

Nineteen-year-old Eveline Hill sits, exhausted and overwhelmed, at a window in her home and looks out onto the street while fondly recalling her childhood. She remembers how she used to play with her siblings and the other children in their neighbourhood in a field that has now been developed by a man from Belfast who filled it with new homes. She remarks that the new brick houses look bright and modern when compared to the small brown houses that make up her childhood street. Eveline's thoughts stray to her father who used to come hunt her and her siblings out of the field with his blackthorn stick. She quickly dismisses this negative memory and claims that her childhood was mostly happy because her father was not as bad back then and her mother was still alive.

However, Eveline's thoughts soon return to her abusive father, with whom she lives. She reflects that while her father was never violent towards her when she was a child, he has made violent threats towards her recently and she is frightened. Luckily for Eveline, she has found a way out and is looking forward to the prospect of freeing herself from her hard life juggling jobs as a shop worker and a nanny to support herself and her father. Eveline faces a difficult dilemma: remain at home like a dutiful daughter, or leave Dublin with her lover, Frank, who is a sailor. He wants her to marry him and live with him in Buenos Aires, and she has already agreed to leave with him in secret. As Eveline recalls, Frank's courtship of her was pleasant until her father began to voice his disapproval and bicker with Frank. After that, the two lovers met clandestinely.

As Eveline reviews her decision to embark on a new life, she holds in her lap two letters, one to her father and one to her brother Harry. She begins to favor the sunnier memories of her old family life, when her mother was alive and her brother was living at home, and notes that she did promise her mother to dedicate herself to maintaining the home. She reasons that her life at home, cleaning and cooking, is hard but perhaps not the worst option—her father is not always mean, after all. The sound of a street organ then reminds her of her mother's death, and her thoughts change course. She remembers her mother's uneventful, sad life and passionately embraces her decision to escape the same fate by leaving with Frank.

At the docks in Dublin, Eveline waits in a crowd to board the ship with Frank. She appears detached and worried, overwhelmed by the images around her, and prays to God for direction. She becomes increasingly apprehensive about her decision and stares into the sea in horror as her panic sets in. Her previous declaration of intent seems to have never happened and she compares going with Frank to being drowned at sea. When the boat whistle blows and Frank pulls on her hand to lead her with him, Eveline resists. She clutches the barrier as Frank is swept into the throng moving toward the ship, causing the lovers to let go of each other's hands. Frank continually shouts "Come!" and calls out her name in a final attempt to persuade her but Eveline remains fixed to the land, motionless and emotionless.