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VIVIAN MITCHELL (CONT'D)

Your supervisor is Mr. Al Harrison, Director of the Space Task Group. You'll write research, proof calculations, so forth. Don't talk to Mr. Harrison lest he talks to you. Not many Computers last more than a few days, he's been through a dozen in as many months.

(hands her a lanyard)

Your clearance.

Katherine takes the lanyard. She's overwhelmed. They arrive at steel doors labeled: Space Task Group.

VIVIAN MITCHELL (CONT'D)

They've never had a colored in here before, Katherine. Don't embarrass me.

Vivian walks off, leaving Katherine alone. She takes a deep breath. Walks into her future.

INT. SPACE TASK GROUP OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine steps into a cyclone of activity and stress. ENGINEERS chalk equations on blackboards, slug coffee. AIDES and SUPPORT STAFF scurry, answer phones. This is the Space Task Group: the world's most exclusive scientific club.

At the back of the room, Harrison paces in his glass bubble, talking with Karl Zielinski.

For the briefest moment, everyone seems to be looking at the black woman who just entered their world. But it's just a passing moment, there's far too much to do.

Engineer Sam Turner hands Katherine a trash can.

SAM TURNER

This wasn't emptied last night.

KATHERINE

I'm sorry. I'm not-

He's gone before she can explain. Katherine sees the only other woman in this zoo: Ruth. Puts the trash can down, walks her way.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Excuse me, ma'am, Mr. Harrison's Computer reporting.

Ruth barely looks up from beneath a pile of worksheets.

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RUTH
(points, far off)
Take the desk in the corner. I'll get
you work in a bit.

She finally notices Katherine is...black. Pauses. Katherine
smiles. Ruth considers her. Her strength. Her calm.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Mr. Harrison won't warm up to you, don't
expect it. Do your work, keep your head
down.

KATHERINE
Thank you.

Katherine lingers.

RUTH
Go on. Get settled.

Katherine walks to her station, way at the back of the room,
against the wall. Puts her personals on the desk. Sits.
She looks at the Engineer toiling aside her, it's Paul
Stafford. He looks at Katherine. Doesn't smile. Just
studies her.

Harrison (with Zielinski) steps out of his office, eating a
sandwich. He barks:

AL HARRISON
Stafford, why are we still losing
shingles off our heat shield?

Stafford damn near jumps.

STAFFORD
We're working with a prototype of the
capsule, Al. It's one third the size-

AL HARRISON
I get that.

He turns to Zielinski. Dead serious.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)
Well, do we need to turn our million
dollar fan down, Karl?

ZIELINSKI
No, Al. I don't think-

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AL HARRISON

Of course not. That was a joke.

Back to Stafford.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

Paul. If the heat shield comes off, what do you think happens to our astronaut?

Stafford nods his head.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

So we're going to come up with a solve, right?

STAFFORD

Yes, sir. We're working on it.

Harrison moves on.

AL HARRISON

Ruth. What's the status on my Computer?

RUTH

She's right in front of you, Mr. Harrison.

Ruth motions to Katherine. Harrison gives her a once over. Not what he expected either.

AL HARRISON

Does she know how to handle Analytic Geometry?

RUTH

Absolutely. And she speaks.

KATHERINE

I do, sir.

AL HARRISON

Which one?

KATHERINE

Both, sir. Geometry and speaking.

Harrison waves a finger at Ruth.

AL HARRISON

Then give her the-

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She knows exactly what he's talking about. She always knows what he's talking about. She snatches a bundle of worksheets off her desk, rushes them to Katherine.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

(to Katherine)

Do you think you can find me the Frenet frame for that data using the Gram-Schmidt--

Katherine glances at the data sheets.

KATHERINE

--Orthogonalization algorithm. Yes, sir. I prefer it over Euclidean coordinates.

That's all Harrison needs to hear. She knows her stuff.

AL HARRISON

Good. Then, I'm going to need it by the end of the day. And I'm also going to ask you to check Mr. Stafford's math as well as others on this floor from time to time.

Stafford rebuts.

STAFFORD

I can work that out myself, Al.

AL HARRISON

I'm sure you can, Paul. I'm sure all of you can. But if that were the case, shingles wouldn't be flying off the heat shield, now would they.

Harrison walks into the center of the Task Group.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

Excuse me. I just want to be clear about something...in 14 days the Mercury 7 will be here for training and I have no doubt that they'll be asking questions about our work. Do I need to remind everyone...that we are putting a human on top of a missile and shooting him into space? It's never been done before. And because it's never been done...everything we do between now and then is going to matter: it's going to matter to their wives, their kids, I believe it's going to matter to the whole damn country.

(MORE)

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AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

So this Space Task Group will be as advertised. And Americas greatest engineering and scientific minds will not have a problem with having their work checked. Will they, Paul?

He waits. Then...nods all around. No issues.

AL HARRISON (CONT'D)

Good. So let's have an amen, goddamnit.

THE ENTIRE SPACE TASK GROUP

Amen.

Harrison plods off, into his office.

The Group jumps back into the work.

Katherine arranges her personals. Everything in it's place. Meticulous.

She looks over at a very frustrated and diminished Stafford. He's using a thick black marker to redact much of the data in a report. He feels Katherine's gaze, and stares hostilely at her until she looks away.

Katherine puts her head down, opens Harrison's bundle of worksheets. Starts to dive in.

THUD. A thick report lands in front of her. She jolts. Stafford's standing above.

STAFFORD

My numbers are spot on.

KATHERINE

I'll double check them, sir, not a problem.

Katherine opens the report. The black marker redaction is bleeding through pages and pages of numbers. Can't make out much.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

I'm not going to be able-

STAFFORD

Work on what you can read. The rest is classified. You don't have clearance.

Stafford walks off. Joins Sam and a FEW COLLEAGUES at the coffee maker. All clearly talking about Katherine.

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She holds Stafford's report up to the light. This is going to be impossible.

Then...her foot starts tapping, jittery. She crosses her legs. Has to pee something fierce.

She walks over to Ruth, who's on a phone call.

KATHERINE

Excuse me...

Ruth holds her hand over the phone.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

May I ask you where the ladies' room is?

RUTH

Sorry, I have no idea where your bathroom is.

Ruth returns to her conversation. Katherine walks away.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine rushes down the hall, worksheets in her arms. Searching for a bathroom. Her papers drop.

At the far end of the hall...she sees the bathrooms. Thank God. She scoops the papers up.

A TRIO OF WHITE WOMEN come out of the ladies' restroom. They stand outside the door, chatting away.

Damn. Katherine gathers herself, ducks down another hallway.

ANOTHER HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine's practically running. No "colored bathrooms" anywhere.

EXT. NASA GROUNDS - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine pushes through steel doors into the blinding sun. Sees the West Campus Building way off in the distance. 1/2 mile away to be exact. She runs.

INT. WEST CAMPUS HALLWAY - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Katherine sprints down the familiarly dingy West Campus hall. She crashes through a door labeled: "Colored Restroom."