

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.

Sheila: (*coming father in*) 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: 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. The girl had been causing trouble in the works. I was quite justified.

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

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

Inspector: Yes. Twenty-four.

Sheila: Pretty?

Inspector: She wasn't pretty when I saw her today, but she had been pretty – very pretty.

Birling: That's enough of that.

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

Birling: Obviously. I suggested that some time ago.

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

Inspector: (*slowly*) Are you sure you don't know.

*// He looks at Gerald, then at Eric, then at Sheila.//*

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

Inspector: Yes.

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

Inspector: No.

*// the other four exchange bewildered and perturbed glances.//*