

Inspector: (severely) do you want me to tell you – in plain words?

// enter birling, looking rather agitated //

Birling: that must have been Eric.

Mrs Birling: (alarmed) Have you been up to his room?

Birling: yes. And I called out on both landings. It must have been Eric we heard go out then.

Mrs Birling: silly boy! Where can he have gone to?

Birling: I can't imagine. But he was in one of his excitable queer moods, and even though we don't need him here--

Inspector: (cutting in, sharply) We do need him here. And if he's not back soon, I shall have to go and find him.

// Birling and Mrs Birling exchange bewildered and rather frightened glances //

Sheila: He's probably just gone to cool off. He'll be back soon.

Inspector: (severely) I hope so.

Mrs Birling: And why should you hope so?

Inspector: I'll explain why when you've answered my questions, Mrs Birling.

Birling: Is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, Inspector?

Inspector: yes, a very good reason. You'll remember that Mr Croft told us – quite truthfully, I believe – that he hadn't spoken to or seen Eva Smith since last September. But Mrs Birling spoke to and saw her only two weeks ago.

Sheila: (astonished) mother!

Birling: Is this true?

Mrs Birling: (after a pause) yes, quite true.

Inspector: she appealed to your organization for help?

Mrs Birling: yes.

Inspector: not as Eva Smith?

Mrs Birling: No, nor as Daisy Renton.

Inspector: as what then?

Mrs Birling: first, she called herself Mrs Birling--

Birling: (astounded) Mrs Birling!



Mrs Birling: Yes, I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence – quite deliberate – and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.

Birling: And I should think so! Damned impudence!

Inspector: you admit being prejudiced against her case?

Mrs Birling: Yes.

Sheila: mother, she's just died a horrible death – don't forget.

Mrs Birling: i'm very sorry. But I think she had only herself to blame.

Inspector: was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused the girl?

Mrs Birling: possibly.

Inspector: was it or was it not your influence?

Mrs Birling: (*stung*) Yes, it was. I didn't like her manner. She'd impertinently made use of our name, though she pretended afterwards it just happened to be the first she thought of. She had to admit, after I began questioning her, that she had no claim to the name, that she wasn't married, and that the story she told at first – about a husband who'd deserted her – was quite false. It didn't take me long to get the truth – or some of the truth – out of her.

Inspector: why did she want help?

Mrs Birling: you know very well why she wanted help.

Inspector: No, I don't. I know why she needed help. But as I wasn't there, I don't know what she asked from your committee.

Mrs Birling: I don't think we need discuss it.

Inspector: you have no hope of not discussing it, Mrs Birling.

Mrs Birling: if you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. The girl asked for assistance. We were asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us. I wasn't satisfied with the girl's claim – she seemed to me not a good case – and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty. So if I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind.

Inspector: Yes I have.

Mrs Birling: No you haven't. Simply because I've done nothing wrong – and you know it.

Inspector: (*very deliberately*) I think you did something terribly wrong – and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. I wish you'd been with me tonight in the infirmary. You'd have seen-

Sheila: (*bursting in*) No, no, please! Not that again. I've imagined it enough already.

Inspector: (*very deliberately*) then the next time you imagine it, just remember that this girl was going to