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The Glass Castle- Final Revision

How It Is Meant

We have all met people who are unfamiliar to us. Every day, new faces drift in and out of our lives at school, at work, even on the road. Each face is different from the next, and it is easy to create opinions of them based on our first impressions. However, as one has heard time and time again, our first impressions are often wrong. The front cover of Jeannette Walls's memoir, The Glass Castle, reads: “[Jeannette] Walls has joined the company of writers such as Mary Karr and Frank McCourt who have been able to transform their sad memories into fine art.” – *People*. However, although many agree that Walls's memoir is a sad remembrance of a dysfunctional childhood, it is not meant to be so. From her use of language in her carefully created descriptions, to a look at how her life turned out, neither depression or sadness is echoed in her work. Walls simply tells it like it was, not with sadness but with understanding.

On the cover of The Glass Castle is a picture of a girl who appears to be crying, or possibly praying, that would seem to be connected with the cover's quote. However, when the book is opened, one realizes that the cover of the book is only showing half of the picture. On the inside of the cover, the same girl is seen but instead of appearing to be crying, she is actually whispering something to another girl who is shown to be laughing. This complete picture is actually one of happiness instead of the one we suppose to be sadness when only looking at half the picture.

As the inside of The Glass Castle's cover shows one the true picture, so the language in the descriptions of The Glass Castle portrays the true nature of the memoir. Language is a powerful tool in writing when it comes to capturing emotion. Walls knew this as well as exactly

how to use it when she wrote her memoir. In several interviews, Walls mentions that she spent nearly twenty years planning and writing her memoir in order to correctly portray the events in her life. If Walls had wanted the tone of her memoir to come across as distressing, she would have used language to reflect such a feeling. However, nowhere in her writing does one find such language. She chooses her words carefully, never mentioning that she resented her parents, their qualities, and most importantly her past.

In her past, Walls experienced many rough situations; however in her memoir, the language Walls uses throughout her descriptions of these experiences does not indicate any sense of fear or regret. For example, in one such experience during her mid-teenage years, Walls is taken to a bar by her father to help him earn money by conning other men. At the bar, Walls gets unintentionally involved with one of her father's victims, Robbie. After losing much of his money, Robbie becomes frustrated and quits. He then begins trying to convince Jeanette to come with him to his apartment over the bar. Jeanette has no interest in going, but with a little persuasion from her dad, she is led upstairs. The following passage occurs in Robbie's apartment, beginning from when he led Jeanette upstairs:

So, with Dad's blessing, I went upstairs. ... He [Robbie] pressed me to him and started dancing...and I resisted him. He...pushed me onto the bed, and began kissing me. ...When I tried rolling away, he pinned back my arms. Dad had said to holler if I needed him, but.... I was so angry at Dad that I couldn't bear the idea of him rescuing me. Robbie, meanwhile, was saying something about me being too bony to screw. ... 'Besides being skinny, I got these scars.' I...quickly unbuttoned my dress at the waist, and pulled it open to show him the scar on my

right side. ...Robbie looked uncertain.... It was like seeing a gap in the fence. 'I think I hear Dad calling,' I said, and then made for the door. (212-213)

This passage clearly talks about potential rape. The idea is one that can actually cause fear just by discussing the topic, but that is not how Walls describes the event. Robbie's actions are upsetting, almost suspenseful as one reads the passage; however, the language Walls uses in describing her own reaction does not seem to imply those feelings. Clearly Walls is uncomfortable with the situation and wants nothing more than to free herself from it; however, none of the words that Walls uses gives one the impression that this event is either horrible or scaring. In contrast, Walls's reaction is composed yet anxious. It was definitely not a situation that she enjoyed, but it was not the worst thing that could have happened to her, and Walls is able to move beyond it.

As Walls moved beyond her hardships and struggles, she was able to find some understanding in them. When one looks at a tragic event that has befallen her, one will notice that neither the writing before, during, or after the event discusses a negative impact it had upon her life. This is because Walls later accepted that bad things happen, but one learns to deal with them. For instance, when the Walls family is moving to Las Vegas, her father takes a sudden turn, throwing Jeanette from the car. Although this scares Jeanette, she is still able to look back on it in an almost positive light:

Dad was driving.... Lori was in the front seat between him and Mom, and Brian...was trying to trade me half of his 3 Musketeers for half of my Mounds. Just then we took a sharp turn... the door flew open, and I tumbled out of the car. I rolled several yards along the embankment.... I lifted my head in time to watch

the Green Caboose ... disappear around the bend. ...I waited for what seemed like a long time before I decided it was possible Mom and Dad might not come back for me. ...I started crying, but that only made me feel more sore. ... I looked up and saw the Green Caboose come back around the bend. ...He [Dad] took out his handkerchief and tried to stop my nose from bleeding. ...‘You busted your snot locker pretty good.’ [Dad said]... I told Brian and Lori and Mom about the word, and they all started laughing as hard as me. Snot locker. It was hilarious. (30-31)

The above passage clearly discusses a jarring moment for Walls. It scares her, and even makes her cry for a bit, but then she calms down, her parents come back for her, and she is relieved. The most important part of this passage, however, is the note with which she ends her experience. Walls intentionally ends this experience with laughter because that is what she wants her reader to be left with; it is her predominant memory of the event, though the event itself was not a particularly happy one for her. It is her father’s concern and his way of showing it that makes this experience important to her.

As Walls grows older and starts to live on her own, her past experiences push her to become as successful as she is today. Walls works hard at being a journalist not only because of her love for writing but also because of the happiness it brings her. She presses on and worked her way through college, though at times she was tempted to quit or did not have enough money to pay college tuition. However because of her motivation, Walls graduated college and went on to pursue a career that she knew would make her happy. In an interview with Rachel Kramer Bussel from the newspaper The Gothamist, Walls proves how her current life has affected her when she said that one of the reasons that she was able to finish writing The Glass Castle was that she was finally happy with where she was in life (Bussel).

Because of her past, Walls became self-sufficient and ambitious; she saw what she wanted and went for it. Who knows what would have happened to Walls had she been raised differently, in what her parents believed to be the constraints of conformity. Without her drive, would she be as successful today? No matter the hardships of her past, Walls has been able to move on and without the feelings of resentment or sadness weighing her down. When Bussel asked Walls if the tone of book was smoothed over by of the length of time that had passed since her childhood, Walls replied, “I’ve never really felt bitter. I’m a really lucky person, I’ve got a great job, I’ve got a wonderful husband, I’ve got a great life” (qtd. in Bussel).

Although the events in Jeannette Walls’ memoir, The Glass Castle, are often seen as sad, that is not how the author intended the events to be. While Walls did endure many hardships during her childhood, she did not allow her past to be filled with tears and sadness because of them. Nowhere in her writing or in of the life that she lives today do we find the sadness that several claim to surround The Glass Castle. Instead, there seems to be an acceptance in of past and the life that she now lives. In the same interview with Bussel, Walls was asked if she were ever able to forgive her parents for all the things they put her through. Walls responded that, “It’s finding the good and being able to leave the bad behind. It’s not even a matter of forgiveness because that implies...that they’ve sort of hurt me and damaged me. I think it’s more a matter of acceptance because I’ve had the life I’ve had and nothing is gonna change that.... There were wonderful things and there were horrible things, and you accept it....” (qtd. in Bussel).

Works Cited

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