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## A Look at the Relationship Between a Mother and a Son in "The Glass Castle"

*The Glass Castle* is a memoir written by Jeannette Walls that elaborates her upbringing particularly her experience with her sisters, brother, and parents. In a sincere but loving manner, Walls reveals the irresponsibility and selfishness of her parents which resulted in Walls and her siblings enduring a lot and defying all odds to attain their goals and remain afloat. Many themes are revealed in the memoir, but one primary theme that this analysis will exude relates to that of the relationship between mother and son. Brian is an only son in the family, and thus by examining the relationship he had with his mother through the interactions, conversations and how the mother treated him, the mother-son relationship will be clear. Although in normal circumstances an only son would be given special attention by the mother, Brian's experience is different, and his mother seemed too occupied with other things to provide Brian with any special attention.

The relationship between Brian and Rosemary is one that is revealed to be characterized by resentment from Brian towards the mother. Such resentment emanated from the way Rosemary would treat Brian in a non-emotional manner. Since Rosemary does not show any compassion and sympathy to her children, it is not surprising that Brian does not care about her feelings and he thinks that she is overdramatic. For example, the mother's drama is seen, as Walls highlights Brian typically started with an impersonation of mom carrying on and sobbing (pg.207) Brian is categorical about his mother's disappointment and is honest about the situation when he chooses to distance himself from the relationship with the mother creating a chasm that seems unbridgeable. This worsened situation was a result of the neglect that Brian experienced when he desperately needed his mother's support in addressing his difficulties. In one instance, Brian is hurt and expected his mother to take him to the hospital. Surprisingly, the mother's response was far from anything that Brian was expecting. She suggested that she would not take Brian to the hospital given that the logical thing that should happen is 'one kid at the hospital at a time is enough' (pg. 13). The thing that followed was Rosemary striving to bandage Brian with a dirty white bandage. Rosemary appears confident as she narrates what happened to Brian. She asserts that Brian fell off the couch and his head split open on the floor but taking him to the hospital was not one of the options (pg13). Rosemary is not moved with the unconditional love and affection of a mother who possibly made Brian wonder what was the importance of having a mother if things were even worse with a mother than they would be if she was not there. It is with this persuasion that Brian even as an adult chose to live his life distanced from the mother.

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Where *The Glass Castle* is concerned, the relationship between a mother and a son is also depicted as one characterized by some love which was buried in selfishness and irresponsibility. For instance, Walls elaborates how the mother toughened up by helping him and the other siblings by showing them which plants were edible and which ones were toxic, she was able to find water when no one could, and she knew how little of it you really needed. She taught us that you would wash yourself clean with just a cup of water (pg. 21). The fact that Brian would also wash himself clean with just a cup of water prepared him to be a gentleman who would survive under any condition in the face of the earth. That is a mother's love in its entirety, teaching her children to survive regardless of the prevailing conditions. Those survival tactics were central to Brian's survival as much as he would not acknowledge it. Furthermore, being able to do so much with so little was an incredible lesson that would extend to all areas of Brian's life.

Brian's relationship with Rosemary is seen as a dramatic one given that mama was not predictable on the answers she would give and even her arguments. Although some of her arguments were true and solid, she overstretched their application beyond the context of a family relationship as an escapism route. For instance, Walls notes something unusual about her mother's claim surrounding cooking and food. She notes, 'Why to spend the afternoon making a meal that will be gone in an hour,' she would ask us, 'when the same amount of time can do a painting that will last forever' (pg. 56). While it is true that the food Brian and his siblings would take could only last an hour, and that paintings would last a lifetime, food was needed. In fact, she also needed the energy from food to be able to make the art that would last forever. The irony is clear, and irresponsibility is also apparent. Notably, the painting would last longer than food but not forever as Rosemary would purport. Apparently, instead of Rosemary being an icon of total commitment to Brian and sacrifice all that is within her power for her son's wellbeing, she seems to do the exact opposite. It is revealed in the text that Brian had seizures when he was small which later stopped. However, in that time that Brian required the mother most, she neglected him and let him be, something that most mother would not do. That neglect would cost Brian and make his life one characterized by insurmountable difficulty.

The fact that Rosemary did not attend to Brian stemmed from her persuasion on how parents should treat their children and toughen them up. Walls asserts this belief by stating what her mother's ideology was Mom always said that people worried too much about their children. 'Suffering when you are gone is good' she said. It immunized your body and your soul, and that is why she ignored us as kids when we cried (pg. 28). It is possible that Rosemary would make such statements as words of knowledge and wisdom to her children given that she would not be able to provide them a comfortable life because of her lifestyle. She saw her words as handy in Brian's survival in the desert. Although Brian was not always persuaded about her mother's persuasion, he would not object it but silently listened to her mother's words which do not seem to amount to much. In one such instance of silence, Walls states She told us to

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forgive her the same way we always forgive dad, for his drinking. None of us said a thing (pg. 174). Brian's relationship with the mother seems mechanical, one that exists because it must, but lacks the spice and joy of a loving relationship that would read trust, compassion, and love. Silence remains central in this relationship. The mother appears harsh when Brian to talk out his mind. In some instance, she stated 'You cannot talk to me like that, she said. I am your mother' (pg.219). Thus, the control and assertion of her authority took center stage in the relationship.

The relationship between Brian and Rosemary is the basis of the mother-son relationship. It appears to be distant, strained and one characterized with resentment. Brian feels unloved given that his mother's passion and pride in painting superseded her responsibility as a mother. Instead of receiving unconditional love when he was suffering and bleeding, all he got was neglect and poor treatment. In the long run, bridging the chasm in their relationship is challenging, and Brian opts to live his life as distant as he could. Notably, motherly responsibilities are primary to a good relationship between son and mother as *The Glass Castle* reveals.

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