



Internalizations: Making Meaning Clear to Your Readers

EXAMPLE: Based on an excerpt from *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls

by Kemlo Aki

The following example was reverse-engineered from the first few paragraphs of *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls. Please note that the "stripped-down" versions below—with and without editorial feedback—were NOT written by Walls nor endorsed by Walls. We are merely using her excellent work as a teaching tool, and our stripped-down version is only meant to show how a writer MIGHT get from there to a final, polished draft.

Stripped Down Version (minimal thoughts, emotions or backstory)—"The What"

I was sitting in a taxi when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a Dumpster. It was just after dark. A blustery March wind whipped the steam coming out of the manholes, and people hurried along the side-walks with their collars turned up. I was stuck in traffic.

Mom stood fifteen feet away. She had tied rags around her shoulders and was picking through the trash while a dog, a black-and-white terrier mix, played at her feet. She tilted her head and thrust out her lower lip when studying items that she'd hoisted out of the Dumpster, and her eyes widened. Her long hair was streaked gray, tangled and matted, and her eyes had sunk deep into their sockets. Her cheekbones were high and strong, but the skin was parched and ruddy. She looked like any of the thousands of homeless people in New York City.

When she looked up, I was overcome with panic. I slid down in the seat and asked the driver to turn around and take me home.

The taxi pulled up in front of my building, the doorman held the door for me, and the elevator man took me up to my floor. My husband was working late, and the apartment was silent except for the sound of my shoes on the floor. I put some Vivaldi on. I looked around the room. There were the turn-of-the-century bronze-and-silver vases and the old books with worn leather spines. There were the Georgian maps, the Persian rugs, and the overstuffed leather armchair. But I could never enjoy the room.

Stripped Down Version with Editor's Feedback

I was sitting in a taxi when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a Dumpster. It was just after dark. A blustery March wind whipped the steam coming out of the manholes, and people hurried along the side-walks with their collars turned up. I was stuck in traffic.

Mom stood fifteen feet away. She had tied rags around her shoulders and was picking through the trash while a dog, a black-and-white terrier mix, played at her feet. She tilted her head and thrust out her lower lip when studying items that she'd hoisted out of the Dumpster, and her eyes widened. Her long hair was streaked gray, tangled and matted, and her eyes had sunk deep

Kemlo - 7/18/2016 12:15 PM

Comment [1]: Wow—what's her reaction to this? She seems detached—is that because this is something she has seen before so it doesn't surprise her?

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Comment [2]: What is it about being stuck in traffic that's significant for this character? Where's she headed?

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Comment [3]: Does she know why?

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Comment [4]: Is this detail important?

Kemlo - 7/18/2016 12:16 PM

Comment [5]: Why? What do the wide eyes indicate to the protagonist?



into their sockets. Her cheekbones were high and strong, but the skin was parched and ruddy. She looked like any of the thousands of homeless people in New York City.

When she looked up, I was overcome with panic. I slid down in the seat and asked the driver to turn around and take me home.

The taxi pulled up in front of my building, the doorman held the door for me, and the elevator man took me up to my floor. My husband was working late, and the apartment was silent except for the sound of my shoes on the floor. I put some Vivaldi on. I looked around the room. There were the turn-of-the-century bronze-and-silver vases and the old books with worn leather spines. There were the Georgian maps, the Persian rugs, and the overstuffed leather armchair. But I could never enjoy the room.

Original, Published Text (from Ch. 1 of *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls)

Yellow highlighting marks the text that was removed to create the stripped-down version. Note how the text slips in the character's backstory, emotion and thoughts throughout.

I was sitting in a taxi, wondering if I had overdressed for the evening, when I looked out the window and saw Mom rooting through a Dumpster. It was just after dark. A blustery March wind whipped the steam coming out of the manholes, and people hurried along the side-walks with their collars turned up. I was stuck in traffic two blocks from the party where I was heading.

Mom stood fifteen feet away. She had tied rags around her shoulders to keep out the spring chill and was picking through the trash while her dog, a black-and-white terrier mix, played at her feet. Mom's gestures were all familiar—the way she tilted her head and thrust out her lower lip when studying items of potential value that she'd hoisted out of the Dumpster, the way her eyes widened with childish glee when she found something she liked. Her long hair was streaked gray, tangled and matted, and her eyes had sunk deep into their sockets, but still she reminded me of the mom she'd been when I was a kid, swan-diving off cliffs and painting in the desert and reading Shakespeare aloud. Her cheekbones were still high and strong, but the skin was parched and ruddy from all those winters and summers exposed to the elements. To the people walking by, she probably looked like any of the thousands of homeless people in New York City.

It had been months since I laid eyes on Mom, and when she looked up, I was overcome with panic that she'd see me and call out my name, and that someone on the way to the same party would spot us together and Mom would introduce herself and my secret would be out.

I slid down in the seat and asked the driver to turn around and take me home to Park Avenue.

The taxi pulled up in front of my building, the doorman held the door for me, and the elevator man took me up to my floor. My husband was working late, as he did most nights, and the apartment was silent except for the click of my heels on the polished wood floor. I was still rattled from seeing Mom, the unexpectedness of coming across her, the sight of her rooting happily through the Dumpster. I put some Vivaldi on, hoping the music would settle me down. I looked around the room. There were the turn-of-the-century bronze-and-silver vases and the old books with worn leather spines that I'd collected at flea markets. There were the Georgian maps I'd had

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Comment [6]: I'm wondering how her mother looked the last time she saw her. And is her mother actually homeless, or does she just look that way? If she is homeless, does the character know why?

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Comment [7]: Why? What's she afraid might happen?

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Comment [8]: Does this matter to her? If so, why?

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Comment [9]: What makes these facts significant? Do they serve the story in some way?

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Comment [10]: Why not?



framed, the Persian rugs, and the overstuffed leather armchair I liked to sink into at the end of the day. I'd tried to make a home for myself here, tried to turn the apartment into the sort of place where the person I wanted to be would live. But I could never enjoy the room without worrying about Mom and Dad huddled on a sidewalk grate somewhere. I fretted about them, but I was embarrassed by them, too, and ashamed of myself for wearing pearls and living on Park Avenue while my parents were busy keeping warm and finding something to eat.