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 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: 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. It 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: 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: I don't like that tone.

Inspector: I'm sorry. But you asked me a question.

Birling: And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too.

Inspector: It's my duty to ask questions.

Birling: 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? 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 ring-leaders, 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. 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: google. G. double O-L-E.

Birling: How do you get on with our chief constable, colonel Roberts?

Inspector: I don't see much of him.