

The Will to Meaning in Tiger's Life Journey in Kathleen Glasgow's *How to Make Friends with The Dark*

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Abstract. This thesis explores the profound suffering experienced by Tiger Tolliver, the protagonist of Kathleen Glasgow's novel "How to Make Friends with the Dark," which leads her to a crisis of meaning. This existential crisis, or existential vacuum, is a psychological and social phenomenon where individuals feel lost, disoriented, and perceive their lives as lacking meaning. In individualistic societies with significant socio-economic disparities, such crises are more prevalent. However, overcoming a crisis of meaning is possible through finding the will to meaning with logotherapy, a theory proposed by Viktor Frankl. Frankl posits that individuals can discover personal meaning and a sense of purpose even in the most challenging circumstances. This study employs a psychological approach and utilizes qualitative methods to analyse the subject. The research findings indicate that Tiger discovers meaning in her life through her determination to release the guilt associated with her mother's death, her will to continue living, and her quest for meaning through actions, relationships, and a sense of humour.

Keywords: *the will to meaning; how to make friends with the dark; viktor frankl, crisis of meaning; logotherapy*

1. Introduction

Understanding life's purpose is a universal challenge. In today's complex world, many face an existential vacuum marked by anxiety, stress, and a sense of emptiness. This crisis stems from shifting values, technological advancements, and increasing individualism, leading to loneliness. Not everyone confronts this crisis equally; while some manage to cope with it independently, others need therapy or counseling. Some ways to overcome this building strong relationships, understanding personal values, and pursuing clear goals. Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor and founder of logotherapy, believed that the search for meaning is a natural part of being human. His idea, "The Will to Meaning," says that life has purpose even in hard times, and suffering can lead to personal growth through our actions and attitudes.

In Kathleen Glasgow's novel *How to Make Friends with the Dark*, the main character, Grace Maria Tolliver (Tiger), deals with bullying, poverty, and grief. Despite tough times, Tiger finds meaning and peace, reflecting the ideas of logotherapy. Her story shows that Frankl's theories still matter today, providing lessons on how to handle life's challenges by finding purpose in difficult situations. This highlights today's struggle with finding meaning and the lasting importance of seeking purpose.

2. Methods

The writer conducts research using primary data from Kathleen Glasgow's novel "How to Make Friends with The Dark" and secondary data from books, journal articles, and internet sources. The analysis uses Viktor E. Frankl's psychological literature approach, focusing on "The Will to Meaning" and logotherapy.

Logotherapy addresses the Existential Vacuum, a modern sense of emptiness due to pain, guilt, and death, which called the Tragic Triad (Frankl, 2006). Pain offers opportunities for growth, guilt highlights moral awareness, and death motivates life appreciation. This approach encourages confronting suffering to find personal meaning, embodying tragic optimism.

According to Frankl (2014), there are three pillars of logotherapy: the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life. The freedom of will has the idea that individuals can choose their responses towards challenges. The will to meaning posits that human life are motivated by the pursuit of meaning. And the meaning of can be found in three ways: through creative value (doing meaningful work), experiential value (having relationship and connections), and attitudinal value (responding purposefully to suffering).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Tiger's Crisis of Meaning

In Kathleen Glasgow's "How to Make Friends with the Dark," Tiger Tolliver experiences a profound crisis of meaning, illuminated by Viktor Frankl's tragic triad of death, pain, and guilt. The sudden death of her mother, her primary emotional support, plunges Tiger into deep grief and a sense of aimlessness. She grapples with the reality, "I don't understand what's happening. Your mom can not be alive one minute and then the next...not." (Glasgow, p. 32). This loss represents the 'death' aspect of the tragic triad.

Tiger's existential struggle represent the 'pain' aspect. Living in poverty, she and her mother, June, face constant financial instability, this worsens after June's death, when asked about her phone in foster care, Tiger laments, "Pay the bill. With what? I hold my breath. I don't want to cry again. My eyes are already swollen and salty." (Glasgow, p. 52). Tiger also has limited social life, primarily revolving around her friends Cake and Kai and her mother, leaves her isolated after her mother's death, intensifying her loneliness and reinforcing her feelings of a meaningless life.

Tiger's situation gets worse after she put in a foster care as there are no relatives who can take care of her. Her new romantic relationship with Kai also ends, making her feel even more abandoned., "Kai Henderson and his sweet, sugary mouth is gone." (Glasgow, p. 133). Hopes for family connection are dashed when she learns that her estranged father is in prison and her half-sister is unreliable, leads Tiger to a

panic attack. Tiger's relationship with her friend Cake also suffers, as Tiger envies Cake's opportunities and fears being left alone. She admits, "I feel shitty for saying that, but I also feel shitty for thinking Cake should stay with me forever. Or that I'm holding her back somehow." (Glasgow, p. 214).

Tiger's 'guilt', another element of the tragic triad, is pronounced after a fight with her mother just before her death, that Tiger wants her mother to fucking leave her alone. Resulting in Tiger's intense self-blame, "Only a bad daughter would say something like that to her mom." (Glasgow, p. 38). This unresolved guilt makes it difficult for her to find closure and any positive meaning in her life.

3.2 The Impact of The Crisis of Meaning

In Kathleen Glasgow's *How to Make Friends with the Dark*, Tiger Tolliver endures a harsh life filled with starvation and bullying, that increase after the death of her mother, which plunges her into a profound crisis of meaning. Struggling with starvation, Tiger describes the physical pain: "... My stomach makes an unseemly rumble from hunger. I feel faint and dejected" (Glasgow, p. 7). Her also make Tiger can't afford new clothes, she can only collect second-hand clothes that lead to ridicule at school, highlighted when a peer mocks her: "Girl, what the fuck you're wearing today?" (Glasgow, p. 10).

The sudden death of Tiger's mother leaves her devastated and consumed by guilt for harsh words she said before her mother died: "The last minutes of your mother's life, she probably thought you hated her" (Glasgow, p. 137). This guilt haunts Tiger, making it difficult to find peace or self-forgiveness. Her intense sadness leads to emotional numbness, as shown when she pinches her forearm hard but feels nothing: "I didn't even feel it" (Glasgow, p. 37). Her grief also affects her physically, causing her to lose appetite and throw up whenever she tries to eat: "I run to the bathroom. Throw up the crackers and apple" (Glasgow, p. 91).

Tiger's guilt compels her to wear the dress her mother bought the last time even though she hate it, symbolizing her desire to hold onto her mother and the guilt of not appreciating her enough: "... will never take this dress off" (Glasgow, p. 44). Her profound loss leads her to consider delinquency, reflecting her deep upset that her mother is no longer there to guide her: "Fighting, drinking, drugs. I don't do any of those things anyway. But maybe I'll start, now that there's no one to care" (Glasgow, p. 69).

In foster care, even with Lala's better care, Tiger struggles to accept her new life without her mother, frequently becoming physically ill at the thought of her loss: "The ceiling over my bunk has old water stains. If I had a pencil, I would write Kill me" (Glasgow, p. 74). This suicidal thought reveals her deep despair and struggle to find meaning or hope.

Tiger's mental health suffers immensely from depression, anxiety, and overwhelming feelings. Her journey through starvation, bullying, desolation,

numbness, guilt, anger, and suicidal thoughts illustrates the deep impact of her mother's death, leaving her grappling to find purpose and meaning in a life filled with hardship and grief.

3.3 The Role of Logotherapy in Overcoming the Crisis of Meaning

3.3.1 The Freedom of Will

In Kathleen Glasgow's "How to Make Friends with the Dark," Tiger Tolliver demonstrates Viktor Frankl's concept of the freedom of will through her choices and responses to adversity. Initially resistant to wearing a dress her mother bought, Tiger later chooses to honor her mother's memory by keeping it close: "You will never take this dress off... And she didn't get to see you in it" (Glasgow, p. 44). This decision illustrates Tiger's exercise of her freedom of will, choosing how to cherish her mother's wishes in her own way.

Throughout tumultuous experiences in foster care and juvenile centers, Tiger's encounter with Teddy offers a pivotal moment of growth. Teddy's wisdom redirects Tiger's perspective on grieving, encouraging her to find meaningful ways to honor her mother without becoming consumed by grief "Tiger, the last thing your mama probably wished for you was to be happy. Not to wear a dress until it's falling off you. Not to hurt yourself in her memory, and to lash out at others. No mother wants that " (Glasgow, p. 312). Finally, after 53 days of wearing the same dress continuously, Tiger willing to keep it. This interaction highlights Tiger's evolving understanding of her freedom to choose how she remembers and respects her mother.

3.3.2 The Will to Meaning

In the beginning, Tiger is hopeful, believing things will be okay, reflecting a sense of purpose rooted in her meaningful relationships, especially with her mother. This aligns with Frankl's idea that having a purpose can sustain individuals through tough times. However, her mother's death plunges Tiger into despair and a profound existential crisis, feeling lost and unable to move on, indicating a loss of meaning in her life. She contemplates suicide, feeling purposeless without her mother, echoing Frankl's view that losing meaning makes one vulnerable to existential despair.

Each time Tiger considers suicide, connections and responsibilities draw her back, reintroducing a sense of meaning. Cake's presence and Lupe's distraction serve as temporary anchors, highlighting the importance of love and responsibility in finding meaning, as per Frankl's views.

A significant shift occurs when Shayna returns, dedicated to caring for Tiger and securing her custody. Shayna's support offers Tiger hope and a fresh start in Tucson, symbolizing a new beginning and a chance to rebuild her life. Reconnecting with Shayna restores familial bonds, providing comfort and stability. Tiger appreciates their simple, shared moments, feeling content in their little family, "My

sister and I, we can be quiet together, eating, and it feels okay. It's a little family, but it's ours" (Glasgow, p. 333).

Tiger's decision to keep going despite suffering embodies Frankl's assertion that life holds potential meaning under any conditions. More than two months after her mother's death, Tiger's resolve to live, even in pain, reflects the existential tension between despair and the will to find meaning. Her reflection on the need to "... make friends with the dark ..." (Glasgow, p. 334) mirrors Frankl's belief in the human spirit's power to find meaning in suffering. Despite immense hardship, Tiger's story illustrates a profound transformation, affirming the human capacity to find purpose amidst the darkest circumstances.

3.3.3 The Meaning of Life

Tiger finds meaning in life through Creative Value, Experiential Value, and Attitudinal Value. Firstly, Creative Value is seen when Tiger creates something tangible, like selling jelly jams with her step-sister Shayna. By engaging in this activity, Tiger not only makes a living but continues a tradition started by her mother, enhancing her sense of purpose, "Outside. The Jellymobile. It's May, Shayna. It's time for the Jellymobile" (Glasgow, p. 191).

Experiential Value is deeply intertwined with Tiger's relationships and encounters. She finds joy and healing at Randy Gonzalez's Ranch, a place where she got to spend time with Thaddeus, Mae-Lynn, Taran, and Alif, providing a serene environment for personal growth. At the ranch, Tiger bonds with horses connect her with her mother's past who also love horses, "I was at the horse ranch and I fell in love with a horse and fell in friendship..." (Glasgow, p. 279). She also has unwavering support from her best friend Cake, "You're my best friend, and I fucking love you, and I will not let you die. You have me..." (Glasgow, p. 110).

In the foster home, Tiger finds solace with her second foster home mother, Lala, who offers unwavering support without judgment. Thaddeus provides stability and insight into foster care life, while Sarah's desire for sisterhood resonates with Tiger, "I wish we could be sisters" (Glasgow, p. 154). At the juvenile delinquent center, Teddy helps Tiger understand that honoring her mother means living with purpose and resilience. Shayna's arrival marks a new chapter, promising a brighter future, "I went to Tucson, and I rented us a house. I got some money from my mom and my...well, our grandparents. Dad's parents" (Glasgow, p. 315).

Attitudinal Value is demonstrated in Tiger's positive approach to unavoidable suffering, particularly dealing with the grief of losing her mother. Despite the pain, she learns to accept her mother's death and finds moments of levity through humor, "I've gotten really good at the silent cry since...you know. I could probably win a silent crying contest" (Glasgow, p. 152).

4 Conclusion

In Kathleen Glasgow's *How to Make Friends with the Dark*, the protagonist, Tiger Tolliver, faces an intense existential crisis, reflected through Viktor Frankl's concept of the tragic triad: pain, guilt, and death. The sudden death of her mother thrusts Tiger into deep grief and meaninglessness, highlighting the 'death' component. This loss strips her of her emotional anchor, forcing her to confront life's finality and seek purpose amid overwhelming sorrow.

Tiger's emotional 'pain' is evident through her struggles with poverty, bullying, and the foster care system. In foster care, she feels lonely and disconnected, worsening her emotional turmoil. She also grapples with 'guilt' over her last harsh words to her mother, adding a significant emotional burden and preventing closure.

Despite these challenges, Tiger's journey demonstrates the principles of Frankl's logotherapy in overcoming existential crises. Through the freedom of will, Tiger makes conscious choices to navigate her grief. Her decision to wear the dress her mother bought her evolves from a coping mechanism to a symbol of her growth, as she learns to honor her mother's memory meaningfully.

Tiger's evolving sense of purpose, or the will to meaning, becomes evident as she reconnects with supportive individuals. Rebuilding her relationship with her step-sister Shayna and moving to a new environment are significant steps towards healing. These relationships provide Tiger with new sources of meaning, aligning with Frankl's belief that purpose can be found through love and duty to others.

Ultimately, Tiger finds the meaning of life in her suffering, a key tenet of logotherapy. Engaging in productive activities, forming meaningful relationships, and adopting a positive attitude towards her suffering help Tiger reconstruct her life and find renewed purpose. Through Tiger's journey, *How to Make Friends with the Dark* showcases the transformative power of finding meaning amid profound loss and hardship.

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