

An inspector calls

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Thank you.



CHARACTERS

Arthur Birling

Sible Birling – His Wife

Sheila Birling – His Daughter

Eric Birling – His Son

Edna – The Maid

Gerald Croft.

Inspector Goole.

All 3 acts which are continuous, take place in the dining room of the Birling's house in Brumley, an industrial city in the north Midlands.



It is an evening in spring, 1912.

ACT ONE

The dining room is of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer.

It has a good solid furniture of the period.

The general effect is a substantial and heavily comfortable but not cosy and homelike. (if a realistic set is used, then it should be swung back, as it was in the production at the new theatre. By doing this, you can have the dining-table centre downstage during act one, when it is needed there, and then swinging back, can reveal the fireplace for act two, and then for act three can show a small table with a telephone on it, downstage of the fireplace; and by this time the dining-table and its chairs have moved well upstage. Producers who wish to avoid this tricky business, which involves two re-settings of the scene and some very accurate adjustments of the extra flats necessary would be well advised to dispense with an ordinary realistic set if only

SETTING- BRUMLEY, NORTH MIDLANDS, 1912, 2 YEARS PRIOR TO WW 1/BACKDROP OF INDUSTRIALISATION/ MR.BIRLING IS A PROSPEROUS BUSINESSMAN-// HE REPRESENTS CAPITALISM/ BOURGEOIS SOCIETY// THE LIFE IS SHOWN TO REVOLVE AROUND THE ISSUES RELATED TO MONEY, SOCIAL ASPIRATIONS, PRIDE, ARROGANCE, COMPLACENCY, SOCIAL SUPERIORITY, EGO, RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL HIERARCHY ETC.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARACTERS GIVES SOME CLUE TO THEIR PERSONALITY.

because the dining-table becomes a nuisance. The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives and then it should be brighter and harder.)

THE MAIN CHARACTERS//LIFESTYLE//BOURGEOIS SOCIETY//CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

At rise of curtain, the four Birling's and Gerald are seated at the table, with Arthur Birling at one end, his wife at the other, Eric downstage and Sheila and Gerald seated upstage. EDNA, the parlourmaid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of the dessert plates and champagne glasses, etc, and then replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. Port glasses are already on the table. All five are in evening dress of the period, the men in tails and white ties, not dinner-jackets. Arthur Birling is a heavy-looking, rather portentous man in this middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in this speech. His wife is about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior. Sheila is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. Gerald Croft is a attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the well-bred young man-about-town. Eric is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

COMPLACENCY

Arthur Birling: Giving us the port, Edna? That's right. (he pushes it towards Eric..) you ought to like this port, Gerald, as a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.

THE CROFTS- HIGHER IN STATUS- POWER/ POSITION/STATUS/ GOVERNOR

Gerald: Then it'll be all right. The governor prides himself on being a good judge of port. I don't pretend to know much about it.

Sheila: (gaily, possessively) I should jolly well think not, Gerald, I'd hate you to know all about port – like one of these purple-faced old men.

Arthur Birling: here, I'm not a purple-faced old man.

Sheila Birling: no, not yet. But then you don't know all about port – do you?

PORT- STATUS SYMBOL

Birling: (noticing that his wife has not taken any) Now then, Sybil, you must take a little tonight. Special occasion, y'know, eh?

Sheila: Yes, go on, mummy. You must drink our health.

Mrs Birling : (smiling) Very well, then. Just a little, thank you. (to Edna, who is about to go, with tray.) all right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing room when we want coffee. Probably in about half an hour.

Edna: (going) Yes, ma'am.

// Edna goes out. They now have all the glasses filled. Birling beams at them and clearly relaxes.//

MR. BIRLING//WEALTHY// NEWLY RICH//POLITE/LIKES TO COMPLIMENT HIS STAFF/HE REPRESENTS HIMSELF TO BE GRACIOUS// KIND- HEARTED- (THE SAME MAN SHALL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF EVA SMITH// HE IS SOMEWHAT NAIVE// (INNOCENT???) IN COMPARISON- SYBIL- IS MORE DIPLOMATIC//MANIPULATIVE// SNOBBERY- PRIDE

Birling: Well, well – this is very nice. Very nice. Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me.

Gerald: (*politely*) Absolutely first class.

Mrs Birling: (*reproachfully*) Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things-

Birling: Oh – come come – I'm treating Gerald like one of the family. And I'm sure he won't object.

Sheila: (*with mocking aggressiveness*) Go on, Gerald – just you object!

Gerald: (*smiling*) Wouldn't dream of it. In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now. I've been trying long enough, haven't I? (*as she does not reply, with more insistence.*) Haven't I? You know I have.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GERALD AND SHEILA APPEARS QUESTIONABLE// AS SHE DOES NOT REPLY// MOTHER/DOMINATES/ REPLIES.

Mrs Birling: (*smiling*) Of course she does.

PARENTHESIS

Sheila: (*half serious, half playful*) Yes – except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.

Gerald: And I've told you – I was awfully busy at the works all that time.

Sheila: (*same tone as before*) Yes, that's what you say.

Mrs Birling: Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realize that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.

Sheila: I don't believe I will. (*half playful, half serious, to Gerald.*) So you be careful.

Gerald: Oh – I will, I will.

//Eric suddenly guffaws. His parents look at him.//

Sheila: (*severely*) Now – what's the joke?

Eric: I don't know – really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.

Sheila: You're squiffy.

Eric: I'm not.

Mrs Birling: What an expression, Sheila! Really the things you girls pick up these days!

Eric: If you think that's the best she can do-

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS// RAISING THE TOAST// CELEBRATING//APPEARANCE
VERSUS REALITY - (THE INSPECTOR- AN ILLUSION- BUSTER)- HE SHALL BE INSTRUMENTAL IN
THE BUSTING OF THE ILLUSIONS

Sheila: Don't be an ass, Eric.

Mrs Birling: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours?

Birling: Yes, of course. (*clears his throat.*) well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party. It's a pity sir George and – we – lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable – couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this-

Mrs Birling: Much nicer really.

Gerald: I agree.

Birling: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult-

Eric: (*not too rudely*) Well . Don't do any. We'll drink their health and have done with it.

Birling: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now – though Crofts limited are both older and bigger than Birling and company – and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices.

Gerald: Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.

Mrs Birling: Now, Arthur, I don't think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this.

MR. B IS VERY SATISFIED THAT THE BIRLINGS AND THE CROFTS SHALL "no longer be competing but working together."

Sheila: Neither do I. All wrong.

Birling: Quite so, I agree with you. I only mentioned it in *passim*. What I did want to say was – that Sheila's a lucky girl – and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald.

Gerald: I know I am – this once anyhow.

Birling: (*raising his glass*) So here's wishing the pair of you – the very best that life can bring. Gerald and Sheila.

Mrs Birling: (*raising her glass, smiling*) Yes, Gerald. Yes, Sheila darling. Our congratulations and very best wishes!

Gerald: Thank you.

Mrs Birling: Eric!

Eric: (rather noisily) All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes – but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila!

Sheila: Chump! I can't drink to this, can I? When do I drink?

Gerald: You can drink to me.

Sheila: (quite and serious now) All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.

//for a moment they look at each other//

Gerald: (quietly) Thank you. And I drink to you – and hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be.

Sheila: (trying to be light and easy) You be careful – or I'll start weeping.

Gerald: (smiling) Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. (he produces a ring case.)

Sheila: (excited) Oh – Gerald – you've got it – is it the one you wanted me to have?

Gerald: (giving the case to her) Yes – the very one.

Sheila: (taking out the ring) Oh – it's wonderful! Look – mummy – isn't it a beauty? Oh – darling – (she kisses Gerald hastily.)

SHEILA ALWAYS LOOKS UP TO HER MOTHER'S APPROVAL/ WE WONDER WHETHER SHE COULD TAKE UP A DECISION FOR HERSELF

Eric: steady the buffs!



Sheila: (who has put the ring on, admiringly) I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

MRS. B VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THE ENGAGEMENT.

Mrs Birling: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.

Sheila: careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.

Mrs Birling: (smiling) Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald. Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing room and leave you men-

GENDER ROLES

Birling: (rather heavily) I just want to say this. (noticing that Sheila is still admiring her ring.) are you listening, Sheila? This concerns you too. And after all I don't often make speeches at you -