

In this section of the novel, Joe goes back to the ashes of his family's home having been a surviving witness to its destruction the night before. Apart from his youngest sister, Eileen, all other members of his family have died.

Joe squatted down. He rummaged a little through the debris and pulled out a small green ceramic pot, the pot Mam would put flowers in on the sill in the kitchen behind the sink, the flowers the children would pick from the fields on their way home from school, the ceramic pot that survived the flames, only a pot, the only vessel in the house beyond the reach of fire. And from the dust it came, from the dirt, from the clay, and yet, valiant. The pot of flowers on the sill of the window through which she would look to watch her children, and they made not of clay but of flesh and blood, of bones and hair, that would succumb to the flames, but not that pot before which she had stood doing the dishes with no sense of humility, no sense of knowing that it would survive her, as she watched her children come in from their jobs or shift around the vibrant green grass in endless play.

Joe felt a sudden chill. He pulled on the overcoat O'Brien had given him. Nowhere near the fit of him. He put the pot in his pocket. He would put it on a sill again, when he had a sill, he would fill it with flowers, when he had flowers, he would fill this land with a house and with children with flesh and blood and laughter and the toil would be on his hands and there would be joy on this land and this pot that he clenched now in his fist wretched at the feel of this foreign wool up against his raw skin, this pot would bear witness to the endurance of his father's love, his father's belief in the part of life that defied dust, defied the inevitable disintegration. Réquiem

ætérganam dona eis Dómine; et lux perpétua lúceat eis. Requiéscant in pace. Amen. May eternal rest, grant unto them, oh Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace.

He looked to the ground....