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19 and above (Over Coffee)
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The young woman stirs her cup one more time. As the small, reflective black whirlpool swirls, she holds her breath with the anticipation of one who waits for news of their own death. "Ha!" she says with a twisted smile. "It's the circle of life."

Her smile fades away, slowly at first and then all at once. Even before the dark water settles, she can see fragments of the face that haunts her. The loud shattering of her cup as it hits the floor startles even her. A second ago, she was watching her coffee settle, and the next, she was standing by the sink, table and chair clunking in front of her in rhythm with the fallen mug. This time, when the nurses in the room look at her, she sees it, and their silent thoughts make her shrink into herself.

"Sorry." she's sure she says, even though everyone else will tell you simply grunts before scurrying out of the small tea room. When she returns with a broom and dustpan, the nurses look at her again, and she shrinks just a little bit more. However, nothing compares to the shame she feels when her eyes land on her mug sitting on the sink, completely intact.

"Did you want to mop the water with a dustpan? Liquids are mopped up by absorbent things, you know. Like mops." A laugh from far away. Possibly multiple. "Anyway, I've already done it for you."

"I.....umm.....uh." she says.

"Dr P! We have an emergency in casualty"

"Has the consultant been notified?" she replies. And just like that, she is walking away from the stunned gazes that are accusing her of having lost her mind. So of course, there is no one to notice the face that glares from the large drop of coffee that remains on the table where our doctor sat only moments ago. The ebony eyes follow the one who killed them as she walks away, and they darken just a little bit more before the last drop is wiped away.

"Coffee?!"

"Huh?"

"Would you like a cup?"

"A cup for what?"

"Drinking, I assume."

"Oh." Dr P replies, unsure of when she had returned to this cursed tea room after her last break when she had dropped her mug before being summoned. "I'm not sure I should....."

"Which makes you the perfect candidate." Dr M plonks down into a chair beside her. She hesitates.

"Was he your first? You're not much younger than I am so he could not have been your first, which means, it's something else. So what is it?"

Dr P looks at her companion. Behind her eyes is a world of activity, gears churning almost audibly. The room is full of other people milling around, chattering excitedly about the new tik tok challenge or that beautiful dress on Instagram, but she hears none of them. The doctor looks at her fresh mug.

“Ha. Still there.” she whispers to herself.

And just like that, the floodgates cease to exist. Someone touches her shoulder, and suddenly, she's falling into their warm embrace. She is initially startled, but then she buries her face in Dr M's shoulder and stops muffling her uncontrollable sobs.

When she finally lifts her head, the room is empty.

“I'm sorry I ...uhdidn't mean to chase anyone..... um.....out. I uh..... I'll call them back.” she manages between snuffles and sobs. “I just uh....need to wash my face first. Probably very puffy now.” She gets up and makes for the tap, whilst simultaneously wiping her eyes. Absent-mindedly, she picks up the cold - when did it become cold - mug. “Gotta pour this out”.

“Stop. You need to stop moving long enough to understand why you're feeling this way. You need to confront it.”

“Confront what? How I allowed a young man in his prime to just die? How he came here alone, with no one but me to care whether he made it or not? It's been 24 hours and no one has been reached who is willing to come here and say that they loved him and they are sad that he is gone. No family in the city. And even then, no one is alive to mourn him. Parents gone, girlfriend in S.A who sounded more concerned about whether she can still drive his car after the accident than the fact that he was in an accident. Tell me, is that what I should confront? Or maybe it's the fact that I didn't get there fast enough to insert a potentially life-saving chest drain because I lost my stupid keys! And now I can't even find someone to tell about his death who will actually mourn him! If no one else will cry for him, or be sad for him, I will. That is all I have left to give him. And maybe then, I will stop seeing him everywhere. Funny thing is every time I see his face, it's distorted, like I'm about to forget him. And new faces that need my help keep coming and I find myself wondering if he had a beard or a simple mustache!”

Dr M moves closer.

“He had neither. Patient was clean shaven.”

Dr P looks at her wistfully. “I'm talking about my brother. I last saw him 2 years before he died. And then he was gone. And they couldn't notify me until a week later. His only family. Reading this patient's history, I just 'knew' they were the same person. So of course, I keep trying to remember him, but I keep asking 'beard or mustache?'.”

“Oh honey.” Dr M moves closer.

“Hie docs. There's an emergency coming in from the local clinic and we really need you.”

“Tomorrow? I'll make you another cup.” Dr M says, her piercing gaze fixed on Dr P.

Dr P hesitates. “Over coffee?”

“Is there any other way?” the reply says as they both walk out of the tea room with dry eyes,