

1 The Thread of Parental Love as an Intricate Design in the
 2 Internal Working Model of the Select Characters in Karen
 3 Kingsbury's Novel Oceans Apart

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8 **Abstract**

9 Oceans Apart discusses the story of a child countering the need of attachment with his
 10 parental caregivers. Kiahna and Connor had an illegal affair and the evident birth of a child
 11 did not hamper the child to create healthy loving attachment patterns. However it did create
 12 the urgency to seek his biological father after his mother's death. This paper presents the
 13 story of Max's internal working model in close connection to the lovely,
 14 intricate-interconnected motherly relationship.

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16 *Index terms*— internal working, intricate-interconnected motherly relationship.

17 **1 Introduction**

18 s one travels on the road of love, there is a longing for the best love that can possibly never be fathomed. This
 19 love transcends inferior emotions and rests safely in a haven on achieving the purpose behind love, the area where
 20 goodness and loving kindness abounds in the surreal. The novel Oceans Apart teaches the story of love where
 21 separation is reminiscent of an untold story of love? where pain ruled the body and motherly passion lead to the
 22 pre-sketched bequeathal of blessings on the only child.

23 Travelling on the portmanteau of relationships, there's a wondrous escapade replenished with beautiful insights
 24 of love. It is the love of the mother with her only son.

25 Kiahna left her assets to her only son Max Riley. The bequeathal of blessings includes the request for the
 26 search of her biological father Connor. The novel Oceans Apart narrates an exclusive account of the relationship
 27 of Kiahna and Connor with Max. In regard to the justification of Kiahna and Connor, to consider Max as their
 28 son, it could not be true. Connor is married to his pretty wife Michele and they have a loving relationship,
 29 where God has give them two beautiful daughters. The eldest daughter in her young childhood year of age ten
 30 in America, is aware of her parents' relationship in society. They are a respectable couple and it is their loving
 31 relationship with each other that holds them through difficult times; (when the request for the custody of Max
 32 is made). The child secures a home in the custodial battle in the home of the Connors; while this story is in the
 33 pages discussed in Oceans Apart, the loving relationship of the mother Kiahna with her son Max is related in
 34 lesser expense. The following pages discuss the accumulation of inherent patterns of the child Max. The paper
 35 is gathered on the basis of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory.

36 Max knows that he is safe at Ramey's house but when he observes Ramey bringing him food to "eat in the
 37 TV room", his "funny feeling got worse. Ramey never let him eat in the TV room" (OA 28). While Max ponders
 38 over the change, he silently drifts through the two movies Ramey had put on for him.

39 Soon Max begins to expect his mother's call and wonders if Ramey's phone call is the reason behind the delay.
 40 He went to Ramey and "tapped her on the shoulder" (OA 28). Here are a few lines: "'Yes, Max? Do you need
 41 another movie?' she used her whisper voice. 'No.' Max whispered back. 'I need my mom. See?' He pointed
 42 out the window. 'See how dark it's out there, Ramey? That's when my mommy's supposed to call, only what
 43 if she can't call because you're on the phone?" (OA 28). Max leaves Ramey trying to understand the reason

1 INTRODUCTION

44 behind the newness of the particular day, and he reasons within himself with the only logical explanation: how
45 could my mother call if Ramey is constantly talking on the phone? Max's in-built coping methods are strongly
46 embedded in his 'attachment behavioral system', and it activates his need to manage the complex situation.
47 He begins to talk to his dog: " 'Hey, Buddy, wake up.' ? Buddy lifted one eyelid, then the other. Max put
48 his face up close against Buddy's nose and waited until the dog licked his cheek. Then Max put his fingers
49 on either side of Buddy's wet nose. 'I'm telling you, Buddy? something's funny here' " (OA 28). Kingsbury's
50 portrayal of a child's observation and understanding is amusing and yet it creates awareness about a child's
51 actions. Hurlock writes how "a social hazard of early childhood is the use of imaginary companions and pets to
52 compensate for lack of real companions. Having an imaginary companion is a temporary solution to the lonely-
53 child problem" (146). Max uses the situation of loneliness to explore the territory of friendship and discover the
54 possibilities of conversation with a pet dog. It correlates with the 'Strange Situation' implemented by the child
55 developmentalist, Ainsworth, to examine child behavior. Joey has been in this habit but it is presented only
56 during extreme situations. However, when 'anxiety' and an unfamiliar situation confront his perception of the
57 familiar, he is stimulated to act likewise. Ramey, however, did not bombard Max about his mother. She waits
58 for the right time. Max seems too restless by the way his mother had forgotten to call him and it was only the
59 next day that Ramey explained the truth.

60 There is no right time to tell a child that his mother would never come back. However, when the moment
61 came for Max to know the death of his mother, he seems contradicted and unbelieving. He loved his mother and
62 she was his safe-haven and "caregiver" (Rynearson 247) who created security and a firm stronghold of positive
63 manifestations. Her demise however stirs a negative sketch in his mind. He "jerked back hard and fast and shook
64 his head" (OA 30). He knows that Ramey would never lie to him, but the truth is hard to accept. The reality that
65 his mother would never be with him dawns on him and like other children bereaved of their parents he consumes
66 the loss little by little. Since Pagan in Tyler's novel *The Amateur Marriage* is only three years old, he is taken
67 in by his grandparents and he could not respond to bereavement in the same way; for Max in Kingsbury's novel
68 *Oceans Apart*, his beloved mother who had loved him dearly and had "kissed him good-bye yesterday morning"
69 (OA 30) could not just die. The absence of Pagan's mother was a part of reality and the reason to 'cope' had
70 not existed except for his withdrawn behavior. His grandparents become his immediate 'caregivers.' Max's first
71 reply to Ramey however is " 'No, Ramey ? you're wrong.' He backed up and ran quick into the bathroom and
72 shut the door. Then he pressed his back against it so no one could get inside" (OA 30). Child developmentalists
73 observe that: "Children who turn to themselves for safety are in fact, in the context of their experience, reacting
74 logically to defend themselves from fear" (Aldgate 78). This is similar to Max's condition. Max fights the shock
75 of his life with the only familiar way; he hides himself from the world till everything becomes clear.

76 The 'caregivers' -Kiahna and Ramey have brought up Max very 'securely', where there is no need for him
77 to feel 'negative' towards adults; 'caregivers' taking care of 'securely attached children,' have "responded to and
78 often preempted their stress or fear. These children will turn to adults for safety because they have learned from
79 their experiences of 'care-giving' that adults can be trusted" (Aldgate 78). Although Max has learned to trust
80 Ramey, he feels 'insecure' and runs to the bathroom and encounters another flashback of his mother. It is his
81 conversations with his mother about planes. He begins to think about the possibilities of an accident: "What
82 if something bad happened to her airplane? Like maybe the wings fell off, or a door blew open? Or the pilot
83 landed in the water?" (OA 31). He also remembers asking his mother about the doors of airplanes: " 'If someone
84 opens the door, what happens? You can't open the door when the plane's flying Max. It isn't possible' "(31).
85 With these memories flashing past him he "peeked out at Ramey and he was all of a sudden afraid to ask. He
86 stutters asking her: "Ramey, did ? did something bad happen to her airplane? " (OA 31); 'fear' has a hold on
87 him but his attempt to face reality when he opens the door points out that he trusts her enough to confront the
88 truth.

89 The revelation of events puts Max in an intricate spot. He begins to think and when Ramey is careful in
90 explaining the truth about his mother, Max's question about planes helps him come to terms with the truth:
91 that his mother had died and he could not see her again. His thoughts about planes have been pondered over,
92 again and again.

93 Max supposed many things except death. His immediate reactions are conveyed through the following lines:
94 "But Mommy knows how to swim, Ramey. Maybe she's swimming back to the island ? is she swimming Ramey?
95 Is she?" (OA 32). Difficult moments in a child's world arise when the sense of 'security' is 'threatened.' When
96 Max understands the fact that his mother would never come back home and take care of him, he is devastated:
97 "Max couldn't run or move or even breathe. His mom was dead? Her plane landed in the ocean, and now
98 she was in heaven? His legs crumpled under, and he fell to his hands and knees. 'No Ramey! She can't go.
99 Not without me?' " (OA 33). The words of a sevenyear old are desperate and frantic for consolation. Max
100 became sorrowful. His primary 'caregiver' was dead and he was all alone in the world. Child developmentalists
101 present their opinions on particular attachment behaviors: "children learn to incorporate themselves, through
102 the internal working model, expectations and beliefs about their own and other people's behavior. The internal
103 working model creates for the child a sense of self, other people, and the relationship between self and others"
104 (Aldgate 79). Max has absorbed, observed and analyzed the people closest to him and finds himself discovering
105 his sense of self-worth and how much he is valued.

106 It is essential to develop healthy 'internal working models' in children "because it is the means by which children

107 learn to develop a perception of their self worth, how much they are accepted by adults and how much they are
108 loved" (Aldgate 79). Max's 'internal working model' is the result of the fervent endeavors of Kiahna and Ramey
109 who had made sure that Max had a well-balanced and healthy life: disciplined, good mannered, with play time
110 and lots of 'love'. His capacity of absorbing the truth little by little and then suddenly taking it entirely rests on
111 the knowledge that Ramey is close by. This is a silent reminder to grieve for a child's self-discovery of a parent's
112 demise. The knowledge of permanent 'separation' for Max however, took a heavy toll on his personality. He is
113 unable to escape from the truth. The 'loss' of his only 'care-giver' is a devastation too grievous to comprehend:

114 Ramey put her arm around him and sat him on the couch. She sat beside him and hugged him for a long
115 time. They cried and cried together, and the more Max thought about it, the more true it felt. His mommy
116 was dead. She really was. He knew, because a hole was in his heart now. A big hole where his mommy used to
117 be. His whole self must've been filled with tears because they spilled out from his eyes without stopping. (OA
118 33) Max's permanent 'separation' from his single parent mother occurred not when he was in school but when
119 realization of his mother's death dawned on him. The news of her death was devastating to him.

120 Max had longed to have a father who could support him and his mother. The unexpected plane crash
121 dashed his hopes to pieces and he undergoes "separation anxiety" (Goldberg 55), a reaction caused as a result
122 of the knowledge of permanent 'separation' of the principal attachment figure. According to Bowlby: "Excessive
123 separation anxiety is due to adverse family experiences ? such as repeated threats of abandonment or rejection
124 by parents ? or to a parents' or sibling's illness or death for which the child feels responsible" (Goldberg 55).
125 Max feels sad that he had not been there to help his mother escape. However, his short prayer to God is a
126 significant attempt made on his part to accept and reconcile with the truth: "God, hi, it's Max ? Ramey says
127 my mommy's with You now, so can You tell her something for me? ... Tell her I'm sorry I wasn't there when
128 her plane landed in the water, because I would've helped her out. Me and her coulda swimm'd to the island and
129 she wouldn't have to live in heaven" (OA 34). The possessiveness of a child towards the permanent attachment
130 figure is presented to the readers in light of the gravity of the situation: Max has become an orphan.

131 At the news of the death of his mother, Max can think only according to his perception of life. Life worked
132 only in the light of his mother, because she was an integral part of his life. She was the principal 'caregiver'.
133 Max becomes very 'emotional' and the following lines represent Max's need for a 'caregiver': His eyes got blurry
134 and tears started coming down his face. More tears than he'd ever had in all his life. How could Mommy be
135 gone? Who would read to him and hug him now? Who would make him blueberry pancakes for breakfast and
136 get him dressed in the morning and take him to the park for roller-skate lessons? Who would sing his special
137 song about I love you, Max, the most, I love to make you toast? (OA 33) Max's need for a 'care-giver' stems
138 from his longing to be near his principal 'care-giver': his mother. His mother may have died, but his memories
139 of her are vibrant. Pagan in Tyler's novel *The Amateur Marriage*, does not face the same gravity of situation.
140 His grandparents take the role of mother and father, thereby substituting his need for immediate 'care-givers'.
141 At the end of Kingsbury's *Oceans Apart*, Max's biological father Connor is located and given a chance to be a
142 'care-giver.' The family of Connor suffers when the truth about the brief affair is conveyed to them and they find
143 it difficult to accept Max, because in doing so she accepts her husband's extra-marital affair with Kiahna.

144 When in bed at the home of his biological father Connor Evans, Max remembers his mother and wonders what
145 the Evan's family thought about him. Max silently listened to the conversation the older daughter Elizabeth had
146 with her mother.

147 Max's eyes are filled with tears when he learns that Connor's daughter Elizabeth and her mother Michele were
148 talking about his mother. His confusion escalates when he realizes that both Elizabeth and Mrs Evans are not
149 happy: "What he didn't understand was why? Why did they sound like they were mad at his mommy? If she
150 and Mr Evans were friends, then that should mean they would like her better, not worse" (OA 157). At age ten,
151 Elizabeth is confused about her father's relationship with Max's mother. Her frequent questions to her mother,
152 points out her ability to speak out her mind and discuss the changes that are occurring within the family. She
153 is able to question her father's relationship with Kiahna. She reasons that the mother of Max is not close to
154 them. The only possible alternative Elizabeth could come up with is an affair. Her question to her mother "So
155 you think they were just good friends? Max's mother and Daddy?" (OA 160) ignites suspicion and preoccupies
156 her to rethink life in the family. Some changes are taking shape in her home and she wants to process the
157 details according to her understanding and clarify them with a trustworthy adult -her mother. Elizabeth has
158 not received specific answers to her questions and she is 'mentally' motivated to feel tense about the situation
159 that is taking shape in her home.

160 Elizabeth wants to feel safe but the question of the identity of Max triggers her to feel 'anxious' and while
161 Max struggles to survive the 'loss' of his principal 'caregiver,' Elizabeth fights to find the truth of her father's
162 relationship with Max's mother. Elizabeth feels frustrated: "The girl felt stiff and tensed, further proof of
163 everything she'd guessed to be true about the boy's arrival. The girls were confused of course. Elizabeth the
164 most because she was older, old enough to wonder why, if the boy's mother and father were such good friends,
165 hadn't she been to the house once?" (OA 161). Max creeps into the giant bed and reaches out for the things
166 Ramey has packed for him. He reads the letter and "dried his tears on his pajama sleeve" (OA 158). He begins
167 to sing his mother's special song but he could not finish it. Here are Max's reasons for not singing his mother's
168 special song: "Because he missed Mommy so much, that's why. Not just his heart and his hands and his feet
169 missed her, but his eyes missed her, too. Because every time he wanted to see her, she was never there. He

1 INTRODUCTION

170 missed her so much he could almost feel her there beside him” (158). Max’s memory of the last lines for his
171 mother’s song is identical to the title Kingsbury chooses for the novel “When oceans we’re apart, I’m right here
172 in your heart” (OA 158). Max’s loneliness combats his desire to feel accepted by the Evan’s family. He ‘copes’
173 with the situation and inherently feels attached to Connor Evans. Connor’s affections and loving gestures like
174 holding Max’s hand, a gentle hold on his shoulder and letting him sleep next to him when the family had gone
175 camping are vivid portrayals of Connor’s feelings for Max.

176 The intention of ‘threat’, or safety issues will not hamper Max’s budding relationship with Connor but the
177 overall experience where Michele may have to play the role of primary ‘caregiver’ is a question left undisclosed.
178 Aldgate points out that “A relationship with a significant adult outside a child’s immediate family who offers
179 consistent encouragement and support, and serves as a positive role model and advocate, is a factor associated
180 with positive outcomes and the promotion of resilience” (153); for Max, the strangeness of being in the company
181 of Mr Evans who is introduced as his mother’s friend faded, and the possibility of becoming Max’s legal father
182 sank comfortably into the atmosphere. However, towards the end of the novel Michele Evans heals from the
183 wounds inflicted by an unfaithful spouse and her attitude towards the orphaned child becomes positive. The
184 adoption of Max begins with the hope that her relationship with her husband would heal and that they would
185 start their roles as good role models for their children.

186 While the process of adoption is still in motion, Michele flies to Hawaii and brings Max and his dog back
187 home. Her husband is devastated by his wife’s intervention to say goodbye to Max, but he is surprised by the
188 presence of a dog in the back yard. Soon Max appears and Connor’s sadness disappears. Max’s ‘internal working
189 model’ undergoes a radical change. The conversations with his mother for a wonderful father incorporates a
190 change in his ‘internal working model’; expecting a principal father figure, not to replace his mother but to fill
191 the empty space in his heart. His longing for a father even before his mother’s death continues in wondrous
192 expectancy and when this longing is fulfilled he does not grieve again (for his beloved mother). As a child, he can
193 accept his dreams coming to reality. His experience or in better words, Kingsbury’s novel attempt for enabling
194 Max to rehearse his life with the Connors for a brief period, allows his ‘internal working model’ to function in a
195 progressive manner, without having to encounter immediate change. His acceptance and observation of Connor’s
196 family into his ‘internal working model’ is reflective and provides insight on the intended ‘family unit’.

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