

*// 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 offices 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 on 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. Horrid business. But I don't understand why you should come here, inspector –

Inspector: (*cutting through, massively*) I've been round to the room she had, and she'd left a letter there and a sort of diary. Like a lot of these young women who get into various kinds of

trouble, she'd used more than one name. But her original name – her real name – was Eva Smith.

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 women, Eva Smith, was 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 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