

SHELLBACK

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INT. ENGINE ROOM - DAY

A network of pipes and valves clamber over one another, small indicator lights providing the faintest illumination.

KATE WARD (late 20's) lies on her back amidst this jungle of metal tubes. She holds a pipe in place while tightening a bolt. The bolt slips from her oil-covered fingers and drops.

KATE

Shit...

Kate feels around her for the bolt.

Two enginemen enter on the level above Kate.

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)

I don't know how to deal with her.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Keep your shit straight. Don't give her any leeway to pull your ass up.

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)

She always finds something. Did you hear what happened to Avery?

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Who the fuck is Avery?

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)

LSE? Biggish guy with the crooked nose? Everyone's just finished morning cleaning, and XO finds this tiny ball-bearing in Avery's section -

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

- Which coulda rolled there from any whichaway.

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)

Exactly. But she pulls Avery up on it, puts the ball-bearing right in his face. Explains to him real condescending-like what'd happen if it got lodged in the wrong place.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (O.S.)

Which he knows.

Kate finds the bolt. Using her feet, she pushes the pipe back into place and holds it there. Kate tightens the bolt, her body cramped up, sweat dripping down her forehead.

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)
 'Course he knows! She's treating
 him like his brain's as big as the
 ball-bearing. So fine, he gets
 chewed out, but then she puts him
 on TAD down in the galley. Two
 months, says maybe then he'll learn
 how to clean. You believe that?

With one last push, Kate tightens the bolt off. She crawls
 back out from under the machinery.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (O.S.)
 This is what I'm telling you: Keep.
 Your. Shit. Straight.

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN (O.S.)
 But over one lousy ball-bearing?
 Mumma wouldn't like me using this
 word but... XO is a tight-up bitch.

Kate pops out right in front of the two enginemen.

The junior freezes on the spot, mortified: He's a pale, ratty-
 looking recruit. The officer is older: He sports a thick
 white moustache that hasn't been popular since the 70's.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER
 What the hell are you doing down
 there?

KATE
 You're behind on getting the engine
 back up.

Kate puts away her tools, cleaning them off.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER
 Ma'am, with all due respect, the
 specifics of the engine room's
 operations are beyond your purview.

KATE
 My "purview" is to keep this ship
 running. Since only three out of
 four engines are working, the ship
 is only three-quarters working.
 That makes it my responsibility.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER
 We have a schedule we follow -

KATE

If you gave a damn about the schedule, we'd have four engines.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER

And if you stopped assigning me these morons, I'd get your goddamned engine working!

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN

Hey!

KATE

They're green: They need the training. If you can't handle repairs and training at the same time, I could reduce your workload. Something simpler? Fan maintenance?

The officer bites his tongue. Kate wipes off her hands and slips on her over-shirt: The shoulder is emblazoned with the stripes of a lieutenant commander.

KATE (CONT'D)

These aren't the good ol' days of you and your snipe friends toying around in here by yourselves. You fuck up my ship, you answer to me.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER

Your ship -?!

Kate pins the officer with her glare. It takes everything he's got to swallow his pride.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER (CONT'D)

Yes ma'am, understood.

INT. ENGINE ROOM CORRIDOR - DAY

As Kate exits down the hallway, the enginemen's voices echo behind her.

ENGINEMAN OFFICER

Who does that woman think she is?

JUNIOR ENGINEMAN

I told you, man!

ENGINEMAN OFFICER

I serve under Everett, not that icy bitch!