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SF PERUSALS

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

A Play

by J. B. Priestley

SAMUEL FRENCH

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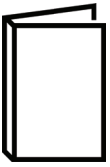
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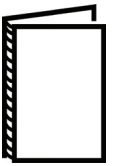
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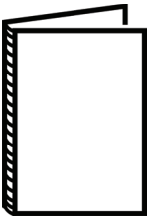
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Boynton Priestley was born on 13th September 1894 in Yorkshire. After leaving school at sixteen, he worked in a wool office, but was determined to become a writer, with his spare time spent buying books and writing. His first published article was "Secrets of the Rag-Time King" which appeared in the London Opinion in 1912.

His writing success allowed him to enter the theatre world, working on *The Good Companions* and his first solo play *Dangerous Corner*. Some of his best-known plays include: *Time & The Conways, I Have Been here Before, An Inspector Calls* and *When We Are Married*.

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AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Produced at the Opera House, Manchester, on 9th March 1946, and subsequently at the New Theatre, London, on 1st October 1946, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

ARTHUR BIRLING	Julien Mitchell
GERALD CROFT	Harry Andrews
SHEILA BIRLING	Margaret Leighton
SYBIL BIRLING	Marian Spencer
EDNA	Marjorie Dunkels
ERIC BIRLING	Alec Guinness
INSPECTOR GOOLE	Ralph Richardson

The play produced by Basil Dean

The three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining-room of the Birlings' house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands. An evening in Spring, 1912.

NOTE: *This acting edition follows the original script of the play, in which only one set was used throughout. In the New Theatre production different aspects of the room were shown in each of the three acts. For the benefit of those companies whose scenic facilities will permit, Ground Plans and a Furniture Plot prepared in accordance with this scheme are given at the end of the book.*

ACT I

The dining-room of the **BIRLINGS***' house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands. An evening in Spring, 1912.*

It is the dining-room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer; a solidly built square room, with good solid furniture of the period. There is only one door, which is up stage in the left wall. Up stage centre, set in an alcove, is a heavy sideboard with a silver tantalus, silver candlesticks, a silver champagne cooler and the various oddments of a dinner. The fireplace is in the right wall. Below the door is a desk with a chair in front of it. On the wall below the fireplace is a telephone. Slightly up stage of centre is a solid but not too large dining-table, preferably oval, with a solid set of dining-room chairs round it. The table is laid with a white cloth and the closing stages of a dinner. Down stage of the fireplace is a leather armchair. A few imposing but tasteless pictures and large engravings decorate the walls, and there are light brackets above and below the fireplace and below the door. The former are lit, but the latter is not. The general effect is substantial and comfortable and old-fashioned, but not cosy and home-like.

See the Ground Plan at the end of the play.

When the curtain rises, **EDNA***, a neatly dressed parlourmaid is clearing the table of dessert plates and finger bowls, taking them to the sideboard.* **ARTHUR BIRLING** *is seated right of the table, and* **MRS BIRLING** *is left.* **SHEILA BIRLING** *and* **GERALD CROFT** *are seated*

above the table, right and left respectively. **ERIC BIRLING** *sits below the table. All five are in evening dress, the men in tails and white ties.* **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 middle 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?

EDNA *comes to* **BIRLING***'s left with the decanter.*

That's right. *(He fills his glass and pushes it towards* **SHEILA***)* 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.

SHEILA *fills her glass and passes the port to* **GERALD.**

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. *(He fills his glass and then passes the decanter towards* **MRS BIRLING***)*

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* **MRS BIRLING** *has not taken any port)* Now then, Sybil, you must take a little tonight. Special occasion, y'know, eh?

GERALD *starts to fill* **MRS BIRLING***'s glass.*

SHEILA Yes, go on, Mummy. You must drink our health.

EDNA *picks up the tray, about to go.*

MRS BIRLING *(smiling)* Very well, then. Just a little, thank you. *(She passes the decanter to* **ERIC**. *To* **EDNA***)* 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.

She 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* **SHEILA** *does not reply; with more insistence)* Haven't I? You know I have.

MRS BIRLING *(smiling)* Of course she does.

SHEILA *(half seriously, half playfully)* 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 *(in the same tone)* Yes, that's what *you* say.

MRS BIRLING Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realise 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. *(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—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. 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 *raises his glass and rises.* **MRS BIRLING** *rises.*

BIRLING 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 *(He rises)*

MRS BIRLING *signals to* **ERIC** *to rise.*

ERIC *(rising; rather noisily)* All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes—but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila!

They all sit.

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

GERALD You can drink to me.

SHEILA *(rising; quiet and serious now)* All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.

For a moment **GERALD** *and* **SHEILA** *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 *(sitting; 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! *(She rises and crosses behind* **GERALD** *to* **MRS BIRLING***)* Look—Mummy—isn't it a beauty? *(She turns to* **GERALD***)* Oh—darling— *(She slips the ring on and kisses* **GERALD** *hastily, then crosses above him to* **BIRLING***)*

ERIC Steady the Buffs!

SHEILA *(admiring the ring)* 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! *(She sits)* I'll never let it 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— *(She is about to rise)*

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. **BIRLING** *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 But 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 civilised 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 that 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 *shows signs of interrupting.*

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 sometimes. And we don't guess—we've had experience—and we *know*.

MRS BIRLING *(rising)* Yes, of course, dear.

They all rise.

Well—don't keep Gerald in here too long. *(She turns to the door)* Eric—I want you a minute.

GERALD *crosses above* **MRS BIRLING** *and opens the door.*

MRS BIRLING *goes out followed by* **SHEILA** *and* **ERIC**.

GERALD *shuts the door.*

BIRLING *(crossing below the table to the desk)* Cigar? *(He takes one himself)*

GERALD *(crossing to his chair)* No, thanks. Can't really enjoy them. *(He takes a cigarette and lights it)*

BIRLING *(moving to the left end of the table)* Ah, you don't know what you're missing. I like a good cigar. *(Indicating the decanter)* Help yourself. *(He lights his cigar)*

GERALD *fills his glass and pushes the decanter towards* **BIRLING**, *and sits right above the table.*

Thanks. *(He sits left of the table. 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? *(He laughs complacently)*

GERALD *(laughing)* 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. He stands just inside the door.*

ERIC What's the joke? Started telling stories?

BIRLING No. Want another glass of port?

ERIC *(closing the door and moving below the table)* Yes, please. *(He takes the 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 had any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em. *(He moves to the chair right of the table and sits)*

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 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. 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 the 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.

EDNA *goes out.*

I'm still on the Bench. *(As he rises and moves to the door and switches on the wall bracket over the desk)* 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. *(He moves in towards the table)*

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 *(staring at* **ERIC***; sharply)* What's the matter with *you?*

ERIC *(defiantly)* Nothing. *(He helps himself to port)*

EDNA *enters.*

EDNA *(announcing)* Inspector Goole.

The **INSPECTOR** *enters. He 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 Thank you, sir.

EDNA *takes the* **INSPECTOR***'s hat and coat and goes out.*

BIRLING Have a glass of port—or a little whisky.

INSPECTOR No, thank you, Mr Birling. I'm on duty. *(He turns the desk chair a little away from the desk and sits)*

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. *(He sits left of the table)*

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 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 *(rising)* 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. *(He takes a photograph about postcard size out of his pocket and moves towards* **BIRLING***)*

GERALD *rises and moves about the table to look over* **BIRLING***'s shoulder.* **ERIC** *rises and moves below the table to see the photograph. The* **INSPECTOR** *quickly moves above* **BIRLING** *and prevents both of them from seeing it. They are surprised and rather annoyed.* **BIRLING** *stares hard and with recognition at the photograph, which the* **INSPECTOR** *then takes from him and replaces in his pocket, as he moves down left centre.*

GERALD *(following the* **INSPECTOR** *down; showing annoyance)* Any particular reason why I shouldn't see this girl's photograph, Inspector?

INSPECTOR *(moving to the desk)* 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. *(He sits below the table)*

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

GERALD *breaks upstage.*

INSPECTOR It's the way I like to go to work. *(He is watching* **BIRLING***)* One person and one line of enquiry at a time. Otherwise, there's a muddle.

BIRLING *notices the* **INSPECTOR** *watching him.*

(he moves towards **BIRLING***)* 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 *(moving centre above the table)* 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. *(He crosses behind* **BIRLING** *to* **GERALD***)* 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. *(He sits right above the table)*

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 *(coming down to the table left of* **GERALD***)* 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 *(rising and moving to the desk)* 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. *(He sits at the desk)* 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 *(coming down left of the table to* **BIRLING***)* 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 *(rising)* I don't like that tone.

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

BIRLING (*crossing to the table*) And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too.

INSPECTOR It's my duty to ask questions.

BIRLING *(turning to face the* **INSPECTOR***)* 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? *(He sits left of the table)* 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. *(He crosses down stage to the fireplace)* 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. *(He keeps his back to them)*

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 *(drily)* I don't play golf.

BIRLING I didn't suppose you did.

ERIC *(bursting out)* Well, I think it's a dam' shame.

INSPECTOR *(turning to face them)* No, I've never wanted to.

ERIC *(rising and crossing down left)* 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 *(crossing back to his chair and sitting; 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 ideas 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 *enters, overhearing these last words.*

SHEILA *(gaily)* What's this about streets?

GERALD *rises and crosses to the door.*

(she notices 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 *(rising and moving to* **SHEILA***)* 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.

SHEILA *(crossing* **BIRLING** *to left of the table)* What business? What's happening?

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 *(coming down to the desk and sitting)* Well, don't tell me that's because I discharged her from my employment nearly two years ago.

ERIC That might have started it.

SHEILA Did you, Dad?

BIRLING Yes.

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