



Dead lizards do not speak

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At the time of writing this, I've just finished watching Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (2000). I have spent approximately four days thinking about the premise of mortality with the subdued conviction of a person sifting through a family album with reluctant fingers, trying to find new ghosts in old faces. The abstract cementing of death means it is a fact swimming in the eddies of obscurity. It has a body and it has a disguise and in dealing with it, we try to tell them apart.

The past year that I spent as a medical intern did what it is colloquially touted to do. It desensitized me to the concept of dying in much the same way one perceives rain after months inundated with downpour. I was inured to the moment of permanent stillness that steals over the hint of a shallow breath, and I, in my own way, reveled in it. I was proud of my detachment. I was glad of my meticulous removal from all things emotional. I was a tedious stoic in the making and lost myself somewhere round the sharp bends. Death was paperwork and exhaustion. Death was cries stowed away behind closed doors. Death was a name, sometimes a number, to read and forget. Death came every day in

different forms; an operatic succession of diagnoses and reports on some days – a mechanical lull on others.

So when a year later, death is sitting beside me on my living room sofa, watching Yang's interpretation of birth and brevity of life, I don't know what it means. I search for a manifesto, a carefully detailed manual for grieving, with a desperation that I had previously deemed too foreign to examine. At the time of writing this, my words seem wooden and precise – they don't seem like me. Language and words betray me in an undue reciprocity of past reverence and this is just as much a study in mourning as it is in healing. They tend to merge into one another in a natural complicity, managing to elude me as one.

I'm not saying I'm consumed by it. But I *am* consumed by it. I read it in a ruse, a veil, a shadow, a book, a poem, a movie, the carcass of a dead lizard, the sodden lines of trampled flowers. I reach out, not knowing what I'm looking for. I'm not prepared. I see it, but I'm not prepared. It looks different now – a stranger I thought I'd recognize but the wounds are all wrong, the nose is not the way it should be, and

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the voice is disconcertingly close.

Death is no longer just a number. Understanding it has a strange sense of duality to it – the task is as futile as it is important. When you look through the right window, it's a maze. You flip through photographs and memories and a slew of too-soon's and what-if's. You look hard enough and you can make out your own handiwork in the hedges and the brick walls. Hospitals walk you through the clockwork intricacies of how death becomes life; they list down the physiology

of a body waiting for the seconds hand to stop, and then you're in your mid-twenties and now death is a sharp pain in your chest, a dull ache behind your eyes; it is a slurry of days subsumed in fatigue and denial and maybe acceptance.

At the time of writing this, I'm not sure if I'm ready to write it yet. I look at death sitting beside me on the sofa, his hand holding mine in a gesture that is both a violent nostalgia and a distinct sense of loss, outward and inward. I look at my words and they betray me still.