

Death Comes To Visit

by Jowell Tan

Late-stage lung cancer has a few consistent things, no matter whether you're a mid-twenties college student or an elderly 60-year old man. For one, the last weeks of your life are spent hooked up to a respiration machine which acts as a replacement for your lungs, too ravaged by disease to perform their duty. That makes it hard to get around, and you're too tired and sick and out of breath to do anything anyway. So you're confined to your bed until you die.

But the other, infinitely worse thing that always happens to lung cancer patients is the the process of actually dying. It's like a system, programmed into every single individual - white, black, Asian, young, old, healthy, unhealthy - it's always the same. First the fingers start to twitch. You feel a strong sensation at your fingertips, like pins & needles multiplied by a thousand. Then slowly, like a shock wave it'll go up your arm, across your shoulders, and down the other arm. Then down the legs, all the way to your toes. It'll feel like your entire body's on fire, but it doesn't hurt. It's just a strange feeling throughout. Then slowly, as it gets hard to breathe, you start to feel light-headed, that sensation will slowly dissolve, starting from the legs up. Your feet lose all feeling, become dead weight. The shock wave that spread out the pins & needles retrace the path they took back to the beginning, and as it returns to its start point parts of your body go numb, become unresponsive to your wishes. That's when you realise - You're going to die. Your soul is leaving the body in parts, and when the entire body loses that sensation of fire you will officially be deceased. It's the same for everyone.

You know how I know? I've seen it happen, a million times over. I've been there for every single one.

He was almost dying when I reached the hospital. I walked past the open automatic sliding doors into the lobby, almost vacant except a

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few people milling around, the nurses fighting sleep behind the desks while waiting for their shift to end. They barely blinked as I walked past them.

When I reached his ward, I peeked in through the ajar door. There he was, illuminated solely by the moonlight streaming in from the window. Lying on the bed, breathing heavily. I'd arrived just in time. Opening the door slightly, I slipped silently into the room, closing the door behind me.

Over the years, I've discovered that when the people I present myself to finally meet me, they view me not as how I really look, but as someone important from their lives. For a nine-year old, it might be their mother. For a teenager it might be an ex-lover or one of their idols. In the case of this man, Benjamin Wessler, I had taken on the appearance of his wife, Alice, who had long died in a car accident when Mr. Wessler was still a healthy man. I know this because I was there at Alice's death as well. And now I was in this man's bedside, because he was about to die.

Noticing me in Alice's skin, his eyes lit up just the slightest. He reached out his hand, fingers trembling and weakened. "A.. Alice?"

I took his hand and replied, "No, Mr. Wessler, I'm not Alice. But I am here tonight to bring you to her."

For a moment, Benjamin was confused. But after a brief moment, he realised who he was talking to.

"Are.. Are you God?"

I chuckled. I always get that. "No, I'm not God. But you could say that I know him very well. I go by many names, but none of those names are important now. What you do need to know is that I'm here tonight because you're going to die. In fact, I was there at the end of

your many lives, Mr. Wessler:

"I was there at your birth, because it was only because of someone else dying that you could be here;

"When you left home when you were 18, abandoning your parents and your given name for a name of your own creation and a grand ambition;

"When your company went bankrupt, and you threw all traces of you into a pile of fire on the beach, escaping your second life with a lifetime of money;

"And now here we are, at the end of everything. One physical life, three different lives. I don't get many people like you, Benjamin, which is why I particularly like such days. It brightens up my job."

By the end of my little self-indulgent soliloquy, I was sitting down in the chair next to him. And Benjamin, by this time, was shaking throughout his body. Soon the shock wave would recede, and his soul would be out of his physical body. He struggled to speak, and managed to say:

"So.. So what happens next?"

"Next? I don't know. I'm merely your guide to bring you to wherever you have to be."

I stood up, and stretched out my hand. "Are you ready now, Benjamin? We have to leave soon."

Benjamin hesitated just a little bit, before taking my hand. I tugged slightly to bring his soul out of his body. He stood up next to me, and together we both looked down upon his souless body, nothing more now than dead weight and cold flesh. "Did I do everything right, you

think? Since you've been seeing me throughout my life. I had the best intentions, but I was never sure."

I turned to look at him. His eyes were pleading, hoping for an answer that would give him peace. But I couldn't give him the answer he wanted. It wouldn't be fair.

"Honestly, I don't know. If you hadn't done those things, you probably wouldn't be here now. You might have met me earlier or later. But you did do those things. You made choices that brought you to me. I don't know what would've happened if you did certain things differently. It's impossible for me to tell you."

He thought long and hard about my answer, staring intensely at his body. At this time the call had gone out to the doctors, and the ward was now filled with activity. CPR was being administered, nurses were bringing out the defibrillators, and now the doctors were trying hard to bring him back to life. The dull tone of the heart monitor registering nothing rang loud and undying through the room. In this chaos, no one had noticed the two of us, standing quietly at the bedside in stark contrast to the rest of the room.

"That's the answer I'll have to accept, huh?" He spoke, barely above a whisper, but strong.

"Yes."

"Alright then," He looked back to me, and smiled. "Where are we going?"

I smiled back at him, and slapped my hand on his shoulder. "Your guess is as good as mine." The white fluorescent light became gradually stronger, almost painfully bright, and filled up the room.

