



Internalizations: Making Meaning Clear to Your Readers

by Kemlo Aki

The following example was reverse-engineered from the first few paragraphs in *The Life We Bury* by Allen Eskens. Please note that the "stripped-down" versions below – with and without editorial feedback – were NOT written by Eskens nor endorsed by Eskens. We are merely using his 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 walked to my car that day, pressed down by a wave that swirled around my head and broke against the evening in small ripples. There are people in this world who would call that kind of feeling a premonition, a warning from some internal third eye that can see around the curve of time. There have been times when I think back to that day and wonder.

The Minnesota Twins were scheduled to play the Cleveland Indians that cool September evening in the game to crown the central-division champion. Soon the lights of Target Field would flood the western horizon of Minneapolis, shooting up in to the night like rays of glory, but I would not be there to see it. I couldn't afford to go on my budget. Instead, I would be working the door at Molly's Pub, stealing glances at the game on the television above the bar as I inspected driver's licenses and tamped down drunken arguments.

My high-school guidance counselor never mentioned the word "college" in any of our meetings. I didn't blame her for not seeing me as college material. Truth is, I felt comfortable in the dinge of a bar.

Stripped-Down Version with Editor's Feedback

I walked to my car that day, pressed down by a wave that swirled around my head and broke against the evening in small ripples. There are people in this world who would call that kind of feeling a premonition, a warning from some internal third eye that can see around the curve of time. There have been times when I think back to that day and wonder.

The Minnesota Twins were scheduled to play the Cleveland Indians that cool September evening in the game to crown the central-division champion. Soon the lights of Target Field would flood the western horizon of Minneapolis, shooting up in to the night like rays of glory, but I would not be there to see it. I couldn't afford to go on my budget. Instead, I would be working the door at Molly's Pub, stealing glances at the game on the television above the bar as I inspected driver's licenses and tamped down drunken arguments.

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [1]: What day? What makes this particular day significant to him?

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [2]: What's weighing him down?

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [3]: Interesting—does he interpret what he's feeling in that way, too? (I'm guessing yes, but maybe he's disagreeing?)

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [4]: Why? Show us (by telling us what he's thinking) what makes that day special and relevant to this story.

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [5]: It sounds like he would prefer to be at the game instead of working at the pub—but who wouldn't? It's not clear what makes this *particular* game important to this *particular* character. Weave in more of his backstory, his thoughts, to show us exactly what it means to him.



My high-school guidance counselor never mentioned the word "college" in any of our meetings. I didn't blame her for not seeing me as college material. Truth is, I felt comfortable in the dinge of a bar.

Original, Published Text (taken from Chapter 1 of *The Life We Bury* by Allen Eskens)

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 remember being pestered by a sense of dread as I walked to my car that day, pressed down by a wave of foreboding that swirled around my head and broke against the evening in small ripples. There are people in this world who would call that kind of feeling a premonition, a warning from some internal third eye that can see around the curve of time. I've never been one to buy into such things. But I will confess that there have been times when I think back to that day and wonder: if the fates had truly whispered in my ear—if I had known how that drive would change so many things—would I have taken a safer path? Would I turn left where before I had turned right? Or would I still travel the path that led me to Carl Iverson?

My Minnesota Twins were scheduled to play the Cleveland Indians that cool September evening in the game to crown the central-division champion. Soon the lights of Target Field would flood the western horizon of Minneapolis, shooting up in to the night like rays of glory, but I would not be there to see it. Just one more thing I couldn't afford on my college-student budget. Instead, I would be working the door at Molly's Pub, stealing glances at the game on the television above the bar as I inspected driver's licenses and tamped down drunken arguments—not my career of choice, but it paid the rent.

Oddly enough, my high-school guidance counselor never mentioned the word "college" in any of our meetings. Maybe she could smell the funk of hopelessness that clung to my second-hand clothing. Maybe she had heard that I started working at a dive bar called the piedmont Club the day after I turned eighteen. Or—and this is where I'd place my bet—maybe she knew who my mother was and figured that no one can change the sound of an echo. Regardless, I didn't blame her for not seeing me as college material. Truth is, I felt more comfortable in the dinge of a bar than I did in the marbled halls of academia, where I stumbled along as though I wore my shoes on the wrong feet.

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 4:59 PM

Comment [6]: Why not? And what triggered this memory? We need to see more of his thinking to understand where this is coming from, why he didn't blame her.

Kemlo - 7/1/2016 12:49 PM

Comment [7]: Why? What makes him feel comfortable there? (What's he thinking?)