To Boldly Go

by waypoint

Summary

Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the star ship, Northern Lights. Her ongoing mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out those who mean to do the galaxy harm. To boldly go where no human has gone before.

... or

Star Trek Shoot?

Notes

Sameen Shaw, graduated from Starfleet Academy with honors, finds herself recruited by a mysterious vessel called the U.S.S. Northern Lights. Equipped with unique technology, the ship travels around the quadrant stopping potential threats to the galaxy before they happen.

Samantha Groves, AKA Root, a woman without a purpose uses her telepathic abilities to help rid the galaxy of scumbags... for a price, of course. Her reputation for being dangerous and cunning certainly suits her. Root currently sits near the top of the Federation's Most Wanted.
Prelude

Sameen Shaw never believed in destiny. At the academy, she was often told how she was “destined” to do great things. Becoming a decorated officer was her “destiny”. Fuck destiny. Shaw is the type of person who believes in action. She believes in the kind of fate that you make happen. You want to graduate? Work for it. You plan on making captain? Earn it.

The year was 2374, and people still droned on about this nonsense. Facts and science. That's what Shaw believed in. It wasn't fate that caused her father's ship, the U.S.S. Tehran, to be shot down by Bajoran rebels. A mysterious hand did not guide Sameen's escape pod out of harms way until rescuers took her back to Earth. Certainly she wasn't destined to be diagnosed with a personality disorder that left her emotionally dull to everything around her. Her condition eventually affected her studies in medicine, which allowed her to make the choice to study tactical analysis, astrometrics, engineering, and anything else she could occupy herself with.

Eventually, she graduated Starfleet Academy with honors. She was then approached by a ship captain who offered her a place within a very unique organization. The United Federation of Planets featured alliances between many different alien races, however, there remained some rebellious sects, outliers who didn't appreciate being forced to work with humans. Control, Shaw's new captain, informed her that her organization dealt with these potential threats to the security of the quadrant. The U.S.S. Northern Lights hunted down and apprehended these threats, returning them either to Federation space, or their original home worlds. With the help of a unique (and highly classified) ship AI known to Shaw as Research.

Shaw's ended up being paired with Ensign Michael Cole for the majority of her away missions. He was an expert in communications and languages, but field work wasn't exactly his forté so he mostly waited on the shuttle while she chased down the perpetrators. Cole was a competent officer and she trusted him to have her back, even if he had a habit of snooping around with information that was well above his pay-grade. Several successful engagements later, and they were Control's number one team.

So, the circumstances leading up to Shaw becoming the head of security on the Northern Lights was not part of divine plan, but the result of her skills being recognized and her dedication to Starfleet appreciated. Her personality disorder almost worked to her advantage; being free of emotional attachment made her a valuable officer on the bridge. She had the respect of her crew mates as well as her captain, and she only had herself to thank.
Samantha Groves used to argue to the contrary. Born with empathic and telepathic abilities, Samantha was certain that destiny had big plans for her. Travel to Earth, join the federation, serve on a nice ship, see the whole quadrant, all while using her abilities to help those around her. Her faith was shaken when her mother fell ill. They lived on a small colony and couldn't afford the medical attention needed. Her mother eventually passed away, leaving Samantha to fend for herself.

A few years later, her beliefs were further crushed when she saw her only friend abducted. She had reported the incident to the local law enforcement, but was steadily ignored. Whether because of her strange abilities or simply because she was just a child, either way Hanna Frey's killer ran free. Samantha then began to develop a different world view. How could people be so selfish, she wondered. She had seen her friend getting kidnapped, and yet they couldn't be bothered to help. She felt the disinterest and disdain coming from those she spoke with, and for what reason? If only her abilities were more developed, she could have made them care about her friend.

She began reading about other incidents throughout the quadrant and it became clear that the behavior was not isolated to her small home. Humans were a disease that had spread to every corner of the known galaxy. Humans started wars, overpowered different species in order to control them. They even went to far as to create an 'alliance' between planets, dictated by humans, of course. She decided to use her skills to orchestrate the death of the man responsible for taking her only friend. This would be the first of many she was responsible for.

That was the day that Samantha Groves became Root.

Having stolen a sufficient amount of credits in the weeks following Trent Russell's “accident”, Root paid for passage to Cardassia Prime where she began to make a name for herself as a killer for hire. Whether convincing vagrants to do her dirty work, or simply manipulating the actions of her victims themselves, the name Root became known to several organizations both rebel and federation. It was intriguing to see the digital panels requesting any information on the assassin. Luckily for her, her identity was in constant shuffle, and her telepathic abilities made it difficult for authorities to apprehend her. She managed to secure a small shuttle craft that she used to travel the Alpha Quadrant taking on contracts over the next several years.
Many aliens utilized her services and she would eventually learn that the problems was not limited to humans after all. She was not partial to any particular species, and would accept their credits all the same. Perhaps this was her destiny all along; to shed her past and rid the galaxy of as much corrupt data as she possibly could. She was rather skilled at it and in a way it could still be considered “helping” people.

On her travels she heard whispers of a new program Starfleet was developing: a full artificial intelligence. Different from the ship audio interface program, this machine was designed as a sentient being, autonomous, purely logical, and... perfect. Root used her resources and contacts to learn all she could about the program and everyone involved with it. She discovered that it wasn't just in development, it had already been implemented. The Machine, as it was sometimes called, was present on very few ships and used predictive algorithms and strategies to help stop potential terrorist acts before they happened.

Maybe this could be her destiny, she thought. Finding this machine and freeing it from Starfleet and it's backwards world view. Yes, this was something much more interesting to focus her talents on. Helping to remake the universe she lived in, rather than just pick out the few diseased parts.

Those pesky thoughts of destiny were quashed once again, however, the day she was arrested just outside of the Mempha sector. She had taken her ship, the Contingency, too close to an ion storm which interfered with her cloaking capabilities. A nearby federation ship was easily able to subdue her small craft and tractor it aboard their own ship. One of the security members was a skilled telepath, and blocked any attempts Root made at getting inside the heads of those around her. She was kept unconscious for most of her time on board, but no more than a day later, she was handed off to a less hospitable ship.

Root currently resides aboard the Black Coffin, a prison vessel which will keep her confined until she can be put to trial for her many, many crimes. No doubt the ship that captured her would was eager to accept their reward for bringing her in. She had been kept isolated in a small cell, forced to wear a cortical monitor in order to dampen her telepathic abilities, as well as a vocal suppressor to stop any attempt at manipulating anyone using just her words. It was flattering that the guards thought she was capable of the latter. A sort of... snake charmer, as the old expression goes.

According to what she gathered from the jailers (after all, they couldn't completely shut off her abilities), she was due to be collected by a different federation ship and carried back to Starfleet headquarters. There she would await trial and likely be executed, or imprisoned for the rest of eternity.

Either way, it seemed like the path to her new destiny waited upon the U.S.S. Northern Lights.
Security Chief's Log, Stardate 51090.2. The captain advised me that we're being sent on a special assignment today: prisoner transport. Originally, Ensign Cole and I were to be the only ones participating, but Control wanted to be present as well since this criminal is rumored to be quite a handful. The away team is scheduled to dock on the Black Coffin shortly, and we will be taking the prisoner back to Earth for trial. Though not our usual gig, I do not anticipate any challenges. End log.

Shaw stood from her working desk and stretched out her arms. She was interested by the idea of visiting a prison vessel, but it seemed strangely different from their usual tasks. She got the feeling that Control wasn't telling her the whole story, but it was not her job to question the captain. Shaw stepped into the bathroom of her quarters and tied her hair back in simple pony tail, making sure to tuck all loose strands back. Next she examined the two gold rank pips on the neck of her shirt that identified her as a lieutenant. Once satisfied that they were perfectly straight, Shaw stepped back into her living area. Taking her black and gray jacket from the chair, she zipped the garment high over her yellow shirt, and exited the room.

As she made her way to the turbo lift, a voice called to her, “Shaw, wait up!”

She stopped to see Cole racing up to meet her, “Ensign.” They walked together.

“You hear anything about this criminal we're picking up?”

“Not much. What do you know?”

“They're saying that he's on the federation's most wanted list,” Cole said enthusiastically.

“unlikely. Otherwise they wouldn't send a small ship like us.”

They entered the turbo lift. “Deck three,” Shaw ordered. The lift shuttered and began it's descent.
“Do you think it's weird that the captain wanted to come with us?” He continued.

“No.”

“Just 'no'?“

“I don't know how many times I have to tell you, Cole. Do your job. Don't ask questions.”

The lift stopped and they exited, making their way towards the shuttle bay.

“Yeah, but what if-“

“We'll be on the prison ship soon and all of your pointless questions will be answered. Lock it down until then.”

The captain met them outside the shuttle doors and offered her salutations. Shaw and Cole followed her into a craft and were equally impressed when she piloted towards the Black Coffin. Security was extremely strict, as one would expect from a prison ship. Their shuttle had to submit to an examination, and all three members of the away team were searched and stripped of their weapons. The prison warden led them down a long corridor towards their mark.

“Thank you for arriving so quickly,” he said.

“Of course. Luckily we were nearby.” Control replied.

“What can you tell us about the prisoner?” Cole chimed in, seemingly unable to contain his curiosity. Shaw shot him a look as they walked.

“You may not believe it, but some random federation patrol ship managed to capture one of the most dangerous criminals in the quadrant.” He paused, perhaps for dramatic effect, “I assume you've heard of Root?”
“Who hasn't? Do you have any idea how high the reward is for bringing him in? We could theoretically divide the money among the whole crew and still be set for life!” Cole replied.

“Your intel on the subject is inaccurate in some regards, Ensign.” Control added.

They turned a corner and arrived at a walkway that overlooked the solitary containment units. The trio looked down into the pit as a handful of guards opened a cell and escorted their prisoner into view.

“That's Root?” She pointed down into the cells.

Rather than the burly thug she may have been expecting, out stepped a tall and thin human woman. She had long brown hair that cascaded down over her shoulders, surprisingly well kept despite the fact that she was in prison. Her eyes swam like Saurian brandy and her pink lips curved into a somewhat mischievous smirk. Speaking from a purely objective standpoint, she was stunning. She carried herself with ease as the guards ushered her away, and turned to look up at the group (even though the glass was one sided) before being led down the corridor. Shaw also noticed a cortical monitor stuck behind her ear, and she wore a strange shackle across her throat.

The warden explained the subject's telepathic abilities and the need to suppress them for safety reasons. As well, he informed them that she had something of a silver tongue, so the ring around her neck prevented her from speaking.

“Once she's on your ship, be careful not to let her inside your head. Unfortunately she was able to charm one of our guards using just her pretty face, and he nearly caused a prison break as a result of her influence.”

“That explains the isolation,” Shaw remarked, while Cole whispered a few expletives from behind her. “She a betazoid?”

“It's possible, though she doesn't bare any of the typical physical characteristics. Her DNA wasn't in our database, and we don't have the medical technology to run any further scans.”

The warden led them back down to their shuttle. Several guards from the Black Coffin would accompany them back to the Northern Lights, and escort the shuttle with a small ship of their own. Root must really be dangerous if they were going through all the trouble, though she definitely didn't look it, Shaw thought.
Once arriving back on the ship, Shaw supervised the prison guards as they led her down to one of the holding cells. Root still couldn't speak and offered no resistance as the guards handled her none too gently. Still, she looked to Shaw with an impish shine in her eyes, as if she knew something Shaw did not.

After securing her in the brig of the Northern Lights, Shaw returned to her quarters. Her shift on the bridge wasn't scheduled to start for another hour, so she wanted to use that time to add a supplementary report regarding their away mission.

“Control to Lieutenant Shaw,” the captain's voice came in over the communication system.

She tapped her com badge, “Shaw here, Captain.”

“Report to my ready room.”

“On my way.”

Research had likely spit out another assignment for them, and Shaw was eager to get back to some real work. She left her quarters and walked the short distance down the corridor to the turbo lift, instructing it to travel to deck one. She crossed the bridge and entered the captain's office and found her sitting at the desk sipping tea from an old fashioned porcelain cup.

“Come in, Lieutenant.” She put the cup down and gestured forward, “take a seat.”

“I prefer to stand.”

“Very well. I wanted to speak with you about the prisoner we collected.” Curious, Shaw simply nodded. “The fact that we were close by when we received this call was not a coincidence. We have been aware of this criminal for some time... she's been difficult to apprehend.”

Shaw didn't know why this number warranted an explanation from the captain, but continued to listen attentively.
Control rose from her seat, and walked around her desk to stand in front of Shaw. “As you already know, she processes empathic and telepathic abilities that make her an extreme risk. Your psychological condition makes you uniquely qualified to interrogate her. That being said, do not let your guard down around her.”

Something about the way Control referred to her disorder made her hands twitch. She quickly refocused her attention. “Interrogate?”

“We have reason to believe that she has knows about our whole operation, including Research. I want you to figure out how she got that information by any means necessary, Lieutenant. Consider this a top priority.”

Any means necessary meant that Control didn't expect this to be an easy task. This may be one of the few times being a sociopath would work to her advantage; Root would have a tough time influencing the emotions of someone who didn't have them.

“Yes, Captain.”

“Dismissed.”

Shaw exited the ready room and made her way back into the turbo lift, this time her destination was deck four. Reaching the brig, she nodded to the guard standing by the only occupied cell. He advised her that the cell was utilizing a level 7 force field, and the only people that could access it were the captain, and Shaw herself. She dismissed the ensign, and it was only after he left the room that she regarded their prisoner.

Root sat on the bench and was casually leaning her back against the wall. Her hands were not bound, but they lay neatly folded in her lap. The cortical monitor and vocal suppressor remained in place, though the latter would have to be removed if Shaw was expected to conduct an interrogation. Her easy smile returned when she noticed Shaw on the other side of the force field.

Shaw moved to stand in front of the control terminal. “I'm going to turn off your vocal restraint so that we can talk. If you try anything I will not hesitate to shoot you. Do you understand?”

Rather than nod in acknowledgment, Root's smile simply broke out into a grin. Shaw rolled her eyes, and tapped the panel to disable the vocal device. She moved to stand directly in front of the cell.
Root slowly brought her hands to her neck, pulling the metal collar off, and gently caressing her throat. Her eyes closed and she let out a sigh of relief as she stood from her seat. She took several steps forward, coming dangerously close to the force field. Their eyes locked.

“Hello, Sameen.”

Chapter End Notes

Too weird or nah? I promise this isn’t as nerdy as it might sound. More Shoot than Trek (probably)!
Q&A

Chapter Summary

Shaw and Control take different approaches to interrogating the prisoner.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for such a positive response on the first chapter! I'm glad you guys liked it!

I decided to make the ship a lot smaller so I went back and made a few minor adjustments to the previous chapter. It's just in terms or what is located on each level, and rather than having ten or so decks, we're down to four. Control would probably want run a tight ship anyway.

I also upped the rating on account of a tiny bit of violence coming up.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To her credit, Shaw's stoic expression only slightly broke at the sound of her own name. It was precisely the reaction Root was hoping for. She could practically see the gears turning in the other woman's head.

“How did you find out my name?”

“Wouldn't you like to know.” Root tilted her head.

Shaw simply held her gaze, her face returning to it's impassive mask. Root found her to be a bit of a challenge to emotionally read. Everything was understated and quiet, almost as if her feelings were buried under of static. The only emotion that was coming clearly was anger. Present and unmistakable, it was still very subdued in comparison to the average person. Though she had already known that Sameen Shaw was anything but average.
Not long after being discharged from the Black Coffin, Root had realized that her cortical suppressor was no longer functioning. None of the guards seemed to notice when it powered down and she immediately regained her telepathic abilities. In the interest of having some kind of advantage, she kept her new found freedom to herself. Now she could hear almost everyone on the ship, all their thoughts and emotions buzzing in Root's head. It was a white noise that she found comforting at times, but maddening at others. Shaw was a different story, however, her thoughts seemed to be more precise and organized than others. The average person usually had a flurry of words and ideas floating around in their mind at all times. Being around Shaw was similar to being around a vulcan; she found her presence very quiet and calming.

The fact that she was so beautiful didn't hurt, either.

“I can make this very difficult for you,” Shaw's threat pulled Root from her own thoughts.

“Are you propositioning me, Sameen?” There was another twinge of anger combined with annoyance and... something else. If Root didn't know any better she might think Shaw was momentarily flustered. She laughed, briefly taking her her bottom lip between her teeth. This was almost too easy.

Shaw shook her head. “If you cooperate I can speak with the captain on your behalf. Maybe convince the federation to go easy on you when we bring you in.”

“I'm not going to the federation,” she crossed her arms, and Shaw raised an eyebrow. “Control is probably going to kill me well before we get there.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Your captain is hiding so much from you.”

“Throwing around insinuations regarding our commanding officer isn't going to help you. You need to tell me what you know.”

“I'm sorry, Commander, but this isn't cutting it for me. All take and no give,” Root made a tsk noise and shook her head. Shaw merely stared at her. “How about you answer a question of mine, and then I'll answer one of yours.”
Shaw mirrored her cross-armed stance, “you're not in a position to negotiate.”

“I like to think of it as a fair trade. You and I both know I can't influence your emotions, so what's the worst that could happen?”

Shaw considered for a moment, then, “One for one,” Root clasped her hands together excitedly, “but you answer me first.”

“Naturally.”

Root suddenly had a lot more trouble getting read on what Shaw was feeling. It seemed like she was schooling her emotions on purpose and Root would be lying if she didn't find the mental silence fascinating. Now the *really* interesting part was going to be finding out what Shaw chose to ask. Of course, she could simply read the other woman's thoughts, but for some reason she didn't have the desire too. How... unusual. Even so, this was an exciting experience: not knowing what another person was going to say. Considering she was locked in a cell en route to be punished for her crimes, Root was rather enjoying herself.

“What do you know about the *Northern Lights* and her mission?”

Ever the good solider. Root smiled and began to walk back and forth in her cage. She told Shaw that Daniel Aquino approached her asking if she would use abilities to protect him. Apparently an evil government organization was trying to kill him. Root was interested, but mostly in money at that time, and the good doctor just couldn't afford her. He was frantic and desperate. It was pathetic, Root recalled.

During one of their meetings, Root gained access to his PADD that happened to contain all the information on *Northern Lights*. That's how she learned about the ship, it's mission, and crew. It was a real page turner, so to speak. Especially the part where the ship uses a sentient artificial intelligence to get it's intel on potential targets. Obviously Aquino couldn't be allowed to reveal her identity when he was ultimately captured, so she wiped his mind of any recollection he had of their meetings, and sent him on his merry way.

Root decided to leave out the part where she discovered that Control was likely behind his death.

“Simple as that?” Shaw asked. Root stopped walking and held her hands out, shrugging. “All right
Shaw turned and started back towards the exit. Root lurched forward and called after her, nearly colliding with the force field. “Aren't you forgetting our agreement?”

Shaw stopped walking, but didn't turn to face her. “I said I would answer one of your questions. I didn't say when that would happen.”

Beautiful and clever. “Well played, Commander.”

“It's Lieutenant,”

“Indeed... my mistake, then.” she sat on the bench in her cell when she heard brig doors sliding open. “We'll do this again soon, Sameen.”

Security Chief’s personal log: supplemental. My first interrogation with the prisoner went well. It turns out that she had an encounter with one of our previous numbers, Daniel Aquino, and seems to have learned about Northern Lights from him. All data we have on Root indicates her as a master manipulator, so I can't be sure about how accurate her explanation was. I'll have to see if there is any evidence to corroborate her story. Still... something she said has been bothering me. Is the captain really hiding something from us, or was that just to throw me off balance? Either way, I'll be keeping a close eye on her. End log.

Shaw completed her personal log before beginning her security rounds. The mess hall was the closest and seeing as how she hasn't had breakfast yet, she figured it was a good place to start. She left her quarters and walked down the corridor to the turbo lift. “Deck two,” she ordered, waiting
the short ride before the door opened again.

“Hersh to Lieutenant Shaw;” the coms pinged.

She tapped her badge. “Go ahead.”

“Report to the briefing room.”

“Yes, Commander.”

Hersh was the second in command on the ship. They had good rapport. He handled most of the advanced training the crew received after being recruited by Control, and worked side by side with the captain most of the time.

Breakfast would have to wait, unfortunately. She turned to enter the lift once again, this time heading for deck one.

Shaw entered the briefing room a few minutes later and found the senior staff standing around the table... wearing their dress uniforms? Rather than black and gray, their coats were the solid division color with black across the shoulders. Rank pips sat at the collar bone instead of the neck. The captain stepped forward to greet her.

“Glad we caught you before you entered the mess hall, Lieutenant.”

“What's going on?”

“It's well passed time you were recognized for your loyalty to the program. Hersh?” she held her palm out, and he stepped forward to place something in it. “Shaw, if you would step forward.”

She complied, moving around the table to face the captain.

“For your outstanding services as our Chief Security officer, I hereby grant you the rank of Lieutenant Commander.” Control pinned a new black pip with Shaw's existing ones while the staff
began to clap. “Congratulations.”

Shaw nodded in thanks to her colleagues. Being promoted for her service was something that would normally please her. Ranking up meant she was performing above what was required, and that she was exceptional at her duties. She would happily accept the new responsibilities and respect from her peers.

Shaw didn't really feel any of that. For some reason, her mind kept drifting down to deck four.

Yesterday, Root had called her 'commander' as she was leaving the brig. As someone who is unfamiliar with Starfleet ranks, it's reasonable to assume it was just a mistake on her part, so Shaw initially didn't think anything of it. However, everything else she said had such conviction and precision. Considering her telepathic abilities, it was also reasonable that Root could have known about this promotion before hand. There was the matter of the cortical device that was supposed to be keeping her in check, too. Shaw would have to dwell on that later and drew her focus back to the situation at hand.

After celebrating for a short time, the staff returned to their duties. Shaw took her place behind the tactical interface on the bridge as they prepared to leave the docking station. Control had returned to the bridge and made a ship wide announcement about their flight plan. After refueling they would travel on the outskirts of the Klingon Empire until arriving back in federation space. Traveling at an average speed of warp six, the trip should take them a total of five days. Shaw remembered Cole telling her about a large concentration of Klingon rebel groups in the area, but she brushed it off as his usual paranoia.

Once her duty shift ended several hours later, Shaw walked off the bridge and into the corridor, intending to return to her quarters. When she reached her door, however, she remained outside while her curiosity from earlier crept back in. She sighed to herself and turned towards the turbo lift.

“Deck four,” she commanded.

She entered the brig, dismissed Lieutenant Dillinger, and walked in front of Root's cell. The woman was lying on the bench with her eyes shut and had her hands folded behind her head. She was also wearing that damned smirk across her face again.

“Back again so soon?” She said without opening her eyes.
“You knew.”

“I have vast knowledge of many things. You're going to have to be more specific.” Root rolled to her side, propping her head up on her hand. She regarded Shaw, eyes drifting down to the new gold and black rank indication on her yellow shirt. “Congratulations, by the way. Well deserved, I'm sure.”

That smile told Shaw everything she needed to know. She turned and accessed the control panel, beginning to run a diagnostic scan on the cortical device. Seconds later it came back saying that the device was fully operational. Shaw shook her head and conducted the scan again. No anomalies. She banged her fist down on the console.

“How did you disable the cortical device?”

“I didn't.”

“You're lying.”

“And you still owe me an answer.”

“Root,” her voice was stern. The 't' sound coming to a sharp end.

“Oh,” she sat up and stood from the bench, her voice low, “I do like the way you say my name, Sameen.”

Shaw sighed and shook her head. This woman was challenging in ways that she had never experienced before. She found it hard to imagine that she was such a high value criminal. Maybe she annoyed her victims to death.

Before she could collect herself and try again, the doors to the brig slid open to reveal Control standing on the other side. She stepped into the room, pushing a small cart. Shaw could also see a roll of black fabric under her arm.

“Captain?”
“I’ve come to relieve you, Commander. I believe some enhanced methods are required to get the information we need.”

That explained the bundle of fabric, but... “Is that necessary? She already told us about Aquino.”

“We can't be sure it was the truth.”

Shaw expected a retort from Root, but none came. Sparing a glance inside the cell, Root was no longer facing outwards, and her posture seemed much more rigid than it was a moment ago. Control stopped in front of the cell and disabled the force field, stepping inside with her cart in tow. The field reactivated once she was inside.

“Ma'am?”

“Dismissed,” Control said sternly. Shaw waited a beat before nodding and walking towards the door. As she stepped through, she wondered if there was any truth to what Root said about the captain wanting her killed.

And if Shaw considered remaining by the door, it was only because she was worried about their mission.

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Root could hear Control from a light year away. In addition to her thoughts, Root could sense emotions from her. Root had been around star ship captains before and each seemed to carry the same sense of duty, strength, and determination. The difference being that the other captains also
had a warmth about them. Something that made them approachable, made their crew want to follow their command. Control was different; she was cold and unapologetic. Even a little frightening. Root got impressions that she would even kill a member of her crew if she felt it was necessary.

She tried to keep her expression neutral so as not to alert Shaw to her telepathy, but had to turn away when the doors to the room opened. Root knew that the captain was carrying an array of injections in the hopes of making her more responsive to their interrogations. The funny thing was, she had been telling the truth when Shaw asked her about Northern Lights, but Control hadn't been convinced. Thus her current predicament wherein Root would very likely be tortured until she was dead.

“Dismissed,” she heard Control say.

Shaw paused before leaving, Root felt a quiet beat of hesitation and concern from her before she stepped out. Her lips turned upwards briefly before turning around.

“Hello Miss Groves.”

“Call me Root.”

“Of course. I suppose you already know my name.” Root didn't reply. Control placed the bundle down on the cart she brought in and uncurled it. As expected, Root saw around thirty vials lined up next to a single hypospray. Control's mind indicated that the vials were filled with both amphetamines and barbiturates, which were commonly used for... oh.

“Looks like you brought a party.” She noted, not taking her eyes of the medication.

Control picked up one vial and loaded it into the hypospray. “What do you know about Research?”

“Like I told Shaw, Aquino had the details on a PADD when I encountered him.”

“You'll find,” Control began, raising her voice, “I am not as easily fooled as Commander Shaw. Allow me to ask a different question: How did you get the machine to help you?”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” It was the truth. What machine?

“I see.” Control stepped forward and held the hypospray to Root's throat.

She knew that the captain was trying to intimidate her by invading her personal space. As well, the lack of guards was meant to enforce her confidence and power. Root didn't want to give her the satisfaction of scaring her so she simply tilted her head back to allow better access to her neck.

She didn't need to be an empath to tell the captain was a little angry, the way she jabbed the hypospray against her skin was telling enough. The medication was very powerful and Root felt her consciousness slipping immediately. She swayed and stumbled back onto the bench behind her. Control's stone-like face was the last thing she saw before she slipped into darkness.

The next thing she knew, Root was being ripped from sleep. She jerked forwards but found that her hands and feet were now bound to a chair. Her heart beat painfully inside her chest and her breaths were ragged and uneven. Control saw that she was awake and took another vial from the table. Root wheezed out a laugh.

“I guess I was wrong about you. You are fun,” she grinned through the pain while the captain's face remained a mask.

“Why is Research interested in you?” Control leaned over her, and held the unit filled with amphetamine to Root's neck once again.

Desperation. Irritation. Anger. They were all radiating from Control. As well as... fear? It was very unexpected. Never a dull moment on the Northern Lights.

“Who wouldn't be interested in a brilliant, sexy, and charismatic human such as myself?” Root said, her breathing nearly returned to normal. “I can already tell Shaw is softening to my charms.”

Control paused and breathed out a laugh, her eyebrows high. “Commander Shaw suffers from a mental disorder that prevents her from feeling human emotion.”

“That's what makes her so captivating, don't you think?”
Root felt a burst of arrogance from Control, like she had finally found her weak point. “You're a murderer. She will never care for you.”

“I do like a challenge.”

Control laughed again before injecting Root's neck. She gasped slightly before her head lulled forward, back into unconsciousness.

It felt like only an instant had gone by before Root was wrenched awake. She groaned as she doubled over in her seat, desperately trying to gasp for air. Her heart was thundering so hard that she believed it might actually burst through her chest.

“Perhaps it's time for something a little more... unconventional.”

Control held a thin metal object in her hands. Root's vision was blurry so she had to blink several times before she could make it out. A medical device perhaps? There was definitely a blade on one end, which was concerning on it's own. Root was having trouble focusing her telepathy since her body was in distress, meaning she was going to have to wait and find out what Control planned to do with that primitive looking knife.

“How very old fashioned of you.”

Without speaking, the captain walked behind Root and brushed some strands of her hair aside. It was... oddly gentle. She tied Root's hair back and pressed the cold blade to the skin behind her ear. Root forced herself not to shiver as she felt Control lean over her shoulder.

Despite Root's mind being somewhat frazzled, Control's fear was beating strongly above all other emotions.

“I wonder...” Root whispered between harsh breaths, “what are you so afraid of, Captain?”

She took a fist full of Root's hair and pulled her head to the side. Root cried out as the blade pierced her skin, feeling the warm blood racing down her neck.
“Bridge to the Captain.” Control withdrew the knife and let Root's head bob forward. The rest of her body shook, and she grit her teeth against the pain radiating from her ear.

“I thought I told you I didn't want to be disturbed.”

“Sorry to interrupt, ma'am, but there is a Klingon vessel approaching wishing to speak with you.”

“On my way.” She stepped towards the force field, “don't go anywhere, Miss Groves. I'm not done with you yet.”

Control left the cell, and the force field crackled back to life. Root heard the doors to the brig open and shut again. She sighed heavily, leaving her head downcast, and began to wonder how she was going to make it out of here.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think, and thanks again for reading!

And the glossary for this week:

vulcan - telepathic humanoid alien. logical mind and very stoic personality, vulcan's use meditation to supress their emotions. physical characteristics include pointed ears and *on point* eyebrows
PADD - personal access display device. essentially a tablet computer
klingon - humanoid warrior aliens. proud, honorable, aggressive. characteristics include pronounced ridges on their forehead
hypospray - medical device used to inject liquids into the body without puncturing the skin. drugs are inserted at the bottom

division colors:
Red - Command
Yellow - Security/Operations
Blue - Science/Medical

Ranks:
Captain
Commander
Lt.Commander
Lieutenant
Ensign
Crewman
Chapter Summary

The crew deals with some clingy visitors. Afterwards, Shaw is forced to make an unexpected change.

Chapter Notes

"clingy" because Klingons ha ha ha... sorry.
Anyway, with that being said, there's a bit of violence in this one near the end.
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shaw indeed remained by the brig for several minutes before striding purposefully down the corridor.

“Computer, locate Ensign Cole.”

“Ensign Cole is in the mess hall,” the automated voice responded.

“Deck two,” Shaw ordered the lift once she entered.

Cole was with her the day they tracked down Dr Aquino. If anyone could shed more light on that engagement, it was him. She found him easily when she got to the mess hall, and took a seat across from him.

“Hey Commander, sorry I missed the party.”
She waved him off, “not now, Cole. I need you to tell me about Aquino.”

They talk for several minutes, recalling the day. Aquino had only made it as far as the Cardassian home world before they were able to pinpoint his location, and Shaw had moved to intercept him. Cole waited behind in the shuttle craft, as was often the case, but before Shaw could speak with him, the doctor had been shot and killed by a phaser. The shooter wasn't identified.

When they reported the incident to the captain, she didn't seem surprised, or even concerned with the loss of a number. Almost as if she had expected it. Shaw didn't think anything of it at the time, but after speaking with Root she felt the operation deserved another look.

The PADD they recovered had been heavily encrypted, in addition to being damaged prior to retrieval. The only data they were able to access wasn't helpful, mostly general ship information and dossiers, which lined up to what Root said. Shaw couldn't figure out why Research had been interested in him.

“I did end up uncovering more of the data, you know.” Cole said.

“Even after the captain ordered you to stop digging?”

“I thought it was weird,” Shaw sighed, but encouraged him to continue, “anyway, there were communiqués between Aquino and Northern Lights. More specifically, from Control.”

Shaw paused for a moment, “did she have him killed?”

“It wouldn't be a stretch to say so. You should read some of the transmissions.”

Shaw leaned back in her seat and crossed her arms. “So, Root could have been right...”

Cole furrowed his brow, “Root?”

“Never mind. Bring the correspondence to my quarters when you can, I need to see them.”
“Shaw,” Controls voice rang through, edgier than normal, “report to the brig immediately.”

“Yes, Captain,” she stood from her seat and addressed Cole, “this stays between us, Ensign. We clear?”

“You got it, Commander.”

Control could be seen leaving the brig just as Shaw approached. Her normally calm demeanor had been replaced with a kind of contained fury.

“Get in there and treat the prisoner. Do not speak with her. Do not leave until I return. Am I clear?”

“What's going on?”

“What's going on is I expect you to obey my orders while I deal with this Klingon situation,” she left it at that and stormed down the corridor.

Shaw entered the brig, unsure what to expect, and took the medical kit from beside the door. When she laid eyes upon Root, her stomach involuntarily dropped. She looked rough; bound to a chair, several vials of medication lay across the floor with the hypospray abandoned on the table, and the cortical monitor sitting next to it. In addition, blood ran down her neck onto her collar bone, staining her gray prison shirt.

Well, at least she wasn't dead, Shaw thought.
“Didn't know you cared, Shaw,” Root mumbled, her head lowered to her chest.

She disabled the force field and entered the cell, not bothering to reactivate it. She absently scratched behind her ear. “You look like crap.”

She knelt in front of the chair and disabled the restraints as well. Opening the kit, first reaching for the medical tricorder to conduct scans. Depending on how serious the wound to her ear was, Root may need to be taken to sickbay. For now the dermal regenerator would have to suffice until she could be moved.

“What happened?” Scans were already indicating higher than normal blood pressure. Her ECG readings were all over the place, too. Shaw would also have to check the medication to see exactly what she was injected with.

“I believe you were ordered not to speak with me,” Root replied weakly.

“I was also ordered to treat you, which I can't do if I don't know what happened.”

Root breathed out a small laugh. “Your captain and I were just getting to know each other a little better.”

Shaw brought the scanner behind Root's right ear and frowned. The wound was fairly serious. Any deeper and it would have affected her hearing. Though, that was probably Control's plan.

“The dermal regenerator should work, but we'll need to get you to sickbay to have your ear properly treated.” She took the instrument in question from the medical kit. The field version was a small silver cylinder. “You might feel a pulling sensation.”

Shaw reached forward with the intention of tilting Root's head slightly to the side, but the other woman flinched away from her. Shaw sighed.
“I know this isn't ideal, but trust me it'll feel a lot better after we repair some of the damage.”

“I trust you,” Root replied immediately. Their eyes met, and Shaw could see the vulnerability within them. It was very different than her usual carefree confidence.

Shaw raised the instrument once more, “lean your head.”

Root complied, and Shaw activated the device and waved it over the wound several times. While she worked, Shaw tried to imagine what it would be like to hear the thoughts of everyone around you. The constant buzzing would be overwhelming, and where did that leave your own thoughts? Do you lose yourself in the collective of everyone else? It would be suffocating, yet lonely all at the same time, Shaw supposed.

She pulled the regenerator back, satisfied with her work. Root wore a content smile on her face. Shaw turned back to the medical kit and pulled two vials from it, as well as the hypospray.

“I'm going to give you a low dose of Metrazene to help get your heart pumping normally. I also have something for the pain.”

Root nodded, “has anyone ever told you, you have excellent bedside manner, Sameen.”

“Don't get used to it. You're still a prisoner, remember?” She applied the two injections, and closed the medical kit. “We should get you to sickbay. Think you can stand?”

“There is a more pressing issue.” Root slowly stood, testing her balance.

“Such as?”

“The Klingons. I don't think they took too well to Control... go figure.”

The ship rumbled around them, the lights dimmed and took on a red hue. An alarm sounded.

“All hands, this is the Captain. Intruder alert. Several Klingon assault teams have boarded the
ship. Let’s give them a warm welcome. Battle stations.”

The most likely points of entry were the cargo and shuttle bay doors, located on deck three. Since the brig was only one deck lower, it wouldn't be long before they had company.

“We need to move,” Shaw stepped over the threshold of the cell just as the ship shook again from a hit, causing her to lose her footing.

She hit the ground and darkness followed.

The first thing she noticed was how cold the floor felt against her face. Why was she sleeping on the floor anyway? And why was she still in full uniform? Shaw lifted her head only to realize that she was not in her quarters but still in the brig. She remembered hearing that the Klingons had come aboard while she was treating Root.

“Shaw,” Root came to kneel beside her, placing a hand on her shoulder.

Shaw shrugged her off and carefully stood, using the computer console to steady herself. She pressed a palm against her forehead, trying to fight the disorientation as the ship still grumbled about. She looked to Root, intending to ask what happened when she noticed the woman was holding a bloody knife.

“From our friend,” she gestured behind her where a Klingon body lay. Root flicked the blade into the air, catching the hilt when it came back down. “Crude, but effective.”
Shaw gave her a pointed look for showing off and Root winked in response. Shaw accessed the console to scan for the rest of the intruders.

“There are a few groups of them around the ship. They seem to be concentrated on deck two, sickbay being the least defended area. We’ll head up there and see if we can clear them out.”

“We?”

“I can’t leave you here. And clearly you can handle yourself in a fight. Plus, Klingons aren’t exactly push-overs,” Root’s easy smile returned. “That being said, if you try and double cross me, I’ll shoot you and stuff you in a Jefferies Tube until this blows over.”

“Sounds cozy. You really know how to woo a girl.”

Shaw rolled her eyes, “enough already. Let's go.”

Not having a weapon of her own, Shaw relieved the dead Klingon of a small phaser, leaving Root to fend with the knife.

Shaw raised the phaser and they exited the brig. Scans indicated no other hostiles on this level so she jogged straight for the turbo lift. “Deck two,” she commanded once they entered, and the lift roared to life. “I believe you, by the way.”

“About?”

“What you said about Aquino. The captain isn't telling us the whole story, and I fully intend to find out what that is.”

“Be careful Shaw, or you’ll end up on Control’s hit list, too.”

The lift door opened to reveal an angry Klingon soldier, and Shaw wasted no time in discharging three phaser rounds into his chest. They raced down the corridor towards the medical bay, shooting two more soldiers before arriving.
They entered just in time to see a Klingon swinging his bat'leth across the body of their chief medical officer, his blood spraying outwards as he fell back. Shaw raised her weapon to fire, but a second Klingon bulldozed into her, sending her to the ground. She was at a disadvantage, her head still throbbing from earlier and the enemy was easily 70kg heavier than her. He sat over her body and brought his fist down hard across her face, the force of it nearly knocking her out again.

Her hands reached on the ground until she grasped the phaser. The Klingon's head was suddenly pulled back and he cried out in pain. Shaw seized her chance and shot him in the chest and as he fell to the side, she saw Root pulling her knife from his back. Root stepped forward and offered her hand.

Shaw reached up and grasped it, only to see the first Klingon swinging his bat'leth once again. She wrenched Root down out of harms way, coming face to face with the other woman as she fell on top of her. The air seemed to sizzle in the short space between them, almost feeling concealed as Root's hair cascaded around them. Shaw did not miss the way Root's breath hitched or the way her eyes flickered down to her lips, either. Nevertheless, their connection wouldn't last since they were still in very immediate danger. Shaw shoved Root off to her right, while rolling herself to the left just as the metal bat'leth clanged down on the space they had been occupying.

Shaw shot the enemy's knees and sent him falling face first. She tried to fire again but the phaser had overloaded. Dropping the weapon, Shaw nodded to Root, who wordlessly tossed her knife into her hands. She plunged the blade under the armor behind the Klingon's neck and twisted until he was motionless.

“Thanks,” Shaw breathed, handing the knife back.

“You too,” her eyes were shining with something akin to... glee?

After killing two Klingons. With a knife.

After nearly being killed herself.

This woman really was a piece of work...

Not having time (or desire) to dwell further, she stepped to where their doctor's body lay. Picking up a medical tricorder from the ground, Shaw began to conduct scans.
“Is he...?”

The tricorder indicated what she had already guessed. “Dead.”

The doors to sickbay opened and a few crew members stumbled inside. One appeared to have suffered a phaser shot to the leg, another was cradling their arm. Seeing no other option, Shaw waved them forward.

“What happened?”

Over the next few hours, several more people came seeking treatment for their injuries and luckily Shaw had enough experience to assist each case. Root stood nearby and helped where she could, apparently using her empathic abilities to keep everyone calm.

Eventually, the captain disengaged the red alert and reported that the Klingon war-bird had retreated. She entered sickbay shortly afterwards, Hersh in tow, but stopped upon seeing Root.

“Seize the prisoner and prepare to return her to the brig.” He complied, pointing his phaser towards Root.

“Captain, wait--” Shaw began.

“With me. Now.”
She followed the captain to the small corner sectioned off as the office. A pane of glass was all that separated the desk and chair from the rest of sickbay. Control stood with her arms crossed, taking in Shaw's appearance; her sleeves had been rolled up, there was blood on the cuff of her jacket, and several strands of her hair had come free.

“I have to say I expected better from you,” she began. “You are a high ranking officer on this ship and you disobeyed my direct orders regarding the prisoner.”

Shaw nodded, “yes, Captain.”

“Though we’ll have to discuss your punishment at a later time, for now you're being reassigned.”

Reassigned? “To another ship?”

Control held out her arms, “to here.”

The captain explained that Shaw was the only member of the crew qualified as a field medic and she would need to serve as the Chief Medical Officer at least until they returned to Starfleet. Control gestured to the door behind the desk which acted as the living quarters for the physician on duty.

“You'll find a new uniform inside, and you can rest there when not attending to someone.”

Shaw paced and began to rub her temple, “don't we have an EMH for this kind of situation?”

“The Northern Lights is not equipped with any holoemitters.” Control stated plainly. Perhaps this was part of Shaw's punishment.

“You're joking.”

“I'm afraid not. Keep in mind this is only temporary.” Shaw tried to keep her displeasure to a minimum. It could be much worse, after all. Control gestured back towards sickbay and they exited.
Hersh still stood with his weapon trained on Root and appeared to have bound her hands while Shaw was speaking with the captain. He had a vise-like grip on her arm, and her eyes were downcast.

“Let's get her back down to the brig.” Hersh nodded and pulled her towards the door, with Control following behind.

“Wait,” Shaw said. The words were pulled from her when she took a step forward. The three turned to face her and she swallowed hard. Root's eyes fluttered up to meet her own, and a soft smile ghosted across her face. “She stays here.”

“I think not.” Hersh said sternly.

Shaw could not believe she was doing this. “As acting Chief Medical Officer, it is my opinion that the prisoner should be held here for observation, having sustained serious injuries during the intrusion.”

Control didn't seem to like it, but technically the CMO had the ability to override command in the case of a medical emergency. She gave a curt nod to Hersh, who shoved Root forward, not bothering to remove her restraints.

Once they left, Shaw placed her hands on her hips, and heard Root breath a sigh of relief.

“Here,” Shaw stepped forwards and took Root's hands in her own. She released the shackles, and her fingers lingered a moment too long before she drew back. If Root noticed (which, of course she did), she wisely didn't say anything.

“You just saved my life.”

“Hardly.” Shaw crossed her arms and Root looked like she wanted to say more, but kept it to herself.
“Thank you,” it was sincere.

There she was looking at Shaw with an unusually warm expression again. It was difficult to understand. Keeping Root in sickbay wasn't a big deal, and it's not like Shaw had lied to the captain. Root's injuries from the interrogation weren't completely treated. Plus she could have been harmed when fighting the Klingon down in the brig. It's only logical to want to ensure the prisoner's well being... right? Shaw shook her head.

“Let me perform an examination, and don't--”

“Feel free to examine any part of me, doctor.”

“--make any comments.” Shaw pinched the bridge of her nose. Root just didn't quit.

And now she was stuck here with her. What the hell was she thinking?

Chapter End Notes

I've finished up to chapter eight-ish, so it's coming along nicely. Thanks for tuning in!

tricorder - small hand held scanning device. medical variation has a small external piece for more accuracy

dermal regenerator - medical device used to treat less serious skin wounds

metrazene - used to treat arrhythmia

Jefferies Tube - maintenance conduits/tunnels

phaser - gun. shoots energy rather than projectiles

bat'leth - klingon weapon of choice. "sword of honor". kind of crescent in shape, points on each end, with three hand grips along the middle

EMH - emergency medical hologram. a holographic doctor used for temporary situations

holoemitters - a system that projects holographic figures or objects
Snake Charmer

Chapter Summary

Shaw begins to think that the ease she feels around Root may not be genuine.

Chapter Notes

I really appreciate the positive comments everyone!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Acting Chief Medical Officer's Log, Stardate 51094.2. The majority of my time in sickbay has been uneventful. We're still conducting repairs throughout the ship and some crew members have suffered minor injuries; lacerations, broken bones, even a few upset cases of insomnia. Root remains here, much to the dismay of everyone who comes in. The captain ordered a security member to be posted outside the door at all times, which is a lot better than having someone lurking around inside.

After my examination, I was surprised to learn that Root is entirely human. My initial thoughts were that she was a Betazoid, considering her abilities, but her DNA indicates otherwise. In addition to the damage behind her ear, Root suffered a sprained ankle at some point during the attack, both were easily mended. I find myself almost enjoying her company. Almost. End log.

Shaw looked up from her computer to see Root walking back and forth. She specifically told her to rest, but the woman seemed incapable of following direction. Control was starting to get impatient, Shaw couldn't keep Root here much longer within reason. The Klingons that were apprehended during the attack were confined to the brig, if Root was sent back down there who's to say that she wouldn't have an 'accident' at their hands. Root was insistent that Control was dangerous and, for some reason, that was sticking in the back of Shaw's mind.

“You really should stay off the ankle, just in case.” Shaw stood from her desk and walked into the sickbay proper. Root had stopped pacing and sat cross legged on one of the biobeds.
“I feel fine. Must be because you're such an excellent doctor,” she flashed a winning smile.

“If the captain saw you waltzing around like that she'd send you straight back to the brig.”

Root face fell slightly as she nodded, but her regular flirty expression quickly returned. “Sameen, how come you don't use the standard greeting when people come in?”

“The what?”

Root straightened and brought her voice down to a monotone. “Please state the nature of the medical emergency.”

Shaw breathed out a laugh. “Yeah, I'm not doing that.”

“My EMH on the Contingency used to,” Root shrugged.

“No way your tiny ship had a holoemitters when our ship doesn't.”

“What can I say, I like having the best,” Root bit her bottom lip and had the nerve to run her eyes all over Shaw. “Have I told you how much I like the new look?”

Having switched to the science division, Shaw now wore blue underneath her gray and black jacket, rather than security yellow. She tied her hair in a low bun instead of a pony tail.

“Several times.”

“Well, it needed repeating. Blue is definitely your color. Really brings out your grumpy eyes.”

Shaw rolled said grumpy eyes, “I should have let them take you away. At least then I'd have some quiet around here.”
“Please. You wouldn’t last ten minutes without me.” Root leaned on her legs, holding her chin in the palm of her hands.

“Root...”

“Sameen,” she dragged out the e’s. Shaw sighed and averted her gaze. “Your friend Cole is here.”

On cue, the door to sickbay opened and Ensign Cole stepped through carrying a PADD. He lifted his hand in salutation. “Hey Shaw.”

“That is so creepy.”

Root shrugged and stepped down from the biobed. “I’ll give you two some privacy.” She touched Shaw's shoulder, and her hand drifted across her back as she passed.

Cole eyed Root as she walked into the office. “What's the dangerous, mind-reading, murderer doing here?”

Shaw looked to her as well, she was now sitting at the desk with her feet up. Honestly.

“It is such a long story I don't even know where to begin.” She gestured to the PADD in his hand. “That the data on Aquino?”

Shaw read through the information carefully. It seemed like Aquino had been working for Control in the months before his death. She had asked him to help perfect a strange duranium compound that could be used in the ship's hull. According to his notes, the Research system emitted a kind of subspace signal, meaning that it could easily be detected by any nearby ships. The Northern Lights would lose any stealth capabilities. With this special hull, however, the ship would go back to being virtually undetectable. After he apparently completed the work, he was threatening to expose Control to Starfleet.

Now, that was strange... what exactly would he be exposing? As far as she knew, their operation had the full support of the federation. In any case, there was more than enough information to at least make an inquiry with the captain. Aquino was clearly working for Control, and yet they had
been sent to him with the orders “apprehend if possible, terminate when necessary”.

“So why the sudden interest?” Cole said.

She glanced back to where Root still sat at her desk. “I'm not sure. Some things weren't adding up, I guess.”

Cole followed her stare and crossed his arms. “What's going on with you? Questioning the captain and allowing her,” he gestured into the office, “to just roam free?”

She didn't appreciate his accusing tone. “Something you want to say, Ensign?”

He took her arm and led her farther from the office. She pulled herself from his grasp.

“I'm worried about you. You have never ever doubted Control's commands or intentions. Not only that, but you are willingly spending time with someone who murders people for a living.”

Shaw blinked. It seemed like this was on his mind for a while. She didn't respond, so he continued.

“It's obvious she's trying to gain your trust. That way it'll be easier for her to shoot you in the back. I read all the reports on her victims, and this is classic Root.”

“What does that even mean?”

Cole looked over her shoulder towards the office and decided to lower his voice. Like it would make a difference.

“Apparently she had received several contracts from this Cardassian gang lord, one of her 'regular customers', right? They have this great working relationship, the pay is good, and she always gets the job done.”

“And the point?” Shaw tapped her foot.
“The point, Shaw, is that after one of her jobs, your friend over there convinced the Cardassian to give her all of his money. Like, all of it. Then, he mysteriously kills himself!”

Shaw stared at him, and after a moment he began to look somewhat disappointed. Apparently he had been expecting a bigger reaction. “I don't see how this affects me.”

“Of course you don't. That's how it starts! First you let her out of the brig,” he holds up his fingers to count, “then she gets free reign in sick bay with minimal security. Next you'll be helping her steal a shuttle.”

“Cole...” she sighed.

“Until finally she tells you to put a phaser to your head and you'll think: 'hey, that's a great idea!'”

Shaw held her hands out. “That's enough. Look, I can handle Root, all right? What I can't handle is your paranoia right now. I have enough shit to deal with here.”

He opened his mouth to argue, but promptly reconsidered after seeing Shaw's glaring eyes. Cole spared one final glance towards Root before turning towards the door. “Just watch your back, Commander.”

Shaw rubbed her temple and walked back into her office. She pushed Root's feet off the desk and swiped a PADD from her hands. Apparently she had gotten bored in the two minutes she was left unattended. Root gave her a mock pout, which Shaw pointedly ignored, and walked out towards the lab. She was going to busy herself with some re-organizing while she figured out what to say to the captain.

It seemed like Root took Shaw's lack of attention as an invitation to follow. “What did Cole want?”

“Can't you just read my mind?” Shaw said without facing her, “Why even bother asking?”

“I find our conversations to be very... stimulating.” Root paused. For what reason, Shaw wasn't sure. “Besides, most people don't like having their thoughts read.”
“Imagine that.”

Shaw began to remove the injection vials that were stacked all throughout the lab. Though she didn’t want to speak ill of the dead, their old doctor truly had a terrible system here. She laid the items across a table and began sorting by medication type, and Root stood watchfully across from her.

“He doesn’t like me very much.”

Whether Root had learned this by listening to Cole’s thoughts or just by using common sense was unclear. Maybe if Shaw kept her attention on a task, Root would get bored and walk away. She made sure to update the sorting system on her PADD as she went. After gathering all the anesthetic vials, she then moved on to sort some of the neurological medications...

“There is not a single person on this ship that likes me,” Root continued. “Well, except you.”

“I don’t like you,” Shaw said flatly, not looking up at the other woman.

Root rested her forearms on the surface between them. “Are you forgetting that I’m also an empath?”

“That’s irrelevant. I don’t have emotions.”

“Mhmm...” Shaw could feel Root’s eyes on her.

“And what happened to not reading me?”

“Well, Sameen,” she leaned forward, her voice lowering slightly. “I can’t help that your feelings are just purring so loudly.”

Shaw placed a vial on the counter with much more force than necessary, and laid her palms flat across. She finally looked up to meet Root’s gaze. Her brown eyes bore deep into her own, seeming
to draw Shaw in like a gravity well. Staring into them, she could almost feel her mind going blank to everything else.

Luckily she recovered before completely losing herself. God, Root was so annoying. “I'm definitely having strong feelings right now. Can you guess what they are?”

This time, Root’s eyes did not stray from Shaw’s. Their faces remained a few inches apart, Shaw refused to look away not wanting to give Root the satisfaction of making her a little uncomfortable.

“Oh... I have some idea,” a smirk made it's way across her face.

After a tense moment, Root's eyes briefly lost focus before she sat up straight, looking away. “Why does this keep happening...” she mumbled to herself.

Before Shaw could ask what she meant, the small panel on the wall lit up, revealing Control's face.

“Am I interrupting, Commander?”

Shaw straightened herself and faced the screen. “Of course not, Captain. I was just preparing to administer medication.”

“I see. Well there is something we need to discuss. Privately. If the prisoner is medically fit to be alone for a few minutes...”

So Control was still upset about the stunt she pulled to keep Root here. Good to know. Shaw nodded and looked to Root. She seemed anxious as she stepped out of the lab, the glass door shutting slowly behind her.

“It has come to my attention that you have been looking into the Aquino number again, Commander. Apparently Ensign Cole has been showing off a report he’s prepared for when we reach Starfleet.”

She mentally cursed him, “I felt that some of the details were unclear, Ma'am.”
“I don’t want to hear your excuses, Shaw. Even after I warned you about the prisoner, you are still allowing her to manipulate you.”

But Root didn't have anything to do with this. Well, not really. “If you're going to tell me that she has me under a spell, or whatever, you can save it. I already got an earful from Cole.”

“You are out of line, Commander,” Control paused. “This is exactly how Samantha Groves works; she uses her charm and intelligence to gain the favor of her targets before eliminating them. Don’t you understand? You are nothing but a mark to her.”

“Captain, it's not like that.”

“I am not finished, Shaw. While I would like to confine you to quarters for the remainder of our mission, we are unfortunately without proper medical staff. That being said, the prisoner will be returned to the brig until we can deliver her to Starfleet for trial.”

“Why waste time on a trial? We both know she's headed straight for execution,” the words were out before Shaw could stop herself.

“Let me guess, she told you that I would have her killed? I am not the enemy here. I am doing what's necessary to protect the galaxy from degenerates like her. You used to understand that.”

Shaw clenched her fists, but kept her mouth shut. She was getting tired of people telling her that she was being strung along. So far Root had shown herself to be a shameless flirt, good with a knife, and not much else.

However, she did feel strange around Root ever since their first conversation, but she attributed the reaction to the accusations she made about Control. Despite the fact that Root was quite possibly the most annoying person Shaw had ever met, they got along well enough now. And it's not like she could be defeated just by Root's perfect face.

Wait... her what?

Shaw shook the her head. Here she was defending a criminal to her captain, for no logical reason.
Not only that, but she found the way that they spoke about Root was actually starting to upset her.

Maybe her colleagues were on to something after all.

“She’s in your mind right now, isn’t she?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she tapped a finger against her skull, “it’s a tritanium trap.”

She wished she felt as confident as her voice sounded.

“... Indeed. Nevertheless, you are under strict orders to maintain a distance of at least one deck from the prisoner at all times. And--”

“That’s--”

“--in addition, when we return to Starfleet, I'm recommending you for a full psychological evaluation.”

“Wait, what the fu--”

Control spoke quickly again. “If I find you've disobeyed my orders again, I will have no choice but to request a court martial once we reach Earth.”

Too blindsided by her comments to respond, Shaw simply kept her gaze forward, her mouth falling slightly open.

"Now, if we could move on to another matter: Hersh and I will be taking on a small away mission to collect resources from a nearby planetoid. Normally I would leave the ship to you, but you cannot be trusted at this point in time.”

Shaw remained silent, so Control continued: “Please understand that I'm trying to protect you. Samantha Groves is toxic. Each second you spend together, her poison is spreading. Try and keep that in mind.”
The display flickered off and Shaw was left staring at the black screen for several minutes.

She eventually stepped from the lab back into sickbay, her fingers running across her forehead. This was a disaster. As a result of Control doubting her loyalty, she was missing the chance to take command of the ship, even if it was only temporary. Not only that, but it was reasonable to assume that her brain was figuratively being turned to mush by their prisoner. Why hadn't she noticed sooner? Shaw had strong mental fortitude and usually had a keen sense of when her mind was being invaded by a telepathic being. She briefly touched behind her ear, but felt no unusual sensation.

This pull she was feeling towards the other woman was quite ridiculous. Shaw was beginning to realize that the fleeting thoughts she had of Root were obviously caused by her mind being influenced. It was the only reasonable explanation for having any thoughts about her. After all, she didn't really care about Root's extremely long legs, or the way her eyes sparkled when she smiled. And she certainly didn't wonder how her lips tasted, or how soft her skin was. What she couldn't understand was why her stomach seemed to flutter when she laid eyes on Root; was that within her telepathic powers as well?

She tried to shake the pesky thoughts from her head, suddenly looking forward to handing Root to the federation, then at least she could go back to normal. Shaw found Root leaning against the center console looking... odd. Her eyes were fixed on a spot somewhere on the ground, occasionally darting back and forth. She reacted neither to Shaw approaching, nor the security guard entering the room.

“Root?”

No response. Shaw was tempted to take her tricorder and conduct some scans, but opted just for snapping her fingers instead. Upon hearing the noise, Root blinked and finally focused her attention on Shaw. Her eyes were slightly wider than usual as she stepped forward to grab Shaw's arms. She seemed frantic about something.

“You're in danger.”

Shaw tried hard to suppress the urge to ask her to elaborate. She had to put a stop to these games if she had any hope of freeing herself from this weird mind control. “Look, Root, I'm sending you back down to the brig.”
“The brig? No, you don't understand. It's the captain. She is going to kill us.”

Shaw sighed and moved herself out of Root's grasp, waving the security guard forward, “Yeah, yeah. The captain is evil.”

The guard took Root's arm and led her towards the door while she tried to shake herself free. It was much different than when she was first led in to the ship.

“I can hear her thoughts, Shaw!” She pulled against the guard again, “Control is going to destroy the whole ship! Why else would she be leaving?”

By this point, a second crew member had entered and was helping to restrain her. Shaw gestured for them to wait, and stepped in front to address Root directly.

“You need to leave.” Her throat felt dry at the words.

The other woman pleaded with her eyes. They were full of desperation, but Shaw could also see a hint of betrayal within them. “Sameen... please.”

Shaw turned her back and waved the guards away. “Get her out of here.”

Even after the doors shut, she could still hear the woman yelling down the corridor. Shaw sighed, fighting to ignore the feeling that a stone had been dropped into her stomach. This was the right decision, she told herself. The first step in escaping from Root's influence over her.

But she couldn't recall a time when making the right choice seemed so wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for tuning in!
biobed - kind of like a hospital bed. serves multiple purposes such as surgery, physicals, or even just diagnostic scanning

duranium - metallic substance used in the construction of starship hulls

tritanium - some kind of alloy. in this case it's really just a play on "titanium trap". I don't know.
Unto the Breach

Chapter Summary

Shaw and the crew face a major problem aboard the ship.

Chapter Notes

I have to admit, I was a little stuck on ch.8, but I got it done and it turned out to be one of my favorites. I can't wait for you to see it. That being said, I (finally) know how to end this crazy train, ha ha.

But for now, enjoy this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Acting Chief Medical Officer's log. Stardate 51098.9. I've started counting down the days until we reach Federation space again. Sickbay remains to be uneventful, and the days seem to be dragging longer than I thought possible. Most of the repairs are already completed, so the crew has resumed their regular ship duties. Cole was in here earlier with indigestion because he still can't handle spicy foods. I apologized for the way I acted the other day, and we spoke briefly about the Captain's away mission. She sent word that it would take longer than expected, and that we're to rendezvous with them back on Earth. With nothing left to occupy myself, I can't help but replay my last conversation with Root. Even two decks away, she remains a constant nagging in my mind. It's annoying. The worst part about it is that I'm actually starting to mi--

“Ugh,” Shaw groaned, pausing her entry. “Computer, strike the last four sentences from this entry and submit the log.”

She sat with her feet up on the desk, continuing to work on a PADD when she heard the doors opening. She stood from the desk, sighing as she crossed into the sickbay proper.

“Please state the nature of the...” she stopped herself before finishing the greeting. Stupid Root. She saw the crew member sporting plasma burns across their face and arm. “What happened?”
Shaw assisted them in laying on the nearest biobed while they explained what happened. She used her tricorder to scan the affected areas, then used the dermal regenerator to treat the wounds. The ensign told her about the problems in engineering; something about the warp core acting up. He was too close to a console when it overloaded, thus the burns.

The lights began to flicker as she worked. Shaw put down the regenerator and touched her communication badge.

“Sickbay to Engineering,” the lights flickered again. “Grice, what the hell is going on down there?”

Lieutenant Devon Grice, the ship's Chief Engineer and acting commanding officer, responded immediately. “We're reading some coolant leaks in the warp core. Had to divert some power from non-essential areas to help try and contain it.”

“Since when is Sickbay non-essential?”

“Apologies, Shaw, but if we don't plug this leak we're looking at a potential breach.”

She'd let him have this one. A breach was pretty serious after all. “I'm coming down to help.”

“Much appreciated, Commander.”

She finished treating the ensign and released him to quarters to rest.

“Computer,” the system beeped in response. “Direct anyone seeking medical attention to engineering.”

“Acknowledged.”

Shaw took her medical tricorder and exited sickbay. Once she reached the turbo lift, she instructed it to take her to deck one, her mind racing at the possibility of a warp core breach. She hastily entered Engineering and spotted Grice standing at the main control panel.
“What can I do?” She said when she reached him, sparing a glance to the glowing blue warp core situated in front of her. White smoke had begun to billow from the base.

“We can't do anything. I can't figure out what's causing the anti-matter to leak into the core. We've tried everything short of diving inside and sealing it with chewing gum.” He furiously tapped the panel. “We're going to have to dump it.”

The ship would lose their capability to travel at warp speed without the core. Stuck on just impulse engines, their remaining journey would easily double in time. The alternative would be allowing it to breach and destroy the ship, so the choice seemed obvious. Shaw would have to play doctor for a while longer, but it was better than being blown to bits.

“Everyone out!” He gestured to the rest of the engineers, who began making their way into the corridor. “Computer, prepare to eject the warp core. Authorization: Grice-Crimson 6.”

Grice and Shaw turned towards the door when the system beeped in response. “Authorization code not accepted.”

They stopped and shared a grave look.

“Let me try,” Shaw said. “Computer, prepare to eject the warp core. Authorization code: Shaw-Indigo 5 Alpha.”

The system beeped once again. “Authorization code not accepted.”

Shaw returned to the control panel and examined the data. There was virtually no explanation as to why the leak would be occurring. Once the anti-matter fully breached the containment, contact with the normal matter would result in an explosion powerful enough to destroy the entire ship. Perhaps an equally concerning issue was that neither of their authorization codes were being recognized, considering they were the highest ranking officers currently on board. Shaw tapped the control panel and accessed a countdown timer. She looked to Grice.

“We have less than thirty minutes before the core breaches.”
His face hardened, mind clearly focused on what had to be done.

“Red alert,” the lights tinted red, an alarm followed. “All hands: This is Engineering. Prepare for ship-wide evacuation.”

The fact that the Northern Lights was a smaller ship worked to their advantage, and the evacuation was proceeding without incident. Shaw sat in the command chair on the bridge, using the console to monitor the crew as they loaded into the escape pods. She decided that she would take a shuttle craft to guide the pods after they launched, or tractor them if they fell off course. Cole had already agreed to meet her there.

Satisfied that decks one, two, and three had been cleared, she brought her attention to deck four. Scanning, she only detected one life sign remaining in the brig, which was strange because there should have been at least two, if any. Not to mention the Klingons that were supposed to be locked up as well.

“Bridge to Dillinger,” she waited several seconds, but received no response. “Computer, locate Rick Dillinger.”

“Lieutenant Dillinger is in the brig.”

That explained the life sign she saw, but then...

“Samantha Groves is in the brig.”

She scanned the area again and still only came up with one life sign. The likely answer was that the Lieutenant already fled to an escape pod and left Root behind, but that didn't explain why they were both registering as being in the brig.

She checked the countdown that told her the core would breach in 11:04.

Shit.

“Shaw, where are you?” Cole called over the coms. “The evacuations are almost complete and we're preparing to launch the pods.”

“I'll be right there.”

She stood quickly from the console and entered the lift, heading for deck four. Mind control or not, she wasn't going to leave Root to die in the explosion. The lights were still tinted red as she sprinted down into the brig. The first thing she noticed was the body of Lieutenant Dillinger on the ground. She didn't need a tricorder to tell he was dead, based on the way his neck was twisted. She glanced around, the Klingon cells were empty, which meant the life sign must have been...

“Root?”

The woman came into view as she approached the force field protecting the cell. She looked no worse for wear, and her typical smirk appeared upon seeing Shaw. “Somehow I just knew you'd come back for me. You finally believe me about Control?”

Shaw used the control panel to deactivate the barrier. “Now's not the time for that. You're lucky I didn't leave your ass down here. Let's go.”

Root didn't miss a beat as she stepped out of the cell. “Why Sameen, have you been thinking a lot about my ass?”

Unbelievable.
“Root,” Shaw was already exasperated. “We are minutes away from the ship being vaporized. Can you *please* shut up?”

“Whatever you say, sweetie.”

Together they left the brig and boarded the turbo lift. Plenty of time until the breach, just over seven minutes. As they headed to the shuttle bay, Root explained that the Klingons escaped during a power fluctuation and were able to overpower Dillinger. Shaw had to wonder why no one reported seeing them, but perhaps the warriors weren't aware of the danger and were wandering around looking for crew to kill.

She spotted Cole waiting outside the shuttle bay doors. His face twisted when he saw Root.

“Not a word,” Shaw ordered. “Come on.”

Root suddenly gasped as the doors opened, “Cole--!”

Shaw turned in time to see a volley of phaser rounds fly past them, several striking Cole. One of the missing Klingon warriors was standing down the hall with his weapon raised. Root dropped to the ground as Cole fell, and Shaw immediately drew her own weapon to return fire.

Root dragged him inside the shuttle bay while Shaw shot the Klingon dead. She followed them inside and used the control panel to seal the doors behind them. She turned to see Root sitting with Cole's head in her lap. He didn't look good.

“Help me get him onto the shuttle,” Shaw ordered. “We can treat him there.”

“Shaw...” he said weakly. “There's no time.”

“You're stupid if you think I'm going to leave you.” Though she spoke with conviction, her clinical mind knew that his chances of survival were low. Based on how the wounds looked, he had minutes left, if that. Not to mention the clock ticking down to their destruction. They couldn't possibly get him onto the shuttle, treat him, and get out of range in time.
“Warning: Warp core breach in: five minutes.”

Shaw knelt down next to Cole and watched him. His eyes were watering, breath shallow, and his body trembling. She heard Root sniffle above him and wondered why she would be so affected; the only thing she really knew about Cole was that he didn't like her. Still, he seemed to calm when she touched his face, shifting his expression to that of contentment and peace. His breathing became less raged and a small smile warmed onto his face.

Shaw realized now what Root was doing, and why she was crying. She must have been feeling his pain as he took his last breaths, reading his thoughts as his mind faded away. He was scared, and she used her abilities to put him at ease in his final moments. Shaw allowed herself a beat of sorrow before quickly standing and walking to the shuttle.

Root boarded moments after, and took the seat beside Shaw. She didn't say anything, but began to tap various control panels in front of her, initiating the launch sequence. How she knew the process was something Shaw would have to ask about later. Meanwhile, Shaw was trying to interface with the *Northern Lights* to see why the escape pods haven't fired yet, but the computer wasn't allowing her access to it. They were running out of time.

“We need to go now if we're going to make it,” Shaw said. Root wordlessly began the launch. Their pod soared across the shuttle bay, straight through the open door and into space. Root set the speed at warp two as the countdown reached one minute.

Shaw tried to open a communication channel with the ship but still wasn't able to connect. She would have to settle for watching it on their view screen. Relief washed over her as she could see the escape pods finally beginning to spill out.

“Time remaining until breach?”

“Warp core breach in: 30 seconds,” the computer responded.

Shaw's face fell. She knew the crew couldn't get out of range in time.

Root drew her hands back from the panel and looked away from the screen, her voice quiet. “I'm sorry, Sameen.”
They could do nothing but watch as the ship finally exploded, taking nearly all of the escape pods with it. The shock wave hit them moments later, causing their shuttle to rumble.

“Shields holding at 91%,” Root said.

Shaw couldn't tear her eyes from the screen as the explosion subsided, leaving minimal debris. There was a void within her, and she wondered what a normal person might feel. Remorse, perhaps, for her fallen colleagues. Maybe even regret that she didn't die with them. But she felt nothing, not even her usual anger. Shaw knew that she had to push the incident from her mind and consider her options. Root spoke, as if sensing her turmoil. Which, given her abilities, she probably did.

“What are we going to do now?”

Shaw sighed and looked into space.

“I don't know.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry (not sorry) about destroying the ship!

I tried to keep the warp core nonsense to a minimum. The core itself is basically a big cylinder and allows the ship to travel at higher speeds. It glows blue and white. Something about matter/anti-matter blah blah.

Certain actions on the ship require a verbal authorization code to complete. Ejecting the warp core, opening/locking certain doors etc. Some things needed higher ranking codes, such as setting the ship to self-destruct. (and only the captain could do that one)

Fun fact: the star dates aren't made up! They correspond with actual dates. The one at the beginning is Feb. 6th, 2374 at around 2AM.
Chapter Summary

Now that the Northern Lights is no more, Shaw and Root try to figure out their next move.

Chapter Notes

We're almost in the home stretch now. Enjoy!

I finished ch10 the other day and I'm a little sad that it had to end, ha ha. Hopefully you'll like how it turns out!

Even with her abilities, Root could not get a read on what Shaw was feeling after watching her ship explode. Root was still recovering from the sorrow she had taken on when Michael Cole was killed, otherwise she was indifferent to it being destroyed. They were holding her prisoner, after all.

Shaw remained silent, obviously still thinking about their next move. Being a good soldier, she would probably decide to take them back to Earth, drop Root off as planned, and continue from there. Root briefly wondered if she could convince Shaw to let her escape capture, but she knew it was an unlikely outcome. Root let out a small sigh and accessed the galaxy map, setting a course for Earth. Since their shuttle could only travel at warp five, their journey would take around two days, give or take.

She noticed a sharp soreness in her left shoulder as she entered the commands. Turning to look, she could see that her shirt was torn, and the skin underneath blistered. One of the phaser blasts that killed Cole must have grazed her shoulder.

“Where's the medical kit?” Root pulled her shirt back a little farther, hissing as the fabric brushed against the burn. Shaw spun in her chair to face her.

“Are you hurt?”
Root shook her head. “It's nothing.”

Shaw stood from her seat and walked past Root, gesturing for her to follow. Their shuttle was compact; behind the command console located at the front, there was a small corridor that led a room resembling military quarters. A single bed, replicator, and small lavatory was attached to the unit. The very back portion of the ship was reserved for the more serious emergency supplies, such as environmental suits and one very small escape pod.

“Sit,” Shaw pointed to the bed as she continued walking into the bathroom. Root complied and watched as the other woman reappeared with the medical kit in hand. She placed it down on the bed next to Root and used her tricorder to first scan the affected area. Apparently satisfied with the data, she returned it to her pocket and opened the kit, pulling out the familiar dermal regenerator.

“Pull back your shirt,” Shaw ordered, and Root's face lit up as she turned to face her. Shaw gave a warning look in response, so unfortunately the innuendo was left unsaid.

Root did as asked and unbuttoned her prison shirt, pulling the fabric completely over her shoulder. She spared a glance at the angry looking burn before facing forward again. As well, she gathered her hair all on the right side so that it wouldn't be in the way.

Part of the reason Root enjoyed spending time in sickbay was watching Shaw work. Despite being a little rough around the edges, she was truly an excellent doctor. Root had a feeling that she didn't hate being reassigned as much as she let on. Once Shaw was finished, she put the device away and sat on the bed next to Root. Both staring forward, neither speaking, it was a comfortable silence. She pulled her shirt back over her shoulder.

“I'm sorry we couldn't save Cole.” Root said quietly, eyes still forward. She could see Shaw slowly nodding from her peripheral vision.

“You used your powers to help him in the end,” Shaw kept her eyes downcast. “I wont forget it.”

Root turned to her and nodded as well. After a beat, Shaw rose from her seat. “There should be a change of clothes somewhere here. Plus the replicator if you're hungry. Feel free to freshen yourself up and get some rest. I'll be at the command console if you need anything.”

She turned to leave, and Root quickly stood up. “You're allowing me to access the ship?”
Shaw spun around to face her, hands on her hips. “Listen closely, because I'm only saying this once. Having you around hasn't been easy considering that, in all likelihood, you're using your abilities to mess with my thoughts and actions.”

Root opened her mouth to speak, but Shaw held her hand out. “I'm not finished. Part of the training required for serving on the *Northern Lights* involved resistance to different forms of interrogation and torture, including the telepathic variety. Each time our vulcan instructor was able to get inside my head, I felt this... intuition. It's this sensation behind my ear. I don't know why, but that's how I knew that my reality was being skewed.

That hasn't happened around you. At least, not yet. That means you're either very good, or Control was wrong. And after seeing what you did with Cole...” she paused, sighing. “I don't know why, but I trust you. It's something I feel with my gut, not my head. So for the moment, you're not a prisoner on this ship. I need you for the mission. That's it.”

Apparently not interested in a response, Shaw turned and walked down the corridor and back towards the front of the shuttle.

Root stood for several minutes wondering exactly what mission Shaw had been referring to.

After a much needed sonic shower, Root dressed in the simple gray t-shirt and black jeans she found in the quarters. She approached the replicator.

“Computer, one apple please. Red.”
The interface lit up at her request, and a bright red apple materialized on the tray. She picked it up and examined the fruit; it was a perfect copy. She walked back through the ship and towards the command console. Shaw was sitting in the chair entering data on a PADD, presumably writing a report about the warp core breach and the events that led up to it. Some of her hair had come lose, and her eyelids seemed to be drooping with each word she typed.

Root sat in the chair next to her and examined the console to see their current flight plan. It looked like Shaw hadn't made any major alterations to the course, only to change the speed.

“Sameen, you look exhausted,” Shaw slowly brought her gaze up to Root. “I can watch the con for a few hours. Get some rest.”

Shaw considered for a moment, but eventually stood from her seat and stretched deeply. She drew something from her pocket and held it out. Curious, Root took the object, recognizing it immediately as the communication badge commonly worn by Starfleet officers. She turned it over between her fingers; somewhat triangular in shape, with a rectangle across the back, and gold and silver in color. Root never imagined she would come to possess one.

“I've asked the computer to notify us of any federation vessels that come into range,” Shaw began. “Call me if anything comes up.”

Their eyes met for several seconds before Root spoke. “Will do.” She felt a twinge of a spark between them. Not unlike the moment they shared in sickbay a few days ago.

After a beat, Shaw nodded and proceeded down the hall. Root could not help but leer at the commander’s body as she walked away, nor could she stop the small sigh that escaped her lips. She off-hand wondered when she had time to develop, well, feelings towards Shaw. It was unlike any previous encounter she'd ever had. Sudden, and fairly alarming, there was just something about the dashing officer that completely enthralled Root from the moment she laid eyes upon her.

Shaw chose to spend her career on a ship whose mission was to capture and eliminate those who mean to do the galaxy harm. Not terribly different than what Root set out to do, although Starfleet would obviously argue that. And her “personality disorder”? Root didn't see it as a negative trait. Root felt like it gave Shaw a different perspective, like she could truly see the world for what it really was. It was one of the most interesting things about her.

Intelligent, loyal, beautiful, great with a phaser... what's not to like?
Root gave a small shake of her head. This was all very unfortunate. Once Shaw dropped her off with Starfleet, the chances of meeting again were impossible. The federation has been trying to capture Root for quite some time and she suspected that the fate awaiting her was to be thrown in a dark hole somewhere. She would just have to make the most of her time with Shaw, she supposed.

Setting her feet on the console in front of her, Root accessed news feeds across the quadrant hoping to come across some action to detour their trip back to Earth.

An hour or so later, a broadcast caught Root’s attention but it was for all the wrong reasons. She dropped her feet from the panel and leaned forward. Control appeared to be giving a press conference regarding the fate of the Northern Lights. How she managed to learn about the accident and make it back to Earth before them was something of a mystery. Root had already known that she had been planning to destroy the ship, it seemed like nothing was too far fetched when it came to the Captain. Root stood from her seat.

“Computer, mute playback,” she tapped the com badge pinned on her chest. “Sameen, you need to come up here.”

She waited several seconds, but no response came. “Shaw?”

Root walked into the aft section of the ship, eventually coming to the bunk. Shaw’s communication badge lay on the small bedside table, and the woman herself appeared to be sleeping quite soundly. Her hair was now in a loose pony tail, with one hand under the pillow, the other in a loose fist close to her face. Root felt her heart flutter at the sight. She reached out and grasped Shaw's bare shoulder, noting how warm it was, and shook gently.

“Shaw, wake up.”

Though her eyes opened slowly, she seemed to be immediately alert. Shaw sat up and quickly ran a hand over her face. “What's the matter?”

“There's something on TV you should see.”

Shaw rose from the bed and slipped her feet into the boots that lay on the ground. Collecting her badge from the table, she headed towards the front of the ship, once again giving Root the opportunity to admire her... shape. Shaw had changed into a simple black tank top, black pants of a
military style, and black combat boots. She looked like something out of a 21st century action film. Root followed her down the corridor.

Both women took their seats and Root resumed the playing of the broadcast. Control was speaking with the news anchor about the destruction of her ship.

“If you're just joining us, we have the Captain of one of the Federation's most advanced ships, the U.S.S. Northern Lights. She is here today to help to clear up some of the rumors we've been hearing regarding the ship's recent destruction. Ma'am?”

“Yes, thank you. It is with deep regret that I must confirm the terrorist attack on one of our own vessels.”

“Terrorist attack?” Shaw looked to Root, who merely shrugged.

“Our reports indicate that the ship suffered a critical warp core failure that could not successfully be corrected.” Control continued, “In addition, the launch mechanism for the escape pods was tampered with, which resulted in them being unable to deploy in time to escape the explosion.”

"A true tragedy for the federation. Over 50 lives lost."

"Tragic indeed," Control said. Root scoffed in response while Shaw continued to listen.

“Earlier in the broadcast,” the reporter continued. "You mentioned impressions of foul play. Do you have any suspects at this time?”

Shaw and Root both leaned forward, eager to hear Control's response.

“We do. Our top suspect is the convict we had secured from the Black Coffin prison ship: Samantha Groves, otherwise known as Root.”

“How original.” Root leaned back in her seat, crossing her arms.
“Our second suspect is the only other survivor of this disaster, the former Lieutenant Commander of the Northern Lights: Sameen Shaw.”

“Wait, what the fuck?” Shaw stood from her seat.

The broadcast closed by displaying a communication frequency to use if anyone had any additional information regarding the criminals. Both of their photos were displayed under a label that said "extremely dangerous”. For Root they had her mugshot from the Black Coffin, and Shaw's appeared to be her official Starfleet portrait. It was extremely flattering. If Root wasn't head over heels before... she shook her head. Definitely not the time for that yet.

Shaw stepped away from the con and paced in the small space behind their chairs. Root turned to watch her.

“We didn't destroy the ship,” Shaw said finally, her eyes on the ground.

Root nodded. “I can understand using me as a scapegoat, but why blame you, too?”

Shaw crossed her arms, walking slowly back to her station. She pressed several commands, and accessed the federation communication channel that was displayed on the broadcast.

“Sameen, what are you doing?”

“Setting the record straight.” She opened the channel. “This is Commander Shaw of the Northern Lights. I'm transmitting our current location and course heading to any Federation ships in the area. Requesting an escort to Starfleet HQ. Allow Root and I to explain what really happened on the ship. End transmission.”

Root was certain that this wouldn't end well. As soon as the federation found them they would be arrested regardless of the truth. Control has no doubt used her status to skew any kind of justice in her favor and, though they were both innocent of this particular crime, Root's previous transgressions would not help their situation. She resolved to at least try and protect Shaw from this punishment, when the time came.

“It might be a while until another ship finds us.” Shaw said, interrupting Root's thoughts. “Any ideas on how we can pass the time?”
Her eyes met Shaw's, and a suggestive smile pulled at her lips.

“A few.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

***

sonic shower - a shower that uses sound waves/pulses rather than water

replicator - device that can reproduce pretty much anything on command. I guess it's like a 3d printer?
Set an Intercept Course

Chapter Summary

A Federation vessel responds to Shaw's request for an escort, but it doesn't go as expected.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Sameen, could you hurry it up?”

“Don't rush me.”

“If you're having trouble...”

“Please, this isn't my first time.”

“Okay, okay.”

Shaw pauses, thinking.

“You know Sam, if you just moved--”
“Root. I'm trying to concentrate.”

“It's not too late to yield.”

“Yeah, you'd like that, wouldn't you?”

“Well, I wouldn't hate it.”

Shaw and Root sat across from each other at a small table and an incomplete *Kal'Toh* game sphere rested between them. Root had suggested that they partake in the Vulcan game of logic to help pass the time until a Federation vessel responded to their message. Two hours later, and the game was still well under way. When it began, the *Kal'Toh* was a jumble of metal rods, known as t'an, that intersected and crossed in all directions. The object of the game was to rearrange the rods into a sphere, moving only one piece at a time. Shaw could work with the logic aspect of the game, but the *patience* part was a little challenging. Root was also incredibly smug the whole time, which made it even more difficult.

Tentatively, Shaw reached for a t'an, pulling it from the mess, and carefully replaced it on the opposite side. She was hoping for some kind of advancement, but the sphere remained in disarray. Root made a 'tut-tut' sound from in front of her.

Shaw huffed and crossed her arms. “If you're so damn smart, let's see you solve it.”

Root raised an eyebrow and leaned forward in acceptance of the challenge. Reaching for a t'an of her own, Root kept her eyes on Shaw, a look filled with intensity. Whether it was a strategy for winning, or genuine desire, the heated gaze was succeeding in throwing Shaw slightly off balance. As Root selected a t'an, drawing the piece slowly from the rest, her eyes continued to bore into Shaw's.

She wondered how Root managed to make it look so *sexual*; each movement was slow and deliberate; casual, yet precise. Shaw's throat suddenly felt dry, and she found herself having to really concentrate on keeping her eyes from drifting to her companion's... other features. Root finally lay the piece back among the rest, and the rods re-materialized into a perfect sphere.

Shaw was speechless. Her mouth hung open in disbelief at the completed game in front of her.
“How...?”

Root sighed in satisfaction, sitting back and interlocking her fingers behind her head. “Elementary spatial harmonics, my dear Sameen.”

Though she was bewildered by the outcome of the game (and annoyed at Root's explanation), Shaw allowed light laughter to escape her.

A sudden rumble shook the ship, causing the pieces of the sphere to fall apart and scatter across the ground. Both women stood from their seats and wordlessly took their places at the command console. Through the main window they could see a large ship attempting to pull them off course.

“We're stuck in some kind of tractor beam,” Root said.

“Let's hail these idiots,” Shaw suggested. Root nodded and accessed the communication command.

“Channel open.”

“This is Commander Shaw of the federation star ship Northern Lights. You mind telling me what you think you're doing?”

The view screen populated with the face of a Ferengi, who she assumed was the captain of the ship. With large ears and very orange skin, Shaw found herself disliking every encounter with these aliens. She assumed this would be no different.

“Greetings, Commander!” he laughed aloud, revealing the sharp and angry teeth protruding from his mouth. “We're responding to your distress call!"

Okay... "Except it wasn't a distress call. And you aren't a Starfleet ship.”

"Surely you're aware of the reward for capturing the infamous Root! We Ferengi aren't usually bounty hunters, but we couldn't pass the opportunity to--”
Root accessed the communication channel and suddenly cut off the video feed. “Not really in the mood to hear the Rules of Acquisition, sorry.”

Shaw rolled her eyes and turned to face the other woman. “Except now we’re stuck.”

“So little faith. Their ship may be bigger, but scans indicate that it's lacking in speed. If we can get free, we can definitely out-run it. Do we have any torpedoes?”

Checking the weapons manifest, the ship listed minimal phaser capabilities, and only two photon torpedoes. “We're not a warship.”

Root explained her plan to Shaw: Since their weapons in general were no match for the Ferengi ship, and they couldn't break free of the tractor beam, they would have to destabilize it somehow. Rather than fire, if they just opened the launching doors, the torpedo would simply travel up the tractor beam and detonate on contact with the ship. The Ferengi wouldn't detect weapons fire until it was too late. Shaw had to admit it was a good plan and she gave Root the go-ahead to launch.

“Torpedo away. Get ready to jump to warp once this thing hits.”

They waited a count of thirty seconds before the warhead detonated, shaking their shuttle and effectively breaking them free from the tractor hold. Shaw immediately increased the speed to warp five, and seconds later they were several light years from the greedy aliens.

“Shields holding at 68% and the vessel is not in pursuit,” Root reported.

“Not bad,” Shaw turned to Root, who spun around in the chair looking quite pleased with herself.

“That was nothing. A few years ago I convinced a Ferengi to trade fifty gold-pressed latinum bars in exchange for a holographic fish.”

Shaw's eyebrows shot up. That was quite a feat if it was true, she thought. Especially given that Ferengi valued money over everything else. She tried not let on how impressed she was. Besides, Root was a telepath, which meant she could essentially make anyone do anything. Well, two could play this game.
“I once beat a Klingon in an arm wrestling match,” Shaw put her feet up on the con and leaned back in her chair, matching Root's smug expression. She seemed to read the challenge.

“I can finish a game of Kotra in under two hours.” Not bad; Shaw's record was eight.

“Well I'm the academy's all time highest scoring Velocity player,” she made a gun shape with her finger and 'fired' several times.

Root raised her eye brow and tilted her head. “And I can make a Vulcan laugh.”

Shaw opened her mouth to retort, but her words died in her throat. The bridge was silent save for the whirring of the warp core. A Vulcan... laughing?

Shaw looked to Root, who seemed to be suppressing a snicker herself. Her own smile broke into a grin, and pretty soon the two gave in to a bout of laughter themselves. When the silliness subsided, she saw Root looking to her with an expression of adoration. Though this had been common, it was the first time Shaw wasn't really bothered by it. She felt a distinct shift in the air between them as silence fell upon the ship once again.

A panel in front of Shaw began to blink, distracting her from pondering any further. She pressed the button and looked over the data: A Federation ship had appeared on sensors, and was currently on an intercept course. She shared this information with Root, who simply nodded and smiled. Shaw noticed that her her smile was no longer reaching her eyes.

Root excused herself while Shaw hailed the incoming vessel. The captain of the federation ship appeared on the view screen.

“Greetings, Commander. I'm Captain Lambert of the Decima.” He was a fairly handsome man, with an accent Shaw recognized as being from Earth. “I understand you're in need of an escort.”

“That would be appreciated, Captain. We need to clear the air regarding the Northern Lights.”

He shifted in his seat. “We?”
“Root and I, yes.”

“I see,” Lambert looked to his left, presumably at someone just out of view. “So you're saying that the telepath is still on board with you?”

Shaw furrowed her brow, this conversation suddenly feeling odd. “Yes.”

“I understand. Worry not, we have top of the line security measures, and my crew will ensure your safety on our short journey back to Earth.”

It only took her a moment to realize that he was implying that Root required extra security. She sometimes forgot that her companion was a dangerous criminal. “That won't be necessary. She isn't a threat.”

Lambert paused again, glancing off screen. “Certainly, Commander. Well, we have your location and should rendezvous with your ship within the hour.”

“Understood. Thank you, Captain.”

The display switched off, leaving Shaw to look out into space. For some reason, she was stuck with a strange feeling like she was about to make a wrong choice again.
A short while later, Root reemerged from the aft section of the ship. Shaw filled her in on the *Decima* situation and though she continued to smile, she still seemed off. While Shaw remained seated, Root slowly paced behind her. It was understandable that she would be a little apprehensive, considering she was still high on their wanted list, but Shaw would be there to defend her from the federation brass. In fact, she was about to tell Root this when Lambert's voice permeated the shuttle.

“Lambert to Shaw.”

“Go ahead.”

“We're almost in range. Lower your shields and prepare to receive our extraction team.”

“Acknowledged.” Shaw replied without really thinking. Why wasn't their shuttle just being taken into their ship?

“Sameen,” Root's voice grabbed her attention. There was a slight quiver of urgency when she spoke. Shaw turned in her chair to face her, but the other woman was looking away. “You need to let me take the blame for the breach.”

Shaw stood and moved to stand before her. “Why would I do that?”

“They're going to arrest you.”

“I haven't done anything wrong. Neither have you.” Not recently anyway. Shaw shook her head.

“Your faith in Starfleet is truly admirable, Shaw, but you have no idea what they're capable of.” she trailed off.

“Everything's going to be fine. Trust me.”

Root seemed to suppress a small shiver. When their eyes finally met, and Shaw could see the worry within. She felt obligated to trust that look, considering last time she saw it was before their ship exploded.
Shaw didn't get a chance to ask what she knew. Root lurched forward and pressed her body against Shaw's, her arms wrapping tightly across her back. Now, Shaw was definitely not a hugger, but eventually the proximity and warmth became too much to resist. She brought her arms up and settled them against the small of Root's back. Reassuring and safe, the embrace actually felt right.

They fit together remarkably well, and Shaw almost felt a pang of longing when Root pulled away. They remained close, however Root's eyes were cast down. Shaw began to consider the possibility that this could be last time they would see each other, and that Root already knew it. Perhaps that explained the sorrow surrounding Root ever since they were contacted by the Decima. So Shaw decided to give in to impulse, and this time it was her surging forward to press her lips against Root's.

The swiftness of Root's response was an indication of how she had been wanting this. Feeling Root's hands roaming across the back of her shirt, she felt electricity coursing through her body. It made Shaw realize that maybe she had been thinking about this too. Root was insistent; she kissed Shaw with urgency and passion, knowing their time was short. Shaw allowed Root's tongue access to her own, and couldn't help the yearning she felt upon hearing the other woman utter a sound of delight. Wishing that they weren't mere moments from being interrupted, Shaw regretfully pulled back. Root chased her lips and kissed her deeply before leaning back as well. It seemed like neither one wanted this to end, and they remained in each others arms.

When Root first came aboard the ship, Shaw felt an unease around her. That part wasn't unusual, as Shaw always felt a kind of imbalance around others. It reminded her of being on a ship with the wrong gravity settings; her movements never being quite right. But the last few days had felt natural, easy, and the more time they spent together, the more Shaw found herself to be more stable. Root had tipped the scale to even her out again.

Three crew members from the U.S.S. Decima materialized across the space from them, thus finally putting an end to their moment. Two held phasers, including Captain Lambert. The third had a device that Shaw did not recognize.

“Step away from the telepath,” he ordered. The women untangled from one another, and Shaw moved slightly to stand in front of Root. She refused to allow his people to treat them like criminals.

“There's no need for this,” Shaw held her hand out. “I told you before, she's not dangerous.”

“Commander, you aren't thinking clearly,” Lambert began, mirroring her stance. “We've detected high levels of mind control waves aboard this ship. She has been manipulating you.”
She huffed in frustration. “First of all, measuring mind control waves isn't a thing. Secondly, no one is controlling anyone.”

Lambert spoke to one of his colleagues, a blonde female. “She's too far gone. Lieutenant Rousseau, activate the device.”

The woman complied and began turning the dial on the object she held. Nothing happened at first, but then Root hissed in pain behind her. She turned to see Root collapsing to her knees, holding her head tightly and squeezing her eyes shut.

“Sam...!” Root managed.

“I guess your little girlfriend doesn't like our dog whistle,” Rousseau said with a smirk. From her comment, Shaw gathered that the device was emitting a sound that only Root could hear.

“Turn it off,” Shaw growled, hand twitching at her sides. The guard was unaffected by her command, and continued to grin at Root's expense. She turned the dial further.

Something in Shaw snapped when she heard Root cry out in pain again. She lunged forward, knocking the device from Rousseau's grasp and throwing a fist against her face. The lieutenant crumpled to the ground, and Shaw intended to move on Lambert next, however she would not get the chance.

As she turned to face him, she was struck in the chest with a phaser beam. She fell hard against the wall behind her and slowly slumped down. Her vision begun to swim as she watched Lambert tower over her. Shaw could see Root laying to the side, she must have passed out from whatever effect that device had on her. Shaw stretched out her hand, trying to reach out to Root, before slipping into unconsciousness herself.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy...
Kal'Toh - Similar to the game jenga.

Tractor Beam - Stabilizing gravity beam. Can be used to hold, carry, or draw in objects.

Ferengi - Greedy aliens from the alpha quadrant. Big ears, orange skin colour, sharp teeth.

Latinum Bar - Ferengi currency.

Kotra - Like the game Risk. And we all know that’s a 5+ hour situation

Velocity - One-on-one competitive sport. Held on the holodeck, each player is to avoid getting hit by a floating sphere, using a phaser to shoot it in the direction of their opponent.
Root was pulled from sleep by a deep throbbing in her skull like nothing she had ever felt. She tried to reach up, but her limbs felt heavy. Perhaps the Decima crew had sedated her after using that strange weapon. When the officer had activated the device Root had been overwhelmed by a terrible sound, as if ten thousand voices were screaming all at once. Whatever it was left both her mind and body feeling drained. She fought a strong wave of nausea as she sat up.

She finally took a moment to take in her surroundings, however, her body seemed to be moving in slow motion, head lulled as she looked left and right. Another brig, it seemed, though this was larger than the one on the Northern Lights.

When the security officer outside noticed she was awake, he tapped his communication badge and spoke. His words sounded muffled, and Root continued to feel like she was under water. The guard left and was replaced by a gray old man. His uniform was different than Shaw’s in that he wore a belt over his jacket. Based on the indication on his neck, and the red coloring of his undershirt, the man was ranked as Admiral.

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Groves. I’m John Greer.” He said, and Root had to concentrate hard on his words. Her head was still spinning slightly.

He stepped into the cell and stood in front of her. Apparently they didn't think her enough of a threat to warrant a force field. She had to agree, considering she could barely keep her head up. She
opened her mouth to reply to her captor, but only a small sound escaped. Something in the realm of a sigh and a whimper.

“Conserve your energy, my dear,” Greer supplied. “You are still medicated. Talking will be difficult for the moment.”

So Root simply sat still, trying to keep herself conscious until the admiral told her what he wanted. Luckily she didn't have to wait long.

“You are currently in the solitary wing of a prison on Earth, awaiting punishment,” Greer began. “For your part in the destruction of the U.S.S. Northern Lights, you will undergo a complete engramatic purge of you mind. Though you will maintain basic function, I'm sorry to say that you wont be much of an assassin once the process is complete.”

So they were going to put her in a catatonic state. She couldn't decide if that was better than being killed.

“As for Miss Shaw, she will undergo a similar procedure, but one that will only remove offending engrams planted by you.”

Shaw...

Root recalled Shaw being shot before she passed out and wondered where they had taken her now, since they obviously weren't being kept in the same area. Although Root gave her word that she would not to use her abilities towards her, this situation was desperate enough to break that promise. She tried to reach out with her mind, but was immediately met with another high-pitched screeching sound. It made her world spin, and she pressed her palms against her forehead trying to get the pain to subside.

“While in this facility, any attempt to use your telepathic abilities will be met with feedback, as you are no doubt experiencing now.”

“Starfleet hospitality,” Root said through gritted teeth, “...never ceases to amaze.”

“We can't be too careful, given your history. Impressive how you managed to influence someone of such strong mental fortitude.”
The pounding in Root's head finally settled enough where she was able to open her eyes again. Even if she couldn't reach Shaw with her thoughts, she could still protect her from inside this cell; Shaw didn't deserve to have her brain picked at by these people.

“There’s no need to purge her,” she mumbled, her voice still heavy.

“I disagree. Your abilities are far too advanced, Miss Groves. We need to be certain that we eliminate all offending memories. Every trace of you must be wiped from her mind.”

She wondered if the kiss they shared was an offending memory as Greer said. She wished she had time to dwell on that moment, but she needed to concentrate on selling this lie to save Shaw. Luckily these people already had strong opinions on what was going on between them.

“Once you’re finished frying my brain, our connection will be completely severed anyway,” Root took a deep breath. “The control I have over her mind will be gone.”

Greer raised an eyebrow. “So you admit to using your powers against Miss Shaw?”

Root swallowed the lump in her throat, and blinked to keep tears from falling.

“Release her, and I'll tell you everything.”
Shaw woke with a start, feeling an uncomfortable pull on her chest. She tried to sit up quickly, but the wound on her chest reminded her to take it slow. Apparently none of Lambert's crew knew how to work a dermal regenerator. Unbelievable. She looked down at the gauze poorly taped across her breastbone where the phaser had struck, and eventually eased into a sitting position. She supposed that she should be grateful that the weapon had only been set to stun.

Looking around, it was not difficult to ascertain that she was in a cell of some kind; poor lighting, a cold bench, and a force field was all that greeted her. How long had she been out? And more importantly, were they holding Root here as well? She stood and approached the barrier, trying to get a better view of the ship's brig. Looking left and right revealed... nothing. She was in a singular room; no additional cells, no guards posted, and only one other door. So much for having top security measures. Shaw brought her hand to the edge of the force field, almost reveling in the shock she received from being too close.

Suddenly the doors slid open, and a tall, dark skinned officer strode through carrying a chair under his arm. The two gold pips on his red shirt indicated he was a lieutenant.

“Hey!” She called out. “Where the hell am I?”

He did not acknowledge her. He simply placed the chair in front of her cell and left the room again. A few minutes later, an elderly admiral, who Shaw recognized as John Greer, entered and took the seat in front of her cell.

“I apologize for the accommodations, Miss Shaw, but we could not be sure about your state of mind when Captain Lambert brought you in.”

So they made it back to Earth then. That didn't quite explain why she was being held like a prisoner, or...

“Where's Root?”

He frowned and folded his hands on his lap. “Miss Groves is preparing to receive her punishment: a full engramatic purge.”

“And that is?”
“A medical procedure we've adapted from the Mari of the Delta Quadrant. They used it to erase violent thoughts from their telepathic citizens and create peace among their people. In this case, however, we have modified the process to fit this unique situation.”

Shaw hadn't heard of the Mari before, being so far away, but she definitely did not like the sound of this purge thing. It was obvious that they intended to push the process until Root was completely brain dead, leaving no chance of Control being exposed for her actions. Shaw clenched her fists.

“She wasn't responsible for what happened on the Northern Lights.”

“Our reports seem to indicate otherwise, Miss Shaw.”

“Your reports are bullshit. I was there.”

The admiral seemed to study her as he leaned forward in his seat. “Let's say that you're right and Miss Groves did not destroy the ship. How do you think we should proceed?”

Shaw shrugged. “Let her go.”

“And what of her previous wrongdoings? If we let her walk away, we will lose the chance to see her punished for her many actions against the federation. Regardless of her innocence of this crime, she is still guilty of many others.”

Shaw didn't respond, so he continued. “Control and I talked a great deal about it, surely you agree with your captain?”

A week ago, Shaw would have said yes without hesitating, but the events leading up to the ship being destroyed had swayed her trust in Starfleet. There was some logic to what Greer was saying about Root, but their justice system was designed to be fair to everyone. Instead they were deciding to destroy Root's mind, rather than giving her an opportunity to defend herself during trial. Regardless of her feelings towards the other woman, it wasn't right. And now, they held Shaw like a prisoner instead of treating her as an equal. Hadn't she earned their respect at least? She could explain everything to them if given the chance.
But maybe that was just it. They didn’t want her to have the chance.

She met Greer's eyes and shook her head.

Greer nodded and smiled as if he expected that answer. He stood from his seat, and stepped closer to the force field. “Not to worry, you will be back to normal once the purge is complete. At which point, you will be released.”

She furrowed her brow. “What are you talking about?”

“It's all right, Sameen, Miss Groves told us everything. In addition to causing the warp core breach, we know she has been telepathically controlling you.”

Shaw's hand reached up to the side of her head, touching behind her left ear. It didn't feel any different; no prickling sensation, and the skin was smooth. Besides, Root had told her that she was not using her abilities on her, and Shaw believed it. Destroying the ship while she was locked up and still on board? It didn't make sense. So why would Root be telling them she was responsible?

“You're lying,” she said, her voice low.

Greer simply shook his head, face filled with pity. Shaw hated it. “Like I said, you will feel better soon.”

He nodded once to her and turned to leave. She needed to figure out a way to stop this, now. Root could already be on her way to have her brain melted. Hell, the procedure could have been completed, and this whole thing was just a ploy to get Shaw to... what, exactly? Agree to keep quiet about the ship? Or admit to accidentally falling for a criminal? There was no endgame in sight, so perhaps Control was just tying up the only two loose ends from the Northern Lights.

She could try to play along, “realizing” that she had been under Root's spell all along, and request one final face-to-face with the other woman. Shaw swallowed, it was a long-shot, but it was the only play she had.

“Can I see her?” She called out to the admiral. “Before she's purged, that is.”
Greer stopped by the door. “If it's not already too late? Perhaps.”

He exited without another word, the feeling of helplessness threatening to swallow her whole.

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Shaw paced back and forth in the cell, thinking of a way out for both her and Root. She felt like an animal kept in a cage that was too small. Though it felt like several hours had passed, in reality it was less than one. This was part of their technique; letting her rot in here until it drove her insane. She had seen it several times over the years with the various delinquents they captured. It was very effective, as her thoughts had been spiraling the entire time, so much that she didn't hear the doors when they opened.

“Miss Shaw,” the sound startled her, she turned around to see Greer standing outside her cell again. The fact that he was still addressing her in a civilian manner was not lost.

“My turn to be put under the laser scalpel? Is that how we cook brains these days?”

“No. Assuming all goes well with Miss Groves' procedure, and we can verify that her hold on you is broken, you will be exempt. For now, we've decided to grant you a short visit with the prisoner before she is purged.”

Shaw schooled her expression in order to hide the relief she felt at the news. This would give her more time to figure out how to get them both free. Greer went on to explain that she would be escorted to a designated visiting area, and receive a few supervised minutes with Root. Shaw agreed, and the admiral deactivated the barrier of her cell.
Zachary, the lieutenant from earlier, entered the room. Shaw could noted the phaser he carried on his belt. When it came time for her to resist, the small weapon would not be enough to stop her.

They led her into what looked like a common visiting area for prisoners. Metal tables, somewhat circular shape, were spread out across the room. Two Starfleet officers guarded the single door that led to the prison cells, and two more were posted at the visitors entrance, each carrying a phaser rifle. The room was empty for this occasion, except for one person.

Root was situated in the center of the room. Hands bound together, as well as being chained to the top of the table. Her head hung low, shoulders slumped, and her usual cascading hair appeared to be tied back in a messy pony tail. Eyes that once sparkled with mischief were now dull in defeat.

“Five minutes,” one of the officers nudged her forwards.

As Shaw approached the table, Root looked up to her, blinking several times before allowing herself a small smile. Closer now, she could see the details on her face more clearly; skin pale, dark circles hanging under her eyes. It made Shaw's chest feel heavy.

When she sat down Root had turned her palms up, which Shaw instinctively reached for. Feeling the soft hands underneath her own created a wave of relief throughout Shaw’s whole body. She didn't care if the feeling was artificial or not, for the moment, it allowed her to forget the somewhat grim situation they were faced with.

Of course it didn't last, one of the guards shouted something about keeping her hands to herself, and she had to comply. Time was ticking, so Shaw went straight to business, making sure her voice was low.

“Why did you tell them that you caused the warp core failure?”

*It was the only way to protect you.*

Shaw’s hand flew up behind her ear, suddenly feeling a burning sensation deep in her skull. She looked to Root who had her eyes squeezed shut, and appeared to be concentrating on taking deep, even breaths.
“Because I did it,” Root's voice came from across the table this time. The words sounded rehearsed.

Shaw shook her head. “And the part about the mind control?”

Root’s face twisted in regret as she looked away. She took a moment to collect herself before meeting Shaw's eyes again, and there remained an electricity between them. A conversation was had with no words, telepathic or otherwise. Shaw suspected it, but this look confirmed it: Root was lying to protect her.

There was still time to salvage the situation, though. She didn't need to take the fall for this.

“I know you lied to them, Root. We can still figure this out.”

“We're running out of time.”

“You're innocent!” She hissed, leaning forward and struggling to keep her voice down.

“I was wondering,” Root looked down at her hands, fiddling with her fingernails. “If you can finally answer a question of mine.”

Shaw’s mind drifted back to their first meeting in the brig when they had agreed to exchange inquiries. Naturally, Shaw had not held up her end. It felt like a lifetime ago.

“Root...”

“Please, Sameen.”

Root may have accepted her fate, but Shaw wasn't going to give up. She refused to even entertain the idea that she would fail to save them both. But on the off chance that this whole thing went pear-shaped, she ought to indulge her request. Just this once.

“What do you want to know?”
Root looked up. “Was it really just about the mission?”

Shaw furrowed her brow, not quite understanding. “What do you mean?”

“Protecting me from Control. Saving me from the breach. What happened in the shuttle...” she trailed off, apparently recalling the moment fondly. “You know, had our circumstances been a little different, I think we would have been perfect for each other.”

Shaw nodded slowly. “That's not exactly a question.”

“You're right,” a smile briefly appeared across Root's face. “I guess what I'm asking is... was this all just a game? Or did you actually care for me?”

Shaw blinked. It wasn't a game, that's for sure. She's a sociopath, so she didn't do “caring” for others. But she had to admit that something about Root was different. Otherwise she wouldn't have stopped the captain from locking her up. She wouldn't have rushed to Root's side during the warp core failure. And she definitely would not have felt the need to kiss her in a moment she thought would be their last. But Shaw was a soldier, and her duty always came first. Whether she was protecting a prisoner, a friend, or whatever Root was to her now.

Yes, it was about the mission. But then... maybe Root had been her mission all along.

Unfortunately, she didn't know how to express this using words, especially given their current predicament.

So she reached forward with her right hand and brushed some of Root's hair aside. Her fingers trailed across Root's brow and eventually came to rest as she fully cupped the other woman's face. Root sighed and leaned into her touch, letting her eyes flutter closed, and Shaw immediately felt a sensation behind her ear.

Most empaths did not require physical contact in order to read someone, but she knew it made the process much easier. So while Shaw could not convey herself verbally, she could at least open her mind to Root, allowing her to have an idea of how she felt deep under all the static.
As their connection continued, Shaw observed several micro expressions flicker across Root's face, eventually settling on a warm smile. As her eyes slowly opened again, a tear slid down her cheek, which Shaw intercepted with her thumb. Behind her, she was vaguely aware of a guard giving her an order, presumably about the touching again.

Whatever, she didn't care.

She allowed herself to be absorbed by Root's eyes. Dark specks swam around in amber orbs, more captivating than the brightest nebula. Like observing a stellar phenomenon, she simply could not pull her gaze away. Open and caring, yet reserved and mysterious, those beautiful eyes made her feel lighter than air all while suffocating her at the same time. Shaw tried her best to match her warm expression as she let her hand fall back down into Root's open palms.

“That good enough for you?” Shaw said softly.

Root gave a small nod, slowly covering Shaw's hand with her own. “Yes, Sameen,” her voice wavered with emotion. “That's good enough for me.”

Suddenly Shaw felt herself being pulled up from her seat. One of the security officers was holding her arm, saying something about her time being up. She fought for a moment, furious at the interruption, until realizing that trying to free herself from his grasp was futile. She could not afford to be locked up again.

“Root,” she called as they dragged her back. The woman hesitated to meet her eyes, sadness dragging her features down.

No, this wasn't right. She needed more time. She had to tell Root that she would save her. Root needed to know that she wasn't going to stop until they were both free; until they were together.

Finally the guard had pulled her past the threshold and the door shut in her face. Shaw remained in front of it and placed her palm against the cool metal. While she couldn't project her thoughts outward the way a telepath could, that didn't stop her from practically screaming inside her own head: *I'm going to get you out of here.*

And hoping that Root could hear.
She was still for a moment, trying to figure out her next move when a tingling began to radiate from the base of her skull. She attributed it to just being rattled by the whole situation, but the throbbing continued, eventually traveling across her neck. Shaw felt a shiver race up her spine as the sensation fully encircled her mind. Once again, she heard an echo of Root's voice from deep within:

*Good-bye, Shaw.*

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Admiral Greer sat at his desk looking over the details for the new Research vessel. The Northern Lights program was successful enough, but during their time away from Earth, Greer's team made several advancements in terms of the AI itself. They were nearing a point where the system would be able to function autonomously, and only require human agents to carry out a fraction of it's tasks. Soon, there will be no need for the investigation or interrogation aspects of their mission. Find a target and eliminate. Simple, clean, and effective.

Greer sighed wistfully, the Samaritan program was truly destined for greatness.

He stood from his desk and approached the replicator on the wall.

“Black tea,” he ordered the system, and an old fashioned tea cup materialized in front of him. He took it back to the desk, and enjoyed a slow sip. Perfection.

He's contentedness was interrupted by the door to his office abruptly opening, and a fuming Sameen Shaw storming up to his desk.

“I need to be there when it happens,” she demanded.
Miss Shaw had just come from seeing the prisoner and was obviously angry about something. Was she still convinced that Miss Groves was innocent, he wondered, or had she come to her senses?

“Could you elaborate, my dear?” Sparing a glance at his computer screen, he placed his cup down and folded his hands.

It seemed like she could barely contain her fury. She placed her palms on his desk and leaned forward.

“I want to see her pay for what she did to my crew,” her voice was practically a growl. “For violating me with her disgusting powers.”

Greer's eyebrows shot upwards. This was certainly an interesting development. But he was not easily fooled.

“And how do I know you aren't planning something? Given that, a few hours ago, you were trying to get Miss Groves released.” Shaw held his gaze, her dark eyes hard as stone. “Rumor is that you may have come to care for her.”

His eyes flickered to his computer screen once again, and he picked up the teacup with one hand. Shaw suddenly leaned forward and slammed his computer shut. Amused, Greer turned his attention back to her.

“If you know my file, you know I don't care about anyone. Especially not some terrorist,” she waited a beat before continuing. “I'm not taking no for an answer.”

A battle of wills was waged between them. He tried to read her face for any change in expression, but her visage remained an impassive mask, unwavering in her conviction. Eventually, Greer nodded. He didn't think she was insincere in her anger.

“Very well. The procedure is scheduled to begin at 1900 hours. I will send someone to collect you shortly before then. For the time being, you can stay in the guest quarters on site. Dismissed.”

A vicious smirk played on her face as she straightened, but she managed to collect herself before walking from his office.
Greer opened his computer again and resumed his communication program. Control's face was still on the screen.

“Can we trust her?” He asked.

Control shook her head. “Not for a second, Admiral. I saw the footage from her little visit with the prisoner.”

“Her anger appeared to be genuine. With the restrictions surrounding Miss Groves' cell, Miss Shaw may have regained herself.”

“It's possible, I suppose. Regardless, I suggest we seize the chance and eliminate them both at the same time. We can risk the exposure of our operation.”

Greer took a moment to look back at the door Shaw had just exited. Deception and undercover work were never exactly her strong suit, however, she was not someone they could afford to underestimate.

He sipped his tea once again. It had gone cold.

Sameen Shaw personal log: Stardate 51114.4. I'm eagerly waiting the engramatic purge of the
Shaw sighed and placed the PADD down on the counter. She hoped that Root would not have the chance to read this entry. While the admiral had agreed to her presence during the purge, she was certain that he remained apprehensive. In order for her plan to work, she had to somewhat convince them that she didn't care for Root. She hoped it was successful.

After she left Greer's office, a member of his security team had escorted her to the guest living quarters. They were smaller than the accommodations on the Northern Lights, but she wasn't complaining. It's not like she would be here for very long. The basics were available: a bed, replicator, change of clothes, and a small desk and chair for her to work.

And work she did. As soon as she arrived, she began replicating the small parts of an electromagnetic pulse grenade. She had to construct the device almost from scratch, just in case they were monitoring the replicators. In fact, it was likely they were monitoring her every move, which is why she decided to record a personal log that contained some fabricated disdain for Root.

She had enough materials to make two charges: one which would be used to stop the purge and allow her to free Root. The second was to cover their escape, if need be. In addition to making the grenades, she was also studying the layout of the hospital and planning their best path to freedom. She was informed that because the medical device used in the engramatic purge was so specialized, it was not kept on site at the prison. As a result, a nearby hospital would be cleared of patients and be forced to accept Root for her procedure. It was much easier to escape a hospital than a prison, so Shaw was grateful for the change.

Shaw checked the time as she completed the second charge: 1827. The purge was set for 1900, so she decided it was time to get changed. Opening the small closet beside the bed, she pulled black slacks, as well as the standard gray and black jacket. She hesitated before choosing her division undershirt, however. Security had always been her main duty, so yellow would have made sense... but her fingers drifted past the garment and came to caress the sleeve of the blue shirt instead.

*Have I told you how much I like the new look?*

*Blue is definitely your color.*

Shaw's lips twitched into a small smirk before she pulled the blue from the hanger.
“Just hold on, Root.”

The journey to the hospital is quick. As she was being led in, she took note of the security guards that were posted, as well as the most direct escape route. In addition to having minimal guards, there was not a security checkpoint before she was shown in, which meant that her phaser and EMPs were still safely on her person. She was becoming more and more thankful that it was being done here rather than the prison.

She had decided that once Root was free, they would exit via the attached parking garage. They would need to travel a short distance down this main hallway, which was currently empty. Shaw could easily commandeer an emergency vehicle to cover their escape.

During the trip, she kept her mind calm, suppressing all her nagging thoughts. And before long, Shaw is standing in front of the door that would lead her to Root. She wondered if Root had already been prepared for the procedure. Based on what she read, it was pretty non-invasive. The device would use some kind of pulse to target and remove certain memories from her mind. The fact that this technology was even available to Starfleet created an unease that she couldn't ignore. It led to her having a fleeting thought about what would happen if her plan failed...

But Shaw shook her head. Root's life depended on her playing good soldier for now and she refused to let anything get in the way. Luckily she fit the role perfectly, and her outward demeanor was nothing short of steady and calm. She noticed Admiral Greer walking up to her left, hands clasped behind his back.
“Miss Shaw,” he nodded. She noted that he still did not address her by rank. As well, there was something about his expression was setting off the red alert in her head. He seemed smug, but it was different than when she was locked up. He looked like he had already won.

“This where the party is?” She said, looking towards the door.

“Well, my dear,” he began. “It seems there was a mix-up with the times,” Shaw's head turned slowly to face him. “I'm afraid Miss Groves' procedure is already underway.”

Of course it was. Fuck.

At least it was “underway” and not “completed”, she supposed. Refusing to see this as completely negative, Shaw would just have to accelerate her plan. As quickly as her reflexes would allow, she swung her right fist and struck the admiral in the cheek, knocking him to the ground. Fortunately, there were no other guards in the immediate vicinity. Time for the real party to begin.

She stepped through the door into a small circular room with white walls and plenty of light. Root was situated in the center, sitting back in a medical chair. Two large prongs stuck out from behind the head rest and were folded forward over Root's brow, perhaps to keep her from thrashing about. Naturally, Root's hands were also bound, and one guard stood over her, tightly grasping her shoulder.

Above Root's head hung something that resembled a crane, which Shaw assumed was the actual engramatic device. Dark in color, the metal arm came to a point just above her, and featured several rods that were pulsing with light. The crane fed into a console behind the chair and was being handled by a member of the medical staff, rather than a security officer. Aside from the doctor himself, there were three other targets: two directly in front of her, and the one holding Root.

Root's face knotted in discomfort as she squirmed under her restraints. The sight of her in such distress made Shaw's blood run hot. Root managed to open her eyes and upon spotting Shaw, she seemed to fight against her restraints even harder.

“Sameen!” She called out.

Both the security officers turned to her, but did not immediately drawn their weapons. A big mistake. Shaw had already taken one of the EMP charges from her pocket and slid it across the
“What the...!” The rest of his words were cut off by the small device bursting like a flash-grenade.

Shaw dropped to the ground and covered her eyes as all electronic devices in the immediate area shut down. She drew the phaser from her ankle holster and shot the knees of the two guards in front of her. Luckily, the officer closest to Root was still disoriented. He let her go and stepped towards where Shaw had been, squinting to see in the now dark room.

She prowled to the right until she had circled behind him. She stood straight up and slammed the end of her weapon against his head. He crumpled to the ground without another word.

Three down, and only one left. Shaw turned in time to see the doctor coming towards her at full speed. She used his momentum to throw him over her shoulder and on to the hard ground. She quickly flicked her foot across his face, knocking him out.

“Ready to get out of here?”

No response.

Shaw turned around. “Root?”

She walked closer to where Root was still sitting. Her head had lulled against the restraints, and her eyes were closed again. Shaw reached out and touched her face, tapping lightly, but there was no reaction.

“Great, just great.” Shaw said to herself as she opened Root's hand restraints and pushed aside the prongs holding her head up. “Of course I have to carry your ass out of here. Wouldn't be you if you weren't annoying even while unconscious.”

She finished releasing Root and hoisted the woman up over her shoulder. This would obviously make her escape more challenging, but she was determined. Shaw wasted several seconds trying to figure out the best way to maintain some kind of freedom of movement, in case they found resistance. She ended up having to use an Earth fire-fighter carry; one arm under Root's left knee, which would be grasping her left wrist as well. That way Shaw could still hold her weapon with her right hand and keep Root securely on her back.
Now she was almost *glad* Root was asleep for this.

Running out of time before the power came back on, Shaw hastily made for the exit door. She turned to the left immediately, noting that Greer was no longer lying on the floor. She couldn't decide if that was a good thing or a bad one. Either way, she began to jog down the eastern hall, emergency lights guiding her path.

One security officer rounded the corner in front of her, and she quickly shot his knees with her phaser. By her recollection, there was only a small distance to travel until she was in the main lobby of the hospital. From there she would have easy access to the parking structure. The lights flickered back on above her.

The dead-weight on her shoulders was starting to take a toll, Shaw could feel herself slowing to a quick walk. Just before she reached the end of the hall, she heard a sound coming from Root. She glanced behind her, and around the corner to make sure it's clear before placing Root down. Shaw held the other woman's head up, making sure it was leaning against the wall. She was definitely moving, so Shaw took it as a good sign.

“Sam?” Root sighed, her eyes fluttering, not yet able to open.

“I'm here,” Shaw brushed some of Root's hair from her face. She finally managed to open her eyes, but they seemed cloudy, like she was in a daze. They likely administered some kind of medication prior to the procedure.

“... you need to leave me,” Root's voice was soft, and her eyes, still unfocused, were fixed forward. Shaw had half a mind to just knock her out again. They really did not have time for this.

“Not a chance. We need to keep moving. Can you stand up?” Shaw looked down the hall again to make sure it was still clear.

“Greer knows. He's waiting and... they'll hurt you,” her head bobbed forward. Shaw had to hold her up again.

“Shut up already,” the words were not harsh, but urgent. “Time to go.”
Since she was now semi-conscious, Shaw decided to carry Root in her arms rather than over her shoulder. She slid her hand under Root's knees and lifted her off the ground. Root curled against her, wrapping both her arms around Shaw's neck, and leaning into her. She quickly rounded the corner and jogged down the corridor, Root squeezing her tightly.

She realized too late that she couldn't effectively carry her phaser this way. When a security officer appeared at the end of the hall with his weapon raised, she could do nothing but turn her body and try to shield Root from injury. She definitely heard the phaser discharge, but felt nothing. Eyes momentarily squeezed shut, she waited a count of five before turning around.

The security officer was on the ground, apparently subdued by the mystery man that was standing over him. Tall, with salt and pepper hair, he appeared to be wearing a modified Starfleet uniform. Similar to Shaw's, except that it was all black and the jacket was left open. He noticed her and slowly raised his hands.

“Shaw,” he said. “I'm here to help.”

Root was holding on tight enough that Shaw could afford to take one hand off her back. She quickly drew her weapon and fired, the beam striking against the man's chest, but to Shaw's surprise it didn't stop him. Though he was knocked back slightly, a green force field materialized across his body and seemed to absorb most of the blast.

“What the hell?”

“I told you, I'm here to help.”

She kept her weapon forward. “I don't remember asking for your help.”

A new male voice then permeated through the open communication system: “Attention: the assailants have been spotted entering the western corridor. Repeat, the western corridor. Please focus your efforts there.”

It was unfamiliar, but it seemed like he was trying to help. Either that, or he was incompetent: Shaw and Root were currently in the eastern hallway.

“Follow me,” the man gestured. “We don't have a lot of time.”
Shaw clenched her jaw, ready to shoot this guy again, but then she heard Root's small voice: “...you can trust him, Sameen.”

That settled it, she figured. Root’s word would have to be good enough for now. Shaw jogged forward and followed the man a short distance down the hall to a turbo lift. He pointed inside when she entered, his blue eyes scanning for threats. He followed a moment later. “Level three,” the lift sped upwards. “Name's John.”

“And where exactly are you taking us, John?” She hoped it was close by, wherever it was. She could hear Root starting to whimper softly in her arms. He entered another room and she followed close behind.

“Transporter.”

John stepped up to the console and tapped several panels. Shaw swallowed hard, still somewhat unsure of his convenient rescue. He looked up at her, the apprehension must have been clear on her face.

“They'll kill you both if we don't leave right now,” he said, sparing a glance at Root. “She needs medical attention as soon as possible. I promise that my partner and I will explain everything once we're in the clear.”

Shaw didn't like it, but he had a point. With Root drifting between consciousness, it would take Shaw much longer to escape on her own and find somewhere to treat her, assuming she was even able to. She couldn't be sure if Root suffered any neurological damage during the brief procedure, either. Shaw stepped on to the transporter pad, and nodded to John.

“Punch it.”

He entered a few more commands on the console and joined her on the pad to her right. He touched was must have been his communication badge. Shaw couldn't see the details clearly, but it looked like a T. “Finch? Three to beam up.”

Shaw's vision was filled with a warm blue light as she materialized out of the hospital to a destination unknown.
Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it, thanks for reading! I added a few things to the finale the other day. Really looking forward to sharing it!

And anyone who can guess the name of the ship they're going to gets a free high-five.
Shaw re-materialized and took a moment to endure the wave of nausea that always accompanied her during transport. She trained extensively to try and rid herself of the feeling, but no matter how many times she transported, the disorientation was a source of great discomfort.

Once her head stopped spinning, she looked around. It seemed like a pretty standard transporter room: she and John stood on the raised circular portion and there was a console just across the room. Currently there was no one stationed at it, so Shaw assumed the access had been rerouted to the bridge.

John stepped down first. “I can take her to sickbay while you speak with my partner.”

“I don't think so,” though her arms were starting to shake from the efforts, she wasn't ready to leave Root just yet. She must have fallen unconscious during transport, as her arm was now hanging at her side rather than around Shaw's neck.

He didn't argue further, and nodded towards the door. “Follow me.”

The ship was similar to a standard Starfleet vessel, with bulkheads a dark brown color, rather than the usual gray, and control panels across the walls, the main difference was the lighting. While a
typical ship had white lights, this had a soft amber glow to it, giving it the feel of an old train station.

They had to travel down only one deck to reach the medical bay.

“Computer, activate the Emergency Medical Holographic program,” John said as they entered. Shaw was expecting the EMH Mark I, but a dark skinned, human female materialized in front of her. She wore blue scrubs, lab coat, and a very old stethoscope hung around her neck. Shaw hoped she wouldn't actually be using it.

“Please state the nature of the medical emergency.”

Shaw stepped forward and placed Root down on one of the nearby biobeds, her muscles thankful for the break. “She underwent a neurological procedure earlier. Is there any way you can, I don't know, reverse it, or...?”

The doctor smiled. “I'll take care of her, I promise.” She immediately produced a medical tricorder from her coat pocket and began conducting scans.

“Thank you, Doctor Enright,” John said.

Shaw thought it was strange that their doctor had a name, but then again the last hour was filled with plenty of surprises. She wanted to monitor Root's recovery herself, but her new friend had other plans. John touched her shoulder and nodded towards the door. Reluctantly, she left with him, but not before she told the doctor to call her as soon as she was finished.

“Don't worry,” John said once they were back in the lift. “She's very talented.”

“Whatever.”

John had led them back up to deck one to where she assumed the bridge was. She still had no answers about the ship, why he helped her, or how he even knew what was going on. As they walked towards the bridge, she felt the exhaustion of the day beginning to weigh her down. Now that she and Root were no longer in immediate danger, she was looking forward to her next chance to rest. She rubbed the back of her neck as they entered the bridge. Shaw was once again taken aback by how the lighting changed the entire feel of the ship. It was comforting and informal, and
there was a warmth that put her at ease. Though, that could have been her fatigue, she supposed.

John didn't seem to be one for much conversation, which suited her perfectly fine. They arrived at what she assumed was the captain's ready room, and John pointed inside.

Shaw was expecting some kind of fancy office, but this room was unlike anything she'd seen on a ship before. The space maintained the same glow the rest of the ship had, but it was set up much more casually. Two high-backed reading chairs sat in front of a fireplace, two of the walls were completely filled with books (actual books), and a small table was off to the side. A cup of tea, computer, and PADD were all that was on the desk.

Perhaps the most surprising thing in the room was the large dog that was sleeping by the fire. Having a fire on a space ship was hazardous enough, but an animal seemed like it would be extremely messy. It's ears perked up when she entered, and he bounded over to lick her hand.

Maybe Greer managed to capture her after all, and this was just some weird drug induced dream.

In any case, the man sitting in the chair rose to his feet upon seeing her. Thin hair, a pointed nose, and spectacles on his face, he wore clothing that was similar to John's but with a vest rather than a jacket.

“Miss Shaw,” he greeted her. “I'm relieved that you are unharmed. And I see you've met my Biologically Emulated Animal Replacement program.”

Shaw knelt down and scratched the dog's head. A few seconds passed before what the man said actually registered. “Your what?”

“I realize the official name is quite a mouthful, so we just call him BEAR for short.”

A holograph dog named bear. Yeah, nothing weird going on here.

“That's enough, BEAR,” the man said. “naDev ghoS.”

And the dog speaks Klingon. Even better.
Bear trotted back to his place in front of the fire. Shaw stood up, not really sure where to start. “You mind telling me who you are, and what the hell this is all about?”

“Certainly. You may call me Harold.”

He explained that he received information predicting that Shaw may be in danger and sent his operative, John Reese, to the hospital to provide assistance. He told her that they had a program which could advise them of violent acts before they happened, and that they used the ship to help stop these acts.

There was something familiar about what he told her. After all, she spent several years of her career on a ship that used a predictive artificial intelligence to stop terrorist threats before they occurred. And Shaw didn't believe in coincidence.

“You're using the same system that the Northern Lights did.”

He gestured to one of the chairs, she crossed the room and sat down. Harold followed suit before continuing. “Believe it or not, I'm the one who developed the program that your former employers used to anticipate terrorist acts. In fact, the main processor is aboard this ship.”

“Research is kept here?”

“I always just called it The Machine, but yes, the core code is here. It's stored in engineering. Mr Reese can show it to you, if you'd like.”

Harold went on to tell her about the ship. It was completely unique and operated outside of any government or military forces. In addition to the enhanced engineering, full holo-emitters(for the holographic fireplace and dog, of course), and self diagnostic and repair protocols, the ship also featured a custom slip-stream drive for incredibly fast travel. It was nothing close to what any federation ships had. Shaw figured they could go from here to the Delta Quadrant within a month.

So while Research, or, The Machine, provided intelligence regarding terrorist threats on a massive scale, it also helped two misfits try and make the galaxy a better place?
Shaw wondered if this day could get any stranger.

“So,” Harold began. “I was wondering if you might come to work with us aboard this ship. You'll be provided with anything you desire, given free reign, and your own quarters. You would be equal to both myself and Mr Reese.”

Shaw blinked. “Is that why you helped me? You want to recruit me?”

“Initially our intention was only to assist. But then we pieced together what happened on your own ship, and how Starfleet would betray you once you returned to Earth. Given your very impressive service record, Mr Reese and I thought you would be a good fit.”

If she hadn't had such a long day already, she probably would have just told him to shut up and drop her and Root off at the nearest M Class planet. But something about her being slightly weary allowed the idea to sink in. She enjoyed her work with the Research program, before her captain blew up the ship and everyone on it, that is. Harold had already risked a great deal in helping her escape the hospital situation. And after the way she acted so mutinously towards Starfleet she definitely couldn't go back and just pick up her career where she left off. Though she might want revenge on her former employers, she was in no position to follow through. At least not now. She could always bide her time on this ship until the opportunity came up.

And there was the matter of Root.

“The woman I brought with me,” Shaw began, rubbing her jaw. “Would you be willing to keep her on board, too?”

Harold shifted in his seat, as if expecting this to be brought up at some point. “Ah yes, well, Miss Groves is--”

“Root,” Shaw corrected. She wondered how he knew her given name.

“Indeed. She is something of a wild card. Let's just say Mr Reese and I have... encountered her in the past.”

Now that was something she would need to ask Root about. Regardless, Shaw was firm on her stance. She didn't go through all the trouble in saving the woman just to abandon her now. Besides,
who wouldn't want a telepathic assassin working for them?

“It's a package deal,” Shaw crossed her arms. “Either we both stay, or we both go.”

Harold nodded, rose from his seat and offered his hand.

“I guess it's settled then. Welcome aboard the Dashwood, Miss Shaw.”

John offered to escort her to quarters once she was finished speaking with Harold, but she knew that sleep would be difficult if she didn't check on Root one more time. He offered to go to sickbay in her stead, but she refused. Even though she hadn't spent much time with him, she was beginning to trust Reese. He was a solider, like she was, and already felt like kin. They walked together back to sickbay, and he left her outside the door, promising to show her the whole ship sometime tomorrow.

When she entered, she saw Root lying in the same bed she'd left her, with Dr Enright standing over her putting various medical instruments on a tray. Shaw assumed this meant her treatment was already completed.

The hologram looked up at her. “I was just about to call you. She needs some rest, but otherwise I expect her to make a full recovery.”

Shaw nodded as she approached the bed. She took several moments to watch Root as she slept,
counting the breaths as she took them in... and out. Relaxed and safe.

“You should probably get some rest, too. You look a little beat.”

“Yeah. I’ll be back in a few hours to check on her.”

“Of course.”

Shaw turned from the bed and walked towards the door, but stopped before exiting.

“Thanks for helping her. Call me if there is any change, I don't care what time it is.”

The EMH nodded, and Shaw left the medical bay feeling lighter than she had all day, the relief gently washing over her. She made the short journey to where her quarters were located, eager to finally get some rest.

Harold advised her that she could change or decorate her area as she wished, but for now it was utilitarian; bed, couch, a work desk, coffee table, and lavatory attached. There was even a large window.

Once arriving, Shaw kicked her boots off and stripped down to basics, not bothering to fold or hang her uniform as she would likely not be wearing it again. Shaw pulled her hair from the bun, and shook out the long locks, feeling them dance across her back.

She climbed into the soft bed and was surprised to fall asleep so quickly.
It's unclear how long she actually slept for, but when Shaw woke up she was feeling more rested than she had in the past week. Once she got passed the brief panic at the unfamiliar surroundings, she was able to enjoy a quick sonic shower. There was a variety of clothing available in the replicator catalog, but she ended up choosing simple black jeans, boots, and a black t-shirt. She also found a communication badge waiting on the table for her. Identical to the one she had seen on John, the device was small and diamond shaped, gold in color, with a silver T embossed on top. After dressing, she tied her hair back in a pony tail and headed towards sickbay.

Reese had asked her to contact him once she woke up, but Root was a priority at the moment.

She entered the medical bay and noticed that it was completely empty. Curious that neither Root nor the doctor were anywhere in sight, she tried not to let her small panic consume her. Certainly there was a logical explanation... although she supposed it was possible that this whole thing was actually an extremely elaborate plot to capture them both. She didn't put anything passed Control at this point.

She shook her head. Only one way to find out. “Activate the EMH.”

Dr Enright appeared in front of her. “Please state the nature of the medical emergency. Oh, hello again Sameen.”

“Where's Root?”

“She left not too long ago. Harold came in to speak with her after she woke up. Given their history I wasn't sure what to expect, but it went well,” the doctor smiled. “She's very excited to be with us.”

“Okay...” Shaw began, placing her hands on her hips. “But where is she now?”

“I believe she's in engineering.”

Shaw thanked the doctor for her help and promptly left. She rode the turbo lift up one deck and walked towards the door to main engineering. On her approach she felt an anxiousness that was very unfamiliar to her. Her stomach fluttered, palms felt numb, and her mouth was suddenly dry. Surely she wasn't... nervous? She lightly tapped her face with both hands before stepping through
the door. Honestly.

Off to the left, Root was casually leaning against the guardrail, her back to the warp core. While she had her attention on what appeared to be a large computer console, Shaw took a moment to admire her profile in the blue glow, and was thankful to see that her easy smile returned. She was dressed simply, in black jeans and a navy blue long sleeve shirt. This was one of the few times she had seen Root outside of danger or captivity. Her lips twitched slightly.

Shaw felt a brief tingle in her skull as Root turned to her. “Hey, sweetie.”

“Hey yourself,” Shaw walked up and leaned against the railing beside her. She spared a glance at the warp core, and the attached slip-stream drive.

“Isn't she amazing?” Root gestured to the computer console.

“It's an nice ship, that's for sure.”

“Not the ship, the Machine. She's been talking to me since I woke up. Telling me all about the people she's helped, and how we're going to be helping her.”

“Uh-huh...” Did regular telepathy work with an AI? Anything was possible with Root around, she supposed.

Asset identified: Shaw, Sameen. Welcome aboard.

The familiar computer voice filled the space. Shaw heard it many times in response to commands, or providing data, but this voice seemed different. If she didn't know better, she'd think it was a real person. Shaw just nodded in acknowledgement, and from her peripheral vision she caught a smile playing on Root's face.

Root stood from the railing and paced forward a few steps. “I don't know how to thank you.”

Shaw crossed her arms and watched as Root eventually turned her body to face her. “You don't have to thank me.”
“Yes, I do,” Root said. “If you hadn't come for me in the hospital, I'd be brain dead. And Control definitely would have killed me if you didn't protect me back on your ship.”

“It was nothing,” Shaw waved her hand.

“Not only that, but you somehow managed to convince Harry to let me stay aboard. I am truly in your debt.”

“Harry?” Shaw raised an eyebrow. “I didn't realize you two were so informal.”

“We go back a bit. From my more... deviant days.”

Shaw nodded, remembering Harold's unease with the idea of working with Root. “Either way, I only helped you for the sake of the mission,” she cleared her throat. “This ship could use someone of your talents.”

Root smiled and briefly looked down to her feet. “Always for the mission, huh Sameen?”

“What other reason would there be?”

Root tapped her finger against her chin. “Well, you can't deny the fact that you obviously--”

“Rhetorical,” Shaw held her hand out to stop whatever nonsense Root was about to spew. “That question was rhetorical.”

Root's mischievous smirk appeared. She didn't need to be a telepath to see through Shaw's flimsy reasoning.

They stood in silence for a beat. Shaw met Root's eyes and could immediately feel their warmth, it was a comfort that spread throughout her whole body. The last time the other woman looked so open and content was back on the shuttle craft. Each time they shared a gaze, Shaw felt like she was reconnecting with a crucial piece of herself that was missing. Like she was being made whole
Shaw could probably stand here all day with Root, but she was supposed to meet Reese shortly, so she went back to business.

“You're okay though, right?” Shaw began. “You were in pretty rough shape by the time we beamed up here. I'm sorry for being late busting you out of there.”

Root shrugged. “The doctor was able to repair what little damage they did, and she recommended I take it easy for a few days.”

Shaw's shoulders relaxed in relief. “All memories intact?”

“There are a few that are still... fuzzy.”

Wait, what? Shaw huffed, “I knew the EMH shouldn't have discharged you yet. Let me take you back to sick bay.”

Shaw turned to leave, but Root's hands grasped her arms and pulled her back.

“Actually, I think you can help fill in the gaps.”

Shaw furrowed her brow. Melted brain-waves weren't exactly her area of expertise. “I don't see how I--”

And then Root's hands were on her shoulders, pulling her in. Warm lips covered hers in a kiss quite subdued compared to their last. With no disaster looming over them, Root was taking her time to savor in the taste of her. Shaw finally gave in and returned the gesture with equal enthusiasm. Root's hands snaked around her back, pulling her close to deepen their connection further.

It was even better than Shaw remembered.

(Not that she had been thinking about it.)
Her strong arms wrapped around Root's middle as she squeezed their bodies together. Her hands worked their way up the other woman's back, feeling the bumps of each vertebrae as their lips finally parted.

The first thing she noticed was the smile across Root's face, one that made her eyes sparkle with mischief. They remained close, Shaw's hands still across her back.

“Mmm,” Root's voice was low, lecherous. “That was a good start. You certainly don't disappoint, Sameen.” She bumped her nose into Shaw's.

Shaw rolled her eyes in response. “I can't believe I fell for that.”

Root stretched her arms over Shaw's shoulders, flashing a roguish smile as she played with the hair in her ponytail. “That little trick, or me?”

Both, she thought to herself. Definitely both.

Root's eyebrows shot up and Shaw felt her face flush, suddenly very warm. She cursed herself for allowing her thoughts to betray her. Still, she couldn't help a slight laugh.

“Shut up and get over here.”

Bringing their lips together again, Shaw was now the one to savor in her partner, grateful for the time they now had. As well as the opportunity to wipe that smirk from Root's face.

The mission on this ship would not be an easy one. For the second time in her life, Shaw was given a unique chance to protect the galaxy, and help those who couldn't help themselves. Her experience with Starfleet may have left a bad taste in her mouth, but luckily she was tasting something even better at the moment.

She knew they had developed something strong during their ordeal, and having Root with her was going to make this new experience much more bearable, she was sure. Exploring new planets, civilizations, new dangers, Shaw was looking forward to it all. And maybe she was looking forward to exploring Root more, as well...
She felt an all too familiar sensation behind her ear, as well as the distinct feel of Root's smile against her own lips.

_Stupid telepaths._

> 

Later, when she and Root were finally able to tear away from each other, Shaw contacted Reese for a full tour of the ship. While they visited different areas of the ship, John filled in some of the blanks regarding how he came to the _Dashwood_. Apparently he served with Starfleet as well, but after a betrayal, Harold found him and offered him this new job. She could appreciate the similarity between their two situations. She couldn't help ask him about Root as well, but he seemed to be pretty tight-lipped on the subject. Something about knowing she was the perpetrator in several cases, but not quite able to keep up with, or stop her. Shaw would be lying if said that she didn't find that kind of hot.

Eventually they came to an area of the ship she wasn't expecting: a holo-deck. Reese told her that there could be some down time while they traveled from case to case, so they set up a small holo-deck to keep themselves occupied, or to allow for continued training. Shaw was surprised that such a small ship would have it, but grateful all the same.

He showed her the various programs available, and offered to run some of his favorites while they had some time. Apparently he enjoyed the 21st century as much as she did, and pretty soon they queued up Earth's New York City.

Several hours went by, and the pair stopped (and caused) mayhem throughout the whole city, all while using primitive means of transport and weapons. Shaw was exhilarated, and the hours just flew by. Reese even showed her a few great places to eat. Holographic or not, nothing beats banana chocolate chip pancakes. She couldn't wait to take Root here, too. Eventually it got late, and Reese had duties to attend to elsewhere. They ended the simulation and parted ways, Reese heading towards the bridge, and Shaw back to her quarters.
Walking leisurely down the corridor, Shaw reflected on how much she enjoyed this new situation so far. A week ago, if someone told her she would be spending her time on a non-federation vessel, stopping crime in holographic old New York, and fraternizing with a telepathic killer, she would have laughed in their face.

While she was lost in thought, Root managed to sneak up behind her. Wrapping her arms tightly around Shaw's middle and squeezing as she pressed a quick kiss to her cheek. Shaw squirmed from her grasp and tried to swat her away, but Root nimbly dodged, and fell into step beside her. Shaw felt her ears getting warm, and tried to control the fluttering in her stomach. Stupid Root.

“Hey Sameen. How was the tour?”

“Not bad. Did you know they had a little holo-deck?”

“I did.”

“I've never really used one for recreation. You should join me next time.”

“Are you asking me out on a date?”

“I'm asking you on a training exercise,” Shaw huffed.

Root sighed and clasped her hands together. “Such a romantic.”

“Forget I said anything,” Shaw rolled her eyes and tried to change the subject. “What have you been up to anyway?”

“Just catching up with Harry. Much to his discomfort.”

“You're really going to have to tell me how you know each other.”

“How about... over dinner?” Root beamed. It was ridiculous how quick witted she was when it came to flirting.
“You don't quit, do you?”

“Not a chance.”

They arrived at the door to Shaw's quarters. She tapped the panel on the wall, and as the metal doors slid open, Shaw turned back to Root.

“You coming in?”

Root's easy smile grew into a grin, obviously picking up on the suggestion. Shaw was eager to continue where they left off in engineering anyway.

“Absolutely.”

After spending quite some time getting to know Root better, Shaw stood before her own reflection in the bathroom of her quarters, examining a particularly angry looking red mark on her neck. She had been surprised to learn that Root's delicate demeanor did not carry over to their dalliance. Pleasantly surprised, of course.

Getting dressed in a tank top and shorts, Shaw exited the bathroom. She stepped over various articles of clothing that had been tossed about, and spared a glance towards her bed. Root was
sleeping soundly, her arm laying across the space which Shaw had been occupying. Her milky white skin seemed to glow in the low light, and Shaw couldn't help think about how she'd like to leave some marks of her own in the very near future.

She took the PADD from her desk, and moved to stand by the open window, gazing upon the vastness of space stretching before her. Shaw typed a short log entry, just a little something to mark the beginning of her new journey, before returning to her partner's very alluring form.

The PADD lay abandoned on the edge of the window, the text still illuminating the screen:

*Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the star ship Dashwood. With a secret system that spies on you every hour, of every day, her mission is to stop violent crimes involving ordinary people.*

*People like you.*

*While the government considers these people irrelevant, our crew does not. Hunted by the authorities, we explore strange new worlds in secret. But rest assured, victim or perpetrator, there is nowhere in the galaxy you can hide.*

*And if your number's up. We'll find you.*

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Chapter End Notes

Hopefully I'll be back with some new stuff soon. Until then, thanks for tuning in!

**

naDev ghoS - Klingon for "come here"
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