

## REPRESENTATION OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS IN DANI CLAYTON FROM THE HAUNTING OF BLY MANOR

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how Dani Clayton undergoes grieving process. Using qualitative descriptive method with online video as data sources, the research analyzed episodes where Dani dealt with grief using Kubler-Ross' theory. Results shows that Dani moved from USA to the UK as a nanny to two kids to grieve her fiancé's death after breaking up their engagement. Dani went through 3 stages of grief; depression, denial, and acceptance while experiencing hauntings multiple times. The hauntings escalated as Dani gets closer to someone romantically. She finally faced her grief and guilt to accept his death and move on with her life. Thus this research shows how Dani starts the series by grieving her fiancé's death and finally accepts it to be able to be happy in her life.

**Keywords:** Stages, Grieving, Dying, Hauntings

### INTRODUCTION

Witnessing the death of a loved one is one of the hardest moments in life. This incident can cause deep sadness for anyone who experiences it. According to Bhounick (2018), Goleman stated that the sadness feeling is a basic emotion that can be experienced by every living thing and is useful for adjusting oneself to the death of a loved one like a boyfriend.

This devastating experience of loss can cause an emotion of sadness that can trigger a reaction. Each individual could have a different reaction when faced with loss, personalized to the circumstances of their loss. Also, when someone loses their partner, it will have a big impact on their personal life. For example, they could become more emotional, unwilling to do basic self-care like eating food, and it also can affect social life, such as isolating from their other friends and family.

Regarding this issue of sadness from loss, Ariyanti, et al. (2023), argued that losing a life partner can often make someone feel a deep emptiness or regret that can lead to depression. People who experienced this loss felt empty in their lives. This is because they were no longer with someone who had been constant presence in their lives. They become lost in sadness and tend to experience symptoms such as depression which negatively impacts their life.

In relation to literary works, characters in literary works of TV series, for example, can be given the same qualities and emotions as humans. A fictional character can have all human emotions (Sari, 2018. p. 6), including the emotion of sadness, due to their experiences, including the event of loss and death. The character Dani Clayton in the Netflix series "The Haunting of Bly Manor" experiences a process of grief and thus becomes a main character in this research.

This grieving process could go through 5 stages of grief, as argued by Kubler-Ross (2014). The 5 stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Papalia and Martorell stated (2024) that grief is a response to the loss of a loved one due to death and is a process of adjusting to the loss in the grieving person (p. 558). Meanwhile Minderop (2010) defines grief as an emotion related to the loss of something that is valued (p. 43). From these two definitions, it can be concluded that the main character Dani Clayton in this show experienced grief because her fiancé died. Kubler-Ross stated that the grief experienced by a person would occur in stages. However, not all the stages have to be experienced by the grieving person. Also, the grieving person does not even have to experience those stages in a neat and tidy order. For example, even though the depression stage is the fourth stage explained by Kubler-Ross, it could be the first one experienced by the grieving person, and then after that they enter the denial stage.

This study attempted to further explore the issue of grief experienced by fictional characters in a literary work. The results of three previous relevant studies are considered for this study to provide depth of analysis and context about what has been researched. Wiandri's (2022) research focused on the how the stages of grief from Lara who is the main character in the film *Senandika Lara* were shown. Using a narrative method, the study showed the five stages of grief that Lara goes through when she is faced with the death of her father. Meanwhile, the research of Intan and Wardiani (2021) focused on studying the stages of grief to lessen their sadness after their son's death. With the qualitative descriptive method, this study revealed the grief experienced by the protagonists, namely Anya and Ale, which were described in the novel *Critical Eleven* through 4 things. These 4 things are the thoughts, attitudes, actions, and speech of the characters, and they also went through all stages of grief that ended in acceptance of reality.

Finally, the third research is from Gani (2022) who highlighted the grief experienced by Ruben Stone, the main character in the film *Sound of Metal*, due to his hearing loss. Focusing on how Ruben undergoes acceptance process, Gani explained the stages of grief that the character goes through. The research used qualitative descriptive methods, and it showed that Stone went through all 5 stages of grief sequentially, starting from denial, anger, bargaining, depression, to acceptance.

To further examine how someone went through grief, this study focuses on the stages of grieving for Dani Clayton, the main character in the series *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. Through the event of grief due to the death of her fiancé. Unlike the three studies, this study not only examines the stages of grief but also how grief manifests as experienced by the character Dani Clayton from the show "*The Haunting of Bly Manor*". The research hypothesis is built through the argument that the stages of grief do not always start from the denial stage.

## **METHODS**

This study used the qualitative descriptive methods to examine the research data. In general, there are two research methods: quantitative and qualitative. Chatra, et al (2023) noted that this method is used to analyze and interpret phenomena, events, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs (p. 14). Specifically, this research applied descriptive qualitative methods in order to analyze the stages of grief that appear in the character Dani Clayton in the series *The Haunting of Bly Manor*. As noted by Chatra, et al. (2023) data collection techniques for qualitative research involved the observation, interviews,

analysis, and documentation (p. 16). The analysis in this study was carried out by collecting data from selected episodes, watching the series, marking scene durations and dialogue. Therefore, data collection was done through the following steps:

1. The first step involves determining the object of analysis, which in this study is the series entitled *The Haunting of Bly Manor*.
2. After that, watching the series, marking an important scenes, noting down the timestamp of the episodes, and collecting screenshots of scenes that are suitable to the research topic. Film data is sourced from Netflix.
3. Compile the data obtained from watching the series that are applicable to the research topic.
4. The scenes were analyzed in stages with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' (2014) theory of five stages of grief
5. The collected data was then classified according to the theory.

The data source for this research is the series "*The Haunting of Bly Manor*" released in 2020. The series was selected because it depicts the story of the life of an American woman who lost her fiancé and so moved to United Kingdom. So, this series aligns to the issue and relevant to research focus.

Given the non-linear progression of the grieving process, characters have the possibility to experience different stages in the grief process. This provides a chance for further research to be carried out. In addition, the character Dani Clayton is the focus of this research, as she is the main character who experienced the journey of accepting grief. Thus, she is the most compatible to the relevant issue of grief through the lens of Kubler-Ross' (2014) theory.

## RESULTS

The findings of this research showed that Dani went through loss when her fiancé passed away in an accident right after they broke up the engagement. During her grieving process, she went through 3 of the stages of grieving being that of depression, denial, and acceptance in that order. Undergoing this process of grief acceptance, Dani is haunted by a vision of her fiancé right before the accident, manifesting as her guilt. Table 1 shows this data

**Table 1. Stages of Grief Appearance and Order**

STAGES	APPEARANCE	ORDER
Denial	Yes	2
Anger	No	-
Bargaining	No	-
Depression	Yes	1
Acceptance	Yes	3

This table proves that the process of grieving does not necessarily have to go through all 5 stages and that they do not always start from the denial stage.

## **DISCUSSION**

The following explains Dani Clayton's grieving process.

### **Grief and Grieving**

Due to the nonlinear storytelling structure of the first 4 episodes, this analysis will present the plot of the show and what stages of grief Dani went through in chronological order. The first is one half of episode 4 showing Dani's history in America before moving to the UK.

The episode started with the engagement party of Dani and Edmund. Dani was shown to have had doubts about her engagement, but still went along with it. She has been best friends with him since childhood. Months after the party, Dani confessed to Edmund that she has gotten cold feet and no longer wished to marry him. When asked for her reason inside their car parked by the street, she responded never having felt any romantic attraction to him. Dani genuinely loves Edmund but only as a friend and not in the romantic way. She had hoped that she would eventually feel romantic love for him, that it would have been selfish if she rejected his proposal. However, the pressure of planning the wedding was too much and so she could no longer pretend to be in love. Upset by this revelation, Edmund storms out of the car not noticing an incoming truck. The truck crashed into him with full speed and he was brought to a hospital. Figure 1 showed the moment right before the accident



At the hospital, the doctor came out after surgery to inform Edmund's parents and Dani that he had not survived the accident. Dani, feeling shocked by the news, went to the washroom. She then proceeded to see a ghost of Edmund's last moment in the mirror, with his spectacles shining the reflection of the truck's headlights. She turned to face the ghost but it is nowhere to be seen. Figure 2 showed a screenshot of Dani seeing Edmund's ghost in the washroom mirror.



**Figure 2. Dani seeing Edmund's ghost in the mirror (35:30)**

This ghost could be understood as Dani experiencing hauntings. Kubler-Ross (2014) noted that during the grieving process, a recurrence of the trauma might appear in the form of sensory hallucinations, be it seeing someone, hearing a voice, or even being touched (p. 63). In her case, Dani's haunting is a manifestation of her guilt, seeing Edmund in his last moments right after they broke up. She felt guilty for having not loved him, and in turn he accidentally stepped onto incoming traffic. This indicated that Dani is in the depression stage of grief. This could be seen by the phantom being a form of her feelings of guilt. Li et al. (2018) found that guilt-complicated grief often is present in people with depression from the loss of a loved one. One of the types of guilt that possibly existed is responsibility guilt, which matched with what Dani was feeling. Thus the bereaved individual often carries a sense of guilt that was related with the passing of a loved one.

The next scene showed Dani and Edmund's family at his funeral service. As people one by one gave their condolences to her, Dani noticed a mirror in front of her and in it, Edmund was standing right behind her with his hand on her shoulder. The camera that looked back at Dani in the real world and she stood alone with no Edmund behind her. Figure 3 showed these 2 shots.



**Figure 3. Dani seeing Edmund in the mirror (36:05 - 36:10)**

These two shots indicated that the haunting was still only of a visual type, specifically these two times were of a reflection on a mirror. Dani became disturbed with this imagery, and chose to go to the mirror and hang a black cloth over the mirror to stop looking at Edmund. This showed that Dani has entered the denial stage of grief. In this stage, denial was not so literal as a rejection of reality in which the deceased has passed, but rather symbolic (Kubler-Ross, p.23). Dani felt an immense amount of grief, and

looking at the harmless apparition in the mirror only reminds her of his death in a much more vivid way than just being at the funeral home. Thus her denial stage was to cover the mirror. It was much easier to just shake hands with people offering condolences instead of looking at the person she has lost. This is in line with what Nurcahya and Juanda (2024) found, which is that denial is also a coping mechanism, meant to explicitly deny danger and assume said danger does not exist (p. 191). If the mirror is covered, then Dani would not see the ghost.

Many months later, Dani received an unexpected visitor in the form of Edmund's mother. The older woman said her worries, receiving news that Dani has not been taking care of herself like eating enough food. This would place Dani in the depression stage, with a symptom of depression being not caring enough to get out of bed or eat. So Edmund's mother brought lasagna for Dani. She also brought Edmund's spectacles that he died in. Unable to look at or even throw them out, she insisted Dani to take and keep it. Dani has plans to move to the UK that day, so she accepted the spectacles. Her plan to move to the UK also put her in the denial stage simultaneously with the depression stage. Her home and Edmund's family would remind her too much of Edmund, and rather than going to therapy or talking to friends, Dani decided to start a new life at the UK.

Such is Dani's life in the USA before moving to the UK. She find work as an au pair there, a type of nanny living with the family helping with childcaring, education, and chores. She was employed by the Wingraves, a rich family with a huge mansion named Bly Manor. Flora and Miles were the kids Dani is in charge of. Their parents had died several years before the show, and so the often absent uncle Henry Wingrave was their only family left. Dani worked with Hannah Grose, the housekeeper who also lived at the estate, Jamie Taylor who was the gardener, and Owen Sharma who served as their cook.

The Bly Manor estate was haunted. Revealed in episode 8, the owners of Bly Manors in 17th century were the sisters named Viola and Perdita. Viola, married and with a daughter, was sick and thus debilitated. Perdita pitied her frail sister and thus suffocated Viola to death in secrecy. She then married Viola's widowed husband and adopted her daughter. Viola's ghost took revenge and killed Perdita. Seeing Perdita dead, the husband moved him and his daughter away from Bly Manor, leaving behind Viola's treasures. Enraged, she refused to move on to the afterlife and instead walked through the mansion every night as a ghost, hoping to see her husband and daughter. Anybody who crossed her path would be killed, such as a doctor who lived in the manor many years after. Anybody who died in the manor, whether killed by her or by other means, would be stuck in the manor as a ghost. One day, Viola killed one of Henry Wingrave's employee, Peter Quint, without anyone knowing. Peter was in a relationship with the previous au pair before Dani, Rebecca Jesel. Wanting Rebecca to be with him forever, Peter's ghost tricked Rebecca and made her commit suicide. Flora and Miles Wingrave witnessed all of this. Thus Bly Manor is filled with many ghosts.

Episode 1 showed Dani starting her work as an au pair for the Wingrave kids. She saw Edmund's ghost twice in this episode. First, she saw him when she was hired for the job, so she packed her belongings at the hostel, preparing to move to Bly Manor. She saw him in the mirror upon leaving. This showed that her feelings of guilt still existed and that her feelings would not be left in America. Denial did not work and the grief followed her wherever she went. Then, the second time was when she was caring for Flora in the bathroom. After Flora took a bath, Dani saw Edmund in the bathroom's mirror. She scrubbed the mirror and he disappeared. Figure 4 showed these reflections.



**Figure 4. Dani seeing Edmund's reflection (15:05 and 26:12)**

This means that she is still in the denial stage of grief. Whenever she chose to actively remove the haunting, she is in denial stage. According to Dewi (2024), individuals in denial will pretend that the upsetting reality never happened (p. 250). So, it can be understood that Dani chose to believe that the haunting, and in turn Edmund's death, never happened.

The night after that second incident, Flora made Dani promise her that the au pair would stay inside the room and not leave. This was so that Dani would not accidentally cross paths with Viola. However, Dani woke up at night and went to the kitchen to make tea with milk. So Flora was upset with Dani. The next night, the kids made a plan to keep Dani safe. They lured Dani into Flora's closet, claiming that there was a fan in there Miles needed to sleep. Dani stepped into the big closet, and they closed the door on her, locking her inside to keep her safe. When locked in the closet, Dani yelled for the kids to open the door, however they lied and said that the key was gone. She started having a panic attack because there was a mirror in there with her. She glanced at it briefly, saw Edmund again, and panicked even harder, taking a piece of clothing to cover the mirror. This indicates that even throughout all this events, Dani is still afraid of Edmund's ghost. The ghost does not do anything to her besides showing up in reflections, yet she is scared of it. Late into the night, after Viola's ghost has done her nightly walk, they let Dani out of the closet. She leaves their rooms and sees the mud prints left by Viola assuming it was by the kids.

The second episode has one important encounter with Dani's grief. As punishment for locking her up in the closet, Dani made the kids do chores for the day. This included pulling weeds in the garden, mopping the floor, and cleaning their rooms. Flora cleaned even Dani's bedroom and found Edmund's broken spectacles. Dani saw Flora wearing the glasses and became visibly disturbed. Figure 5 showed Flora wearing them from Dani's perspective.





**Figure 5. Flora wearing Edmund's broken spectacles (27:43)**

Flora saw Dani looking sad, so she gave it back. After that, Dani went outside and suffered a panic attack. This is in line with what Bui et al finds (2015), that people with complicated grief are more prone to panic attacks akin to having Panic Disorder. Dani with her grief and guilt mixed is thus more susceptible to panic attacks of being reminded of Edmund. This was another indication of her depression phase, where the bereaved individual will overthink. It is important to note that unlike being trapped in a closet with a mirror and Edmund, her panic attack this time is triggered merely by seeing the spectacles. Yet she still has them in her possession. Kubler-Ross (2014) noted that when going through the deceased belongings after their death, it can be hard because it is both a physical reminder of the person and it holds stories or memories related to the loved one (p. 127). Thus for Dani, looking at the broken glasses was not just a reminder of Edmund as a person, but also of the accident that killed him. Dani saw Edmund getting hit by the truck. She saw the life leaving his body with his cracked glasses beside him. Yet she has not thrown them out. The glasses is a symbol of her grief, she will hold on to the grief, yet be unable to face it head on.

Later that night, Dani and the kids played a game of hide and seek. While looking for Miles, she saw Peter's ghost not knowing that he was dead, so she assumed that he must be an intruder. Dani charged outside with an iron rod as a weapon in hand, and found no one outside. Then she looked back and witnessed Miles passing out as the episode ended.

Episode three continues from where episode two ended. With a possible intruder on the loose, Dani and Hannah Grose called the police to help search the area. However they did not find Peter. So Hannah called Owen and Jamie to help guard the mansion for the night. Dani and Jamie scouted the area and grew close but found nothing. Meanwhile the show flashbacks to how Peter and Rebecca started a relationship and how it was a bad kind of relationship, that Peter was moody and easily jealous of other men near Rebecca. That night, as Dani tried to sleep, she noticed Edmund's spectacles, turned to face the empty side of bed, then saw his bloodied hand on her bed as seen in figure 6.

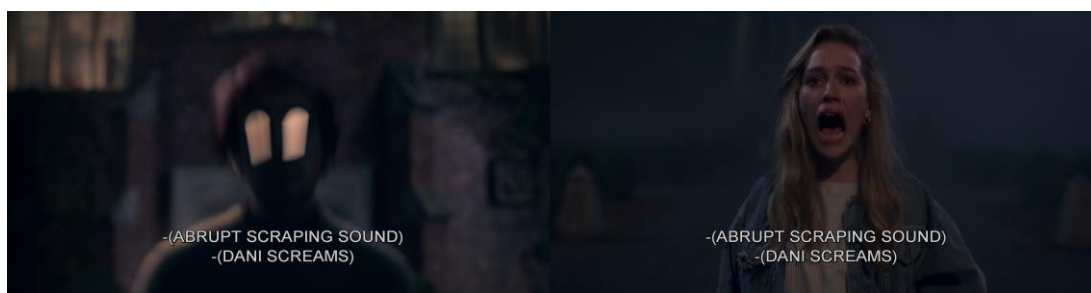




**Figure 6. Edmund's hand on Dani's bed (27:20)**

This was the first time Edmund's ghost has been visual not from the mirror. Dani grew closer to Jamie, someone whom she might like, and thus her grief has a new part; what happens if Dani moves on and falls in love. Li et. al (2018) noted again that guilt in bereavement can take many forms, one of which is guilt from enjoying life after the deceased (p. 2). Thus, Dani's complicated grief with guilt has evolved from one to two forms of guilt, which were responsibility and love after loss. This evolution also meant that her haunting, Edmund's ghost, was able to manifest beyond just in the mirror. The haunting also evolved not just as Edmund with the bright glasses, but it haunted her as his dying form.

The next day, Owen and Jamie stayed at the mansion for the full day and night again, just in case Peter appears again. In the morning, Dani found Flora outside, almost passing out like Miles. She called the doctor but he said that Flora is physically healthy and that she just need therapy instead. Dani called Henry to come check up on Flora but he refused. By night time the kids looked healthy and want to perform storytime like a drama. Their play was interrupted by a phone call with bad news. While Owen was staying in Bly Manor for two nights in a row, his mother passed away. Thus Owen and Jamie chose to go back to their homes, leaving Dani and Hannah alone again. Before Jamie left, a romantic moment was had with Dani. After Jamie left, Dani saw Edmund standing right in front of her. Then suddenly the ghost was pulled back violently and Dani screamed, as seen in figure 7.



**Figure 7. Dani reliving Edmund's accident (53:47)**

Just like before, her haunting has escalated even further after a romantic moment with Jamie. Now, not only was Dani seeing Edmund without a mirror, she was reliving the moment he got hit by a truck, an event she felt responsible for. So when Jamie and Dani were very close romantically, Dani's hauntings became more extreme. What was

once just Edmund looking at Dani in the mirror has become Dani reliving her worst moment in life. This guilt-mixed depression still showed that Dani was in the depression stage. Even though she was having romantic feelings for Jamie and the au pair job was not that hard, the weight of her grief was still heavy on her shoulders and her depression was manifesting her worst nightmare in real life.

Episode four's second half is in the present. Dani and her friends were preparing to attend the funeral of Owen's mother. However, Dani got anxious at funerals so Jamie suggested that Dani did not go to the funeral. She accepted that, and they even flirted a bit when suddenly Dani saw Edmund in the mirror again, gasping and alerting Jamie. Brushing it off, Dani went to the manor's chapel speaking with Hannah who also chose not to attend the funeral. They said their prayers then left. The show's narrator noted that Dani prayed not for those that have died, but to atone for not remembering Edmund and even be happy for forgetting him sometimes. This was the show's most explicit dialogue regarding Dani's guilt and grief that were explained previously.

Jamie came back from the funeral to see Dani, Hannah, and the kids cooking supper. After chatting a bit about Owen's mother, Dani and Jamie shared a romantic glance before Dani went to wash the pot. There Dani felt Edmund's hands on her hips and saw his reflection on the glass. Yet again, Dani's haunting has now gained a new factor, the feeling of touch, after her romantic moment with Jamie. Previously all of the hauntings were only visual, she saw Edmund in the mirror, his bloodied hand on her bed, and even right in front of her. Shaken up by his touch, Dani retreated from the kitchen to the living room, then saw Peter's ghost outside looking into the mansion. She went to confront Peter, thinking that he was a real intruder, only to be met by Owen. He had been overwhelmed by the funeral, so he chose to take a break at the manor with his friends.

They have dinner then after the kids went to sleep, the adults have a bonfire with red wine outside the mansion. Jamie talked about bonfires. People would make big fires then throw in old bones while talking about the deceased, driving away evil spirits, hence the word bonfire from bone fire. So one by one they made a toast to the dead. Hannah talked about Rebecca, Jamie talked about Miles and Flora's parents, and Owen talked about his mother. Jamie and Dani went to a shed nearby to chat. Dani confessed that she has been seeing the ghost of her fiancé. Jamie comforted her with some humor and Dani laughed. Then they started kissing. Suddenly they were interrupted when Dani saw Edmund behind Jamie. Jamie felt rejected, so she backed off and drove Owen back to their respective homes.

This pushed Dani to finally confront her fears. Unable to sleep, she took the glasses to burn them. Flora noticed that Dani was not in her room and fearing that Dani might cross Viola's path, pretended to have a nightmare to stall Dani with the help of Miles. After comforting the kids and putting them back to bed, she continued to go to the bonfire and burned the glasses. As the glasses cracked and burned, she looked up to see Edmund's ghost, as shown in figure 8.



**Figure 8. Dani facing Edmund at last (51:41)**

This is closure for Dani. Kubler-Ross (2014) stated that closure can be done by finding a way to say goodbye to a loved one (p. 145). To be able to look at Edmund and not be afraid was her way of saying farewell to him. All this time, his ghost terrified Dani, so she always ignored it or ran away from it. By choosing to stare directly and not run away, Dani accepted his death, her complicated grief, and the possibility of moving on. She did not want the haunting and her denials to keep her from living life to the fullest, like having new love, so she embraced the grief. This will be the last time Edmund's ghost was shown in the series and thus it is shown that Dani has finally entered the acceptance stage.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, at the start of the series, Dani was grieving her dead fiancé, who died from an accident from a truck crashing into him. She went through 3 of the 5 stages of grief which are depression, denial, and finally acceptance. Her grief was complicated because it was mixed with two types of guilt; she felt responsible for his death because he stepped into the road from rage right after she broke up with him, and she felt bad for starting to like someone else and moving on from him. Her depression was linked to how she did not take care of herself. Her denial occurred when Dani chose to move to the UK to start a new life.

Also, this complicated grief manifests as three things. The first was the ghost of Edmund haunting her. At first the hauntings were just the image of Edmund in mirrors. Then as Dani found a new love interest, they escalated into visual hauntings seen in real life and the feeling being touched by him. Then her grief was also shown by holding on to his glasses that broke during the accident. Despite the glasses being able to trigger a panic attack in Dani, she keeps them. Ultimately, Dani found closure when she accidentally rejected her new romantic partner, and decided to burn the glasses. This closure allows her to embrace her grief that is mixed with guilt and learn to move on and be happy with a new person. Thus, she was able to accept her fiancé's death and able to love a new person without feeling guilty.

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