



The Glass Castle, A Memoir

Jeannette Walls

Simon and Schuster

RED FLAGS:

- Sexual Content (Masturbation, Molestation,
- Sexual Assaults)
- Physical abuse (Peer to Peer)
- Extreme Violence
- Bigotry
- Alcohol & Drug Use (Beer/Cigarettes, Alcoholism & Drunk Driving)
- Extreme Profanity
- Condemnation of Christianity
- Mental Health Issues
- Extreme Poverty
- Child Abuse, Abandonment and Neglect
- Solicitation of Prostitutes
- Adult Situations

PROFANITY COUNT:

(and other sensitive words)

- f*ck 1
- p*ssy 1
- c*nt 1
- a*s 4
- b*tch 9 (sonofab*itch, etc.)
- b*stard 6
- n*gger 6 (n*ggers, N*ggerville, n*gger lover)
- screw 1
- whore 8
- faggot 1
- rape 3
- drunk 21
- beer 21
- pissed 3

- shit 7 (shit-hole, bullshit, shit-for-brains)
- demon 17
- damn 44
- Jesus 2 (in vain, Jesus H. Christ)
- virgin 1
- penis 1
- wanker 2 (also wanking off)
- God 34 (in vain, oh my God, by God, godforsaken, Goddamn, Goddammit)

Part II: The Desert

 *I started stealing matches from Dad. I'd go behind the trailer and light them. I loved the scratching sound of the match against the sandpaper brown strip when I struck it, and the way the flame leaped out of the red-coated tip with a pop and a hiss. I'd feel its heat near my fingertips, then wave it out triumphantly. I lit pieces of paper and little piles of brush and held my breath until the moment when they seemed about to blaze up out of control. Then I'd stomp on the flames and call out the curse words Dad used, like "Dumb-ass sonofabitch!" and "Cocksucker!"* [27](#)

September 5, 2022

 *"You flea-bitten drunk!" Grandma would scream. "You goddamned flint-faced hag!" Dad would shout back. "You no-good two-bit pud-sucking bastard!" "You scaly castrating banshee bitch!"* [32](#)

September 5, 2022

 *"Tell us a story about yourself, Dad!" we'd beg him. "Awww. You don't want to hear another story about me," he'd say. "Yes, we do! We do!" we'd insist. "Well, okay," he'd say. He'd pause and chuckle at some memory. "There's many a damned foolhardy thing that your old man has done, but this one was harebrained even for a crazy sonofabitch like Rex* [36](#)

Walls.”

September 5, 2022

“Nothing, probably,” I said. “I just think maybe I saw something in the bedroom.” Dad raised his eyebrows. “But it was probably just a figment of my overly active imagination.” “Did you get a good look at it?” he asked. “Not really.” “You must have seen it. Was it a big old hairy sonofabitch with the damnedest-looking teeth and claws?” “That’s it!” “And did it have pointed ears and evil eyes with fire in ’em, and did it stare at you all wicked-like?” he asked. “Yes! Yes! You’ve seen it, too?” “Better believe I have. It’s that old ornery bastard Demon.”

[48](#)

September 5, 2022

Dad said something about freaks of nature, and Mom called Dad a Mr. Know-It-All Smarty-Pants who refused to believe that she was special. Dad said something about Jesus H. Christ on a goddamn crutch not taking that much time to gestate. Mom got upset at Dad’s blasphemy, reached her foot over to the driver’s side, and stomped on the brake. It was the middle of the night, and Mom bolted out of the car and ran into the darkness. “You crazy bitch!” Dad hollered. “Get your goddamn ass back in this car!” “You make me, Mr. Tough Guy!” she screamed as she ran away.

[54](#)

September 5, 2022

“They’re for suckers who rely on luck.” Dad knew all about statistics, and he explained how the casinos stacked the odds against the slot players. When Dad gambled, he preferred poker and pool—games of skill, not chance. “Whoever coined the phrase ‘a man’s got to play the hand that was dealt him’ was most certainly one piss-poor bluffer,” Dad said.

[67](#)

September 5, 2022



Goddammit, Rose Mary,” Dad snapped. “Do you think I’m a fucking idiot?” “What?” Mom asked, throwing her arms up in the air. “Am I not allowed to give my daughter a sock?” She winked at me again, just in case I didn’t get it.

[89](#)

September 5, 2022



The neighborhood also had its share of perverts. Mostly, they were shabby, hunched men with wheedling voices who hung around on street corners and followed us to and from school, trying to give us boosts when we climbed a fence, offering us candy and loose change if we would go play with them. We called them creeps and hollered at them to leave us alone, but I worried about hurting their feelings because I couldn’t help wondering if maybe they were telling the truth, that all they wanted was to be our friends.

[114](#)

September 5, 2022



The next day, when Dad came home and we told him what had happened, he said he was going to kill that lowlife sonofabitch. He and Brian and I went out on a serious Pervert Hunt. Our blood up, we searched the streets for hours, but we never did find the guy. I asked Mom and Dad if we should close the doors and windows when we went to sleep. They wouldn’t consider it. We needed the fresh air, they said, and it was essential that we refuse to surrender to fear. So the windows stayed open. Maureen kept having nightmares of men in Halloween masks. And every now and then, when Brian and I were feeling revved up, he’d get a machete and I’d get a baseball bat and we’d go Pervert Hunting, clearing the streets of the creeps who preyed on kids.

[115](#)

September 5, 2022



Dad yanked out the silverware drawer and hurled the forks and spoons and knives across the room, then picked up one of the chairs and smashed it on Grandma's table. "Rose Mary, where the goddamn hell are you, you stinking bitch?" he yelled. "Where is that whore hiding?"

[134](#)

September 5, 2022

Part III: Welch



That day I was leaving the house at the same time as Uncle Stanley. He never had the wherewithal to learn to drive, but someone from the appliance store where he worked was picking him up. He asked if I wanted a ride, too. When I told him where I was headed, he frowned. "That's Niggerville," he said. "What you going there for?" Stanley didn't want his friend to drive me there, so I walked. When I got back home later in the afternoon, the house was empty except for Erma, who never set foot outside. She stood in the kitchen, stirring a pot of green beans and taking swigs from the bottle of hooch in her pocket. "So, how was Niggerville?" she asked. Erma was always going on about "the niggers." Her and Grandpa's house was on Court Street, on the edge of the black neighborhood. It galled her when they started moving into that section of town, and she always said it was their fault that Welch had gone downhill. When you were sitting in the living room, where Erma always kept the shades drawn, you could hear groups of black people walking into town, talking and laughing. "Goddamn niggers," Erma always muttered. "The reason I have not gone out of this house in fifteen years is because I do not want to see or be seen by a nigger." Mom and Dad had always forbidden us to use that word. It was much worse than any curse word, they told us. But since Erma was my grandmother, I never said anything when she used it. Erma kept stirring the beans. "Keep this up and people are going to think you're a nigger lover," she said.

[154](#)

September 5, 2022

They'd been gone for a minute or two when I heard Brian weakly protesting. I went into Grandpa's bedroom and saw Erma kneeling on the floor in front of Brian, grabbing at the crotch of his pants, squeezing and kneading while mumbling to herself and telling Brian to hold still, goddammit. Brian, his cheeks wet with tears, was holding his hands protectively between his legs. "Erma, you leave him alone!" I shouted. Erma, still on her knees, twisted around and glared at me. "Why, you little bitch!" she said. Lori heard the commotion and came running. I told Lori that Erma was touching Brian in a way she ought not to be. Erma said she was merely mending Brian's inseam and that she shouldn't have to defend herself against some lying little whore's accusations. "I know what I saw," I said. "She's a pervert!" Erma reached over to slap me, but Lori caught her hand. "Let's all calm down," Lori said in the same voice she used when Mom and Dad got carried away, arguing. "Everybody. Calm down." Erma jerked her hand out of Lori's grasp and slapped her so hard that Lori's glasses went flying across the room. Lori, who had turned thirteen, slapped her back. Erma hit Lori again, and this time Lori struck Erma a blow in the jaw. Then they flew at each other, tussling and flailing and pulling hair, locked together, with Brian and me cheering on Lori until we woke up Uncle Stanley, who staggered into the room and pushed them apart.

September 5, 2022

The family who had it the toughest on Little Hobart Street, I would have to say, was the Pastors. The mother, Ginnie Sue Pastor, was the town whore. Ginnie Sue Pastor was thirty-three years old and had eight daughters and one son. Their names all ended with Y. Her husband, Clarence Pastor, had black lung and sat on the front porch of their huge sagging house all day long, but he never smiled or waved at passersby. Just sat there like he was frozen. Everyone in town said he'd been impotent for years and none of the Pastor kids was his.

September 5, 2022

Ginnie Sue Pastor pretty much kept to herself. At first I wondered if she lay around in a lacy negligee all day, smoking cigarettes and waiting for gentlemen callers. Back in Battle Mountain, the women lounging on the front porch of the Green Lantern—I'd long since figured out what they really did—wore white lipstick and black mascara and partially unbuttoned blouses that showed the tops of their brassieres. But Ginnie Sue Pastor didn't look like a whore. She was a blowsy woman with dyed yellow hair, and from time to time we saw her out in the front yard, chopping wood or filling a scuttle from the coal pile. She usually wore the same kinds of aprons and canvas farm coats worn by the rest of the women on Little Hobart Street. She looked like any other mom.

September 5, 2022

Of course I went. I'd never gotten inside the Green Lantern, but now I'd get an up-close look at a genuine prostitute. There were lots of things I wanted to know: Was whoring easy money? Was it ever any fun, or was it just gross? Did Kathy and her sisters and her father all know Ginnie Sue Pastor was a whore? What did they think of it? I didn't plan on flat out asking these questions, but I did think that by getting inside the Pastors' house and meeting Ginnie Sue, I'd come away with some idea of the answers.

September 5, 2022

Sweet Man came in crying, and Ginnie Sue picked him up and let him suck some mayonnaise off her finger. "You did good on that bird," Ginnie Sue told me. "You strike me as the kind of girl who's one day going to be eating roast chicken and those on-fire desserts just as much as you want." She winked. It was only on the way home that I realized I hadn't gotten answers to any of my questions. While I was sitting there talking to Ginnie Sue, I'd even forgotten she was a whore. One thing about whoring: It put a chicken on the table.

Grandpa and Uncle Stanley did have a working bathroom, so every weekend some of us went over to take a bath. One time I was sitting next to Uncle Stanley on the couch in his room, watching Hee Haw and waiting for my turn in the tub. Grandpa was off at the Moose Lodge, where he spent the better part of every day; Lori was taking her bath; and Mom was at the table in Grandpa's room working on a crossword puzzle. I felt Stanley's hand creeping onto my thigh. I looked at him, but he was staring at the Hee Haw Honeys so intently that I couldn't be sure he was doing it on purpose, so I knocked his hand away without saying anything. A few minutes later, the hand came creeping back. I looked down and saw that Uncle Stanley's pants were unzipped and he was playing with himself. I felt like hitting him, but I was afraid I'd get in trouble the way Lori had after punching Erma, so I hurried out to Mom. "Mom, Uncle Stanley is behaving inappropriately," I said. "Oh, you're probably imagining it," she said. "He groped me! And he's wanking off!" Mom cocked her head and looked concerned. "Poor Stanley," she said. "He's so lonely." "But it was gross!" Mom asked me if I was okay. I shrugged and nodded. "Well, there you go," she said. She said that sexual assault was a crime of perception. "If you don't think you're hurt, then you aren't," she said. "So many women make such a big deal out of these things. But you're stronger than that." She went back to her crossword puzzle.

September 5, 2022

Part IV: New York City

He wouldn't let me hug him. "Whoa, Nelly, stay back," he said. "You're sure a sight for sore eyes, honey, but I don't want you catching this sonofabitch of a bug." Dad escorted me back to the TB ward and introduced me to all of his friends. "Believe it or not, ol' Rex Walls did produce something worth bragging about, and here she is," he told

them. Then he started coughing. "Dad, are you going to be okay?" I asked. "Ain't none of us getting out of this alive, honey," Dad said. It was an expression he used a lot, and now he seemed to find a special satisfaction in it.

September 5, 2022

 *When I told Dad about my plans, he asked if Eric made me happy and treated me well. "Because if he doesn't," Dad said, "I will by God kick his butt so hard, his asshole will be up between his shoulder blades."*

[280](#)

September 5, 2022