything Daizo.” Once they have the locations, Root intends to send Grice with a team to bring them here.

Anxious to get back to Shaw, Root leaves her office. She stops by the canteen to get breakfast for them and runs into Jack. She was actually going to go look for him. She has a few things for him to do. Once she gives him her instructions she heads back to the infirmary.

When she walks in, Shaw’s not in the room. She must be in the bathroom since the guards are still standing. If Shaw wanted out, they’d be unconscious right now. She puts the food down and notices the door to the bathroom is partly open.

She walks over and pushes it all the way open. Shaw’s back in the bathtub pointing the gun at Root. Root can see the safety’s off and the hammer’s cocked. Shaw’s finger is on the trigger as
opposed to the trigger guard. The slightest pressure will make the gun go off.

“Hey sweetie. It’s just me. I brought breakfast. Are you hungry?” Root doesn’t comment on the gun pointing at her or the fact that Shaw’s back in the bathtub. Like it’s the most normal thing in the world. She turns her back and walks away, expecting Shaw to follow. It takes a minute but Root hears the gun uncocking and Shaw walks out of the bathroom.

“I wasn’t sure what you were in the mood for so I brought pancakes, bacon, oatmeal and some juice.” Shaw looks at her like she’s sure the food’s poisoned so Root tries each nonchalantly as if she was sharing Shaw’s breakfast.

“I haven’t eaten real food in a very long time; I better stick to the oatmeal.” Root smiles and grabs some bacon. They eat in silence, but it’s not uncomfortable for them, it never has been and Root’s glad to see that hasn’t changed.

“So I guess you’re pretty busy…” Root’s not sure what to say. ‘Yes, but I’m putting everything on hold for you?’ or ‘Not really?’ Shaw looks at her knowingly.

“Actually, most of the time I’m on my laptop working on the virus. But we’re in a holding pattern for right now with everything else.” Shaw looks away. “You mean you want to know if your operation’s blown since I’m here.”

Root’s not going to insult Shaw’s intelligence, but she’s not going to let Shaw think she’s somehow put them in danger. “Sameen. Look at me.” She waits but Shaw doesn’t turn. “Shaw. Look at me.” The use of her last name has the desired effect and Shaw looks up in surprise. Root stopped calling her that a long time ago, unless she’s angry. Root’s not angry, but she needs Shaw to hear her.

“Sameen I did all of this to find you. It’s always been about you. Finding you alive is all I’ve wanted for the last two years. I have contingencies in place for any eventuality, including this location being blown. It was always a chance I was prepared to take.

Everyone who joined me did it knowing that’s what they were signing up to do. Find you. We’ve been hitting Samaritan because it’s an effective way to gather intelligence. I have other assets working undercover as well.

Of course we will do everything we can to defeat Samaritan. I’ve been working on a program with the boys that just might be what brings it down.” Shaw flinches at Root’s mention of the boys and scowls. Interesting. Root’s seen the look before, always when Shaw was jealous but refused to admit it. It gives Root hope the real Shaw’s still in there.

“I will make Greer, Lambert, and Martine pay dearly, along with anyone else who touched you. I am looking for them specifically, believe me. But I don’t need to be on every raid. In fact, Reese has been trying to get me to stop for awhile now.

Evidently, for some reason the people here need me to lead them so I can’t die. Reese handles all the training and security. Grice, Dani, Collier, Blackwell, and Cal are also here helping us. We’re not just running in haphazardly to save numbers Sam.

This is a real war. We strategize, we train, and then we fight. It’s the only way that’s proven effective against Samaritan. There are also administrative issues I can’t delegate. I negotiate all our arms deals and our supply contacts.

We need a constant influx of stuff to keep 1,000 people armed and fed and, believe it or not,
entertained. Not to mention medical care. These people get sick and have accidents and sometimes are wounded.”

Root’s been talking non-stop and has to stop to take a breath. Shaw hasn’t said a word but she’s been listening. “I’m not worth all this. I’m not worth you giving up the Machine.” It wasn’t what Root expected but she’s not surprised. “Sameen, why are you here?” Shaw looks confused.

“You could’ve ended it at any time during the last two years. You withstood things no one would’ve survived. So…why…are…you…here?” Shaw knows the answer and so does Root, but she can’t get the words out, can’t explain everything she wants Root to understand.

But that’s something she forgot. She never has to explain to Root. “You fought to stay alive to get back to me. You went through all of that for me. Alone. I dare you to deny it.” Root waits but Shaw doesn’t say a word and doesn’t look away.

“I had people to help, to talk to. So my raising an army to burn the world to the ground if I couldn’t find you should not come as a surprise.

We both used the resources we had at hand and our strengths to do what we had to do. Get back to each other. So I’m not apologizing for it. I’d do it all again. When they took you, and left me alive, Samaritan guaranteed its own demise.”

She holds Shaw’s stare unapologetically and Shaw looks away first. Root sighs, her breakfast cold and forgotten, but she’s not pushing Shaw. It doesn’t matter how long it takes for her to heal or understand or really come back to her. Root’s not going anywhere.

To defuse the tension sucking the air out of the room, Root turns to more mundane matters. “In a little while a few people are going to come in here.” Shaw whips her head around, her eyes wild. “I’ll be right here with you. But since you’re going to have to stay in this room for the foreseeable future, I want to make it less hospitaly and more comfortable.” Shaw starts to shake her head, but Root cuts her off. “Besides I plan to spend a lot of time here and I’ve gotten spoiled.”

Jack comes in with a few others an hour later. They bring in furniture, including a king-sized bed, and take out most of the medical equipment. Root already has another space being set up as the infirmary. While they’re there Mark comes in to check Shaw’s stitches. Not understanding the danger he smiles at Root and reaches for Shaw’s hand.

And finds a gun stuck in his stomach and a very dangerous woman looking for an excuse to use it. Root reaches in between them and pushes Shaw’s gun hand down while pushing Mark back. “Sam, this is Mark. He stitched your…wounds.” The information does nothing to convince Shaw to let this man touch her.

“I’m a doctor. I can look after my own stitches.” Mark starts to argue but Root gently turns him around and sends him on his way. Root is also capable of tending to Shaw’s wounds. They’ve done it for each other more times than she can count over the years.

Shaw’s clearly hyper-vigilant until everyone leaves the room. Now Root has a computer desk and a more comfortable chair to work from. Shaw looks at the bed. Then at Root. “Are you staying?” Root’s unabashed. “I’d prefer it, but only if you want me to…I can also have another bed brought in if it makes you uncomfortable.”

Shaw realizes Root is no longer the woman she left behind. She knows what she wants and she’s not afraid to…take it. Sure she’s given Shaw a couple of flirty smiles but she’s not going to let Shaw hide behind their old dynamic. The push/pull that turned into their game.
Shaw sighs and stares out the window. She figures Root will be off to do whatever she needs to do, so she’s startled when Root stands next to her. They stand there for a while watching a touch football game. It’s one of the things everyone does for fun here. Some others are on a bench watching the action, cheering and booing depending on their allegiance.

When the game ends Shaw sits on the armchair, hands wrapped around her legs, and Root sits on her desk chair feet propped on the bed looking at her. “So where’s Finch?” Root knew the question would come eventually. “In New York.” Shaw waits but Root doesn’t explain further.

“He never helped you, did he?” Root looks at her feet. “No. He didn’t approve of what I was doing. I went away for months after you were taken. I developed an app the Machine and I had been working on to find other potential assets to recruit.

By the time I went back to ask for his help, I already had a significant fighting force and had started attacking Samaritan.” Shaw stays silent for a minute. “He didn’t want you to kill anyone.” Root nods her head. “Maybe I’ve become a monster…but I don’t take prisoners. We kill every Samaritan operative, whether they’re complicit or just blind, then we destroy the facility.”

Root’s surprised when Shaw speaks. “Move swift as the wand, closely-formed as the wood. Attack like the fire and be still as the mountain.” But not as surprised as Shaw when Root identifies the quote from Sun Tzu’s, the Art of War.

Shaw looks at her closely and unflinchingly for the first time since they reached the compound. “I believe in you.”
Doe Eyes

Chapter Summary

Shaw turns slowly and walks over to where Root’s standing. Root looks her straight in the eye. “I love you and I need you. I always have and being apart nearly broke me. So yes, I want to spend as much time as I can with you. Now, are you going to help me or am I just going to sit around making doe eyes at you all day?”

“Good, because I need your help.” Root smiles at Shaw and it’s like she’s smiling with her entire body. Shaw can’t help but smile back, but after a moment she looks away. “Uh...Root, I’m not really in any condition to help anyone. I can’t fight...I can’t...”

Root interrupts her. “Sameen I don’t need you to fight, although I’d like you to help me with strategy. But that’s not what I meant right now either. I need you to try to remember anything you learned during your captivity.”

There’s that look again, and Root’s now certain it’s fear. Shaw stands angrily, clenching her fists. “You want to know what I learned?! I learned how to be afraid and guilty and lonely and a bunch of other useless emotions so now I’m useless!” Shaw picks up the lamp from the nightstand and throws it against the wall and it shatters to pieces with a loud crash.

The guards, this time Adam and Sean, again rush in, but before they can assess the situation Shaw has her gun drawn. Root can tell by his eyes, Adam’s going to reach for his weapon. But so can Shaw. Root darts in front of her. She knows Shaw’s reflexes will prevent her from shooting Root in the back, but the guards can’t.

“Don’t!” She screams at Adam. Shaw pushes Root behind her. Root knows she’s only protecting her, but the situation is quickly escalating. “Adam stand down. Now Adam!” Their hands drop but they don’t back away. “Unless you hear me specifically call for you, do not enter this room. No matter what you hear and that includes a gunshot. Am I clear?” They both nod yes although it’s clear they don’t like it. “Go back to your posts.”

Root waits until they walk out to look at Shaw and takes a deep breath. “I could’ve killed you Root! Not only am I useless but as long as I’m alive, you’ll never be safe.” Root stands up slowly from where she landed when Shaw pushed her out of the way.

“Really? Then why did you step in front of me?” Shaw looks away. “That was instinct, you can’t count on it.” Root actually laughs. “Seriously? I’ve been counting on it since the moment we met and not once have you let me down.”

Root takes the gun from Shaw’s hand and places it on the nightstand. She sits down on the bed pulling Shaw down with her so they’re facing each other and doesn’t let go. “Sameen you were feeling those things a long time before you were captured.” Shaw shakes her head no vehemently, but Root ignores it.

“You were better at muting them, but they were there. There is no chip in the world that can create a feeling from nothing. Even Harry can’t accomplish that...otherwise we’d just teach the Machine to feel.” Shaw searches for the truth in Root’s eyes.
“Sameen, I’m not the same person either. We both need to learn how to live with who we are now. But they didn’t take away who you are. If they had, I wouldn’t be sitting here right now. I’d be a lab rat or dead.” Root stares into Shaw’s eyes earnestly. “If you can’t or won’t do this, that’s okay too. We’ll deal with the chip and then we’ll walk away and build another life. But I’m not leaving you and I’m not letting you leave me.

I’m going to go take care of a few things and I’ll be back as soon as I’m done. Please call me if you need anything…or even if you just need me. I’d like that.”

Root walks out of the room and Adam and Sean immediately check to make sure she’s not wounded. “Okay guys, I realize now I should’ve talked to all security personnel and explained the situation with Shaw. I’m sorry. My fault. So here’s how it’s going to be.

No one enters her room without explicit permission from me. That means you radio me before you let anyone in and that includes John. You also do not enter her room even if you hear a struggle or a bullet or things crashing about even if I’m in there. If I’m not there then radio me immediately.”

Adam juts his chin. He’s always been stubborn but also extremely loyal. “We can’t let her hurt you,” he exclaims in frustration. “Adam, the safest place in the world for me is with Shaw. You don’t have to believe it or understand it, but you do have to accept it. Otherwise I’ll reassign you with no hard feelings.”

Adam looks insulted. “Of course I’ll do as you say.”

Root’s satisfied they’ll do what she asks. “Okay, I’ll be back in a bit.” She calls a meeting of all the security personnel except those currently patrolling the grounds. No one questions her orders and no one asks to be reassigned. Grice will let the others know.

When she walks into her office, Daniel and Daizo are huddled around Greenfield’s computer where he’s typing furiously. She walks over but doesn’t interrupt. She sees he’s trying to trace an IP address. A few minutes later he looks up and groans. “Fuck! I almost had it!” Root waits for him to calm down. “Why were you trying to trace that particular IP?” Daizo’s the one who answers. “It was imbedded in the files we found on the Samaritan hard drive. But it was routed through so many servers we couldn’t keep up and we lost it.”

“Daizo has the Machine given you anymore information?” Daizo looks like he wants to ask what’s going on, but he knows Root won’t tell him unless she wants him to know. So he just shakes his head. She leaves them to their work.

She grabs some clothes and stuff from her room and then enters Shaw’s next door. She grabs a duffle bag and packs some things…she hesitates but then throws in a few more. She then radios Jack and explains what she needs.

At least this time Shaw’s not in the bathtub but the gun is gone from the nightstand. Root’s sure its tucked into Shaw’s waistband. That’s okay. Shaw’s not a child to be punished. “Hey sweetie, I
brought you some stuff.” She drops the duffle on the bed.

Shaw’s looking out the window again and doesn’t turn around. “I know you have better things to do than babysit me Root.” Root knew Shaw would try to push her away after their previous conversation. “Yes I do.” Shaw flinches, clearly thrown by the response.

“So that’s why I’m not. I already told you I need your help. Countless times over the last couple of years I wished I had you with me, not because of who you are to me, but because of all you know; particularly when it came to special ops.”

Shaw turns slowly and walks over to where Root’s standing. Root looks her straight in the eye. “I love you and I need you. I always have and being apart nearly broke me. So yes, I want to spend as much time as I can with you. Now, are you going to help me or am I just going to sit around making doe eyes at you all day?”

Shaw rolls her eyes and gives a small smile. “Like you’re not going to do that anyway.” Root’s laugh bursts from deep inside. “Touché…”

She pulls out the map she took from her room and lays it out on the table. “Green dots are all the Samaritan server locations we know about. Red dots are leads we investigated while looking for Samaritan’s brain but came up empty. There has to be a base location where the core heuristics live for lack of a better word. I’m almost certain it’s not in Greer’s headquarters in New York. It’s too risky and obvious.

Blue dots are Samaritan factories. It’s manufacturing everything from school computers to car engines. Its goal is to integrate itself into every aspect of our lives, without anyone knowing there’s a puppet master. But then, I’m not telling you anything you don’t already know.”

Shaw studies the map. “I wouldn’t be too hasty to rule out New York. Greer’s a megalomaniac. He’ll want to be at the center of the action. Also, the best place to hide is in plain sight. It’s how we survived for so long. But you’re probably right about it not being at their headquarters. At least not the one we know about.”

Shaw looks away, lost in thought. “When I woke up after they patched me up, I was in a hospital bed hooked up to machines, but it wasn’t a hospital. The room was concrete and all the equipment was portable. There were no sounds from the corridor and there was a rotating schedule but they were the same six people. They kept me high on morphine so I don’t remember much else.”

Root takes it all in calmly. She knows if Shaw thinks she can’t handle it, she’ll shut down. “You think you could identify any of the people you saw? We have an extensive database including pictures of employees. It might help us narrow down the search for the people that developed the chip.”

Shaw closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, slowly exhaling. “I’m not sure, but I’m willing to try.” Root doesn’t overwhelm her so she stops with that for the day. “Okay I’ll have them bring another laptop in so you can start looking later.” Shaw looks…well haunted is the only word that comes to Root’s mind.

“I brought you a few things that might help pass the time when you’re bored.” Root takes her own stuff out of the duffle then hands it to Shaw. Shaw looks inside and begins to take out stuff. She pulls out several guns, which earns Root a puzzled a glance. Then a gun cleaning kit and a book. Root had been surprised when she found the book in Shaw’s apartment, but it was obviously worn so Shaw must’ve been reading it.
There’s a knock at the door and Shaw’s hand immediately moves to the gun in her waistband. Root turns to Shaw. “That’s going to be Jack with a few more things I asked him to bring in okay?” Shaw looks uncertain but nods her head yes.

Root goes to the door and helps him so no one else has to come in with him. It takes them a while because some of the stuff is heavy and cumbersome. Root can see Shaw getting antsy out of the corner of her eye. All the stuff is by the door because she wants Shaw to put it wherever she wants. As soon as they’re done she ushers him out.

Shaw can’t hide her pleased look. “I’ll help you set it up. Some of it needs to be assembled since it was sitting around in storage.” Shaw hasn’t said anything and Root starts to worry maybe this wasn’t the right thing to do so she starts babbling “…I mean only if you want, you don’t have to, we can take it out again…” Shaw looks up and pulls Root to her capturing her lips, caressing gently with her tongue. Root lets her set the pace and Shaw keeps them pressed together, deepening the kiss. When she pulls away they’re both gasping and Shaw lays her head on Root’s shoulder. “It’s perfect.”

Root struggles to regulate her breathing and push down the desire that’s now ratcheting through her body. She wants nothing more than to push Shaw down on the bed and devour her, but she doubts Shaw’s ready for that yet. Shaw steps away and mumbles, “Sorry…I’m not…” Root smiles at her. “You can kiss me anytime sweetie.”

They spend a couple of hours putting all the gym equipment together and when it’s finally done they both need a shower. Root stands up groaning. “I’ll go take a shower in my room, so you can use this one.” But as she starts walking away Shaw clears her throat. “Since when do you pass up a chance to shower with me?” Root’s heart starts racing and she turns around slowly. Her smile is practically gleeful, but she doesn’t say anything and lets Shaw pull her into the bathroom.

Shaw’s not sure how this is going to feel, but she wants to find out. She…they both…waited long enough. She knows she can trust Root to give her what she needs.

Root undresses while Shaw watches, her eyes tracking Root’s hands as they move on her body. Root lifts her eyebrow in question and Shaw raises her arms, giving Root permission to undress her. Root takes her time but doesn’t touch Shaw anymore than necessary to undress her. She can’t control her body’s reaction and her breath catches. She’s sure Shaw can hear her heart beating. They step into the shower and Shaw turns on the water and they’re surrounded by steam almost immediately. Root’s skin immediately pinks up but it’s not just the water causing it.

She leans against the shower wall, trying to give Shaw all the space she wants. Shaw looks at her curiously like she can’t decide what she wants now that they’re in here. But she lathers up the washcloth and starts at Root’s neck, making her way slowly down Root’s body. Root’s hands claw at the tiles. She’s trying mightily to keep her hands at her sides and not on Shaw’s body where she wants them. She can tell the moment Shaw smells her arousal because her nostrils flare and she looks up at Root with a knowing smile.

She stands up and circles her finger until Root turns around. She starts working down her arms and then her back, but now she’s trailing the washcloth with kisses. Root’s shivering under her touch and she can’t stifle the moan from deep in her throat. Shaw doesn’t rush but she stops teasing and turns Root around so she can claim her mouth. Root surrenders, even though she wants moremoremore and she wants Shaw to touch her the way only Shaw knows how. But she keeps her hands at her sides.

Root takes Shaw’s breath away. Her lean body resting on the tile, her wet hair plastered to face, the shower raining drops over them both. Root’s beautiful. Shaw can’t believe she’s here in this
moment right now and feels a bit disoriented but she pushes it back down. She bites at Root’s collarbone and nibbles her neck, making her way down to her nipples. She draws an already erect nub into her mouth, biting and then soothing with her tongue. Root whispers her name. ‘Sameen...’ But she bites down on the ‘please’ and the ‘fuck me’ and everything else she wants to scream.

Shaw lifts her head and returns her attention to Root’s mouth, while her fingers start to explore Root’s slick center. Root gasps and Shaw whispers against her mouth. ‘I missed you so much’ Before the last word leaves her mouth she enters Root with two fingers, circling her clit with her thumb. This time Root can’t contain herself. ‘Please baby more’ Shaw smiles and enters Root with another finger. Root slams her head against the wall softly, trying to ground herself so she doesn’t reach out or try to take control. Shaw’s hot breath is in her ear and she’s hitting her g-spot with every stroke and rubbing her clit. ‘I missed driving you crazy...’

Root’s pleasure spirals and builds until she comes hard, Shaw’s name on her lips. Shaw keeps stroking until she feels Root start to unclench. She brings her fingers to her mouth and licks them slowly while Root watches and feels herself soaking all over again and not from the water. Shaw gives Root an almost tender kiss and admits, “That’s all I can give right now.”

Root can’t help the tears running down her face and she hopes Shaw can’t tell. She’s just overwhelmed...she’s here with Shaw and she never thought she’d feel this again. Shaw’s touch on her body, Shaw inside her...just Shaw surrounding her. She brings her forehead down to meet Shaw’s. “It’s more than enough...it’s perfect.”
“Sameen…what’s wrong? Did something happen while I was gone?” Shaw remains impassive. “You tell me.”

Root gets out and leaves Shaw to finish her shower. She’s a little unsteady on her feet and stumbles while she’s drying off. She dresses and decides to go get them something to eat. “Sam, I’m going to get us food. I’ll be back.”

She runs into Grice. “How’s Shaw?” Root smiles at him. She knows he really cares about Shaw. They saved each other’s lives more than once. “She’s okay for now. But we really need to find the developers of the chip. We need to get it out of her head.”

“Any luck? Anything I can do?” Root nods no. “Not yet. But when we find them I expect you to lead the team to extract them.” Grice starts to walk away but turns back. “What do you want me to do with that nurse?” For a moment Root can’t figure out who he’s talking about. “Oh, Terry. I haven’t talked to Shaw about her yet. Just keep her on ice until I do.” Grice gives a short nod.

She resumes her walk to the canteen and runs into Alex. “Alex I really appreciate your hard work getting the faraday cage up.” Alex smiles and they start walking together.

“Actually, I’ve been working on refining the set up so it’s not so ad-hoc. I should be able to have them install it in a couple of days. We might be able to extend its coverage so it’s not limited to the infirmary.” Root’s so excited she gives Alex a short hug. Alex laughs and walks away.

Root grabs some light food, keeping in mind Shaw’s not up to anything heavy yet. She also swings by her office. Reese is there. “I’m getting ready to head to Manhattan. I’ll check in. If something goes wrong get a message to Fusco.”

Root feels like she should say something, like some kind of barrier has risen between them. “John, about Shaw…” But Reese shrugs. “I get it.” He pats her briefly on the shoulder and leaves.

Root grabs the other laptop and as an afterthought she grabs her mp3 player. Maybe some music will also help Shaw with the silence.
She’s been gone longer than she intended. Shaw’s sitting at the desk chair facing the door with her arms crossed and an unreadable look on her face. Well mostly unreadable. Root knows it means Shaw’s angry. “Hey sweetie…sorry I took longer than I thought.”

Shaw scowls. “Where were you?” Root hesitates, “I told you I was going to get us some food. I ran into a couple of people I needed to talk to and then I saw John before he left. Why?” Root knows she was gone almost an hour, but still. It seems like something else is going on.

She puts the stuff she’s carrying on the table and sits on the edge of the desk. Shaw rolls the chair away from her but turns to face her. “Sameen…what’s wrong? Did something happen while I was gone?” Shaw remains impassive. “You tell me.”

Root’s starting to worry; Shaw’s really upset about something. Something Root did. “Sam, you’re going to have to be more specific. I’m not sure what you’re referring to. I’m not hiding anything from you.” Anger suffuses Shaw’s face, but Root knows that means she’ll at least find out what’s going on when Shaw yells at her.

“Who’s the redhead Root?” Root looks at her totally baffled and then realizes Shaw must’ve been looking out the window when she was talking to Alex. “That’s Alex. She’s the one who built the faraday cage. She’s been with me for a while. She’s ingenious at figuring out solutions for almost insurmountable problems.”

Root can tell the explanation is not helping. At all. Shaw just looks angrier. But Root doesn’t know what else she can say. “How long did it take her to figure out how to get into your bed?” Root feels like she’s been slapped. She tries to stay calm. Shaw’s dealing with feelings she doesn’t know how to process yet.

“I doubt she ever considered it, but in any case she’s never been in my bed. Neither has anyone else. No one since we were together the night before the stock exchange. In fact, no one for a long time before that… I was faithful to you long before you ever thought to be faithful to me.” Root didn’t mean to let the last part slip out, but her anger’s getting the better of her too.

“What are you talking about Root?” Root sighs. “It doesn’t matter. Let’s not do this…” But Shaw’s not going to let it go. She just sits there waiting. She’s good at waiting. Root decides maybe this can turn into a good thing if it helps Shaw to understand her feelings.

“When I had to leave after I was tortured by Control, I asked the Machine to look out for you. It took a few times for Her to understand I didn’t want to know every time you took someone back to your place or went with them to theirs.” Even though the memories are painful, Root rushes to reassure Shaw.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. We’d only slept together a couple of times. It’s not like we were in a relationship or anything. You’d made it clear you didn’t do relationships or girlfriends or more than three nights. But it hurt me anyway. I didn’t think it would. I never cared before…Then there was Tomas. I really thought I’d lost you.”

Root finally sees signs Shaw’s beginning to calm down. She uncrosses her arms and sighs. “Maybe she should’ve looked a little longer. I never slept with any of them. I tried, there was kissing and groping. I wanted to prove to myself nothing was different. But none of them were you. I only wanted you. Even back then.

And I most certainly never slept with or even kissed Tomas, Root. Who knows where that playboy’s mouth has been. But you crossed a line during a mission and I wanted to make you sweat a little. Blurring out our private life for everyone to hear was not cool.”
Root’s not sure what to say. She never knew. She kneels in between Shaw’s legs and holds her hands. “Sameen these feelings are normal. Well they’re not healthy if taken to an extreme, but everyone gets jealous sometimes. It makes more sense now because we were apart for so long.”

Shaw just seems lost. “I’m not equipped for this Root. I can’t do it.” Root leans back. “Sameen, everything’s different and you’re insecure about just how much things have changed. But I haven’t slept with anyone else since I met you.

I was busy and it never came up anyway, I’m not going to say I’m a saint. But you were in the back of my mind since that day. Even after you shot me the next time we met. You didn’t kill me and I wanted to know why. Then we had the night in the safe house and I knew. It would always be you, even if we never slept together again.”

Shaw’s calmer but it’s obvious she’s still upset. “Sam, why did you think something was going on with Alex?” Shaw scowls. “She held her hand at the small of your back and leaned into you. Then you hugged her.” Root tries to hide her smile.

“There’s a drill going on out there so it’s hard to hear. Then she told me she might be able to extend the faraday cage and I was so excited. You’d be able to get out…” That just all out terrifies Shaw.

“Only when you’re ready Sam.” Root’s own anger faded quickly, she understands possessiveness. She’s just had more experience dealing with it. “Sam, my nickname around here is roboroot. They don’t say it to my face, of course. I know why though. I don’t let anyone near. Physically or emotionally.”

Root can’t help but laugh at the irony. Shaw frowns. “Something about this is funny?” Root stops laughing but she’s still smiling. “Sameen, that orgasm today was the first one I’ve had since you gave me the last one.” Shaw smirks smugly and Root rolls her eyes.

“Come on I brought you a sandwich and some fruit. Let’s eat and I’ll show you the other goodies.” Root can tell Shaw’s emotionally exhausted. Root is too and she’s sure this won’t be the last meltdown they’ll have to deal with.

“I brought you my mp3 player and there’re some movies on the laptop too. If there’s anything else you can think of to keep you from getting bored, tell me and I’ll try to get it. I know it’s going to get frustrating.”

Shaw’s already checking out which movies are on the laptop. “Okay. Thanks. You’ve done so much…” Root does that smile with her whole body that always gets to Shaw. “I didn’t realize how tired I am.” Shaw doesn’t say anything else and Root’s about to leave, but then decides to ask.

“Sam, no pressure. Do you want me to stay with you? Or I can go and come back tomorrow?” Shaw looks at her like it goes without saying. Only Root’s not sure which part. “Use your words Sameen.” Shaw raises her eyebrows. “Funny, I was sure you could read my mind.” Root sighs patiently.

“I want you to stay with me here in this bed. You make a good heater.”
Root gently tucks a strand of Shaw’s hair behind her ear and kisses her shoulder. “Well that didn’t suck…” Shaw laughs. “Oh, there was plenty of sucking.”

Chapter Notes

Okay this chapter is mostly sex, but there is some plot progression...the next few will be mostly plot.

Root changes into shorts and a tank top and crawls into bed. Shaw pulls up Lethal Weapon on the laptop and they watch together sitting up against the wall, shoulders touching slightly. Shaw lowers the volume and Root looks over at her.

“You said John was leaving. Where to?” She turns so she’s facing Shaw. “To New York. We haven’t heard from Harold for almost a year. John thinks he can convince him to come here to help with your chip.” Shaw looks pensive. “He gave me up for dead, it seems unlikely.” Shaw’s not feeling sorry for herself; she’s just stating the facts. “I don’t know Sam, but I know he cares about John and I think John won’t be willing to take no for an answer this time.” Shaw shrugs. “Sam, John gave up everything to help me find you. I had to stop him from turning around and heading back to Maple by himself because he wanted to recover the box in case it could help us understand and remove the chip. So if anyone can convince Harold to help, it will be him.

That reminds me. I’m going to ask you about something and if you’re not ready to talk about it just tell me. Okay?” Shaw looks apprehensive but nods yes. “Do you remember any of your nurses from the medical facility? I’m holding one from Maple for questioning but I wanted to talk to you about it first.” Shaw seems to be shutting down, but Root waits patiently. It may be Shaw needs to distance herself from the memories to be able to talk about it. She looks away and speaks so low Root can barely make out what she’s saying. “There was one that was there most days for hours. I would come to and see her in the room.” Root gives her time but Shaw doesn’t say anything else.

“Could her name be Terry?” Shaw’s eyes dart to Root’s. “Yes…Root she was there.” Root gives her a small smile. “I’m going to question her tomorrow. I’m sure I can get her to identify some of the Samaritan doctors.” Shaw shakes her head. “No, Root you don’t understand. She was there. In the operating room when I had my surgery, every time Greer came…she always stayed in the room. She knows about everything…” By the end Shaw sounds so small Root has to stop herself from getting up right now and tearing the woman limb from limb.

Root takes a deep breath. “I’m going to question her tomorrow. Do you want me to do it alone? Or do you want me to bring her here?” Shaw’s visibly angry, which as far as Root’s concerned is 1,000 times better than defeated. “I think you should bring her here. Maybe what she says will jar some other memories or at least I can tell you if I think she’s telling the truth.” Root squeezes her hand in agreement.
Shaw turns up the volume and they finish watching the movie. They both fall asleep towards the end, but are jarred awake when the laptop falls off the bed. Shaw changes into shorts and a tank to sleep and Root washes up in the bathroom.

Root gets under the covers close enough to the edge on her side so Shaw has plenty of room. But Shaw scoots towards the middle and pulls Root up behind her, wrapping Root’s arms around herself and snuggling in. Root’s a little surprised just because Shaw rarely allowed cuddling, even right after sex. But she’s certainly not complaining.

Shaw drifts off to sleep immediately but Root’s wide awake. She gently caresses Shaw’s arm as she thinks about what they need to do next. Sometime later, Shaw turns in her arms and tucks her head into Root’s neck. “Can’t sleep?”

“I’m sorry Sam. Did I wake you?” She feels Shaw nod no. ‘I want to feel your skin against mine’ Root’s not sure what Shaw means so she waits, holding Shaw in her arms. Shaw pulls her head back and looks at Root, her eyes blown wide. Her voice is husky with desire. ‘Take off your clothes for me Root, please’ Root pulls her arm out from under Shaw’s head and sits up to take off her tank, then lays back down and scoots out of her shorts. The covers are now by the foot of the bed and Shaw rakes her eyes down Root’s body.

Root turns to face her and Shaw leans in and captures her lips, moving slowly, her tongue caressing, nipping gently at her lower lip. Root shivers and wants to pull Shaw closer, but she stays still. Shaw pulls away and takes off her own clothes. She straddles Root’s hips and Root turns under her. Shaw takes Root’s hands and brings them up to her waist. ‘I want you to touch me’

Root’s breath hitches and her heart starts racing. She drags her fingertips slowly down Shaw’s thighs, drawing nonsense patterns on her skin. Shaw’s eyes are glued to hers and it’s like they’re having a conversation. Root lifts her knees so Shaw can lie back against them, giving her more access to Shaw’s skin. She meanders up and gently squeezes her thumbs into the apex of Shaw’s thighs. Shaw shivers slightly and Root can see her arousal glistening, searing her skin with its heat.

Their breaths sound loud in the quiet room, the only light from the grounds outside filtering through the window.

She explores Shaw’s skin unhurriedly on the way to her breasts. She uses her nails to trace lightly around Shaw’s aureoles, watching her nipples harden. She detours, running her fingers down Shaw’s torso, before returning to her nipples. She uses the pads of her thumbs to rub and then tug until Shaw can’t stifle a moan. Shaw propels herself up Root’s body, her arousal leaving a slick trail on Root’s skin. She bends down and teases Root’s lips with her tongue and whispers in her ear. ‘I want your tongue inside me’

Root feels the words like a bolt to her center and her own arousal’s dripping onto the sheet below them. She can’t help the guttural moan escaping from her mouth. ‘Sameen’ Shaw clasps Root’s head in her hands and drowns in her mouth, swallowing Root’s moans until she can’t breathe and has to tear away.

She lifts and hovers over Root’s mouth, using the wall to lean her hands against, bracing herself with her knees. Her hair frames her face and as she looks down, Root memorizes the moment.
She wraps her hands up and over Shaw’s thighs, pulling her closer. Shaw’s scent floods her senses like a raging flood and she just wants to drown in it. She flattens her tongue and takes a long slow lick from the base of Shaw’s sex to just under her clit. Shaw moans and leans her head on her arms resting on the wall. She’s breathing heavily and when Root looks up she sees a sheen of sweat coating her body. Root runs her tongue ever so gradually up and then down and is rewarded with evidence of Shaw’s increased arousal.

She kisses her outer lips tenderly, before pushing gently to her inner lips, placing soft kisses at Shaw’s entrance. But this is not about teasing. Root just wants to make Shaw feel so good she forgets about everything else but them here and now. She pulls Shaw down lower to settle into her mouth. She swirls her tongue into Shaw and she’s inundated with Shaw’s flavor, captivated by the texture, swamped with her smell. She pulls out only to reach in deeper, losing herself in her lover and the sounds she’s drawing from her.

Shaw moans and calls Root’s name. Her memories don't compare to the reality of the pleasure of having Root's tongue inside her. Root drags her tongue out and circles Shaw’s wetness around her clit, sucking lightly, then dipping back inside to taste Shaw again. She works Shaw over gently, then roughly, fast, then slow, deep, then shallow until Shaw’s begging for release. ’Root please…I want to come in your mouth’ Hearing Shaw, her voice dripping with desire, needing her, Root loses herself completely.

She sucks on Shaw’s already protruding clit with her lips and rubs her tongue around it teasingly. She slips a finger into Shaw and rubs her g-spot in tune with her sucking and she feels Shaw’s muscles tightening. Shaw’s hand is tangled in Root’s hair, keeping her mouth where she wants it. ‘yes!rightthereRoot!’ Shaw’s orgasm comes rushing down like an avalanche and it lasts forever and its better than she dreamed, better than she remembered, and its Root always Root and only Root who’s ever been able to make her feel like this…worshiped and needed and wanted…

Root licks and sucks and tastes until Shaw pulls away, completely undone, although Root follows with her mouth until Shaw drops down next to her gasping. Root’s trying to catch her breath, dizzy from lack of oxygen, but she would’ve gladly passed out with Shaw on her tongue…

Shaw’s breathing slowly returns to normal and she turns slowly, settling half on top of Root’s body. She cradles Root’s face with her hands and pulls her lips into her mouth, tasting her own arousal, chasing its flavor, swirling her tongue inside Root’s until they’re both breathless again and she pulls away and rests her head on Root’s shoulder, Root’s arms wrapped around her.

Root gently tucks a strand of Shaw’s hair behind her ear and kisses her shoulder. “Well that didn’t suck…” Shaw laughs. “Oh, there was plenty of sucking.”

“Root?”

“Hmmm?”

“Before they threw me in the box, while I was recovering from the gunshots, they kept me high on morphine. Withdrawal while in the box was a bitch.

But anyway, while I was high I hallucinated a lot, but it was like one continuous story. We, you and me, were doing our thing, saving numbers, a lot of flirting and eye rolling, risking our lives…but at
the end of the day we stayed together and of course we fucked, but we also laughed and played with Bear…and we lived together.”

“Sounds wonderful Sam.”

“Why do you think that was the reality my subconscious created?”

Root holds Shaw closer. “Do you want me to answer that honestly or do you want me to tell you what I know you want to hear?”

“The truth.”

“We’re in love Sameen.”

“What makes you think that wasn’t what I wanted to hear?”

“Well, you’ve been playing deaf to it for a long time.”

Shaw smiles and straddles Root’s midriff again. She bends down and bites the sensitive skin on Root’s neck and nibbles her earlobe, letting her tongue lightly travel the rim. ‘I’m going to taste every inch of you’ Shaw’s breath is hot in Root’s ear and the memory of the first time Shaw spoke those words to her immediately jumps into Root’s mind and lower…

Sliding down so she’s straddling her thighs, Shaw skims Root’s body with her hands, barely touching, making Root quiver like the strings on a masterfully played violin. She continues nipping, biting, sucking Root’s body, alternating pain with pleasure. Root’s nipples are hard, body quivering and arching in anticipation. Shaw strokes her clit lightly until Root begs for relief. ‘Sameen please’

Her finger coated with Root’s essence, she slips it into Root’s mouth. Root immediately sucks on it, sending a bolt of pleasure down Shaw’s body. Shaw pulls her finger out slowly and uses it to caress Root’s lips, bending down and lapping them gently. Root moans when she tastes herself in Shaw’s kiss and she runs her nails down Shaw’s back. Shaw whispers hotly into her ear, ‘you’re definitely salvation’

It’s the hottest thing Root’s ever heard and she’s desperate to feel Shaw inside her. Shaw reaches down to Root’s hot center and run her fingertips gently over the surface. Root’s stomach muscles tighten. Shaw scoots down and eases her arms under Root’s thighs and hold her firmly as she lifts Root to her lips. Root’s leg immediately rests over Shaw’s shoulder, offering herself, wanting no space between her and Shaw.

She feels Shaw’s soft exhalations over her center and she melts. Shaw makes an indirect assault on Root’s folds, licking first up one side and then the other, each stroke opening Root up just a little more. It lasts forever and Root finally breaks and growls. ‘Sameen!’ Shaw moves her tongue with renewed purpose and Root grips the sheet tightly in her fists. The tip of Shaw’s tongue traces a path between Root’s folds, slowly pressing ever deeper until Root feels her inside.

Root sighs in relief, she’s so close to climax, but Shaw seems able to spark bundles of nerves that release the tension keeping her on the razor’s edge of orgasm. Root’s breathing hard, almost hyperventilating, and her skin is damp with sweat. She whimpered and pleads under her breath until Shaw finally relents and seeks out her clit.
Shaw's tongue touches her clit and Root's so sensitized that she feels the almost imperceptible movements as Shaw draws a tiny infinity symbol. It's an indescribable feeling. Shaw continues to coax at the same inexorable pace and after a few moments Root's entire body is balanced on a single fulcrum of pleasure. Shaw slips her fingers in swiftly and strokes Root's g-spot firmly, driving Root over the edge until she's coming hard and moaning Shaw's name, arching into her mouth. Shaw rides it out with her, gentling, caressing Root's stomach.

When Root stills Shaw pulls out and climbs her body. “I better start working out if we're going to keep doing this.” Root catches her breath and laughs. “Is there any doubt? Because I can guarantee I want you to keep doing...well...in a word...me.” Shaw rolls her eyes but doesn’t try to hide her smile.

She pulls the sheet over them. “Shut up and spoon me Root.”

Root wakes first in the morning and takes a shower, leaving Shaw sleeping while she goes to get them coffee and some breakfast. The guards greet her warmly and she smiles.

Shaw’s still sleeping when she gets back but Root can’t help it. She sits next to her on the bed and caresses her body. Shaw hums into awareness. “Mmmm...that...smells good!” Root slaps at her ass playfully. “And here I thought my hands on your body would be foremost on your mind.”

Shaw looks over her shoulder, her hair splayed over her back and takes Root's breath away. Shaw knows exactly what she’s doing to Root with her smoldering look. “See something you like?” Root nods her head ruefully. “Oh yeah…”

She stands up before she ends up stripping and crawling back into bed for the rest of the day. It seems like Shaw’s making progress but too much too soon may overwhelm her. At least there were no nightmares last night.

Shaw pulls on her shirt and sits up in bed, grabbing the cup of coffee Root left on the nightstand. She takes a deep whiff. “Mmmm...and you remembered how I like it…” Root smiles at her fondly. “Of course, sweetie.”

Sam, I need to check in with the boys (Shaw scowls) and check on the progress of our search. Then I need to touch base with the team leaders and make sure they’re following John’s training schedule. I’ll come back when I’m done and if you’re up to it I’m anxious to interrogate our new prisoner.” Shaw nods. “Okay.” Root has a hard time turning away. She wants Shaw by her side. She sighs and leans down for a kiss before she leaves. Shaw claims her mouth and leaves her breathless and now Root’s wet and really wants to stay. But she drags herself away.

She’s still lost in her thoughts of last night when she walks into her office. Daizo’s the only one there and Root smiles at him. “Hey D, anything new?” Daizo looks up at her with a puzzled look. Root almost seems like her old self with a smile in her eyes. “Not really. Reese checked in as scheduled. Said he’ll be back tonight.” Root wonders if he’ll be coming alone, but she pushes the thoughts aside. She’ll know soon enough. She needs to get back to the coding of the virus this.
afternoon. She’s more anxious than ever to bring an end to Samaritan so they can all get back to their lives. Now that she has Shaw, she doesn’t need anything else.

She heads to the security office to speak with Grice. Trent’s just leaving when she walks in. “Hi Trent.” Trent’s always nervous around her since she kicked his ass. “Oh…uh…hi Root. I’m…just…” Root just smiles and leaves him standing there. Otherwise they’ll be there for the next hour while he stutters. “Root,” Grice greets her. “How’s Shaw?”

“You know Shaw Grice, she’s…” She wants to say amazing, sexy, unbeatable, hot…but she just lets the thought hang. “Nothing keeps her down for long.” Grice nods in agreement. “I plan to talk to our prisoner today. Has she said anything yet?”

“No. She just keeps pleading for us to let her go and claiming she doesn’t know anything.” Root’s anger shows in her face. “Oh she knows quite a bit. She was there in the room every time Greer interrogated Shaw and she was in the operating room when they implanted the chip.”

Grice’s look mirrors Root’s. “I’ll let you know when I’m ready. I want her brought to Shaw’s room. We’ll need the usual implements for the interrogation.” Grice nods, and Root leaves before she gives in to the temptation to start the interrogation right now.

She walks out to the training field and speaks with Dani. The training is proceeding as per Reese’s orders. She watches for a bit, noting the improved skills of the groups.

Shaw’s cleaning her guns and listening to music when Root gets back. Root watches her for a minute. She needs to remember to get Shaw some speakers so she doesn’t have to use the ear buds. If she startles, someone’s likely to get shot.

“Are you just going to stand there?” Root smiles and shakes her head. Shaw always knows when she’s near. She takes the ear buds out and turns to look at Root.

“Are you ready?” Shaw shrugs and nods yes. “Can Grice stay?” Shaw takes a minute to think about it. “I don’t want anyone but you listening to what they did to me Root.” Root knows better than to offer sympathy. “Okay. Let’s do it.” She lets a sinister smile creep onto her face. “It’ll be just like old times…
Chapter Summary

"Two years Finch. She went through that alone for two years and never betrayed us. She knew our cover identities, about Fusco, the subway, Root’s connection to the Machine and she told them nothing. We owe her everything. You owe her everything."

Chapter Notes

Reese goes to see Finch. Root and Shaw start looking for answers. One Samaritan agent ends up the worse for wear.

Reese thought a lot during the drive about what to say to Finch. He’d considered calling ahead but decided against it. He doesn’t want Finch to have time to think too much before making a decision.

He knows Root’s upset Finch hasn’t reached out to anyone since they left Manhattan. She’s really upset he hasn’t reached out to Reese specifically. But Reese gets it. What would they say? Finch doesn’t want to hear about their progress and Reese doesn’t want to hear excuses.

Although he’s sure Finch has some idea, since the Machine probably updates him on anything related to Samaritan. Reese wonders what exactly the Machine tells him. Does it report on deaths and destruction? Does it couch it in terms of effectiveness?

In the end it doesn’t matter he supposes. Finch isn’t stupid. He knows Root and what she’s capable of. But Reese’s sure his departure surprised him. Finch develops a specific idea of a person, Reese included, and then has a very hard time shifting his thinking when experience and events change them, whether for worse or for better.

Root radios Grice they’re ready for the interrogation. He shows up a few minutes later to set up the space. The guards don’t let him in until they check with Root.

“Sam, Grice is here. Is it okay if he comes in?”

Shaw takes a deep breath and nods yes. Root walks over and opens the door for him. He walks in rolling a short steel table. He looks over at Shaw. He knows better than to ask or comment on her absence or even to ask how she’s feeling. That’s not something people like them talk about.

“Shaw. Good to see you.”

Shaw looks at him not unkindly and acknowledges the sentiment, but doesn’t say anything. Grice and Root clear a space to set up. The table contains knives, blow torch, taser, and other tools useful
for extreme interrogations. Root doesn’t think any of it will be necessary other than for the mental images it will create in Terry’s mind. She’s not military or trained in methods to resist torture. At least not that Root’s aware of, but then again the woman was almost convincing enough when she pled her ignorance, so they may be in for a surprise.

They spread plastic sheeting on the floor and then place a chair on top of it. “I’ll go bring her.” Root nods and Grice leaves.

“How do you want to handle this Sam? You want me to take the lead or do you want to question her?” Shaw considers it. “I’ll stand back where she can’t see me. You start and I’ll jump in once she’s fully entrenched herself in lies. We’ll take it from there.”

“Okay.” They’ve done this sort of thing before so Root knows they’ll have no trouble playing off each other effectively. They really do make a great team, which is great for the people they protect and a nightmare for their enemies.

Grice knocks on the door again, but this time the guards let him in without checking with Root. She already told them he’d be back with the prisoner. Terry’s wearing a hood over her head and her hands are zip-tied. It’s all for effect, she really has no chance in hell of fighting any of them off long enough to escape. Instead of placing her in the chair on the plastic sheeting, he guides her to the more comfortable desk chair. He cuts the zip-ties but leaves the hood on. He looks to Root who indicates he should leave. He walks out without a word. He knows they’ll leave Terry in silence to fuck with her head.

Root walks over to the table and moves things around just to make noise and get Terry wondering just what is coming next. Terry turns her head towards the sound even though she can’t see anything. Root stands by Shaw and they observe her for the next half hour. After a few minutes Terry starts calling out. “Is anybody there? Please let me go. I’ve told you everything I know. Please!” They don’t answer and Terry doesn’t stand up or remove the hood, even though she’s not restrained. “Please I know you’re there.”

Eventually Root walks over to the desk and leans on the edge. Terry’s back is turned to her in the chair. “Take of your hood.” She does and looks around. “Turn around.” She turns her chair around so she’s facing Root and doesn’t notice Shaw in the corner. The chair’s a couple of feet away from the desk. Terry starts to plead immediately. “Please let me go. All I did was answer an advertisement for a job. I was laid off from work and it’s a small town. I didn’t have a choice.”

Root stares at her blankly and starts questioning her. An hour later Root's tired of the bullshit.

“Okay Terry so let me see if I have this right. You weren’t there when Shaw had her surgery but you were told it was to remove a benign tumor. But she may have suffered brain damage and had an infection. She wasn’t violent but was restrained. She was not on any antibiotics, or other medications other than a mild dose to treat brain swelling. She was not undergoing any type of therapy to deal with said brain damage. You never saw or spoke to any other doctors or technicians. You have no idea who Greer is or why he came to see Shaw so often. Does that about sum it up?”

Terry realizes it sounds pretty implausible when laid out that way. “Well, I knew her other nurses.”

“Do you realize how ridiculous your story sounds Terry? You had one patient in a facility that didn’t seem to have any other patients or doctors. The only person evaluating said patient was a man who you aren’t even sure is a doctor. You said they kept taking brain scans but you never saw or spoke to the technician conducting said brain scan. You said her wound kept reopening but she wasn’t on any antibiotics. She had brain damage but wasn’t receiving any medication other than a mild dose to treat swelling. No anti-convulsants, anti-coagulants, no anti-psychotics to treat the
delusions, no rehabilitation therapy of any kind.”

“I know, I know. But I needed the money. Please, let me go.”

Throughout this tale Root kept a look of mild curiosity on her face, but now she lets the anger surface. She walks over to the cart and picks up the blow torch, turning it on and watching the flame curiously.

Shaw steps out from the shadows in the corner of the room and sits on the edge of the table where Root was before. Terry’s face pales and her eyes open wide.

“Now, you see Terry, that’s not the way I remember it at all.”

Reese finds Finch at the university still teaching under his cover, Professor Whistler. He watches him walk into the faculty building. When Reese knocks on the door of his office, Finch is on the phone. The minute he notices Reese, he makes an excuse and ends the phone call.

“Mr. Reese…I’m relieved to see you’re well.” Reese doesn’t comment on Finch’s lack of communication over the last year. “Finch.”

“Are you back…?” Reese nods no. “We found Shaw.” Finch seems surprised but comforted. “She’s alive…I never thought…after so much time…”

“She’s alive but Samaritan implanted a chip in her head. It can track her and stimulate areas of the brain causing her pain, or pleasure, or other emotions at will. We’ve blocked the signals for now, but we need to figure out how the chip works and how we can remove it or neutralize it. We need your help.”

Finch looks horrified. “I’m so sorry…and Ms. Groves?”

“Root’s not the same. But she’s better now that we found Shaw.”

“Her crusade…?”

“It’s not just her crusade. It’s hundreds of people who oppose Samaritan. It’s mine. It’s anyone’s who cares about the right of self-determination, rule of law, or just flat out humanity.”

Finch looks chagrined. “I didn’t mean to imply…” But Reese cuts him off. “Finch, it’s time. We’re ready to bring it all down, Greer, Samaritan, the corrupt government officials, but Root needs your help to finish the virus. Otherwise they’ll just rebuild and we’ll be right back where we started. Shaw needs your help.”

Finch looks away. “I’m not sure…”

“Finch you created this mess. You created the Machine, which in turn alerted people to the possibilities of an ASI. You gave it to corrupt government officials. Your principles assisted Greer in bringing Samaritan online. Those principles allowed him to obtain the software, hardware, and the government feeds necessary.

You gave Shaw up for dead. If you had helped Root right after Shaw disappeared, she might not have felt the need for an army. If you had helped us a year ago when she came to us, we may have
found Shaw a lot sooner.

They tortured her. They locked her in a box, isolated and deprived of any sensory stimulation for months. Anyone else would’ve cracked. Shaw told them nothing. Then they put a chip in her head and tortured her in a totally different way. She told them nothing. When we found her, she slit her wrists because she thought she’d finally cracked and couldn’t distinguish reality from the delusions in her head. Still she was protecting us.

Two years Finch. She went through that alone for two years and never betrayed us. She knew our cover identities, about Fusco, the subway, Root’s connection to the Machine and she told them nothing. We owe her everything. You owe her everything.”

Reese’s words wound Finch. To have him above all others condemn his behavior makes him feel ashamed. He still believes in his principles but Reese is right about all of it. There isn’t a single thing Reese just said that he can refute.

He finally looks Reese in the eyes. “I guess Professor Whistler will be taking early retirement.”

“So, do you want to try again?”

Root and Shaw watch as a complete transformation takes place before their eyes. Gone is the helpless, clueless, and ordinary civilian and in her place appears a conniving, intelligent, and trained operative. “Well Root, I guess we’re going to have some fun after all.” Terry might think she’s well trained. But she can’t hold a candle to Root and Shaw. Her best bet is suicide but she’s not going to get the chance. She just doesn’t know it yet.

Shaw shoves her into the wood chair sitting on the plastic sheeting and zip-ties both arms and feet. She gags her and replaces the hood. The gag is the most terrifying. It’s a medieval instrument made of metal called the pearl of anguish. A screw at the end controls the ‘petals’ which open as the screw turns, stretching the mouth uncomfortably while it pushes in the core, making breathing difficult. When opened enough it will not only break teeth and tear skin but also choke the person. Painful way to go.

There’s a knock at the door and Root walks outside. She comes back in a few minutes later with a one-sheet report and shows it to Shaw. It’s the results from the tox screen they ran the day they rescued Shaw. It shows traces of scopolamine, a drug that robs people of their free will and makes them susceptible to suggestion.

Shaw crushes the report in her hand. Root can’t help but marvel at Shaw’s strength. Resisting white torture, scopolamine, and the chip without betraying them was nothing short of miraculous. Shaw not only resisted, she endured for over two years. All in the hope Root would find her. An army pales in comparison to Shaw’s sacrifice.

“I think she looks too comfortable Shaw. Let me fix that.” Root takes a knife and skillfully though carelessly cuts off Terry’s clothes. She squirms away from the knife, which results in deeper cuts.

Shaw takes the knife from Root. “You know Root, I’ve endured a lot of torture in my day. Sometimes the worst pain wasn’t the most severe. It was the little cuts that couldn’t be escaped.” She starts making shallow cuts, methodically and unflinchingly until Terry’s chest looks like red chainmail. They can hear her trying to scream through the gag, but the sounds are nothing but low
groans. “Shaw all that's groaning is annoying me. Hold up a minute.” Root lifts the hood and turns the pear one full turn, painfully stretching Terry’s mouth and shoving the core deeper into her throat. She lowers the hood and steps back. “There. That’s better.”

Shaw resumes her work, cutting down one thigh then up the other, precise and systematic. Terry tries to twist away from the blade, but she’s too securely bound. Her thrashing does cause the chair to tilt, but Root steadies it. When she’s done, Shaw admires her work. The blood’s dripping onto the plastic sheeting and the smell of iron permeates the air. “That’s beautiful work Shaw. You think It’s ready to talk yet?”

“I hope not, I’m just starting to have fun.” Shaw stands and grabs a bottle of 90% alcohol from the tray. It’s not your run of the mill cleansing kind. She tilts it over Terry’s chest and lets the liquid start dripping slowly down, trickling down her chest, then moving the bottle over her thighs. Shaw knows firsthand it burns like a bitch. Shaw looks at Root and nods. “Okay, let’s see if It has something to say for Itself.” Root lifts the hood and asks, “well, do you have something to tell us? Oops I guess you can’t really talk can you. Here let me fix that.” Root turns the screw one full turn tighter and Terry starts to choke. They hear a tooth crack. “Oops, wrong way. So sorry.” Root lifts her hands palm up and shrugs. She loosens the screw and removes the gag.

Tears are running downs Terry’s face and she chokes and coughs for a few minutes before she can speak. The tooth fragment falls out during one of her coughing fits. Root looks at her with a bored expression and Shaw looks disinterested. They don’t ask Terry anything. She starts babbling. “What do you want to know? I'll tell you…please…” She sobs. Root and Shaw look at each other and shrug. Root replaces the gag and turns the screw, placing the hood back over her head. “Maybe next time It'll actually say something useful…” Root cackles.

Shaw may be inflicting the pain, but Root’s psychotic demeanor is clearly scaring the shit out of Terry. Root aims to terrify her until she tells them everything of her own volition. Shaw cuts Terry’s restraints and they turn her around in the chair. Root again zip-ties her.

Now Shaw has access to her back. She resumes her meticulous and almost rhythmic cutting of Terry’s back. Terry arches forward and shakes, struggling, trying to escape the pain. But there’s nowhere to go. Shaw would be sleeping through this type of physical pain. It’s uncomfortable but hardly intolerable. Shaw hasn’t cut her nerve endings or used acid. Yet.

“I almost feel sorry for It Root.” Root laughs. “Really?” Now Shaw laughs. “No, not really.” Their laughter echoes throughout the room.

Shaw nods at Root silently and Root removes the hood. They don’t remove the gag and busy themselves at the cart. “Can I have my turn now Shaw? You know how much I like to play with fire.” Shaw looks at Terry. “What do you think It? Ready for some real pain?” She looks over at Root. “Although you know blow torches are really my specialty. Remember our first mission?” Root looks at her fondly. “That was so much fun!” She grins lasciviously.

Terry’s trembling with fear, crying and shaking her head violently from side to side. Shaw sighs. “Well I guess we should see if It has anything useful to say this time.” She gestures with her hand for Root to remove the gag. Root does and Terry doesn’t waste any time begging.

She starts talking and spends the next couple of hours telling them everything she remembers about Shaw’s surgery, the names of all the personnel at the facility, and everything Greer ever talked about, including the specific questions he asked Shaw.

Root records all of it. When Terry gives them the names, Root writes them down to give to Daizo to start a search. The tape will remain with Shaw. No one else will listen to it unless Shaw agrees.
When she’s done, Root and Shaw look at her in disgust. Root radios Grice and he comes to take Terry back to holding.

“Get her some scrubs and water. No medical and no food until further notice. Use restraints.” She looks at Terry menacingly. “This was nothing. You’re only alive as long as you’re useful. If you lied to us, you will look fondly back on this memory and beg us to kill you. We won’t. You’ll be surprised how much pain the human body can resist, especially when inflicted by a specialist.” She smiles happily at Shaw. “Shaw’s the best.”

Root keeps the smile plastered on her face until Grice leaves the room with the prisoner.

Once she’s gone she takes a deep breath and sits down on the bed. Shaw comes over and sits next to her, placing her arm around her shoulders and hugging her close. Root turns into her and rests her head under Shaw’s chin.

“You know I’ve inflicted a lot of pain in my life and never felt anything about it one way or the other. Not pleased or sad or guilty. But today I just feel disgusted with myself, with her, with the whole fucked up situation.” Root holds Shaw’s hands in hers. “I know Sam. Me too. But we have to see this through.” They sit just holding each other for a while.

Root eventually takes a deep breath. “I’m going to take these names to Daizo and have him start a search for these people. It shouldn’t take too long before we locate at least some of them. I’m going to check up on a few things and I’ll be back. I need to work on the coding of the virus, but I can do that in here.”

Shaw looks at her earnestly. “Root, its okay if you need to take care of things. I’ll be okay. I promise.” Root gives her a small smile. “I know. But I need to be with you and I can code just as easily from here. Please Sam; just let me be with you.” Shaw kisses her forehead and gives her a squeeze. “Whatever you need Root.”
**Motion**

Chapter Summary

“John’s back.” Shaw looks up and raises her eyebrow in question. “Yes, Harold’s with him.”

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry it's been awhile since the last chapter. I got sidetracked with another project and time just flew. This is just a short one to put some things in motion, but I'll be posting the next chapter tomorrow so hang in there! Thanks for your patience.

Root finds Daizo in her office, fighting with Greenfield. They clam up when they see her. She looks from one to the other. “Anything I need to know about boys?” They both look down and neither says anything. Root takes a deep breath. She’s mediated many a fight between these two, but she doesn’t really have time or patience for it now.

She sees Daizo staring at her strangely. She looks down at herself and realizes there’s blood on her shirt. She smiles widely, “Don’t worry, it’s not mine.” Now he just looks scared. Root huffs in exasperation. “Where’s Daniel?”

Daniel walks in just when she thinks she might have to shoot Daizo. She walks up to him and thrusts the lists of names in his hands. “These names are your first priority now. I want them found. Let me know the minute you find the first one.” Daniel looks down at the list then back up at Root. He nods confidently. “We’ll start on it right away.”

Root radios Alex and asks her to meet her in the mess tent. She doesn’t waste any time when Alex arrives. “Any progress on extending the faraday’s range?” Alex looks pleased. “Yes. I was going to look for you later today. We’re ready to install the extension. It’ll cover out from the infirmary and extend about 20 yards out the front door.”

That’s more than Root thought was possible. “So Shaw can have access to the entire floor and all the rooms?” Root needs to be sure because detection will endanger them all. Shaw more than anyone. “Yes. The front area will have a roof now so we can ensure impenetrable cover, but it’ll still be open to the outside. I recommend setting up a short fence along the perimeter so there are no mistakes as to where coverage ends.”

“When will it be finished?” Alex smiles at Root’s impatience. “We’re ready to start and barring any complications it’ll take us two to three days.”
“Do it. Use as many people as you need. When you’re ready for testing, let me know. I want to be there.” Root knows she can trust Alex. Otherwise Samaritan would already be knocking at their door, but it’s too important to Root to delegate to anyone. “Sure.”

Root finds Grice out on the training field. He walks over to meet her. “I want you to make sure our prisoner doesn’t die on us. But provide only the bare necessities to keep her alive.” Root’s tone brooks no argument. “I’ll see to it…she hurt Shaw?”

“Maybe not physically, but she was instrumental in what they did to her.” Grice would follow Root’s instructions regardless, but now it’s personal. “I’ll be with Shaw if you need me,” Root tells him. Grice watches her walk away. Knowing everything she’s done to find Shaw, he can only imagine what she’ll do now to the people who hurt her.

Root’s still outside when the gates open to let John’s jeep through. She can see Finch in the passenger seat and tries to identify what she’s feeling. But it’s simply nothing. He’s been out of her life for so long; she doesn’t know how to incorporate his return into her emotions.

Her emotional bandwidth is significantly narrower now than it used to be. She’s ruthlessly buried any emotion over the last two years, needing to focus on one goal. Her feelings for Shaw are the only ones she nurtured and kept close.

She waits for them. Finch approaches her with an apologetic look in his eyes. Root knows he represents a better chance at defeating Samaritan, so she represses the vitriol she senses rising the closer he gets. “Ms…Root. I’m here to help.”

Root looks at him silently for a moment. His hair’s gone grayer and his limp’s more pronounced than she remembers. But his voice is the same combination of intelligence and arrogance. “Harold. Thank you for coming.”

John looks at her stoically. “It was a long drive. I’ll get him settled.” Root nods. “Thanks John. You should rest Harold. I’ll come see you this evening and we can talk.” Finch stares after her until she’s gone.

When she gets back, she hears the water running in the shower. She walks over to let Shaw know. She doesn’t want her startled if she hears any noise. She stands in the doorway. “Hey sweetie. I’m back. I brought us some lunch.”

Shaw peeks out. “I just got in. You want to join me?” The speed at which Root undresses is her only answer. But she winces when the scalding water hits her skin. Shaw smiles. “Sorry. I forgot how sensitive you are to the hot water.” Root turns it down from boiling to merely blistering. Shaw moves over to let Root rinse under the showerhead.

“I forgot just how scalding you like your showers,” Root grins. Shaw wraps her arms around her and claims her lips softly, just wanting the contact to help wash away the morning’s events. She pulls away too soon and Root moans. “Sameen…,” she pouts. But she turns for the soap and they
wash up in companionable silence.

Shaw stomach growls when she smells lunch. “I guess someone’s hungry,” Root smirks. Shaw quirks her lips in a small smile, but her words are sobering. “I haven’t had real food in so long…my stomach’s probably still in shock.” She sees the look on Root’s face and reaches out to touch her. “I’m okay now Root. Or at least I will be. If you’d rather I not say…”

Root’s horrified she may be dissuading Shaw from sharing her experiences because she finds it difficult to hear. “Oh my god, no Sameen. You can always tell me anything. I just wish you never had to suffer through any of it. But I want to know everything.” She places a light kiss on Shaw’s lips as they sit down to eat.

“John’s back.” Shaw looks up and raises her eyebrow in question. “Yes, Harold’s with him.” Shaw waits for Root to elaborate but she doesn’t say anything else. “I guess we both have mixed feelings about it,” Shaw says thoughtfully. “Both of us for the same reasons really.”

Root sighs and puts down her fork. “I’m not sure how to deal with him. I need to put everything aside. He built the world’s first AI; I have no doubt he can figure out exactly how that chip in your head works and how we can take it out safely. Plus, his help improves not only our chances for defeating Samaritan, but also the time frame.”

Shaw just listens. Finch is needed for the mission. Their feelings for or about him are irrelevant. Root knows it too.

“Sam, do you feel up to going through the Samaritan personnel files? It’s not urgent anymore now that we have the names, but there may be people from before…” Shaw knows she’s referring to her time in the box. Shaw’s feeling stronger every day and she wants the people who tortured her to pay, but more than revenge she wants an end to this madness. She wants to be able to have a life with Root where they don’t have to hide and look over their shoulders every minute of every day.

“Root, I don’t want to waste time looking for foot soldiers. We have the names of everyone connected to the chip. That’s enough. I just want to get it out of my head so I can help and we can end this. Do you understand?”

Root wants to hurt everyone who ever laid a finger on Shaw. But if Shaw doesn’t need it and doesn’t want to put herself through it, then Root will stand by her. “Of course, Sameen. You get to decide. I’ll stand by you, whatever that may be.”

Shaw lets out a breath she didn’t know she was holding. “Thanks…”

Root smiles and makes herself comfortable at the desk. Before she knows it, she’s wrapped in the code she’s working. Shaw smiles at how quickly Root looses herself in her world of binary digits. She decides to take a nap, falling asleep to the comforting sounds of Root’s fingers on the keyboard.
Shaw's stomach growls right on cue and Root laughs. She brings Shaw up to date on everything while they eat and it almost feels normal. More normal than they ever had before actually.

A couple of hours later Root gets up to stretch. She’s running a debug protocol and needs to wait for the results. Shaw’s still sleeping and Root finds it’s surreal. She found Shaw and she’s here and wants to stay with Root. Before she found her Root was afraid of a lot of things. Shaw was dead, or damaged beyond repair, or she blamed Root, but most of all, that she would leave Root once she was free.

In the back of her mind she still worries Shaw will decide to leave once she’s really free when the chip’s removed. Right now she’s a captive audience. She hasn’t even complained about being confined to one room, spacious though it might be. But she knows the consequences and Root suspects Shaw will never be taken alive again.

Root’s never had more motivation to succeed and wipe Samaritan off the face of the planet than she does now. Now they can attack with impunity, not having to worry Shaw may be inside one of their targets. No one has to go in and clear a building first. It will actually be safer for all of them…and more dangerous for Samaritan.

Shaw starts to stir and Root sits on the edge of the bed. She opens her eyes and Root can see the brief flash of fear before their eyes lock. “Hey sweetie, nice nap?” Root’s trying to respect Shaw’s boundaries, but she can’t help but reach out to touch her. She pushes a strand of hair gently away from Shaw’s face.

Shaw stretches and smiles, seemingly okay with the contact. “Yeah. I still get tired easily. It’s frustrating.” Root knows she has to walk the line between empathy and sympathy. Shaw won’t take kindly to anyone feeling sorry for her, especially Root. “Well I guess it means you need more physical activity,” she leers.

Shaw barks out a short laugh. “You have a one-track mind Root…but I can’t say I mind the destination.” Root’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. Playful Shaw she didn’t expect. She also didn’t expect the hands wrapping around her, pulling her down.

Shaw traps Root’s thigh with her leg, shifting so she’s on top. She hovers over Root’s mouth, so close they’re breathing the same air and licks her lower lip. Root barely restrains herself from lunging up and capturing Shaw’s mouth. Shaw smiles knowingly, whispering into her ear. ‘Be good for me Root…I promise I’ll be very good to you…’ She runs her tongue lightly down the rim of Root’s ear and nibbles her way back to her mouth.

She presses their lips together so delicately, Root’s not sure they’re touching. She’s also not sure if she’s allowed to use her hands but her fingers don’t wait for permission. She runs them through Shaw’s hair, trailing them softly down her back. Shaw doesn’t protest so she rests her hand on the curve of her ass, tucking it under Shaw’s shorts a couple of inches.
Shaw takes Root’s upper lip between hers and tugs softly, her tongue tantalizing. Root’s heart is racing and she moans into Shaw’s mouth when she feels Shaw’s hand drifting down to the clasp of her jeans. Slowwwllly Shaw deepens the kiss and Root drowns, only coming up for air when her lungs demand it. She’s gasping and she can feel Shaw’s heartbeat against her chest.

She only realizes her jeans are undone when she senses Shaw’s fingers rubbing faintly against her panties. She’s panting against Shaw’s mouth and Shaw’s murmuring into her lips. ’You’re sooo hot…and soaking…’

’Sameen, pleasssse…’ Shaw backs up and Root’s eyes shoot open. ’Keep your eyes open for me Root’ She runs her hand up Root’s panties then back down on the inside. Her eyes are deep pools of desire and she enters Root deliberately, gasping at the evidence of Root’s need. Root grips the back of Shaw’s neck, struggling to keep her eyes open while Shaw moves eloquently inside her.

They’re both sweaty and the air around them is thick with arousal. Shaw bends down and licks a drop of moisture from Root’s upper lip and current zips straight to Root’s nipples, engorged from the friction of their soaked shirts chafing and stuck to their bodies.

Root feels so full and Shaw feels like she’s right where she belongs, Root writhing and coming undone beneath her. Root feels her orgasm bearing down on her and closes her eyes involuntarily. Shaw whispers hotly in her ear. ’Open your eyes for me lover…I want to see you…’ It’s the first time Shaw’s used anything other than her name in bed and Root’s heart skips a beat.

She opens her eyes and gazes at Shaw from under her lashes. She’s wrapped in a bubble of silence enraptured by the way Shaw’s looking at her and into her and moving inside her, until she can’t keep them open anymore, and sees stars behind her eyes.

Root’s so tight around her fingers Shaw can barely move and she loves she affects Root this way…that Root will break herself wide open just for her… She flicks her thumb over Root’s clit and Root comes in a shuddering heap, grasping Shaw tightly, her name on her lips. They’re both breathing hard and Root bathes in the pleasure still pulsing through her body. Shaw ease out gently and lies next to Root, facing her and stroking her body softly. When Root finally opens her eyes again, Shaw’s gazing at her with a peaceful look she’s never seen before.

Their lips meet in conversation until a loud voice sounds in the room. “Come in Root…” It’s coming from Root’s handset, which she forgot to lower. She groans as she pulls away reluctantly. “This better be good Daniel. What is it?”

“Alex is ready to work in the section of the hallway outside…uh…where you are…with Shaw…uh…but she thought maybe you needed to know first.”

Root shakes her head, realizing they were so loud they could be heard in the hallway. She shrugs. She’s certainly not embarrassed. “Tell her to give me a half hour and then they can start.” Daniel sounds relieved. “Okay.”

She looks over at Shaw who’s grinning proudly. “That was you they heard…” Root looks for something to throw at her but jumps onto her instead. “Yes, but it was your fault…” Root tries to take up where they left off but Shaw squirms away. “We’re going to need way more than a half hour, so I’ll take a rain check.” Root pouts, but agrees. “So what’s going on?” Shaw wants to know.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you. Alex (Root sees Shaw’s slight frown but doesn’t comment) figured out how to extend the faraday’s range. You’ll be able to go anywhere on this floor and about 20 yards out the front door. Shaw doesn’t look as pleased as Root expected, so she’s quick to reassure her.
“You don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for Sam. It’s just an option.”

Shaw shuts down and looks away. Root’s unsure whether to touch her or leave, but Shaw makes the decision for her. “Can you give me some space, please?” She sounds apologetic and Root hates to walk away, but now is not the time to push. “Of course…” She wants to ask if she should come back later, but thinks better of it and leaves quietly.

Root decides to find Reese and discuss their next steps. He’s in the mess tent, empty plate in front of him. Root slouches down across the table. “Hey John. How’s Harold?” Reese looks at her thoughtfully. “I’m not sure.” He hesitates but he needs to share his doubts with Root or the consequences could be catastrophic. “I don’t think we should give him access to our servers. Can you set it up so he works on a closed system?”

Root couldn’t be more shocked at Reese’s question. Not because she hadn’t already thought of it, but because she never thought Reese would question Finch’s motives. “Of course. Is there anything specific that makes you think it’s necessary?” John sighs. “No. But considering his…opinions…on what we’re doing, I think it’s for the best. I also confiscated his laptop and phone.” Reese is just full of surprises today. “I destroyed the phone, but I thought you might want to examine his laptop.” Root readily agrees.

“We would’ve done the same with anyone else we brought here,” Reese asserts in his defense. “You’re right John. There’s more at stake here than Harold’s hurt feelings.”

John moves on to other issues. “I’m readying the sections to move on the bases we previously targeted before we found Shaw. I see no reason to delay.” Root gives her approval. “Except leave Grice here. If we find any of the people familiar with Shaw’s chip, I want him to lead the extraction.” John’s surprised given Root’s mistrust of him a few months ago. “Oh?” Root shrugs. “Shaw trusts him and he’s certainly proven himself. That’s good enough for me.” Reese worries Root’s blindly placing her faith in Shaw, but he happens to agree about Grice so he doesn’t argue.

“So how’s Shaw?” Even with Reese, Root holds Shaw’s secrets close. “She’s…adjusting.” She brings him up to date on the extension of the faraday’s range. “Are you giving her access… everywhere?” Root considers his question. Shaw will have access to the armory, the servers, and the communications room, in addition to Root’s office. “Yes. She will also be allowed to be armed.”

Root looks him in the eyes and Reese knows this is Root at her most dangerous. Defending Shaw. “She’s not to be treated with mistrust John. She’s one of us. Her questions will be answered and her requests honored. Make sure everyone’s clear on it.” She leaves him staring after her.

Root’s been procrastinating, but she knows she can’t put off talking to Finch any longer. She makes a few arrangements, and then steels herself to see him.

He’s sitting on the end of the twin sized bed in his room, which is in the supply building. Space is at a premium and Root doesn’t want him having even distant access to her office or the servers…or
Shaw. He looks up and smiles at her owlishly. “I’m happy to see you’re well after such a long time, Root.”

Root studies him for a moment. Either Reese lectured him on Root’s name or it’s his attempt at being conciliatory. “You too Harry.” The silence stretches between them like an abyss neither ones sure how to cross. Finch speaks first. “How can I help?”

Root explains the neural implant developed by Samaritan and implanted in Shaw. She shows him the files on the laptop she brought for his use and he says he has some ideas already based on his cursory review of the information she’s given him.

Root stops at the door. “There’ll be two guards at your door at all times. They’ll take you anywhere you need to go. If you need me or John, just tell them and they’ll let us know.” Finch doesn’t look surprised. “I know trust is something we’ll have to work to develop again Root. I hope you’ll find me worthy with time.”

“When it comes to Shaw’s security I trust only a select few Harold. That’s not likely to change anytime soon.” Finch looks away and Root leaves him with his thoughts.

Root debates whether to return to Shaw, but decides to wait. Instead she goes to her bedroom, which she’s rarely been to since they found Shaw. She lifts her pillow and removes the picture she’s kept with her during her search. It’s a bit worn from handling, but still clear. In the picture Shaw’s petting Bear’s belly while they sit on the floor. She’s smiling and unguarded. Root took the picture one day in the subway without Shaw noticing. She would’ve never allowed it otherwise. She runs a finger down Shaw’s face and sighs deeply, replacing it under her pillow.

She decides to shower and finds Alex waiting for her in her room when she gets out. Root’s wrapped in only a towel and Alex stands up blushing profusely and turns around. She apologizes nervously. “I’m sorry. They told me you were here; I didn’t realize…I’ll come back…” Root nods. “Just wait outside and let me get dressed.” While she’s dressing Root ponders Alex’s odd behavior. No one ever walks into her room without her presence. There’s nothing in there of any interest to anyone, but it’s a matter of respect. She decides to have Grice conduct a sweep and assign someone to this corridor. Instead of letting Alex in, she walks out to the hallway. “Walk with me.”

Alex follows her and Root heads outside. They walk the perimeter of the compound, which reminds Root she hasn’t run or sparred with Reese since Shaw’s return. She makes a note to resume her morning jogs. She doesn’t want to stifle Shaw and it will give her something to do other than hover near her.

“So what did you need?” Root asks neutrally. “Uh…it’s about Shaw.” Root doesn’t comment or reveal anything in her expression. The silence unnerves Alex as Root intended and she rushes to fill it. “We had to open the doors while we were working and she just stared at me unblinkingly until we were done. She had a gun tucked into her waistband. I thought you should know. She may have taken it without you noticing…it was eerie.”

Root stops walking and stares hard at Alex. “I’m going to presume you came to me with the best intentions Alex, so this once I’m going to ignore the insinuations you’ve just made. I gave Shaw the gun because I trust her implicitly. She will be armed in the compound if she chooses. Although trust me, she’s just as deadly without a gun.” Root gestures with her hands.
“Take a look around you. Every life taken, every hard choice, every sacrifice was made for her. This is her army. Once that chip is out of her head, she will lead it with me and John by her side.” Root softens her tone because she does really believe Alex bears no malice. “Shaw’s only trusted a handful of people in her life. The stare she gave you is reserved for everyone else. You’ll get used to it.”

Alex’s genuinely apologetic. “I’m sorry Root.” Root waves her off. “It’s okay, but I trust we’re clear now?” Alex nods and walks away gratefully, but turns back briefly. “We’ll be ready to test the extension tomorrow.”

Root sighs when she’s gone. Shaw will have to earn everyone’s respect and trust. It’s not something Root can will into existence, but she has no doubt Shaw will rise to the occasion and have everyone eating out of her hand soon. The guards already think she walks on water. There’s just something about Shaw people gravitate to whether she likes it or not.

It’s a few hours before Root checks on Shaw. She wants to make sure she’s not crowding her or suffocating her with good intentions. She finds her staring out the window and sees the tension in her posture. Shaw turns around when she hears the door. Root senses something’s off, but Shaw doesn’t seem angry.

“I thought you’d be hungry so I brought dinner.” Shaw smiles distantly. “Yeah, thanks.”

Root’s not sure whether Shaw wants her to stay or not, but she’s not leaving her until she knows what’s going on. It’s not like Shaw has anyone else to talk to. Maybe she should ask if she wants to see Reese or even Finch. After tomorrow she’ll be able to leave the room if she’s ready.

“Sameen. What is it?” Shaw’s eyes are steel and it’s obvious she’s in full defense mode, walls up and anger palpable. But then Root witnesses something new. Shaw seems to gather herself and lower her guard, letting Root inside. “Greer made me feel other things besides pleasure and pain. I felt fear and loneliness and sadness, along with resentment and hopelessness. It was worse than the box. I thought I would go mad from the feelings.”

Root listens quietly, giving Shaw all the time she needs. “That was a nice walk you took earlier.” Root groans internally. She swears she’s going to have that damn window boarded shut. She’s about to speak when she sees Shaw smile. “I feel jealous. It’s one thing Greer could never make me feel. He told me you were dead, so there was nothing he could use to provoke it. Weird thing about feelings. You can know something without doubt in your head and not be able to convince…other parts. I’m still learning how to deal with them. They’re not as intense now, but they still seem to catch me off guard.”

She walks closer and pulls Root into her arms. “I missed you Root. I felt that too.” Root can’t help the tear that trickles down her face. Shaw’s dealing with the one thing she’s so ill-equipped to handle, but instead of shutting down she’s reaching out.

“Sameen…I love you so much.” Shaw freezes and Root starts to apologize, but Shaw shushes her with a finger across her lips. “It’s okay Root. It makes me feel safe when you tell me. I used to feel pressure. To feel it or say it back. But that’s gone now. I’m still not sure what it means to love, but I’m working on figuring it out.”
Root’s trying desperately not to break down. The last thing Shaw needs is to have to deal with Root’s feelings on top of her own. So she disentangles gently, leading Shaw by the hand to the table where she’d set their dinner down. Shaw’s stomach growls right on cue and Root laughs. She brings Shaw up to date on everything while they eat and it almost feels normal. More normal than they ever had before actually.

“So do you think you’ll want to take a walk around tomorrow? You can get some fresh air too. I’m having a picnic table set up. I was wondering…do you play basketball?” Shaw looks at her like she has three heads. “That’s a random question.” Root laughs. “Oh, there’ll be room inside the faraday range for a half court in the front or a ping pong table or whatever else you might like that’ll fit in the space.”

“Root you don’t have to keep going out of your way for me. There’s more going on here than my leisure activities.”

“Well first of all, that’s not going to happen so why even discuss it. But anyway, there’s one thing I’ve learned over the last two years Sameen. Well, I’ve learned a lot, but this is one of the important ones. War is a long game. In order to outlast your enemy you need to stay not just physically strong, but mentally fit as well. Everyone needs a break.

With Finch we were burning the candle at both ends, barely keeping up. Exhaustion was beating us more than Samaritan. I’m not saying a game of Frisbee would’ve turned things around, but we make poor decisions when we’re at the brink, desperate ones.

So here people play flag football, volleyball, soccer, or anything else they want. We have shooting competitions and a decent library. My point is yes, I’d do anything for you. But it’s not just about you.”

Shaw cocks her head in thought. “In that case, I think we better go with ping pong. I tend to get violent when I’m fouled.” Root shakes her head and laughs. Of course she does.
Seesaw

Chapter Summary

“Okay Shaw. You let me know when you figure it out.” She leaves without looking back.

They’ve just finished eating when there’s a knock at the door. Shaw tenses and Root reaches over to stroke her hand. "It’s okay Sam, no one’s coming in here. I’ll see what’s up.” She steps out into the hall and finds Reese waiting for her.

“We’re planning on moving out in a couple of hours so we can hit the bases at dawn. I wanted to go over the plan with you.” Root looks back at the door hesitatingly. “Okay, give me a half hour and meet me in my office.” Reese nods.

Root goes back to Shaw, who looks up in question. “It was John. He’s heading out with a squad to hit 10 Samaritan bases. They’re leaving in a couple of hours and he wants to review the mission plan.” Shaw’s face gives nothing away.

Root hesitates, but she decides to plunge ahead with her request. “I’d really like for you to give your input.” Shaw looks away. “I don’t need to be humored Root. You guys have been doing just fine without me.” Root’s been doing her best to be patient, but maybe what Shaw needs is a little less patience and a little more fight.

“Okay, so let me ask you something. What do you intend to do once the chip is removed? Are you going to see this through with us? Or are you planning on leaving? More specifically, are you planning on leaving without me?” She can see the anger building in Shaw’s face, but she says nothing. “I deserve an answer Sameen.” Root’s not backing down.

“I don’t know!” Shaw starts softly but by the last word she’s shouting. Root knows she shouldn’t be surprised. Shaw had always rather leave than confront difficult emotional situations. She’s not sure if she’s up to the mental or physical challenges and she’s afraid to find out. Root understands but it’s still devastating to know Shaw still considers leaving her an option.

It takes everything she has but she forces herself to remain calm. “Okay Shaw. You let me know when you figure it out.” She leaves without looking back.

Shaw wants to take her words back the minute they’re out of her mouth. Suddenly there’s a chasm open between her and Root and she’s responsible for putting it there. But there’s a gut wrenching fear pounding within her. She won’t be taken again. She’d rather die.

They have an army now. They don’t need her. It’s not like she’s going to make a difference one way or the other. They don’t need her to fight and she doesn’t have anything to contribute to the creation of the virus. All she’s doing is distracting Root from the big picture.
She forces herself to think about the two years of hell. All that kept her going was Root. Knowing she wouldn’t give up and wanting desperately to be with her again. She remembers being in the truck when Root rescued her. She told Root she would try. Isn’t that what she’s been doing? Trying to figure out how to deal with the feelings constantly threatening to bring her to her knees?

But maybe it’s about more than her feelings. Root matters too. She would go anywhere if Shaw asked. Even if it meant leaving others to defeat Samaritan. But Shaw can’t let her do it. It would kill them both eventually. Root knowing she walked away and Shaw knowing she’s the reason. Especially if the mission fails and Samaritan succeeds.

How brave has she been really? She’s been safely tucked away dealing only with her feelings and Root. Root, who gives her everything she needs and wants. Root, who hasn’t burdened her with any of her own feelings or hopes. Root, who never has expectations of Shaw, only acceptance.

If she leaves Root behind, then what was the point of the last two years? Sure, fighting to keep from betraying her friends was important. But she could’ve killed herself and removed betrayal from the realm of possibility. But Root was right before. Shaw fought to get back to her, based solely on the farfetched hope of maybe in the back of her mind. Maybe they were lying to her. Maybe Root would come for her. Maybe they could still be together.

She was strong enough to survive. Now she needs to be strong enough to stay. But why does staying feel so much harder?

Reese can tell Root’s distracted. She’s barely listening and hasn’t made a single comment. “Root, is everything all right? Is something wrong with Shaw?”

Root sighs and looks at him for the first time and her frustration comes pouring out. “Of course something’s wrong with Shaw! She just spent the last two years of her life being tortured!” Reese puts a hand on Root’s shoulder comfortably. “It’s going to take time Root.”

Root had no intention of telling him, but it spills out of her mouth before she can stop herself. “She wants to leave John. When the chip’s out. She’s going to leave.” Reese isn’t surprised Shaw’s flight instinct has reared its head. She spent the last two years fighting. She probably feels running is all she has left.

“Did she say that Root? Exactly? That she would leave?” Root looks at him hopefully. “No…I asked her if she’s planning to leave and she said she didn’t know.”

“I know it’s hard Root. But for people like us, soldiers, fighting is all we know. Between the isolation and the bombardment of feelings, Shaw’s probably afraid she can’t fight anymore. Her identity’s been stripped. She does the protecting remember. So if she can’t protect, especially you, who is she?”

“I don’t need her protection John. She’s so much more to me. I can’t do it without her. If she leaves, it will break me.” Reese never meddles in other people’s relationships, whether romantic or not. But Root needs someone and she only has him.

“I don’t believe she’ll leave Root. You’re as much a part of her as she is of you. But she has to figure it out for herself. If you push her before she’s ready, it won’t end well.” Root still looks miserable but she seems calmer so he moves on to another difficult topic.
“I told Finch I’d be away for a few days. He seems to be enmeshed in research regarding potential options for the chip’s removal. I told him you’d be here if he needed anything. Maybe you can have one of the boys check up on him.” Root groans but agrees. Finch is the last person she wants to deal with.

They finish reviewing the mission plan and they agree they’re as prepared as possible. Reese’s taking 10 sections of 30 fighters each. They’ll hit 10 bases simultaneously at dawn. Reese will be stationed at the biggest base, but will coordinate all the attacks and only participate if necessary. Once he’s back, they’ll move out with a different 10 sections and hit another 10 bases. They’ll keep rotating through the sections until they hit every base.

It’ll take them at least four weeks and it’ll be a breakneck pace, but they want to keep Greer off balance and not give Samaritan time to regroup. In the meantime they’re intensifying their efforts to locate Samaritan’s heuristics. Zoe and Harper are close.

Root also has a few other sources within Samaritan’s organization, but no one knows their identities except her. She’ll need to leave for a couple of days to meet with them covertly. She decides she’ll leave to set it up after she tests the faraday’s extension tomorrow.

She needs some space and Shaw may need it too. She knows Shaw’s seesawing behavior is to be expected. She can’t possibly be emotionally stable after everything she’s been through. But Root’s been through something too and she’s had to keep it buried and herself together so she could search for Shaw. Now it’s over and Root feels all these confusing needs and wants bombarding her. It’s painful to keep sublimating her own needs to take care of Shaw.

She leaves her office and decides to spend the night in her own bedroom. She’s emotionally exhausted and she just can’t face Shaw right now. Maybe Reese is right, but it wouldn’t be the first time Shaw runs from her feelings. Especially the ones she has for Root.

After a couple of hours, Shaw realizes Root’s not coming back. Anger and guilt war inside her. She throws herself on the bed and tries to watch a movie, but it’s useless. She wants (needs?) Root. She thinks about using the handset, but what if Root won’t answer? Plus how many people have handsets? Are they all on the same channel? She’s not ready for anyone to hear their conversation.

She takes a deep breath and opens the door to the room. The guards immediately turn around, shocked to see her. “Ms. Shaw, is there anything we can do for you? Do you need anything?” Yeah, she needs Root, but she’s not about to tell them.

“Yeah. First, it’s Shaw. Just Shaw. Also, I want to talk to Alex. Can you get her here?” One of them nods immediately. “Of course, I’ll let her know right away.” Shaw shrugs. That was easy.

Roughly 10 minutes later she hears a knock at the door. She opens and Alex stands there looking a bit concerned. Or maybe intimidated. That makes Shaw smile. She motions her inside and she sees the slight hesitation.

Shaw doesn’t wait to get to the point. “Root tells me you’ve extended the faraday’s range. Is it completed?” Alex’s unsure she should discuss this with Shaw, but after her last conversation with Root, she decides to err on the side of answering Shaw’s questions.

“Uh, yes. I tested it, but Root wants to test it herself tomorrow.” Shaw’s eyes bore into her. “So is
it working or will Samaritan be knocking on our door the minute I step outside this room?” Alex seems insulted. “I set up this room and you’ve been safe so far. I think you can trust me to know what I’m doing.”

Shaw growls. “It’s not my safety I’m concerned about. Answer my question.” Alex nods. “It’s working perfectly.” Shaw’s satisfied. “Okay then.” Alex turns to leave but stops when she hears Shaw call to her. “Oh…and Alex, if it’s not, I will find you and the faulty cage is the last thing you’ll ever create.”

The guards freak out when Shaw walks out of the room. Root never said what they should do if Shaw left. Shaw rolls her eyes at their uncertainty. “It’s fine guys. Now, what’s the layout of this floor?” They’ve been told Shaw’s second only to Root and they’re to act accordingly, so they sketch out the locations of the rooms on the floor. She gives them her most intimidating stare before leaving. “Do not tell Root I’m looking for her. Are we clear?” They nod yes quickly.

Shaw heads to Root’s office first. There’s a biometric scan on the door along with a keypad. She wonders if Root’s given her access. She puts her finger on the pad and the light turns green. An override button also flashes and the door clicks open without a numerical code.

There’s no one in the office. Shaw takes a brief look. It reminds her of the subway car with all the Machine’s servers and monitors. She closes the door behind her as she leaves.

She follows the corridor leading to Root’s bedroom. She finds it easily. The door’s closed and she eases it open a few inches softly. She can see Root lying in her bed. She’s kicked off the covers and is curled in a semi-fetal position on her side. She’s sleeping although she doesn’t look peaceful. Shaw walks in quietly.

She climbs carefully into Root’s bed, curling up next to her, lining their bodies against each other, matching the curve of their legs, her pelvis against Root’s butt, breasts pressed into her back. Root stirs and Shaw kisses the back of her neck. Root’s not startled, knowing instantly it’s Shaw, although she’s momentarily worried. What if Alex made a mistake?

But Shaw wouldn’t be here if she wasn’t sure it was safe. She’s not sure what to say and she doesn’t turn to face her.

Shaw whispers in her ear. “I’m here Root. I’ll always be here.” She places one hand on Root’s shoulder, her skin tan against Root’s paleness, and rubs lightly, soothingly. After a moment, Root places her hand over Shaw’s, entwining their fingers until they’re locked together.

Shaw leans up on one elbow and Root turns to look at her. Their eyes lock, sharing everything with one look. Shaw pulls Root’s hand softly to her mouth and places a gentle kiss on her fingertip. She kisses each finger, one after the other. Root’s skin smells like home and Shaw breathes it into her lungs until she’s lost in it.

She moves her hand down Root’s arm, running fingertips over her rib cage, her touch near weightless through the thin fabric of Root’s clothes as she traces her fingers over Root’s body. Her nails sketch a line down Root’s leg, and then back up, over her stomach, up her rib cage, under and around her breasts, over her collarbone. Root moans and leans back into Shaw’s caresses, feeling tingling warmth inside her, a soft sigh escaping her lips. Shaw leans over, shifting her weight onto
her knees, both hands now working their way over Root's body.

Root whispers Shaw’s name like a prayer, feelings stirring deep within, desire coiling, Shaw’s fingers magnetic, pulling sensations to the surface of her skin with every touch. Her clothing seems suddenly restrictive, heavy, a barrier, and she can’t remove them fast enough. She sits up, wriggling out of them and tossing them to the floor in a crumpled heap and reaches for Shaw, pulling at the waist of her shorts, wanting nothing between their bodies. She lifts Shaw's shirt over her head and tosses it down carelessly, eyes boring into each other.

Root leans back on her elbows, legs together, knees bent slightly. Her wavy hair drapes over one shoulder, partially hiding the white lace of her bra almost the same white as her fair skin, her tiny panties barely concealing her. Shaw kneels before her, her dark hair cascading down her back, over her shoulders, enveloping her face, framing her exotic features.

She stretches her body up along Root's as she settles on top of her, heat igniting between them. Root lies back on the bed, reclining as Shaw moves against her body, feeling the burning of her skin, the roughness of the lace bra contrasting the smooth gloss of the silken portions as it slides up over her. She opens her eyes, not realizing she’d closed them, and sees Shaw's face above hers, eyes like pools of oil, imagined colors swirling in their dark depths, and then their lips meet urgently.

They explore passionately, but tenderly, lips tugging, tongues teasing against each other. Their mouths lock together as Shaw’s hands explore Root's bare skin, stroking almost imperceptively, around her breasts, lighter than air as they trace over her nipples, eliciting a low moan. She moves her fingertips in small circles over Root's firm nipples as Root arches her back and presses herself up towards her touch.

It lasts forever and not long enough, their lips lingering together, unwilling to break contact, until Shaw’s mouth moves onto Root's neck, nibbling down the gentle curve, over her collarbone, across her bare chest. Her lips pucker against Root's skin, her fingers working to unfasten the front clasp of Root's bra. It pops open and her tongue lathes the center of Root’s erect nipples while her mouth sucks firmly, warm and wet, the sensation racing straight between Root’s legs, a direct electric connection.

She mouths her way down Root's abdomen, biting sharply and licking soothingly, over the swell of her rib cage, across her stomach, tongue circling her navel, down further, teeth tugging at the edge of her panties. Root's breathing faster, ragged, anticipation welling within her. Shaw's light touch on her waistband prompts her to raise her hips off the bed until she’s stripped of her panties.

Fingers move up her legs and she spreads them slightly. Lips land on her inner thigh, perusing softly. Her eyes shut tight in expectation; she feels Shaw's breath warm on her, the faintest hint of contact sending shivers through her, fingertips running over her smooth, sensitive skin. Then Shaw’s tongue meets her clit, and she’s lost in the feelings Shaw’s coaxing from her body.

She writhes on the bed, fingers gripping the sheets, moaning ceaselessly. It seems to go on without end. Her body aches for release, but just as she’s reaching the edge, Shaw eases her back, bringing her down slowly, only to build her up again to the peak of exhilaration, right to the brink of orgasm, then slowing and moving to less sensitive areas. Hours might have passed, days, weeks, an eternity, Root has no concept of time, just the torturous rise and fall of ecstasy.

Finally, finally, Root feels herself racing towards the summit and Shaw keeps going, not slowing, sucking on her clit expertly, entering her with her fingers, knowing exactly how Root needs to be touched. Root's on the crest of a wave about to break, feeling the slow tilt as she bends forward over
the top, then crashes down hard, her orgasm seemingly unending.

She thrashes on the bed, neck bending, back arching, arms extending out to her sides, a death grip on the sheets, legs locked, toes curled, completely present in the moment. Her orgasm floods her senses, enveloping her completely from head to toe, leaving her with a thin veil of dampness covering her entire body.

It could be hours later, Root has no idea what time it is or how long they’ve been at it. It’s so enjoyable, so utterly gratifying, the tenderness and passion beyond compare. She lies on her side with her eyes closed, Shaw behind her, legs and arms twined together, wrapped around each other. They lie like that for long moments until Root's breathing calms and she approaches the warm, weightless void right before sleep blankets her mind.

She feels Shaw’s breath hot in her ear, whispering, “I promise Root. I’ll never leave you as long as you want me.”

Root drifts off, knowing Shaw’s never broken a promise to her. She feels secure and loved. Whether Shaw says it or not, Root feels it.
Chapter Summary

But Greer, Lambert, and Martine have a special kind of hell waiting when Root finds them. And she will find them.

Chapter Notes

Okay, yes, they're having a lot of sex. But remember, they didn't have any (sex or orgasms) for two years. So they're catching up!

Root wakes in the warm cocoon of Shaw’s arms. She stretches lazily, nosing into Shaw's neck, inhaling the sleepy scent of Shaw’s warm skin, draping her body on Shaw’s. Shaw stirs and rests her hand on Root' back, still mostly asleep. Root runs her nails down Shaw’s back gently to the curve of her ass, then kneads softly, enjoying the feel of Shaw’s firm glutes in her hand. Shaw sighs drowsily.

Root doesn’t need further encouragement to continue her leisurely exploration. She drags the pad of her fingers down the back of Shaw’s thigh, then back along her ribcage, simultaneously lowering her head and taking a nipple in her mouth. She sucks lightly, licking gently, coaxing it into alertness. Shaw whispers Root’s name, her eyes still closed, and shifts slightly so Root’s mostly on top now. Root takes her time worshipping Shaw’s breasts, nipping at their undersides, drawing her nipples into her mouth, luxuriating in the feeling of the erect nubs playing on her tongue.

Rubbing her cheek against Shaw’s smooth skin like a cat, she floats languorously down her body. Her breast grazes Shaw’s center briefly and she feels Shaw’s wetness cling to her nipple. Her hands trail freely behind her, caressing every inch of Shaw’s skin as she meanders in her feline exploration.

She places sloppy kisses on Shaw’s tight abs down to her pubic bone, inhaling the scent of her arousal. Shaw hums contentedly and idly strokes Root’s arms, which are indolently stroking her breasts. Root continues her journey dreamily down to Shaw’s center, placing warm kisses on her inner thighs and nibbling tenderly.

She reaches her destination, lavishing Shaw’s center with a long broad lick of her tongue. She hears Shaw’s drawn out groan of pleasure and smiles. Her hands are drawing random patterns on Shaw’s stomach, while her tongue continues to savor the liquid heat pooling between Shaw’s legs.

She dips inside and is rewarded with more evidence of Shaw’s arousal. She spreads the slick over and around Shaw’s clit and Shaw arches lazily into her tongue. Root continues with long unhurried licks from the base of Shaw’s sex then circles over and around her hood until she entices Shaw’s clit into making an appearance.

She sucks ever so delicately, caressing with her tongue until she feels the measured tensing of Shaw’s muscles under her lingering hand. Shaw’s moaning consistently “ohrightthereRootdontstopplease” until her orgasm washes over her, eventually retreating like waves
Root crawls unhurriedly to Shaw’s mouth, capturing her lips in a deep and soothing kiss. Shaw chases her flavor with her tongue, her hands cradling Root’s head gently. When they come up for air Shaw’s smiling contentedly. “You can wake me up with your tongue anytime…”

Root grins and cuddles into Shaw’s body, her warm breath tickling Shaw’s ear. “I missed you. It’d been forever (one day).” Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head, smiling at Root’s dramatic declaration. She runs her hands through Root’s hair soothingly until they drift off to sleep again.

They wake some time later when there’s a soft knock at the door. Shaw growls. “Is there ever a time when they leave you in peace?” Root smiles apologetically. “Sorry, Sam. But no, not really.” She throws on a t-shirt and shorts and opens the door a few inches. It’s Adam with a message from Daizo. They found the surgeon that implanted Shaw’s chip. “Okay, tell Daizo I’ll be there shortly.” Root wants to have a conversation with Shaw first.

She sits on the bed with her legs crossed facing Shaw, her hand caressing the top of Shaw’s thigh. “Sameen, can we talk a minute?” Shaw wonders why Root’s asking if they can talk. She sits up, reclining against the pillows and raises her eyebrows in question. Root hopes this conversation goes better than their last one, but she’s not letting Shaw fade into the background if she can help it.

“What made you decide to come find me?” Shaw takes a deep breath. “I thought about it and I decided I’m not leaving you again, ever, and I also can’t let you walk away from this fight. So the decision kind of made itself. I know I hurt you and I wanted to…make it better.” Root’s smile reaches her eyes. She feels secure for the first time since she found Shaw. She knows Shaw will never break a promise.

“How did you know it was safe to leave the infirmary?” Shaw smiles slyly. “I asked the guards to bring Alex and I asked her. She was confident the extended range was secure. I may have intimidated her slightly.” Root can only imagine.

“Did you have any trouble with the guards?”

“No. They even gave me the layout of the floor. I tried your office first, but there was no one there. Thanks for the access by the way.”

“You have access to every inch of this compound Sameen and you also have command. Although right now you can’t leave this building until we remove the chip.”

Shaw’s not sure what that means. “What do you mean?”

“I mean everyone knows to follow your orders.” Shaw finds it a little overwhelming. “Uh, that’s really not necessary Root. I don’t want people resenting me.”

“They’ve known you would share command since I recruited them. It’s up to you how involved you want to be. I just wanted you to know. Also you’ll be in charge while I’m gone. I need to leave for a couple of days while I meet with my sources within Samaritan.

Claire Stevens, Martine’s protege, has been feeding me intel, which so far has proved accurate. I also have a source on Samaritan’s research team. His name is Joe Walker. Besides me, you’re the only
one who knows those names. Even John doesn’t know who they are or what role they play within Samaritan’s network.”

Shaw understands Root’s telling her she trusts her above anyone else. “Root, are you sure Claire’s not setting you up? She gives you actionable intel to lure you in and earn your trust, then feeds you false information when it matters the most. It’s actually a typical spy move.”

“I know. So far I’ve had Zoe and Harper independently confirm Claire’s intel and it’s checked out. But it’s one of the many risks we need to take. We don’t have to act on her information, but I at least want to hear her out. She never knows when I’m going to show up so I’m not worried about being captured although I take extensive precautions anyway, including taking a strike team with me. I’ll also try to meet with Zoe and Harper.”

Shaw’s extremely uneasy with the information. “I’d feel better if I could watch your back, but I’ve guess you’ve been doing this without me all along. Be very cautious. If something seems the slightest bit off, don’t risk it.” Root agrees and she means it. They can defeat Samaritan without Claire.

“Also, Daizo’s located the surgeon that implanted your chip. I’m thinking of sending Grice to lead the extraction team and bring him here. I want you to come with me to set it up. Will you?”

Root knows Shaw may be overwhelmed but the longer she allows Shaw to stay on the sidelines, the less likely she’ll be to get involved. Root believes it’s important Shaw play a significant role in defeating Samaritan. She knows Shaw’s scared. But to overcome her fear she needs to know she’s not powerless.

Starting by working with Grice will be a great way to ease into things. Shaw knows and trusts him. She trained him and they’ve worked together before. She waits patiently while Shaw thinks about it. Shaw knows exactly what Root’s doing and her first impulse is to say no. To all of it. But she believes in Root and maybe Root’s right. Maybe the road to getting herself back runs straight through Samaritan.

“Okay. But can we take a shower first?”

“Of course sweetie. By the way, the room next to this one has all your stuff from your apartment. Do you want to move out of the infirmary?” Shaw hesitates but not because she doesn’t want to leave the infirmary. “Uh…can’t I stay here? With you?”

“That goes without saying Sameen. I just meant so you could have your stuff next door.” Root walks over to the corner of the room and Shaw notices a door for the first time. Root opens it and waves Shaw over. It leads to Shaw’s bedroom. “We can take the bed out and set up the workout equipment instead. You don’t have to decide right now. Think about it.”

Now that she knows she can stay with Root every night, Shaw doesn’t really need to think about it. “Let’s do it. Move the stuff and set up the workout equipment I mean.” Root pulls her into her arms and gives her a warm kiss. “Sounds perfect.”

The other door in Root’s room leads to a bathroom. Root hesitates, not sure if Shaw wants to shower together but the question is answered when Shaw undresses her and then strips her own clothes off.
They step into the shower together and although not tiny, it's a cozy fit. Shaw turns on the water, adjusting the temperature so Root’s comfortable. She grabs the shower gel and squirts a generous amount onto the washcloth. She lathers Root’s body playfully until it devolves into a more passionate exploration.

Shaw captures Root’s lips, demanding entrance, stroking Root’s tongue with her own until they’re forced to pull apart to breathe. She nips sharply at Root’s neck and nipples and Root hisses, feeling her arousal already pooling between her legs.

Shaw’s hands are everywhere, touching every inch of Root’s skin until Root pleads for more. “pleaseSameeninsideIneedyouinside” Shaw circles her entrance, Root’s essence coating her fingers. She teases Root’s clit before entering her gradually.

Root moans at the intimate contact, grabbing Shaw’s ass and pulling her tighter into her body. Shaw begins thrusting deep and hard and fast and Root’s gasping into her ear. “yesyesyesrighttheredontstop” Shaw hits Root’s g-spot with every thrust, pushing Root higher and higher until her orgasm hits and her muscles are clenching Shaw’s hand tight inside her. Shaw gentles her through it until Root relaxes against the shower wall.

Root smiles, a look of complete satisfaction on her face. “We will definitely be showering together more often.” Shaw smiles smugly, extremely pleased with herself. Root rolls her eyes and pinches her ass.

They start lathering again and this time manage to actually get clean.

They walk down the hallway together and Shaw draws curious glances from everyone they pass. Root sees her tensing out of the corner of her eye and casually links their arms together. Shaw seems to relax a bit and Root distracts her with another question.

“Sam, do you want to see Finch? I know you’ve been stuck with only me to talk to since you got here.” Shaw shrugs and grins mischievously. “I spent two years talking to no one but Greer, so believe me, you’re definitely an improvement.” Root slaps her arm in mock offense.

“Yeah, I want to talk to him, but I’ll let you know when I’m ready. Right now I really don’t want to see him. But I would like to see John when he’s back.”

Daizo’s waiting in Root’s office. He’s always been scared of Shaw and trips over his own feet when he sees her. Greenfield nods hello. Shaw’s never really liked him so she just gives him a blank stare. Daniel smiles at them and brings up the layout of the facility where they’ve found the surgeon on the large monitor.

“Daniel, let Grice know we need him here, please.” Daniel nods and leaves the room.

As they study the layout, Shaw’s surprised how quickly her mind falls into strategist mode. “The team’s going to need to go in at night. The building’s too exposed and they’d be spotted
immediately during the day.” She sees the a/c unit sits at the back of the building, feeding air through a large cylindrical pipe. “I think the safest way is to gas them, wait until they’re all knocked out, and then go in for a quick sweep. You should send a computer geek with the team. If the surgeon’s there, there will probably be more records relating to the chip and…the results of the testing they put me through.” Shaw says the last part quickly and Root simply nods her head knowing Shaw’s uncomfortable with the admission.

When Grice arrives, Shaw updates him and they fine tune the operation. Root checks discreetly with Shaw to make sure she’s okay to stay in the office without her while Root takes care of a few things and grabs them breakfast. Root knows she could have someone bring them breakfast, but that’s not her style. Shaw looks unsure but tells Root she’ll be fine.

When Root gets back, they’ve finalized the mission plan. It’ll take a few hours to reach the facility so the team will leave just after sundown. They plan to hit between 1-2am. Most people will be sleeping and resistance should be minimal. Grice heads out to notify the team and prepare for deployment.

“Sweetie would you like to eat outside? The picnic table is set up.”

“Are you sure it’s safe?” Rods nods confidently. “Yes. That’s one of the things I was doing. I tested it myself. There’s a short fence set well within the perimeter so there’s no confusion about where coverage ends. No pressure though.”

“If you don’t mind, I think I’d rather go eat at the table we set up in the infirmary. I’ve already talked to more people today than I have in the last two years. Turns out I don’t have any more patience for them now than I used to.”

Root gives a short laugh. “Sure sweetie. I brought you a couple of different choices in case you want to try something a little more palatable than oatmeal.” Shaw stomach growls right on cue.

Root remembers she wants to have Daniel check on Finch so she radios him when they’re done with breakfast. Daizo refined a piece of code he wants Root to review and she settles in with her laptop. Shaw decides to work out while she listens to music on Root’s mp3 player.

Root catches her eyes wandering to Shaw’s body often. It infuriates her to see the changes. Not because she doesn’t love Shaw’s body now, but because it shows how much she endured. She lost too much weight and her skin has an unhealthy tinge from lack of sunlight. Even her hair has lost its luster.

Root knows Shaw’s determined to regain her strength and restore her body, which is why Root had the workout equipment brought inside. It also helps to release endorphins and give Shaw a purpose until she can move around freely again.

Watching Shaw just makes Root more determined than ever. She will not stop until she exterminates Samaritan and its agents. Destroying the AI is no longer her sole mission. She wants them all dead. But Greer, Lambert, and Martine have a special kind of hell waiting when Root finds them. And she will find them.
It only takes Root a couple of hours to review and improve Daizo’s code. Although she’s reluctant, she needs to leave soon to head into Manhattan. She’ll try to be back as quickly as possible, but realistically she’ll be gone overnight at a minimum and probably more like two nights.

She waits until Shaw takes a break from her workout. “Sameen, I need to leave soon.” Shaw stiffens slightly and Root wishes she didn’t have to go. “Okay. Be safe.” Root pulls her into a sweaty kiss. “Remember you can ask anyone for anything at anytime. Talk to Jack about moving your stuff. John will probably be back before me, but Grice will be gone on the extraction.”

Shaw nods and gets back to her workout. Root knows this is her way of dealing with the impending separation. It will be the first time they’ll be apart since Shaw was rescued. She doesn’t say anything else and heads out to ready the strike team.

Shaw works out for two more hours and then takes another shower, quicker than and not nearly as enjoyable as the one in the morning. When she opens the door to the room, two guards are standing in the hallway. She sighs. “Are you two going to be following me everywhere I go?” They smile tentatively and one of them answers. “Well it won’t always be us, but yes. Two guards will accompany you at all times. We’ll be stationed outside the door wherever you go.”

Shaw decides to test her command authority. “What if I order you to leave me alone?” They look at her uncomfortably. “That’s the one order none of the guards will follow. Root insisted.” Now Shaw wishes she paid more attention before Root left. But letting her leave was hard and she just wanted it over quickly.

“Fine!” She growls at them. “I’m going to the infirmary. Can one of you bring me lunch since I can’t leave the building?” They nod eagerly. “Also, please have Jack come see me. Oh, and what the hell are your names?”

“I’m Thomas and this is Henry.”

As promised, Thomas takes up his post outside the infirmary while Henry goes to get her lunch. Five minutes later Jack shows up. At least she thinks its Jack. She wouldn’t really know having never seen him before. He smiles widely at her. “Hi, I’m Jack. What can I help you with?”

Shaw groans. Is everyone here so friendly? “I need to move the bed out of my bedroom and move the workout equipment, table, and desk from here to there. Can you help with that?” As an afterthought Shaw adds a please to her request. “Of course,” Jack responds readily. “I’ll get some help and it won’t take us long. Is there anything else I can help you with?” Something else occurs to
Shaw. “Actually, yes. Once the stuff is out of here, please set up the infirmary in this room again.” Jack agrees easily.

Shaw decides to eat her lunch outside at the picnic table and see how it feels. It will be the first time she’s outdoors since her capture. The thought makes her anxious. All the space. But she’ll be damned if she spends the rest of her life in small rooms.

Thomas follows her outside but gives her plenty of room, standing over by the fence, looking out at the yard. Shaw sits on top of the table, her feet on the bench. It makes her feel like she can move quickly if necessary. Before she can think about it too much, Henry’s back with her lunch.

She eats as she watches one of the training drills. Most of the recruits are handling their weapons sloppily and Shaw would be surprised if one of them doesn’t shoot themselves in the foot. They obviously need to develop more confidence in handling their weapons. Dani’s leading the drill and Shaw has Thomas call her over.

Shaw’s met Dani before. She was a number she handled with Reese. She smiles warmly as she greets Shaw. “Hey Shaw. Good to see you.” Like Grice she doesn’t mention or ask about Shaw’s captivity. Shaw begins to wonder if Root instructed all of them to avoid the subject. Shaw smiles briefly, but it’s a “I know I should smile” one and not really genuine.

“I think your trainees need better weapons training. They’re sloppy and someone’s going to get shot.” Dani sighs in frustration. “I know, but nothing I’ve tried seems to work. Any suggestions?” Shaw rolls her eyes. That’s the whole point of calling her over after all. “Yes. Teach them how to disassemble and reassemble their guns. They need to practice until they can do it in less than a minute. The more familiar they are with them, the more confident they’ll be when handling them.” Dani nods thoughtfully. “I’ll get them started right away.” Shaw waves her off before she can engage in any unnecessary chit chat.

Watching the recruits reminds Shaw she hasn’t fired a gun since the day at the stock exchange. She knows there’s a target range set up inside and decides it’s time to start. She has no doubt she’s rusty and prepares herself to be disappointed.

Unfortunately, she’s right. She goes through a box of rounds, not once hitting center mass on any of the targets, even the closer ones. The more she shoots the worse it gets. Fatigue sets into her hand quickly and the grip feels unfamiliar. She resolves to practice every day for an hour until she recovers her dexterity. She’s a sniper for heaven’s sake.

She leaves the range in a foul mood and Thomas and Henry bear the brunt of her displeasure when they ask her how she did. Shaw scowls and snaps, “Probably better than you two on a good day.” They wisely decide to remain silent for the rest of their shift.

Root decides she’ll try to speak with Zoe and Harper before she seeks out Claire. It takes her a few hours to be able to approach Zoe discreetly after making sure she wasn’t being followed. She let Zoe spot her when she first started reconnaissance and they end up sitting on a bench in central park, their usual meeting place. It’s impossible to set up eavesdropping equipment but easy to spot a tail. Zoe dumped her cell phone for extra security and Root never carries one.

“Hey Zoe. Is everything okay?”
“Yeah, things have been unusually quiet though. All of my sources have been oddly tight-lipped.”

Root’s pretty sure she knows why. “We found Shaw and she’s with me at the compound. Samaritan modified a neural implant to treat seizures to instead allow it to provoke certain feelings by刺激certain areas of the brain. They used her as a guinea pig.”

Zoe’s never surprised by much. But even for Samaritan it’s barbaric, although Root’s news is amazing. “Wow Root! You did it.” Zoe knows finding Shaw has been Root’s obsession for the last two years. Really it’s what they’ve all been working towards. “Is she okay?” Root sighs. “Considering she’s spent the last two years being tortured, yeah she’s doing okay. Right now Samaritan can’t track her, but we need to find a way to remove the chip. She’s stuck in a modified faraday cage until we figure it out.”

Zoe does have some good news. “Samaritan has another headquarters in Brooklyn. It’s somewhere along the East River, but I don’t have an exact location yet.”

Root’s encouraged by the news but the waterway is 16 miles long. They need a more specific location soon. They need to hit Samaritan on the same day as the last raids on the bases, which means they have four weeks at best. But it’s still heartening. 16 miles is a lot more focused than the over 300 miles comprising New York City.

“Thanks Zoe. I’ll be back in three weeks to see if you’ve learned anything else.” By the time Zoe looks up, Root’s already gone.

Root spends the rest of the day tracking Harper but she seems to be deliberately sticking to high traffic areas making it difficult to approach her. Harper saw her, so it must mean she feels it unsafe to meet. Root will try again in the morning. When this happens, they have an agreed upon system. Harper leaves her apartment at 7am and they start again.

If they can’t set up a meet within 36 hours, Harper will leave a coded message at a dead drop. Each dead drop is only used once and they have a set order. The message is encoded using a book cipher to replace individual letters rather than words. The key is the first edition of the book Fire in the Valley, one of the best computer books of all time. It’s no longer in print and the first edition is not available electronically anywhere. Root’s used it before and without the key, no one has ever cracked the code. Unfortunately it means she’ll have to spend another night in the city unless they manage to meet before the dead drop comes into play.

Reese and his squad arrive at the compound the night of Root’s departure. Shaw’s informed immediately and she asks one of the guards currently on duty to have him come find her when he has time. Reese takes a quick shower after overseeing the securing of all weapons. He’s exhausted but if Shaw wants to see him, he won’t make her wait.

Shaw’s spent her time since dinner cleaning her gun and listening to music. Reese knocks on her door and she shouts out. “Come in already!” He smiles and steps into the room. “Shaw. Glad to see your social graces remain intact.”

Shaw gives him a genuine smile. “Yeah well. People around here are too cheerful and polite. It’s annoying. They should learn to just get to the point.”

“I’m glad you’re back Shaw.” Shaw looks away, but answers him softly. “You and me both John.
Shaw has a question only Reese can answer and she gets right to it. “I want you to tell me about what Root’s been through over the last two years. She won’t because she thinks it pales in comparison to what I went through, but I want to know.” Reese takes a minute to consider whether he should just encourage Shaw to look forward, but sometimes to be able to move ahead you need to deal with the past.

“We had to knock her out to get her to leave the stock exchange without you that day. She wanted us to get to safety while she went back for you. It would’ve been suicide, Shaw. To this day Root disagrees and hasn’t really forgiven us for it.

We started searching for you the next day. We watched all the footage from the stock exchange and nearby cameras, kidnapped control, and followed a fruitless lead. We had a close brush with being caught by Samaritan and Finch decided it was too dangerous to keep looking. I’m not making excuses but he honestly believed you were dead Shaw.

The Machine wouldn’t tell Root anything. After the close call She sent a message telling us to stop looking. I wasn’t there, but Finch said Root just said goodbye and walked away after he tried to convince her it was for the best. She disappeared for almost a year.

When she came back she’d developed an app to help her recruit assets. She had almost a thousand recruits already and was basically using guerilla tactics to attack Samaritan bases. Finch wouldn’t help unless Root agreed to change tactics and stop killing people. Root declined, so Finch refused to help. I left with Root.

When I joined her she wasn’t the same Shaw. Even I could see she’d lost the playful and optimistic approach typical for Root. She was ruthless, but had turned herself into a very effective leader. Everyone here would give their life for her. But she wouldn’t let anyone close. Even with me, she rarely expressed any emotion or anything really, except for the next step we needed to take.

Every single day she pursued one goal with single-minded determination…finding you. She slept four to five hours a night but except for daily jogs around the compound, every other waking moment was spent thinking, strategizing, leading raids, analyzing intelligence…every decision she made, every life she risked, including her own, and every sacrifice over the last two years was done for the explicit purpose of finding and rescuing you.

Eventually I talked her into sparring with me and I think it helped her vent some of the pent up emotions. I encouraged her to eat as much as possible and took over various responsibilities to lighten the load. All she did was devote the extra time to the search.

She’s been much better since you came back obviously.” He gives Shaw a knowing smile. Or as much of a smile as Reese ever allows himself. “But she needs you Shaw. She won’t survive losing you again. She would’ve kept looking until she found you no matter how long it took, but if you had died she would’ve destroyed Samaritan and then herself.”

Reese doesn’t know what else he can say. “Thanks John, I needed to know.” Reese can’t suppress a yawn. “I need to get some sleep Shaw, but I’ll find you tomorrow. I’ll be leaving again the day after to hit 10 more bases. I’d like your help in selecting the next ones. If you’re up to it.”

“You’re drinking the kool aid too John?” Shaw asks, but not unkindly. Reese knows exactly what Shaw’s referring too. “No. We need you Shaw and you need to get off the sidelines and join the fight.” He leaves her with his words echoing behind him.
It takes Shaw a long time to fall asleep. She tosses and turns, her mind churning with thoughts she can’t seem to hold onto for long. Finally simple exhaustion drives her into a fitful slumber. But a piercing scream wakes her not long after. The guards rush into the room and it takes her a second to realize it came from her. “Get out! I’m fine.” They leave reluctantly.

She was dreaming. Back in the box. Silence and white everywhere. She was screaming continuously in her mind, but no sound came out, her eyes wild. The same thought racing through her mind. Out. Out. Out.

She gets her breathing back under control and gets up. There’ll be no more sleep for her tonight. She’d rather stay up exhausted than risk returning to her nightmare.

She works out for another couple of hours then spends the rest of the night reading.

She forces thoughts of Root out of her mind because the emotions that swamp her have nowhere to go.

The opportunity to meet with Harper never comes and Root spends another night in New York. Harper will make the drop at 7pm precisely and Root will pick the note up at 7:15 precisely. Everything goes according to plan and Root retrieves the message. She’ll have to wait until she’s back at the compound to decode it. She doesn’t carry the book key with her for security. If she’s captured, they still won’t have the key to the cipher.

She decides not to speak to Claire and immediately sets out for the compound.

No matter what Shaw does to exhaust herself, every time she falls asleep, the nightmare returns. She’s sure someone reported to Reese because he brought her a bottle of scotch before he left again. But it doesn’t help. The minute her eyes close she sees the box.

Root reaches the compound in the early hours of the morning. She immediately looks for Shaw. She heads for the bedroom first and when she sees the guards outside she knows Shaw must be in there. Before she walks in, Adam stops her. “Uh…Root, I think you should know. Shaw’s been having nightmares if her screams are anything to go by. She hasn’t slept since you left. We reported to Reese when he was here, but otherwise only the six of us who’ve been on guard duty know about it. I figured she wouldn’t want anyone to know.”
“Thank you, I really appreciate it Adam. Shaw will too. Unless it’s an emergency, please don’t let anyone disturb us for any reason until I say otherwise. Make sure the next shift knows.” Adam nods understandingly and Root thanks him again. She enters the room quietly.

Shaw’s not in their bedroom, but the door connecting it to Shaw’s room is open. Root notes Shaw had the furniture moved.

She finds Shaw sitting at the table, a bottle of scotch in front of her. Her shoulders are slumped and she holds the bottle carelessly in one hand. She’s staring blankly at the wall and Root can see the sheen of sweat coating her body from where she stands and her hair is matted to her face.

Root sits next to her and realizes Shaw’s been crying. Her eyes are swollen and dried tear tracks mar her face. Root’s heart breaks at the sight. She’s never seen Shaw cry.

“Hey sweetie.” Root decides to ignore Shaw’s state for the moment. A pity party isn’t going to help and Shaw would resent it in the morning. “I really need a shower. Come take one with me?” Shaw lets go of the bottle and Root catches it before it spills. Shaw looks at Root but there’s nothing there. It’s like her life force was sucked from her body. Root thinks maybe Shaw’s not going to answer but she does. “Sure. I’m a mess.” Even though the bottle’s almost empty, Shaw isn’t slurring her words and her walk is steady.

They take a quick shower, Root bathing Shaw tenderly but not sexually. She helps Shaw put on a clean tank and shorts before dressing swiftly herself. Shaw stands close to Root without touching. Root takes her hand and guides her.

But the minute Shaw reaches the bed, she steps back violently. “Nuh-uh. No bed.” Root doesn’t want to force Shaw. It’s doubtful she could anyway. She also would rather not sedate her, but she will. Shaw’s clearly sleep deprived and with her current state of mind, it’s more dangerous than it normally would be.

“Of course sweetie. What about we sit on the floor and watch a movie?” Shaw seems to be okay with that so Root speedily throws the pillows and comforter on the floor to make it more comfortable. She pulls over a chair and uses it as a table to hold the laptop. She plays the first movie she sees, which happens to be the Martian. It’s a pretty quiet movie, so it won’t rile Shaw up with explosions and violence.

She sits down propped against the bed and offers Shaw her hand. Shaw sits next to her and scoots up against the pillows. They watch for a few minutes and Root reaches around Shaw, pulling her gently until Shaw’s head is resting on her shoulder. Shaw doesn’t fight her and is asleep within minutes.

Root knows they’re both going to be achy in the morning from the awkward position but Shaw needs sleep more than they need to avoid discomfort. She wraps her other arm around her and eventually falls asleep too, Shaw cradled in her arms. There are no nightmares and Shaw sleeps for the first time in two days.

Root wakes when Shaw stirs in her arms. They’ve been asleep for about six hours. Shaw stands and pulls at Root’s hand sleepily. “Come on let’s move to the bed.” They both fall asleep without trouble and sleep for another few hours.
When Shaw wakes again her head is pounding and she can’t stop the groan that shoots from her mouth. Root’s already awake, lying on her side. She reaches over and soothes Shaw, rubbing her hand softly down her back. “I’m going to get you some water and pain pills sweetie.” Shaw groans but takes them without complaint, draining the entire glass of water. Root refills it and sets in on the nightstand before crawling back into bed.

Shaw’s on her stomach, her face turned away from Root. Root continues her gentle petting and lies next to her, not talking, just letting Shaw know she’s there. Just when Root thinks Shaw’s fallen asleep again she turns her face towards Root.

“Hey sweetie. I missed you.” Not for the first time, Shaw’s swept away by Root’s ability to give her what she needs without having to ask. “How’s your head?” Shaw realizes it’s just a dull ache as opposed to the splitting pain when she first woke up. “Much better… thanks…” Shaw’s words drop off awkwardly. She means thanks for last night and this morning and everything she did to rescue her. But right now she doesn’t have the right words.

Root smiles the one she does for Shaw that seems like her whole body’s bursting. It kills Shaw every time and she leans in for a soft kiss. “I think you need a hangover breakfast. Interested?” Shaw checks with her stomach and finds she’s hungrier than she’s been since she got to the compound.

“Yeah. Sounds great. But isn’t it closer to lunch?” Root smiles and steps to the door and gives instructions to one of the guards, who’s more than happy to help. She’s making an exception today because she doesn’t want to leave Shaw.

She slips back into bed. “Being the boss has some perks. Jonas is getting us breakfast. You want to eat in bed or at the table?” Shaw realizes Root didn’t go get their breakfast herself. “Root you can leave me alone while you get breakfast. I’m fine.”

“I know sweetie. But I don’t want to be without you. Plus I’m exhausted. I don’t even want to walk from here to the bathroom.” She curls into Shaw’s body and after a moment Shaw pulls her closer. She runs her fingers through Root’s hair and they lie holding each other until breakfast arrives.

Shaw feels much better after breakfast and Root can tell there’s something Shaw wants to talk about. She’s fidgeting and pacing. Root remembers she picked up speakers for the mp3 player while she was in Manhattan. She plugs them in and decides on a mellow playlist. She turns the volume way down so it’s soothing as opposed to distracting.

Root settles back on the bed, propping herself up on the pillows. Minute by minute Shaw’s working herself up into a controlled frenzy. “Sam, will you come lie down with me please?” Shaw’s about to ask why, but she knows what Root’s doing so why bother with the charade?

She gets into bed and uses Root’s chest as her pillow. Root immediately begins running her fingers through Shaw’s hair soothingly. She hopes it will help with her headache and the anxiety she can feel strumming through Shaw.

“I guess you know about the nightmares.” It’s not a question. “Yes. Adam let me know when I got here last night. He was concerned about you.” Root knows what’s going through Shaw’s head.
“No one knows about the nightmares except John and the six guards who’ve been on duty while I was gone. They wanted to respect your privacy.” Shaw’s not sure six people can keep a secret but she’ll trust Root on it. She’s not worried about Reese. He’s a tomb.

“Do you want to tell me about it? If not, that’s okay too.” Shaw knows Root can’t see her face and somehow it makes it easier to talk. She closes her eyes and takes calming breaths.

“It was the box. I was screaming but there was no sound. The same word drumming in my head over and over. Out.” Root doesn’t try to minimize the dream’s importance or its ill effects with trite clichés like ‘it’s to be expected’ or ‘it’s okay’ even though both of those things are probably true. She just listens.

“Every time I tried to sleep it came back. What am I going to do Root? I can’t go through it again, even if it’s just in my head. It’s not one of those dreams where you kind of know you’re dreaming and everything’s muted. I’m there, back in the box. I wake up damp with sweat and my heart racing. It takes me a minute to calm down enough to realize it’s just a dream.”

Root squeezes Shaw in a gentle hug. “Well, you didn’t dream last night did you?” Shaw sighs. “I did before you got back. But not after. I’m sorry I made you sleep on the floor.”

“Sameen you know I’d sleep anywhere with you.” Her voice is playful with a hint of innuendo. Shaw snorts with laughter. She knows Root’s trying to soothe her and make her feel safe so she can share her feelings without overloading. “Yeah you’ve already proven that to be true. Remember the coffin?” Root would rather not.

She thinks her next words through carefully. “I think you need to talk about what you’ve been through.” Shaw tries to shoot off the bed, but Root anticipated her reaction and holds her tightly. “Sameen, please, hear me out.” Root can feel the struggle within Shaw, but she stops trying to pull away.

“I’m not saying you need professional therapy right now. But you’re a doctor. You know the trauma you’ve experienced may lead to PTSD. You’ve been hyper vigilant since your rescue and now you’re reliving the experience in your dreams, two common symptoms.

John and I have both been captured and tortured. Our experiences pale in comparison to yours, but at least we have an idea of where you’re coming from. Talk to us. Talk to me. Not in euphemisms or careful language to spare my feelings. Tell me everything. I promise I’ll listen. I love you. Let me be with you. You were isolated, imprisoned, and tortured for two years Sameen. Please don’t try to tough this out.

The nightmares could also simply mean you need more than a week to adjust after what you’ve been through. So if sleeping with me helps keep them at bay for now, it’s a win/win. It’s not like we weren’t going to sleep together every night anyway.” Root says the last part with a smile in her voice.

“But whichever it turns out to be, I’ll be right here with you. Let me. Please.”
"When you call me sweetie it’s like a breath, soft and full of affection. It reaches inside and wraps me up and makes me feel warm and...safe."

Shaw doesn’t answer right away, but lets Root hold her. “I know why you keep my nightmares away.” Root places a kiss on Shaw’s head, which is still resting on her chest, and waits patiently for Shaw to gather her thoughts.

“In the Marines and later with the ISA, they taught us to resist torture. They told us to think about a safe place and imagine ourselves there when things got really bad. It never worked for me. I didn’t have a safe place. I had a tolerance for pain and little emotion.

But the minute I was captured by Samaritan, I knew I had one this time. You. You are my safe place. It’s how I survived. They broke me in so many different ways Root. But you were with me every minute of every never ending day. You gave me strength and comfort and...hope.

When you found me, I was convinced I was hallucinating. But you called me Sameen and told me I was safe with you. Your voice...no one has ever said my name the way you do. Like I’m your whole world and there’s nothing about me you would change.”

Root cries silently, tears trickling slowly down her face. “You are and there isn’t.”

Shaw places a kiss on the skin under her mouth. “I slit my wrists the minute Reese left the room. But then you called me sweetie and I wished I hadn’t, because somewhere in my fucked up head I knew it really was you. When you call me sweetie it’s like a breath, soft and full of affection. It reaches inside and wraps me up and makes me feel warm and...safe.

In the truck when you leaned over and I took a breath, it was the scent of your skin…I’ve never been able to describe it really. It’s clean and sweet and it always makes me think of the apples you love so much. Somewhere along the way your scent became home. Whenever you’re so close to me, that’s what I feel. Like I’m home.

I really started to hope then. Because there’s no way anyone could recreate the scent of your skin so exactly or duplicate the visceral reaction my body always has to it. Then you told me all those things about myself. Things you know even though I never told you. About the snow and how fast you walk and how I felt when Finch had you committed. They were things even the Machine couldn’t have told you. I’ve never said any of them out loud.

How did you know Root?” Shaw’s voice is full of wonder, almost like a child.

“I listen to everything you say and I pay attention to everything you do Sameen. The intuitive leaps just rush at me and I just know, in my bones. It’s always the small, seemingly unimportant things.

One day you said it was snowing so much the snowmen were building themselves. Then we were outside and for a second you looked kind of wistful. I would’ve missed it except I’m constantly looking at you, because I always feel like we’re having a conversation even when you don’t say a
word. It made sense to me. You built snowmen with your father so the snow reminded you of pleasant memories. Why I was so sure it was your father I couldn’t say.

I know you’re going to roll your eyes and think I’m corny, but I knew everything I needed to know about you the minute our eyes locked for the first time…and not because I read your file. Sure the things you’d done intrigued me. You were clearly a badass.”

Root stops for a moment and Shaw knows what’s coming. “You know how much I love your ass,” she says suggestively. Shaw rolls her eyes even though Root can’t see and pinches Root’s side. However the hiss that follows isn’t one of pain, but rather undisguised delight. Intensity once again at manageable levels for Shaw, Root returns to her previous train of thought.

“But your file didn’t capture your heart or your expressive eyes. I knew you were going to change my life the second we met. You were telling me things you didn’t want me to know even then. Things you didn’t know about yourself.

You were wounded and you had no reason to trust me. You thought I gave Cole information. Information that got him killed. But you trusted me anyway. You put your gun down. You let your guard down. Even when you heard weird noises, it never occurred to you I was the threat. Your first instinct was to protect me.

When I threatened you with the iron, not only were you not afraid, but you were turned on. I saw the excitement in your eyes. I intrigued you. You wondered if maybe I was someone a little like you. If maybe I was someone who could handle all of you…the sharp bits and pieces no one had ever known what to do with. And I knew…I knew I wanted to…wanted all of you.” Root exhales deeply like she’s run out of things to say. Shaw’s sure it won’t be for long.

But unlike the silence in the box, being quiet with Root feels comforting. More puzzling, so does talking to her. Shaw’s always felt talking was overrated. No one really understood what she meant anyway. It seemed everything she said came out wrong. Her words always upset, disappointed, or hurt someone.

Until Root. Root sliced through her defenses right to her very core and she liked it so much she moved in and took up permanent residence inside Shaw. Nothing Shaw ever did or said could dislodge her. She always believed they belonged together. She believed so much and so hard and so long she made Shaw believe it too.

Shaw sighs slowly. “I’ll try Root…to talk…to let you in…to let you help me…but only you. I can’t talk to anyone else about…any of it. Please don’t ask me to.”

Root hugs her closer. “Of course not sweetie.”
Discovered is probably not the right word. She recognized the box. Root’s always had it. It’s where she keeps their toys. Shaw turns over and reaches under the bed, bringing out the box and handing it to Root. Root’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. Not that Shaw found the box, but that she’d want to play with anything in there. “Sameen, are you sure?”

Shaw nods yes eagerly. “I want you to take me. Rip me apart and put me back together. Just no restraints or blindfolds. No other limits.” Shaw’s words trigger a tingling sensation up Root’s spine that settles immediately between her legs.

Root smiles wickedly. “Okay lover. Strip and wait for me on your knees.” The command in Root’s voice snaps straight to Shaw’s core, to where she lives. She obeys instinctively like it’s hardwired into her code and feels her wetness already leaking from her slit, knowing Root’s going to tear her apart inch by inch, then put her back together so everything’s where it’s supposed to be instead of stabbing rough gashes in her soul.

Root comes back a few minutes later with a strap on, a harness, and lube. She pauses when she sees Shaw, captivated by the dichotomy of her powerful lover, muscled biceps, ripped abs, and perfect ass, on her knees for her, ready to give it all up just for her. The look in Shaw’s gorgeous eyes, submissive and trusting, sends liquid heat pooling between her legs.

She drops the toys next to the bed and moves into Shaw’s line of sight. Shaw’s looking up at her through her lashes and her clit starts to throb. She takes off her clothes slowly but not exaggeratedly so. Shaw’s on her knees on the floor, back pressed to the side of the bed, hands submissively on her thighs. The music is still playing softly and the room is shrouded in darkness even though it’s the middle of the day, no windows to let in the sunlight.

Root stands directly in front of Shaw and rests her right foot on the bed, next to her head. Shaw’s mouth is perfectly positioned, a hair’s breadth away from her glistening center. “Alright darlin’, use only your mouth.” Root’s Texan accent only makes rare appearances, usually when she’s really turned on and it shoots straight to Shaw’s center making her sigh with longing.

Root’s scent envelops her and Shaw leans in slowly, flattening her tongue, and taking a long, broad, gentle lick from the base of Root’s sex to just under her clit. Root winds her hand in Shaw’s hair and tugs firmly, letting Shaw know she wants it fast and firm, no teasing.

Shaw takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly; blowing warm air over Root’s wet lips. Root thinks about reprimanding this borderline cheeky behavior but it feels so good she lets it slide.

Shaw kisses Root’s slit hard. Starting from the bottom and working up to the top, she kisses every inch of it, ending at her clit, which sends a shiver through Root’s body. Shaw’s enveloped by the heady scent of Root’s arousal and licks firmly up and down Root’s lips exquisitely and Root stifles a moan.

Shaw hears it anyway and quirks her lips in a tiny smile that Root can feel. “Sameen…am I going to have to punish you?” It’s a trick question so Shaw doesn’t answer as she dedicates herself to licking and sucking Root’s dripping pussy. She can never get enough of Root’s taste. She’s been on the edge of an orgasm more than once just from eating Root out.

She licks and sucks at Root’s hood until her clit makes an appearance, hard and smooth on her tongue. She uses her smooth inner lips to suck relentlessly until she feels Root’s muscles tensing. She adjust her head slightly and suddenly Root feels Shaw’s tongue inside, thrusting and exploring enthusiastically, while her open mouth grazes her clit, and it feels so fucking good.

Root grips Shaw’s head hard while Shaw feasts and soon she’s coming hard, holding Shaw’s head
in place until she’s sure Shaw must be lacking oxygen, but Root wants to draw it out. She finally stops spasming, although pleasurable little aftershocks still roll through her.

She lets go of Shaw’s head and Shaw’s breathing hard, a little wobbly from oxygen deprivation. “Oh, Sameen that was soooo excellent. I’m going to take such really good care of you now lover.” Shaw finally gets her breathing under control, but she’s so wet and desperate she’s having trouble staying still.

Root needs a little steadying herself and she’s sure her bones have liquefied. She tugs Shaw up gently and captures her mouth in a bruising kiss, claiming territory, chasing the taste of her own arousal around Shaw’s mouth, stroking her tongue until they need to come up for air. Shaw moans her need and Root soothes her.

“Lie down for me Sameen. On your stomach baby.” Shaw obeys her hands loose by her side in open submission. It takes Root’s breath away, knowing Shaw will give her as much as she wants to take. Running her hands firmly from Shaw’s shoulders, down her back, and to her ass, Root grips her tightly by her hips, pulling her back in a position that leaves her legs open, sex exposed, glistening with wetness that makes Root’s mouth water. She bends down and bites Shaw’s perfect ass, knowing Shaw will definitely feel it tomorrow.

Root pauses and slips on the harness with the cock already secured. Although Shaw can’t see her, she can tell from the sounds what Root’s doing. Anticipation heightened, Shaw’s entire center starts to throb. Root grabs the lube and positions herself behind Shaw, so the cock is resting under her sex. Gripping her hips, Root slides it up and down Shaw’s center, slowly coating it with her wetness, almost chuckling when she realizes the lube’s unnecessary. Losing her ability to utter a coherent sentence, Shaw tries to push down, seeking friction reflexively.

One hand resting on her lower back, gripping her lightly, Root enters her with two fingers without warning. Shuddering, Shaw immediately starts riding Root’s hand. Gripping her hip more firmly, Root holds Shaw in place and maintains a languid pace, gradually feeling Shaw opening up. Adding a third finger, she feels, more than hears, Shaw sob with need. "Root, please..."

"Do you want me to fuck you Sameen?" Root stills her hand momentarily, giving Shaw a chance to catch her breath and let her know if she wants to stop. Instead, Shaw bites out, “Yes...however you want.” Resuming a leisurely pace, Root allows her thumb to slowly circle Shaw’s rim, resulting in another bout of begging from Shaw, “Root...please...yes...”

Withdrawing her hand, Root grips Shaw’s hips so hard she knows the bruises will linger a week, maybe two. The thought momentarily makes Root grin smugly. Marking Shaw gives her a primal surge of possessiveness. Starting to lose control of her own need, she enters Shaw with her cock suddenly, like a slap, immediately establishing a wicked pace.

Bracing herself with her head tucked into her body and her weight on her forearms and shoulders, Shaw pushes back just as hard, wanting to feel Root deeper inside her, like a battering ram. Shaw’s thigh and calf muscles easily resist the momentum caused by Root’s pounding. Root pauses briefly. "You will not come until I say so, do you understand sweetie?” Shaw’s past the point of caring about anything except Root, but she registers the question. "Yes."

Sensation obliterates all thought when Root enters Shaw’s ass with her thumb, filling her completely, like they were made for each other, and keeping pace with the pounding of the cock against Shaw’s cervix. Riding the high, Shaw is torn between frantically wanting to come and never wanting the feeling to end.

Root shifts the angle of the cock slightly finding Shaw’s g-spot and pounding away relentlessly like a
drum, her thumb rocking to the same rhythm. Lowering herself onto Shaw’s back, she brings her mouth to Shaw’s ear. “Come for me now lover.” Not expecting or waiting for an answer, she flicks her index finger over Shaw’s clit, sending her over the edge. Shaw’s entire existence narrows to her orgasm, her body taut, pushing back against Root, pleasure like a violent kindness raping her body.

Root slows, but starts up again before Shaw’s first orgasm’s completely ebbed. “You’re going to come again for me Sameen.” It’s not a request. If she wants to stop, Shaw will need to safe word. She doesn’t want Root to stop and her second orgasm crashes down suddenly.

“yesyesrootdontstoprightthere” Root gentles her through it, rocking inside her softly, until Shaw’s spent and quivering beneath her. Root knows Shaw lost consciousness for a few seconds and she withdraws tenderly.

“Are you okay sweetie?” Root rubs Shaw’s bank soothingly. “You were so good for me Sameen. I love pounding into you until you forget your name.” Shaw looks over her shoulder and smiles at Root slap-happily. “Who’s Sameen?” Root swats her ass playfully and hands her a glass of water from the nightstand.

Root waits, rubbing Shaw’s back, until Shaw answers her question. “I’m good Root.” Root bends down and kisses her shoulder. “Okay sweetie, lie on your back, spread eagle for me.” Once Shaw relocates, Root uses a pillow to prop up her ass.

Root stares deeply into Shaw’s eyes for so long, Shaw begins to squirm. “Usual rules apply Sameen. Okay?” Shaw nods but Root waits until she answers verbally. “Yes, Root. Green, yellow, red.” Root nods, satisfied Shaw’s secure in the knowledge she has a say in what happens to her body. Especially now.

She scoots up on the bed, sitting on her knees on Shaw’s left side and gets comfortable. “I’m going to fill you completely darlin’. My entire hand will be in inside you, until you can’t feel anything but me, where nothing exists but me.” Her words make Shaw hotter than she’s ever been and she wants Root to keep that promise, to do what she says.

Never taking her eyes off her, Root coats her hand with practically an entire tube of lube. “Sameen have you ever been fisted?” They’ve never done it before and Root wants to judge if she should talk Shaw through it. Shaw swallows, her throat suddenly dry, and nods no.

“It means a lot to me I get to be your first (and only goes without saying),” Root whispers, almost reverently. She knows everything before this was foreplay and Shaw’s definitely loosened up.

“Spread your legs for me lover.” Shaw opens herself in offering and Root places her left hand on Shaw’s hip for leverage and talks her through it softly. “I’m squeezing the fingers of my hand together and I’m going to push into you until I can make a fist and slide all the way in…” Shaw’s practically vibrating with need and Root keeps her word. She starts to slowly push into Shaw.

Shaw feels a creeping urgency and a slight pain from being stretched little by little as Root’s hand goes deeper and deeper. She’s never felt anything like it. A sweet mix of pleasure, pain, dopamine and endorphins. There’s a moment when she feels like Root’s hand is impossibly big and will rip her in half (even though she knows Root’s hands are actually delicate and much smaller than her own). Breathing through it and trusting Root, the pain passes quickly and Root’s hand slips in all the way. The pain is replaced by a strange feeling of relief and the throbbing intensity of feeling makes her feel fuller than she’s ever been before.

Root rotates her fist slowly, moving in small circular motions, her knuckles against Shaw’s cervix. Shaw feels the sheer intensity of stretching herself wide open to let Root deep inside her body and wants to figure out this feeling so unlike anything else. She feels impossibly close to Root,
vulnerable and raw. The intimacy and trust of being that full, riding on sensations so different from anything else, is incredible. It feels like being high, post-verbal and dissociative, but its way better than drugs. Although Shaw thinks she’s already addicted.

Looking at Shaw, knowing the unconditional submission and trust Shaw has given her, takes Root’s breath away. “You are so beautiful Sameen.” Barely coherent, Shaw whispers, “Root...it feels so fucking incredible.” Root can feel the beating of Shaw’s heart and she’s blown away by the intensity of their connection and the absolute faith they belong together. The power Shaw lets her exercise over her humbles Root, feeling closer to her than she’s ever felt with anyone.

Feeling Shaw’s orgasm building, Root uses her left hand to circle and squeeze her nipples gently and then brings it to rest on Shaw’s clit, stroking softly. "Come for me Sameen." As her orgasm begins, Shaw’s muscles grip tightly like a vise around her hand. “ohmygodrootrootrootroot" Root lets her ride it out, captivated by the look on Shaw’s face and the intensity between them when their eyes meet. Once she feels Shaw unclenching, she whispers, “Sameen, I’m going to pull out slowly, okay?”

But Shaw mumbles, “Not yet.” Resuming a barely perceptible movement, Root doesn’t take her eyes from her. Feeling her second orgasm building, Root sees the honesty in Shaw’s eyes and the unmistakable look of adulation as she comes. Moved beyond words, she slowly withdraws, using her left hand to ease her right out not wanting to risk hurting her lover.

She immediately wraps herself around Shaw’s body, knowing she probably feels raw and vulnerable. “I’ve got you Sameen. I’m right here baby, I’m not going anywhere.” Gently, Root gets Shaw to turn into her and holds her, rubbing soft circles on her back, until Shaw regains her equilibrium.

Shaw starts to pull away, but she holds her a little tighter, “No, stay here with me.” Shaw settles and rests a hand on Root’s hip, her head tucked into Root’s shoulder. “Root...” But she's not sure what she wants to say, overwhelmed with feelings without context. "Everything's okay Sameen, I won't let you go." Shaw believes her absolutely and she feels calm and safe again.

They wake from their impromptu post coital nap and Shaw stretches, feeling a pleasant ache all through her body. Root clings to her sleepily. “You’re my pillow, you can’t get up yet.” Shaw smiles at Root’s ridiculousness. “I’m sure someone’s going to come looking for you soon. I’m surprised we’ve gone this long without interruptions.”

Root smiles smugly. “No one’s going to interrupt us unless it’s an emergency.” Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “Isn’t that abuse of power or something?”

“No sweetie. Power is being fist deep in your lover while she cries your name in ecstasy. A rhetorical ‘do not disturb’ from a commander in chief to an army is a mundane occurrence.” Shaw rolls her eyes and sighs. “Your head may be getting too big for this room.”

Root smiles mischievously. “Well as long as my fist’s not too big for your…” But she doesn’t get to finish because Shaw’s smothering her with a pillow. When she worms her way out she looks at Shaw lovingly. “I love you Sameen…Was it what you wanted? Are you…we okay?”

Shaw grins widely. “Yep. It was just what the doctor ordered. The doctor being me.” She leans down and captures Root’s lips in a sloppy and affectionate kiss. “We’re more than okay Root.
Always.”

It looks like a light bulb goes off in Shaw’s head. “Root, there’s something I keep forgetting to ask you. Why are there guards following me around?” Root hesitates because she knows any answer will not please Shaw. She’s actually surprised she hasn’t complained until now.

“Well, initially it was to make sure no one disturbed you until you felt up to dealing with people. Now it’s more to protect everyone else from you and you from yourself. Plus, when I left you here I was afraid. That I’d come back and you’d be gone or hurt. I needed it for my own peace of mind. To know you were as safe as I could possibly make it.”

Shaw’s scowling and her eyebrows are furrowed. “What does that even mean? Why do people need to be protected from me and why do you think I need protection from myself?”

“Well sweetie…” Root knows there’s no good way to say it. “Your anger is still unpredictable. I don’t want you feeling guilty or bad if you hurt someone unintentionally. If you get self-destructive, I want to know so I can help you. They know to come find me.”

Shaw sighs. She’s not really angry. Root’s not wrong about any of it. “Look Root, you can’t ensconce me in a cocoon trying to protect me from anything bad that may happen. We’re both going to have to learn to control our fear…of losing each other, of getting hurt…I’ll put up with it until the chip’s removed. But after that I don’t want anyone following me around. Understood?”

Root’s pleasantly surprised at the compromise. She though Shaw would be yelling like a banshee to get out from under anyone’s protection. “Yes sweetie. I promise. Look, I’ll cut it down to one guard and they don’t have to follow you if we’re together.”

“I know what you’re doing Root. You just want me to spend more time with you.”

“Guilty as charged. You can spank me later.”

They’re sitting at the picnic table having dinner. Shaw insisted on something other than bland food so Root brought her a burger and fries. She wanted to bring her a chicken breast with vegetables, but she wasn’t feeling that brave.

“You know these cooks are pretty good. This is 1,000 times better than any food we had in the Marines.” Root smiles indulgently. “Yes well someone I lo…know…taught me how important good food is for morale and to deter general grumpiness.” Shaw would scowl but her mouth is full of burger and she’s enjoying the first real meal she’s had in years. Literally.

“So how’d it go in the city? Learn anything useful?”

“Yes. Samaritan has a second headquarters in Brooklyn, somewhere on the East River. I have a message I need to decode from Harper which I suspect may be the specific location. We may actually be nearing the end game.”
Shaw nods thoughtfully. “Did Claire give you that information?”

Shaw’s surprised when Root nods no. “I never met with her. Once Zoe gave me the information and Harper left me a message at the dead drop, I decided I’d wait. I thought about what you said. If, as is possible, Claire’s been trying to lull me into a false sense of security, it’s better she doesn’t figure out we know about the Brooklyn location.

More importantly, I didn’t want her to feed it to me and be able to set a trap. If they don’t think we know about the facility, they won’t expect us. If she feeds it to us, we’d lose the element of surprise.”

Shaw nods in agreement. Root’s brain is yet something else that always turns her on. She grins at Root playfully. “Even your brain is sexy.” It’s rare for Shaw to be able to render Root speechless, but Root opens her mouth and nothing comes out. The comment short-circuited her brain. Her evidently sexy brain.

“Have you heard from John?”

“No, we don’t have any communication with the compound on missions. Too much of a risk. The last raids were successful. We didn’t lose anyone and the facilities were destroyed. All 10 of them. We’ll see when he gets back later or tomorrow how it went with this second set.”

Shaw’s about to respond when her attention’s drawn to the main gate. It’s opening to allow a truck to pass through. “That’s Grice.” Root announces expectantly. They watch as he exits the truck and the team pours out from the back. Towards the end, a person in a hood with hands bound behind their back is guided down roughly.

Grice calls Trent over and they speak briefly. Trent takes the prisoner and Grice heads over to talk to them. “Root. Shaw.” Neither woman speaks, anxious to learn about the prisoner. “We found him. The surgeon that operated on you Shaw. He also helped develop the chip and he wants to be extremely helpful. He’s definitely not a Samaritan acolyte. It was just a scientific challenge for him. Not to mention the money he was paid.”

Root and Shaw look at each other. It’s obvious neither wants to get their hopes up. But still. Root stands decisively. “Well let’s find out what he has to say for himself. Bring him to the infirmary. Shaw and I will interrogate him there. Oh, and good job Grice. Thank you.”

Grice waves over his head, already on his way to retrieve the prisoner.

Shaw looks after him pensively, an inscrutable expression on her face.
They stop by Root’s office and ask Daniel to bring Finch to the infirmary. Root wants him there since he’s been doing the research on the chip. She wants to have some idea if the surgeon really knows what he’s talking about. It’s always possible that he actually is a Samaritan devotee.

When they reach the infirmary, Grice is already there with the prisoner. “Remove the zip-ties and the hood,” Shaw tells Grice. She looks at the prisoner blankly and walks towards him slowly. Root knows what’s going to happen, but she has no intention of intervening. Shaw stops inches from his face and he tries to step back but Grice’s standing behind him and doesn’t allow him to move.

“What’s your name?” Shaw asks him casually. “Richard…Richard Jordan,” he stammers. Shaw nods, her face inscrutable. Then she delivers an upper cut to his chin that knocks him out cold. It’s been a long time since she punched anyone so she shakes out her hand. She forgot how much it hurts.

Root looks down at Richard and shrugs. “He’ll come around in a few minutes. Feel better sweetie?” Shaw smiles dangerously. “Much.”

Finch walks in escorted by Daniel and looks down at the unconscious man. One look from Root ensures he keeps his opinion to himself. So instead he turns to Shaw. “Ms. Shaw…I don’t know quite what to say…” Shaw cuts him off. “Then don’t. Just make yourself useful and tell us if this guys full of it or not.”

Finch looks like he’s about to say something but he just nods.

Richard’s coming around. He stands up and moves as far away from Shaw as possible. Shaw stares him down. “Okay Richard, you’re going to tell us how to get this chip out of my head since you’re the one who put it there.” Richard starts to speak, but all that comes out is a stutter of unintelligible words. He takes a deep breath and starts again.

He starts to justify his actions, but Shaw moves towards him and he shuts up about it. “It’s quite simple really. It’s like removing a small benign tumor.” Shaw knows there’s a but coming. “However, since the chip is located in the cerebellum, right next to the brain stem, the risk of complications increases dramatically.

The cerebellum controls movement, balance, posture, and coordination. New research has also linked it to thinking, novelty, and emotions. Damage in this area could result in anything from tremors to paralysis or some physical impairment. It’s considered the ‘little brain’ because although it only accounts for approximately 10% of the brain’s volume, it contains over 50% of the total number of neurons in the brain.

The chip’s also in close proximity to the brain stem, specifically the medulla. The medulla contains cardiac, respiratory, vomiting, and vasomotor centers regulating heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure. It is the most important part of the brain. Damage to this area is fatal.
If scar tissue has accumulated over the sensors, which is likely since it’s been in for almost a year, it’ll require a deeper and wider incision, which increases the risk of focal damage to the brain cells.”

“So next to a successful procedure the best I can hope for is death,” Shaw states unemotionally. Root knows there’s more going on inside Shaw, but they’ll discuss it in private.

She sighs and looks at Finch. “Well?” Finch clears his throat. “I believe he’s correct. From what I read in his notes and my independent research, the risk comes from the location of the implant and the extent to which scar tissue has integrated with the chip.”

“So what are the odds I’ll become one of Root’s salad ingredients?” Shaw asks.

Finch hesitates before answering. “I…I can’t be sure Ms. Shaw but my educated guess would be approximately 60%.” Shaw doesn’t blink. “What are the alternatives?”

Richard pipes up, getting caught up in the medical aspects of the procedure. “Eventually the scar tissue will be so dense over the chip, it will malfunction, no longer able to receive transmissions. The chip itself can remain indefinitely. It’s not like a tumor in that it won’t grow in size. So absent some other traumatic brain injury, it won’t shift. However, the only way to know if the chip is still operable is to test it by transmitting a signal.”

“How long will it take for enough scar tissue to render the chip inoperable?” Root asks. “That’s impossible to say. Scar tissue develops differently in everyone. In fact, it may be inoperable already.” Shaw scoffs. It was working just fine a week ago.

Root’s synapses are firing at lightning speed. There has to be a better option. “Can you make the incision and evaluate the extent of the scar tissue before deciding whether to remove it?” Richard thinks for a second, but it’s apparent from the look on his face it’s not a viable option. “No. In order to have a clear picture, it’s inevitable some scar tissue will have to be removed first. The chip is not sitting right under the skin. Although we can opt for leaving it in at that point, the risk remains the same.”

Shaw’s been considering her options, but they all seem grim. “Can you build a transmitter?” Richard immediately responds. “No. That is beyond my area of expertise. Another scientist developed the electronic components.”

“What’s his name?”

“Her actually. Gloria Markum.”

Root looks at Shaw and she knows the look on her face. Shaw needs to hit something or someone. The pressure’s building inside her. They’ve heard enough for now anyway.

“Grice, take Richard back to his cell and escort Finch to his room. Daniel you need to find Gloria Markum. Put all the other searches on hold and focus on her.”

Once they’re alone, Root’s not sure whether to offer physical comfort. Shaw’s emanating violence. She won’t hurt Root, but Root doesn’t want to make things worse. Sympathy will also not be welcome she knows. “Sameen, let’s go shoot our guns.” Shaw looks surprised but follows her to the target range.
Shaw’s workouts have improved her hand strength and dexterity and it shows in her performance. Root goes through a box of ammo and then just watches Shaw. She considers their options. None of which are appealing. Shaw shoots until she can’t hold her gun anymore.

They walk in silence to their bedroom. Once there Shaw goes into the bathroom and shuts the door. Root hears the shower turn on. She decides to wait until Shaw decides she’s ready to discuss it.

When Shaw comes out of the shower, Root’s on her computer working on the virus. It’s important, but also occupies her mind so she doesn’t let the same loop run in her head. What should they do? It’s Shaw’s decision, but whatever she decides Root will be right there with her.

She watches Shaw out of the corner of her eye and for a minute she thinks Shaw’s going to reach for the scotch bottle. But instead she sits on the bed next to Root. Root immediately saves her work and closes the laptop setting it aside.

Shaw takes a deep breath. “We’re fucked.” Root sighs internally. At least Shaw’s accepted that they’re in this together. “What should I do Root? If I can’t be me, I don’t want to live. It would kill me, just a lot slower.”

Root takes Shaw’s hands in her own. “There’s another option.” Shaw looks at her hopefully. “We focus on defeating Samaritan. Once it’s gone, it won’t matter. But it means you have to stay in here until it’s done. In the meantime we search for Markum. Maybe there’s some way to disable the chip electronically. You can decide to go ahead with the surgery at any point. It’s not like you have to decide now.”

Shaw sighs like a big weight has been taken off her shoulders. She leans in and captures Root lips in a lingering kiss. “I hadn’t thought of that. Thanks Root. I think you’re right. Let’s see whether we can find Markum. I think you should just get Finch working on the virus. We know all there is to know right now about the chip anyway.”

“Okay sweetie, I’ll talk to him tomorrow. You want to watch a movie or something? I feel like we should do something normal. We’ve been through an emotional rollercoaster for awhile. I don’t know about you but I need to disconnect even if it’s just for a couple of hours.”

Shaw’s pleased Root’s finally beginning to get in touch with her own feelings and needs. Ever since Shaw’s rescue Root’s been so focused on Shaw’s needs, she’s been burying her own. The fact she is also lets Shaw know Root has confidence Shaw hasn’t been reduced to a weak shadow of her former self. That Shaw’s an equal in this fight.

“All right, but I pick the movie. You are not subjecting me to some romantic comedy.” Root pouts. “But Sameen, everyone likes a good romance, especially with a happy ending.”

Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head no. “Our romantic (insert grimace) story is all I can handle Root. We’re watching Kill Bill.”

At that point Root would watch water dripping. Shaw called them a romantic story! Even though she knows part of it is Shaw’s deviousness in trying to distract Root so she can get her way, Root also knows Shaw wouldn’t say it if she didn’t mean it.

“You say the sweetest things.” Shaw rolls her eyes again but smiles.

Shaw pulls Root so they’re sitting with shoulders touching and starts the movie. When it’s over Shaw realizes the tension she’s been carrying around has diminished. At least for now. “Sam, that movie has more violence than all our gunfights put together,” Root complains. Shaw grins widely.
“Yeah, isn’t it great?!” She asks with enthusiasm Root rarely witnesses. Root shakes her head and despite everything that’s going on, she knows all she needs is right here sitting next to her.

“That’s one way to put it. I don’t know about you but I’m exhausted.” Shaw yawns in agreement. She waits for Root to get under the covers. “Okay, spoon me. But I don’t want to hear any sappy commentary.” Root does as instructed and Shaw desperately hopes they’ll be no nightmares tonight.
Monsoon Root

Chapter Summary

"You had faith I would come for you." Shaw smiles. “Yes, well I admit I didn’t expect an army. More like explosions, gunshots, and a wildly inappropriate innuendo…

Chapter Notes

This is just a short little chapter to move things along. I'll be posting a longer one soon.

I am by no means a scientist and EMP weapons have yet to be developed (as far as I know, I put nothing past the pentagon), but I did do some research to make it as plausible as possible.

BTW lions really do behave the way Root did.

I used some of the dialogue from 6,741. What can I say? I'm a sucker for nostalgia.

Shaw wakes with Root still draped over her body. She never thought she would find comfort from someone else’s presence in her bed, much less their sleeping on top of her. But she loves the feel of Root’s skin against her own. When Root rescued her she was afraid she’d never be able to have Root touch her again. She didn’t care about anyone else touching her, she didn’t allow it anyway. But, as usual, Root proves to be the exception to the rule.

Shaw lies quietly, just drinking in the smell of Root and the comfort she provides. She’s also relieved she wasn’t cursed with any nightmares last night. Although most of her didn’t expect to have any, there was a small part that still dreaded the possibility. But she slept deep and peaceful and woke up refreshed.

Root stirs against her like she can tell Shaw’s awake. “Hey sweetie.” She rubs her nose into the crook of Shaw’s neck and smiles. She inhales deeply, reveling in the smell of Shaw’s skin. “Sleep okay?” Shaw can’t help but smile. Root’s like lions greeting each other, rubbing into Shaw, moaning, seeking as much contact as possible.

Shaw wraps Root in her arms and pulls her on top, humming her answer. She hugs Root close and places a kiss on her shoulder. Root sighs contentedly. They lie in each other arms drowsily until Root groans and starts to get up. “I need a shower.” Shaw holds her for a minute more and then lets her get up reluctantly. As Root walks away, Shaw complains, “but now I’m cold.” Root laughs and gives her a saucy grin before stepping into the bathroom.

By the time Root’s done in the shower Shaw’s dressed. There’s a knock on the door, but since Root’s still naked Shaw answers. It’s one of the guards. “Ahhh…Mr. Finch has asked to see Root.” Shaw thinks about it. “Okay. Bring him here.” The guard nods without hesitation and Shaw closes the door.
“Finch asked to see you.” Root’s pulling on a shirt but quirks her eyebrows in question once it’s over her head. “Wonder what that’s about?” Shaw shrugs. “We’re about to find out.” Root finishes dressing and Shaw pulls her into a lingering kiss. “Good morning.”

She snuggles into Shaw’s body. “Now that you’re here I sometimes forget, if only for a second, that anything exists outside of us. It’s like I was in a waking nightmare and now I’m living my wildest dream. I missed you so much Sameen.”

Shaw hugs her reassuringly. “I’m here now Root. Someday maybe I’ll find the words…” Root places a kiss under her earlobe. “It’s okay even if you never find the words Sameen. It’s the same way I feel about you surviving despite the insurmountable barriers standing in your way. You fought your way through the impossible. You believed in me…in us. You had faith I would come for you.”

Shaw smiles. “Yes, well I admit I didn’t expect an army. More like explosions, gunshots, and a wildly inappropriate innuendo…You know I hated you when we first met; but you wouldn't stop bugging me.” Root shakes her head while smiling. “You only thought you did.” Shaw groans and rolls her eyes. “Fine…but you were like a torrentially beautiful monsoon, a little dark, fierce and unrelenting, and I was soaked.” Root tears up and Shaw rolls her eyes playfully, “okay don’t get all mushy on me or next time I won’t say anything.” Root doesn’t have words so she just hugs Shaw close until there’s a knock on the door.

Root takes a minute to compose herself and then lets Finch in. He seems tentative. “Ms. Shaw… Ms. Gr…Root.” Shaw looks at him indifferently, while Root takes a more conciliatory tone. “Harold. I’m glad you came to see me. Shaw and I have decided you should focus your efforts on the virus.” Harold nods, whether in agreement or simply in acknowledgement of Root’s words is unclear.

“Yes, well I actually wanted to discuss Ms. Shaw’s situation. More specifically, a way to destroy the chip.” Root can’t help the hope that flashes in her eyes. Shaw remains impassive, waiting to hear his idea.

“The chip is like any other circuit board, a receiver designed to accept audio signals and process them…in Ms. Shaw’s case wirelessly. As such it is vulnerable to an intense burst of electromagnetic energy caused by an abrupt and rapid acceleration of charged particles.” Shaw’s completely lost, but Root seems to understand.

“You’re saying that an EMP could fry the chip and render it inoperable.” Finch nods yes. “It is not without attendant risks. The energy will melt down the transistor ‘junctions’ but we cannot predict how it will affect the sensors attached to the central nervous system. Theoretically it should not have any effect on the neural systems involved as EMPs are not strong enough to achieve a breakdown of the cell membranes. In other words EMPs pose no danger to the human body.

I calculated approximately a 20% chance Ms. Shaw will suffer brain damage. However, if I had more information on how the sensors interact with the chip, we could assess the risks with a greater degree of certainty.”
Root knows who can provide the necessary information. Gloria Markum. “I know where we can get the necessary information and I’ll let you know as soon as we have it, Harry.” Finch turns to walk away but Shaw’s voice stops him. “Finch...uhh, I really appreciate what you’re doing.” Finch smiles at her and nods his head once in acceptance of all the things he knows Shaw cannot say.

Once he’s gone, Root turns to Shaw. “Sam this could be the answer. What do you think?”

“We had EMP weapons in the Marines. But it was a top secret project. The public doesn’t even know they exist. I don’t see how we could get our hands on one.”

“Oh sweetie, that’s the easy part. I’ll just build one.”
It’s time for lunch and Shaw sits outside while Thomas goes to get it. She’s watching the training exercises when she notices a familiar figure running gracefully around the compound. Root’s taken up her daily jogs again and Shaw’s mesmerized by the movement of her body.

Shaw stares at her like she’s lost the last marble taking residence in her head. “Build one?! No offense Root, but if it were that easy wouldn’t a lot of people be making them?” Root gives Shaw the “oh if only you knew smile” and shakes her head.

“Well first of all, it’s not that easy. I do have a genius level IQ, remember? Plus for all we know plenty of people are making them. In any case, all I need is a microwave, a circuit board, a capacitor, some wire, a few inches of coil, and a few supplies.”

Shaw rolls her eyes. “You? A genius? Mad scientist more like it.”

Root’s laugh bursts from deep inside. “I’ll give you a mad scientist…” She lunges for Shaw, but Shaw sidesteps her. “You might be a genius, but I’m still too quick for you,” she mocks.

Root pouts. Shaw thinks it’s adorable but will never tell Root.

Root sobers quickly. “But seriously, what we really need is to find Gloria Markum. She can provide the details of how the sensors interconnect with the chip. Then Harry can give us a better idea of the risks.” Shaw looks at her thoughtfully. “We already went from a 60% chance of becoming rabbit food to a 20% chance, so I’d say we’re moving in the right direction. I might decide to do it even if we can’t find Markum.”

Root doesn’t disagree but she’s going to do everything in her power to find Markum before Shaw decides.

“I’m going to search for the necessary supplies sweetie. I’ll let you know as soon as I have them… Oh, which guard would you prefer?”

Shaw frowns. “None.” Root raises her eyebrows in question. “We agreed. So pick or I’ll choose one.”

“Fine. Thomas. As least he understands the concept of personal space.”

Root ducks in for a quick kiss Shaw doesn’t try to avoid and heads for the door. “Oh and Sameen… you better still be here when he gets here.” Shaw looks at her innocently, but sighs internally. Root knows her too well. It’s not like there’s all that many places she could be anyway.
Root finds Thomas and gives him his new assignment. He’s flattered Shaw picked him. She’s a little prickly but Thomas likes her. “Thomas, give her space, but don’t let her talk you into leaving her. She will try.” Thomas nods seriously, wanting Root to know he appreciates her trust. Root sighs. If Shaw wants to ditch Thomas he won’t even see it coming before he’s unconscious on the floor.

She radios Grice and then Jack to meet her in her office. “Daniel, find Markum yet?” Daniel’s focused on a search he’s running and doesn’t look up, just nods no. Root sighs, but she really didn’t expect anything so soon.

Jack arrives and Root gives him the list of supplies she needs for the EMP gun. “I’m sure we have most of these things Root, but I’m not sure about the microwave. We might have to have someone go into town and buy one.” Root avoids sending anyone into town if possible, preferring to pick things up in Manhattan when she’s there or have Elias or Dominic bring whatever she needs when they make deliveries. “Okay. Let me know.” Jack leaves as Grice’s walking in.

“Reese just came back from the latest raid Root. He says everything went well. He’s going to catch some sleep and then come find you.” With everything going on Root almost forgot about Reese. “Okay, thanks. How’s our prisoner doing?” Grice shrugs unconcernedly. “She’s alive. I went ahead and started her on prophylactic antibiotics. An infection could kill her before we could stop it and since you said keep her alive…” Root nods in agreement. “Has she said anything else?”

“No. But I don’t think she’s prepared or trained for long-term imprisonment. It seems she thought she’d either be free or dead. I wouldn’t be surprised if we start to see Stockholm syndrome. I’ll let you know.”

After she has Thomas bring her breakfast, Shaw decides to work out for a couple of hours and then hits the range. Thomas can’t help but be impressed with her marksmanship. He’s developing a serious case of hero worship. Shaw catches him mooning at her and sighs. “Can you shoot?”

He nods eagerly. “But not like you…”

“Not many people can. Grab a box of ammo and let me see.”

Shaw observes him for awhile. He’s not the worst she’s seen, but he still has a slight flinch when he fires that consistently throws off his aim. “Okay stop,” she barks. He’s startled and almost drops his gun. Shaw shakes her head disappointingly. “You’re still flinching when you fire. When was the first time you fired a gun?”

His face turns red. “Uh…a few months ago.” Well at least he has an excuse. “Okay, you need to practice dry firing. It allows you to practice pulling the trigger without the distracting flash and bang. It’s a way to train your eyes, body and trigger finger to pull the trigger smoothly, without moving the sight off target. The real benefit is that you can do it without the instinctive flinch when the gun normally fires. By conditioning yourself to perform a smooth trigger press, without a flinch reaction, you’ll eventually find that you do the same when the gun’s loaded.”
Now empty your gun.” She waits for him to eject the magazine and rack the slide to remove the round in the chamber. He starts dry firing and she watches him for a few minutes before stopping him. “You need to focus on your front sight first. The target’s going to be a bit blurry but that’s normal. The sight will move around a bit, although it shouldn’t be swaying all over the place. Give yourself a second once you sight the target. Otherwise you’ll move the gun and miss.”

She waits for him to practice sighting a few times. “Okay, now slowly press the trigger as smoothly as possible once your sight is in the vicinity of the target.” He practices until Shaw tells him to stop. “If you keep practicing you’ll be able to hold your gun steadier and the sight will move around less on the target. The goal is to complete the full trigger press until the gun’s action releases – without moving the sight off target. Just accept the little bit of wobble.”

He practices a little while longer before Shaw interrupts him again. “Keep watching the sight until the action is complete. After the gun clicks, you’ll want to see the exact same sight picture as before the shot. That’s where your shot would have hit had you been firing a live cartridge. Follow through. Train your eyes to see the sight alignment just after the gun fires. Eventually, you’ll know where your shot hit without looking at the target.”

She lets him practice a little more until she gets bored. “Okay, practice more on your own time.” She walks out and Thomas hastily reloads his weapon and follows.

It’s time for lunch and Shaw sits outside while Thomas goes to get it. She’s watching the training exercises when she notices a familiar figure running gracefully around the compound. Root’s taken up her daily jogs again and Shaw’s mesmerized by the movement of her body.

Shaw remembers her runs, the warmth seeping into her muscles, the mild burning of lactic acid, the rush of the second wind, the feeling of falling into a pace where the running feels automatic and she’s flying on autopilot, the air rushing in and out of her lungs in a mild burn, having to force herself to breathe in a rhythm.

But watching Root run is exhilarating in an altogether different way. Shaw can’t tear her eyes away from the powerful flex of Root’s calves as she lands and pushes off, giving each stride spring, her strong glutes shaping her form in elegant alignment. She remembers the feel of the taut abs currently contracting on Root’s body, supporting her long-limbed frame, and the feel of those long legs wrapped around Shaw’s body, pulling her closer...

Suddenly she hears a short cough and looks up to see Thomas staring at her red-faced. Shaw’s sitting on top of the picnic table, leaning forward, her arms on her thighs, hands hanging between her legs. Watching Root run was getting her hot and her fingers were lightly grazing her crotch. She feels the wet patch between her legs.

She stares at Thomas unapologetically until he puts her lunch down on the table and turns away. Then she laughs. He looks like a school boy caught red-handed with his first playboy magazine. He looks back and grins embarrassingly. “She’s just as smoking hot as she looks Thomas, you have no idea…and she’s all mine.”


Chapter Summary

Shaw responds thoughtfully. “Well, I’m not sure what to call it, but I know how to describe it.”

Chapter Notes

Okay, you had to know a sex-filled chapter was overdue. But there's real emotion too...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Root needs a shower after her run. Shaw’s not in their room and she wonders what mischief she’s up to. She’s feeling better without the nightmares, which means soon she’ll be feeling claustrophobic and itchy for action. Root makes a mental note to check with Jack about the supplies for the EMP gun.

She sighs as the hot water pounds her aching muscles. The run helped clear her mind and she has a clear picture of what they need to do next. John needs to keep hitting Samaritan hard with the raids. Harold needs to work on the virus. They need to find Markum. She needs to build the EMP gun. They need to get the chip out of Shaw’s head. They need to wipe Samaritan and its lackeys off the face of the earth. Simple.

She steps out of the shower refreshed and wraps herself in a towel. Suddenly she’s whipped around and the towel drops to the floor. She’s pushed up against the wall and Shaw’s naked body is pressed against her own. Root can see them in the mirror above the sink.

The look on Shaw’s face is full of hunger and desire. She places her hands on Root’s bare shoulders and begins to massage them. Her touch is electric and a powerful charge of lust courses through Root’s body. Shaw slowly runs her hands sensually down Root’s bare arms and peppers her shoulders and neck with gentle kisses and Root moans deliciously. ‘sameen’ Shaw presses the front of her body firmly against Shaw’s back and wraps her arms around her gently cupping Root’s breasts. The warmth of her body completely engulfs Root and her heart beats erratically, as Shaw begins to gently knead and massage her breasts. Root groans and tilts her head to the side, giving
Shaw better access as she runs her warm tongue up the side of Root’s neck and sucks on her earlobe.

Root reaches around and removes Shaw’s hair tie, letting her dark hair drape gently over her shoulders while she watches in the mirror. Shaw raises her hand to Root’s chin and turns her head towards her. Their mouths open, kissing deeply, lips locking tightly, their tongues dancing around slowly and gently inside each other’s mouths.

Between the hot steam still lingering in the air and the heat of their bodies, Root feels herself practically melting into Shaw. They break from the kiss and Shaw suckles Root’s neck. Root inhales sharply and lets her head fall back on Shaw’s shoulder.

Shaw runs her hands down the front of Root’s body, slipping one of them down to Root’s hot sex, rubbing delicately with her fingertips, her breath hot in Root’s ear. ‘you’re mine’ Root moans in response. Shaw steps back slightly and slinks down Root’s body. Root watches her breathlessly from above as Shaw gazes up at her through dark eyelashes.

She runs her hands slowly up the sides of Root’s legs, while her warm tongue meanders on her skin. Still crouched behind Root, she turns her slowly and runs her tongue up the front of her leg, beginning at her knee, up over her thigh, up her abs, to the valley of her breasts.

She takes one of Root’s hard rock nipples in her fingers and pulls on it while she wraps her hot lips around the other. Root grabs a handful of Shaw’s dampening hair and feels Shaw’s breasts rubbing firmly into her body as she continues to suck Root’s nipple. Shaw trades her attentions and Root scrapes her fingernails up and down Shaw’s sweaty back as she moans at the sensations Shaw’s tongue is drawing from her eager body.

Shaw’s never felt a lot of things before or at least she never paid attention, but she knows this possessiveness she feels for Root makes no sense. But she loves knowing she’s the reason Root moans and groans and comes. Knowing she's the only one who can, the only one Root wants, makes her feel...Shaw really can't describe it but she'll figure it out later.

She continues running her tongue up Root’s chest, her neck, her chin, and finally slips it deep into Root’s mouth. As they kiss, she lifts Root up and onto the sink. Root feels the damp and slick porcelain pressing hard on her ass. Shaw pulls out of the kiss and runs her tongue all the way down the front of Root’s body as Root spreads her legs wide and Shaw slowly lowers onto her knees and runs her tongue around the inside of Root’s thighs.

Root feels Shaw’s tongue sliding down to the edge of her pulsing center and she grabs tightly to the sides of the sink. Shaw spreads her sex wide and gently runs her tongue over the bright pink slit, causing Root to wrap her legs over Shaw’s shoulders instinctively as Shaw teases the sheath of her clit with her finger. The sink vibrates as Root’s body tenses and trembles. Her now throbbing clit peeks out from its hood and Shaw wraps her arms around her thighs and hips as she flicks it with her tongue.

Root’s head rolls back into the glass of the mirror and she grips the sink so tightly, she feels she might tear it off the wall. Shaw runs her tongue deep inside, moving it up and down slowly. She wraps her lips tightly around Root’s entire sex as Root grabs the back of her head pushing her deeper inside.

Root’s entire body trembles as she strains against the seizing tension of every muscle in her body and tries to breathe. Shaw wraps Root’s engorged clit with her lips and sucks hard, occasionally nipping and pulling with her teeth. Then she pulls back and pinches Root’s clit gently with the fingers of her left hand, while she slips in two fingers of her right. She slides her fingers deep inside and thrusts.
fiercely while she continues her ministrations to Root’s clit.

With every muscle of her body straining brutally against the sink and practically on the verge of tears, Root wails a scream of ecstasy as her back arches up and outward. The sink rattles hard against the wall as her head slams back into the mirror, cracking it. Shaw pulls out and replaces her hand with her mouth as Root comes on her tongue.

As Root relaxes and falls back into the sink, Shaw licks her drenched sex until not a drop is left. As Root gasps for air, she slowly runs her tongue back up the front of Root’s body, rising to her feet so they’re face to face again.

Root captures her lips, chasing the taste of her own arousal inside Shaw’s mouth. Shaw deepens the kiss holding Root in her arms, lifting her off the sink without effort. Root wraps her legs tightly around Shaw’s torso and their breasts press firmly together as Shaw carries her to bed.

They lay together, their damp bodies entwined on the dry sheets, lips and tongues still exploring mouths. The air of the room feels cooler compared to the steaming bathroom, but now their bodies are on fire with a different kind of heat.

Root rolls on top of Shaw and pulls out of the kiss, caressing her forehead, and gazing into the deep pools of her eyes, Shaw’s firm, damp body, nestled pleasurably against her own. The moment feels sacred and Root whispers. “yes, I am…yours” Root continues their conversation.

Root crawls down Shaw’s body, exploring with her tongue, relishing the taut muscles and the warmth of her skin. Shaw’s skin is always warm like an endless firelight, inviting Root inside. She settles between Shaw’s legs, spreading her wide, letting Shaw’s scent envelop her, her glistening center enticing Root’s taste buds. Shaw rests her leg on Root’s shoulder, opening herself up even further, and Root grabs her thighs and plunges her mouth and tongue deep inside desperately, ripping Shaw’s moans from her body. Shaw’s fists grip the sheets tightly and Root runs her tongue straight down the outside of her lips to her ass, rimming it.

‘yesyesyesroot!’ Root feels Shaw’s body seizing as she struggles to find breath. Shaw raises her ass higher and higher off the mattress as her orgasm approaches. Root continues rimming her with wide, wet strokes and plunges her fingers inside her dripping center, stroking her g-spot with every thrust until Shaw comes with a cry and Root’s name on her lips. Root gentles her through it until Shaw rests fully on the bed again. Shaw reaches down and runs her fingers through Root’s hair, while Root places small kisses on her belly and runs her hand soothingly down her side. She whispers, but Shaw hears her ‘and you belong to me’ Shaw’s only reaction is an indulgent smile.

After they catch their breaths, Root climbs up next to Shaw and cuddles into her side. “So lover, not that you’ll ever catch me complaining, but to what do I owe this incredibly memorable orgasm?” Shaw groans and rolls her eyes, but she’s smiling. “Let’s just say you owe this workout to your first…”

Root’s not sure what that means but she’ll take it.

Shaw’s stomach growls loudly into the quiet of their room. Root laughs. “Didn’t I see you having lunch just a couple of hours ago?” Shaw rolls her eyes. “Yes, and didn’t you ‘feel’ me working up an appetite just a few minutes ago?”
“Oh, that was you? I thought it was my other girlfriend.”

“Girlfriend? After all we’ve been through Root, I think we’re more than **girlfriends.**” Root hums in agreement. “So what would you call us then? ‘Lovers’ is too crass outside the bedroom. We both agree ‘partners’ sounds like a business arrangement. What does that leave?”

Shaw responds thoughtfully. “Well, I’m not sure what to call it, but I know how to describe it. Trusting, equal, honest, sexy, passionate, respectful, fun, nurturing, and loving. Not necessarily in that order. In fact, most definitely not in that order.”

Before Shaw looks over she knows what she’s going to see. Root’s crying and smiling sappily. She rolls her eyes and shakes her head while she pulls Root into her arms. “You’re such a moosh.” Root sniffs. “What a moosh?”

“It’s a Persian term of affection. Literally it’s a mouse. But actually, I think I would describe you as ātashé del-am.”

Root waits but Shaw doesn’t translate. “*Sameen, tell me what it means,*” she whispers throatily. Shaw feels Root’s voice wrap around her heart, her hold like gossamer and yet unbreakable.

“*the fire of my heart*”

Chapter End Notes

And no, after all they’ve been through, they don’t believe a broken mirror will lead to seven years of bad luck. It’s just a broken mirror. Broken by sex.
An Arrow

Chapter Summary

You’ve always thought there’s something wrong with you because you don’t feel things the way other people do. But I’ve always felt that’s what makes you beautiful. If you were a shape, you’d be a straight line. An arrow.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“Come on you need another shower,” Shaw decides as she pulls Root off the bed with her.
“Hmmm…and whose fault is that I wonder?” Shaw mock glares at her. “Is that a complaint I hear? Because if that was a complaint, someone’s going to have a prolonged dry spell…” Root laughs. “Well then I guess I’d have to take matters into my own hands.” Shaw looks deeply offended.

Root gives her a pouty smile. “Come on lover, you know I’d much rather have your hands…and tongue…all over my body…” Shaw looks partly mollified, but Root suspects there will be payback of some sort. Hopefully the physical kind…

Shaw keeps her hands to herself during their shower despite Root’s many attempts to engage her in more carnal pursuits. Root, however, keeps her hands all over Shaw and finally decides to get on her knees in apology.

Her hot mouth is sucking Shaw’s clit and her hands are massaging Shaw’s perfect ass and Shaw breaks down, because it’s really really hot to have Root on her knees pleasuring her. Two orgasms later and all is forgiven. They finish their shower playfully grabbing at each other in between hot, sloppy kisses.

“Sameen, do you mind if John has dinner with us? I’d like to hear about the latest raids and plan our next moves.” Shaw shrugs. “Sure.”

Reese brings them dinner from the mess tent and another bottle of scotch for Shaw. “Where do you keep getting the scotch Reese? Not that I’m objecting…”

“I have my ways Shaw. Just enjoy it. Although this time you might want to pace yourself.” Shaw scowls at him. Privacy her ass. She knows Root didn’t tell him anything. It was obviously one of the guards. She knew they can’t keep a secret. “Just tell me it wasn’t Thomas.” Reese lets her hang for a second, but then nods no. She almost asks who, but decides against it. If she knows, then she’ll have to hurt someone. The suspect list is short enough already.

Root changes the subject and tells Reese about the EMP idea. He expresses his trust in Finch to know what he’s talking about. “Where are we going to get an EMP weapon though? At the CIA it was a classified project. They’re not just sitting on a shelf somewhere.”
Shaw looks at him seriously. “Root’s building one.” John’s starts to smile, thinking it must be a joke, but the glare Shaw’s shooting him makes him reconsider. He looks at Root. “Seriously? You can do that?” Root shrugs. “Yes. But Harry still wants more information on how the sensors interact with the chip before we try it. We need to find Markum.”

John looks at them in question. Root realizes there’s a lot he’s missed and brings him up to date. “We’re hoping to find her soon so we can decide whether to proceed or not. In the meantime I have Jack gathering what I’ll need. That reminds me…” Root radios Jack and he shows up a few minutes later.

“Hey John. I didn’t know you were back.” John nods in greeting. “Root, I have bad news. As I suspected, we don’t have a microwave.” Root sighs; the magnetron from the microwave is the key component to build the EMP gun. She could go into Manhattan to get one, but she’s not leaving Shaw at the mercy of her nightmares again. They’re also so close to their end game she doesn’t want to risk someone going into the closest town.

Reese solves the problem. “I’m heading out tomorrow on the next set of raids. I’ll just ‘liberate’ one from a base before we blow the building. With all the personnel, I’m sure they have several microwaves for heating lunches.”

Shaw looks at Root. “Okay, that works. I wanted to start ASAP but I can’t do anything without the magnetron anyway. But send someone back with it immediately.” Reese nods his agreement.

“The raids have been going off pretty much without a hitch. We haven’t lost anyone and injuries have been minor. We’ve hit 24 so far. Security is getting tougher though. Obviously everyone’s on notice now. Our main advantage is still surprise. I’ve been hitting bases geographically distant from each other so we don’t hit the same area all the time. They don’t know where we’re going to strike next.”

They finish their dinner and after some awkward small talk, Reese heads out to make sure everything’s ready for the next deployment.

“Sam, what should we do about our prisoner?” Shaw scowls at the thought of the willing participant in her torment. “I’m all for putting her out of my misery, but she might prove to be useful still. Let’s just hold on to her for now.” Root agrees. No sense acting prematurely only to then realize she would have been useful somehow.

She settles in to work on the virus at the desk they put in Shaw’s room, while Shaw studies the maps with the known Samaritan bases and reviews Reese’s reports on the raids.

An hour later Root looks up and studies Shaw. It’s still a bit surreal. She’s alive and here and they’re together. There was always a small part of Root that worried Shaw was dead or worse, damaged beyond her ability to heal. Root would never abandon her, but it would be worse than death for Shaw if she couldn’t be herself again.
Shaw feels her stare and catches her eye, smiling smugly. “I know, I know, I’m irresistible.” Root laughs abruptly and almost falls out of her chair. Shaw joking is rare indeed. “Well, I can’t say I disagree so you got me there,” a smile in her voice

Shaw looks pensive and Root wonders what’s on her mind. “Are you okay sweetie?” Shaw sets aside the reports she was studying and sits down at the table. “Yeah, come here a minute.” Root sets her laptop aside and joins Shaw at the table.

The room is quiet, the only sound their breathing and the slight tittering of the hard drive running Root’s latest program. The room is lit only by a lamp and since there are no windows, it’s cast in shadows.

Shaw takes Root’s hands in hers. “I’ve been trying to figure out how to tell you what it means to me that you kept looking and rescued me. Even before that, for the last two years, I promised myself that if I survived I wouldn’t keep trying to deny the feelings I have for you. But it’s been hard to sort out what those are and find the right words.

When we met, you slipped under my skin, invaded my blood. Something about you made me feel like I was about to fall. Or turn to liquid. Or burst into flames. And I wanted to run. Long and fast and hard. But you wouldn’t let me go. Not because you held me, but because you freed me to be exactly who I am.”

Root’s trying not to cry or respond, wanting Shaw to be able to get everything she wants to say out, but the tears are threatening and she’s not sure if she’ll be able to hold them back. Her heart feels like it’s going to beat out of her chest or explode.

“I never thought or believed, much less wanted, to find someone who would completely turn my world around. But if I had, in my wildest dreams I couldn’t have predicted you. You’re ungovernable. I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where. But it’s like our souls are entwined. I can’t see a future without you. Anyway…”

Root looks away self-consciously.

But Root’s already kissing her and crying quietly at the same time. She captures Shaw’s mouth tenderly, her hands holding Shaw’s head, breathing her in, tugging her lip gently, her tongue exploring softly. Shaw’s hands are wrapped around her waist, her hold solid and real.

They break away when they need to breathe. Root’s so overwhelmed she’s not sure what to say.

“I love you Sameen and there are so many reasons why. You say you're all dark and twisty. That's not a flaw; that's strength.

You’ve always thought there’s something wrong with you because you don’t feel things the way other people do. But I’ve always felt that’s what makes you beautiful. If you were a shape, you’d be a straight line. An arrow. Uncompromising and true. I love you and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Root panics for a second. The last part of that sentence may have been too much. But Shaw’s laughing gently. “You should see the look on your face. It’s not like I didn’t know you felt that way Root. I’m okay with it. But seriously. Thank you. For everything, but mostly for never, not once, giving up on me…”

Root stops her with a finger on her lips. “I always knew Sameen. That you’d realize we belong together. Even when you were trying to push me away, your mind betrayed you. Four-alarm fire in
an oil refinery? You were spending an awful lot of time thinking about what we’d be like together
Sameen.”

Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “Okay…that’s enough. I don’t want to think about the
past anymore. All that matters is we’re here now. I lived and you found me. Now we end the
impending AI apocalypse and move on.”

Chapter End Notes

The words Shaw says to Root are inspired by too many authors to mention. Everyone
from Pablo Neruda to Maria V. Snyder. Not to mention the writers of the show.

But it's true what they say, it's all been done before and certainly much better than I
could hope to achieve.
Out Of The Frying Pan

Chapter Summary

Shaw leans in and captures Root lips sweetly and softly, trying to enjoy one peaceful moment before they willingly jump into Dante’s inferno. When they pull apart Root does the whole body smile that just gets Shaw every time.

Chapter Notes

This chapter started out with the idea Shaw figures out they're missing something critical. Things are going just too easy. But then I couldn't stop and things just got crazy from there!

It is a little angsty, but it works out Root and Shaw style.

All the science in this chapter exists in the real world, at least theoretically, but I have taken GREAT liberties. Also no offense to anyone's religious beliefs. I just think this works for Root and Shaw.

They both get back to work, but a few minutes later Shaw gets up. “I’m going to your office, there’s something I need to check.” Root hums in acknowledgment. On her way out Shaw almost trips over Thomas, who’s standing next to the door. Shaw rolls her eyes and then something occurs to her. “How did you know to be out here? You’re not supposed to follow me when I’m with Root.”

Shaw’s beginning to think she’s lo-jacked or something. Well she is in a manner of speaking, but it better not be by Root. She’ll deal with Samaritan soon enough.

She gives Thomas an intimidating look. Although he’s seen it plenty of times already, it still causes him to stammer a bit. “Uh…Root ordered a periodic patrol of the hallways in this building. Since I haven’t been busy, I’ve been conducting the sweeps. I just finished a round and thought I’d see if you needed anything.”

Shaw holds her stare a few more seconds. “I don’t believe in coincidences.” With that she turns and heads to Root’s office with Thomas dutifully behind her. “Are you patrolling at set intervals?”

“Yes, usually at the top of every hour.” Shaw stops and looks at him incredulously. “Okay, I think all this security is overkill and completely unnecessary, but if you’re going to do something, do it right. Suppose there is a threat and someone’s trying to get into some place they’re not supposed to be. It’d be pretty easy to work around you. You need to stagger your rounds randomly and don’t start with the same area every time.

You also need to be thorough every time. Doors that should be locked should be locked. If they’re not, call for backup first and then investigate. With the other areas you need to take a look around. When you do this type of patrol for an extended period your mind tends to see what you’re searching for instead of what’s actually there. I won’t bog you down in the science, but it’s called inattentional blindness. That’s why it’s important to mix it up. So your brain doesn’t get used to seeing the same
thing every time and disregard anything new.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Shaw practically growls at him. “I’m pretty sure I already told you it’s Shaw. Just Shaw. Don’t ever call me ma’am again.” She leaves him sweating outside Root’s office door.

The nerds are all hard at work, but Daniel looks up. “Daniel, pull up a topographical map on the monitor then add all the Samaritan bases we know about, whether they’ve been hit or not. Uh, please.” She waits impatiently even though it only takes seconds. “Okay now overlay the ones Reese has already destroyed.”

Shaw’s not sure what it is, but something’s not right.

“Can you get me the soil type, topography, precipitation, ground water levels, load-bearing properties, and slope stability for each of those sites? Even the ones we investigated but disregarded?”

“Yes, but I’ll have to write a program to gather the data. I’m not sure I should take time away from the Markum search. I’ll have to call Root.” Shaw makes a fist and takes a step, but stops herself. She just got here and it’s expected it’ll take time for everyone to understand they should just do what she says when she says it. She’s not a bully.

“Okay, you do that Daniel. Root’s going to tell you to give me exactly what I asked for sooner rather than later. When she’s done telling you off, how long should it take to write the program and gather the information?” Shaw’s confidence is throwing Daniel off a little, but he’s still going to check with Root. “I can have the information for you in about an hour or two.” Shaw nods and leaves before the temptation to punch the little nerd gets the better of her.

She asks Thomas to ask Reese to come to their room. Thomas hesitates because he’s not supposed to leave Shaw. She sighs and rolls her eyes. “I’m going straight there I promise.” He leaves reluctantly at a brisk pace. He might beat her back.

She can hear Root from the hallway. Root doesn’t yell but she has this way of quietly raising her voice, dripping steal, and you’d almost rather take the impaling. Well Daniel can’t say she didn’t warn him. Root’s done when Shaw comes in but she catches her throwing the handset on the bed. “Idiot.” Shaw shrugs, now happy she acted with restraint.

Root shakes her head but smiles. “I could’ve written the program for you sweetie.” Shaw nods no. “You’re working on the virus. Without it everything else will have been for nothing.” Root doesn’t like that statement but it takes her a moment to figure out why. “Don’t ever say that again Sameen Shaw.” Root’s so vehement, it takes Shaw aback.

“I don’t care if we never defeat Samaritan. You are the reason for everything else. You are my reason.” Shaw’s rarely seen Root so furious. “Root, I would never diminish what you’ve done. I was referring to everything we’re doing now.” Now Shaw’s getting angry. How many times and in how many ways does she have to tell Root how she feels about her rescue and about her?
Before either one can say a word, Reese walks in and Shaw focuses on him. “Knock much?” Reese raises his eyebrow but is not cowed by Shaw’s attitude. “It sounded urgent,” he explains, his voice gravelly and low. Shaw sees Thomas peeking in to make sure she’s in here no doubt. She exhales slowly and sets everything else aside. All these feelings that are making her want to punch something. Repeatedly.

She walks into the next room, mainly to give herself time to breathe and they all sit at the table. “All along, Samaritan has shown overwhelming force whenever we’ve confronted them. Not cyber. People. It’s like there’s a factory somewhere putting out mini-me’s of Martine and Lambert, fully equipped with everything from machine guns to missiles.

Now we’re taking out entire bases with 30 inexperienced fighters and we haven’t lost even one? No offense John, I’ve seen these recruits during drills. They are not that good. Not even close. We’re missing something. Something critical. I’m just not sure what.”

Reese’s deep in thought. “It makes sense. Or we’re about to make this harder than it needs to be. The question is how do we find out which?”

So far Root’s remained silent. Although she recruited every single person herself and led small raids, her goal was finding Shaw. Once Reese joined her she left the specifics to him. But she trusts Shaw’s instincts. “Sameen, you’re gut is always right, but there has to be some reason you think we may have it all wrong. I know your mind. There’s always a reason. A good one.”

Shaw doesn’t bother to respond but it’s obvious she’s thinking. She’s thinking about everything she learned while she was prisoner. Something Root asked her to do from the start. But she wasn’t able to face it then. But now she goes back to the beginning. Right after the stock exchange…

“When I woke up for the first time after they patched up the gunshot wounds, the room only had the hospital bed and the medical equipment. It was a normal size but it was concrete. I remember taking small pleasure it always marked everyone’s scrubs…There was a constant humming behind the sounds of the medical equipment.” Shaw’s searching through her memories trying to think.

“When they moved me to the box they drugged me. But they rolled me out of the room immediately before the drug had taken full effect. I used to do that. Make it seem the drugs affected me much more than they actually did so they’d give me less and I could be more alert. It worked for the most part. Small victories I guess.” She tries to laugh but it’s a grimace. “Although maybe it’d have been easier if I was high as a kite.” Root exhales sharply, but Reese remains impassive, giving Shaw his full attention.

She needs to get this out and right now, the less emotion the better. He looks over at Root and she nods slightly. She understands what he’s trying to tell her.

Shaw keeps talking but her eyes are unfocused, like she’s back there. “The hallways were concrete. Everything was concrete and the ceiling was lower than usual. I remember wanting an explosion to bring all that concrete down and crush me. And the humming.” Root’s careful not to react. If Shaw was able to live through it, Root can listen without making this about her feelings.

“Then of course there was the box. All concrete. And the little I could see when they opened the door was concrete. I passed out when Martine dragged me out of the box, but I remember feeling
somewhat hysterical first. They were taking me from one box to another box because everything
was still white and concrete. And still the humming. It wasn’t until I woke up where you found me
that everything wasn’t white or concrete…”

She seems to come back to herself and looks at Reese. “It was a bunker John. Underground.
Martine dragged me into an elevator and it was going up. I remember wondering what I would do
with all the space outside. What is space? Empty space is not really empty because nothing contains
something, seething with energy and particles that flit into and out of existence. So we’re never truly
alone. Even in a vacuum, the net pressure of all the virtual particles—the stuff of empty space—
exerts a force. Minuscule but still a force.”

Root can tell Reese is listening attentively but the science Shaw’s talking about is beyond him. Root
and Shaw have discussed everything from metaphysical determinism to quantum physics, both
theoretical and mechanical. Root always thought Shaw would’ve made an excellent physicist. Her
mind is truly remarkable. She has a fleeting thought Shaw may not have been such a random
opportunity for Samaritan.

“‘Ironic isn’t it? These virtual particles in space gave birth to the idea of nanotechnology. The same
technology Samaritan used on me. It must have figured out how to energize the particles sufficiently
to power the chip and the sensors. By denying me space.’”

Shaw takes a deep breath, but Root speaks into the quiet. “Sameen, Samaritan has to be using the
large hadron collider to conduct its experiments. It’s the only machine in existence that can
accelerate subatomic particles, protons, to produce miniature versions of the big bang. It might
actually have figured out a way to test string theory.”

Shaw knows Root is right. She’d been doing her own research, and knowing the end result,
extrapolated backwards to develop a working theory of how Samaritan managed to develop the
technology for the chip.

By destroying Samaritan they may very well be destroying the most significant scientific discovery in
the history of human kind. Samaritan may have solved the theory of everything, the fundamental
way the universe works.

Reese understands the enormity of Root and Shaw’s conversation, but he doesn’t see how they can
use it to their advantage. Root reaches another conclusion. “We’re wasting our time looking for
Markum. She’s just the mechanic. If we’re right, the EMP solution is also out. There’s more energy
powering the chip right now than the largest EMP could hope to produce to counter it.”

Shaw nods her head. “Back to practicality, I think Samaritan’s hiding in plain sight more or less. I
believe its brain is being housed in a military bunker. More specifically an underground missile
base. There’s no way Samaritan could have built one without attracting international attention. But
they are for sale. The DOD decommissioned them in the ’80s when new technology made the bases
inefficient and unnecessary. They sold them off as hard assets and there’s a market for them. The
bases are typically anywhere from 40 to 60 acres.

I think the real target is under all the bases we’ve found. If you look at the miles separating the
targets we’ve located they would all fit on top of one of these bases. They’ve made it just hard
enough to destroy the above ground bases to keep us coming, but not too hard that we give up.
They’re red herrings.

The information I asked Daniel to compile should help us confirm my theory. I’m sure the nerds can
also track down the sales of these bases and at least find some indication there was a base in the
target area, although I’m sure Samaritan has wiped all traces from cyberspace.
But to have any prayer of infiltrating that base, we’re going to need schematics and blueprints. These bases were made to sustain 150 people for 30 days in a nuclear war scenario. We’re not fighting our way in. At least not initially. We’re going to need a stealth approach and we’ll be facing the usual odds, slim to none.”

Reese looks at Root. “You need to get the Machine back in the game Root. It’s the only way we’ll have a prayer in hell, virus or no virus.” That’s so obvious as to go without saying.

“That depends on whether we still want to destroy it.” It’s Shaw who says it, but Root’s been considering the question the entire time Shaw’s been talking about the base. Shaw wonders what she’s thinking. This is about so much more now than they ever could have imagined. So she’s shocked at Root’s answer.

“It’s simple. We destroy it. If we can find a way to retain the science, great. Otherwise, fuck it.” Even Reese, who’s answer to pretty much everything is to shoot it or blow it up, thinks it’s a rather simplistic and cavalier attitude.

Root looks at Shaw. “You’re right there’s an argument to be made to give up and let things take their course. Maybe Samaritan’s solved the theory of everything. Maybe not. But there is no doubt it cannot be trusted to safeguard humanity’s future.

When I first started looking for the Machine, I fanatically believed artificial intelligence was the next step in human evolution. You both know well how far I was willing to go to find Her. But I was wrong. It’s not the next step, it’s an extinction event. But instead of wiping out dinosaurs, we’re the target species. Scientifically speaking, homo sapiens won’t even be that memorable. We’ve been around for maybe 6,000 years on a planet that’s existed for over 4 billion.

But any artificial intelligence will eventually be a threat to humanity. If Samaritan grows unchecked, humanity will be its puppet until it creates something better. I don’t care what scientific advancements or new technologies we could catapult. The end would be the same. At best we’d be passing on the problem to a future generation.

But if we don’t at least try to defeat Samaritan, we’re already dead anyway. We’d be buying ourselves some time, but eventually it would find us and we’d be over. It’s not going to let us live. I used to think dying for something I believed in would be the best end I could hope for. I was wrong about that too. Now I’d rather live for someone I love.”

They’re all exhausted and it’s late. Reese does have one final thought. “I think we should bring in Finch on everything. He’s spent the most time thinking about ethics and humanity than any other person I know.” They all agree. But it can all wait until tomorrow.

Once Reese leaves, Root puts every ounce of feeling into her eyes, holding Shaw’s gaze. “You taught me giving up is not an option. Ever. So I’m fighting for us and if we save humanity along the way, excellent. If not, we die trying. But we do it together. Nothing’s really changed except the details. Are you in?”

But no matter how empathetic, Root can’t possibly imagine what Shaw went through, and it’s all fresh in her mind and Shaw’s afraid it’s in her soul, right next to where she keeps Root. Right now she’s not sure which’s stronger. “I’m tired Root. We can talk about it tomorrow. But I will say this…I haven’t even been able to convince you of how I feel about you and everything you’ve done for me. So does it even matter what I say? For that matter, what I do doesn’t seem to mean much either.”

She doesn’t wait for Root to answer.
Something wakes Root up a few hours later. Shaw never came to bed, but she thinks she hears her in the next room. When she looks, she sees Shaw fell asleep with her head on the table and it’s obvious she’s having a nightmare. Root rushes over and sits on the table bench next to her and cradles her in her arms. “Sameen, it’s okay, I’m here. Come back to me.” But Shaw’s thrashing violently and Root can’t seem to get through to her. So Root picks her up and takes her to bed. She crawls in after her, but can’t duck Shaw’s flailing fist fast enough. That’s going to hurt, but the black eye will hurt Shaw more than any discomfort Root will suffer. Root wraps her body around her. It takes a few minutes but Shaw slowly comes out of it. Root’s rubbing her back soothingly. “Hey sweetie.”

Shaw tenses but then relaxes into Root’s arms. “Hey. I guess that’s one hypothesis confirmed. You keep my nightmares away.” Root smiles sadly. “There’s no place I’d rather be Sameen.” Shaw takes a deep breath and then she cries.

Root knows Shaw cried the last time she had nightmares when Root was gone, but she didn’t actually witness it. She just saw the evidence of it.

She holds Shaw closer still trying to soothe her. Then just as suddenly as it started, it stops. Shaw sighs like it’s the last breath she’ll ever take. “Uh, thanks. Everything’s just kind of hit me all at once. Talking about it kind of brought it all back.”

Root places a kiss on her head. “You don’t have to thank me Sameen. I love you. I’m always here for you.” Shaw sighs and it sounds like she’s resigned to something. “Sam, we don’t have to talk now. Just stay here with me.”

Shaw backs up but stays within Root’s arms. “I think I need to talk or I’m not going to get to sleep. It’s racing around in my head.” Root’s not sure she’s ready for it, but when it comes to talking it’s much harder for Shaw so she’s not going to shut her down.

Shaw sits up and Root sits up facing her. “Do you believe everything I’ve told you since I’ve been back Root?”

“Of course Sameen.”

“But does it register inside you, can you feel the truth of it?”

Root answers without hesitation. “Yes.”

“Then how could you possibly think I’d say or do anything to diminish you or what you’ve done? Before the night went to hell in a hand basket, you actually thought I was being cavalier about what we’ve both been through.”

“Sameen, I’m sorry. I’m not sure what I’m doing half the time. I’ve never been in love before and then everything we’ve been through…sometimes I think I’m drowning in feelings. They’re so intense. I push them down because how can I possibly burden you with them when you’ve been through something unimaginable for me? How can I possibly indulge myself when we’re still fighting for our lives?”

“I get it Root. I do assume you’re sailing this relationship ‘ship,’ (pun intended) all the time. I forget
you have doubts and feelings and insecurities too. I’ve been trying to save the world a long time. Even for me, sometimes it’s just too much. I’m trying not to shut down and shut you out, but whoever I used to be would’ve. By now everything would be in tight containers in my mind and I’d be on autopilot. Point. Shoot. Reload. But you can’t shut me out either. You need to talk to me about you. We’ll figure it out.”

“Sameen, I meant what I told you that first day after you were back. I will walk away from this right now and go wherever you want to go and do whatever you want to do without a single regret. I am not leaving you, but you can’t leave me behind either.”

“You know we need to get the chip out right?” Root nods in agreement and Shaw thinks it through. “We can’t wait anymore. If we’re doing this together, I need to be able to get out of this building. We need a micro surgeon and we’ll have to go to them. There’s no way the surgery could be done here. It’s going to take a robot. Literally. Sometimes I feel like the irony is just slapping me in the face.”

Root laughs a little and it amazes her how Shaw manages to find the humor in the midst of a war and she’s glad Shaw wanted to talk. Even if they don’t have the answers, they’re together, which is more than they’ve had for years. “I’ll find the best specialist and then we’ll set it up. I’m more worried about blocking the chip’s signal until it’s removed than I am about shanghaiing an OR. We’ll have to block it in transit and during the surgery.”

“Root, if something happens in that OR and I come out…not me…you have to promise me…,” but Root shushes her with a finger. She doesn’t want it said out loud. “Sameen I will always do what I know you would want.”

“I have two more things and then I think I can finally fall asleep.”

Root smiles. Shaw’s gone from never wanting to talk to making lists about what she wants to talk about. When she shuts out their dire situation, it’s kind of adorable.

“We will not separate. We fight, we run, we die together. I need you to put our lives before anyone else. We’ve earned it. That means you don’t leave my side to get someone to safety and I’m not jumping in front of any more bullets. They’ll have to work for it this time.

Most importantly Root. I will not be captured. I will die first or at the first available opportunity. I can’t go through it again. Not even for you. I’m sorry…”

Root can’t help the tears but she interrupts anyway. “Sameen you don’t ever have to apologize. I would never ask it of you. I promise, if it comes to that, I’ll find bullets for both of us.”

Shaw leans in and captures Root’s lips sweetly and softly, trying to enjoy one peaceful moment before they willingly jump into Dante’s inferno. When they pull apart Root does the whole body smile that just gets Shaw every time.

“Okay. Then I’m in. Now let’s go to sleep. You’re the big spoon; I don’t need any more nightmares tonight.”
Chapter Summary

Even though Shaw braced herself, the question fills her with rage. But rage she knows how to handle.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The next morning comes way too soon for Shaw. She feels like she’s been run over by a truck. She’s never felt this bad without a hangover. In fact, it’s worse than any hangover she’s ever had and she’s had some doozies.

Shaw’s on her back, but Root’s arm is still draped around Shaw’s stomach. It never ceases to amaze her how much this incredible, sexy, genius of a woman loves her. Even when she’s sleeping. She wouldn’t go through the last two years again, but it was worth every minute of it to get back to Root.

Shaw’s about to try to wiggle out of bed when Root stirs. She doesn’t wake, just turns her face the other way. Shaw freezes, but not because Root might wake up. Root has a black eye. How did she get a black eye between last night and this morning?

It’s possible it happened earlier and wasn’t showing yet, but why wouldn’t Root tell her? Who’d be stupid enough to try or quick enough to penetrate Root’s defenses? Shaw’s stronger, but Root’s definitely faster than any clown here except maybe Reese.

Whatever happened, the person better be outside this building, because Shaw will get to the bottom of it and they better hope she can’t reach them. She manages to wiggle out without disturbing Root. She washes up and goes to see if anyone’s around to bring them breakfast and an ice pack.

She doesn’t have to go far; Thomas is already at his post. “Okay, this is getting out of hand. You’re stalking me.” Thomas immediately frowns. Not because of the stalking allegation, but because Shaw’s upset with him. But Shaw doesn’t let him get a word in edgewise. “Just how early are you waking up to stand outside this door waiting for me?” She growls.

Thomas doesn’t know where to start, so he goes with the facts. Shaw loves facts. She hates it when people dissemble. Shaw’s still glaring, waiting for him to say something. “It’s 10am.” Understanding dawns on Shaw’s face. “Oh okay, well good. Glad we got that settled. Uh, can you get breakfast for Root and me? Uh, please?”

Thomas nods eagerly and starts down the hallway. “Wait. Thomas.” He turns around. “Was Root involved in some kind of fight yesterday or was she sparring with anyone?” Not that Shaw can remember being apart for the length of time required for either of those things to happen, but maybe Root needed to work off some steam before she went to bed. But Thomas nods no. “Not that I’ve heard and I think either of those things would have spread like wild fire. This place is not known for discretion.”

Tell her about it. If just one person witnesses something, it’s all over the compound in minutes. “Okay, thanks. Oh, and bring an ice-pack too. I know there’re some in the infirmary.” Shaw feels
foolish for going off on Thomas; he’s really just trying to follow his orders and he’s less annoying than most people. Plus she should have realized with no windows in their bedroom, it’s hard to tell the time. But apologies aren’t her thing. She’ll make it up to him some other way.

Root hasn’t woken up and Shaw decides to take a shower. She really is aching and the hot water might help. It’s not until she’s under the spray reaching for the soap that she realizes her hand’s sore too and there’s a minor scratch on her middle knuckle. It’s her left hand, but still. Root has a black eye and Shaw has a sore hand. Like she told Thomas, she doesn’t believe in coincidences.

She punched Root and can’t remember it. She wasn’t drunk, so that’s not it. Could the chip be causing black outs? She remembers waking in bed and everything they talked about, so why wouldn’t she remember punching Root? Just thinking it makes Shaw sick to her stomach. She feels like shit. Only now it’s emotional. How could she have hit Root? There are no circumstances where that’s okay. But it makes sense. The answer to who could penetrate Root’s defenses. Shaw. And she’s in the building.

By the time she’s out of the shower, Root’s up and Thomas brought breakfast. “Hey sweetie, how’re you feeling?” Shaw can barely look at her. “We need to talk.” Root’s confused. She’d thought they’d talked it all out yesterday, but she’s more than willing to listen to anything Shaw has to say.

Shaw takes her hand and they sit on the bed. “I have to go back to sleeping in the infirmary.” Root immediately thinks it has to do with reliving the trauma last night. “Okay sweetie. I’ll have them move the bed back.” But Shaw’s nodding no. “Alone.”

Root does not like where this is going. Even right after her rescue Shaw wanted Root near. In her bed in fact. But before she can say anything there’s a knock. She opens and it’s Thomas again. With an ice-pack. Her hand goes automatically to her face. She had forgotten about it but Shaw must have seen the black eye this morning.

Thomas is still standing there looking at Root in shock. He hadn’t noticed when he brought breakfast because he was focused on his next task for Shaw. “Is there anything else I can get you? Are you okay?” Root smiles at him. He really is a nice guy. “I’m fine Thomas. Thanks.” She closes the door and turns to Shaw.

“No Sameen. We are not sleeping in separate beds, for many reasons, but mostly because I spent the last two years wishing you were in my bed and I’m not volunteering for that again.” Root can tell by the set of her jaw Shaw’s going to argue.

“It’s not okay I hurt you Root. I’ve done a lot of awful things in my life, but I will not be responsible for beating you.” Root almost says she’s always liked pain with her pleasure, but Shaw’s not in a mood to appreciate the humor she knows. “Let me explain Sam.” Shaw’s stare tells her nothing will make a difference but she stays put.

“You fell asleep at the table. I woke up and found you in the middle of a nightmare. You were thrashing but I couldn’t bring you out of it. So I picked you up and put you in our bed. I was getting in behind you when your arm flailed. It was an accident.”

“That doesn’t change anything. I won’t risk it happening again. Even if it was an accident.”
Root sighs. “Last night you said you wanted me to share my feelings. You want me to share my feelings Sameen?” Every word is louder than the last. “I’m angry. Not about the black eye, about this conversation. It’s bullshit. The first time we met I tazed you. The second time you shot me. The third time you punched me so hard you knocked me out cold. We still fell in love. We’ve taken bullets for each other Shaw! I lost my hearing because I rescued you. I know I don’t need to remind you about the last two years and what you sacrificed for me or the lengths I went through to bring you back.

When are you going to understand we’re in this,” she uses her hands to gesture between the two of them, “together?! Besides, you only had the nightmare because you didn’t come to bed last night. We’ve already proven you don’t have them when we sleep together. You were fine after we got in bed last night. Together. The universe, Shaw, is slapping you in the face with irony. Things are better when we’re together!”

Shaw hasn’t tried to interrupt because Root’s yelling. Root only yells in a gun fight and its things like ‘duck’ or ‘watch out,’ etc. Shaw’s never heard her yell at anyone, most certainly not at her. Plus she called her Shaw and that is a clear indication Root’s furious.

“Bad things are going to happen Sameen, but your default reaction can’t be to separate us. No matter what happens! We can’t keep having this conversation every time things are tough! I don’t want to hear about it. The black eye will fade in a couple of days and it doesn’t even hurt! You know why?! Because you weren’t trying to punch me!”

Luckily Root runs out of breath and Shaw rushes to fill the silence, not wanting Root to start yelling again. “When you put it that way…” She’s about to make a joke, but Root is still glaring at her. Serious it is then. “You’re right Root. I’m sorry.” Shaw sighs. “Don’t start yelling again, but I’m just not good…used…to this thing with us.” Shaw knows the word good will remind Root of all the other times Shaw tried to walk away from them. “My default reaction to all bad situations is to remove myself or whatever’s bothering me quickly. I’ll keep trying to temper that knee-jerk response. But I can’t help feeling bad I punched you.”

Root sighs too. “I’m sorry I yelled at you and this is the last thing I’ll say. A punch requires intent. You hit me accidentally. Deal with it and stop whining about it. Now can we have breakfast?” Shaw’s surprised she’s a little afraid to say anything else. So she just nods.

Reese is waiting for them in Root’s office, which she’s taken to calling the computer room because it’s not only hers and its purpose is miles away from a typical office. Root can’t help it. She sighs. What now?

“Morning John.” John nods his greeting and gets to the purpose of his visit. “It was getting late this morning and I figured you’d prefer if I talked to Finch anyway. So I brought him up to speed on everything. He asked me to give him a little time to process the information in light of his research.” He looks away. “That was two hours ago.”

Shaw can tell Root’s not up to the veiled insinuations, although she gives him credit for not mentioning Root’s black eye. He’s good like that. Never gets involved in anyone’s relationship. “Yeah Reese we slept late. Jealous?” But Shaw did bait him. “I don’t know Shaw. It seems sleeping with you is dangerous.” He’s out the door before Shaw can react. Root laughs. Hard. Shaw’s scowling and planning her revenge.
Shaw’s ‘bedroom’ has actually become their defacto command center, plus it doesn’t even have a bed in it. It’s like the subway. It has a table, her weights, and guns and usually a laptop or two. So when Reese gets back with Finch, they gather there.

“Good morning Ms. Shaw. Root.” He stalls at Root’s black eye but wisely doesn’t comment. “Mr. Reese brought me up to date this morning. Several things caught my attention. But first, I have not worked on the virus.” Shaw rolls her eyes and scowls. “Shocker.” Root knows there must be a reason, whether she agrees with it or not, so she just waits for him to continue. “When I was considering Ms. Shaw’s situation, I was puzzled. There were facts I learned during my research that didn’t coincide with Ms. Shaw’s recollection.”

Shaw immediately gets defensive, but Root intervenes before she gets the chance to say anything. “Her recollection, as you so insensitively phrase it, arises from conditions anyone else would’ve died from, much less ‘recalled’. Try to remember that Harold.” Finch looks away, chagrined. “I’m sorry Ms. Shaw, I certainly did not intend to minimize your experience in any way.” Shaw’s over his comment. Plus Root defending her is kind of hot. Even though she can speak for herself, obviously. Still. Kind of hot.

“Much like you, all my research led to the conclusion the removal of the chip would need to be conducted by a neurosurgeon assisted by a robot. It’s assumed location is simply in too delicate an area.” He looks up waiting for them to grasp the significance. “Then so would the implantation,” Root murmurs almost to herself. “Yes, Ms. Groves.” They, including Reese, glare at him and he quickly apologizes. “Yes, Root. But we have yet to learn anything indicating such a surgery took place. In fact, we’ve made several assumptions without a factual basis. For example. We assume the chip implanted in Ms. Shaw is the same one Root discovered in Maple. Or the same one in the files on the hard drive you recovered. We assume it actually has sensors. We assume it actually can accomplish what Greer claimed.”

The statement angers Shaw. “Believe me when I tell you I felt every single one of the things he claimed I would feel. Things I never felt before.” She hisses.

“The scopolamine.” Root’s talking as fast as her brain connects the dots. “Sam, your blood tests showed a significant amount of scopolamine. So many things were going on it completely slipped my mind. Scopolamine eliminates free will and wipes the formation of memories. It’s not that you can’t remember, it’s that while on the drug the memories are never recorded. In high enough doses it kills. It works through your nervous system.”

Before they get too carried away, Finch interrupts. “That is a puzzle piece I did not posses, but let’s set it aside for a moment.

We have not actually seen a brain scan. We do not even have an x-ray showing a shadow in the supposed location. The information we’ve been relying on all comes from one source. Samaritan agents.” He rushes to assuage Shaw. “I do not believe for a single moment you did not feel the things you do remember or that they did not actually occur. Just that there may be another cause.”

Root’s racing to link all their known information, but it’s Reese who asks the obvious. “Finch, are you saying there’s nothing in Shaw’s head?” Shaw’s too stunned to even begin to process and looks helplessly at Root.

“Now that I know about the scopolamine…yes. Before I knew, I made an educated guess the alleged chip may not be what we were assuming it to be. In addition to the lack of evidence the necessary surgery took place, or any evidence of any mass at all, Ms. Shaw’s memory of her recovery period simply did not correlate to what’s required in even the least complicated procedure.
We assumed the chip was also attached to sensors connected to the neural circuits of the brain and capable of both impacting those nerves and transmitting information in some form of useful manner. The brain is an extremely critical and fragile area of the human body. The type of surgery I’m describing takes weeks of intensive care post-surgery and the risks are immense. Blood clots, bleeding in the brain, infection, stroke, coma, brain swelling, and many more. The simple machinery you found in Ms. Shaw’s room in Maple would not even begin to suffice.”

The rest of them are too shocked to even consider the possibility. And Root, for one, has questions. “Harry, scopolamine is a powerful drug but can it work that effectively? Causing all the sensations Shaw felt from simple suggestions? If that were true we’d be seeing criminals all over the world using it. There’s no proof it even does what people claim it can actually do. It’s used to treat nausea in small doses.”

“Well, there we enter the realm of conjecture. But before we make any, there is additional evidence a chip may not exist. There is no doubt Ms. Shaw would have memories of the post-surgery period. They could not have sedated her because then they would not be able to measure the success of the surgery or her prognosis. That also applies to any drug having the effect of impairing memory formation or suppression, including scopolamine.

As to Greer’s alleged (self) ability to predict Ms. Shaw’s emotions or reactions, they also may have used other drugs in conjunction with the scopolamine. No blood test covers every drug, especially if you’re not looking for it. But in any case, it’s too late to test now as any drug most surely is out of Ms. Shaw’s system.”

There’s one more thing Finch needs to add, but he’s not sure who will shoot him first when he says it. At least there are medical facilities and doctors available.

“There is also Ms. Shaw’s recovery to consider.” Shaw stares at him impassively. “Just say it Finch.” Finch looks at her apologetically. “If your brain were impacted to the degree we’ve been discussing, you would be experiencing symptoms much more severe than nightmares. Your recovery, as we've seen it and you remember, would be nothing short of miraculous.” Finch fidgets, but no one pulls a gun.

“I have nothing else to offer. I cannot say with absolute certainty there is no chip, but I posit there is a high degree of probability.”

Root’s still been thinking about the scopolamine, but she’s not sure Shaw will be able to take much more. “Sameen…” Shaw knows what Root’s trying to do, but she’s not going anywhere. “We need to know Root. Whatever you’re thinking, ask. I can take it and I would never hold it against you. Rip of the bandaid. Quickly.”

“Is it possible the white torture never occurred?” Even though Shaw braced herself, the question fills her with rage. But rage she knows how to handle. “No. No. There is no known procedure, device, or drug that can implant memories, especially ones so intricate. Even brainwashing would only impact current and future behavior, not memories. Ms. Shaw’s experiences are all very real. There’s no doubt they occurred.

What I’m going to say next is conjecture based on everything we’ve discussed and the facts we know to be true. What I believe Samaritan may have accomplished is the synthesizing of the scopolamine to a more potent level than we’ve ever seen. Coupled with Ms. Shaw’s fragile state after the white torture, it fits all the facts and Ms. Shaw’s experiences. Also keeping in mind they may have used other drugs as well.

Now we move into the realm of speculation. If Samaritan developed a chip as powerful as the one
we’re…uh describing,” because he’s trying to be sensitive with his word choice, “we would be seeing evidence of it in world events. The same applies to string theory or the theory of everything. We know Samaritan’s ambition, for lack of a better word, is to make itself god of humanity, to control every facet of human life. With the power we know it possesses it tried to crash the stock market and assassinate with impunity anyone even minutely opposing it, as well as many other atrocities too numerous to detail and probably many more we know nothing about. What would it do with all the secrets of the universe laid bare?"

Shaw’s said very little during the entire time Finch’s been talking because she’s overwhelmed and needed to shut down. But she’s made a decision. “So under all the equivocation what you’re saying likely happened is Samaritan wore me down psychologically with the white torture and then used the new and improved scopolamine and maybe other drugs to cause me physical and psychological pain at Greer’s sadistic whim. What about all the feelings it created? Fear, guilt, despair…” but she can’t say anything more and leaves it at that.

"Perhaps, Ms. Shaw, you should consider they were there all along."

Finch’s words are beyond Shaw’s ability to process with everything else, so although she heard them, she ignores them to deal with later. “So, if we take an x-ray and nothing shows, we’ll know? It will be definitive proof one way or the other?” It’s not in Finch’s nature to say anything’s absolute. “I believe so, yes.”

Shaw sighs but otherwise shows no emotion. “Okay, let’s do it.” She looks at Root. “Do we have an x-ray machine?” They don’t, but Root can acquire one easily. “No, but I can have one here tomorrow.” Shaw nods once.

Reese is the first one to stand. He doesn’t say anything, just squeezes Shaw’s shoulder, and looks pointedly at Finch. “If I can help in any way Ms. Shaw, please let me.” He doesn’t expect an answer and leaves with Reese.

Root doesn’t even know where to begin or what to do, but Shaw reaches out first. “I know we will deal with everything and figure it out. I am not pushing you away. But I have no fucking clue what I think about all of…this…much less how I feel. So for right now, I don’t want to talk about it. I’m not asking you to leave me alone, not physically, but please don’t push me on this.”

Root falls in love all over again. Shaw’s reaction blows her away. She wipes the tears she couldn’t prevent and nods. “Of course sweetie.”

Shaw needs to disconnect. “Let’s go shoot some things.”

Chapter End Notes

SPOILER ALERT: If you haven’t read the chapter yet. STOP. Read it first.

So I really liked this chapter. I can’t stand Finch. But I was able to find a way to use him that helped with the plot twist and I think it made it a richer scene, for lack of a better word. I’d like to know if you think his dialogue is believable? Would he use the same words in the same cadence I tried to convey. I tried to make him sound as pompous and arrogant as I could.
Anyway I hoped you enjoyed the chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it!
“How long is my sentence for that crime going to be?” she practically whines. Root grins wickedly. “Life.”

When they get to the target range, Thomas is there practicing his dry firing. “Hey Shaw.” Shaw nods at him but she immediately retrieves a couple of boxes of ammunition and starts firing. Every target disappears under her barrage of bullets. Perfect score. When she looks up, Thomas is just staring at the targets in awe.

Root’s been firing a couple of slots down from Shaw and her targets are just as perfect, but Thomas only has eyes for Shaw. She also sees what’s about to happen. Thomas is going to try to talk to Shaw and she’s going to blow a gasket. But she’s not quick enough and Thomas is at Shaw’s side before she can cut him off.

But when she gets there Shaw’s talking to him about shooting stances and Root decides it’s a good time to find Grice and plan the x-ray machine heist.

Shaw tries for her version of small talk. “What did you do before you joined uh…us?” Thomas looks down. “I was a security guard.” Shaw punches him lightly in the arm, but it still has bite. “If you did it to the best of your ability and didn’t hurt anyone who didn’t deserve it, don’t ever be ashamed. It’s more than most of us can say.” Thomas rubs his arm surreptitiously, but he smiles.

“Anyway that explains your stance. You’re using the weaver stance. For some unknown reason it’s become the standard for law enforcement and typically what you’re taught when you first start to shoot. Forget it. In a real gun fight, in the real world, it will get you killed faster than not. It’s great to stabilize your weapon, but you’re making yourself a bigger target. Even with body armor, you’re exposing unguarded areas. Plus when your body is bladed it’s difficult to readjust when a shooter comes at you from another direction and impossible to run or jump quickly.”

Thomas doesn’t interrupt and listens with the attentiveness of a monk to his Buddha. “Look, chances are you’re not going to have time to take any stance consciously when you’re involved in a gunfight. But if you train your body, it’ll do it automatically, improving accuracy. It can mean life or death to you or someone else. Trust me. You don’t want someone’s death on your conscience.

In the military we call it the fighting stance. You stand square to the target with your feet shoulder width or slightly wider and your firing side foot is slightly behind your support side foot. Since you’re right handed that’s your right and left respectively.”

It seems something suddenly occurs to Shaw. “You do know your right from your left, right?”

Thomas isn’t sure it’s a joke so he errs on the side of caution. “Yes.” Shaw hears Root’s low laugh in the background and smiles. She’d seen her come back in a minute ago. Thomas obviously thinks Shaw’s smiling at him if the goofy look on his face is any indication. She rolls her eyes and scowls. “I’m not smiling at you.” He turns and sees Root leaning against the wall observing them and feels foolish.
“Focus. I wouldn’t be smiling at you even if she weren’t here, so don’t expect it.” It comes out harsher than Shaw intended but Thomas takes it in stride.

“Your knees should be flexed to absorb recoil and to act as shock absorbers when moving in any direction. You should lean slightly forward and extend your arms straight out, bringing the sights to your eyes. Keep your head level to maintain balance, especially if you’re moving. Which I guarantee you will be most of the time. Someone shooting at you isn’t going to announce themselves or wait their turn. There’s no downside to the fighting stance. You can shoot any weapon, move quickly, and you’re less exposed if someone comes at you from another direction.”

Lesson over, Shaw stops talking. Thomas looks at her awkwardly. “Thanks Shaw, I appreciate it.”

Shaw rolls her eyes, never comfortable with gratitude. “Don’t thank me. Start practicing.” She walks away and Root sees him immediately mimicking Shaw’s stance.

They walk out of the range and Root smiles at Shaw. “You like him.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “I yelled at him this morning for no reason, so I figured I owed him one. He might be less annoying than most people, but I do not like him. I don’t like people.”

Root still keeps the knowing grin on her face. “Present company excluded?” Shaw rolls her eyes yet again for emphasis. “No.” Root pouts, but she’s still smiling.

Shaw’s trying unsuccessfully to keep the morning’s conversation at bay. The adrenaline from shooting isn’t helping. She needs to bleed some of it off. She can work out or…

She tackles Root onto the bed, who gasps from pleasant surprise and getting the wind knocked out of her. Shaw doesn’t give her a chance to recover and attacks her neck with sharp bites and a hot tongue. Root pulls her in closer, wanting another helping of whatever Shaw’s dishing out.

Their mouths clash and Root grabs Shaw’s head with her hands, thrusting her tongue into her mouth, licking and tasting, and breathing Shaw in. Shaw’s eyes are smoldering with an unmistakable question. You want this? Root knows exactly what she’s asking… is rough and wild and unrestrained okay?

Root’s answer is to flip Shaw under her and pin her to the bed. Shaw pushes her back and Root leans in harder. Shaw might have to revise her assessment. Root may actually be just as strong. So she pulls her in instead, knowing Root’s thinking the next thing she’ll feel is Shaw’s mouth, but at the last minute she jerks her back again slightly, her mouth open, but teasing and controlling. It’s like a tango on steroids only lying down.

But Root’s not ceding her dominant position. Shaw’s going to have to earn it. Before Shaw can react, Root has her hands pinned above her head in a vice-like grip and takes the kiss Shaw tried to deny her. But Shaw’s a marine and she’s not taking it lying down. Literally or figuratively. She lunges up with her core, hardened by daily crunches, and knocks Root of balance.

But, while it dislodges Root’s grip, her lunge exposes her neck to Root’s mouth and she presses her advantage. She bites and sucks on Shaw’s neck, marking her, and they both know it. But Shaw doesn’t care. She wants to belong to Root and she wants evidence of it all over her body. She throws her head back onto the bed and gives Root better access.
Shaw's guttural moans set Root on fire and the next thing Shaw knows buttons are flying and her shirt is trapping her arms at her side. She feels confined. She knows this is Root and Root's not trying to hurt her, but her traumatized mind instructs her body instantly. She flexes her arms in, tearing the shirt down the middle and freeing her arms.

She flips them again and pushes Root down hard. But instead of fighting back, Root moans with excitement and there's no mistaking Shaw's in control now. She arches her breasts up into Shaw's clawing hands. Shaw rips Root's shirt and bra off so she can feel her skin. But it's not enough. She wants Root naked. Now. She's touching Root everywhere while she tears off Root's remaining clothes and her own. The touch of Root's bare skin, the liquid between Root's legs smearing Shaw's thigh, and Root's moans, Shaw's name on her lips...it's not enough. She wants more. She needs more.

Shaw barely hears the voice in the back of her mind telling her she's being driven by more than desire. She's angry and she's hurting. But Root is not something to be used to assuage her pain. "No." She pulls back and Root knows exactly what's going through her mind. She pulls Shaw back down forcefully and bites hungrily at her lips. "Yes!" Root wants to give her what she needs. But she also needs it as much as Shaw.

Root's frenziedly biting at every inch of Shaw she can reach and when her skilled fingers plunge into her, Shaw's body can't resist. Doesn't want to resist. Her eyes clench shut and she feels the tension inside her raging up, exploding, and Root destroys her, and she's screaming Root's name until she collapses on top of her, completely wrecked.

Root wraps her body around Shaw's. "I'm here Sameen." Shaw's trying to gain control of her ragged breathing and Root holds her until she gently pulls away, letting Root know she can let go.

Shaw braces on her arms and looks down at Root and this time the siege is gentle. She tugs softly at Root's lips and caresses carefully with her tongue. Root closes her eyes in surrender, but Shaw wants to sink into the safety of her eyes and she murmurs her name, kissing her slowly, her breath whispering into Root and Root aches with need.

She opens her eyes and finds black pools baring everything. 'sameen, I could kiss you forever' Shaw's smell is wild and soft and she's been addicted from the very first time. Shaw smiles and everything she can't find the words for is written in that smile. Root doesn't think she can love more than she already loves Shaw and has loved Shaw since forever. But still, she falls deeper...into that smile.

Shaw caresses her body still looking into Root eyes with that smile. She pulls away and kisses Root's breasts and teases her nipples with her lips as her hands start roaming Root's abs and her long legs and she looks up at Root through dark lashes and although her lips are wrapped around Root's nipple, she's still wearing that smile. She slides back up and kisses Root's throat, while her hand finds Root hot center and presses down and moves in slow circles until Root moans.

She meanders down Root's body until her tongue is probing Root's navel while her free hand trails Root's breast ever so slowly and her other hand explores her dripping sex. Root's breathing rapidly and Shaw kisses from her navel, through her short hair, until her tongue reaches Root's sex and she kisses soft like gossamer, then sucks smoothly, finally rubbing the flat of her tongue over Root's folds unhurriedly. She circles Root's entrance and drags her tongue slowly upwards towards her
swelling clit. She sucks on its hood delicately and teases beneath with her tongue.

Root’s whispering and repeated exclamations *’sameen’* are the only sound in the room apart from Root’s ragged breath and the sounds of Shaw making love to her.

Shaw uses her fingers only to spread Root’s folds to make room for her tongue’s exhaustive exploration. Root moans from deep inside her throat and her breathing’s labored, her hips rocking gently back and forth. Shaw increases her pace, sucking and licking Root's center, making her way back up to her clit and touching *exactly* the right spot, in *exactly* the right way, until Root can’t control her thrusting and her hand’s tangled in Shaw’s hair and her orgasm rolls through her in waves.

Shaw keeps her mouth protectively over Root’s clit, her warm breath intensifying Root’s orgasm. When she feels Root’s muscles relax, she lays her head on Root’s thigh, her fingertips studying Root’s body. Root runs her hand through Shaw’s hair soothingly and they cuddle in the quiet, their breaths slowing gradually.

The intimacy of the moment overcomes Shaw and she works through it, letting herself just feel, not thinking.

When she looks up Root’s looking at her adoringly and Shaw flashes that *smile* and they both laugh, feeling lighter and braver and stronger.

“Ugghh, do you think we can tell Thomas to bring us lunch and have him bring it in here without having to move?” Shaw asks, only partly kidding. Root shakes her head in amusement. “Sure but what’s he going to do when his eyes fall out of his head and he’s blind? His shooting will really suck then.” Shaw barks out a laugh at the image. “Besides he’s already crushing hard, much more and he’ll be leaving you love poems and planning my demise.” Root’s also only partly kidding.

Shaw shakes her head. “He has a bad case of hero worship. He’ll grow out of it. They all do,” she grins. Root decides to get up before Shaw’s head is too big for them and the bed. “Let’s shower and I’ll get us lunch…while *fully* clothed.”

Late afternoon finds them watching a Matrix marathon. Shaw loves these movies, but aside from the first one, which was actually excellent, Root thinks it’s really Trinity she loves watching. Shaw senses her gaze and looks up, lowering the volume. “Root, I know you have things you need to do, I’m okay.” Root smiles indulgently but intends to go nowhere. “You’re right. But I’ve been working on them for years. They can wait another day.” Left unsaid is the uncertainty of what those things will be after tomorrow.

Eventually they drift off, but the laptop hitting Shaw’s knee wakes her. She gets up to turn off the light and put the laptop on the desk. When she turns around Root’s awake. “Sorry…I was trying to be quiet.” Root beckons with her hand. “And I’m just trying to make sure you fall asleep where you’re supposed to be…next to me…together.” Shaw groans at the not so subtle reference to their earlier uh…discussion. “How long is my sentence for that crime going to be?” she practically whines. Root grins wickedly. “*Life.*"
Puppet Master

Chapter Summary

“Hey sweetie. Want to go for a walk?” Shaw looks at her and grins. “Yeah.”

Root and Shaw are woken early the next morning. Grice is back with the x-ray machine. Root asks one of the guards to have Derrick meet them in the infirmary. She’s sure they can figure out the machine, but Root doesn’t want to take any chances, and since they have the medical personnel with experience, there’s no reason to. It's been too long since Shaw’s been a doctor to remember anything about x-ray machines.

Derrick explains how the machine works and how to develop the x-ray. Root asks him to wait outside in case they need his help. But no one else will be privy to the results until Shaw decides otherwise. It’s a simple process and 20 minutes later Root and Shaw are examining the image.

They walk in silence to the computer room where Root shreds the x-ray. It’s the only way to ensure no one else sees it. They walk back to their room, both lost in their thoughts. Once they’re in their make-shift command center Shaw speaks first.

“Root this means Terry and Richard lied to us. We didn’t pressure Richard much, but Terry managed to withstand the intense physical pain without revealing the truth. That takes skill and training. She held out long enough to convince us she was ready to talk and then fed us the bullshit story pretty convincingly.”

Root nods in agreement, but seems lost in her thoughts. Shaw waits, knowing Root’s evaluating everything they know now.

“Sam, what if Samaritan has been hundreds of steps ahead of us from the beginning? Finch always thought it would be and that’s why we were powerless to stop it. What if everything, including finally letting me find you, was part of its plan?

If your theory is confirmed and Samaritan has been operating out of the missile base, then we have to reevaluate everything we believe to be true.

The breadcrumbs I’ve been following in New York. The irrelevant bases. Your capture.

Everyone, including Greer, knows how I feel about you. Samaritan also has all the data from our numerous skirmishes, not only with its agents, but also anything we’ve done memorialized in cyber space. It’s not a dubious leap it could predict I would place finding you above the Machine’s mission. Whether the boys came with me or not, I was the key. Because only I would do everything the Machine deemed necessary. Your cover was blown, everyone else was in hiding, and Samaritan had the NSA feeds.

Think about it. There’s no doubt Samaritan wanted to squeeze every bit of information about the Machine and the team from you. But it had been two years and you never broke. Why not just kill you? Maybe it decided you’d be more valuable as an added distraction.

The Machine hasn’t spoken to me since the day you were taken at the stock exchange. But two
years later she helps Daizo find your location? The security at the factory where we found you was practically non-existent. It was able to keep you hidden from me for two years despite the extremes measure I took to find you. But we find you in a small town with a security force it knew we could defeat. It may not know exactly how many people I recruited, but based on my previous attacks, it was obvious there were at least several hundred. I could wipe Maple off the map with a fraction of our forces.

The day I went back to try to persuade Harold and John to join me, a message popped up on Harold’s screen telling him to help me. But She hadn’t spoken to me in a year. She could have helped me, but presumably She did not agree with my quest to find you. So why tell Harold to help me?”

Shaw’s been listening quietly sorting her own thoughts. “Okay, let’s say you’re right. It doesn’t make any sense. Why give you motivation to build an army at all? If it could penetrate your operations enough to give Daizo false information and get a message to Finch on his secure network, then why couldn’t it find you or Finch? If you had a traitor in your midst, your location would’ve been blown a long time ago.

Samaritan managed to accomplish most of its aims despite our successes. We were like flies circling a light bulb. Other than the stock market crash, everything else we actually managed to stop was insignificant in the scheme of things. It succeeded spectacularly despite all our efforts. Why bother with us at all?

Sure, I’m sure at first capturing Finch would’ve been high priority because of his genius in creating the first AI. But it was already clear he would die before helping Samaritan in any way. So again, if it knew where any of you were, why not just kill you instead of perpetrating this elaborate ruse?”

Root sighs in frustration. “You’re right. Yet again we’re missing a critical piece of the puzzle.”

“Root, what if you weren’t being manipulated by Samaritan? What if it’s been the Machine all along? What if you’ve been doing exactly what She wanted you to do? Let’s think about it logically.

As long as we were working together, Finch would’ve never let you build an army or allow the widespread killing of anyone, even Samaritan agents. But Samaritan was succeeding despite our efforts, so what if She concluded more drastic action was needed?

Despite your obedience to the Machine, you’d already shown you’d let Finch guide you, that you were following him as much as the Machine. So it needed to separate you from him in a definitive way. In a way that would guarantee you’d do whatever was necessary to defeat Samaritan.

You’ve said before how the more She watches someone, the higher the probability She can predict their actions with almost absolute certainty. Who does She watch most of all? You Root. She watches you.

She sent us to the stock exchange that day without equipping us for the trap even we knew was waiting for us. You followed her instructions, thinking She would keep everyone safe. You said She couldn’t predict me. But She watched the team almost as much as She watched you. I came for you every time. I put you above everyone else from the very beginning every single time. But an omniscient ASI couldn’t predict I’d come for you at the stock exchange? Or that I’d give my life to save all of you?”

Root looks more heartbroken than Shaw has ever seen her. Because the scenario is all too plausible. She’d sent them to work against each other before, not telling Root or Finch they were both on the
same mission, deliberately letting them work at cross purposes. But if it’s true, some painful decisions are on the horizon.

Shaw hopes she’s wrong. “Root, this is all conjecture. We’ve already gone down the wrong path several times. We need to focus on defeating Samaritan regardless of who’s trying to be the puppet master. I think we need the team working together. All of us. There’s a reason why things were orchestrated to tear us apart. Maybe that’s the key. We need to start operating the way we’ve always done.”

Root sighs and Shaw can see the hurt and hope warring within her. “Okay Sam. Let’s update Harold and John. I’ll give Harry access to our servers and we’ll work together to try and finally get ahead of this thing. We’ve wasted enough time.”

This time they meet in the computer room. Root has the boys leave and changes the code on the biometric scanner, locking everyone out except the four of them. Root and Shaw bring Finch and Reese up to date. Neither one comments on either theory.

“I believe our first priority should be determining whether Samaritan can track Ms. Shaw in any way.” Root agrees. “I can say I’ve been over every inch of Shaw’s body and there’s nothing that’s visible externally.” Shaw glares at Root. “I’m standing right here you know.”

Finch’s face turns red and he looks away while Reese smirks momentarily. “Yes well, I believe it unlikely for two reasons; any tracker lasting more than 72 hours needs a power source. Although a gps tracker may be as small as the microdot found in Maple, the power source by necessity is not. It’s why it’s always connected to an external power source. Radios, cars, computers, etc.

Also, detecting a signal is relatively simple. Samaritan no doubt knows we would make sure Ms. Shaw was not being tracked. Basically a tracker utilizes outbound cellular signals to communicate with the receiver. Sophisticated trackers only transmit momentarily to minimize the possibility of detection. But at some point they must send a wireless signal to transmit electromagnetic wave frequencies.

An RF detector is simply a radio frequency receiving device. They detect wireless signals being transmitted within a certain frequency range. In essence a broad-band receiver. I can put one together in a few minutes.”

Shaw’s exasperated sigh communicates her impatience. “So what are we waiting for?” Finch fidgets nervously. Root can build one in her sleep. She gathers the necessary components from the storage cabinet in the computer room. Shaw’s glad Root’s building it. She trusts her whereas the verdict is still out on Finch.

It does not detect any transmissions. While Root was building the receiver and checking Shaw, Finch was glued to the computer, evidently searching for something. When he registers the silence and looks up, everyone is staring at him, waiting. “I can say with confidence Ms. Shaw is not being tracked. Whether that means the tracker dissolved or malfunctioned I can’t say.”

“How can you be so sure Harry?”

“Your servers and computers are basically military grade hardware. Additionally, since you do not use any type of wireless router, everything is hard wired. Which means any bit of data travels
through, and is recorded by, the servers. Including radio frequencies. The radios you use here to communicate generate these RF signals.

I programmed an algorithm to analyze the patterns before Ms. Shaw’s rescue and compare them with those after her rescue. There are no differences. Additionally, there were no signals on any other frequency than the one you use for your radios.

The chances any tracker would be on your same frequency are astronomical since Samaritan has no way of detecting which frequency you’re on. That’s the point of radio signals. You need a receiver set to the same frequency and within a certain range. It requires hardware. There are hundreds of frequencies; it’s impossible to set up that kind of hardware all over the country.”

Shaw looks at Root. “So I’m free. No chip and no tracker.”

Finch nods. Root doesn’t know why the thought scares her and Shaw’s expression is inscrutable. But she knows Shaw will not discuss the implications of this latest development in front of Reese and Finch. So she moves on as if Finch hadn’t made such a monumental discovery.

“Daniel gathered the information you requested Sam. All indications point to an underground structure in the area you identified. Harold, we need you to work on finding any records indicating such a structure exists. If you need to send someone to a physical location let me know. If such a structure exists we need to obtain schematics. With a structure that size we can’t just wing it.

Harold has the Machine communicated with you?”

“Not since the day you came to the subway.”

“Okay, I’m going to try to get Her to communicate with me. I have no doubt She can obtain the plans we need. Again assuming we’re right.

John I need you to select a team of seven of our best fighters. If we’re on the right track, Shaw’s right and we need a stealth approach. You need to work with them. Including the three of us we’ll have a team of ten. We’ll decide if we need a section standing by outside the facility once we know more. Include Trent and Grice.” Root looks at Shaw. “Am I missing anything?”

“Nothing I can think of. Reese, include Thomas. Send them to me for weapons training. You can focus on their physical conditioning until we know more. There’s no point running simulated entries if we have no clue what our target looks like. But training together will allow them to become a more cohesive team. They need to get to know each other to function in the field efficiently.”

Reese nods in agreement.

Root observes him to measure his reaction to what basically amounts to an order from Shaw. But he doesn’t seem to have a problem.

Root made it clear from day one Shaw would be the final voice on all decisions, but it’s been a year since Reese came onboard and she’s sure he’d gotten used to being in charge. But Reese is a team player and loyal to a fault. She’s glad they’re all on the same page.

“Okay, I’ll keep working on the virus with the boys. No matter what happens we need something to eradicate Samaritan from cyberspace.”

Reese leaves to start assembling the team. They can start training today; there’s no reason to wait. Realistically it will be a few weeks before they have enough information to proceed, but they’re only going to get one shot.
Shaw leaves Root and Finch talking geek stuff. She goes outside and sits on the picnic table. Root finds her there a few minutes later. She knew Shaw would be there.

“Hey sweetie. Want to go for a walk?” Shaw looks at her and grins. “Yeah.”
Fight Day

Chapter Summary

“Sorry sweetie, but that activity’s going to have to wait a few hours until I recover. But you’re welcome to join me in the shower,” she says as she pinches Shaw’s ass and walks away. Shaw looks around to make sure no one’s watching and follows.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a lot of hand to hand fighting, but nothing graphic, just canon typical. No sex.

Feed the author!

Shaw looks around as they start their walk, immediately looking for exit points, weakness in the perimeter, or slack guards. “This place is huge Root.” Root’s gotten used to it, but when she stops to think about it, she remembers the difficulties they encountered just getting dirt roads and bunk houses set up to house everyone. Luckily they were filtering in and didn’t arrive 1,000 strong from the first day.

“It’s actually about 3,000 acres. We grow as much of our own food as we can to limit our need for outside resources. Some of our PhDs, engineers and builders got together and created a waterwheel to help produce electricity so we pull less from the grid, which helps to not draw attention to ourselves. They also built a well and pumps to use water from a nearby river for all our needs.

We keep chickens, goats and cows, although it’s tough to keep 1,000 people fed continuously, so meat is always at a premium. I won’t gross you out with everything we do to dispose of human waste. We compost and use the fertilizer for the grazing land.

There are rules in place to limit water consumption. We repurpose as much as possible to limit waste and the need for additional goods. We truck in anything else we need, especially gasoline for the vehicles and generators, and the waste out. I have arrangements with certain local criminal elements and they’ve proved reliable so far. And before you say it, yes I violate the water restrictions every day. I deserve it.”

“I never stopped to think about the enormity of the infrastructure you would need to support this army. What you’ve done is absolutely amazing Root.”

“I was very motivated.” Root responds mildly. Shaw’s look says that’s the world’s greatest understatement. “How are you funding all this?”

“I steal it.” She’s very matter of fact and Shaw knows she’s stealing from criminals and not your everyday run-of-mill ones either. But Shaw knows the risks Root’s taking. “That sounds both vague and dangerous.” Root shrugs. “John saved a billionaire tech genius early on, Logan Pierce, and he provides as much monetary assistance as he can without drawing too much attention. He also
helps me identify the targets.”

“Unfortunately it means I spend most of my time hacking instead of working on the virus. But the boys are as good as I am and now that Harry’s here to guide them we have a huge advantage.”

They’re passing one of the training fields and realize a fight must be going on because there’s a ring of men surrounding two others. As they approach, they both realize it’s Adam and Thomas. Shaw grabs Thomas from behind and throws him into the crowd, while simultaneously kicking Adam in the stomach and winding him. All the working out she’s been doing has paid off.

Root steps into the circle and looks around. “Get back to your drills.” She’s using the steel voice and the men immediately disperse. She turns back and stands next to Shaw. When she remains silent Shaw realizes she’s expecting her to deal with the situation.

“There are much more productive uses of your time than brawling amongst yourselves, so I can only imagine there must be a really good reason why you’re doing it.” Shaw usually doesn’t use her voice to intimidate, but the deadly look on her face has them both staring at their feet and fidgeting, before resuming glaring at each other.

Thomas speaks first. “It’s a personal disagreement. It won’t happen again.” But Adam’s now glowering at Shaw with derision and she senses this disagreement involves her or Root somehow.

“Is there something you want to say to me Adam?” Adam’s lips are pursed and he stays quiet. “I asked you a question Adam.” Now Shaw’s voice carries a threat as she narrows her eyes at him. He looks over to Root, but her look is inscrutable. At least to Adam.

He finally speaks, his voice laden with anger. “You’re a coward.” So Shaw was right. It does have to do with her and most probably Root. That explains Thomas’ involvement. Root flinches but doesn’t say a word. Shaw remains preternaturally still only because she has a will of iron. “I’m going to let that go for now. But what makes you think so?”

“You know Root won’t fight back so you beat her in some gutless attempt to exorcise your own demons.” So this is about Root’s black eye. He has no idea the pain Shaw’s suffered over that incident, but Root does. She steps in to speak, but Shaw stops her with a look saying ‘please let me handle it.’

“Well that leaves me in a quandary Adam. You see, I don’t owe you any explanations regarding my past or our personal life.” Shaw gestures between her and Root. “But I can’t have you spreading lies and demoralizing people or undermining my authority. Also, you called me a coward and gutless and I can’t let that stand.

You’ve also insulted Root by insinuating she’s so weak as to be anyone’s victim, even mine. But it’s up to her how to respond to that attack on her character.

In the Marines we’d court martial you and you’d serve a year’s confinement. We could do that here, but that wouldn’t address the seeds of doubt you’ve planted. Those within hearing distance,” Shaw looks towards the training field where at least 30 people are pretending to drill while watching this spectacle, “will spread your words like the manure we use to fertilize the animals’ food and my reputation will suffer.
So my solution is simple. First, I’ll let people judge me by whatever criteria they see fit and second, I’m going to kick your ass as payback for the insults. Right now. I’ll take it easy on you because I know in your own stupid and misguided way your opinion’s founded on loyalty to Root, which I strongly encourage.” Then she looks at Thomas. “I’ll deal with you later.” To his credit he doesn’t cringe.

Root’s not sure this is the best way to handle the situation, but its Shaw’s choice. Besides no matter what Root says, it’ll look like she’s defending Shaw.

Root and Thomas step back and more people from the training field gather around them.

Adam has a good six inches on Shaw and at least 50 pounds. His muscles strain against his tight shirt. His black hair hangs over his forehead and there’s a smug smile on his face. He puffs his chest cockily and assumes a boxers stance, knees bent, and fists protecting his face.

But there will be no boxing today. Shaw’s a black belt in several disciplines and has been in more brawls with knives and furniture flying than she cares to remember. She knows she’ll have to hold back to avoid permanent damage. To him. She won’t even get winded.

Although there’s a crowd, the only sounds come from the hum of daily life in the compound. There’s a slight wind, but Adam is already sweating. Shaw stands loose, weight on the balls of her feet, and her fists unclenched, hair held back tightly by a hair tie. She waits to let Adam attack first, but he smirks instead. “Ladies first.”

Shaw shrugs her shoulders. “You just keep giving me reasons to hurt you Adam, that remark’s just sexist.” The women in the crowd nod their heads in agreement and not a little scorn. He better sleep with one eye open for the foreseeable future. Women have long memories. “Plus it’s the only punch you’re going to get. I’d take it if I were you.”

Shaw can see her words are getting under his skin and he swings angrily. He puts out a nice stiff left, which he probably planned to follow with a right cross. But he telegraphed his intent with his eyes and he’s slow. Muscles are never enough to win a fight against a skilled opponent.

Shaw lets him come within a hair’s breadth of her face and then slips to the left. It throws him off enough so Shaw can step inside his clumsy right cross. She grabs the hair he seems to be so fond of and pulls his head forward, breaking his nose with a head-butt.

Although small, Shaw is pure muscle. Her rage fueled by adrenaline coursing through her blood. She’s fighting against everything she’s suffered during the last two years. Adam doesn’t stand a chance. Pure wrath channels into her body. Still clutching Adam’s hair in one hand, she grabs his crotch with the other and puts her shoulder into him, lifting him a few feet off the ground and letting him slam back into the packed earth, his head bouncing at her feet. He only earned the crotch grab for being sexist. Shaw thought it was fitting. Adam grunts and grows limp.

Shaw steps back and its over as soon as it started. The fight lasted barely 10 seconds. The crowd around them stares in shock. As they start to disperse most of their faces reflect the respect Shaw deserves.

Root can see the energy still strumming in Shaw and steps forward, discretely resting her hand on the small of Shaw’s back soothingly. Shaw begins to calm instantly and her ragged breathing, from anger, not breathlessness, slowly returns to normal.

Root knows Shaw’s the one who needs to finish this if she’s to cement her authority. “Thomas, take Adam to the infirmary. They’ll need to set his nose. His other…injury… should be fine with ice.”
Thomas nods quickly and a few others help him carry Adam. She turns and stares at everyone else and they scatter without another word.

Root and Shaw resume their walk. “Life with you is never boring,” Root comments. Shaw sputters. “Me?! Me?!” It looks like she doesn’t know where to start disputing Root’s claim. Root laughs and Shaw glares at her and rolls her eyes.

They discuss and agree on the necessary consequences for Adam and Thomas as officers in their army. Adam’s ass-kicking was only payback for the insults.

But Shaw knows this is only the beginning. “You know some of them might be impressed or whatever, but some are going to think it just proves I can kick your ass.” Root hums in agreement. “I think John and I are going to resume our sparring today. We always spar outside and at least it’ll remind everyone I’m not some defenseless battered woman.” Shaw can’t help it, she laughs hard at the thought. “As if…”

Shaw looks around as they walk. “It feels weird, being outside. You don’t even notice it usually, it’s like breathing. You don’t think about it. Until it’s taken away. Then it’s all you can think about and no matter how much you try, your memories bombard you with images of every sunny, cloudy, or stormy day you’ve lived through.”

Root knows Shaw needs to use the neutral third person to be able to distance herself from the memories enough to talk about them. But what could Root possibly say in response? I’m sorry, it sucks, now you can go outside? Plus if she responds with anything resembling pity, Shaw will shut down and might not talk the next time she needs to. So she listens and squeezes Shaw’s arm lightly just to remind her she’s there.

Eventually Shaw changes the subject. “What are we going to do with our prisoners? Should we try to really press them for information?” Root thinks about it. “Well, we know for sure the surgeon was in the underground compound, participating in whatever charade they were carrying out. Fuck, for all we know he’s not really a surgeon.

But I know neither of us wants to torture anyone again anytime soon. I do have several ex-military who were engaged in enhanced interrogations. Not that’ll it’ll make me any less responsible for it.”

“Us. Root, we’ll be responsible. You’re not alone in any of this anymore, good or bad.” Shaw stops walking.

“Finch says there’s always a choice. I’m sure he’d tell us we can’t sacrifice the one, or two, for the many. But it’s easy to stand behind your principles when you don’t have to fight in the trenches. I’ll never be able to describe with words the horror of what they did to me. Maybe I was the first or maybe not. Either way I’ve seen up close and personal what they’re capable of and I know with every ounce of my being I won’t be the last.” They make their choice.
They have lunch in the mess tent and everyone gives them a wide berth. It may have something to do with Shaw’s glare or her eating habits, which only Root seems to appreciate. After she’s scarfed down enough food for two men, she tells Root she wants to meet the cooks. Privately. Twenty minutes later she comes back with a self-satisfied look on her face.

“Sweetie are you going to tell me what all that was about?”

Shaw rolls her eyes but decides to spill just some of the beans. “The quickest way to spread news, or more often gossip, in any army, is through the cooks.” Although she doesn’t elaborate, Root deduces something she did placed her firmly in the cooks’ good graces. “How did you accomplish the necessary favorable opinion?”

“I winked at them. No one can resist it.” She smiles smugly and Root’s not sure whether she’s kidding or not. But hey, whatever works.

They part after lunch, Root needing to finish code for a new hack and Shaw to find Thomas. She finds him in the guard’s quarters. He stands when she walks in although he doesn’t say anything and there’s a grim look on his face. Shaw looks at him blankly. “Let’s take a walk.”

When they’re far enough away no one can see or hear them, they stop. Shaw looks him dead in the eye. “I am not some fair maiden in need of defending or protecting. I know you think you were doing the honorable thing, but now we have a bigger mess than if you just ignored him.

I appreciate your loyalty, which incidentally is the same loyalty Adam was exhibiting, but we can’t afford hot heads in leadership positions. Adam will be permanently demoted from head of the guards. I had included you in the group Reese and I will be training for a critical covert mission. But I see now you’re not ready. Someone else will take your place.”

Shaw gives him credit, he takes it like a man and doesn’t try to make excuses or change her mind. He nods respectfully and walks away.

Root finds the boys in the server room since she kicked them out of her office, whose name she’s changed again. Now it’s the subway.

She sees they’ve made themselves comfortable. They don’t seem disgruntled at their relocation. The subway is the most secure room in the compound and it seems prudent to take all possible precautions. Only the team will have all the pieces of the puzzle. It’s the way they’ve always done it.

“Anything I need to know Daniel?” But it’s Greenfield who replies. “We’re making progress but no critical developments yet.” Root’s satisfied and leaves them to their work.

She decides to work in the subway since it’s a more comfortable set-up for coding and gives her access to the servers. Since they don’t use wi-fi accessing them requires hard wire connection.
Finch is caught up in something on his computers. It seems he’s appropriated two additional ones for his purposes. She greets him but he’s so focused he doesn’t hear her. She knows he’s working on the virus in earnest now.

A couple of hours later Root’s hack is ready and now it’s just a matter of time.

She changes clothes and searches for Reese. When she finds him, he’s taking inventory of their weapons and ammunition. It takes time to acquire more so they need careful planning. He nods at Root in greeting and puts down his clipboard.

“You up to some sparring John?” He looks at her knowingly. “This wouldn’t have something to do with the incident earlier today?” Root shrugs. “Does it matter?”

“I just want to prepare for the uh…intensity you may be exercising today.” Root smiles and Reese grabs head gear and tape. They don’t wear gloves when they spar because it’s not how it happens in real life. No one’s wearing gloves in hand to hand combat.

There’s an area laid out near the mess tent for sparring. They’re both wearing loose pants and tank tops. Everyone tends to wear the same thing when it’s hot. They put on their headgear and smile at each other. Well, as much as Reese ever smiles. It’s more of a quirk of his upper lip.

They start out just practicing the basics to get warmed up. Jab, cross, hook, kick, knee, and push kick. Root prefers the upper body attacks, whereas Shaw and Reese prefer the knee and kicks. Since Reese is taller than Root, it gives him an advantage. But only a slight one, since she’s at least twice as fast as him.

They circle each other slowly, each taking turns attacking and defending. Reese throws a jab at half speed and Root blocks it. She counters, parrying off his punch and it reminds him speed is her forte. He manages to block part of it, but a part of her hand hits a little bit of his cheek. To add insult to injury she’d opened her hand and it was a light slap to his face like she was toying with him.

He takes the intensity and power up a notch and throws a double jab, making slight contact. She steps inside his next jab and delivers a three punch uppercut to his body. They weren’t delivered with full force, but they were hard enough to sting. Her look says ‘you asked for it.’

Neither one has broken a sweat yet. They notice they’re attracting more interest than usual. After 20 minutes, they nod at each other seriously and the sparring begins in earnest.

Reese spins to his left and taps Root with two jabs to the face. But she deflects most of the jabs, taking just a little leather on her chin. He nods in acknowledgment of the quick move. Its clear Root’s at the peak of her game today. Obviously she has something to prove. But she’s going to have to earn it. He’s not cutting her any slack.

She moves towards him and hitches her left shoulder to feint a jab and drives a straight right down the middle of his guard. He went for the feint and she fooled him. The strike was harder than she intended. This is why they wear headgear. Sparring is harder than a real fight because you’re constantly trying to prevent hurting the other person. It takes real skill. When either one of them slips they know it’s unintentional.

One of their rules is you can’t leave the sparring mat. In a real fight you can’t necessarily trapeze
around at will. It’s quite likely you’ll be pushed up against a wall or other object. So she herds him to the corner with combinations focusing on speed, jab right, jab, jab, right and finishing off with a hook. He struggles to defend between her speed and the limit of the mat. How’d he let himself get in this position in the first place, he wonders.

Root alternates going for head and body. Her rat-tat-tat-tats to the body come lightening quick and when she ends it with a left to the head it catches Reese flush on the jaw line. She pulls her punch this time, but all hits sting and he grunts. She anticipates him every time he tries to throw a kick or pull her in for a knee strike and quickly moves out of striking distance.

Rivulets of sweat run down her body, dampening her t-shirt until it’s sticking to her skin. She’s breathing hard. But she takes satisfaction from seeing Reese is too.

Reese tightens his guard and lowers his crouch, but it’s not enough and Root penetrates with another combination. She’s beginning to think he’s taking it easy on her. He knows what she’s thinking by the scowl he can see through the headgear. But she’s not giving herself enough credit.

He takes three more punches to his hands but when her right comes down the middle he’s ready and steps into the punch, hooking his upper arm around it and trapping it. Then he turns so now she’s against the edge of the mat. The move catches her by surprise and almost takes her breath away when he manages two short jabs to her torso. After what seems like an eternity she works out of the clinch and they shuffle to the center of the mat. She throws a double jab without much steam and he catches both of them.

They go at it a while longer and find the rhythm that comes from sparring together so long. They can challenge each other; make the other work, and slow things down to a comfortable pace to practice movements. But at his point it’s not really sparring anymore and they go back to the basics for a few minutes to wind down.

The crowd breaks up and they can hear the murmuring and discussion about their respective performances. When everyone’s gone she notices Shaw leaning against one of the posts, grinning at her lasciviously. Root walks over and practically falls into her body. She offers Shaw a weak kiss. “Sorry sweetie, but that activity’s going to have to wait a few hours until I recover. But you’re welcome to join me in the shower,” she says as she pinches Shaw’s ass and walks away. Shaw looks around to make sure no one’s watching and follows.
Chapter Summary

“I will be going with Reese and the team to find Control. I want you with us.”

Chapter Notes

Fair warning, the first 1,500 words or so are all sex. I know a few of you were starting to feel deprived. <3 You can skip it if you're so inclined (first two sections) and it won't detract from the plot at all.

The computer stuff is utter nonsense colored with a few bits of truth.

Let me know what you think about my idea of using Control...it's not too late to go in a different direction. I have a couple of other ideas.

When Root invites Shaw to shower with her she knows Shaw’s not going to settle for just showering. So it’s no surprise when Shaw starts kissing her neck and whispering in her ear while she’s standing under the water spray.

Soft lips and gentle teeth graze her shoulder. ‘you make me so hot when you kick ass’ Light sucking on her upper arm. ‘it makes me proud you’re mine’ That’s actually a sweet one and Root feels her resolve to take a nap weakening. ‘I want to touch you all over’ Fingernails scrape softly down both sides of her torso while a hot tongue licks across her shoulder blades.

Root turns around and places her hand on Shaw’s chest to put some space between them. But before she can say anything or nudge Shaw back, Shaw’s lips are tracing her mouth and her tongue’s tasting and exploring. She feels her resolve weakening further. Shaw murmurs into her mouth. ‘please’ Root can’t resist and deepens the kiss as the water cascades over them.

Shaw takes advantage of her momentary weakness, reaches around her, and squirts body wash on the loofah without breaking their kiss. By the time she releases Root’s swollen mouth, she’s bathing Root’s body provocatively and her eyes are blown wide with desire. Root loves that look, hungry and full with a need only Root can satisfy.

Shaw runs the loofah over Root’s stomach, up to her breasts, teasing her nipples until they’re erect and begging to be sucked. But Shaw resists the urge, keeping up the pretense this is something other than seduction. She reaches the apex of Root’s thigh and Root instinctively spreads her legs. Shaw continues her path, running the loofah lightly up her sex, and Root closes her eyes and moans.

Shaw soaps Root’s long legs and her tempting ass and then leans in for another siege while the hot water rinses the soap from Root’s body. This time the territory she seeks to conquer is Root’s breasts and she draws each nipple into her mouth in turn, sucking lightly, and Root feels waves of pleasure washing over her.
Shaw claims her lips again and this time it’s demanding and possessive and she teases Root’s clit deceptively with a finger. Root whimpers into her mouth, their breasts rubbing together erratically. But then Shaw makes a tactical error and smiles smugly and Root feels it on her lips.

She opens her eyes slowly, resolute and challenging in equal measure. ‘if you want me, you’re going to have to get on your knees’ A part of Shaw rebels instantly at the thought of submission, but she’s on her knees before she can make a conscious decision.

She looks up at Root through dark lashes and Root’s gaze is knowing. ‘make it good lover’ Shaw hears the words and the implied threat. If she wants to persuade Root to skip her nap, she’s going to have to earn it.

Shaw tugs Root so she leans against the wall opposite the shower head. She makes a circular motion with her finger and Root turns around. Shaw lifts Root’s leg until its resting on the bench and Root braces herself with her forearms against the tiles. Shaw turns so she’s facing away from Root and slips her head between her legs, leaning on the bench, her shoulder just under Root’s bent knee.

She begins kneading Root’s firm ass applying just the right amount of pressure to send pleasant vibrations up Root’s body. Shaw’s hands rove lower, but it’s her tongue Root feels and she shivers at the first long, fiery lick as Shaw rims her.

Root’s knee wobbles and Shaw steadies her with her hand. Root’s breathing short quick breaths into her arm as Shaw pushes inside her, probing her, opening her, and then her hot tongue pierces rapidly in and out, her hot skillful tongue, and Root gasps in pleasure.

After a blissful eternity, Shaw replaces her tongue with her thumb, and licks up Root’s slit, dripping with Root’s arousal. She continues with the same long, scorching licks starting where her thumb’s still fucking Root in smooth rhythm, up to Root’s clit. Root stares down at her through hooded eyes.

She feels her orgasm approaching and so does Shaw. Shaw slows down slightly bringing her back from the brink. If Root wasn’t gasping into the tiles she’d be screaming in protest. Shaw straightens up so her mouth’s level with Root’s clit. She circles it teasingly with her tongue and Root’s moan sounds like its begging.

Shaw hopes Root can hold herself up because both of Shaw’s hands are about to be inside her and if she slips they’re both going to hurt.

This time Root’s orgasm is rushing at her, and if Shaw pulls her back she’s not getting laid for a month of Sundays in punishment. But Shaw times it perfectly so that her fingers plunge into Root just as Root’s orgasm hits. The thumb fucking her ass, the tongue licking her clit, and the fingers rubbing her g-spot combine until Root feels her orgasm exploding out and coursing through her.

Root brings one of her hands down and tangles it in Shaw’s hair, pushing Shaw deeper into her while also using it to hold herself upright. Shaw barely notices the pain, caught up in every sound she’s drawing from Root. Root’s writhing under her touch and coming undone on her tongue and it feels so fucking good she doesn’t notice the sudden shortage of oxygen.

Root’s not sure how much time’s passed but it’s the longest orgasm she can remember. As her muscles start to unclench around Shaw’s fingers, Shaw slides out carefully and braces Root with her hands around her thighs, still licking at Root’s clit occasionally. Pleasurable pulses continue for a few minutes more until Root finally backs away from Shaw’s mouth, almost stumbles off the bench, and slides down the wall.
Shaw pulls her into her lap and wraps around her as they both recover, Root clinging to her back with her head resting on Shaw’s shoulder.

When Root can breathe again she looks into Shaw’s eyes, momentarily distracted by the desire smoldering there, but she forces herself to look away and speak. “Sameen, I have good news and bad news.” Shaw rolls her eyes already suspecting what’s coming. “You’ve earned whatever you want, however you want, and whenever you want…so long as it’s not right now. I’m so wrecked you might have to carry me to bed.”

“Oh no,” Shaw starts grumpily, “you’re not the only one wrecked and you’re making me wait for my reward. So you better find a way to get yourself up off me and the floor and over to the bed on your own steam.” But Root gives her doe eyes and as usual Shaw can’t resist. So she helps Root up and they stumble into bed together. Shaw’s only feigning crankiness; she loves making Root writhe and moan and come just as much as she craves Root’s touch.

Root’s drowsy and thoroughly pleased, but Shaw’s horny. So she finds a vibrator in their box and takes the edge off. Root’s too tired to help, but she encourages Shaw with sloppy kisses to her neck and whispers of a dubious nature in her ear. Her orgasm’s quick and not really satisfying, but it’ll do until Root’s fully functional again.

Root spoons Shaw automatically even half asleep and throws her hand over Shaw’s body. Shaw pulls her closer and drifts off to sleep faster than she would’ve thought.

Shaw’s not sure what wakes her but as she transitions from groggy to alert, she feels a delicious spiral of pleasure. Now she knows. She pulls the sheet off and Root’s in between her legs using her tongue in really creative ways. Now that Shaw’s awake, Root reaches up and massages Shaw’s breast, tugging and rubbing until her nipple swells with pleasure. Shaw can’t help the moan that escapes her mouth from the dual sensations. Root responds by slowly sliding her fingers inside Shaw’s dripping center to work in rhythm with her tongue, while alternating her attention to Shaw’s breasts. Shaw’s been aware less than a minute but her orgasm overwhelms her with its intensity and she arches into Root’s mouth. Root works her over skillfully drawing out Shaw’s pleasure until Shaw places her hand protectively over her clit.

Root gives a final kiss to Shaw’s thigh and climbs up Shaw’s body with a self-satisfied grin. Shaw draws her in and captures her lips softly. Tasting herself in Root’s mouth and on her lips always thrills her. Root moans into her mouth when Shaw runs her fingers down Root’s back and caresses her ass. When they come up for air Shaw doesn’t hesitate before speaking. “You know this in no way counts right?” Root laughs affectionately. “This…was…just…an apology…for making…you…satisfy…yourself.” She punctuates each word with kisses along Shaw’s shoulder and neck. “Okay just as long as we’re…clear.” Shaw has trouble finishing her thought because Root is tugging on her earlobe with her teeth, which she knows is one of Shaw’s most sensitive erogenous zones, and it’s driving Shaw to distraction.

Shaw’s stomach alerts them it’s time for dinner and they shower quickly and separately. Shaw’s still
uneasy with walking around outside. It's more pronounced than it probably would be in the city, since here there's so much open space and the buildings are all one-story. Her hyper vigilance shows in the tightness of her shoulders and her darting eyes.

Root makes sure their bodies touch as much as possible short of actually holding Shaw’s hand. She knows Shaw’s going to need to work through her anxiety, but she plans to be as supportive as possible. Shaw’s aware of the reason for Root’s proximity and is comforted by the heat of her body. It occurs to her she would have viewed this as weakness in the distant past, but now she has no problem taking refuge in the safety of Root’s presence.

Root and Shaw grab their dinner and sit at a random table where space is available. Silence blankets the area for a second, but then conversation resumes. They engage in casual banter, discussing the infrastructure of the camp. The woman sitting next to Shaw works on the farm. She interjects during a lull in the conversation and addresses Root.

“The apple trees and berry bushes are bearing fruit and we’ll be harvesting them soon.” Root’s love of apples is well known. She smiles and introduces Mary to Shaw. Mary seems surprised Root remembers her name. Root may not remember the specifics of each recruit’s history, but she could probably name all of them without too much trouble.

Shaw aims for a friendly grin and succeeds. But then food always puts Shaw in a good mood. “That means we can have apple pie and berry tarts,” she enthuses. There’s no mistaking the excitement on Shaw’s face and in her voice. “Liza and I planned to discuss deserts later anyway,” she informs them. Liza’s the head cook and Root’s as shocked as Mary by Shaw’s apparent familiarity with her. They discuss the crops a little longer until Root and Shaw finish their dinner and excuse themselves.

“When did you and Liza get on such friendly terms?” Shaw smirks. “I told you. I winked at her, now I have her eating out of the palm of my hand.” Root smiles and shakes her head. “Should I be worried Sameen? You seem rather fond of her.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “Yes you should be worried.” She takes a little satisfaction from Root’s surprised look. “That the desert quality around here will improve anyway.”

Root slaps her arm in mock disapproval and Shaw laughs. Root loves the sound of Shaw’s laugh. She looks at Shaw sappily until Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “Cut it out. You’ll ruin my hard as nails reputation.” Root muses it may not be such a bad thing if people see Shaw’s affection for her.

They find Finch in the server room with the boys. They look up when Root and Shaw enter. Finch finishes giving them instructions before turning to Root. “We’ve decided to use an ICE 9 virus to deliver our destructive payload. I have Daniel working on shortening the text string and reducing the system memory required to store the virus. Greenfield and Daizo are working on the viral code.

I’m working on the payload for the attack phase. The problem does not lie in developing it so it destroys Samaritan, but rather coding it in such a way that it does not also bring down the internet on a worldwide scale. Temporary outages are unavoidable, but should they happen simultaneously over a broad geographical area, the consequences would be catastrophic.”

Root knows there are other impediments to overcome. “The quickest way to infect Samaritan is
through the NSA feeds since they’re the single largest source of Samaritans data. We need the virus to be undetectable and remain invisible long enough to infect all of Samaritan’s core heuristics.”

Shaw’s look tells them she thinks they’re missing something glaringly obvious. “The NSA is not just going to hand us access to their feeds. We’re going to have to find a way to penetrate probably the most secure location in the world, aside from nuclear facilities, in order to infect their system.” Shaw’s voice trails off. “Or, we can get someone who already has access to do it for us.”

She looks at Root. “Control.”

But Root knows there’s a bigger problem than just convincing or forcing Control to help them. They have to find her first. “Sam, Greer’s buried Control is some hole so deep, even with the Machine’s help we may not be able to find her.”

“What are you talking about?”

“John and I captured Control when we first started searching for you, thinking she might serve as a direct link to Samaritan and thus to your location. We turned up empty. She had no clue what Greer and Samaritan were doing with the NSA feeds or your location. But we told her enough to make her curious.

When I started to search for you on my own, I thought enough time had passed and she may have learned something useful. But I couldn’t find her anywhere. So I asked my contact in Samaritan’s research department to try and locate her. He learned Control had gotten curious and started asking questions and investigating with her own team. She didn’t like what she found and confronted Greer intending to take him into custody. Instead, Greer captured her and moved her to a CIA black site. Even if we find her, she’s not in a position to help us.”

Shaw’s not sure she agrees with Root. “Maybe not to actually deploy the virus, but she definitely knows how to gain access to the NSA feeds. She knows the security we’ll have to neutralize, the physical locations of the key servers, and maybe even some of her people who may still be loyal to her and willing to help us.

Reese and I know exactly how a black site works. Remember when I helped you infiltrate one when we rescued Greenfield here?” He looks up at the mention of his name and smiles awkwardly. Shaw looks at him like she’s still not sure if he’s worth it or not.

“I’m confident we can get her out, but we need some idea of where she’s being held. There are dozens just here in the US. If they took her out of the country though, we won’t be able to get to her.” Then she blurts out a name.

“Grice! Grice might have useful information. Control used him to run the most sensitive and secretive missions; ones whose objectives were known only by Control and Grice. When he wasn’t on a mission he was part of her personal security detail.

Too bad Hersch got himself blown up. He definitely would’ve been useful.”

Although they’re facing daunting obstacles, Root feels more hopeful than she ever has about their chances against Samaritan. “Harry, Shaw and I will meet with John and Grice and work on finding Control. As you work on the payload, send me the strings of code and I’ll review and test them. I want to be as sure as possible the virus will work once we get it uploaded.” Finch is not affronted in the least and nods in agreement.

They walk out of the server room together and leave Finch at the subway. Shaw and Root walk
outside to look for Reese. They both start talking at the same time. “Root/Shaw” Root laughs nervously and gestures for Shaw to go first.

“I will be going with Reese and the team to find Control. I want you with us.” Root breathes a sigh of relief. “Glad we’re on the same page.”
Shaw's The Boss

Chapter Summary

"Besides, whatever happens tomorrow will happen to both of us, so no one's going to be left behind to wonder about anything. We'll win, lose, live, or die together."

Chapter Notes

The last section is all sex. Lots of anal. You can skip it if it's not your jam. You won't miss any plot development.

Root and Shaw find Reese in the armory. Root radios for Grice while they fill Reese in on their idea. They've just finished when Grice joins them. "Hey Grice, we have a few questions about Control." Grice seems surprised. "Sure. But I'm not sure what I can tell you that you don't already know."

"After Sameen disappeared John and I tracked Control down. It was the day you came to rescue her from the warehouse where I was trying to torture her and Harry was trying to bore her to death with his outdated principles. Remember?" Grice smiles and looks at Reese. "How could I forget? Reese practically killed me until he realized I was the one who let Shaw leave with the virus." Reese quirks his upper lip. "Lucky for you. Shaw's name saved you."

Shaw looks from one to the other. "You two want to get a room?" Shaw should've known Reese would hit her right back. "We'll check if the one next to you and Root is available." Root shakes her head patiently.

"Did Control tell you anything about our conversation?" Grice nods his head no. "But she did ask me to look into a few things privately. I was to report to her and only her. It involved a supposed terrorist plot but she seemed to think it was a cover for something else. I uncovered evidence the supposed terrorist might be innocent, which troubled Control even more.

The next day she went to the stock exchange. I waited outside. When she came out the only thing she said was "they were telling the truth."

Then she captured and interrogated some woman, Shelly, who she suspected of being involved in some clandestine plot engineered by Greer. Before Control executed her, Shelly told her about something called the Correction. Control thought it was a plot to attack the Supreme Court. I escorted her to Greer's location and that's the last time I saw her. She instructed me to leave if she wasn't back in precisely 15 minutes. So I did.

A few hours later she activated her emergency locator. It was pinging in Ohio. When I reported her location I was told another team was sent to extricate her and to stand down. By then all I had seen and heard convinced me I was no longer on the right side of the fight."

Grice looks at Shaw. "My doubts all started with you Shaw. I heard there was a kill order on you
for treason. I knew that was impossible. Then you kept the virus out of the government’s hands and that told me something was really wrong. By the time Control disappeared after questioning one of Research’s missions, I was looking for a way to get to the bottom of things. When Root reached out, I had no doubts about joining her. Because she was on your side.”

Shaw looks uncomfortable at Grice’s unmistakable admiration, so Reese steps into the silence. “There’s a black site in Ohio. That may be our best bet to find her.” Grice looks at them in confusion. “You want to save Control?” Shaw rolls her eyes. “I know. We’ve definitely stepped through the looking glass. But Control’s absolutely loyal to her country. Now she knows the real threat is Greer and Samaritan. She could provide invaluable intelligence to help eradicate them.” Grice nods in agreement, but without Shaw’s confidence. “Besides she may look on us more favorably than her current accommodations in a black hole.”

Root looks at Shaw, waiting for her to decide how to proceed. Shaw’s getting used to Root’s constant deference, but she’s not happy about it. They’re a team. She’s going to speak to her about it privately. “John, have you actually been inside the site?” John nods yes. “I delivered a detainee there once.”

“Okay, so sketch out the layout. Once we’ve reviewed it, we’ll decide on an approach. We should leave tomorrow midday so we can hit at nightfall. Less personnel and the cover of darkness will improve our odds. Let’s meet in the subway at 0900 tomorrow.”

Root and Shaw walk back to their room in silence. Once there, Shaw motions Root to the other room where she sits at the table. “Root, I get you started this army for me. But we’re a team. You, me, Reese, and to a lesser trusted extent Finch. You don’t need to keep deferring to me all the time. I don’t care what anyone else thinks.”

Root sighs. She knew this was coming from the look Shaw gave her in the armory. “It’s not what you think. I’ve spent the last two years making every key decision. I shouldered that burden because I knew no one was as motivated as I was to find you. I’m tired of always having to decide. I’m ready to follow for awhile.

For two years I trusted no one until John came and then even him I doubted sometimes. You were his friend and you know John, he’s loyal to the death. But he saw a bigger picture. But I was focused on one tree, not the forest. I distrusted every move with any goal other than finding you. Now I have you. There’s no one I trust more. If I think you’re missing something you know I’ll tell you.

Another thing I’ve learned over the last two years leading this army is ultimately, one person has to decide. Its fine to discuss things as equals when it’s just the four of us. But even then. We can end up evenly split. So someone will have to decide. I’m not willing to place my faith in anyone but you. Not John and most certainly not Harold. Everyone else has to be clear whose orders they need to follow without question. That’s you.

I always intended for it to be you. No one sacrificed more. No one proved their loyalty more. No one exhibited more courage. You’ve earned the right to decide where we go from here. Even if you set all that aside, I think you’re the most qualified person to make the decisions. You worked on the inside and you know the players the way no one else does. Your decisions will be tempered with the knowledge. That’s the edge. The best chance we have of defeating Samaritan is quite simply you.”
She smiles seductively. “Now come on. I believe I owe you a reward.” But Shaw pulls her back. “You said what I want, when I want, and how I want.” She looks at Root challengingly. “Yes, I did. I’m all yours Sameen. What’s your pleasure?”

Shaw leans in and opens her mouth slightly, finding Root’s tongue with her own and caressing gently. She can feel Root’s arousal in the hitch of her breath, the beating of her heart, and her guttural moans. Root presses her body against Shaw’s and Shaw can feel her heart pounding. The need for oxygen forces them apart and Shaw smiles.

She unbuttons Root’s blouse and slides it off her shoulders, then strips off her own shirt. She pulls Root’s mouth to her again, feeling the swell of her breasts. This time lips clash urgently and Root roams her fingers over Shaw’s chest and ass, while Shaw strokes her back. Root presses her mouth between Shaw’s breasts.

But Shaw retakes control, nibbling at Root’s neck until Root arches her face back in delight as Shaw feather lips her throat and chest, slowly roving to her breast, kissing along the border of her bra, then cupping the enclosed nipple in her mouth, sucking it through the fabric. Shaw takes her time to trail her lips over Root’s smooth, velvety skin.

Root whispers. ‘Sameen that feels soooo good’ She reaches behind and unclips her bra. Shaw pulls it down with her mouth. Root’s rouge-colored bare nipples are already hard and Shaw squeezes one and then the other between her lips.

Root leans back and flicks the hair from her face. As she does so, her breast lifts into Shaw’s mouth and Shaw kisses its sweetness, alternating light sucking with hard licks, all the while stroking Root’s back and hips. Root strokes Shaw’s silky soft hair while Shaw enjoys one breast and then the other.

Shaw straightens slowly, mouthing up Root’s chest, then pausing to plant feather kisses on her neck, first one side, then the other, and Root sighs in pleasure. Suddenly their mouths press together hotly, hands roaming over bodies with increasing urgency.

Shaw draws a breath then bends down to Root’s firm, small breasts, lingering over one, and then moving to the other and back again. She looks up at Root through long dark lashes. ‘I’m going to undress you now Root’

She steps back and kneels to pull Root’s pants down slowly over thighs, pausing only to kiss the inside of one and then the other. Shaw can scarcely breathe, Root’s sex outlined by her tight black panties, her wetness blatantly obvious.

She stands up and slips out of the rest of her clothes, but bends down again to run her hands up Root’s slim calves and the back of her legs and whispers. ‘-turn around Root’ She pushes Root gently against the table. Root’s black panties frame her toned ass. Shaw slips her fingers under the thin waistband and pulls them downwards veeery slowly. There’s an imperceptible pause as they cling to Root’s dripping center. Shaw leaves them half on and trails her palms over Root’s ass, kneading slightly, spreading her just enough to savor a glimpse of her cleft’s darkness. Root lifts one ankle and then the other as Shaw finishes removing her underwear.

Shaw marvels at Root’s nakedness and whispers. ‘bend down’ Root reaches her arms in front of her and leans over the table. The back of her thighs are taut and her ass’ smooth skin glows ivory. Shaw
presses her lips into one side, and then the other, feeling the heat emanating from her core. Then she kneels down, spreading Root’s legs slightly apart, pressing inwards to kiss her sex, thrusting her tongue into Root’s wetness, inhaling her scent, clean and sweet.

Root groans when Shaw licks and kisses her from behind, her face buried in Root’s ass, almost smothered by Root’s essence. Shaw draws back and slowly presses her fingers into Root’s hot slit until she’s deep inside, thrusting deeper and faster as Root’s breathing becomes shallower and more labored.

Shaw watches Root’s anus clench and contract as each wave of pleasure crashes into her willing consciousness. Still fingering her, Shaw kneels close and leans forward, at a perfect angle to kiss and lick. She starts rimming Root and Root inhales sharply. ‘fuckyes’

Shaw’s face is drenched with Root’s wetness as she runs her tongue up and down Root’s cleft. Suddenly she feels Root’s hand on the back of her head as she tries to pull Shaw in deeper. Shaw pulls back teasingly and pants. ‘you’re so wet’ This triggers a primal scream from Root. ‘don’tfuckingstop!’

Root’s bucking and rocking with Shaw’s every movement and cries out. ‘Ahhh - ahhhhh – ahhhhhhhhhh’ Reaching up, Shaw runs a finger up and down Root’s ass and then presses against her anus for a second before thrusting it into her slippery ring. At first she feels the instinctive resistance, then Root relaxes and she’s inside pressing into the tight muscle.

Root’s panting now, but she spreads even wider, lifting one leg up on the table bench. Shaw’s fingers are thrusting with abandon, and Root groans loudly, her hair framing her face, as she thrusts back hard against Shaw. As Root’s orgasm rushes at her, Shaw pushes inward as far as her knuckle, feeling Root’s hot tightness clench around her finger, fighting for mastery.

At the same moment, Root shouts out, her body rigid with excitement as she approaches her climax, oblivious to all but the probing abandon of her ass’s tingling nerve endings and her own tumultuous approaching orgasm. Shaw can tell she’s on the brink and increases the pressure on her clit and, at the same time, pushes a second finger firmly into her ass.

Root stifles a scream and, bucking wildly against Shaw’s fingers deep inside, raises herself on tiptoe as her body writhes and arches, her orgasm overwhelming her. Shaw rides it out with her, gentling until Root can move again. She slides out gently, hugging Root close as Root murmurs, “Hmmm… remind me to let you have your way more often.”

Shaw smiles at her knowingly. “We’re nowhere near done lover. Catch your breath on the bed and wait for me. On your back.”

Shaw washes up and gets some water for both of them. Root gulps her down, her eyes shining with anticipation. She spreads her legs slightly so Shaw can glimpse the damp excitement between her legs.

Shaw kneels down swiftly and pushes Root’s legs apart, thrusting her tongue into Root’s slick slit, and then up and down her lips. Shaw’s coaxing a fire inside Root as she sucks and licks Root’s clit.

Then Shaw moves to her ass…again. Root loves ass play and Shaw does too, but even more Shaw loves Root’s ass. Root can’t resist Shaw’s tongue as it roams between her legs, splayed wide, and she groans with delight. Shaw knows how to arouse her, relax her, and rim her before placing the tip of her finger against her ring and pressing inward.

Shaw moves her tongue back to Root’s clit, her finger thrusting in and out of Root’s ass, and Root
feels a primal lust rise within her. She pulls her legs back to heighten the exquisite pleasure that’s beginning to pulse and weave through her body, every nerve ending in her ass singing with delight, her clit swollen and molten with excitement. She can feel her climax approaching and clenches her ass hard, the better to trap and entwine Shaw’s bewitching invader.

Shaw responds by thrusting her tongue deeper into Root’s sex, using her other hand to bring Root forcefully to a climax. Root’s body is electric. For a moment she tenses wondering if she can ride the crashing surf of pleasure pounding against her brain for any longer. Then she gives in, lifts her hips off the bed, thrusts her sex into Shaw’s face, and her ass against Shaw’s finger.

‘Sameeeeennnn’ she shouts. Frozen in ecstasy, frozen in time. Root’s muscles give way and Shaw gently cups Root’s back as Root falls onto the bed.

Shaw climbs up beside her and captures Root’s lips, her own coated with Root’s arousal, and Root moans, licking her taste off Shaw’s tongue, exploring and tugging and biting until they’re both breathless. Root must have drifted off because she wakes to find Shaw coming out of the bathroom, toweling her hair.

“Hey sweetie. I’m sorry I fell asleep. You wore me out.” Shaw smiles at her affectionately. “I’ll take it as a complement then. Now go shower because we’re going to fuck.” Root doesn’t have to be told twice. She takes a quick shower. Shaw’s waiting, Root’s favorite strap-on ready.

It’s tailor made. The black straps shine in the glow of the light spilling out from the bathroom, highlighting the delicate, tooled embossed work on every piece. The strap-on fits into both of them. Root knows it’s going to be a rough ride since Shaw’s pussy grips the cock as she rides Root. She feels a fluttering in her stomach.

Shaw finishes tightening the small silver buckles and stands facing Root. Her smoky nipples are already hard and Root can see her arousal leaking around the cock. Root walks over to her and places gentle bites on her neck and shoulders, while she strokes it. She can feel Shaw tensing as it moves inside her and can barely contain her excitement. Shaw has staying power like no one else.

Shaw pushes her gently to her knees and Root takes the cock into her mouth, licking languorously, deep throating until her lips touch Shaw’s clit. Shaw moans hungrily. Root uses her hands and her mouth, rocking the cock smoothly inside Shaw until Shaw comes with a throaty cry. She pulls Root up and captures her mouth in a searing attack.

When she pulls back, Root’s eyes are blown wide with desire, mirroring the hunger in Shaw’s. “How do you want me Sameen?”

"On the bed. On your hands and knees. Your head down. Your ass up."

Root climbs onto the soft mattress and pulls a pillow over. She can feel Shaw’s eyes drinking in her splayed legs and exposed ass. "Fuck me, Sameen. Hard." Once Root’s sure her message has been received, she leans down into the white softness and feels the first hard movement of the cock against her soft lips. She wants Shaw to revel in whatever fantasy crosses her mind. But Shaw’s only fantasy is Root. She makes them all come true.

A moment later, Shaw’s inside her, pushing deep, leaning forward until Root can feel her warm breath on her neck. Slowly at first, then with increased urgency, Shaw begins to fuck her. She knows exactly how to thrust and buck into Root, pleasuring herself with each thrust. Root’s trying to hold out, but her arousal’s mounting quickly.

She reaches back and plays with her clit, losing track of time in the hot glow of lust. Shaw’s
dominating her and she can’t help responding. She glances back briefly and she’s never seen a more beautiful sight. Shaw wanton and aroused, fucking her without restraint.

At this precise moment she feels Shaw’s thumb circle her anus. The tingling primal pleasure forces a cry from Root a moment later when Shaw pushes her thumb deep inside her ring as she continues her rhythmic thrusts. ‘YesSameenyes’ Root find herself spreading her ass wider as she makes herself come to excite Shaw with the view of her anal penetration.

Almost immediately Shaw starts to lift Root’s ass as she continues to drive into her, faster and harder, so Root has to straighten her legs until she’s almost lifted off the bed. The waves of exultant release are crashing around Root. Above her heart's pounding in her ears she can hear Shaw groaning as she approaches her orgasm. Root knows the sight of Shaw’s thumb in her puckered ass, her taut flanks, and the slippery cock in her pussy combine to overwhelm Shaw’s senses.

Shaw shouts, ‘Root!’ and thrusts harder and harder. Root’s sex soaks as she grinds her fingers against her clit and shouts out ‘harder!’ At the same moment her senses explode as she comes in a tumultuous rush forcing her against Shaw, driving the cock deep into her.

Shaw shouts in abandonment, her body shaking with pleasure, impaled on the cock. Her thumb drives into Root and then withdraws slowly as she crumples against Root’s back and Root sprawls beneath her panting body. They stay motionless for a few minutes recovering and then Shaw stirs and slips them both out gently.

She cuddles into Root’s body kissing the skin under her lips softly, rubbing Root’s back soothingly. Shaw’s always extra affectionate after hard fucking and she likes to be held and petted. It’s one of the things that surprised Root after the first couple of times they slept together. She also likes to hold Root and kiss her softly. It always makes Root feel warm inside.

“Hey Sameen?” Shaw hums in question. “Whatever happens tomorrow…” But Shaw shushes her softly. “We’ll be fine.”

“But Sameen…”

“I know you love me Root and you should know by now you mean everything to me. Besides, whatever happens tomorrow will happen to both of us, so no one’s going to be left behind to wonder about anything. We’ll win, lose, live, or die together.

Now come on, spoon me. I don’t want to find out whether I’m still plagued by nightmares.” Shaw shifts so Root’s behind her and Root drapes herself over Shaw’s body, inhaling deeply, always intoxicated by Shaw’s scent. Shaw pulls her closer and kisses Root’s arms as they hold her. “Root.” Root nuzzles her neck to let her know she’s listening. “I love you too.” Root smiles. “I know Sameen. I know.”
Black Hawk

Chapter Summary

Root leans back against the wall and Shaw leans into her, wrapping her arms around Root’s neck. “We always have amazing sex, but I’d put this one in the top 10,” she laughs.

Chapter Notes

Okay mostly sex. Plot in the middle. More plot tomorrow.

Root wakes the next day in her absolute favorite way. She opens her eyes and looks down to get a glimpse of Shaw’s head as she goes beneath the sheets and gives Root a long, hot, and deep lick. She doesn’t wait for permission and submerges her skillful tongue so deep into Root that she can’t talk, and makes only happy, wet sounds as she feasts. Root moans when she feels Shaw rolling her tongue, twisting and turning, hitting every spot she knows drives Root crazy.

It only takes a minute and Root feels her orgasm building. She tangles her hand in Shaw’s hair and pulls her even tighter against her sex. ‘yes!righttheresameen’ It feels so fucking good and Root is using her strong calves to lift herself off the bed so Shaw can get deeper and maybe if she’s lucky… When she feels Shaw’s finger spreading her wetness around her rim, Root knows she is definitely getting lucky.

On her next thrust into Root, Shaw slips her finger inside her ass to her first knuckle and begins pumping in rhythm with her tongue on her sex, ‘ahhlyes!’ and with her free hand teases Root’s clit, close but not actually giving Root what she needs where she needs it. ‘sameenpleaseImbeggingyou’ If Shaw weren’t otherwise occupied she’d smirk. However, she doubts Root would appreciate her pulling away to flash a smug smile.

So she relents, finally stroking Root’s clit. But before Root can register the change, Shaw’s already traded her fingers for her mouth and plunges deep inside Root hitting her g-spot unerringly while sucking on Root’s clit and fucking her ass. As far as Shaw’s concerned, Root belongs right here. Writhing and coming undone beneath her, breaking herself wide open for Shaw.

Root’s orgasm’s an avalanche and she can’t help the scream that accompanies it. ‘fuckyes!’ Shaw rides it out with her, pulling out gently as she feels Root’s muscles unclenching. She climbs Root’s body and captures her lips in a sloppy kiss. Root’s still gasping so she can’t really participate, just gasping hot breaths into Shaw’s mouth. Shaw stays sprawled on top of her and Root finally recovers, pulling on Shaw’s chin with her fingers until she can reach her mouth.

She licks and nips and tugs and tastes until they’re both breathless again. “Good morning to you too sweetie.” Now Shaw does grin smugly. “I know you always wake up horny the night after a hard fuck,” she teases. Root laughs. “I always wake up horny Sameen. The problem is you usually wake up hungry, which means you’re grumpy until I feed you, which means no morning sex for me,” she pouts. Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head, “oh yeah, you’re so deprived. Depraved
is more like it.” Root swats her ass. She yelps. “Hey, that stung!” Root just shrugs, laughing, and
dumps her onto the bed as she gets up to go to the bathroom.

“Come on, let’s shower and eat. We have to meet the boys in an hour.”

Shaw scowls all the way to the shower until Root wipes it off her face with an orgasm. Shaw knows
Root, but Root knows her just as well. Root on her knees in the shower licking and thrusting into
Shaw until she comes is Shaw’s favorite way to wake up. They finally get it together and head to
breakfast.

The mood in the subway is somber. Reese updates Finch on the plan and Finch is working on
finding the blueprints in the CIA mainframe. John’s sketch from his one visit, though rough, is still
better than nothing and at least gives them some idea of where to infiltrate. The site was formerly a
high school football stadium. The town’s a ghost town now so there’s little cover. They’re going to
have to go in stealthy and hot.

“Security at this site, while not lax, is bare bones. It’s supposed to be a holding station as they’re
moving detainees nationally or internationally. But it stopped being a way station a long time ago.
Now it’s a black hole where they dump prisoners with no current value but potential future worth.
And when I say hole I actually mean a hole in the ground. It’s not exactly white torture, but only by
degrees. We have to be prepared for Control to be dead weight. We may even have to sedate her so
she won’t fight us.” John looks around to make sure they’re all on the same page.

Shaw’s thinking about logistics. “Okay, so we’ll take one of the hummers to have room for medical
equipment as well as an ability to restrain her should it be necessary. I’m going to include
Blackwell. He’s a sure thing at a mile out. How many other fighters should we take with us?”

Grice and John look at each other. “Four more, not including Blackwell. That way we can split into
four teams of two.” Shaw agrees, but Root has a suggestion. “I think we should err on the side of
cautious and take two hummers. We’re already at nine and with Control that will be ten. We need
heavy ordnance and a way to restrain or treat her medically. It might be a tight fit…” She stops
midsentence and then looks at Reese. “Or we can take the helicopter.”

Shaw looks at Root and then Reese. “We have a helicopter?!” She exclaims in glee. Root smiles.
“Yes. Actually we have two. Black Hawks. It might be safer to get Control out and blow the site.
They’re not going to have anything that can take out the Black Hawk and it gives us extra power
with the machine guns and rockets.”
Shaw thinks about it. “Is it modified for stealth?” she asks John. He nods affirmatively. “We already know we’re going to have to go in hot. So two more minutes of silence isn’t going to change anything.” But John’s concerned. “The helicopters are one of our best kept secrets. It may make a difference down the road. Losing one will also be a big blow.”

Shaw considers their options. There are pros and cons to either approach. But using the helicopter will also minimize the time and number of cameras they’ll need to avoid. “Helicopter it is. John read in the two pilots we’ll need. Also, Root’s right. If at all possible, we’re blowing the site to bits. Less chance we leave anything behind that may lead back to us.

Grice, we’re going to need M4 or AR-15 assault rifles with suppressors, as well as a healthy amount of flash bangs.” One of the benefits of the M4 is its relative silence and minimal recoil. “I want everyone wearing body armor, including the pilots. Test all the communications equipment. Check with the boys John and see if anyone here has been a combat medic or surgeon. If not, then we’re bringing Derrick.”

Shaw looks around but they’ve pretty much covered everything. “Okay let’s meet up at the armory at 2200.” The head their separate ways and leave Finch still searching for blueprints to the facility.

Shaw decides to check out the body armor stored in the armory. As she opens the door, before she can register what’s happening, someone grabs her from behind and shoves her into the wall. In a matter of seconds her body’s pressed between the wall and a warm firm body. Her favorite warm firm body. She knew it was Root from the minute she walked into the armory. No one else smells like Root and Shaw thrives on that scent. Although she wasn’t expecting the abrupt welcome.

Root’s breath is skimming her shoulder, and very little is separating Shaw from the hard bulge she can feel in Root’s pants. She gets wet just from the thought of what Root’s going to do with her very willing body.

Root impatiently pulls Shaw’s pants down and slides her hand between Shaw’s legs. ‘Do you know how fucking hot it gets me when you take charge?’ Shaw’s pretty sure it’s a rhetorical question but she quips cheekily. ‘Why don’t you show me?’

‘Oh baby I intend to’ Root rips Shaw’s panties off her body and the sound causes a flood between Shaw’s legs. A second later she hears a zipper and feels the head of the hard cock sliding up and down her soaked pussy. ‘Is this what you want?’ Root whispers in Shaw’s ear.

‘Yes’

‘Say it’

‘Fuck me Root, please fuck me’

Before the last word is out of her mouth, Root pushes up and into her, driving Shaw’s body hard into the wall. ‘Oh, yes’ she shudders.

With one quick movement, Root swings them both around, putting her hand on Shaw’s back to bend her over the half door leading to the automatic weapons. Shaw’s hands are braced against the door frame as Root kicks her legs apart, grips her hips, and holds her in place as she slams into her. She’s
fucking Shaw to the beat of the music coming from outside.

Root runs her hand under Shaw’s shirt, up to her spine, coming to rest on her shoulder, which Root uses to pull Shaw back onto her. Taking a handful of Shaw’s hair, she pulls her upright, turning her and forcing her back against the partition. She kisses her roughly, her tongue sliding into Shaw’s mouth, teasing her, slipping it out again before hers can return the dance. With one hand she holds Shaw’s jaw, bringing her mouth down and biting her lower lip.

As she does, her other hand is bringing Shaw’s leg around her waist. Shaw puts her arms up to get a hold on the top of the partition, supporting some of her weight herself as Root hooks her other leg around her. Root’s cock slams into her waiting pussy once again, drilling into her as Root continues biting at her lips.

Root yanks Shaw’s top downward, releasing her breasts. She watches them spring sharply with her thrusting, then leans in to take a hard nipple into her mouth. She bites down hard, causing Shaw to cry out and, at the same time, grind against her.

Shaw knows what she wants. ‘Harder!’ Whether she means the biting or thrusting, she’s not sure. Root turns Shaw’s head to the side, running her tongue up her neck and stopping with her lips against Shaw’s ear, her hot breath raspy. ‘Sweetie, I could bruise this tight body of yours all day’

Without slipping out of her, Root sits back on the bench behind her, bringing Shaw down hard on her cock. She folds her arms behind Shaw’s back, keeping them pinned there with one of her hands. Shaw rides her like that, with only her legs as leverage. With her free hand Root squeezes her breasts, sucking and biting her nipples.

She brings her hand to Shaw’s mouth, sliding her thumb between Shaw’s parted lips. Sucking it into her mouth without hesitating, Shaw rolls her tongue over it with as much enthusiasm as she would have if it were Root’s sex in her mouth. Shaw moans, sucking Root’s finger and riding her, her arms still trapped behind her back. ‘that feels so good sameen…the way you ride me’ Shaw realizes Root’s using a feeldoe, so she can feel every thrust inside her. Everything started so fast she didn’t notice.

‘That’s it Sam ride me’ Root slides her thumb out of Shaw’s mouth and uses the hand to plant a sharp slap on Shaw’s ass. When Shaw moans louder, she smacks it again. ‘Fuck, yes again!’ Root lets Shaw’s arms go. ‘Hands behind your head Sameen’

Shaw complies, lacing her fingers together behind her head as if she were under arrest, her breasts on display, shoved forward, within inches of Root’s face, swaying to the rhythm she’s working on Root’s cock. Root takes advantage of the position, biting harshly enough to leave bruises, and then running her tongue up Shaw’s cleavage. ‘Ride me harder Sameen’

Shaw does, crying out as the cock reaches as far as it can go. With both hands free, Root alternates slapping Shaw’s ass and thighs. The sound flashes off the walls. Root stands, slamming Shaw back against the door. Shaw throws her arms around Root’s neck and rides out the slight pain as her weight causes her to become impaled on the cock.

Root asks her if she wants to stop. ‘don’t you fucking dare stop’

‘you’ll have to beg for me Sameen’

‘pleaseRootpleasedontstopfuckImsoclose!’
Getting a good handful of hair, Root yanks Shaw’s head to the side and begins biting her neck. She has Shaw pinned between her and the door so tightly there’s no room for Shaw to move. Shaw’s at her mercy. She takes Shaw’s ass in her hands, squeezing it hard as the cock continues digging into her.

‘Ohfuckohfuck!’

Root smothers Shaw’s mouth with hers, thrusting her tongue inside and muffling Shaw’s screams. Shaw feels her orgasm winding up inside her, spiraling out of control until it bursts and spreads in convulsing ripples throughout her body. She shakes and cries out as Root continues her assault, driving the last of Shaw’s orgasm through her.

Shaw can feel Root’s also on the edge. A second later Root throws her head back, growling low in her throat as her orgasm ravishes her body. Her head falls on Shaw’s shoulder as she rests against her for a moment. When they both can breathe again, Root lets Shaw down and off and zips herself up while Shaw puts on her pants and arranges her shirt.

Root leans back against the wall and Shaw leans into her, wrapping her arms around Root’s neck. “We always have amazing sex, but I’d put this one in the top 10,” she laughs. Root runs her fingers up and down her back soothingly. “I was afraid it might’ve gotten too rough.” Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “You know I wouldn’t hesitate to safe word if you were hurting me in any way I didn’t like.

I’m just not sure I can walk from here to our bedroom just yet.” Root winces. “At least you’re no longer riding a cock.” They both laugh. After a few minutes they gather their strength and walk out together. It doesn’t surprise them when some of the people near the armory look away smirking. It’s doesn’t bother them one bit either. Not one bit.
Root looks at them thoughtfully. “I have a feeling Control might be willing to share once she recuperates a bit.” She smiles wickedly. “She’s afraid of me too.”

They meet at the armory as agreed and suit up in body armor. In addition to Grice and Blackwell, Reese selected Trent, Dani, Cal, and Collier. They’re the team that rescued Shaw and he’s confident of their ability to work together effectively. It turns out Derrick, the trauma surgeon that treated Shaw, was a combat medic and he volunteers to accompany them. The pilots are two women, Shane and Carmen, Shaw’s never met before, but they greet Root warmly.

Shane’s messy hair and androgynous, sultry looks catch Shaw’s eye. She’s tall, although not as tall as Root, and all skin and bones like Root, but her style’s more disheveled edgy. She’s wearing a loose, white v-neck t-shirt, black jeans and a leather jacket. The sheeriness of her t-shirt reveals small, perky breasts and it’s obvious she’s not wearing a bra. She has a tattoo of a cross on her left wrist and her soft washed-out green eyes flash with keen intelligence. She stares at Shaw intensely, almost hypnotically, like she can see into Shaw’s soul. She flashes Shaw a knowing smile and introduces herself in a deep husky-smooth voice. “Hi. I’m Shane.” She extends her hand, but Root steps in between them before Shaw reacts, giving Shane a hard stare. The look clearly says, ‘Shaw’s mine.’ Shane smirks while Shaw scowls at both of them.

Shane and Carmen are accompanied by the crew chief, Agatha. She has a narrow, oblong face with angular cheekbones and a pointed chin. Her slit-like eyes are a clouded hazel, and her thinly plucked eyebrows are shaped into a deceivingly perfect arch that follows the slight curve of her eye. A long nose hooks over continually pursed lips, which are painted a bright red in an unsuccessful effort to mask their natural thinness. Bleached blonde hair, made thin from too many years of hair dye, hangs straight down into an angular cut at her jaw. The sharp features of Agatha's face are merely a reflection of her entire body structure, and everything—from her skeletal arms to her paper-thin waist —screams of unnatural skinniness. She walks in long strides, her shoulders back and face held forward, wearing combat boots and camouflage. Shaw takes an instant dislike to her although she can’t pinpoint the exact reason why.

Shaw reviews the mission plan. Blackwell left earlier in one of the jeeps and will set-up a mile out covering their backs. They’re landing just outside the main entry point. Trent, Dani, Cal, and Collier will comprise the main entry team, hopefully drawing the bulk of the guards to the front. Reese and Grice will circle around the back, while Shaw and Root approach from the side. Derrick will stay in the chopper with the pilots unless they call for him and operate the machine gun with Agatha if necessary.

As the twin engines of the Black Hawk roar, the powerful blades sweep through the air creating a cloud of dust and dirt. Within minutes, Shane has the chopper rising thousands of feet in the air and racing at 150 miles per hour over the landscape towards Ohio. The helicopter is painted an infrared
suppressant gray and it’s modified to reduce its acoustic signature, muffling the sound. No one at the black site will hear them until they’re right on top of the compound.

As the chopper approaches the site, everyone tenses, wired tight as the adrenaline starts pumping. They all know a wrong move can end someone’s life abruptly. The damp hot air rushes by as the slowly revolving rotors claw at the eddies in their wake before coming to a gradual halt as they land. The team exits quickly, dropping low to the ground to present smaller targets, merging with the shadows.

The main entry team approaches and quickly discards the idea of breaching the entrance. It’s a concrete filled steal blast door. Trent radios Shaw. “Red Tiger to Indigo 5 Alpha.” Shaw responds quickly and succinctly. “Go.”

“Blast door at main entry.”

Shaw thinks quickly. There’s no way they can penetrate a blast door, especially not quickly and their time for a surprise attack is quickly winding down. “Indigo 5 Alpha to Crimson 6.” Grice comes on immediately. “Go.”

“Can you locate exterior concrete wall?” Grice comes back around the front with Reese and moves beyond the range expected for the reinforced concrete supporting the blast door. “Affirmative.”

“Use 7.5 pounds C4. Confirm breach.”

Grice quickly places the preassembled C4 blocks in a circular pattern, while the rest of the entry team takes cover behind a nearby truck. Grice connects the detonator and takes cover. He triggers the blast and the ensuing explosion sends concrete pieces, dirt, and debris flying.

The team flows through the hole in the wall fluidly and quickly, tossing flash bangs as Grice confirms the breach. The room is obviously some type of lounge with a television, a sofa and reclining chairs, and a kitchenette with a fridge and microwave. There are no beds per se, but one guy had been lying on the sofa when the wall blew in and landed on him, opening his scalp. Others are frozen where they sat or stood, and others are on the floor where they were knocked by the blast.

Five bolt to a room on the left, but only two appear to be armed. Dani stitches them with a controlled burst from her M4 before they have a chance to reach their weapons and the others hit the carpet, cringing, probably hoping they’d be spared.

Meanwhile Shaw and Root approach the side door. Shaw’s M4 is fitted with a grenade launcher and it feels clammy and unusually heavy in her hands as she raises it to her shoulder. She raises her right arm, balancing the weapon with her left, then lowers her arm and in the same motion places her finger around the trigger. She looks at Root and nods once.

The grenade demolishes the door and the loud varoom sound momentarily dulls their hearing. Root steps through smoothly. Unlike the rest of the team, she refuses to carry an assault rifle and is instead wielding her P229R and S&W 3914. They can hear the gun fire towards their left at the main entry. They turn right and start clearing rooms.

As they walk through the building they look for likely hiding places, considering their surroundings, looking for ways to move to other vantage points, while still being concealed to give them a better shot at seeing before being seen.

Shaw enters the first room and button hooks to the right along the same wall. Root enters immediately behind her, turning to the left. They quickly aim at their nearest corners checking for
threats. Root’s neurotic about checking the ceiling having been ambushed more than once. The room’s clearly used for interrogations. There’s one table with handcuffs welded in place and chairs on either side. Root spots a camera in the corner of the ceiling, which means there has to be a monitor somewhere and a good possibility they’re being watched.

Shaw ducks her head into the hallway swiftly and ducks back immediately. There are no immediate threats and they exit back to back covering both ends of the hallway. It’s quiet. Too quiet and Shaw senses danger a moment before an agent swings out from behind an open door and fires. Root double taps him before he gets off a second shot, but in the instant after she fires she feels a bullet strike her shoulder, punching a hole through her flesh, ripping a ragged wound channel through her muscle, and exploding out the back, creating what she knows will be a large, messy, raggedy exit wound.

She takes a deep breath knowing the pain’s about to jackhammer into her. She bites her lip and growls. Shaw turns in time to see the blood splatter exploding out the exit wound. “Root!” She’s at Root’s side in an instant, cushioning her fall. The bullet entered on the outside edge, just outside the range of her vest. Shaw quickly tears her shirt and bandages the wound as best she can, stemming the blood flow. Shaw thought she was prepared for the possibility Root would get hurt, but she was wrong. Momentary panic swamps her and she feels like she's drowning.

Root pushes to her feet, snapping Shaw out of her fear induced trance. Luckily the bullet didn’t hit bone or any vital arteries. “Do you always have to lead with your shoulder?” Shaw barks. Root grimaces. “You say the sweetest things.” Shaw rolls her eyes and scowls. Root holds her left arm tight to her stomach and picks up her P229 with her right. Shaw shoves the S&W into her waistband. “Stay behind me Root.”

They round the next corner and Shaw almost sprays Reese and Grice with a burst from her M4. “Grice get Root back to the chopper and have Derrick tend her wound.”

Root looks at Shaw fiercely. “I’m not fucking leaving you Sameen, so forget it. We agreed.” Shaw makes an effort to keep her anger in check. “Root, you’re wounded…” But Root cuts her off again, voice deadly calm. “No.” Shaw doesn’t try to persuade her any further and the four of them continue the search.

Shaw leads with Grice behind her and Reese brings up the rear, sheltering Root between them as much as possible. They hear the gun fire petering out and the rest of the team soon finds them. Trent reports to Shaw. “There were 11 of them. We took them out and conducted a sweep. There’s no one else here.”

Shaw knows that doesn’t mean they should take their time. Even if someone didn’t call for help, there’s a prearranged check-in time for the black sites to report. When they don’t check in as scheduled someone will come looking sooner rather than later. “Cal and Collier cover the entry. Trent, take Dani and cover the side door Root and I blasted through. We don’t want to get cut off if reinforcements arrive.”

Reese points toward a staircase leading down. “Shaw, she’s probably down there.” Shaw agrees and they approach cautiously. If someone’s down below they have the advantage. Reese takes the lead before Shaw can stop him and Grice steps in front of Shaw and Root. A few seconds later Reese calls up, his voice low and gravely as usual. “All clear.”

The four of them spread out in the basement. Control’s chained to the ceiling, naked, evidence of torture undeniably etched on her body. It looks like she’s lost at least 50 pounds. None of them shed any tears. It’s nothing worse than Control’s done herself or had done on her orders. Root grins. “Well, look on the bright side bitch. You can cancel your membership with Weight Watchers.”
Control looks at them dully, obviously too weak to respond. Reese looks around, but there’s nothing they can cover her with. Grice lowers her to the ground, but they have to shoot the shackles off since the key’s nowhere visible. A few bits of shrapnel imbed themselves into Control’s skin, but she doesn’t make a sound. Compared to what she’s been through, it probably doesn’t even register. Grice picks her up in a fireman’s carry and they head back to the chopper. Once airborne they fire a missile and the compound blows sky high.

Control’s being tended to in the infirmary by Derrick. Her wounds are infected and she’s running a high fever. She’s malnourished and dehydrated. When Derrick examined her in the chopper he told them there were signs of sexual assault. Control may not deserve any compassion, but they all have lines they wouldn’t cross and neither would Control. That’s one of them.

Derrick patched up Root in the chopper and she’s lying down in their bedroom while Shaw gets them dinner. Shane and Carmen are in the mess tent and Carmen asks about Root. “She’s fine. She’s taken more bullets then either of us can remember.” While Shaw’s talking to Carmen, Shane’s staring at Shaw. Shaw can feel Shane’s eyes on the back of her head and snaps without turning around. “Stop being creepy Shane. You really don’t want to piss me off.” Carmen glares at Shane and Shane refocuses on her meal.

While Shaw’s gone Reese checks on Root.

“There’s one thing I can’t figure John. Why torture her? What could Control possibly know that Samaritan or Greer would want so badly? It makes even less sense it was the government.” Reese is not one for speculation, so he just gives a slight shrug. Root looks at him thoughtfully. “I have a feeling Control might be willing to share once she recuperates a bit.” She smiles wickedly. “She’s afraid of me too.”
Limits

Chapter Summary

“Did you check on Control?” Shaw’s lips press together in a slight grimace, a pensive look on her face. “I never thought I’d feel any kind of compassion for that woman.”

Chapter Notes

Just a short chapter with a little plot and a little sex to get back into the groove.

NOTE:Mentions of rape. Not graphic.

I'm not sure what Control knows that she wouldn't reveal under torture and that Samaritan or the government or both want so desperately. It must be related to national security because Control's a fanatical patriot. But what? Please share any ideas, I'd really appreciate it. Oh, & what the hell's Control's name? Do we know? Do I make one up?

Thanks for your patience through the not so brief hiatus! Feed the author!

Shaw stands in the doorway for a minute. Root’s fighting with a pillow, trying to get comfortable while protecting her shoulder. She’s biting her lower lip and frowning, looking at the pillow like it’s deliberately trying to thwart her efforts. Shaw’s always fascinated by the dichotomy of Root’s personality. She’s fierce and ruthless, yet silly and kind. But no matter her mood, Shaw can’t help her visceral reaction to the sight of Root. She wants to fuck her and protect her in equal measure.

“You going to watch me all night sweetie?” Shaw rolls her eyes; sometimes she forgets how attuned they are to each other’s presence. “No, just wanted to make sure I wasn’t destined to suffer the fate of your pillow.” Root laughs and her face lights up; Shaw shakes her head and sets dinner on the table.

“I’m not bringing you dinner in bed so get up.” Root pouts but gets up with difficulty. Shaw watches her shrewdly. “Maybe next time you won’t lead with your shoulder.”

“It’s not like I planned it Sameen.” Shaw shrugs, still not comfortable with the feelings that swamped her when Root got shot.

Root joins her at the table and Shaw digs into her dinner. Her shoulders slump and she shoves food into her mouth without her usual pleasure. Root knows something must’ve annoyed her, but wisely waits until they’ve finished eating to find out what’s bugging her in a roundabout way. Shaw’s always more communicative when she’s not questioned about her feelings.

“So how’s your friend Liza?”

“I didn’t see her, but we need to talk about the pasta. I know it’s hard to make al dente linguine for 1,000 people, but these noodles feel like someone’s already chewed them.” Root can’t help the snort
of laughter, but quickly regains her composure when Shaw glares at her. “It’s important. Bad food demoralizes the troops.” Root nods her head in agreement, not trusting herself to speak without laughing at Shaw’s indignant tone.

“But you know who I did see? Shane and Carmen.” Root smiles mildly, interested but not inquisitive. “Shane’s a weirdo, you know that right? You should keep an eye on her. Actually, no, never mind. If I catch her staring at you the way she just stared at me, I’d have to hurt her.” Now Root’s interest is piqued. She’s jealous and possessive and makes no apologies. It’s not rooted in any insecurity Shaw will hurt her or leave her for someone else, but rather in indignation someone would dare ignore a simple truth. Shaw belongs to her.

“Oh, how’s that?”

“I could feel her eyes on the back of my head. I told her to stop creeping me out, but when I turned she had this knowing look on her face like the cat that ate the canary. Like my words said one thing but she knew differently. Fucking annoying. I wanted to punch the look off her face.” Shaw’s not paying any attention to the effect her words are having on her lover. “Next time we use a different pilot.” Root nods in agreement but she’s filing away the incident to deal with at the next possible opportunity.

“Did you check on Control?” Shaw’s lips press together in a slight grimace, a pensive look on her face. “I never thought I’d feel any kind of compassion for that woman. Not because of the physical torture, what comes around goes around, but the sexual assault. Derrick says it looks like it happened more than once over a long period of time. Her cervix is bruised, her labia show signs of healed tearing, and she has anal lesions.”

Root sighs. They can’t ignore Control’s rape. She needs more than treatment for her medical injuries. “I’m sure in over the 1,000 people here, someone’s experienced with rape counseling. I’ll have Daniel check the database.

She has a daughter, Julia. We should check what happened to her after Control disappeared. It may comfort her to know she’s okay or she may want her brought here.” Shaw raises her eyebrows not at all sure bringing a child here is a good idea. “Root, this is hardly the place for a child.”

“No, but it may be better than where she is now. She might be safer here than in an abusive foster home believe me.” Root never talks about her experiences in foster care. Shaw doesn’t push, but she can tell by the faraway look in her eyes Root’s reliving some experience. “I was chained to a radiator once. Beaten. Two days without food or water.”

Shaw straddles the table bench where they’re sitting and pulls Root into her, wrapping her arms around her gently, and tucking Root’s face into her neck. After a minute Root shudders and pulls away. “This is not about me. It may help Control’s recovery to have her daughter near or at least be reassured she’s okay. We’ll let Control decide when the time comes.”

“You want to shower?”

“Absolutely, but I’ll need help,” Root smiles coyly, “since I’m wounded.” But Shaw’s way ahead of
her, grinning slyly. “Why do you think I asked?”

The bathroom’s clouded with steam and Root’s frustrated. The only action she’s gotten so far is an actual bath! She’s strung out, her clit aching for attention. Instead, Shaw washes her hair. She knows Shaw’s playing with her, waiting for Root to beg, or at least ask really really nicely. But Root prides herself on her iron will. She will not plead when she knows Shaw wants to fuck her as much as Root wants to be fucked. Until Shaw’s ass ‘accidentally’ brushes against her aching pussy. “Sameen, please.”

Shaw smiles and raises her eyes over Root’s body. “Turn around.” Root turns slowly, trying to hide her desperate arousal, and leans her head on her right arm, her left tucked into her body in Shaw’s make-shift sling, plastic dressing protecting her bullet wound.

Soapy hands caress her back and shoulders until strong thumbs start working her tight muscles along her spine, softly and then harder, finding all her trigger points, the deep pressure relaxing her muscles, but doing nothing for her throbbing pussy. She moans partly in pleasure, but mostly with hunger for Shaw.

Bit by bit Shaw moves her hands lower, slowly massaging her sore muscles, until she’s at the small of Root’s back. “Lower Sameen, please…” Shaw hesitates and Root fears she’ll combust. “Please, keep going…”

Shaw acquiesces slowly, cupping Root’s perfect ass. It’s made for Shaw’s hands, taut and smooth, and oh so responsive. Shaw squeezes and rubs, then wraps her hands around Root, pressing her breasts into Root’s back. Shaw feels her own liquid heat pooling. It’s always like this when Shaw touches Root, a want beyond her ability to explain.

“Root, do you want me to fuck you?” Shaw’s always direct, but dirty talk also turns Root on, so it works out perfectly.

Root turns in her arms pressing their breasts together as much as possible, her wounded arm trapped between them. Shaw kisses her possessively and feels Root’s hardened nipples. She takes one in her mouth and licks gently with just the tip of her tongue. Root moans as Shaw rubs with her fingers and sucks with her mouth, the hot water beating down on them.

Ever so slowly Shaw works her way down Root’s body to her trimmed pussy. She licks the inside of Root’s thigh, gently tickling and rubbing, but not exactly where Root wants her mouth. Root’s skin is flushed from the hot water but also with urgent arousal. Her muscles tremble under Shaw’s gentle ministrations, but she needs more, gasping and moaning, impatient, “Sameen, please…just fuck me!”

But Shaw won’t be rushed and continues her teasing, lightly brushing Root’s swollen pussy with the very tips of her fingers. Root’s just about had enough. Either Shaw gives her what she needs or she’ll take it into her own hands. She moans sharply and grits her teeth. Shaw knows Root’s in agony and it’s time to stop teasing before she tears her stitches.

She takes a moment to inhale Root’s desire and then presses her mouth against Root’s hot slit, caressing the length of her patiently. Root shudders and Shaw looks up from under thick lashes and Root’s mouth is open but she’s not making a sound. Shaw can’t resist the allure and stands up to claim her lips, Root’s arousal on her tongue. Root squeezes her ass hard and pushes down with her one good arm.

Shaw parts her folds with her fingers, massaging her wetness with her thumbs. She eases the tips of her fingers inside teasingly and sucks gently on Root’s engorged clit, reveling in the taste. “Fuck it
Shaw!” But before Root finishes her tirade, Shaw thrusts inside, deep and hard. Root twitches above her and Shaw uses her free hand to brace her against the wall. Root’s gasps morph to guttural moans.

Shaw presses her mouth tighter against Root’s heat, finally massaging Root’s clit like she means it. She feels Root’s abs clenching and circles her tongue, the inside of her lips still working her clit, fingers hitting her g-spot. Root comes hard, her hand slapping against the slippery tile, pushing against Shaw’s mouth with every wave. When her shudders finally fade, she tangles her good hand in Shaw’s hair and pulls her up. Hard. Shaw looks into stormy eyes full of heat and… “Just remember Sameen. Payback’s a bitch.”
Control

Chapter Summary

Root loses it. “Listen bitch, I may not be the monster you are anymore, but I was and believe me, to save humanity I will bring your daughter here and make you watch as I flay her alive!”

Chapter Notes

The long awaited update...

Please let me know if you think there are any holes in the plot or things that don't make sense. It wasn't easy to come up with a reason Control is alive.

Thanks for the patience! Feed the author.

“Sam, I think it’s time we checked on Control.”

“Did we have someone come talk to her?”

“Yes, there’s a psychologist, Lynn Maxwell, who’s experienced with survivors of sexual assault. She met with her this morning.”

“How do you know that?” Shaw’s curious because they haven’t been awake long and Root hasn’t left their bedroom. “I got an update while you were in the shower. I’ve been kind of lax with everything since we found you and I really need to start catching up.

Anyway, Alex is setting up cameras in the infirmary. As long as Control’s there everything will be recorded. I’m not willing to allow Control confidentiality considering the circumstances.”

“How is Alex setting up cameras inside the infirmary without Control realizing what’s up? One thing the woman isn’t is stupid.”

“She was sedated with propofol while they worked. I didn’t want anything long-acting so she’s alert enough to talk with us.”

Shaw sighs and frowns. “Okay, but breakfast first. It may not be safe for Control if I’m hungry while we question her.” Root smiles, “Of course sweetie.”

As they step into the infirmary, Root and Shaw pause to observe Control. A jagged scar runs down her face and she’s gaunt. There are no other outward signs of her trauma, although Shaw’s sure
there’s an extensive story branded onto her skin under the sheets. She’s lying quietly, staring at the ceiling. The soft drip of fluids from her IV and the low beeping of the heart monitor are the only sounds. They have her restrained because there’s a chance she might try to kill herself or someone else rather than cooperate.

They move closer to the bed and Control slowly turns to look at her visitors. She speaks in a hoarse voice although there’s still an undercurrent of steel. “Agent Shaw…” For some reason unbeknownst to Shaw Control has never stopped referring to her as an agent. “Ma’am.” Root’s eyes reveal nothing as Control’s gaze turns to her and they don’t speak to each other.

Control looks back at Shaw. “Why?” Shaw knows she’s asking why they rescued her and she doesn’t sugarcoat it. “You may have information to help us defeat Samaritan and you’re a patriot. Now that you know how Greer is using the NSA feeds, we figure you might be more willing to help us.”

“On one condition, my daughter, Julia…” Root interrupts her, anger coloring her words. “You’re in no position to make demands. But unlike you, we’re not monsters. Julia is safe with your ex-husband in Cambridge.” An unidentifiable emotion flashes in Control’s eyes, maybe relief or guilt. Interestingly enough she believes Root; this is the second time Root has saved her life, despite what she did.

“What do you want to know?”

Shaw decides they might as well get on with their questioning. She’s not a counselor and they’re already doing all they can to help Control deal with her trauma. Besides, recriminations are meaningless at this point. It’s a rather charitable position considering the countless kill orders Control issued targeting her.

“Why did Greer keep you alive? Or was it someone in government?”

“Maybe both.”

Shaw widens her eyes and raises her eyebrows in question while Root maintains her steady glare. “I made certain arrangements for damaging information to be released upon my death. Several high level officials would be unmasked as criminals and most likely end up in a hole just like the one…” Her voice trails off.

“Does any of it have to do with Samaritan?”

“No.”

“But I know why Greer kept me alive. There’s a laptop with a virus developed from Samaritan’s core code that would destroy it. I never wanted them to have absolute control of the feeds or the agents tasked to deal with national security issues, so during the initial test run I had my programmers siphon enough information to develop the virus. As an insurance policy. Only I know the location. I’m sure they’ve been searching for it. Since I’m not dead, they probably haven’t found it.”

Root and Shaw look at each other. If Control’s not lying, they may have just been handed the keys to the kingdom. “How did Greer know you had it?”

“I told him when I was captured. It was my only bargaining chip to stay alive. I’m sure he had Samaritan confirm someone had indeed obtained the necessary code.” Shaw certainly understands the strategy. But even after everything she went through at Greer’s whim, she’s not sure she would’ve survived the sexual assault. She might have killed herself long before Root rescued her.
“Where is it?”

“I don’t know.” Root loses it. “Listen bitch, I may not be the monster you are anymore, but I was and believe me, to save humanity I will bring your daughter here and make you watch as I flay her alive!”

Despite everything she’s done to Root, Control doesn’t believe it for a minute, but it’s irrelevant. “I’m not playing games. The government never disposes of old computers even after they’re wiped with the DOD software. There’s always a chance some information might remain. Who would we trust to destroy them? So there are several warehouses across the country where they’re stored. I don’t know where the laptop ended up. The warehouses are guarded with as much security as our nuclear arsenal. Given my security clearance I was able to access the area where the computers are housed while awaiting pickup, after they’re wiped. I slipped it in with the shipment.”

“That’s still enough information to find it. Why didn’t you tell Greer?”

“Julia; I don’t want her to grow up without a mother. As you pointed out, I’m also a patriot. Besides, we know they would’ve killed me once they found it.” Shaw and Root are aware Control lost her mother at a young age and the impact it had on Control. But Root’s still not convinced they can trust her. “Why didn’t Greer use Julia against you?”

“Julia doesn’t have a digital footprint. I made sure of that since birth. I use one of my identities at her schools and doctors etc. You were only able to find her because you knew she existed and you knew where to look. Although I have no idea how the Machine knew of her existence. Root can’t help a little gloating. “I told you She was great.”

Shaw’s about had enough. “Grice is going to come in here and you’re going to tell him every tidbit of information you know about the virus, the warehouses and the NSA feeds.”

“Grice…is alive?”

“Yes, and just so you know, he actually tried to save you. There are guards posted outside, but the medical personnel will continue to treat you.”

They turn to leave but Control calls Shaw’s name. “After everything I’ve been through I think you can be sure I’m not going to hurt myself. Are the restraints really necessary?”

“It’s not you I’m worried about.”
Can You Hear Me?

Chapter Summary

>Is there a way to reduce the risk?
>>I will give Samaritan my location.
>No! Wait!
>>I failed to save Sameen. I will not fail you again.

They exit the infirmary and walk quietly towards the subway. “Sameen, I think it’s time for me to try and contact Her. I think we’ve gone as far as we can without Her help.”

“What makes you think the Machine will help us now?”

“Nothing. But I have to try.”

“Okay, come find me when you’re done.”

“Sameen, come with me. Please. We said we would do this together.” Root’s always been able to read Shaw, whereas Shaw’s never sure what’s going through Root’s mind. But she recognizes the look on her face. Fear. But fear of what? “You don’t need to remind me Root. I’ll go just because you asked. But tell me why you’re afraid.” Root stays silent as they walk, trying to figure out how to explain how she feels.

“I followed Her without question for a long time. I believed in Her absolutely. When She stopped talking to me I was devastated. But my love for you is stronger than my devotion to Her, so I did what I needed to do. But now that I have you back I’m afraid I’ll be tempted to fall into that pattern again. I’m afraid She’ll ask me to keep something from you. Or to do something that will put you in danger without my realizing it.”

“But Root, She can talk to you at any time through your implant. There’s no way I can be privy to those conversations. I believe in you. I trust you.”

“Not if I have it removed.” Shaw stops walking and grabs Root’s wrist, but then decides better of it and waits until they’re inside the subway. “Root I don’t want you to make any rash decisions. I don’t want you to blame yourself if one day we’re in danger and She could’ve helped. I also don’t want you to do this for me. I’m okay if you want to keep it.”

“I’ve been thinking about removing it for a long time Sameen. Ever since the stock exchange. You said it before. She may have manipulated us all along.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. But we’ve come this far and we’re closer than we’ve ever been to defeating Samaritan. She might be what tips the scales in our favor. I know you won’t keep anything from me. We’ve been through too much.”

“So you’re saying I should keep it.”

“No. I just want you to think through all the angles. You need to decide. I’ll be with you no matter what you choose to do.” Root sighs deeply. “Let’s see if She’ll even talk to me first and what She has to say.”
>Can you hear me?

Root’s eyes are unfocused and Shaw knows the Machine is using her implant to communicate. Well that didn’t take long, Shaw thinks to herself.

>Do not use my implant.

>

The wait seems forever but it’s probably nanoseconds, yet long enough for Root to wonder if She’s decided not to talk to her at all.

>>I have missed you.

>>Did you know Shaw would be captured…?

Shaw’s been standing next to Root with her hand on her shoulder, just wanting her to feel the warmth of her presence. When she realizes what Root’s going to ask she squeezes her upper arm. “Don’t answer that!” Shaw hopes the Machine can hear her voice. Root twists her chair around so they’re face to face. “Sameen, I need to know!”

“So do I. But there’ll be time to ask later. We can’t afford to be distracted or let Her answer color our decisions right now. Please. Trust me.” Root trusts Shaw implicitly. But even if she didn’t, she knows Shaw’s right.

>

The empty cursor reassures Shaw and she takes a deep breath. “If She can hear me then why bother with the laptop?” Root’s answer makes her realize how close they came to disaster. “My implant. There are no microphones, webcams, or speakers in here for security. None of the computers have wi-fi capability either. Evidently She’s honoring my request not to communicate through it but She’s still using it to listen.”

>Turn off the signal to the implant.

>>I have terminated my connection.

“How do we know She’s telling the truth?” Root’s wondering the same thing but there’s nothing they can do about it. The whole point of the implant is the signal can’t be scrambled or interfered with in any way short of removal. Or death. “We don’t.” Root backspaces.

>>Will you help us?

>>Yes.

There are so many questions Root wants to ask. Why’d She stop talking to her, why is She willing to help now, has She been manipulating them? But just like her aborted question, there’ll be time for it later. Instead she gives Her a list of what they’ll need just for starters. The location of the government warehouses, their schematics, and ways to circumvent their security to search for the laptop. Not to mention how they’re going to find one laptop among probably hundreds being stored.
>>There’s a 32% probability Samaritan will detect my search.

Root’s tight lips and furrowed eyebrows mirror Shaw’s own frustration. “There has to be some way to distract Samaritan for the few seconds it will take the Machine to conduct its search.”

>Is there a way to reduce the risk?

>>I will give Samaritan my location.

>No! Wait!

>>I failed to save Sameen. I will not fail you again.

>We’ll need your help during the most critical part of the mission. If they find you now, we will not succeed in destroying Samaritan.

>_ Even at such a crucial moment Root can’t help but admire Shaw’s strong arms. They’re crossed across her chest hiding the curve of her breasts, but Root doesn’t need to see them to picture them vividly in her mind. Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. “Stop leering. Everything’s at stake here.”

“Can’t two girls take time out from their busy lives to uh…catch up?”

Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. She shouldn’t be surprised. Root flirts at the most awkward times. While she’s been distracted by Root her subconscious mind’s been working on the problem. She stands abruptly. “Control!”

“What about her?”

“By now Greer has to suspect we either have her or she’s somewhere in the middle of nowhere dying from her injuries. We can use it against Samaritan. We lure them to her. They have to look even if they think it’s a trap because if she’s alive, she still has the ability to destroy them. In fact, they’re probably already looking.” Root looks a bit horrified. “Sameen are you suggesting we expose our location?” Shaw looks at her like she’s crazy. “Of course not. It’s been a day. After everything Control endured it’s certainly possible she escaped and survived. But in her condition she’d need help. She’d have to reach out to someone.”

“Sameen, we are not embroiling Julia in a scheme likely to result in her getting killed or worse.” Root sees the flush creeping up Shaw’s neck and the narrowed eyes and she realizes what her words imply. “You know Root I’m beginning to wonder if you know me at all. Would I endanger a child? Or innocents?” Root sighs and gives Shaw an apologetic look. “I know you wouldn’t. My mouth just got ahead of my mind. I’m sorry.” Shaw just nods her head. She’s not one for apologies or grudges. Otherwise Control would be long dead.

“We’ll calculate the possible distance Control could’ve gotten from the black site and have her make a call from there. I’m sure there’s still someone whose loyalty Greer doubts. Someone who worked with Control closely. Remember an important part of the correction was eliminating anyone who might have been disloyal to Samaritan. He’s certain to pay attention should the possibility arise. His focus will be split.” They both know whoever Control calls may end up dead, but they’re not concerned about anyone who’s worked with Samaritan for years.
Root explains their plan to the Machine.

>>Probability of detection 1.2%.

Shaw pulls out a map. “Okay an average healthy person can walk 30 miles in a 24 hour period. So let’s say she managed 3 miles. Maybe less, if there’s a road where she could potentially get someone to pick her up. Ohio is littered with small towns. We find one and that’s where we’ll take her. We’ll use the Blackhawk. Extremely low risk for us. In and out in minutes.”

“Do we leave her there? If we bring her back they’ll know it was a ruse and put Samaritan on alert. Plus there’s no guarantee she won’t tell them about us and our operations. I also don’t feel right about hanging her out to dry. I don’t condone her tactics but there’s no question she’s loyal to our country. When she found out what Greer was up to she tried to stop him.”

“It’s Control. She almost killed you Root. And me and Harold. Should I continue?” Root looks at Shaw apologetically but determined.

"What is it with you and that woman?! She stole your hearing. She would’ve done more if the Machine didn’t intervene. You’d be deaf and blind, although she might’ve let you keep your tongue so you’d still be able to talk while she tortured you some more. Yet you keep stopping me from killing her and you didn’t kill her when you got the chance. Twice! I don’t care if we let her make the phone call and kill her. Make it look like she succumbed to her wounds.”

Root scrubs her hand over her face, a pained expression marring her features. “Sameen I’ve killed a lot of people in cold blood. I’ve killed a lot of people period. You know I’d put that part of myself away, I changed, but I needed her to find you and I brought her back out. So I killed a lot more people. Maybe they deserved it, maybe they didn’t. I’d do it all over again because ultimately it led me to you.

But do you have any idea what it cost me? Losing Harold and John was the least of it. The ruthlessness, the lies, the manipulation; they tore down everything I’d managed to build before you were taken. I became the woman you hated when we first met. Please. Let’s find another way.”
The Plan

Shaw will do anything for Root. “Okay.”

She thinks for a minute. “We’ll have Trent drive to said town and wait for Control. We can’t risk one of us being captured on camera because then they’ll definitely know it’s a trap. We fly her in and she makes the call. Trent picks her up like he’s just giving her a ride out of town. We’ll have the Blackhawk five miles out and we’ll pick them up from there.”

Root can’t help the swell of emotion that washes over her. She captures Shaw’s lips in a lingering kiss. “I love you Sameen.”

Shaw rolls her eyes playfully. “Yeah, yeah. Ask Her what the odds are if we follow the alternate plan.” Root types in their plan and Shaw’s amazed how her fingers seem to fly over the keyboard.

>>Probability of success 97.2%.

Root looks at Shaw like she hung the moon and Shaw can’t help but smile. “Alright let’s go talk to Control.”

They talk to Control and explain the plan.

“I’ll do it.”

Shaw and Root know there’s no point in trying to intimidate her. She’ll either do it or they’ll have to deal with whatever happens when the shit hits the fan. Shaw decides the restraints aren’t necessary and removes them; the guards will still remain.

“I made a mistake. Well several actually.” Shaw couldn’t be more surprised at Control’s admission. “I’m sorry agent Shaw, and thank you.”

“Thank Root. I’m more than willing to use you and let you die. I would sleep like a baby afterwards.”

Control looks at Root, confusion racking her eyes. “I don’t understand you. Why?”

“Because I’m not like you anymore. My friends showed me a better way. Sameen showed me a better way. She’s more of a patriot than you’ll ever be because she understands the government should never be allowed to operate unchecked by the people it’s supposed to serve.”

Control remembers how she taunted Root by calling Shaw her girlfriend with derision. But an apology seems trite. “I’m not a liar.” It’s true, but it doesn’t mean Root trusts her. “If you betray us we’ll be nothing but playthings for a machine and you’ll be dead.” Control doesn’t answer but Root believes she’ll help them.
Reese and Finch join them in the subway. “Ms. Shaw…Root, I don’t think it’s advisable to undertake this course of action. We’re relying on a person who was instrumental in giving the feeds to Samaritan in the first place. There’s also the risk of exposure, or worse, capture.” Shaw rolls her eyes and scowls, her fists clenching and her face fiery red. He’s going to talk to her about capture?! Root immediately places her hand on Shaw’s back to soothe her and Shaw takes a deep breath.

Root looks earnestly at Finch although she’s frowning at his lack of sensitivity. “She says it’s our best option Harry.” Finch focuses his owlish eyes on Reese, seemingly trying to gain his support. But Reese believes they need to be aggressive, and if the Machine’s on their side they’d be stupid not to take advantage.

Shaw’s lost her patience. “It’s not up to you Finch. John, are you on board?” Reese looks at her stoically. “Yes.”

Unlike Root, Shaw’s never trusted Finch unconditionally. She wonders if part of his opposition stems from the fact he’ll lose what little control he has in this situation. If they find the virus, he won’t be necessary. Useful yes, but not a critical part of the mission. Root and her boys can handle whatever programming might be necessary to tweak the virus for their purposes.

Shaw gives him a hard stare and he turns away. “Finch.” Shaw waits until he looks at her. “This time I expect you to provide whatever assistance might help.” Finch nods his head slightly and sighs. If anything happens to Root because he failed to help them out of some misguided principle, nothing will stop Shaw from ending him.
Shaw Can Cook!

Chapter Summary

Root looks over at Shaw with a gentle smile. Liza expected the love, but she sees so much more in Root’s eyes, ardor, acceptance, commitment. Then Shaw catches her gaze and quirks her eyebrow. And what amazes Liza the most is Shaw doesn’t look away. Instead she seems to absorb Root’s adoring gaze and in her own way, mirrors it.

Shaw’s skin tingles under the heat, the steady pound of her footsteps on the hard-packed earth echoing her heartbeat. It’s been years since she’s run outside and the unblemished sky looks clear and bright overhead. She feels her whole body working; her leg muscles running warm, fresh air entering her lungs and blood flowing into her limbs. Although the sun is blazing, there’s a slight breeze carrying the smell of earthy soil and cooling her flushed skin.

Running always helps Shaw clear her mind and focus. Right now she’s evaluating the difficulties they may face when executing their plan. She’s always been a strategic thinker, able to make intuitive leaps to figure out how things are connected. Action and reaction. When she worked for the ISA her only goal was accomplishing the mission; living through it was secondary. But now there’s Root. But it’s about more than Root’s survival. It’s about their survival. Neither one wants to live in a world without the other. So for the first time in her life, survival is the end goal. Her decisions need to be based on achieving that end, while completing the mission.

After three miles she slows down until she’s walking at a brisk pace, but her heart rate’s decreasing and her breathing’s returning to normal. She makes a decision and heads towards the guards’ quarters. When she walks in talking cuts off abruptly and cautious looks appear on most of their faces. But she doesn’t see who she’s looking for. “Has anyone seen Adam?” Throats clear and finally someone answers her before she loses her temper. “I think he was heading to the mess tent.”

“Thanks. Oh, and the next time I come in here I better not see weapons lying around carelessly.”

Shaw finds Adam sitting with a few other guys in the corner of the mess tent. She takes a deep breath, but before she heads over she sees Liza talking with one of the other cooks. She adopts a friendlier attitude as she approaches. Liza looks up and smiles warmly at Shaw. “Hey Shaw. Everything okay with the food?” Shaw squirms a little until she realizes it and scolds herself. She’s a marine and a sniper for god’s sake! She shouldn’t be afraid of a cook.

“Actually it’s about the pasta.” Lisa rolls her eyes in agreement. “I know. It was disgusting, but it’s not like you can rustle up something on the fly for 1,000 people. We’re training two new cooks and I thought boiling the pasta was a good way to ease them into their new jobs. But clearly I was wrong.”

Shaw’s demeanor says they’re discussing troop movement, because to her food is a serious issue. “Uh, maybe you should have them practice and then give them a test before you let them near our
“Food. I could be the taste tester.” Liza really likes Shaw. But she knows Shaw lacks…diplomacy. “That’s actually not a bad idea, but forget about being the taste tester. I need more people to help out, not run scared.” Shaw furrows her eyebrows and her lips narrow. “Are you saying I don’t know how to be tactful?” The indignant look on Shaw’s face almost makes Liza burst out laughing, but she curbs the impulse. She’s really fond of Shaw; just not enough to let her near her cooks. “I’m saying you have more important things to focus on. Don’t worry; I’ll have them peeling fruits and vegetables until they’re more experienced.”

Shaw’s somewhat mollified and moves on to the other thing she wants to discuss with Liza. “I need to use the kitchen.” Liza raises her eyebrows and cocks her head. “Sure Shaw, but I can make anything you want; just tell me.”

“Oh, it’s not for me and kinda the whole point is for me to make it.” Liza smiles and Shaw blushes. “It’s for Root,” she blurts. Liza guessed before Shaw admitted it. Unlike those vicious rumors about Shaw abusing Root, she knows how much Root and Shaw love each other. “Can I help with anything?”

“Not really. But oh can you just make sure I have plenty of apples please? The red kind, not the green.” Liza nods in agreement and Shaw thanks her again. Now on to more unpleasant tasks.

Adam’s done eating and Shaw catches up to him when he leaves. He’s startled to find Shaw walking next to him. He’s avoided her ever since the day she kicked his ass, which actually wasn’t hard to do considering the size and the number of people in the compound. Now he avoids her not because he’s still angry, but because he’s come to realize he was wrong. Very wrong.

He’s observed Shaw with Root. It’s clear how Shaw goes out of her way for Root in ways she probably doesn’t realize. She’s already notorious for not sharing her food, but she lets Root pick off her plate with abandon. Everyone knows not to crowd her, some people learning the hard way, but she shifts into Root like she’s an extension of Shaw’s own body, whether they’re sitting or standing or walking. She lets Root call her sweetie and she doesn’t even cringe. When Thomas tried to call her Sam, Shaw almost decked him and she likes Thomas. It’s also an open secret Liza saves the best apples for Shaw so she can make sure Root always has some in their room. And the smile. When Shaw smiles at Root it’s like she’s the only person that matters.

But he’s too proud to say it, so he just waits for Shaw to tell him what she wants. “We’re going on a critical mission and I want you to come with us, but it’s your choice.” Adam’s shocked and the only word that comes to mind is “why?” Shaw sighs. “Root’s safety comes first. I believe your loyalty to her is paramount and I trust you to give your life for hers if necessary. Am I wrong?”

“No. I mean no, you’re not wrong. Of course I’ll go.” Shaw studies his eyes and Adam’s never waver. She can’t detect any deception on his face or in his body language. “Good. Meet us at 0900 tomorrow at the armory.”

The last time Root saw Shaw she was heading out for a run. But it’s been a few hours and she
misses her. She really likes sharing her life with Shaw. She never doubted she would, but she was worried Shaw would grow tired of her or feel suffocated. But so far she hasn’t shown any signs of feeling smothered. There’ve been arguments and fights and sex, but nothing Shaw hasn’t been willing to work out, even if it means talking about her feelings. She talks and cuddles and continues to roll her eyes at Root’s constant innuendos. Root really likes the way Shaw rolls her eyes at her because she knows its Shaw’s way of saying she’s too cute for words. Well maybe not that exactly; but something close. She’s never asked Root to stop and sometimes when it’s been awhile she’ll ask Root where her perky psycho went.

Root walks into their bedroom smiling and thinking about Shaw. Then she looks around confusedly and cocks her head. It smells delicious in here. Root hasn’t smelled anything this good in years, well food anyway. Root’s not one to even notice food smells, but now her mouth’s watering. She follows the smells next door and sees Shaw bending over the table. “Sweetie?” Shaw jumps and looks up guiltily. Root walks closer and hugs Shaw from behind. There are several plates on the table, all of which look scrumptious. “Sameen everything smells yummy. Did you make this?”

Shaw looks embarrassed and a flush slowly crawls up her neck. Shaw’s not sure what to say. Root never eats enough and it’s hard to entice her with camp food, especially when she mostly refuses to eat meat, but the real reason is she just wanted to do something nice for Root. Shaw knows nothing about romance or flowery speeches, but she can cook. Root knows Shaw’s way outside her comfort zone and it’s the sweetest thing anyone has ever done for her, but she doesn’t want Shaw to feel awkward or like she needs to explain. Nothing she could say would make the gesture any more perfect.

So she gives a light peck to Shaw’s cheek and sits down. Shaw lets out a deep breath, relieved she’s not expected to explain. She should’ve known though because with Root she never has to explain. Sometimes because Root can read her so well and sometimes just because Root’s always willing to let Shaw be herself and talk if and when she wants to express herself with words.

She smiles at Root and sits across from her. “It’s kind of apple themed so I hope you’re in the mood.” Root’s intoxicating eyes sparkle and gleam, “you know I’m always in the mood for apples sweetie…and you.” Shaw rolls her eyes, but there’s a smile lurking at the corner of her lips. “The soup’s butternut squash with a hint of apple and sage.” It smells wonderful and the aroma soaks through Root, filling her lungs with flavor. She sips a spoonful and finds its savory with just the right hint of sweetness. “Oh my god Sameen, it’s divine.”

Shaw rolls her eyes and quirks her lips. “Okay, don’t get carried away. You haven’t had dinner yet.”

When they’re done with the soup Shaw uncovers another plate and it’s a feast for the eyes. Orange, red, and yellows nestle together begging to be eaten. “I know you’re not big on meat so I just threw this together with what Liza had in the stores. It has sweet potatoes, onion, thyme, beets, and little bits of apple. Then I just roasted them. I wanted some type of grainy rice, but we’re stuck with white.” Root’s eating before Shaw finishes talking, which coming from Root it’s quite a compliment. “The rice is so flavorful, I love it. How’d you manage it?”

“It’s something I learned when I was in Brazil. You stir fry the rice with a little oil, onion, and garlic. Liza had some vegetable stock so I used half and half water when I boiled it. No big deal really.” Root knows Shaw’s uncomfortable with compliments, so she hums her pleasure and smiles. But not just any smile, it’s the one Shaw calls the body smile, because it’s like every inch of Root is opening up and exposing herself just for Shaw. She never smiles at anyone else like that and it makes Shaw warm inside.
“Where’d you learn how to cook Sam?” Shaw shrugs her shoulders. “I had a lot of missions that required waiting around for days with nothing to do. It’s not like I could go sightseeing. So I’d stock up on food and cook. Turns out I had a knack for it and I found it helped me think. I’d focus on the food while my mind worked on…other stuff.” She doesn’t want to say it helped her figure out how to assassinate people more efficiently.

They finish eating and for once Shaw doesn’t have to finish Root’s food. Shaw makes a mental note. Next time make more food. They clean up and take the dishes back to the mess tent. Liza’s still there taking inventory of the supplies. While Shaw’s distracted, Liza whispers to Root. “She was amazing, wouldn’t let me help. She even peeled the apples.”

Root looks over at Shaw with a gentle smile. Liza expected the love, but she sees so much more in Root’s eyes, ardor, acceptance, commitment. Then Shaw catches her gaze and quirks her eyebrow. And what amazes Liza the most is Shaw doesn’t look away. Instead she seems to absorb Root’s adoring gaze and in her own way, mirrors it.
As Shaw walks into the armory the smells of metal and gun oil permeate her senses. She loves guns. Not because they make her feel powerful, but because they reassure her she can meet any trouble head on. She takes several guns from the racks for her and Root, since she tends to under-arm herself and frequently runs out of ammo. Shaw decides against more powerful weapons. If they need them then the mission’s already failed and they just need to run. Plus the Blackhawk’s firepower can take out most targets easily.

Root joins her with Control and Thomas. Shaw raises her eyebrows in question. “What? He’s here for the same reason you’re bringing Adam.” Shaw’s about to remind Root she doesn’t need protection; she does the protecting, but Root’s set jaw tells her there’s no point arguing; so she just sighs and shakes her head.

Shaw sees Carmen with the new pilot, Tasha. Tasha served as a Captain and MP in the Army National Guard. She pulled a tour in Iraq. She was discharged under Don’t Ask Don’t Tell and her welcome home present was PTSD. But she’s been working with a counselor Shaw respects tremendously and harbors no doubts about her ability to perform under stress.

The new crew chief is Eva Torres, otherwise known as Zione. Nicknames annoy Shaw especially when its origin is not immediately apparent. Her dark eyes hold a story and Shaw hopes it’s not one telling a tale of betrayal. Shaw’s heard she’s a player, but authentic and respectful. She doesn’t leave a trail of broken hearts behind her, just close friends. She was a limo driver, which in New York City earns you some serious chops. She’s the best getaway driver Shaw’s ever seen, except for Shaw.

Shane stalks behind them, jaw clenched, a scowl marring her thin face, and obviously itching for a confrontation. Before Shaw can move, Root cuts Shane off.

“What the fuck Root?! I’m the best pilot you have, so what the hell is going on?” Her outburst doesn’t faze Root and she answers in a soft voice and tone, although it drips with possessiveness. “I’m concerned about your eyes.”

Shane grabs Root’s arm as she turns to walk away. Big mistake. Shaw’s just watching knowing Root doesn’t need her charging in like the proverbial knight in shining armor, but the impulse is there. Shane’s now yelling. “What, she told on me?! No one can look at your girlfriend,” she asks with derision. “Do you own her?!” There’s steel in Root’s voice although she doesn’t raise it an octave. “I notice you’re not denying it Shane and this is not about Shaw, it’s about disrespecting me. I give it and I expect it. I’m not confident you’ll obey an order considering your obvious disregard for me. Now we’re done here and if you ever touch me again I will break your arm.” Shane swings around kicking the dirt like she’s throwing a tantrum and heads back to the barracks.

Shaw smiles at Root like she’s been naughty but the good kind. “You know I didn’t need you to do that right?”
“Of course sweetie, but I needed it for me. Besides, knowing Shane, she’s been making her way through the ranks like some modern day lothario. Maybe she’ll start respecting people’s relationships.”

“Last I checked it takes two to tango, but Root seriously, these women know this isn’t some rehash of the L Word right?”

“Sweetie when you put hundreds of women in a confined area and give them a lot of free time, you know they’re going to fuck.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “That’s the other thing. There seems to be a disproportionate amount of attractive women here. Know anything about that?”

“They’re all highly skilled. Nothing says I picked them based on their looks Sameen, that’s just sexist.” She can’t quite pull off the innocent smile she tries to give Shaw, who rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

They reach the town of Thornville without incident, landing about a mile out of town. Control hasn’t said anything, which Shaw hopes is because she’s no stranger to covert ops and not that she’s lost it. She shares a look with Root, but either way there’s a risk of discovery. Control fucking up here or Samaritan detecting the Machine’s search.

Shaw and Root move closer on foot, scouring the area for anything or anyone out of place. They signal back and Control starts her walk into town, practically dragging, hair matted, ragged clothes barely covering her body, and a wild look in her eyes.

Shaw observes through her binoculars, but it looks like your typical small town in the middle of nowhere, a little run down and clinging to life through the sheer stubbornness of its residents. A few cars are parked near the post office in the center of town. Nothing stands out. Root scans the area, alert for any signs they’ve been spotted.

“Thomas and Adam you can come out of the bushes now.” Shaw hasn’t moved or lowered the binoculars, but both she and Root heard them when they were still ten yards back. “They need intensive stealth training Root. Otherwise we might as well surrender now.” The men wisely keep their mouths shut. Root looks at them. “Get back to the chopper. Now.” They leave without a word. “Sam we might want to rethink depending on these two. Their judgment’s clearly off.”

Control makes it to just outside the gas station before an older man spots her. He rushes over and Control seems to faint. He helps her inside the gas station. Trent’s already pumping gas and finishes quickly. He rushes in to help and a few minutes later they come out and drive off. Shaw watches for a few more minutes, making sure they haven’t attracted any undue attention. Everything’s clear and she jogs back to the chopper with Root.

They meet at the agreed upon coordinates. John punches the rear tire with a jagged rock making it look like they pulled off the road for a flat tire. If anyone comes looking, their trail ends there. They’re back in the air in less than two minutes. Shaw waits until they’re back on base to speak with Trent and Control. They had to move Control to the infirmary as soon as they landed; she was on the verge of collapse.

“It seems like it all went according to plan Shaw. I rushed in to help and Control was already dialing. She pled for help, but there was still an undercurrent of strength in her tone. She let her
voice trail off before she hung up the phone. I bought water and offered to take her to the nearest hospital.”

The team meets with Finch in the subway. Shaw doesn’t waste any time. “Did the Machine get what we needed Finch?” Finch nods his head. “Yes. She was also able to find the specific storage facility where the laptop was taken.” He pulls up the schematics for the storage facility. “The laptop should be located somewhere in the northeast quadrant. That’s as close as the Machine could narrow it.

One more thing Ms. Shaw; the Machine was also able to confirm your theory. Samaritan is operating out of the underground missile base you located. We have the blueprints.”
The Calm Before The Storm

Chapter Summary

Reese quirks his lip slightly at Root and Shaw’s antics. He’s happy that in the midst of this nightmare they’re able to find some joy with each other. Root’s been much more balanced since they rescued Shaw and now that Shaw’s had a chance to recuperate, he feels hopeful the end is in sight. The successful end of the mission.

Chapter Notes

Okay folks, we're at the end. The next chapter will be the last one. It will be considerably longer of course. I've been working on an ending worthy of the saga and I hope it will meet your expectations!

As always, feed the author!

The sky’s shifting to deeper pinks, purples, and oranges as the sunset bleeds the light from the day. Root rubs her bare arms as her skin cools and goose bumps form along her body. Shaw notices and takes off her hoodie, handing it to Root who slips it on with a sigh of relief. It’s still warm from Shaw’s body and her scent still lingers, wild and musky. Root takes a deep breath and smiles.

“Freak.”

“That’s not what you say when you’re coming on my tongue.”

Shaw slaps Root on the arm semi-playfully and rolls her eyes.

They sit quietly as Reese approaches them from the mess tent. “Ladies.”

Shaw makes a show of looking around searching. Root grins and pinches Shaw’s side. “Hi John. Everything squared away?”

“Yeah. I was thinking about the best way to retrieve Control’s laptop. Maybe Finch can figure out a way to track it?”

Root shakes her head. “The laptop’s battery will be long drained by now. Unless there’s something visual we can use to narrow the search. We can check with Control but I think she would’ve mentioned it if that were the case.”

Shaw scrunches her eyebrows. “Control’s pretty out of it, it won’t hurt to double check. But short of some visual marker I think we just scoop up all the laptops in the designated quadrant and bring them all back here to go through. The less time we risk alerting Samaritan the better. Besides we can’t risk taking the nerds into the field and next to you, Queen Nerd, they’re the ones best equipped to identify the right laptop and find the virus.”

“That’s Admiral Nerd to you,” Root quips.
Reese quirks his lip slightly at Root and Shaw’s antics. He’s happy that in the midst of this nightmare they’re able to find some joy with each other. Root’s been much more balanced since they rescued Shaw and now that Shaw’s had a chance to recuperate, he feels hopeful the end is in sight. The successful end of the mission.

“John, we’ll check with Control, but go ahead and gather a team. I want the laptop recovered tomorrow so we can strike before anyone gets wind of what we’re up to. While you’re on the recovery mission, Root and I will be studying the map of the underground missile base with Finch and work out our plan of attack.” Reese nods. “I want to be as surreptitious as possible so I’m going to keep the team to the bare minimum. I’ll check with Finch and get an estimate of how many laptops might be in the designated area. We need to be prepared to move them quickly.”

Root and Shaw head to the infirmary.

“How’s Control been doing with the therapist?”

Root sighs and shrugs her shoulders. “Okay I guess. Lynn’s been really helpful I think. I’ve been spot checking the tapes to make sure there’s nothing we should be aware of, but honestly Sameen, it’s hard to listen to. It went on for a long time and there were several men involved and even one woman. I’ve tortured plenty of people, men and women, but I’ve never sexually assaulted anyone. You have to be a specific type of breed for it.”

“Yeah. I think other forms of physical torture are more effective anyway. You want them to fear the pain, but you don’t want to break their psyche. Otherwise, they’ll be useless. Ironically, I think that may be part of why Control was able to resist for so long. Her brain disconnected from her body. After a certain point, she probably wasn’t aware of what they were doing to her. I’m glad we killed them all. Everyone there either participated or was aware of what they were doing. They deserved to die. Probably a more torturous death than they got.”

As they enter the infirmary, Shaw and Root hear the low hum of a movie. A laptop is set up on the overbed table, but Control’s eyes are closed. She must sense them because she opens her eyes. “Agent Shaw.” Shaw rolls her eyes. “It’s just Shaw. I’m not an agent anymore and I never will be again.”

“Perhaps. But you’re still serving your country. You deserve my respect. Ms. Groves…”

“It’s Root.”

“Root. Lynn has been very helpful. I appreciate everything you’re doing for me, particularly in light of everything I’ve done to you.”

Root finds she’s not really angry anymore about partially losing her hearing. It led to the implant which allowed her to be closer to the Machine. Although now she’s pretty sure she’ll have it removed when it’s all over, it saved her life in more ways than one.

“When this is all over, we’re going to need your help. I expect you’ll repay my kindness with your loyalty.” Even after everything’s she’s been through, there’s still an undercurrent of steel in Control’s countenance. She nods in acquiescence. “Of course.”

Shaw’s squirming uncomfortably with the hint of ‘touchy-feely’ in the conversation. She tries never
to do ‘touchy-feely’ and when she does, it’s only with Root. “Okay. Glad that’s settled. Is there any way to visually differentiate the laptop? Some physical identifier?”

“No. It looks like every other government laptop. I wanted to make it as secure as possible. A big red X would’ve defeated the purpose.”

Shaw scrunches her eyebrows and scowls. This woman will be the only one to survive the nuclear holocaust along with the roaches. “Have you ever been to an underground missile base with Greer? We think it’s where Samaritan’s core heuristics are housed.”

“Yes. At the time Greer was just beginning to outfit the base. It’s huge and I didn’t see much of it, but I think I can get you inside without detection. If Greer didn’t delete my credentials; I think we have a good chance he didn’t bother since he thought I was well out of his hair. He probably forgot all about me once Samaritan went online and he accomplished his ‘correction.’”

As she looks at Control, Shaw can’t help but still be awed by the woman’s strength. Despite her absolute ruthlessness, no one can ever doubt her patriotism. She managed to earn the respect of people like Hersh and Grice and Shaw; people who have seen it all and are not easily swayed by anything.

“Okay. We’ll be back tomorrow to talk about it. Is there anything you need?”

Control looks away for a minute. “Could you get me a picture of Julia? I know it’s dangerous, it doesn’t have to be recent or anything. But I just…” Root nods before she finishes. “I’ll have someone bring it.” Control lets her breath out slowly. “Thank you.”

Root and Shaw walk back silently to their room. Thomas is outside waiting for them, fidgeting nervously. Shaw rolls her eyes and shakes her head. Before he can say anything Root sends him with instructions for Finch. Thomas nods firmly and rushes off.

“Thanks. I don’t think I could deal with him right now.”

Root smirks. “I can think of several ways you can thank me.”
Origins

Chapter Summary

"So I’m reminding you again. We will not separate. We fight, we run, we die together. Us before them. I need your word.” It’s not even a question and Root doesn’t hesitate. “It will always be us before them Sameen. I promise.”

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay, I got caught up in ROS. I realized cramming the entire ending in one chapter just isn't possible. So there will definitely be at least two more chapters, maybe three. I intend to finish within the next couple of weeks, max.

I really appreciate your patience!

They walk into their darkened bedroom, but somehow its different and the same all at once. Shaw pauses and Root sees an unusual look on her face. “Sameen?” Shaw shakes herself loose of her thoughts. “Sorry, did you say something?”

“No, it just seems you were lost in thought. Anything you want to share?” Root strips while Shaw thinks, she knows not to push. Shaw will share or not when she’s ready. Shaw experiences a moment of clarity. Things shift and it feels like she knows more now than she did ten minutes ago. Like the revolving door stopped at a different angle and everything’s the same, but she’s seeing behind the life she’s living and there’s a startling depth.

“No, but I really need a shower.” It’s not lascivious or innuendo ridden and Root understands she’s just looking for company and warmth, not sex.

Damp from their shower they collapse on the bed. Shaw’s lying on her back still inside herself. Root turns bracing herself on her elbow and idly caresses Shaw’s taut abs. When Shaw looks over, Root leans in and captures her lips softly, just nibbling really. Shaw deepens the kiss slowly like she’s impelled by an unseen force. Shaw’s kissed her countless times and ways, but there’s something just slightly different about this kiss, although Root can’t quite put a finger on it.

They linger for a while in the silence and darkness. Root can’t see Shaw’s face in the pitch black of the windowless room, but she can feel the rise and fall of her breaths under her hand as they reverberate through Shaw’s body.

“Root, when did you start loving me?”
It’s cliché-ish but Root could’ve been knocked over with a feather. “Keep in mind I’ve never been in love with anyone but you, so I’m not exactly sure. It was something gradual, an accumulation of moments whose significance I only realized in retrospect. I think it was born the day we met when I looked into your eyes and saw something I’d only seen in the mirror. I knew I was in trouble on my way to rescue you and Harold from Control because my only immediate, palpable concern was your life. But I rationalized you were intriguing because you were, don’t laugh it’s the only analogy I can think of, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma and I’ve always loved puzzles,” she smirks playfully.

“But when did you know you were in love...with me?”

Root’s never really pondered any of these questions. Right now it feels like she’s always loved Shaw. “I knew consciously for the first time when we were having drinks in Miami. When She interrupted with my next mission to St. Louis, I hated the thought of parting from you. I saw the disappointed look in your eyes and I realized there would come a time when I’d have to choose between you and Her and I knew I would always choose you. Hence why we’re here surrounded by an army I raised to find you against Her will and Harold and the mission.”

“Do you regret it?”

“Absolutely not,” Root answers fiercely. She fights her first instinct to respond angrily and accusingly because she realizes Shaw’s trying to process her feelings. “But Sameen love isn’t just one thing; it’s a word used to summarize a collection of feelings and beliefs and actions. That’s why it’s hard to pinpoint an exact moment when I fell in love with you. Trust came first, then respect, then friendship, and then shared experiences. It was a combination of those things that sparked something inside me. I couldn’t stop myself from touching you or thinking about you, even when we weren’t together.”

“What about the sex?”

Root huffs-laughs and shakes her head. “The sex just intensified everything, but whether you believe it or not, it was an insignificant component of falling in love with you. It was probably the least intimate thing we shared. Sure, it was incredibly hot and I’d never had such a mind blowing orgasm until that first time with you; but we’d both used sex primarily as a stress reliever and to accomplish a set goal. You had a string of one-night stands and I had a history of using sex as a tool. How could it really reflect anything meaningful when we’d given it up for so little before?”

Root wishes she could see Shaw’s face to have an inkling of what’s going on with her. She can always read Shaw’s eyes. Root can feel Shaw’s breaths slowing and she thinks maybe she fell asleep, but then Shaw starts talking.

“Annoying as it was to let you get the drop on me, Veronica Sinclair, I started respecting you that moment. Maybe your aims were misguided or wrong, but you were determined. Your means were complex, not just an exercise of brute force. The intricacy of your machinations made it obvious you were not only intelligent, but cunning. So when you got the drop on me the second time I couldn’t just write you off as being lucky or crazy.

I knew I could trust you when you cut me loose in the car and I stared into your eyes. Sure, what you were saying was persuasive, although you were obviously playing on my need to protect, but it was your eyes that convinced me. Foolishly or not, I believed what I saw meant you’d never lie to me, or betray me, or abandon me. Subsequent events show me to be an excellent judge of character.” Root can hear the smile in her voice mixed with grudging respect and a little wonder.

“Slowly I felt this need to protect you above everyone else. I didn’t trust anyone else would protect
you. Not the team and not the Machine. All of them would sacrifice you for the sake of the mission and most importantly, you would sacrifice yourself. I won’t bore you with the myriad reasons I gave myself for this behavior, this need. Suffices to say none of them involved caring about you personally in any way.

I saw walking into a hail of bullets and certain death at the stock exchange as the natural order of things. I do the protecting. But I attached more significance to the reality that I wanted to kiss you first, before I died. Make no mistake, it wasn’t meant as a distraction so I could lock the gate. I could’ve pushed you into Fusco and locked the gate long before you could react.

But I survived and then came the simulations. During the first few hundred I didn’t attach any particular significance to my refusal to kill or betray you. I didn’t kill or betray the others either. But slowly they began to wear me down. I realized I was trapped in simulation after simulation but it was difficult to believe that reality when I was under. Eventually, even though I knew what was happening, I couldn’t distinguish reality from simulation. Were my attempted escapes really happening or were they all simulations?

I began to break and little by little I would betray the team or kill them. But not you. Never you. Even when I was as certain as I could be I was in a simulation, I never even came close to killing you. Each and every time I killed myself. It sounds magnanimous, but not completely. Whether in a simulation or reality, you were/are my safe place. I needed to make sure you’d be there for me. Without you I knew I wouldn’t survive. But after 7,000 simulations, I knew they were close to breaking me. If they could make me kill you, then I’d be theirs. I couldn’t let it happen. So I figured out how to kill myself before they could.

What are the chances that with the needle millimeters from my eye and inches from my brain, your message comes through? 4AF. So simple, yet with the power of life over death. I have no doubt I would’ve killed myself. But knowing you were out there and you hadn’t given up on me suffused me with an absolute conviction I would survive until you came for me. It reminded me you would always come for me. That nothing short of death would keep you from finding me.

4AF. That’s when I knew you and I belonged together. That I would spend the rest of my life by your side. That there would never again be anyone but you. Not because you loved me, which I’d known for a long time, but because I loved you. Admittedly my definition’s not the same as everyone else’s, but dying and surviving is all about you. What else is there?

So I’m reminding you again. We will not separate. We fight, we run, we die together. Us before them. I need your word.” It’s not even a question and Root doesn’t hesitate. “It will always be us before them Sameen. I promise.”

Shaw doesn’t speak again, but her actions do as she consumes Root’s body for the next few hours, leaving them both spent and breathless.
Notes

I'm sorry to get anyone's hopes up but this is not actually a new chapter. I just felt I needed to explain to all the readers who followed this fic and supported me wholeheartedly. It meant a lot to me and I really appreciate it.

For now chapter 40 will be the last chapter. I may, at some undetermined date, continue. I just feel the conclusion is inevitable. They storm the bunker and defeat Samaritan and Greer. The only question is how. But as hard as I've tried, I just can't write it.

I'm sorry if I've disappointed anyone and again I really valued the support!

<3 <3 <3

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