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Reel Reading

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‘Girl Interrupted’ was directed by James MacGold and released on December 21, 1999. This movie follows Susanna Kaysen, who spends her time at McLean hospital, a renowned mental institution for troubled young women. There, she meets Lisa, a troubled woman who makes Susanna question life at McLean or life outside of McLean.

Susanna also grows interest in a seasonal visitor at McLean, a girl named Daisy who checks herself in every Thanksgiving. When Susanna discovers Daisy dead body in the bathroom one day, she is completely distraught and takes the time to grieve. In the scene where this takes place, the low lighting in the hallway matches the somber mood of Susanna. From this medium shot, the dimly lit corridor overpowers and contrasts the bright, flower-patterned wall. They’re in Daisy’s house so the aspect ratio of the flower patterned wall that Susanna’s leaning on compared to the somber hallway is different. You see the hallway more than the wall, which symbolizes how Daisy felt from the day she met Susanna to the day she died. After that, Lisa comes upstairs. In a shot, you can see Lisa behind Susanna, in the corridor. The lighting gains a new meaning.

Now that Lisa’s in the shot and, the lowkey lighting emphasizes her feelings of indifference towards Daisy dying. While Susanna goes downstairs to call 911, Lisa stares at

Daisy's corpse not because she cares about her, only because she wants her money so that she can escape to Florida. She proceeds to steal money from Daisy's pocket so that she can realize this dream. The lighting in the medium shot of her in the hallway changes to a soft white lighting on her face to emphasize her ambition and yearning for her dream of escaping. Susanna comes upstairs after calling 911 and there's a two shot of Lisa inserting the money into Susanna's pocket.

They're wearing muted colors, but Susanna's dark brown look really showcases her empathetic personality whereas Lisa's plain white T-shirt emphasizes her carefree personality. Usually when someone is described as carefree, it has a positive connotation, but in Lisa's case it doesn't because it reflects her indifference and stoicism in the face of serious events, such as Daisy's death.

Unlike Lisa, Susanna's world isn't as carefree since she actually cares for people and is affected by their pain. In this shot of Susanna coming to terms with Daisy's death in the hallway, you can also see Lisa leave the front door, to signify her quick exit and escape from the situation. Susanna, on the other hand, takes time to mourn on the floor of a narrow hallway, as if the world is closing in on her. She is forever changed by Daisy's passing, whereas Lisa remains unmoved by the tragedy. The lighting, costumes, and characters' movements in this scene does a great job at contrasting both characters' personalities.