

Tension ↑

ACT THREE

Exactly as at the end of Act Two. ERIC is standing just inside the room and the others are staring at him.

ERIC: You know, don't you?

INSPECTOR [as before]: Yes, we know.

[ERIC shuts the door and comes farther in.]

MRS BIRLING [distressed]: Eric, I can't believe it. There must be some mistake. You don't know what we've been saying.

SHEILA: It's a good job for him he doesn't, isn't it?

ERIC: Why?

SHEILA: Because Mother's been busy blaming everything on the young man who got this girl into trouble, and saying he shouldn't escape and should be made an example of -

BIRLING: That's enough, Sheila.

ERIC [bitterly]: You haven't made it any easier for me, have you, Mother?

MRS BIRLING: But I didn't know it was you - I never dreamt.

Besides, you're not that type - you don't get drunk -

SHEILA: Of course he does. I told you he did.

ERIC: You told her. Why, you little sneak!

SHEILA: No, that's not fair, Eric. I could have told her months ago, but of course I didn't. I only told her tonight because I knew everything was coming out - it was simply bound to come out tonight - so I thought she might as well know in advance. Don't forget - I've already been through it.

MRS BIRLING: Sheila, I simply don't understand your attitude.

BIRLING: Neither do I. If you'd had any sense of loyalty -

INSPECTOR [cutting in, smoothly]: Just a minute, Mrs Birling. There'll be plenty of time, when I've gone, for you all to adjust your family relationships. But now I must hear what your son has to tell me. [Sternly, to the three of them] And I'll be obliged if you'll let us get on without any further interruptions. [Turning to ERIC] Now then.

ERIC [miserably]: Could I have a drink first?

BIRLING [explosively]: No.

She was talking about her own son!

Threat

ACT THREE

power struggle

INSPECTOR [firmly]: Yes. [As BIRLING looks like interrupting explosively] I know - he's your son and this is your house - but look at him. He needs a drink now just to see him through.

BIRLING [to ERIC]: All right. Go on.

[ERIC goes for a whisky. His whole manner of handling the decanter and then the drink shows his familiarity with quick heavy drinking. The others watch him narrowly.]

[Bitterly] I understand a lot of things now I didn't understand before.

INSPECTOR: Don't start on that. I want to get on. [To ERIC]

When did you first meet this girl?

ERIC: One night last November. - After Gerald

INSPECTOR: Where did you meet her?

ERIC: In the Palace bar. I'd been there an hour or so with two or three chaps. I was a bit squiffy. Act 1

INSPECTOR: What happened then?

ERIC: I began talking to her, and stood her a few drinks. I was rather far gone by the time we had to go.

INSPECTOR: Was she drunk too?

ERIC: She told me afterwards that she was a bit, chiefly because she'd not had much to eat that day.

INSPECTOR: Why had she gone there - ?

ERIC: She wasn't the usual sort. But - well, I suppose she didn't know what to do. There was some woman who wanted her to go there. I never quite understood about that.

INSPECTOR: You went with her to her lodgings that night?

ERIC: Yes, I insisted - it seems. I'm not very clear about it, but afterwards she told me she didn't want me to go in but that - well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty - and I threatened to make a row.

INSPECTOR: So she let you in?

ERIC: And that's when it happened. And I didn't even remember - that's the hellish thing. Oh - my God! - how stupid it all is!

MRS BIRLING [with a cry]: Oh - Eric - how could you?

BIRLING [sharply]: Sheila, take your mother along to the drawing-room -

SHEILA [protesting]: But - I want to -

BIRLING [very sharply]: You heard what I said. [Gentler] Go on, Sybil.

- Birling upset
controlling

Disgust

Realisation

*Gerald

*Mrs B?
*Sheila?

determined

Tension ↑↑

[He goes to open the door while SHEILA takes her mother out.
Then he closes it and comes in.]

INSPECTOR: When did you meet her again?

ERIC: About a fortnight afterwards.

INSPECTOR: By appointment?

ERIC: No. And I couldn't remember her name or where she lived.

It was all very vague. But I happened to see her again in the Palace bar.

INSPECTOR: More drinks?

ERIC: Yes, though that time I wasn't so bad.

INSPECTOR: But you took her home again?

ERIC: Yes. And this time we talked a bit. She told me something about herself and I talked too. Told her my name and what I did.

INSPECTOR: And you made love again?

ERIC: Yes. I wasn't in love with her or anything - but I liked her -
she was pretty and a good sport -

BIRLING [harshly]: So you had to go to bed with her?

ERIC: Well, I'm old enough to be married, aren't I, and I'm not married, and I hate these fat old tarts round the town - the ones I see some of your respectable friends with -

BIRLING [angrily]: I don't want any of that talk from you -

INSPECTOR [very sharply]: I don't want any of it from either of you. Settle it afterwards. [To ERIC] Did you arrange to see each other after that? Takes charge

ERIC: Yes. And the next time - or the time after that - she told me she thought she was going to have a baby. She wasn't quite sure. And then she was.

INSPECTOR: And of course she was very worried about it?

ERIC: Yes, and so was I. I was in a hell of a state about it.

INSPECTOR: Did she suggest that you ought to marry her?

ERIC: No. She didn't want me to marry her. Said I didn't love her - and all that. In a way, she treated me - as if I were a kid.
Though I was nearly as old as she was.

INSPECTOR: So what did you propose to do?

ERIC: Well, she hadn't a job - and didn't feel like trying again for one - and she'd no money left - so I insisted on giving her enough money to keep her going - until she refused to take any more -

INSPECTOR: How much did you give her altogether?

maturity

ERIC: I suppose - about fifty pounds all told.

BIRLING: Fifty pounds - on top of drinking and going round the town! Where did you get fifty pounds from?

[As ERIC does not reply]

INSPECTOR: That's my question too.

ERIC [miserably]: I got it - from the office -

BIRLING: My office?

ERIC: Yes.

INSPECTOR: You mean - you stole the money?

ERIC: Not really.

BIRLING [angrily]: What do you mean - not really?

[ERIC does not reply because now MRS BIRLING and SHEILA come back.] Women Return.

SHEILA: This isn't my fault.

MRS BIRLING [to BIRLING]: I'm sorry, Arthur, but I simply couldn't stay in there. I had to know what's happening.

BIRLING [savagely]: Well, I can tell you what's happening. He's admitted he was responsible for the girl's condition, and now he's telling us he supplied her with money he stole from the office.

MRS BIRLING [shocked]: Eric! You stole money?

ERIC: No, not really. I intended to pay it back.

BIRLING: We've heard that story before. How could you have paid it back?

ERIC: I'd have managed somehow. I had to have some money -

BIRLING: I don't understand how you could take as much as that out of the office without somebody knowing.

ERIC: There were some small accounts to collect, and I asked for cash -

BIRLING: Gave the firm's receipt and then kept the money, eh?

ERIC: Yes. demand his only concern

BIRLING: You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool - why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?

ERIC: Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble - that's why.

BIRLING [angrily]: Don't talk to me like that. Your trouble is - you've been spoilt -

INSPECTOR [cutting in]: And my trouble is - that I haven't much time. You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you

"reputation" - false sense of importance.

she was right!

sad

when I've gone. [To ERIC] Just one last question, that's all. The girl discovered that this money you were giving her was stolen, didn't she?

ERIC [miserably]: Yes. That was the worst of all. She wouldn't take any more, and she didn't want to see me again. [Sudden startled tone] Here, but how did you know that? Did she tell you?

INSPECTOR: No. She told me nothing. I never spoke to her.

SHEILA: She told Mother.

MRS BIRLING [alarmed]: Sheila!

SHEILA: Well, he has to know.

ERIC [to MRS BIRLING]: She told you? Did she come here - but then she couldn't have done, she didn't even know I lived here. What happened? [MRS BIRLING, distressed, shakes her head but does not reply.] Come on, don't just look like that. Tell me - tell me - what happened?

INSPECTOR [with calm authority]: I'll tell you. She went to your mother's committee for help, after she'd done with you. Your mother refused that help.

ERIC [nearly at breaking point]: Then - you killed her. She came to you to protect me - and you turned her away - yes, and you killed her - and the child she'd have had too - my child - your own grandchild - you killed them both - damn you, damn you -

MRS BIRLING [very distressed now]: No - Eric - please - I didn't know - I didn't understand -

ERIC [almost threatening her]: You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried - you -

SHEILA [frightened]: Eric, don't - don't -

BIRLING [furious, intervening]: Why, you hysterical young fool - get back - or I'll - Threat to hit

INSPECTOR [taking charge, masterfully]: Stop! [They are suddenly quiet, staring at him.] And be quiet for a moment and listen to me. I don't need to know any more. Neither do you. This girl killed herself - and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. [He looks from one to the other of them carefully.] But then I don't think you ever will. Remember what you did, Mrs Birling. You turned her away when she most needed help. You refused her even the pitiable little bit of organized charity you had in your power to grant her. Remember what you did -

Disrespect

Lesson

ERIC [unhappily]: My God - I'm not likely to forget.

INSPECTOR: Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person. No, you won't forget. [He looks at SHEILA.]

SHEILA [bitterly]: I know. I had her turned out of a job. I started it.

INSPECTOR: You helped - but didn't start it. [Rather savagely, to BIRLING] You started it. She wanted twenty-five shillings a week instead of twenty-two and sixpence. You made her pay a heavy price for that. And now she'll make you pay a heavier price still.

BIRLING [unhappily]: Look, Inspector - I'd give thousands - yes, thousands - Bribe?

INSPECTOR: You're offering the money at the wrong time, Mr Birling. [He makes a move as if concluding the session, possibly shutting up notebook, etc. Then surveys them sardonically.] No, I don't think any of you will forget. Nor that young man, Croft, though he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time. Well, Eva Smith's gone. You can't do her any more harm. And you can't do her any good now, either. You can't even say 'I'm sorry, Eva Smith.'

SHEILA [who is crying quietly]: That's the worst of it.

INSPECTOR: But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone - but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.

[He walks straight out, leaving them staring, subdued and wondering. SHEILA is still quietly crying. MRS BIRLING has collapsed into a chair. ERIC is brooding desperately. BIRLING, the only active one, hears the front door slam, moves hesitatingly towards the door, stops, looks gloomily at the other three, then pours himself out a drink, which he hastily swallows.]

BIRLING [angrily to ERIC]: You're the one I blame for this.

ERIC: I'll bet I am.

BIRLING [angrily]: Yes, and you don't realize yet all you've done.

message/lesson

Reputation

Most of this is bound to come out. **There'll be a public scandal.**

ERIC: Well, I don't care now.

BIRLING: You! **You don't seem to care about anything.** But I care. **I was almost certain for a knighthood in the next Honours List -**

[ERIC laughs rather hysterically, pointing at him.]

ERIC [laughing]: Oh - for God's sake! What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?

BIRLING [stormily]: It doesn't matter to you. Apparently nothing matters to you. But it may interest you to know that until every penny of that money you stole is repaid, you'll work for nothing. And there's going to be no more of this drinking round the town - and picking up women in the Palace bar -

MRS BIRLING [coming to life]: I should think not. Eric, **I'm absolutely ashamed of you.**

ERIC: Well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well - **yes, both of you.**

BIRLING [angrily]: Drop that. There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did - **it turned out unfortunately, that's all -**

SHEILA [scornfully]: **That's all.**

BIRLING: Well, what have you to say?

SHEILA: I don't know where to begin.

BIRLING: Then don't begin. Nobody wants you to.

SHEILA: **I behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it.**

But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened -

BIRLING: Nothing much has happened! Haven't I already said there'll be a public scandal - **unless we're lucky** - and who here will suffer from that more than I will?

SHEILA: But that's not what I'm talking about. I don't care about that. **The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything.**

BIRLING: Don't I? Well, you're quite wrong there. I've learnt plenty tonight. And you don't want me to tell you what I've learnt, I hope. When I look back on tonight - when I think of what I was feeling when the five of us sat down to dinner at that table -

ERIC [cutting in]: Yes, and do you remember what you said to Gerald and me after dinner, when you were feeling so pleased

Sheila vs Birling

aggressive, hypocrite

with yourself? **You told us that a man has to make his own way,** look after himself and mind his own business, and that we weren't to take any notice of these cranks who tell us that everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together. Do you remember? Yes - and then one of those cranks walked in - the Inspector. [Laughs bitterly.] I didn't notice you told him that it's every man for himself.

SHEILA [sharply attentive]: Is that when the Inspector came, just after Father had said that?

ERIC: Yes. What of it?

MRS BIRLING: Now what's the matter, Sheila?

SHEILA [slowly]: It's **queer** - very queer - [she looks at them reflectively.]

MRS BIRLING [with some excitement]: I know what you're going to say. Because I've been wondering myself.

SHEILA: It doesn't much matter now, of course - **but was he really a police inspector?**

BIRLING: Well, if he wasn't, it matters a devil of a lot. Makes all the difference.

SHEILA: No, it doesn't.

BIRLING: Don't talk rubbish. Of course it does.

SHEILA: Well, it doesn't to me. And it oughtn't to you, either.

MRS BIRLING: Don't be childish, Sheila.

SHEILA [flaring up]: I'm not being. **If you want to know, it's you two who are being childish** - trying not to face the facts.

BIRLING: I won't have that sort of talk. Any more of that and you leave this room.

ERIC: That'll be terrible for her, won't it?

SHEILA: I'm going anyhow in a minute or two. But don't you see, if all that's come out tonight is true, then it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess. And it *was* true, wasn't it? You turned the girl out of one job, and I had her turned out of another. Gerald kept her - at a time when he was supposed to be too busy to see me. Eric - well, we know what Eric did. And Mother hardened her heart and gave her the final push that finished her. **That's what's important - and not whether a man is a police inspector or not.**

ERIC: He was our police inspector all right.

SHEILA: That's what I mean, Eric. But if it's any comfort to you -

share guilt + Responsibility

and it isn't to me - I have an idea - and I had it all along vaguely - that there was something curious about him. He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector -

BIRLING [rather excited]: You're right. I felt it too. [To MRS BIRLING] Didn't you?

MRS BIRLING: Well, I must say his manner was quite extraordinary; so - so rude - and assertive -

BIRLING: Then look at the way he talked to me. Telling me to shut up - and so on. He must have known I was an ex-Lord Mayor and a magistrate and so forth. Besides - the way he talked - you remember. I mean, they don't talk like that. I've had dealings with dozens of them.

SHEILA: All right. But it doesn't make any real difference, y'know.

MRS BIRLING: Of course it does.

ERIC: No, Sheila's right. It doesn't.

BIRLING [angrily]: That's comic, that is, coming from you. You're the one it makes most difference to. You've confessed to theft, and now he knows all about it, and he can bring it out at the inquest, and then if necessary carry it to court. He can't do anything to your mother and Sheila and me - except perhaps make us look a bit ashamed of ourselves in public - but as for you, he can ruin you. You know.

SHEILA [slowly]: We hardly ever told him anything he didn't know. Did you notice that?

BIRLING: That's nothing. He had a bit of information, left by the girl, and made a few smart guesses - but the fact remains that if we hadn't talked so much, he'd have had little to go on. [Looks angrily at them] And really, when I come to think of it, why you all had to go letting everything come out like that, beats me.

SHEILA: It's all right talking like that now. But he made us confess.

MRS BIRLING: He certainly didn't make me confess - as you call it. I told him quite plainly that I thought I had done no more than my duty.

SHEILA: Oh - Mother!

BIRLING: The fact is, you allowed yourselves to be bluffed. Yes - bluffed.

MRS BIRLING [protesting]: Now really - Arthur.

BIRLING: No, not you, my dear. But these two. That fellow ob-

Kids

Blaming
the
family

viously didn't like us. He was prejudiced from the start. Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank - he talked like one. And then, instead of standing up to him, you let him bluff you into talking about your private affairs. You ought to have stood up to him.

ERIC [sulkily]: Well, I didn't notice you standing up to him.

BIRLING: No, because by that time you'd admitted you'd been taking money. What chance had I after that? I was a fool not to have insisted upon seeing him alone.

ERIC: That wouldn't have worked.

SHEILA: Of course it wouldn't.

MRS BIRLING: Really, from the way you children talk, you might be wanting to help him instead of us. Now just be quiet so that your father can decide what we ought to do. [Looks expectantly at BIRLING.]

BIRLING [dubiously]: Yes - well. We'll have to do something - and get to work quickly too. [As he hesitates there is a ring at the front door. They look at each other in alarm.] Now who's this? Had I better go?

MRS BIRLING: No. Edna'll go. I asked her to wait up to make us some tea.

SHEILA: It might be Gerald coming back.

BIRLING [relieved]: Yes, of course. I'd forgotten about him.

[EDNA appears.]

EDNA: It's Mr Croft.

[GERALD appears, and EDNA withdraws.]

GERALD: I hope you don't mind my coming back?

MRS BIRLING: No, of course not, Gerald.

GERALD: I had a special reason for coming. When did that Inspector go?

SHEILA: Only a few minutes ago. He put us all through it -

MRS BIRLING [warningly]: Sheila!

SHEILA: Gerald might as well know.

BIRLING [hastily]: Now - now - we needn't bother him with all that stuff.

SHEILA: All right. [To GERALD] But we're all in it - up to the neck. It got worse after you left.

GERALD: How did he behave?

SHEILA: He was - frightening.

Tone change

BIRLING: If you ask me, he behaved in a very peculiar and suspicious manner.

MRS BIRLING: The rude way he spoke to Mr Birling and me - it was quite extraordinary!

GERALD: Hm - hm!

[They all look inquiringly at GERALD.]

BIRLING [excitedly]: You know something. What is it?

GERALD [slowly]: That man wasn't a police officer.

BIRLING [astounded]: What?

MRS BIRLING: Are you certain?

GERALD: I'm almost certain. That's what I came back to tell you.

BIRLING [excitedly]: Good lad! You asked about him, eh?

GERALD: Yes. I met a police sergeant I know down the road. I asked him about this Inspector Goole and described the chap carefully to him. He swore there wasn't any Inspector Goole or anybody like him on the force here.

BIRLING: You didn't tell him - about the inquiry

GERALD [cutting in]: No, no. I passed it off by saying I'd been having an argument with somebody. But the point is - this sergeant was dead certain they hadn't any inspector at all like the chap who came here.

BIRLING [excitedly]: By Jingo! A fake!

MRS BIRLING [triumphantly]: Didn't I tell you? Didn't I say I couldn't imagine a real police inspector talking like that to us?

GERALD: Well, you were right. There isn't any such inspector. We've been had. Tricked

BIRLING [beginning to move]: I'm going to make certain of this.

MRS BIRLING: What are you going to do?

BIRLING: Ring up the Chief Constable - Colonel Roberts.

MRS BIRLING: Careful what you say, dear.

BIRLING [now at telephone]: Of course. [At telephone] Brumley eight seven five two. [To others as he waits] I was going to do this anyhow. I've had my suspicions all along. [At telephone] Colonel Roberts, please. Mr Arthur Birling here. ... Oh, Roberts - Birling here. Sorry to ring you up so late, but can you tell me if an Inspector Goole has joined your staff lately ... Goole. G-O-O-L-E ... a new man ... tall, clean-shaven. [Here he can describe the appearance of the actor playing the INSPECTOR.] I see ... yes ... well, that settles it. ... No, just a little argument

Tension



on the phone waiting
omit Colonel Voice

we were having here. ... Good night. [He puts down the telephone and looks at the others.] There's no Inspector Goole on the police. That man definitely wasn't a police inspector at all. As Gerald says - we've been had.

MRS BIRLING: I felt it all the time. He never talked like one. He never even looked like one.

BIRLING: This makes a difference, y'know. In fact, it makes all the difference.

GERALD: Of course!

SHEILA [bitterly]: I suppose we're all nice people now.

BIRLING: If you've nothing more sensible than that to say, Sheila, you'd better keep quiet.

ERIC: She's right, though.

BIRLING [angrily]: And you'd better keep quiet anyhow. If that had been a police inspector and he'd heard you confess -

MRS BIRLING [warningly]: Arthur - careful!

BIRLING [hastily]: Yes, yes.

SHEILA: You see, Gerald, you haven't to know the rest of our crimes and idiocies.

GERALD: That's all right, I don't want to. [To BIRLING] What do you make of this business now? Was it a hoax?

BIRLING: Of course. Somebody put that fellow up to coming here and hoaxing us. There are people in this town who dislike me enough to do that. We ought to have seen through it from the first. In the ordinary way, I believe I would have done. But coming like that, bang on top of our little celebration, just when we were all feeling so pleased with ourselves, naturally it took me by surprise.

MRS BIRLING: I wish I'd been here when that man first arrived. I'd have asked him a few questions before I allowed him to ask us any.

SHEILA: It's all right saying that now.

MRS BIRLING: I was the only one of you who didn't give in to him. And now I say we must discuss this business quietly and sensibly and decide if there's anything to be done about it.

BIRLING [with hearty approval]: You're absolutely right, my dear. Already we've discovered one important fact - that that fellow was a fraud and we've been hoaxed - and that may not be the end of it by any means.

do we believe him?
audience = confused

so who was he!

Sarcasm

Quiet

hocked

angry

GERALD: I'm sure it isn't.

BIRLING [*keenly interested*]: You are, eh? Good! [*To ERIC, who is restless*] Eric, sit down.

ERIC [*sulkily*]: I'm all right.

BIRLING: All right? You're anything but all right. And you needn't stand there - as if - as if -

ERIC: As if - what?

BIRLING: As if you'd nothing to do with us. Just remember your own position, young man. If anybody's up to the neck in this business, you are, so you'd better take some interest in it.

ERIC: I do take some interest in it. I take too much, that's my trouble. — Guilt Responsibility

SHEILA: It's mine too.

BIRLING: Now listen, you two. If you're still feeling on edge, then the least you can do is to keep quiet. Leave this to us. I'll admit that fellow's antics rattled us a bit. But we've found him out - and all we have to do is to keep our heads. Now it's our turn.

SHEILA: Our turn to do - what?

MRS BIRLING [*sharply*]: To behave sensibly, Sheila - which is more than you're doing.

ERIC [*bursting out*]: What's the use of talking about behaving sensibly? You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? Nobody's brought her to life, have they?

SHEILA [*eagerly*]: That's just what I feel, Eric. And it's what they don't seem to understand.

ERIC: Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And Mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It's still the same rotten story whether it's been told to a police inspector or to somebody else. According to you, I ought to feel a lot better - [*To GERALD*] I stole some money, Gerald, you might as well know - [*As BIRLING tries to interrupt*] I don't care, let him know. The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters. And I still feel the same about it, and that's why I don't feel like sitting down and having a nice cosy talk.

SHEILA: And Eric's absolutely right. And it's the best thing any one of us has said tonight and it makes me feel a bit less ashamed of us. You're just beginning to pretend all over again.

his only concern?

ACT THREE

BIRLING: Look - for God's sake!

MRS BIRLING [*protesting*]: Arthur!

BIRLING: Well, my dear, they're so damned exasperating. They just won't try to understand our position or to see the difference between a lot of stuff like this coming out in private and a down-right public scandal.

ERIC [*shouting*]: And I say the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her - and that's what matters -

BIRLING [*also shouting, threatening ERIC*]: And I say - either stop shouting or get out. [*Glaring at him but in quiet tone*] Some fathers I know would have kicked you out of the house anyhow by this time. So hold your tongue if you want to stay here.

ERIC [*quietly, bitterly*]: I don't give a damn now whether I stay here or not.

BIRLING: You'll stay here long enough to give me an account of that money you stole - yes, and to pay it back too.

SHEILA: But that won't bring Eva Smith back to life, will it?

ERIC: And it doesn't alter the fact that we all helped to kill her.

GERALD: But is it a fact?

ERIC: Of course it is. You don't know the whole story yet.

SHEILA: I suppose you're going to prove now you didn't spend last summer keeping this girl instead of seeing me, eh?

GERALD: I did keep a girl last summer. I've admitted it. And I'm sorry, Sheila.

SHEILA: Well, I must admit you came out of it better than the rest of us. The Inspector said that.

BIRLING [*angrily*]: He wasn't an Inspector.

SHEILA [*flaring up*]: Well, he inspected us all right. And don't let's start dodging and pretending now. Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide.

GERALD: Did we? Who says so? Because I say - there's no more real evidence we did than there was that that chap was a police inspector.

SHEILA: Of course there is.

GERALD: No, there isn't. Look at it. A man comes here pretending to be a police officer. It's a hoax of some kind. Now what does he do? Very artfully, working on bits of information he's picked up here and there, he bluffs us into confessing that we've all been mixed up in this girl's life in one way or another.

is Gerald trying to make up a story so he isn't held responsible?

ERIC: And so we have.

GERALD: *But how do you know it's the same girl?*

BIRLING [*eagerly*]: Now wait a minute! Let's see how that would work. Now - [*hesitates*] no, it wouldn't.

ERIC: We all admitted it.

GERALD: All right, you all admitted something to do with a girl.

But how do you know it's the same girl?

[*He looks round triumphantly at them. As they puzzle this out, he turns to BIRLING, after a pause.*]

Look here, Mr Birling. You sack a girl called Eva Smith. You've forgotten, but he shows you a photograph of her and then you remember. Right?

BIRLING: Yes, that part's straightforward enough. But what then?

GERALD: Well, then he happens to know that Sheila once had a girl sacked from Milwards shop. He tells us that it's this same Eva Smith. And he shows her a photograph that she recognizes.

SHEILA: Yes. The same photograph.

GERALD: *How do you know it's the same photograph?* Did you see the one your father looked at?

SHEILA: No, I didn't.

GERALD: And did your father see the one he showed you?

SHEILA: No, he didn't. And I see what you mean now.

GERALD: We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl. Now take me. I never saw a photograph, remember. He caught me out by suddenly announcing that this girl changed her name to Daisy Renton. I gave myself away at once because I'd known a Daisy Renton.

BIRLING [*eagerly*]: And there wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton was really Eva Smith. We've only his word for it, and we'd his word for it that he was a police inspector, and we know now he was lying. *So he could have been lying all the time.*

GERALD: Of course he could. Probably was. Now what happened after I left?

MRS BIRLING: I was upset because Eric had left the house, and this man said that if Eric didn't come back, he'd have to go and find him. Well, that made me feel worse still. And his manner was so severe and he seemed so confident. Then quite suddenly he said I'd seen Eva Smith only two weeks ago.

BIRLING: Those were his exact words.

MRS BIRLING: And like a fool I said Yes I had.

BIRLING: I don't see now why you did that. She didn't call herself Eva Smith when she came to see you at the committee, did she?

MRS BIRLING: No, of course she didn't. But, feeling so worried, when he suddenly turned on me with those questions, I answered more or less as he wanted me to answer. *not initially*

SHEILA: But, Mother, don't forget that he showed you a photograph of the girl before that, and you obviously recognized it.

GERALD: Did anybody else see it?

MRS BIRLING: No, he showed it only to me.

GERALD: Then, don't you see, there's still no proof it was really the same girl. He might have showed you the photograph of any girl who applied to the committee. And how do we know she was really Eva Smith or Daisy Renton? *? odd word*

BIRLING: Gerald's *dead* right. He could have used a different photograph each time and we'd be none the wiser. We may all have been recognizing different girls. *to use?*

GERALD: Exactly. Did he ask you to identify a photograph, Eric?

ERIC: No. He didn't need a photograph by the time he'd got round to me. But obviously it must have been the girl I knew who went round to see Mother.

GERALD: Why must it?

ERIC: She said she had to have help because she wouldn't take any more stolen money. And the girl I knew had told me that already.

GERALD: Even then, that may have been all nonsense.

ERIC: I don't see much nonsense about it when a girl goes and kills herself. You lot may be letting yourselves out nicely, but I can't. Nor can Mother. We did her in all right.

responsibility

BIRLING [*eagerly*]: Wait a minute, wait a minute! Don't be in such a hurry to put yourself into court. That interview with your mother could have been just as much a put-up job, like all this police inspector business. The whole damned thing can have been a piece of bluff.

ERIC [*angrily*]: How can it? The girl's dead, isn't she?

GERALD: What girl? There were probably four or five different girls.

ERIC: That doesn't matter to me. The one I knew is dead.

BIRLING: Is she? *How do we know she is?*

GERALD: That's right. You've got it. How do we know any girl killed herself today?

BIRLING [*looking at them all, triumphantly*]: Now answer that one. Let's look at it from this fellow's point of view. We're having a little celebration here and feeling rather pleased with ourselves. Now he has to *work a trick* on us. Well, the first thing he has to do is to give us such a shock that after that he can bluff us all the time. So he starts right off. *A girl has just died in the infirmary. She drank some strong disinfectant. Died in agony -*

ERIC: All right, don't pile it on.

BIRLING [*triumphantly*]: There you are, you see. Just repeating it *shakes you a bit*. And that's what he had to do. *Shake us at once - and then start questioning us - until we didn't know where we were. Oh - let's admit that. He had the laugh of us all right.*

ERIC: He could laugh his head off - if I knew it really was all a *hoax. not convinced*

BIRLING: I'm convinced it is. No police inquiry. No one girl that all this happens to. No scandal -

SHEILA: And no suicide?

GERALD [*decisively*]: We can settle that at once.

SHEILA: How?

GERALD: *By ringing up the infirmary. Either there's a dead girl there or there isn't.*

BIRLING [*uneasily*]: It will look a bit queer, won't it - ringing up at this time of night -

GERALD: I don't mind doing it.

MRS BIRLING [*emphatically*]: And if there isn't -

GERALD: Anyway we'll see. [*He goes to telephone and looks up number. The others watch tensely.*] Brumley eight nine eight six. ... Is that the infirmary? This is Mr Gerald Croft - of Crofts Limited. ... Yes. ... We're rather worried about one of our employees. Have you had a girl brought in this afternoon who committed suicide by drinking disinfectant - or any like suicide? Yes, I'll wait.

[As he waits, the others show their nervous tension. BIRLING wipes his brow, SHEILA shivers, ERIC clasps and unclasps his hands, etc.]

Yes? ... You're certain of that. ... I see. Well, thank you very much. ... Good night. [*He puts down telephone and looks at them.*] No girl has died in there today. Nobody's been brought in after drinking disinfectant. They haven't had a suicide for months.

BIRLING [*triumphantly*]: There you are! Proof positive. The whole story's just a lot of moonshine. Nothing but an elaborate sell! [*He produces a huge sigh of relief.*] Nobody likes to be sold as badly as that - but - for all that - [*he smiles at them all*] Gerald, have a drink. *Celebrating?*

GERALD [*smiling*]: Thanks, I think I could just do with one now.

BIRLING [*going to sideboard*]: So could I.

MRS BIRLING [*smiling*]: And I must say, Gerald, you've argued this very cleverly, and I'm most grateful.

GERALD [*going for his drink*]: Well, you see, while I was out of the house I'd time to cool off and think things out a little.

BIRLING [*giving him a drink*]: Yes, he didn't keep you on the run as he did the rest of us. *I'll admit now he gave me a bit of a scare at the time. But I'd a special reason for not wanting any public scandal just now. [Has his drink now, and raises his glass.] Well, here's to us. Come on, Sheila, don't look like that. All over now.*

SHEILA: The worst part is. But you're forgetting one thing I still can't forget. Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us. But it might have done. *- War.*

BIRLING [*jovially*]: But the whole thing's different now. Come, come, you can see that, can't you? [*Imitating INSPECTOR in his final speech*] *You all helped to kill her. [Pointing at SHEILA and ERIC, and laughing]* And I wish you could have seen the look on your faces when he said that. [*SHEILA moves towards door.*] Going to bed, young woman?

SHEILA [*tensely*]: I want to get out of this. *It frightens me the way you talk.*

BIRLING [*heartily*]: Nonsense! You'll have a good laugh over it yet. Look, you'd better ask Gerald for that ring you gave back to him, hadn't you? Then you'll feel better.

SHEILA [*passionately*]: You're *pretending* everything's just as it was before.

ERIC: I'm not!

omg... She is telling off her parents

war

SHEILA: No, but these others are.

BIRLING: Well, isn't it? We've been had, that's all.

SHEILA: So nothing really happened. So there's nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn. We can all go on behaving just as we did.

MRS BIRLING: Well, why shouldn't we?

SHEILA: I tell you - whoever that Inspector was, it was anything but a joke. You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way.

BIRLING [*amused*]: And you're not, eh?

Speech

SHEILA: No, because I remember what he said, how he looked, and what he made me feel. Fire and blood and anguish. And it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it.

ERIC: And I agree with Sheila. It frightens me too.

BIRLING: Well, go to bed then, and don't stand there being hysterical.

back to normal?

MRS BIRLING: They're over-tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are.

GERALD: Everything's all right now, Sheila. [*Holds up the ring.*] What about this ring?

SHEILA: No, not yet. It's too soon. I must think.

BIRLING [*pointing to ERIC and SHEILA*]: Now look at the pair of them - the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke -

[*The telephone rings sharply. There is a moment's complete silence. BIRLING goes to answer it.*]

Tension

Yes? ... Mr Birling speaking ... What? - Here -

[*But obviously the other person has rung off. He puts the telephone down slowly and looks in a panic-stricken fashion at the others.*]

BIRLING: That was the police. A girl has just died - on her way to the Infirmary - after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here - to ask some - questions -

[*As they stare guiltily and dumbfounded, the curtain falls.*]

END OF PLAY

The Linden Tree

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS