

"Eveline" - Character Analysis

"There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision (James)." Originally appearing in *Dubliners*, a compilation of vignettes by James Joyce, his short story *Eveline* is the tale of such an unfortunate individual. Anxious, timid, scared, perhaps even terrified -- all these describe *Eveline*. She is a frightened, indecisive young woman poised between her past and her future.

Eveline loves her father but is fearful of him. She tries to hold onto good memories of her father, thinking "sometimes he could be very nice (Joyce 5)," but has seen what her father has done to her siblings when he would "hunt them in out of the field with his blackthorn stick (Joyce 4)." As of late she has begun to feel "herself in danger of her father's violence (Joyce 4)." Ironically, her father has "begun to threaten her and say what he'd do to her only for her dead mother's sake (Joyce 5)."

Eveline wants a new life but is afraid to let go of her past. She dreams of a place where "people would treat her with respect (Joyce 4)" and when contemplating her future, hopes "to explore a new life with Frank (Joyce 5)." When, in a moment of terror she realizes that "she must escape (Joyce 6)," it seems to steel her determination to make a new home for herself elsewhere. On the other hand, she is comfortable with the "familiar objects from which she had never dreamed of being divided (Joyce 4)." She rationalizes that: "In her home anyway she had shelter and food; she had those whom she had known all her life about her (Joyce 4)." As she reflects on her past she discovers "now that she was about to leave it she did not find it a wholly undesirable life (Joyce 5)."

Eveline wants to keep the deathbed pledge made to her mother but is alarmed at the prospect of sharing her mother's fate. Her mother was ill-treated in life and *Eveline* vows that "she would not be treated as her mother had been (Joyce 4)." She has had a life filled with hardship and chafes under "her promise to keep the home together as long as she could (Joyce 6)." When she recalls "the pitiful vision of her mother's life (Joyce 6)" she is uncertain of what to do and prays "to god to direct her, to show her what was her duty (Joyce 6)."

Eveline thinks she loves Frank but is apprehensive about her future with him. She likes Frank; she thinks he "was very kind, manly, open-hearted (Joyce 5)." She wants to believe in Frank; to believe that "he would give her life, perhaps love, too (Joyce 6)." However, she is riddled with self-doubt. She questions the validity of her decision to leave. Although "she consented to go away, to leave her home (Joyce 4)," she wonders "was that wise (Joyce 4)?" She hesitates at the thought of living "in a distant unknown country (Joyce 4)."

Although fear is not *Eveline*'s constant companion, it is a common one. A companion that contributes greatly to her lack of self-confidence. A companion that gives her fate over to a wavering will. *Eveline*'s indecision leads to a paralysis that dooms her to the fate she sought to avoid. Besides, "we know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run over (Bevan)."

WORK CITED

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