

An Inspector Calls

CHARACTERS

Arthur Birling

Sybil Birling - his wife

Sheila Birling - his daughter

Eric Birling - his son

Edna - maid

Gerald Croft - Sheila's fiancé

Inspector Goole.

All 3 acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining room of the Birling's house in Brumley, an industrial city in the north Midlands. It is an evening in spring, 1912.

The dining room is of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has a good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is a substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy and homelike [...]

At rise of curtain, the four Birling's and Gerald are seated at the table, with Arthur Birling at one end, his wife at the other, Eric downstage and Sheila and Gerald seated upstage. Edna, the parlourmaid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of the dessert plates and champagne glasses etc., and then replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. Port glasses are already on the table. All five are in evening dress of the period, the men in tails and white ties, not dinner-jackets. Arthur Birling is a heavy-looking, rather portentous man in this middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in this speech. His wife is about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior. Sheila is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. Gerald Croft is an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the well bred young man-about-town. Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

ACT ONE

ARTHUR BIRLING: Giving us the port, Edna? That's right. [*He pushes it towards Eric.*] You ought to like this port, Gerald, as a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.

GERALD CROFT: Then it'll be all right. The governor prides himself on being a good judge of
5 port. I don't pretend to know much about it.

SHEILA BIRLING - *gaily, possessively*: I should jolly well think not, Gerald, I'd hate you to know all about port - like one of these purple-faced old men.

BIRLING: Here, I'm not a purple-faced old man.

SHEILA: No. not yet. But then you don't know all about port - do you?

10 **BIRLING** - *noticing that his wife has not taken any*: Now then, Sybil, you must a take a little tonight. Special occasion, y'know, eh?

SHEILA: Yes, go on, mummy. You must drink our health.

MRS BIRLING - *smiling*: Very well, then. Just a little, thank you. [*To Edna, who is about to go, with tray*]: all right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing room when we want coffee. Probably
15 in about half an hour.

EDNA - going: Yes, ma'am. [*Edna goes out. They now have all the glasses filled. Birling beams at them and clearly relaxes.*]

BIRLING: Well, well - this is very nice. Very nice. Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me.

GERALD - *politely*: Absolutely first class.

20 MRS BIRLING - *reproachfully*: Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things.

BIRLING: Oh - come come - I'm treating Gerald like one of the family. And I'm sure he won't object.

SHEILA - *with mocking aggressiveness*: Go on. Gerald - just you object!

25 GERALD - *smiling*: Wouldn't dream of it. In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now. I've been trying long enough, haven't I? [*as she does not reply, with more insistence*]: Haven't I? You know I have.

MRS BIRLING - *smiling*: Of course she does.

SHEILA - *half serious, half playful*: Yes - except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.

30 GERALD: And I've told you - I was awfully busy at the works all that time.

SHEILA - *same tone as before*: Yes, that's what you say.

MRS BIRLING: Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realize that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.

35 SHEILA: I don't believe I will. [*half playful, half serious, to Gerald*]: So you be careful.

GERALD: Oh - I will, I will. [*Eric suddenly guffaws. His parents look at him.*]

SHEILA - *severely*: Now - what's the joke?

ERIC: I don't know - really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.

SHEILA: You're squiffy.

40 ERIC: I'm not.

MRS BIRLING: What an expression, Sheila! Really the things you girls pick up these days!

ERIC: If you think that's the best she can do.

SHEILA: Don't be an ass, Eric.

MRS BIRLING: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours?

45 BIRLING: Yes, of course. [*He clears his throat.*]: Well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party. It's a pity Sir George and - well - Lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable - couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this.

MRS BIRLING: Much nicer really.

50 GERALD: I agree.

BIRLING: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult.

ERIC - *not too rudely*: Well. Don't do any. We'll drink their health and have done with it.

55 BIRLING: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now - though Crofts limited are both older and bigger than Birling and Company - and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together - for lower costs and higher prices.

GERALD: Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.

MRS BIRLING: Now, Arthur, I don't think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this.

SHEILA: Neither do I. All wrong.

65 BIRLING: Quite so, I agree with you. I only mentioned it in passing. What I did want to say was - that Sheila's a lucky girl - and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald.

GERALD: I know I am - this once anyhow.

BIRLING - *raising his glass*: So here's wishing the pair of you - the very best that life can bring.
Gerald and Sheila.

70 MRS BIRLING - *raising her glass, smiling*: Yes, Gerald. Yes, Sheila darling. Our congratulations
and very best wishes!

GERALD: Thank you.

MRS BIRLING: Eric!

ERIC - *rather noisily*: All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes - but she's not bad
75 really. Good old Sheila!

SHEILA: Chump! I can't drink to this, can I? When do I drink?

GERALD: You can drink to me.

SHEILA - *quite and serious now*: All right then. I drink to you, Gerald. [*For a moment they took
at each other*]

80 GERALD - *quietly*: Thank you. And I drink to you - and hope I can make you as happy as you
deserve to be.

SHEILA - *trying to be light and easy*: You be careful - or I'll start weeping.

GERALD - *smiling*: Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. [*He produces a ring case.*]

SHEILA - *excited*: Oh - Gerald - you've got it - is it the one you wanted me to have?

85 GERALD - *giving the case to her*: Yes - the very one.

SHEILA - *taking out the ring*: Oh - it's wonderful! Look - Mummy - isn't it a beauty? Oh darling.
[*She kisses Gerald hastily.*]

ERIC: Steady the buffs!

SHEILA - *who has put the ring on, admiringly*: I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

90 MRS BIRLING: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.

SHEILA: Careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.

MRS BIRLING - *smiling*: Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you. Gerald.
Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing
room and leave you men.

95 BIRLING - *rather heavily*: I just want to say this. [*Noticing that Sheila is still admiring her
ring*]: Are you listening, Sheila? This concerns you too. And after all I don't often make
speeches at you.

SHEILA: I'm sorry, daddy. Actually I was listening. [*She looks attentive, as they all do. He
holds them for a moment before continuing.*]

100 BIRLING: I'm delighted about this engagement and I hope it won't be too long before you're
married. And I want to say this. There's a good deal of silly talk about these days - but -
and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about
- I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry, you'll be marrying at a
very good time. Yes, a very good time - and soon it'll be an even better time. Last month,
105 just because the miners came out on strike, there's a lot of wild talk about possible labour
trouble in the near future. Don't worry. We've passed the worst of it. We employers at last
are coming together to see that our interests - and the interests of capital - are properly
protected. And we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.

GERALD: I believe you're right, sir.

110 ERIC: What about war?

BIRLING: Glad you mentioned it. Eric. I'm coming to that. Just because the kaiser makes a
speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin taking
nonsense, you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say - fiddlesticks!
The Germans don't want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilized folks in the
115 Balkans. And why? There's too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to
gain by war.

ERIC: Yes, I know - but still ...

BIRLING: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I'm taking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war. The world's developing so fast that it'll make war impossible. Look at the progress we're making. In a year or two we'll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the automobile's making headway - bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week - the Titanic - she sails next week - forty-six thousand eight hundred tons - new York in five days - and every luxury - and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. That's what you've got to keep your eye on, facts like that, progress like that - and not a few German officers taking nonsense and a few scaremongers here making a fuss about nothing. Now you three young people, just listen to this - and remember what I'm telling you now. In twenty or thirty years' time - let's say, in 1940 - you may be giving a little party like this - your son or daughter might be getting engaged - and I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these capital versus labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere - except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.

MRS BIRLING: Arthur!

BIRLING: Yes, my dear, I know - I'm talking too much. But you youngsters just remember what I said. We can't let these Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses do all the talking. We hard-headed practical business men must say something sometime. And we don't guess - we've had experience - and we know.

MRS BIRLING - rising. The others rise: Yes, of course, dear. Well don't keep Gerald in here too long. Eric - I want you a minute.

[She and Sheila and Eric go out. Birling and Gerald sit down again.]

BIRLING: Cigar?

GERALD: No, thanks. Can't really enjoy them.

BIRLING - taking one himself: Ah, you don't know what you're missing. I like a good cigar.

[Indicating the decanter]: Help yourself.

GERALD: Thank you. *[Birling lights his cigar and Gerald, who had lit a cigarette, helps himself to port, then pushes the decanter to Birling.]*

BIRLING: Thanks. *[Confidentially]:* By the way, there's something I'd like to mention - in strict confidence - while we're by ourselves. I have an idea that your mother - Lady Croft - while she doesn't object to my girl - feels you might have done better for yourself socially ... *[Gerald, rather embarrassed, begins to murmur some dissent, but Birling checks him.]* No, Gerald, that's all right. Don't blame her. She comes from an old country family - landed people and so forth - and so it's only natural. But what I wanted to say is - there's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next honours list. Just a knighthood, of course.

GERALD: Oh - I say - congratulations!

BIRLING: Thanks, but it's a bit too early for that. So don't say anything. But I've had a hint or two. You see, I was Lord Mayor here two years ago when royalty visited us. And I've always been regarded as a sound useful party man. So - well - I gather there's a very good chance of a knighthood - so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal - eh? *[Laughs complacently]*

GERALD - laughs: You seem to be a nice well-behaved family.

BIRLING: We think we are.

GERALD: So if that's the only obstacle, sir, I think you might as well accept my congratulations now.

BIRLING: No, no, I couldn't do that. And don't say anything yet.

GERALD: Not even to my mother? I know she'd be delighted.

BIRLING: Well, when she comes back, you might drop a hint to her. And you can promise her that we'll try to keep out of trouble during the next few months. *[They both laugh. Eric*

enters.]

170 ERIC: What's the joke? Started telling stories?

BIRLING: No. want another glass of port?

ERIC - *sitting down*: Yes, please, (takes decanter and helps himself.: mother says we mustn't stay too long. But I don't think it matters. I left'em talking about clothes again. You'd think a girl had never any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em.

175 BIRLING: Yes, but you've got to remember, my boy, that clothes mean something quite different to a woman. Not just something to wear - and not only something to make 'em look prettier - but - well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.

GERALD: That's true.

ERIC - *eagerly*: Yes, I remember. [*He checks himself.*]

180 BIRLING: Well, what do you remember?

ERIC - *confused*: Nothing.

BIRLING: Nothing?

GERALD - *amused*: Sounds a bit fishy to me.

185 BIRLING - *taking it in the same manner*: Yes, you don't know what some of these boys get up to nowadays. More money to spend and time to spare than I had when I was Eric's age. They worked us hard in those days and kept us short of cash. Thought even then - we broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes.

GERALD: I'll bet you did.

190 BIRLING - *solemnly*: But this is the point. I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now. when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way - has to look after himself - and his family too, of course, when he has one - and so long as he does that he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive - community and all that nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters - and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience - that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own - and ... [*There is the sharp ring of a door bell. Birling stops to listen.*]

195 ERIC: Somebody at the front door.

200 BIRLING: Edna'll answer it. Well, have another glass of port, Gerald - and then we'll join the ladies. That'll stop me giving you good advice.

ERIC: Yes, you've piled it on a bit tonight, father.

BIRLING: Special occasion. And feeling contented, for once. I wanted you to have the benefit of my experience. [*Edna enters.*]

EDNA: Please, sir, an Inspector's called.

205 BIRLING: An inspector? What kind of inspector?

EDNA: A police inspector. He says his name's Inspector Goole.

BIRLING: Don't know him. Does he want to see me?

EDNA: Yes, sir. He says it's important.

210 BIRLING: All right, Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light. [*Edna does, then goes out.*] I'm still on the bench. It may be something about a warrant.

GERALD - *lightly*: Sure to be. Unless Eric's been up to something ... [*nodding confidentially to Birling*] ... and that would be awkward, wouldn't it?

BIRLING - *humorously*: Very.

ERIC - *who is uneasy, sharply*: Here, what do you mean?

215 GERALD - *lightly*: Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.

ERIC - *still uneasy*: Well, I don't think it's very funny.

BIRLING - *sharply, staring at him*: What's the matter with you?

ERIC - *defiantly*: Nothing.

EDNA - *opening door, and announcing*: Inspector Goole.

- 220 *[The inspector enters, and Edna goes, closing door after her. The inspector need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.]*
- 225 INSPECTOR: Mr Birling?
BIRLING: Yes. Sit down inspector.
INSPECTOR - *sitting*: Thank you, sir.
BIRLING: Have a glass of port - or a little whisky?
INSPECTOR: No. thank you. Mr Birling. I'm on duty.
- 230 BIRLING: You're new, aren't you?
INSPECTOR: Yes, sir. Only recently transferred.
BIRLING: I thought you must be. I was an alderman for years - and lord mayor two years ago - and I'm still on the bench - so I know the Brumley police officers pretty well - and I thought I'd never seen you before.
- 235 INSPECTOR: Quite so.
BIRLING: Well, what can I do for you? Some trouble about a warrant? INSPECTOR: No, Mr Birling.
BIRLING - *after a pause, with a touch of impatience*: Well, what is it then?
INSPECTOR: I'd like some information, if you don't mind, Mr Birling. Two hours ago a young woman died on the infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd
- 240 swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course.
ERIC - *involuntarily*: My God!
INSPECTOR: Yes, she was in great agony. They did everything they could for her at the infirmary, but she died. Suicide, of course.
- 245 BIRLING - *rather impatiently*: Yes, yes. Horrid business. But I don't understand why you should come here, inspector-
INSPECTOR - *cutting through, massively*: I've been round to the room she had, and she'd left a letter there and a sort of diary. Like a lot of these young women who get into various kinds of trouble, she'd used more than one name. But her original name - her real name - was Eva Smith.
- 250 BIRLING - *thoughtfully*: Eva Smith?
INSPECTOR: Do you remember her, Mr Birling?
BIRLING - *slowly*: No - I seem to remember hearing that name - Eva Smith -somewhere. But it doesn't convey anything to me. And I don't see where I come into this.
INSPECTOR: She was employed in your works at one time.
- 255 BIRLING: Oh - that's it, is it? Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing.
INSPECTOR: This young women, Eva Smith, was out of the ordinary. I found a photograph of her in her lodgings. Perhaps you'd remember her from that.
- 260 *[The inspector takes a photograph, about postcard size, out of his pocket and goes to Birling. Both Gerald and Eric rise to have a look at the photograph, but the inspector interposes himself between them and the photograph. They are surprised and rather annoyed. Birling stares hard, and with recognition, at the photograph, which the inspector then replaces in his pocket.]*
GERALD - *showing annoyance*: Any particular reason why I shouldn't see this girl's photograph,
- 265 Inspector?
INSPECTOR - *coolly, looking hard at him*: There might be.
ERIC: And the same applies to me, I suppose?
INSPECTOR: Yes.
GERALD: I can't imagine what it could be.
- 270 ERIC: Neither can I.

BIRLING: And I must say, I agree with them, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: It's the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise, there's a muddle.

275 BIRLING: I see. Sensible really. [*He moves restlessly, then turns.*] You've had enough of that port, Eric. [*The inspector is watching Birling and now Birling takes notice of him.*]

INSPECTOR: I think you remember Eva Smith now don't you, Mr Birling?

BIRLING: Yes, I do. She was one of my employees and then I discharged her.

ERIC: Is that why she committed suicide? When was this, father?

280 BIRLING: Just keep quiet, Eric, and don't get excited. This girl left us nearly two years ago. Let me see - it must have been in the early autumn of nineteen-ten.

INSPECTOR: Yes. End of September, nineteen-ten.

BIRLING: That's right.

GERALD: Look here, sir. Wouldn't you rather I was out of this?

285 BIRLING: I don't mind your being here, Gerald. And I'm sure you've no objection, have you, Inspector? Perhaps I ought to explain first that this is Mr Gerald Croft - the son of Sir George Croft - you know, Crofts limited.

INSPECTOR: Mr Gerald Croft, eh?

BIRLING: Yes. Incidentally we've been modestly celebrating his engagement to my daughter. Sheila.

290 INSPECTOR: I see. Mr Croft is going to marry Miss Sheila Birling?

GERALD - *smiling*: I hope so.

INSPECTOR - *gravely*: Then I'd prefer you to stay.

GERALD - *surprised*: Oh - all right.

295 BIRLING - *somewhat impatiently*: Look - there's nothing mysterious - or scandalous about this business - at least not so far as I'm concerned. It's perfectly straightforward case, and as it happened more than eighteen months ago - nearly two years ago - obviously it has nothing whatever to do with the wretched girl's suicide. Eh, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: No, sir. I can't agree with you there.

BIRLING: Why not?

300 INSPECTOR: Because what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.

305 BIRLING: Oh well - put like that, there's something in what you say. Still, I can't accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?

INSPECTOR: Very awkward.

BIRLING: We'd all be in an impossible position, wouldn't we?

ERIC: By Jove, yes. And as you were saying, dad, a man has to look after himself-

BIRLING: Yes, well, we needn't go into all that.

310 INSPECTOR: Go into what?

BIRLING: Oh - just before you came - I'd been giving these young men a little good advice. Now - about this girl, Eva Smith. I remember her quite well now. She was a lively good-looking girl - country-bred, I fancy - and she'd been working in one of our machine shops for over a year. A good worker too. In fact, the foreman there told me he was ready to promote her
315 into what we call a leading operator - head of a small group of girls. But after they came back from their holidays that August, they were all rather restless, and they suddenly decided to ask for more money. They were averaging about twenty-two and six, which was neither more nor less than is paid generally in our industry. They wanted the rates raised so that they could average about twenty-five shillings a week. I refused, of course.

320 INSPECTOR: Why?

BIRLING - *surprised*: Did you say 'why?' ?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Why did you refuse?

BIRLING: Well, Inspector. I don't see that it's any concern of yours how I choose to run my business. Is it now?

325 INSPECTOR: It might be, you know.

BIRLING: I don't like that tone.

INSPECTOR: I'm sorry. But you asked me a question.

BIRLING: And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too.

INSPECTOR: It's my duty to ask questions.

330 BIRLING: Well it's my duty to keep labour costs down. And if I'd agreed to this demand for a new rate we'd have added about twelve per cent to our labour costs. Does that satisfy you? So I refused. Said I couldn't consider it. We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else. It's a free country, I told them.

ERIC: It isn't if you can't go and work somewhere else. INSPECTOR: Quite so.

335 BIRLING - *to Eric*: Look - just you keep out of this. You hadn't even started in the works when this happened. So they went on strike. That didn't last long, of course.

GERALD: Not if it was just after the holidays. They'd be all broke - if I know them.

340 BIRLING: Right, Gerald. They mostly were. And so was the strike, after a week or two. Pitiful affair. Well, we let them all come back - at the old rates - except the four or five ring-leaders, who'd started the trouble. I went down myself and told them to clear out. And this girl. Eva Smith, was one of them, she'd had a lot to say - far too much - so she had to go.

GERALD: You couldn't have done anything else.

ERIC: He could. He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck.

345 BIRLING: Rubbish! If you don't comedown sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth.

GERALD: I should say so!

INSPECTOR: They might. But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it.

BIRLING - *staring at THE INSPECTOR*: What did you say your name was, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Goole. G-double O-L-E.

350 BIRLING: How do you get on with our chief constable, colonel Roberts?

INSPECTOR: I don't see much of him.

BIRLING: Perhaps I ought to warn you that he's an old friend of mine, and that I see him fairly frequently. We play golf together sometimes up at the west Brumley.

INSPECTOR - *dryly*: I don't play golf.

355 BIRLING: I didn't suppose you did.

ERIC - *bursting out*: Well, I think it's a dam' shame.

INSPECTOR: No, I've never wanted to play.

360 ERIC: No, I mean about this girl - Eva Smith. Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices. And I don't see why she should have been sacked just because she'd a bit more spirit than the others. You said yourself she was a good worker. I'd have let her stay.

365 BIRLING - *rather angrily*: Unless you brighten your ideas, you'll never be in a position to let anybody stay or to tell anybody to go. It's about time you learnt to face a few responsibilities. That's something this public-school-and-varsity life you've had doesn't seem to teach you.

ERIC - *sulkily*: Well, we don't need to tell THE INSPECTOR all about that, do we?

BIRLING: I don't see we need to tell the inspector anything more. In fact, there's nothing I can tell him. I told the girl to clear out, and she went. That's the last I heard of her. Have you any idea what happened to her after that? Get into trouble? Go on the streets?

370 INSPECTOR - *rather slowly*: No, she didn't exactly go on the streets. [*Sheila has now entered.*]

SHEILA - *gaily*: What's this about streets? [*Noticing THE INSPECTOR.*]: Oh - sorry. I didn't know. Mummy sent me in to ask you why you didn't come along to the drawing-room.

BIRLING: We shall be along in a minute now. Just finishing.

INSPECTOR: I'm afraid not.

375 BIRLING - *abruptly*: There's nothing else, I know. I've just told you that.

SHEILA: What's all this about?

BIRLING: Nothing to do with you. Sheila. Run along.

INSPECTOR: No, wait a minute, Miss Birling.

380 BIRLING - *angrily*: Look here, Inspector, I consider this uncalled-for and officious. I've half a mind to report you. I've told you all I know - and it doesn't seem to me very important - and now there isn't the slightest reason why my daughter should be dragged into this unpleasant business.

SHEILA - *coming father in*: What business? What's happening?

385 INSPECTOR - *impressively*: I'm a police inspector, Miss Birling. This afternoon a young woman drank some disinfectant, and died, after several hours of agony, tonight in the infirmary.

SHEILA: Oh - how horrible! Was it an accident?

INSPECTOR: No. she wanted to end her life. She felt she couldn't go on any longer.

BIRLING: Well, don't tell me that's because I discharged her from my employment nearly two years ago.

390 ERIC: That might have started it.

SHEILA: Did you, dad?

BIRLING: Yes. The girl had been causing trouble in the works. I was quite justified.

GERALD: Yes, I think you were. I know we'd have done the same thing. Don't look like that Sheila.

395 SHEILA - *rather distressed*: Sorry! It's just that I can't help thinking about this girl - destroying herself so horribly - and I've been so happy tonight. Oh, I wish you hadn't told me. What was she like? Quite young?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Twenty-four.

SHEILA: Pretty?

400 INSPECTOR: She wasn't pretty when I saw her today, but she had been pretty - very pretty.

BIRLING: That's enough of that.

GERALD: And I don't really see that this inquiry gets you anywhere, inspector. It's what happened to her since she left Mr Birling's works that is important.

BIRLING: Obviously. I suggested that sometime ago.

405 GERALD: And we can't help you there because we don't know.

INSPECTOR - *slowly*: Are you sure you don't know. [*He looks at Gerald, then at Eric, then at Sheila.*]

BIRLING: And are you suggesting now that one of them knows something about this girl?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

410 BIRLING: You didn't come here just to see me, then?

INSPECTOR: No. [*The other four exchange bewildered and perturbed glances.*]

415 BIRLING - *with marked change of tone*: Well, of course, if I'd known that earlier, I wouldn't have called you officious and talked about reporting you. You understand that, don't you, Inspector? I thought that - for some reason best known to yourself - you were making the most of this tiny bit of information I could give you. I'm sorry. This makes a difference. You sure of your facts?

INSPECTOR: Some of them - yes.

BIRLING: I can't think they can be of any great consequence.

INSPECTOR: The girl's dead though.

420 SHEILA: What do you mean by saying that? You talk as if we were responsible.

BIRLING - *cutting in*: Just a minute, Sheila. Now, Inspector, perhaps you and I had better go and talk this over quietly in a corner-

SHEILA - *cutting in*: Why should you? He's finished with you. He says it's one of us now.

BIRLING: Yes, and I'm trying to settle it sensibly for you.

425 GERALD: Well, there's nothing to settle as far as I'm concerned. I've never known an Eva Smith.

ERIC: Neither have I.

SHEILA: Was that her name? Eva Smith?

GERALD: Yes.

SHEILA: Never heard it before.

430 GERALD: So were are you now, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Where I was before, Mr. Croft. I told you - that like a lot of these young women, she'd used more than one name. She was still Eva Smith when Mr Birling sacked her - for wanting twenty-five shillings a week instead of twenty-two and six. But after that she stopped being Eva Smith. Perhaps she'd had enough of it.

435 ERIC: Can't blame her.

SHEILA - *to Birling*: I think it was a mean thing to do. Perhaps that spoilt everything for her.

BIRLING: Rubbish! [*To the inspector:*] Do you know what happened to this girl after she left my works?

440 INSPECTOR: Yes. She was out of work for the next two months. Both her parents were dead, so that she'd no home to go back to. And she hadn't been able to save much out of what Birling and Company had paid her. So that after two months, with no work, no money coming in. and living in lodgings, with no relatives to help her, few friends, lonely, half-starved, she was feeling desperate.

SHEILA - *warmly*: I should think so. It's a rotten shame.

445 INSPECTOR: There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence in every city and big town in this country, miss Birling. If there weren't, the factories and warehouses wouldn't know were to look for cheap labour. Ask your father.

SHEILA: But these girls aren't cheap labour - they're people.

450 INSPECTOR - *dryly*: I've had that notion myself from time to time. In fact, I've thought that it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies, in their dingy little back bedrooms.

SHEILA: Yes, I expect it would. But what happened to her then?

INSPECTOR: She had what seemed to her a wonderful stroke of luck. She was taken on in a shop - and a good shop too - Milwards.

455 SHEILA: Milwards! We go there - in fact, I was there this afternoon ... [*archly to Gerald*] ... for your benefit.

GERALD - *smiling*: Good!

SHEILA: Yes, she was a lucky to get taken on at Milwards.

460 INSPECTOR: That's what she thought. And it happened that at the beginning of December that year - nineteen-ten - there was a good deal of influenza about and Milwards suddenly found themselves short handed. So that gave her a chance. It seems she liked working there. It was nice change from a factory. She enjoyed being among pretty clothes, I've no doubt. And now she felt she was making a good fresh start. You can imagine how she felt.

SHEILA: Yes, of course.

465 BIRLING: And then she got herself into trouble there, I suppose?

INSPECTOR: After about a couple of months, just when she felt she was settling down nicely, they told her she'd have to go.

BIRLING: Not doing her work properly?

470 INSPECTOR: There was nothing wrong with the way she was doing her work. They admitted that.

BIRLING: There must have been something wrong.

INSPECTOR: All she knew was - that a customer complained about her - and so she had to go.

SHEILA - *staring at him, agitated*: When was this?

INSPECTOR - *impressively*: At the end of January - last year.

475 SHEILA: What - what did this girl look like?

INSPECTOR: If you'll come over here, I'll show you.

[He moves nearer a light - perhaps standard lamp- and she crosses to him. He produces the photograph. She looks at it closely, recognizes it with a little cry, gives a half-stifled sob, and then runs out. The inspector puts the photograph back in his pocket and stares speculatively after her. The other three stare in amazement for a moment.]

480 BIRLING: What's the matter with her?

ERIC: She recognized her from the photograph, didn't she?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

BIRLING - *angrily*: Why the devil do you want to go upsetting the child like that?

485 INSPECTOR: I didn't do it. She's upsetting herself.

BIRLING: Well - why - why?

INSPECTOR: I don't know - yet. That's something I have to find out.

BIRLING - *still angrily*: Well - if you don't mind - I'll find out first.

GERALD: Shall I go after her.

490 BIRLING - *moving*: No. leave this to me. I must also have a word with my wife - tell her what's happening, (turns at the door, staring at the inspector angrily.: We were having a nice family celebration tonight. And a nasty mess you've made of it now, haven't you?

INSPECTOR - *steadily*: That's more or less what I was thinking earlier tonight when I was in the infirmary looking at what was left of Eva Smith. A nice little promising life there, I thought, and a nasty mess somebody's made of it.

495 *[Birling looks as if about to make some retort, then thinks better of it, and goes out, closing door sharply behind him. Gerald and Eric exchange uneasy glances. THE INSPECTOR ignores them.]*

GERALD: I'd like to have a look at that photograph now, inspector.

500 INSPECTOR: All in good time.

GERALD: I don't see why ...

INSPECTOR - *cutting in, massively*: You heard what I said before, M Croft. One line of inquiry at a time. Otherwise we'll all be taking at once and won't know where we are. If you've anything to tell me. you'll have an opportunity of doing it soon.

505 GERALD - *rather uneasily*: Well, I don't suppose I have ...

ERIC - *suddenly bursting out*: I'm sorry - but you see - we were having a little party -and I've had a few drinks, including rather a lot of champagne - and I've got a headache -and as I'm only in the way here - I think I'd better turn in.

INSPECTOR: And I think you'd better stay here.

510 ERIC: Why should I?

INSPECTOR: It might be less trouble. If you turn in, you might have to turn out again soon.

GERALD: Getting a bit heavy-handed, aren't you, inspector?

INSPECTOR: Possibly. But if you're easy with me, I'm easy with you.

GERALD: After all, y'know, we're respectable citizens and not criminals.

515 INSPECTOR: Sometimes there isn't much difference as you think. Often, if it was left to me, I wouldn't know where to draw the line.

GERALD: Fortunately, it isn't left to you, is it?

INSPECTOR: No, it isn't. But some things are left to me. Inquiries of this sort, for instance.

[Enter Sheila, who looks as if she's been crying.] Well, Miss Birling?

520 SHEILA - *coming in and closing the door*: You knew it was me all the time, didn't you?

INSPECTOR: I had an idea it might be - from something the girl herself wrote.

SHEILA: I've told my father - he didn't seem to think it amounted to much - but I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse. Did it make much difference to her?

525 INSPECTOR: Yes, I'm afraid it did. It was the last real steady job she had. When she lost it - for no reason that she could discover - she decided she might as well try another kind of life.

SHEILA - *miserably*: So I'm really responsible?

INSPECTOR: No, not entirely. A good deal happened to her after that. But you're partly to blame. Just as your father is.

ERIC: But what did Sheila do?

530 SHEILA - *distressed*: I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again and I'd persuade mother to close our account with them.

INSPECTOR: And why did you do that?

SHEILA: Because I was in a furious temper.

535 INSPECTOR: And what had this girl done to make you lose your temper.

SHEILA: When I was looking at myself in the mirror I caught sight of her smiling at the assistant, and I was furious with her. I'd been in a bad temper anyhow.

INSPECTOR: And was it the girls fault?

540 SHEILA: No, not really. It was my own fault. [*suddenly, to Gerald:*] All right, Gerald, you needn't look at me like that. At least, I'm trying to tell the truth. I expect you've done things you're ashamed of too.

GERALD - *surprised*: Well. I never said I hadn't. I don't see why ...

INSPECTOR - *cutting in*: Never mind about that. You can settle that between you afterwards. [*to Sheila:*] What happened?

545 SHEILA: I'd gone in to try something on. It was an idea of my own - mother had been against it, and so had the assistant - but I insisted. As soon as I tried it on, I knew they'd been right. It just didn't suit me at all. I looked silly in the thing. Well, this girl had brought the dress up from the workroom, and when the assistant- miss Francis- had asked her something about it, this girl, to show us what she meant, had held the dress up, as if she was wearing it.
550 And it just suited her. She was the right type for it, just as I was the wrong type. She was very pretty too - with big dark eyes - and that didn't make it any better. Well, when I tried the thing on and looked at myself and knew that it was all wrong, I caught sight of this girl smiling at miss Francis - as if to say: 'doesn't she look awful' - and I was absolutely furious. I was very rude to both of them, and then I went to the manager and told him that this girl
555 had been very impertinent - and - and - [*She almost breaks down and only just controls herself.*] How could I know what would happen afterwards? If she'd been some miserable plain little creature, I don't suppose I'd have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her.

INSPECTOR: In fact, in a kind of way, you might be said to have been jealous of her.

560 SHEILA: Yes, I suppose so.

INSPECTOR: And so you used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer and also of a man well known in the town, to punish the girl just because she made you feel like that?

SHEILA: Yes, but it didn't seem to be anything very terrible at the time. Don't you understand? And if I could help her now, I would ...

565 INSPECTOR - *harshly*: Yes, but you can't. It's too late. She's dead.

ERIC: My God, it's a bit thick, when you *come* to think of it ...

SHEILA - *stormily*: Oh shut up, Eric. I know! I know! It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody. I've noticed them giving me a sort of look sometimes at Milwards - I noticed it even this afternoon - and I suppose some of them
570 remember. I feel now I can never go there again. Oh - why had this to happen?

INSPECTOR - *sternly*: That's what I asked myself tonight when I was looking at that dead girl. And then I said to myself: 'Well, we'll try to understand why it had to happen?' and that's why I'm here, and why I'm, not going until I know all that happened. Eva Smith lost her job with Birling and Company because the strike failed and they were determined not to have
575 another one. At last she found another job - under what name I don't know - in a big shop, and had to leave there because you were annoyed with yourself and passed the annoyance

on to her. Now she had to try something else. So first she changed her name to Daisy Renton ...

GERALD - *startled*: What?

580 INSPECTOR - *steadily*: I said she changed her name to Daisy Renton.

GERALD - pulling himself together: D'you mind if I give myself a drink, Sheila?

[Sheila merely nods, still staring at him, and he goes across to the tandalus on the sideboard for a whisky.]

INSPECTOR: Where is your father, Miss Birling?

585 SHEILA: He went into the drawing room, to tell mother what was happening here. Eric, take the inspector along to the drawing-room. *[Eric leaves with the inspector.]* Well, Gerald?

GERALD - *trying to smile*: Well what, Sheila?

SHEILA: How did you come to know this girl - Eva Smith?

GERALD: I didn't.

590 SHEILA: Daisy Renton then - it's the same thing.

GERALD: Why should I have to know her?

SHEILA: Oh don't be stupid. We haven't much time. You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name.

GERALD: All right. I knew her. Let's leave it at that.

595 SHEILA: We can't leave it at that.

GERALD - *approaching her*: Now listen, darling ...

SHEILA: No, that's no use. You not only knew her but you knew her very well. Otherwise, you wouldn't look so guilty about it. When did you first get to know her? *[He does not reply.]*

600 Was it after she left Milwards? When she changed her name, as he said, and began to lead a different sort of life? Were you seeing her last spring and summer, during that time you hardly came near me and said you were so busy? Were you? *[Gerald does not reply but looks at her.]* Yes, of course you were.

GERALD: I'm sorry. Sheila. But it was all over and done with, last summer. I hadn't set eyes on the girl for at least six months. I don't come into this suicide business.

605 SHEILA: I thought I didn't half an hour ago.

GERALD: You don't. Neither of us does. So - for God's sake - don't say anything to the inspector.

SHEILA: About you and this girl?

GERALD: Yes. We can keep it from him.

610 SHEILA - *laughs rather hysterically*: Why - you fool - he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see. You'll see.

[She looks at him almost in triumph. He looks crushed. The doors slowly opens and the inspector appears, looking steadily and searchingly at them.]

INSPECTOR: Well?

END OF ACT ONE