

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

English 11R

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls

New York City & Thanksgiving

"I hoped when New Yorkers looked at me, they would see whatever it was that Dad saw" (245).

*Her Dad is a source of confidence.*

"My favorite room was the bathroom. It had a black-and-white tile floor, a toilet that flushed with a powerful whoosh, a tub so deep you could submerge yourself completely in it, and hot water that never ran out."

How do they view their apartment in the South Bronx (pages 247). What does this say about their perspective/expectations?

*Others would be horrified but their expectations are so low that this seems like a palace*

"I had just turned eighteen. I quit my job at the hamburger joint the next day and became a full-time reporter for The Phoenix. I'd never been happier in my life. I worked ninety-hour weeks, my telephone rang constantly, I was always hurrying off to interviews and checking the ten-dollar Rolex I'd bought on the street to make sure I wasn't running late, rushing back to file my copy, and staying up until four a.m. to set type when the typesetter quit. And I was bringing home \$125 a week. If the check cleared." (248-249)

How would you feel if you were in Jeannette's position at this point? How and why might your perspective differ?

*Has purpose - in charge of her life*

Brian moves to NYC as conditions in Welch get worse. "He never said anything, but I think he figured that, as when we were kids, we both stood a better chance if we took on the world together" (249-150).

*Strength in numbers - they had each other  
Thank God.*

"...I applied to its [Columbia's] sister college, Barnard, and was accepted. I received grants and loans to cover most of the tuition, which was steep, and I'd saved a little money while working at *The Phoenix*. But to pay for the rest, I had to spend a year answering phones at a Wall Street firm. *Doesn't let roadblocks stop her*

Once school started, I could no longer pay my share of the rent, but a psychologist let me have a room in her Upper West Side apartment in exchange for looking after her two small sons. I found a weekend job in an art gallery, crowded all my classes into two days, and became the news editor of the *Barnard Bulletin*. But I gave that up when I was hired as an editorial assistant three days a week at one of the biggest magazines in the city. Writers there had published books and covered wards and interviewed presidents. I got to forward their mail, check their expense accounts, and do word counts on their manuscripts. I felt I'd arrived."

What do these opportunities say about Jeannette? How does she make things happen for herself?

*She perseveres - finds/creates opportunities  
The harder you try, the luckier you get.*



Maureen:

"Maureen had fallen off the porch and gashed her head.

4-12 in Welch - she only knew poverty + conflict

When Lori heard that, she declared it was time for Maureen to move to New York, too. But Maureen was only twelve, and I worried that she might be too young to leave home. She'd been four when we moved to West Virginia, and it was all she really knew" (251).

**How was Maureen's experience different from the other kids? How do you think this impacted Maureen's path later in life if at all?**

Didn't know "the good times" - wasn't adventurous for her

"After talking to Mom, I looked around my room. It was the maid's room off the kitchen, and it was tiny, with one narrow window and a bathroom that doubled as a closet. But it was mine. I had a room now, and I had a life, too, and there was no place in either one for Mom and Dad" (252).

**How do the kids react to their parents' arrival? Why do you think they react like this?**

They create their own lives - parents bring burden

"They were homeless"

They get kicked out of the flophouse, and "Brian thought they needed to be forced to be self-sufficient or they'd be dependent on us forever, so he refused to take them in." But Lori had moved out of the South Bronx and into an apartment in the same building as Brian, and she let them come stay with her and Maureen...one month at Lori's became two months and then three and four" (253). Dad and Lori fight, so Dad moves in with Brian. He drinks and moves out when Brian tries to enforce rules. Lori and Mom fight until Lori can't take it anymore. Jeannette suggests that she kick out mom and Lori finally agrees: "It almost killed her to tell Mom she would have to leave, and she offered to do whatever it took to help her get reestablished, but Mom insisted she'd be fine" (254). They lose the van and end up sleeping on the park bench.

tough love

Later, Jeannette says, "Part of me wanted to do whatever I could to take care of Mom and Dad, and part of me just wanted to wash my hands of them" (256)

CONFLICT - Helping them vs. self-preservation

**Why are the kids so conflicted about how to handle the parents?**

→ Can she really help or are they past help?

Drowning people often jeopardizing their rescuers

Encounter with the professor - 256-257

**Why doesn't Jeannette speak up for herself?**

The notion that people choose to be homeless seems outlandish



## Mom and Dad Had Options

For a while I considered dropping out of Barnard to help. It felt unbearably selfish, just downright wrong, to be indulging myself with an education in the liberal arts at a fancy private college while Mom and Dad were on the streets. But Lori convinced me that dropping out was a lamebrained idea. It wouldn't do any good, she said, and besides, dropping out would break Dad's heart. He was immensely proud that he had a daughter in college, and an Ivy League college at that. Every time he met someone new, he managed to work it into the first few minutes of conversation.

*Internal conflict - feels selfish doing anything to further her success*

*↳ he's so proud.*

Mom and Dad, Brian pointed out, had options. They could move back to West Virginia or Phoenix. Mom could work. And she was not **destitute**. She had her collection of antique Indian jewelry, which she kept in a self-storage locker. There was the two-carat diamond ring that Brian and I had found under the rotten lumber back in Welch; she wore it even when sleeping on the street. She still owned property in Phoenix. And she had the land in Texas, the source of her oil-lease royalties.

Brian was right. Mom did have options. I met her at a coffee shop to discuss them. First off, I suggested that she might think of finding an arrangement like mine: a room in someone's nice apartment in exchange for taking care of children or the elderly.

*But she didn't*

"I've spent my life taking care of other people," Mom said. "Now it's time to take care of me."

**Why don't you think the mother will take advantage of any of her "options"?**

*Afraid of work? Success?  
mentally ill?*

## Dad's On Track...or At Least, He Was.

Dad gets TB, sobers up, and gets a job upstate with room and board included. He loved being back with nature and was staying sober. Mom convinces him to quit his job and return to the city. He returns and starts drinking again. He says, "This crazy-ass mother of yours, can't live with her, can't live without her. And damned if she doesn't feel the same about me" (262).

**How would you describe their relationship?**

*Toxic - He's not used to normalcy.*



## Awkward Christmas

Mom passed around their presents, each wrapped in newspaper and tied with butcher's twine. Lori got a cracked lamp that might have been a Tiffany; Maureen, an antique porcelain doll that had lost most of her hair; Brian, a nineteenth-century book of poetry, missing the cover and the first few pages. My present was an orange crewneck sweater, slightly stained but made, Mom pointed out, of genuine Shetland wool.

When I passed Dad my stack of carefully wrapped boxes, he protested that he needed and wanted nothing. "Go ahead," I said. "Open them." I watched as he carefully removed the wrapping. He lifted the lids and stared at the folded clothes. His face took on that wounded expression he got whenever the world called his bluff. "You must be mighty ashamed of your old man," he said.

[Dad walks out of the apartment]

"What did I do?" I asked.

"Look at it from his perspective," Mom said. "You buy him all these nice new things, and all he has for you is junk from the street. He's the father. He's the one who's supposed to be taking care of you."

"The room was quiet for a while. "I guess you don't want your presents, either," I said to Mom.

"Oh, no," she said. "I love getting presents." *> She has no pride / no shame*

Why would Rex get so offended? What else could be the reason behind his reaction? What does the Mom's reaction say about her?

*↳ selfish.*

*↳ hurt pride?, guilt?*

*he's always been in position of provider - hurts his pride to have his kids help him*

## College Tuition:

What do you think about Rex giving Jeannette nearly \$1000 for college tuition after she talks about dropping out? He says, "Since when is it wrong for a father to take care of his little girl?"

*↳ Provides for her - trying to make up for shortcomings*

*Does your view of Rex change?*

### Park Ave:

Jeannette moves in with her boyfriend Eric who is the opposite of her father. She insists on paying her fair share and says, "I actually live on Park Avenue, I kept telling myself... Then I started thinking about Mom and Dad. When they had moved into their squat - a fifteen-minute subway ride south and about half a dozen worlds away - it seemed as if they had finally found the place where they belonged, and I wondered if I had done the same" (268).

*- he's safe*

*↳ Independent - Doesn't want to live off a man*

*↳ Dichotomy - 2 opposite worlds*

*She always seemed to want this kind of life but she seems discontented - maybe it's too different from what she's used to.*



## Mom Visits Park Ave

Mom comes to her Park Avenue apartment and she says, "I don't really like Park Avenue... The architecture is too monotonous. I prefer the architecture on Central Park West" and later asks, "Where are the values I raised you with?" She proceeds to evaluate Jeannette and "eventually, even Mom acknowledged that I'd done all right. 'No one expected you to amount to much,' she told me. 'Lori was the smart one, Maureen the pretty one, and Brian the brave one. You never had much going for you except that you always worked hard'" (270).

Why is Rosemary so condescending to her?

*Jealous so she has to put her down for living with the things she always wanted.*

*↳ makes it seem like a bad thing?*

"True or not, I was convinced that if all these people found out about Mom and Dad and who I really was, it would be impossible for me to keep my job. So I avoided discussing my parents. When that was impossible, I lied" (270).

What is Jeannette's internal conflict?

*Embarrassed of past - guilt for embarrassment betraying her family and, in turn, herself.*

*She seems to resolve this later when she stops worrying so much about what others think of her.*

## Everything's Bigger in Texas!

"So if Uncle Jim's land is worth a million dollars, that means your land is worth a million dollars."

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know? It's the same size as his."

"I don't know how much it's worth, because I never had it appraised. I was never going to sell it. My father taught me you never sell land. That's why we have to buy Uncle Jim's land. We have to keep it in the family."

"You mean you own land worth a million dollars?" 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? 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? Could she have solved our financial problems by selling this land she never even saw? But she avoided my questions, and it became clear that to Mom, holding on to land was not so much an investment strategy as it was an article of faith, a revealed truth as deeply felt and incontestable to her as Catholicism. And for the life of me, I could not get her to tell me how much the land was worth... I wasn't interested in her money; I just wanted to know - needed to know - the answer to my question: How much was that freaking land worth? Maybe she truly didn't know. Maybe she was afraid to find out. Maybe she was afraid of what we'd all think if we knew. But instead of answering me, she kept repeating that it was important to keep Uncle Jim's land - and that had belonged to her father and his father and his father before that in the family.

"Mom, I can't ask Eric for a million dollars."

*Outlandish request!*

"Jeannette, I haven't asked you for a lot of favors, but I'm asking you for one now. I wouldn't if it wasn't important. But this is important."



I told Mom I didn't think Eric would lend me a million dollars to buy some land in Texas, and even if he would, I wouldn't borrow it from him.

"It's too much money," I said. "What would I do with the land?"

"Keep it in the family."

"I can't believe you're asking me this," I said. "I've never even seen that land."

"Jeannette," Mom said when she had accepted the fact that she would not get her way. "I'm deeply disappointed in you."

→ tries to guilt her into it.

**What are some of the outlandish aspects of this scene? Why is Rosemary so evasive? What is Jeannette's biggest source of surprise?**

That they didn't have to live that way all those years.

### Maureen - A Wayward Soul

Meanwhile, Maureen had graduated from high school and enrolled in one of the city colleges, but she never really applied herself and ended up living with Mom and Dad. She worked from time to time as a bartender or waitress, but the jobs never lasted long. Ever since she was a kid, she'd been looking for someone to take care of her. In Welch, the Pentecostal neighbors provided for her, and now in New York, with her long blond hair and wide blue eyes, she found various men who were willing to help out.

→ Unlike Jeannette, she's okay w/ living off of other men.

... That two-room squat was cramped, and Maureen and Dad would get into the worst screaming fights, with Maureen calling Dad a worthless drunk and Dad calling Maureen a sick puppy, the runt of the litter, who should have been drowned at birth.

→ terrible thing to say!!

..."I told Mom that Maureen should get professional help, but Mom kept insisting that all Maureen needed was fresh air and sunshine. I talked to several doctors, but they told me that since it sounded like Maureen would refuse to seek help on her own, she could be treated only on the order of a court, if she proved she was a danger to herself or others.

Denial!!

↳ People have to help themselves

Six months later, Maureen stabbed Mom. It happened after Mom decided it was time for Maureen to develop a little self-sufficiency by moving out and finding a place of her own. God helps those who help themselves, Mom told Maureen, and so for her own good, she would have to leave the nest and make her way in the world. Maureen couldn't bear the idea that her own mom would kick her out onto the street, and she snapped. Mom insisted Maureen had not actually been trying to kill her she'd just become confused and upset, she said, but the wounds required stitches, and the police arrested Maureen.

so blunt!

→ ironic



## Effect of Maureen's Arrest

*They all react differently*

She was arraigned a few days later. Mom and Dad and Lori and Brian and I were all there. Brian was fuming. Lori looked grief-stricken. Dad was half potted and kept trying to pick fights with the security guards. But Mom acted like her normal self - nonchalant in the face of adversity. As we sat waiting on the courtroom benches, she hummed tunelessly and sketched the other spectators.

*Denial!!!*

On page 275-276 the Walls get into a screaming match outside Maureen's arraignment and they each blame each other for "allowing the most fragile one of us break into pieces" (276).

*GUILT*

What does she decided about Maureen's decision to move to CA? Why does Jeannette feel particularly bad about how Maureen fared in life?

*Looking for scapegoat*

*nervous but thinks it might be good for her*

*She feels responsible for her*

## Something in Us Broke That Day

*to get away*

"We hadn't gotten together since Maureen's arraignment. Something in all of us broke that day, and afterward, we no longer had the spirit for family gatherings" (277).

*Can't pretend it's an adventure anymore - too much of a reality*

## Rex & Jeannette's Heart to Heart

*They had loving relationship despite everything*

But despite all the hell-raising and destruction and chaos he had created in our lives, I could not imagine what my life would be like...what the world would be like without him in it. As awful as he could be, I always knew he loved me in a way no one else ever had. I looked out the window.

"Now, no snot-sliding or boohooing about 'poor ol'Rex,'" Dad said. "I don't want any of that, either now or when I'm gone." I nodded.

"But you always loved your old man, didn't you?"

"I did, Dad," I said. "And you loved me."

"Now, that's the God's honest truth." Dad chuckled. "We had some times, didn't we?"

"We did."

"Never did build that Glass Castle."

*Glass Castle*

"No. But we had fun planning it."

"Those were some damn fine plans." Mom stayed out of the conversation, sketching quietly.



"Dad," I said, "I'm sorry, I really should have asked you to my graduation."

"To hell with that." He laughed. "Ceremonies never did mean diddly to me." He took another long pull on his magnum. "I got a lot to regret about my life," he said. "But I'm goddamn proud of you, Mountain Goat, the way you turned out. Whenever I think of you, I figure I must have done something right."

"Course you did."

"Well, all right then." We talked about the old days some and, finally, it was time to go. I kissed them both, and at the door, I turned to look at Dad one more time.

"Hey," he said. He winked and pointed his finger at me. "Have I ever let you down?"

He knows he had

He started chuckling because he knew there was only one way I could ever answer that question. I just smiled. And then I closed the door.

What are some of the things said and unsaid in this conversation? What do they express to each other?

- They love each other
- Dad - sorry for not providing
- I - sorry for sometimes rejecting

### Rex's Death

"In the months that followed, I found myself always wanting to be somewhere other than where I was. If I was at work, I'd wish I were at home. If I was in the apartment, I couldn't wait to get out of it. If a taxi I had hailed was stuck in traffic for over a minute, I got out and walked. I felt best when I was on the move, going someplace rather than being there... It took me a while to realize that just being on the move wasn't enough; that I needed to reconsider everything.

A year after Dad died, I left Eric. He was a good man, but not the right one for me. And Park Avenue was not where I belonged.

I took a small apartment on the West Side. It had neither a doorman nor a fireplace, but there were large windows that flooded the rooms with light, and parquet floors and a small foyer, just like that first apartment Lori and I had found in the Bronx. It felt right" (280-281).

Why does Rex's death prompt Jeannette to re-evaluate her life?

Makes her realize life is precious + people need to be @ peace

### A Toast to Dad

Resolution to Internal Conflict

Mom stared at the ceiling, miming perplexed thought. "I've got it." She held up her glass. "Life with your father was never boring."

"We raised our glasses. I could almost hear Dad chuckling at Mom's comment in the way he always did when he was truly enjoying something. It had grown dark outside. A wind picked up, rattling the windows, and the candle flames suddenly shifted, dancing along the border between turbulence and order.

What is significant about the last line? What has Jeannette learned by the end?

↳ Life isn't neat and easy - it's a balance between the craziness and quiet times - between helping others + saving yourself