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opening extract from

An Inspector Calls

written by

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ACT ONE

The dining-room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike. (If a realistic set is used, then it should be swung back, as it was in the Old Vic production at the New Theatre. By doing this, you can have the dining-table centre downstage during Act One, when it is needed there, and then, swinging back, can reveal the fireplace for Act Two, and then for Act Three can show a small table with telephone on it, downstage of fireplace; and by this time the dining-table and its chairs have moved well upstage. Producers who wish to avoid this tricky business, which involves two re-settings of the scene and some very accurate adjustments of the extra flats necessary, would be well advised to dispense with an ordinary realistic set, if only because the dining-table becomes a nuisance. The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR *arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.)*

At rise of curtain, the four BIRLINGS *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 parlour-maid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of 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 his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his 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 easy 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.*

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

SHEILA [*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?

BIRLING [*noticing that his wife has not taken any*]: Now then, Sybil, you must 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 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.

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 mock aggressiveness*]: Go on, Gerald – just you object!

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.

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.

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.

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?

BIRLING: Yes, of course. [*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 – er – 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.

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.

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.

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.

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 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 [*quiet and serious now*]: All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.

[*For a moment they look at each other.*]

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?

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 ring on, admiringly*]: I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

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 –

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.*]

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, 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.

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 talking 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 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 talking 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 – 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 talking 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!

[*As* MRS BIRLING *shows signs of interrupting*]

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 decanter*] Help yourself.

GERALD: Thank you.

[BIRLING *lights his cigar and* GERALD, *who has lit a cigarette, helps himself to port then pushes 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 county 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.*]

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

never had any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em.

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 – [*but he checks himself.*]

BIRLING: Well, what do you remember?

ERIC [*confused*]: Nothing.

BIRLING: Nothing?

GERALD [*amused*]: Sounds a bit fishy to me.

BIRLING [*taking it in 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. Though even then – we broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes.

GERALD: I'll bet you did.

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 –

[*We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell.* BIRLING *stops to listen.*]

ERIC: Somebody at the front door.

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.

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.

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?

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.

[*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.*]

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.

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.

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 in the Infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd 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.

BIRLING [*rather impatiently*]: Yes, yes. Horrible 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.

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.

BIRLING: Oh – that's it, is it? Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing.

INSPECTOR: This young woman, Eva Smith, was a bit out of the ordinary. I found a photograph of her in her lodgings. Perhaps you'd remember her from that.

[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, 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.

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.

BIRLING: I see. Sensible really. [*Moves restlessly, then turns.*] You've had enough of that port, Eric.

[*The* INSPECTOR *is watching* BIRLING *and now* BIRLING *notices 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?

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?

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.

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.

BIRLING [*somewhat impatiently*]: Look – there's nothing mysterious – or scandalous – about this business – at least not so far as I'm concerned. It's a 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?

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.

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.

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 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.

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?

INSPECTOR: It might be, you know.

BIRLING: I don't like the 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.

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.

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.

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 ringleaders, 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.

BIRLING: Rubbish! If you don't come down 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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

BIRLING [*abruptly*]: There's nothing else, y'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.

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.