

# Isolation and lack of love in i'm the king of the castle essay sample



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Mrs Helena Kingshaw has spent the years since the death of her husband moving from place to place with her son Charles, determinedly seeking stability, companionship and comfort for herself, desperate not to be alone. The fact that she has “ not so very many friends”, meaning that they have to move into the houses of various strangers, and even stay in a hotel at one point, suggests that she is not a person who radiates love, affection and trust upon people so that they can grow close and develop a friendship.

When Mrs Kingshaw arrives at Warings and meets Mr Hooper, she is sure she has found the perfect situation: a widower with his own house and land, who possesses a considerable amount of money, and on top of everything, a son, Edmund, whom Charles can befriend. She becomes more and more happy throughout the book, as Mr Hooper pays for “ cocktail parties” and shopping trips to London.

It is not her love for Mr Hooper which makes her ignore Charles's declarations of his “ hate” for Mr Hooper's, nor her affection for Edmund which prompts her to bring him gifts when he is in hospital, but rather her overwhelming need to be given attention and comfort. Mrs Kingshaw tries to convince herself she is a good mother who loves her son and attempts to keep up pretences and stick to all the cliches as she feels she must. When Charles writes home from boarding school saying how “ smashing” it is, Helena tells herself he's just being brave, whilst “ weeping a little”.

She can't bear to believe that he is enjoying being without her, because she worries “ about her own capacity for motherhood and whether she [says] the right things and [looks] sufficiently at ease in his presence”. She asks

Charles to “ tell Mummy” if something is wrong, to make herself feel as though she has tried her best to connect with him, but calls him “ wicked” and “ naughty” when he does. Motherhood obviously doesn't come naturally to her, and while she tells herself that all the moving around and trying to go up in the world is for the sake of her and her child, it is evident that she feels no real understanding or love for her son.

Charles Kingshaw in turn feels no love for his mother. He has “ never gone to her” when he is afraid, even though he is so young and has so many crippling fears. He knows she cannot help and will not understand. Charles knows he “ ought to care about his mother” and thinks it's wrong that he doesn't, but he feels “ sick with shame at her”. She has never understood him, and they have never had a typical mother-son connection. It is implied that Charles didn't have a loving relationship with his father either, as he has “ never missed” him.

When Mr Kingshaw took Charles to the swimming pool as a child, he didn't recognise his fear of the water, and of the boy Turville who was tormenting him. This lovelessness contributes to Charles's isolation, and his feeling that he has nobody to turn to when he needs them. Charles is treated with nothing but loathing by Edmund Hooper. Hooper makes it clear from the very beginning that Charles is unwelcome at Warings, and starts a campaign of vicious and unrelenting persecution against the boy.

When we see Edmund and how he behaves at Warings, it is easy to believe that he holds this power over everyone he meets, and not just his father and Kingshaw. Indeed, he would have Kingshaw believe this as well - when it

transpires that Kingshaw will not be going back to his "school for poor people" which he loves so much, and will instead be going to Edmund's school, Hooper takes the opportunity to incite real dread in Kingshaw's mind, saying that he has "a lot of friends" who will do whatever he says, and he will turn them all against Kingshaw.

However, there is evidence that Hooper has no friends at school, and is bullied himself. Kingshaw himself realises that "Hooper is not used to being a bully". In truth, Hooper does not have the personality of a typical popular boy with lots of friends - he is small, pale (which implies that he doesn't go outside much like most little boys), cold and detached, and likes to be on his own. Hooper not only does not experience love and friendship at school, but he does not receive it at home either.

He is, in his father's opinion, like his mother, which implies that she was also cold and detached, meaning that she would also be incapable of love.

Hooper's father, like Kingshaw's mother, has no idea how to act around him, having "failed to ingratiate himself" with his son. He doesn't even know how to discipline him, having to debate with himself whether to hit Edmund or not when he misbehaves - deliberating so long that the opportunity is gone.

Mr Hooper, in turn, never experienced love from his father, who was distant to him and whom he "loathed". Mr Hooper's father had been a famous lepidopterist who had forced him, as a young boy, to watch him tend to his moth collection, something he "hated violently". He had belittled and mocked him, and contributed to Mr Hooper's low opinion of himself, and, indirectly deprived his grandchild of a father capable of love. Mr Hooper does

not love Mrs Kingshaw, but the idea of a physical relationship with her excites him.

He has been so repressed his whole life - by his father not letting him go outside to play, shirtless, with the local children as a child, and, later, the "politeness" of his loveless marriage to the late Ellen Hooper - that he is thrilled by the possibility of escaping "the niceties and restraints" with which he has lived his life up until now. He feels that Mrs Kingshaw's coming to live with him is an opportunity to "bridge the gap between fantasy and life", to forget his usual severity and reticence. The writer shows the characters' loveless, isolated existence with a particular writing style.

It is a third person narrative - giving an impression of detachment - which focuses on the opinions and thoughts of these characters. There is little flowery, emotive language, which adds to the deadened, lonely tone of the book, reflecting what the characters are experiencing at the time. The lovelessness and loneliness shown in the relationships between the characters in I'm the King of the Castle, and the way Susan Hill portrays this, is very noticeable and very important in understanding their feelings and actions throughout the book.