**The Inspector interviews Sheila:**

Birling: Rubbish! (*to* inspector.) Do you know what happened to this girl after she left my works?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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*.//

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?

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.

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.

// 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 e*xchange uneasy glances. The* inspector *ignores them*.//

Gerald: I’d like to have a look at that photograph now, inspector.

Inspector: All in good time.

Gerald: I don't see why -

Inspector: (*cutting in, massively*) You heard what I said before, Mr 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.

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.

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.

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?

Sheila: (*coming in, 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?

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?

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.

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?

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?

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. 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 had been very impertinent – and – and – (*she almost breaks down, but 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.

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---

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 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 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?

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 tantalus on the sideboard for a whisky.*//

Inspector: Where is your father, Miss Birling?

Sheila: He went into the drawing room, to tell mother what was happening here. Eric, take the inspector along to the drawing-room.

// *As* Eric *moves, the inspector looks from* Sheila *to* Gerald, *then* *goes out with Eric.*//

**The Inspector interviews Mrs Birling (Part 1):**

// *he regards her calmly while she stares at him wonderingly and dubiously. Now Mrs Birling. Enters, briskly and self-confidently, quite out of key with the little scene that has just passed. Sheila feels this at once*.//

Mrs Birling: (*smiling social*) Good evening inspector.

Inspector: good evening, madam.

Mrs Birling: (*same easy tone*) I'm Mrs Birling, y'know. My husband has just explained why you're here, and while we'll be glad to tell you anything you want to know, I don't think we can help you much.

Sheila: No. mother – please!

Mrs Birling: (*affecting great surprise*) what's the matter, Sheila?

Sheila:(*hesitantly*) I know it sounds silly--

Mrs Birling: what does?

Sheila: you see, I feel you're beginning all wrong. And I'm afraid you'll say or do something that you'll be sorry for afterwards.

Mrs Birling: I don't know what you're talking about, sheila.

Sheila: we all started like that – so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions.

// *Mrs Birling looks from sheila to the inspector*.//

Mrs Birling: you seem to have made a great impression on this child, inspector.

Inspector: (*coolly*) we often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.

//*He and Mrs Birling look at each other for a moment. Then Mrs Birling turns to sheila again*//

Mrs Birling: you're looking tired, dear. I think you ought to go to bed – and forget about this absurd business. You'll feel better in the morning.

Sheila: mother, I couldn't possibly go. Nothing could be worse for me. We've settled all that. I'm staying here until I know why that girl killed herself.

Mrs Birling: nothing but morbid curiosity.

Sheila: no it isn't.

Mrs Birling: please don't contradict me like that. And in any case I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class--

Sheila:(*urgently, cutting in*) mother, don't – please don't. For your own sake, as well as ours, you mustn't--

Mrs Birling: (*annoyed*) mustn't – what? Really, sheila!

Sheila: (*slowly, carefully now*) you mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do, then the inspector will just break it down. And it'll be all the worse when he does.

Mrs Birling: I don't understand you. ( *to inspector.*) Do you?

Inspector: yes. And she'd right.

Mrs Birling: (*haughtily*) I beg your pardon!

Inspector: (*very plainly*) I said yes – I do understand her. And she's right.

Mrs Birling: that – I consider – is a trifle impertinent, inspector.

// *sheila gives short hysterical laugh*//

now, what is it, sheila?

Sheila: I don't know. Perhaps it's because impertinent is such a silly word.

Mrs Birling: in any case....

Sheila: but, mother, do stop before it's too late.

Mrs Birling: if you mean that the inspector will take offence-

inspector: (*cutting in, clamly*) no, no. I never take offence.

Mrs Birling: i'm glad to hear it. Though I must add that it seems to me that we have more reason for taking offence.

Inspector: let's leave offence out of it, shall we?

Gerald: I think we'd better.

Sheila: so do I.

Mrs Birling: (*rebulking them*) I'm talking to the inspector now, if you don't mind. (*to inspector, rather grandly*.) I realize that you may have to conduct some sort of inquiry, but I must say that so far you seem to be conducting in a rather peculiar and offensive manner. You know of course that my husband was lord mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate--

Gerald: (*cutting, rather impatiently*) Mrs Birling, the inspector knows all that. And I don't think it's a very good idea to remind him--

Sheila: (*cutting in*) It's crazy. Stop it, please, mother.

Inspector: (*imperturbable*) Yes. Now what about Mr Birling?

Mrs Birling: He's coming back in a moment. He's just talking to my son, Eric, who seems to be in an excitable silly mood.

Inspector: What's the matter with him?

Mrs Birling: Eric? Oh – I'm afraid he may have had rather too much to drink tonight. We were having a little celebration here--

inspector: (*cutting in*) isn't he used to drinking?

Mrs Birling: No, of course not. He's only a boy.

Inspector: No, he's a young man. And some young men drink far too much.

Sheila: And Eric's one of them.

Mrs Birling: (*very sharply*) Sheila!

Sheila:(*urgently*) I don't want to get poor Eric into trouble. He's probably in enough trouble already. But we really must stop these silly pretences. This isn't the time to pretend that Eric isn't used to drink. He's been steadily drinking too much for the last two years.

Mrs Birling: (*staggered*) it isn't true. You know him, Gerald -and you're a man – you must know it isn't true.

Inspector:(*as Gerald hesitates*) Well, Mr Croft?

Gerald: (*apologetically, to* Mrs Birling) I'm afraid it is, y'know. Actually I've never seen much of him outside this house – but- well, I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard.

Mrs Birling: (*bitterly*) And this is the time you choose to tell me.

Sheila: yes, of course it is. That's what I meant when I talked about building up a wall that's sure to be knocked flat. It makes it all harder to bear.

Mrs Birling: But it's you – and not the inspector here – who's doing it--

Sheila: yes, but don't you see? He hasn't started on you yet.

Mrs Birling: (*after a pause, recovering herself*) if necessary I shall be glad to answer any questions the inspector wishes to ask me. Though naturally I don't know anything about this girl.

Inspector: (*gravely*) we'll see, Mrs Birling.

**The Inspector interviews Mrs Birling (Part 2):**

// *he goes out. They watch him go in silence. We hear the front door slam.*//

Sheila: ( *to* inspector) you know, you never showed him that photograph of her.

Inspector: No. it wasn't necessary. And I thought it better not to.

Mrs Birling: you have a photograph of this girl?

Inspector: Yes. I think you'd better look at it.

Mrs Birling: I don't see any particular reason why I should-

Inspector: probably not. But you'd better look at it.

Mrs Birling: very well. (*he produces the photograph and she looks hard at it*.)

inspector: (*taking back the photograph*) you recognize her?

Mrs Birling: No. why should I?

Inspector: of course she might have changed lately, but I can't believe she could have changed so much.

Mrs Birling: I don't understand you, Inspector.

Inspector: you mean you don't choose to do, Mrs Birling.

Mrs Birling: (*angrily*) I meant what I said.

Inspector: you're not telling me the truth.

Mrs Birling: I beg your pardon!

Birling: (*angrily, to* Inspector) Look here, I'm not going to have this, Inspector. You'll apologize at once.

Inspector: Apologize for what – doing my duty?

Birling: No, for being so offensive about it. I'm a public man-

Inspector: (*massively*) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.

Birling: Possibly. But you weren't asked to come here to talk to me about my reponsibilities.

Sheila: Let's hope not. Though I'm beginning to wonder.

Mrs Birling: Does that mean anything, sheila?

Sheila: it means that we've no excuse now for putting on airs and that if we've any sense we won't try. Father threw this girl out because she asked for decent wages. I went and pushed her farther out, right into the street, just because I was angry and she was pretty. Gerald set her up as his mistress and then dropped her when it suited him. And now you're pretending you don't recognize her from that photograph. I admit I don't know why you should, but I know jolly well you did in fact recognize her, from the way you looked. And if you're not telling the truth, why should the Inspector apologize? And can't you see, both of you, you're making it worse?

*// she turns away. We hear the front door slam again.//*

Birling: that was the door again.

Mrs Birling: gerald must have come back.

Inspector: unless your son has just gone out.

Birling: I'll see.

// *he goes out quickly.* Inspector *turns to* Mrs Birling.//

Inspector: Mrs Birling, you're a member – a prominent member – of the Brumley Women's Charity Organization, aren't you?

// Mrs Birling *does not reply*.//

Sheila: Go on, mother. You might as well admit it. (*to* Inspector.) Yes, she id. Why?

Inspector: (*calmly*) It's an organization to which women in distress can appeal for help in various forms. Isn't that so?

Mrs Birling: (*with dignity*) Yes. We've done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases.

Inspector: there was a meeting of the interviewing committee two weeks ago?

Mrs Birling: I dare say there was.

Inspector: you know very well there was, Mrs Birling. You were in the chair.

Mrs Birling: and if I was, what business is it of yours?

Inspector: (*severely*) do you want me to tell you – in plain words?

// *enter birling, looking rather agitated.*//

Birling: that must have been Eric.

Mrs Birling: (*alarmed*) Have you been up to his room?

Birling: yes. And I called out on both landings. It must have been eric we heard go out then.

Mrs Birling: silly boy! Where can he have gone to?

Birling: I can't imagine. But he was in one of his excitable queer moods, and even though we don't need him here--

Inspector: (*cutting in, sharply*) We do need him here. And if he's not back soon, I shall have to go and find him.

// B*irling and Mrs Birling exchange bewildered and rather frightened glances*.//

Sheila: He's probably just gone to cool off. He'll be back soon.

Inspector: (*severely*) I hope so.

Mrs Birling: And why should you hope so?

Inspector: I'll explain why when you've answered my questions, Mrs Birling.

Birling: Is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, Inspector?

Inspector: yes, a very good readon. You'll remember that Mr Croft told us – quite truthfully, I believe – that he hadn't spoken to or seen eva smith since last september. But Mrs Birling spoke to and saw her only two weeks ago.

Sheila: (*astonished*) mother!

Birling: Is this true?

Mrs Birling: (*after a pause*) yes, quite true.

Inspector: she appealed to your organization for help?

Mrs Birling: yes.

Inspector: not as Eva smith?

Mrs Birling: No, nor as daisy renton.

Inspector: as what then?

Mrs Birling: first, she called herself Mrs Birling--

Birling: (*astounded*) Mrs Birling!

Mrs Birling: Yes, I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence – quite deliberate – and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.

Birling: And I should think so! Damned impudence!

Inspector: you admit being prejudiced against her case?

Mrs Birling: Yes.

Sheila: mother, she's just died a horrible death – don't forget.

Mrs Birling: i'm very sorry. But I think she had only herself to blame.

Inspector: was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused the girl?

Mrs Birling: possibly.

Inspector: was it or was it not your influence?

Mrs Birling: (*stung*) Yes, it was. I didn't like her manner. She'd impertinently made use of our name, though she pretended afterwards it just happened to be the first she though of. She had to admit, after I began questioning her, that she had no claim to the name, that she wasn't married, and that the story she told at first – about a husband who'd deserted her – was quite false. It didn't take me long to get the truth – or some of the truth – out of her.

Inspector: why did she want help?

Mrs Birling: you know very well why she wanted help.

Inspector: No, I don't. I know why she needed help. But as I wasn't there, I don't know what she asked from your committee.

Mrs Birling: I don't think we need discuss it.

Inspector: you have no hope of not discussing it, Mrs Birling.

Mrs Birling: if you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. The girl asked for assistance. We were asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us. I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim – she seemed to me not a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty. So if I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind.

Inspector: Yes I have.

Mrs Birling: No you haven't. Simply because I've done nothing wrong – and you know it.

Inspector: (*very deliberately*) I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. I wish you'd been with me tonight in the infirmary. You'd have seen-

Sheila: (*bursting in*) No, no, please! Not that again. I've imagined it enough already.

Inspector: ( *very deliberately*) then the next time you imagine it, just remember that this girl was going to have a child.

Sheila: (*horrified*) No! Oh – horrible – horrible! How could she have wanted to kill herself?

Inspector: because she'd been turned out and turned down too many times. This was the end.

Sheila: mother, you must have known.

Inspector: it was because she was going to have a child that she went for assistance to your mother's committee.

Birling: Look here, this wasn't gerald croft-

Inspector: (*cutting in, sharply*) No, no. nothing to do with him.

Sheila: thank goodness for that! Though I don't know why I should care now.

Inspector: (*to* Mrs Birling) and you've nothing further to tell me, eh?

Mrs Birling: I'll tell you what I told her. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.

Inspector: That doesn't make it any the less yours. She came to you for help, at a time when no woman could have needed it more. And you not only refused it yourself but saw to it that the others refused it too. She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate. She needed not only money but advice, sympathy, friendliness. You've had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face.

Sheila: (*with feeling* ) mother, I think it was cruel and vile.

Birling: (*dubiously*) I must say, sybil, that when this comes out at the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good. The press might easily take it up--

Mrs Birling: (*agitated now*) Oh, stop it, both of you. And please remember before you start accusing me of anything again that it wasn't I who had her turned out of her employment – which probably began it all.

( *turning to Inspector*.) In the circumstances I think I was justified. The girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies. Afterwards, when I got at the truth, I discovered that she knew who the father was, she was quite certain about that, and so I told her it was her business to make him responsible. If he refused to marry her – and in my opinion he ought to be compelled to – then he must at least support her.

Inspector: and what did she reply to that?

Mrs Birling: Oh – a lot of silly nonsense!

Inspector: what was it?

Mrs Birling: whatever it was, I know it made me finally lose all patience with her. She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.

Inspector: (*very sternly*) Her position now is that she lies with a burnt-out inside on a slab. ( *As* Birling *tries to protest, turns on him*.) Don't stammer and yammer at me again, man. I'm losing all patience with you people. What did she say?

Mrs Birling: (*rather cowed*) she said that the father was only a youngster – silly and wild and drinking too much. There couldn't be any question of marrying him – it would be wrong for them both. He had given her money but she didn't want to take any more money from him.

Inspector: why didn't she want to take and more money from him?

Mrs Birling: all a lot of nonsense – I didn't believe a word of it.

Inspector: I'm not asking you if you believed it. I want to know what she said. Why didn't she want to take any more money from this boy?

Mrs Birling: Oh – she had some fancy reason. As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!

Inspector: ( *sternly*) I warn you, you're making in worse for yourself. What reason did she give for not taking any more money?

Mrs Birling: her story was – that he'd said something one night, when he was drunk, that gave her the idea that it wasn't his money.

Inspector: where had he got it from then?

Mrs Birling: he'd stolen it.

Inspector: so she'd come to you for assistance because she didn't want to take stolen money?

Mrs Birling: that's the story she finally told, after i'd refused to believe her original story – that she was a married woman who'd been deserted by her husband. I didn't see any reason to believe that one story should be any truer than the other. Therefore, you're quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did.

Inspector: but if her story was true, if this boy had been giving her stolen money, then she came to you for help because she wanted to keep this youngster out of any more trouble – isn't that so?

Mrs Birling: possibly. But it sounded ridiculous to me. So I was perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance.

Inspector: you're not even sorry now, when you know what happened to the girl?

Mrs Birling: I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all.

Inspector: who is to blame then?

Mrs Birling: first, the girl herself.

Sheila: (*bitterly*) for letting father and me have her chucked out of her jobs!

Mrs Birling: secondly, I blame the young man who was the father of the child she was going to have. If, as she said, he didn't belong to her class, and was some drunken young idler, then that's all the more reason why he shouldn't escape. He should be made an example of. If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him.

Inspector: and if her story id true – that he was stealing money-

Mrs Birling: (*rather agitated now*) there's no point in assuming that-

Inspector: but suppose we do, what then?

Mrs Birling: then he'd be entirely responsible – because the girl wouldn't have come to us, and have been refused assistance, if it hadn't been for him-

Inspector: so he's the chief culprit anyhow.

Mrs Birling: certainly. And he ought to be dealt with very severely-

Sheila: (*with sudden alarm*) mother – stop – stop!

Birling: Be quiet, sheila!

Sheila: but don't you see-

Mrs Birling: (*severely*) you're behaving like an hysterical child tonight.

// Sheila *begins crying quietly.* Mrs Birling *turns to the* Inspector. //

and if you'd take some steps to find this young man and then make sure that he's compelled to confess in public his responsibility – instead of staying here asking quite unnecessary questions – then you really would be doing your duty.

Inspector: (*grimly*) Don't worry Mrs Birling. I shall do my duty. ( *He looks at his watch*.)

Mrs Birling: (*triumphantly*) I'm glad to hear it.

Inspector: No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh? Public confession of responsibility – um?

Mrs Birling: Certainly. I consider it your duty. And now no doubt you'd like to say good night.

Inspector: not yet. I'm waiting.

Mrs Birling: Waiting for what?

Inspector: To do my duty.

Sheila: (*distressed*) Now, mother – don't you see?

Mrs Birling: ( *understanding now*) But surely …. I mean … it's ridiculous . . .

// *she stops, and exchanges a frightened glance with her husband*.//

Birling: ( *terrified now*) Look Inspector, you're not trying to tell us that – that my boy – is mixed up in this - ?

Inspector: (*sternly*) If he is, then we know what to do, don't we? Mrs Birling has just told us.

Birling: ( *thunderstruck*) my God! But – look here -

Mrs Birling: (*agitated*) I don't believe it. I won't believe it . . .

Sheila: Mother – I begged you and begged you to stop-

**// *Inspector holds up a hand. We hear the front door. They wait, looking towards door. Eric enters, looking extremely pale and distressed. He meets their inquiring stares.***

**Curtain falls quickly. //**

**END OF ACT TWO**