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*The Glass Castle, Maturing Voice*

Jeanette's maturing voice in the *Glass Castle* plays a considerable role in how readers perceive events in the book. As Jeanette changes, so does her opinion of her parents and how she grew up. Through this changing voice, the reader's opinion of the Walls family changes, much like Jeanette and her siblings' opinion. As Jeanette ages, she becomes more independent and aware of her surroundings. Toward the end of the book, Jeanette decides to move to New York with Lori. As a result, she no longer believed her dad was a superhero preparing to build the Glass Castle. This maturing voice adds depth to Jeanette's character, making the book more engaging; the story would have been monotone written from the present, recalling her childhood.

Jeanette portrays her father, Rex, as intelligent and loving. Through her eyes, we see the admiration she felt. In the beginning, she describes her father as a folktale hero. "Dad always fought harder, flew faster, and gambled smarter than everyone else in his stories" (Walls, p. 24). This idolization remained consistent until Rex tried to teach her how to swim at the watering hole. Rex's ugly "sink or swim" method is exposed, and Jeanette almost drowns. It becomes clear that he is willing to put his children in harm's way to justify his cruel methods. He firmly believes that overcoming obstacles is crucial to making his children self-reliant and independent. Rex's reaction makes it appear likely that he grew up with great hardship and adversity. He faced many of his own "sink or swim" moments. His hard exterior and detached emotions were

molded by the hard life he led. He never intended to drown Jeanette, and he honestly thought he was teaching her an important life lesson.

The Walls ended up moving a final time from Arizona to Welch. Rex seemed ashamed to return to his home since it was one of the poorest cities in the United States. Welch was also ripe with racial tension. The Walls children had been exposed to that before. The school was extremely difficult for the children. They had taken many gifted classes at their previous schools. However, due to the accents and missing academic records, the children were placed in Learning Disability classes due to the accents and missing academic papers. Jeanette's new school went from bad to worse quickly. She was bullied ruthlessly by children who didn't like outsiders in their town. To further complicate the situation, the Walls parents left the children with Rex's mother to retrieve their belongings at their previous home. Jeanette witnessed her grandmother, Erma, sexually molest her younger brother Brian. Rex's reaction to the abuse is telling of his own experiences with his mother. He contends that "Brian's a man, he can take it, I don't want to hear another word of this. Do you hear me?" (Walls, p. 148). This disgusting moment offers a looking glass at the horrible childhood Rex had in Welch. The abuse exposed the Walls family's lack of morals and failures to protect the children. Prior to this, Jeanette believed they were just poor and had a rough upbringing.

Jeanette's view of her parents and surrounding grew dark and grim. Her siblings, Lori and Brian, devised a plan to save money and move to New York. They spent months working odd jobs filling up Oz, the piggy bank. Then, one day, Rex broke it open and blew the money on booze. Jeanette didn't want to believe her father had done such an awful thing. "I knew it was Dad, but at the same time, I couldn't believe he'd stoop this low." (Walls, p. 228). After this

incident, Lori and Jeanette decide to leave the family upon graduation. The kids no longer viewed their father as a mentor and worked hard to escape him. Jeanette spent her time in Highschool working at the school newspaper, which changed her social status. She attends football games and many school functions. However, Welch's conditions continued to deteriorate, and she decided to move to New York her senior year.

Jeanette was mesmerized and excited when she arrived in New York. She completed an internship at *The Phoenix* for her senior year instead of attending classes. She enjoyed the long hours and busy schedule. Her siblings Brian and Maureen later moved to New York. They continued to receive updates from Welch that Rex was either drunk or in jail. Then, one day on the radio, Jeanette heard about a broken down car and loose dog causing a massive traffic jam. She knew her parents were responsible; later, she received a call that they had moved to New York. Jeanette was ashamed of her parents and herself for believing they were role models. She began to see her mother in a darker light. Jeanette's father got TB, and she recalled, "DAD STAYED IN THE hospital for six weeks. By then he only beaten back the TB, he'd been sober longer than any time since the Phoenix detox" (Walls, p. 262). Rex eventually got a job and a place to live and appeared to be more responsible than any other time in their life. Unfortunately, Rose Mary convinced him to quit his job and return to the streets with her. He quickly began drinking again. It was interesting that Rose Mary caused the family's hardship at this point. Throughout the book, it seemed routine for Rex to drag the family down. This was an eye-opening experience to see Rose Mary's role in the family's dysfunction. She had kept things hidden, so it wasn't surprising when her property in Texas was revealed to be worth a million dollars. Jeanette is shocked and disgusted by her mother letting them suffer. "I was

thunderstruck. All those years in Welch with no food, no coal, no plumbing, and Mom had been sitting on land worth a million dollars? Jeannette had a hard revelation that those years of hardship, life on the street, and bad living conditions could have been avoided. “Had all those years, as well as Mom and Dad’s time on the street—not to mention their current life in an abandoned tenement—been a caprice inflicted on us by Mom?” (Walls, p. 273). It becomes clear that Rex was less to blame for the Walls family’s poor situation. Jeannette reconciles that her father has a drinking problem, but he is a loving man. Rex reveals that his proudest accomplishment in life is his children.

The Glass Castle is a whirlwind of growing up rough and learning hard lessons. The story’s narrative allows the reader to grow up with the children and see life through their eyes in real-time. Their story begins with a daughter’s idolization of her father, hampered by his drinking problem. She learns over time how he justifies his drinking and poor behavior. As life unfolds, her love and trust dissipate until she comes full circle and accepts her parents for who they are and why. Jeanette reconciles that the “tough love” approach did teach them some important lessons and made them strong. She realizes that her life has been made better by her parents than the life they experienced. Jeanette, Lori, and Brian eventually achieved all of the success they dreamed about as children. Jeanette’s maturing voice allows the reader to have a first-person perspective of her childhood. This unique quality helps make the book more captivating.

### References

Walls, J. (2005). *The glass castle: a memoir*. New York: Scribner. Kindle Edition.