

SHIFT CHANGE

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INT. COFFEE SHOP - EVENING

CARRIE MILLER, a young woman dressed in hospital scrubs sits at a table by the window. Her eyes are red from crying, and she is sipping her coffee.

A few moments later, a second woman, about 10 to 12 years older than CARRIE, enters the shop. Her name is LIZ BENEDICT. LIZ also wears hospital scrubs.

LIZ notices CARRIE, who does not notice that LIZ has entered the shop. LIZ sees that CARRIE is upset, rolls her eyes, and places her order with the CASHIER.

LIZ:  
I'll have a small original roast,  
please.

CASHIER:  
(ringing it in)  
Comes to \$2.56

LIZ hands the CASHIER her card, and the CASHIER swipes it. Moments later, LIZ'S coffee arrives, and she grabs two creams and a sugar before walking up behind CARRIE.

LIZ:  
Mind some company?

CARRIE:  
(startled)  
Oh, hi. I didn't know you'd come  
in.

CARRIE wipes her face to hide the tears.

CARRIE: (CONT'D)  
Please, have a seat.

LIZ:  
(sitting across from  
CARRIE)  
You did well today. That biker  
with the heart attack. You saved  
his life.

CARRIE:  
(sniffling)  
Thanks.

They both sip their coffee.

LIZ:  
This is your first residency,  
correct?

CARRIE:  
Yeah. I got a bit of a late start  
to Med school.

LIZ:  
Are your grandparents still alive?

CARRIE:  
What?

LIZ:  
Your grandparents. Are they still  
living?

CARRIE:  
(what's this got to do  
with anything?)  
Yeah.

LIZ:  
Reason I ask is because it looked  
like your burn victim today was the  
first person who you'd ever watch  
die on you. Am I right?

CARRIE:  
Yeah.

CARRIE shuts her eyes, looks down. This is humiliating -  
crying in front of her boss.

CARRIE: (CONT'D)  
Sorry. I just didn't think that it  
would effect me like this.

LIZ:  
Well, death in a classroom is  
different than death on the  
operating table.

CARRIE:  
Why did you give him to me?  
Someone else could have saved him.

LIZ:  
You think so? 'Cause the report  
you filed said that he'd lost two  
quarts of blood in the back of the  
ambulance. The guy lives six

(MORE)

LIZ: (CONT'D)

minutes away, and he had a host of other issues to contend with. Sounds like he was dead long before you could do anything.

CARRIE:

But it was my job to save him. And I couldn't--

LIZ:

Carrie, I admire your dedication and empathy, but you gotta dial down the emotional attachment you have for your patients--

CARRIE:

I know--

LIZ:

It will drive you insane.

CARRIE:

I know.

(a beat)

How did you deal with it?

LIZ:

You move on to the next patient. Pretty simple really--

CARRIE:

No, I mean, the first patient you lost?

LIZ:

I moved on. I didn't "deal with it." There were others who needed saving.

CARRIE:

Well I can't do that--

LIZ:

(give me a break)

Yes, you can

CARRIE:

(offended)

What?

LIZ:

You heard me, and yes, you can.

CARRIE:  
 No, I can't, Liz. I'm sorry I'm  
 not as cold and unfeeling as you  
 are.

LIZ:  
 I'm going to ignore your bitchy  
 remark to teach you something.

LIZ stands and heads back to the counter. Before she  
 reaches the counter...

LIZ: (CONT'D)  
 (to CARRIE, without  
 turning around)  
 How do you take your coffee?

CARRIE:  
 I usually get French Roast. One  
 cream, two sugars.

LIZ reaches the counter.

LIZ:  
 (to CASHIER)  
 Small French Roast, please.

CASHIER:  
 (rings it in)  
 \$2.56

LIZ hands the CASHIER the card and the CASHIER swipes it.  
 After the transaction, LIZ grabs the cream and sugar and  
 joins CARRIE at the table again.

LIZ:  
 (sitting down again)  
 Here. Put the cream in. I'm  
 keeping the sugar.

CARRIE, looking skeptical, complies.

LIZ: (CONT'D)  
 Take a sip.

CARRIE does, making a face after tasting the bitterness.

LIZ: (CONT'D)  
 This cup of coffee is exactly like  
 the day you had today.  
 (a beat)  
 The cream in the coffee represents  
 the life that you saved today. It  
 (MORE)

LIZ: (CONT'D)

makes the coffee a little bit better, but the sugars that I didn't let you have represent the guy who died on you. That's what makes the coffee bitter.

CARRIE:

So, what's your point?

LIZ:

In this line of work, more often than not, you're going to have days that don't go your way, so you might want to get used to how this feels, because you'll feel this way a lot.

(a beat)

Just because you can't save everyone doesn't mean you're a bad resident. It's not going to make you a bad doctor either.

(a beat)

Please understand that I'm not asking you to stop feeling empathy. Empathy is what makes great doctors and nurses who they are. But if you let each death get to you like this, it'll ruin you. The same way that it ruined me.

CARRIE:

What do you mean?

LIZ:

You asked me how I coped with my first death on the job. The truth is that I didn't. At the end of my shift that day, I went home and had a few drinks. That turned into a few more, then the alcohol changed. First beers, then harder liquor, until one day I found myself looking across a courtroom at my ex-husband, as the judge awarded him custody of our kids.

LIZ'S eyes are glassy, as if she might cry.

LIZ: (CONT'D)

Don't lose your empathy, but don't let it control you. I let mine

(MORE)

LIZ: (CONT'D)

control me, that's why I have to  
leave and go to an AA meeting now.

CARRIE:

(feeling tremendous  
guilt)

Liz, I'm so sorry for what I said--

LIZ:

Don't be.

CARRIE:

I had no idea--

LIZ:

No one does. So I'd appreciate it  
if you'd keep it to yourself. The  
whole mess was a long time ago.  
I've been sober for seven years.

CARRIE:

Do you still have to go?

LIZ:

It's a condition of employment.  
Doctor's orders, so to speak. And  
to be honest, the meetings...are  
how I cope with the death that  
comes with this job.

(a beat)

I gotta go. Just, remember what I  
said, and find something  
constructive to help you cope with  
the death you'll face. It'll  
destroy you if you don't.

LIZ hands the sugars to CARRIE.

LIZ: (CONT'D)

You did a good job today. See you  
tomorrow morning.

CARRIE:

Thank you.

LIZ:

Don't mention it.

FADE TO BLACK.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.