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Despite his insistence, they were not in the engine room. Because of his insistence, the first mate had punched him in the mouth.

She'd said it was no worry to him, since he was minutes from medical attention. It didn't give him much assurance, but never got a moment to contest it. The last he'd seen of her was the back of her head as the door to the medic's office shut.

He'd also learnt she wasn't the first mate, and had completely slipped her actual title.

Every wall in the office was trying very hard for titanium white, but could only achieve a sickly cream. Surfaces that weren't covered with equipment a cointoss between medical devices and instruments of torture had a layer of dust thick enough to use as a towel. In the corner, a plant waited for a coroner to take notice.

John was sitting on a rickety chair, as instructed. The medic peered at him over half-lidded glasses, in such a way it threw him back to years of endless detention. "Why did you burn yourself?" he asked, in a similar manner Mr. Wilkinson asked why his hat was on the roof.

John swallowed. "Er. The engine's on fire."

"I know the engine's on fire," he said flatly. "How did you get this burn?"

"Some hot steam got to it. Well, you know what I mean. Steam can't be cold." Then John did a double-take. "What do you mean *you know*?"

"Steam," the medic said, scribbling unreadable notes. "You've scalded yourself."

"Hardly myself. I was sound asleep and suddenly there's steam interrupting me, and then my hand got in the way. I did nothing."

"Barely awake in your cabin, I presume?"

"Yes. One of the pipes near the bed burst. Er." John shuffled awkwardly in his seat. The wood was digging into his tailbone. "But, you said the engine's on fire."

"I did," the medic said coldly. "Steam leak. Interesting."

"...You did, so?"

"Yes. The engine's on fire. Now, give me a moment."

The medic opened a journal, and set about copying notes made on his clipboard into it. The new ones were somehow even more incomprehensible, and John wondered if they were instead in a script he didn't recognise. *That* word definitely wasn't in the dictionary, besides.

The scratch of the pen felt like it was etching the inside of his skull.

He pushed on. "You said you already knew? For how long?"

The medic stopped writing for a brief second, shot John one look, and continued.

"Have you told anyone else about it? The engine?"

He sighed. "Sir, I don't know what that has to do with anything."

"Well, the thing is, I wouldn't have burnt myself if the engine wasn't on fire."

"You said your scald was from a steam leak, not from noseying in the engine room." His pen slowed, stopping on a deliberately dotted 'i'. "Unless you're lying to me."

"No no, no," John hurried. "The burn was from steam. I just think, er, the fire caused that leak. Pressure, maybe? That's all."

"You talk about the engine a lot, don't you?" The medic capped his pen, and sent it rolling across the desk. "And it's a scald, not a burn."

"Because it's the engine?!" John wailed, ignoring that. "I'm not sure how many times I can say it's on fire before you realise it's an issue."

"I understand how a ship works, sir."

"Plainly you don't!"

A severe look swept the medic's face. His lips tightened, and he wordlessly grabbed John's affected hand at the wrist.

John floundered, before composing himself. "I'm sorry, but please. I tried talking to the first mate— Well, no. Er..." He shook his head. "Look, I think we agree it's quite the emergency. She didn't seem to believe me when I told her, but you're part of the crew. If you could explain—"

John screamed.

Pain seared through his forearm, every nerve alight. The medic had poured something on the burn, sinking into his palm. John's fingers writhed in response, and he almost collapsed off the chair.

"If you'd be kind enough," the medic said, handing him a cloth, "to scream into this. There are patients trying to rest."

He inhaled through his teeth and straightened himself up as best he could. His fingers had stopped, mostly. Pain still throbbed up his arm.

"I'm fine now. I'm fine." He exhaled deeply to convince himself of that. "You could have warned me, though."

"If you'd paid attention instead of rambling on about engines, you would have noticed."

There was a bottle in the medic's hand, John realised. He placed it on the table and started pulling lengths from a roll of bandages.

"But," John said between pulls, "the engine. The fire."

The medic didn't even lift his eyes this time.

"Are you listening to me?"

"I have to, unfortunately." He took a pair of scissors off the shelf, snipped the bandage, and pulled the length taught around John's hand. "Please stay still."

John tried not to jump each time the wrap tightened. "But—!"

"Yes, sir, the engine's on fire. I've known this for some time; you are not surprising me, nor do I think you're funny. Consider it a quirk of the ship and continue your day."

"A quirk of— *What?*"

"You learn to live with it." The medic finished the bandages, put the scissors back into its dust mould, and returned to his notes. "Run along. I'm very busy today."

John sat with his mouth agape. He couldn't believe anything he'd just heard. The medic knew. He *knew* the engine was on fire and was sitting here doing nothing. And he insisted that everyone should just live with it? It was going to kill everyone! He couldn't *possibly* leave!

"Get out of my office, sir."

Then he did.

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Magdalene's cabin was far grander than his own. There was room for more than two pieces of furniture, for starters. The double bed shocked him the most. Running his fingertips along the sheets made it the first time he'd ever touched silk. Then he noticed the rug. The flourished wallpaper. The wardrobe almost as big as his own cabin.

A circular table was tucked in a corner, which they were both sitting at. Magdalene took a long, calculated draw from her glass, smacking her lips with a satisfied pop. "How's your neck?"

"It's been better," John grimaced, rubbing it. "But this helped a lot."

"The wine?"

"The wine, yes."

A part of him had hoped that a 'last trick' would have been more than a joke. That thought perished when the first thing she did on unlocking the door was raiding the alcohol cabinet. In there, several bottles older than he was. They'd been through enough he couldn't remember where one started and the other ended.

He could scarcely believe they were still conscious, let alone conversing.

John held their latest bottle in his hands, pretending to read the label. All he cared for was the weight—or more the lack of it. "You know Mags, this was a great idea, but now what?"

"Hm?" she said into her glass. "There's no next bit. That's the plan."

"Drinking to the last second, is it?"

"Mm," she said back into the glass.

He twirled the bottle, dregs swirling around the bottom, to illustrate the point.

Magdalene almost spat wine back into her glass, but saved it with muted coughs.

"Already?"

"It's been," he began. "It's been..."

"What?"

"It's been—" he choked down some vomit. "Look, I'm trying to say, it's been."

"Been?"

"Been... It's been..."

Magdalene squinted.

"A while!" John slammed the bottle back on the table in triumphant victory.

"I think," he sniffed. "I don't know how long, but a while."

"If the clock's right, it's been twenty minutes," Magdalene said confidently.

"There's a clock in here?"

"No."

"Ah, alright." Then he actually listened. "Wait, how do you know the time then?"

"I just, I have a feeling."

"What?"

"I feel, I think. The time."

He blinked.

"Maybe, if I was a clock, and I was hung on the wall, I'd say it's been twenty minutes. If there was a clock in here. Yeah."

He blinked again. "Er."

She moaned and pressed fingers against her temples. "I don't know. I don't. Not the point."

"Not the point!" John exclaimed. "We can't drink away time if there's nothing to drink. Then we're just drinking time."

"And we're not exactly popular enough to ask others for more."

"Don't think they'd mind, at the moment." He tuned back into the ambient despair for a moment. "Bit much on their plates."

"It just *feels* immoral, you know?"

"They did, Mags, try to kill me."

She slumped back into her chair. "I'd still feel bad."

"And probably wanted to, probably. You, probably."

She huffed. "Fuck the wine, then."

Another boom jolted the table, the empty bottles clinking. There'd been a few of those and by now they were used to it.

John straightened from his own slump, which he didn't even realise he was in. "We could go up to the deck, I suppose."

"Would that make it better or worse?"

"I'd like to know when oblivion's going to hit, personally." John downed the rest of his wine like it was beer, slamming the glass hard enough the base chipped. "But that's me. You do what you want."

Magdalene stared down hers, empty. "I think I'll come with you."

She slammed it much like John had. Only, she slammed it with enough force a crack split through the entire glass. It shattered into a hundred pieces.

"Good grief," he whispered.

"I've had," she hiccuped, "a lot of wine."

Magdalene tried standing, and immediately stumbled to a fall. John flew out of his seat to catch her. Only barely; his own head started to swim. The two looked like someone tried to draw an embracing couple from a poor description and got the amount of limbs wrong.

"Sorry," she mumbled.

"Don't be." He tried to let her go without his support, and Magdalene did with a hand on the table. Mostly.

She looked back to the shattered glass, and the drops of wine between them. "I hope no-one gets mad over that."

"I don't think people will," he half-laughed. "There won't be any to."

Their eyes met for a second, and they shared an uneasy smile.

"Er," he said, "I thought a joke would—"

"It's fine," she said, bringing herself to a, for lack of better description, stand. "It's fine."

John cleared his throat. "The deck."

"The deck!" she said with a snap of her fingers. "You lead the way. I can't see the floor."

He wasn't much better than she was, but at least his vision decided to stay with him. John walked very slowly, for once leading the way for Magdalene. He only wished he could have done so when he didn't need to stop the world rolling away.

Magdalene's cabin gave immediate access to the deck, and once the door was open, he decided it was good enough.

"Will this do?" John slumped against the railing. It wasn't the best spot for the view, not by far. But really, what difference were the clouds on this side, anyway?

"Oh, this will do." Magdalene also slumped against the railing. Her bun was loose, the tie hanging on by a thread. "This is nice."

"Nice, you know, except for—"

"Not now," she wiggled a hand. "Not yet. Not thinking about it."

John didn't want to, but couldn't stop himself.

He concentrated on the wind, and how it rustled through his hair. It was something he'd gotten used to, but now it was a distraction. Realising the clouds were at eye-level rather than below them ruined that.

"Hm," Magdalene said. "I'm thinking about it."

"I can't stop thinking about it."

Her brows furrowed, like she was running through a particularly nasty maths problem. "Eight minutes?"

"I was going to say seven."

"I don't think a minute really matters."

"I think it does, when it's one of your last."

She leaned further over the rail, her curls rolling over her cheeks. "I guess you're right."

There was another boom. A much weaker one, this time. John vaguely wondered why.

"Just thinking," Magdalene said. "Just, an idea—"

"I don't think there's a chance. No."

She made a noise halfway between a hiccup and a gasp. "How did you know my question?"

"I'm not sure what else you could be asking, right now."

Magdalene paused, then nodded.

Maybe the clouds weren't his enemy. They came in so many interesting shapes. Colours, too. Not all of them were just white, and some of them even caught the setting sun. When his focus drifted he heard screams.

Magdalene spoke again. "I've realised what I hate the most, about this."

"The death?"

"Oh, not really." She rubbed her nose. "They're going to find the wreck, is what I hate."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Because we won't be there," she said. "All they'll see, a ship run to the ground by some old crones who couldn't see what was right in front of them. That's all they'll remember," her voice quivered. "They won't know we tried to do something."

John's eyes grew wide. "No. No, they'll have to realise."

"Think about it," she stared deeply, purposefully into his eyes. "Really, you know, think about it."

He did. It started to bury deeply in his mind. That horrible, horrible realisation.

"We could..."

She held onto his arm. "Just like you said: I don't think there's a chance."

"You're right," he whispered. "I'm right."

The next boom couldn't be described as one. It started as one, but cascaded into a wretched groan John could feel inside his skull.

Magdalene held tighter. "It's an interesting way to go, John."

"You know, Mags," John smiled, "I thought I'd be scared."

The deck buckled under his feet. His heart jumped into his throat.

Then, he was.