

The Lament

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Premise

A Gothic short film set in Bath in the late 1800s. When Cecilia loses her dear brother Edward, she relinquishes control of her own life in an attempt to bring him back to her. After receiving the tragic news of his passing the lines get blurred between where she ends, and Edward begins.

Treatment

Cecilia sits on an old stone monument, surrounded by trees at the end of a trail of dried flowers in the pleasure gardens. She is still, unmoving whilst the birds wake in the trees.

Finally, she raises her head. Her eyes are bloodshot. She reaches out for the papers beside her, trying desperately to read the words written. But soon the paper disintegrates, literally rots in her hands. She flings it away, horrified. There's nothing else for it. She reaches for the poison in the bottle...

Edward, a tortured novelist and Cecilia's elder brother sits at his desk. He is agonising about his work, he can't find the words, can't focus. Can't do the one thing he's meant to. It's quiet, the dead of night, and Edward knows he is alone. He pours himself a dram from the decanter. Carefully slips in a few drops of laudanum from a bottle concealed in his jacket. Then drinks it down. His hands start to shake less. His body relaxes. He is able to write once more.

Edward and Cecilia are running through the pleasure gardens together, playful, childlike. The memory, if it is one, is hazy. Echoed laughter, parts missing. Cecilia skips across the exposed tree roots of century old trees. Edward stands on the monument, about to read out his latest work. Though, when he does, all that comes out of his mouth is blood. Cecilia gasps in horror. The sight of her brother isn't pretty. His skin is pallid, ashen and grey. He wipes the blood into a handkerchief embroidered with his initials. The siblings can only stare at each other...

Now, there is only Cecilia. It's a rainy night and she notices as she passes his room that Edward's window has been left open. She hesitantly steps inside. Hurries over and slams it shut. The room is quiet, paper has stopped fluttering in the wind. Just soft raindrops on the windowpane. She looks over to her brother's desk. His manuscript is still there, though a glass has fallen over, its contents leaking onto the pages, making the ink run. Cecilia searches for something to wipe it up. Goes through his drawers and pulls out Edward's rolled up, bloodied handkerchief. As she unravels it, the laudanum vial slips out and lands in front of her. She stares at it. Glances at the door. Unscrews the cap. Hesitates. Then lets a few drops fall onto her tongue...

Days later. Cecilia stands by the window holding a postcard. It's a seaside scene, a beach, Victorian men and women in their bathing suits. Blue skies, colourful houses. It looks beautiful and she seems convinced. Sitting down at her brother's desk, she slips on his jacket, comforted by it, and reads as Edward explains that he was sent away by their father to the sea to get better. He says she mustn't worry for him. Just await his swift return. And if she can't wait that long, find him in their place; in the pleasure gardens.

Full of excitement from her brother's correspondence, Cecilia quickly writes a gushing letter back and hurries out so as to catch the afternoon post. As soon as she gets to the door, she

stops. Looks down. At her feet is a black envelope. Cecilia already knows what it means before she opens it. That eternal symbol of death. She drops to her knees and sobs.

Later, when Cecilia has finally opened the letter, she has returned to her brother's room. Wrapped up in his jacket, her own letter is torn, and the contents of the black envelope is informing their father that Edward was 'lost at sea'. Cecilia is distraught. She gulps down more laudanum, the only thing to numb the pain. A photograph of her, Edward and her father catches her eye. She looks disgusted. Pulls the photo from the frame and burns it in the nearby candle, right in the spot where her father's face is. Her expression is pure hatred.

Time has passed, though its unclear how much, a day, a week, a month. Cecilia is dressed entirely in Edward's clothes. It would appear she hasn't left his room. She admires herself in a tarnished old mirror. It's a surprisingly good fit. She looks so much like him; it could almost be Edward staring back at her. Is it? For a minute, she's not sure. His pale, hollowed face. His dripping wet hair.

It's too much. Cecilia hurries back over to his desk to retrieve the laudanum. Make sure it's her hands holding it. Then gulps down more and more. Something compels her to write. She reaches for Edward's pen and finishes what he started.

Yet more time passes. Cecilia now almost completely embodies Edward, down to the way he moved and held himself. Only, she wears a veil of black lace cross her face, the last remaining feminine touch to her otherwise masculine identity.

She is in a graveyard. It's quiet, the tranquillity only broken by a murder of crows cawing. She kneels at a grave. Recent, fresh flowers on the mound. Cecilia lifts the veil and reveals her expression. The same she had when she found out her brother was dead. She brings out the burnt photograph from her pocket and lets it drift down onto the ground. Cecilia kicks up some dirt with the cap of her boot, scattering it over the grave and photograph then snatches the flowers and walks away.

And now, we are back again at the monument. The lilies are dying, as they lead along the path to Cecilia, vial in hand, sprawled out on the monument.

She looks up. In the distance, chasing each other through the trees and jumping the roots are her and her brother. They are ethereal, like they were before. Shouts, laughter, but its distant. Not in this world. Cecilia watches as Edward gets closer to her. She smiles. Unscrews the stopper on the vial...

Edward gets so close he's almost touching. He steps up onto the monument. Cecilia tries to speak to him. He passes behind the stone column and disappears. The world goes quiet again. Cecilia gulps down the entire contents of the bottle. Lays down and is still. Flower petals scatter.

Centuries pass. Cecilia lies still on the monument. She almost looks faded.

Like stone herself.

A father and his two children walk into the park. They can't see her; she isn't there to them.

The children laugh and chase each other. Edward is standing behind a tree. His hair still wet. Mouth open. Trying to speak, to call out, to reach her...

But there is no sound. Only the children's laughter.