

An Inspector Calls

Key Extracts Booklet



Re-read the key extracts from all three acts and complete the questions and activities below to analyse them. You should also highlight key quotations to learn from these sections of the play.

Act 1

Mr Birling shares his advice and experience, showing his arrogance.

Eric: What about war?

Birling: Glad you mentioned it, Eric. I'm coming to that. Just because the kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few german officers have too much to drink and begin taking nonsense, you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say – fiddlesticks! The germans don't want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilized folks in the Balkans. And why? There's too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.

Eric: Yes, I know – but still -

Birling: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I'm taking as a hard headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war. The world's developing so fast that it'll make war impossible. Look at the progress we're making. In a year or two we'll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the auto-mobile's making headway – bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week – the titanic – she sails next week – forty-six thousand eight hundred tons – new york in five days – and every luxury – and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. That's what you've got to keep your eye on, facts like that, progress like that – and not a few german officers taking nonsense and a few scaremongers here making a fuss about nothing. Now you three young people, just listen to this – and remember what I'm telling you now. In twenty or thirty year's time – let's say, in 1940 – you may be giving a little party like this – your son or daughter might be getting engaged – and I tell you, by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these capital versus labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere – except of course in russia, which will always be behindhand naturally.

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| What does Birling reveal about himself by talking about war and the Titanic? |
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| What is your first impression of Mr Birling here? |
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Act 1

Gerald and Eric joke about the inspector coming due to something Eric has done, which makes Eric nervous.

Gerald: (*lightly*) Sure to be. Unless Eric's been up to something. (*nodding confidentially to Birling.*) and that would be awkward, wouldn't it?

Birling: (*humorously*) Very.

Eric: (*who is uneasy, sharply*) Here, what do you mean?

Gerald: (*lightly*) Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.

Eric: (*still uneasy*) Well, I don't think it's very funny.

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| Why are both Gerald and Birling able to joke about this? |
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| What does Eric's response make an audience feel? |
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Act 1

The inspector is described in the stage directions.

// 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.//

In your own words, summarise the impression we get of the inspector before he has spoken.

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Act 1

Birling, again, claims he is not responsible for others but seems to become uncomfortable explaining this to the inspector.

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.

What does the inspector mean by 'a chain of events'?

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How do we see that Eric agrees with his father's views here?

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Why doesn't Birling want Eric to 'go into all that'?

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Act 1

Birling and Eric disagree over whether Eva Smith had to be sacked.

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?

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| How is Eric disagreeing with his father here? |
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| What does the inspector mean by 'it's better to ask for the earth than to take it'? |
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Act 1

The inspector explains what happened to Eva after she was sacked by Birling. Sheila shows sympathy for her.

Inspector: Yes. She was out of work for the next two months. Both her parents were dead, so that she'd no home to go back to. And she hadn't been able to save much out of what Birling and company had paid her. So that after two months, with no work, no money coming in, and living in lodgings, with no relatives to help her, few friends, lonely, half-starved, she was feeling desperate.

Sheila: (*warmly*) I should think so. It's a rotten shame.

Inspector: There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence in every city and big town in this country, miss Birling. If there weren't, the factories and warehouses wouldn't know where to look for cheap labour. Ask your father.

Sheila: But these girls aren't cheap labour – they're people.

Inspector: (*dryly*) I've had that notion myself from time to time. In fact, I've thought that it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies, in their dingy little back bedrooms.

Sheila: Yes, I expect it would. But what happened to her then?

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| How is sympathy created for Eva Smith here? |
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| What does the inspector suggest about factory owners such as Birling by saying that women like Eva are seen as 'cheap labour'? |
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Act 1

Sheila explains how she used her status to demand Eva be sacked from Milwards because she was jealous of her.

Sheila: (*miserably*) So I'm really responsible?

Inspector: No, not entirely. A good deal happened to her after that. But you're partly to blame. Just as your father is.

Eric: But what did Sheila do?

Sheila: (*distressed*) I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again and I'd persuade mother to close our account with them.

Inspector: And why did you do that?

Sheila: Because I was in a furious temper.

Inspector: And what had this girl done to make you lose your temper.

Sheila: When I was looking at myself in the mirror I caught sight of her smiling at the assistant, and I was furious with her. I'd been in a bad temper anyhow.

Inspector: And was it the girls fault?

Sheila: No, not really. It was my own fault. (*suddenly, to Gerald*) All right, Gerald, you needn't look at me like that. At least, I'm trying to tell the truth. I expect you've done things you're ashamed of too.

What do the stage directions tell us about how Sheila is feeling here?

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What does Sheila's last comment to Gerald lead the audience to expect?

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Act 2

Sheila insists on staying to hear about Gerald's affair with Daisy Renton, which we now know was the name Eva Smith assumed.

Sheila: no, but you haven't finished asking questions – have you?

Inspector: No.

Sheila: (to gerald) You see? (to inspector.) then I'm staying.

Gerald: Why should you? It's bound to be unpleasant and disturbing.

Inspector: and you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?

Gerald: if possible – yes.

Inspector: well, we know one young woman who wasn't, don't we?

Gerald: I suppose I asked for that.

Sheila : be careful you don't ask for more, gerald.

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| What does the inspector suggest here about how Gerald views women? |
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| Why does Sheila want to stay, even though she suspects what she is to hear? |
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Act 2

Mrs Birling shows her arrogance towards the lower classes and Sheila realises she is setting a trap for herself, as she did.

Mrs Birling: you're looking tired, dear. I think you ought to go to bed – and forget about this absurd business. You'll feel better in the morning.

Sheila: mother, I couldn't possibly go. Nothing could be worse for me. We've settled all that. I'm staying here until I know why that girl killed herself.

Mrs Birling: nothing but morbid curiosity.

Sheila: no it isn't.

Mrs Birling: please don't contradict me like that. And in any case I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class--

Sheila: (*urgently, cutting in*) mother, don't – please don't. For your own sake, as well as ours, you mustn't--

Mrs Birling: (*annoyed*) mustn't – what? Really, sheila!

Sheila: (*slowly, carefully now*) you mustn't try to build up a kind of wall between us and that girl. If you do, then the inspector will just break it down. And it'll be all the worse when he does.

What does Mrs Birling seem to feel about 'girls of that class'?

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Why is Sheila trying to stop her mother from talking?

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Act 2

Gerald tells of how he set up Daisy in rooms owned by a friend after 'rescuing' her from the drunken advances of a womaniser at a bar known for 'women of the town' (prostitutes).

Inspector: but she became your mistress?

Gerald: yes. I suppose it was inevitable. She was young and pretty and warm hearted – and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life – you understand?

Inspector: yes. She was a woman. She was lonely. Were you in love with her?

Sheila: just what I was going to ask!

Birling: (*angrily*) I really must protest--

Inspector: (*turning on him sharply*) why should you do any protesting? It was you who turned the girl out in the first place.

Birling: (*rather taken aback*) well, I only did what any employer might have done. And what I was going to say is that I protest against the way in which my daughter, a young unmarried girl, is being dragged into this--

Inspector: (*sharply*) your daughter isn't living on the moon. She's here in brumley too.

Sheila: yes, and it was I who had the girl turned out of her job at Milwards. And I'm supposed to be engaged to gerald. And I'm not a child, don't forget. I've a right to know. Were you in love with her, Gerald?

Gerald: (*hesitatingly*) it's hard to say. I didn't feel about her as she felt about me.

Sheila: (*with sharp sarcasm*) of course not. You were the wonderful fairy prince. You must have adored it, Gerald.

Gerald: all right – I did for a time. Nearly any man would have done.

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| Why does Birling not want Sheila in the room? |
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| What does Sheila suggest Gerald got out of the relationship when he didn't love Daisy? |
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Act 2

The inspector explains what Daisy did after Gerald ended their affair.

Inspector: she had to move out of those rooms?

Gerald: Yes, we'd agreed about that. She'd saved a little money during the summer – she'd lived very economically on what I'd allowed her – and didn't want to take more from me, but I insisted on a parting gift of enough money – though it wasn't so very much – to see her through to the end of the year.

Inspector: did she tell you what she proposed to do after you'd left her?

Gerald: No. she refused to talk about that. I got the idea, once or twice from what she said, that she thought of leaving brumley. Whether she did or not – I don't know. Did she?

Inspector: Yes. She went away for about two months. To some seaside place.

Gerald: By herself?

Inspector: Yes. I think she went away – to be alone, to be quiet, to remember all that had happened between you.

Gerald: how do you know that?

Inspector: she kept a rough sort of diary. And she said there that she had to go away and be quiet and remember ' just to make it last longer'. She felt there'd never be anything as good again for her – so she had to make it last longer.

Why do you think Daisy didn't want to take more money from Gerald?

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Why did Daisy feel like she would never have anything as good as this life again?

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Act 2

The inspector accuses Mrs Birling of lying about not recognising Eva's photograph and Sheila shows she realises they were all responsible.

Inspector: you're not telling me the truth.

Mrs Birling: I beg your pardon!

Birling: (*angrily, to Inspector*) Look here, I'm not going to have this, Inspector. You'll apologize at once.

Inspector: Apologize for what – doing my duty?

Birling: No, for being so offensive about it. I'm a public man-

Inspector: (*massively*) Public men, Mr Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.

Birling: Possibly. But you weren't asked to come here to talk to me about my responsibilities.

Sheila: Let's hope not. Though I'm beginning to wonder.

Mrs Birling: Does that mean anything, sheila?

Sheila: it means that we've no excuse now for putting on airs and that if we've any sense we won't try. Father threw this girl out because she asked for decent wages. I went and pushed her farther out, right into the street, just because I was angry and she was pretty. Gerald set her up as his mistress and then dropped her when it suited him. And now you're pretending you don't recognize her from that photograph. I admit I don't know why you should, but I know jolly well you did in fact recognize her, from the way you looked. And if you're not telling the truth, why should the Inspector apologize? And can't you see, both of you, you're making it worse?

What does the inspector mean by 'public men...have responsibilities as well as privileges'?

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How is Sheila starting to change now?

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Act 2

Mrs Birling explains why she used her influence to prevent the organisation from helping Eva Smith.

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.

Why does Mrs Birling evade the questions by answering 'possibly' and then refusing to say why Eva asked for help?

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How does Mrs Birling come across in the final lines of this extract?

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Act 3

Eric explains how he met Eva at the Palace music hall and went home with her.

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 to help her 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: Yes. 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!

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| Why does Eric suggest Eva had gone to the Palace? |
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| What impression do we get of Eric here? Does it change how you feel about him? |
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Act 3

Eric explains that he stole money after Eva told him she was pregnant.

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?

Eric: I suppose – about fifty pounds all told.

Birling: Fifty pounds – on top of drinking and going around 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.

Why do you think Eva didn't want to try and get another job?

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Why doesn't Eric consider taking the money to be stealing?

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Act 3

Birling tries to act to cover up Eric's theft and the inspector discovers why Eva ended things with Eric.

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 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.

Why does Birling want to 'cover this up' and what does that show about what matters to him the most here?

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What does Eva's refusing the stolen money tell us about her as a person?

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Act 3

The inspector gives his final assessment of the case and leaves.

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-

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 you 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-

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, and 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 bloody 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.*//

Act 3

Sheila tries to argue that recognising their responsibility is the important thing, whilst the Birlings begin to think the inspector was not genuine.

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 hearth 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.

Why doesn't Sheila care that the inspector may have been a fake?

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Act 3

They learn for certain that Goole is not a real inspector.

Birling: 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.

Why is Sheila speaking 'bitterly' here? What does she mean?

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Act 3

Eric and Sheila continue to argue that their responsibility has not changed while Birling argues that all of this being private means it does not matter.

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.

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 a private and a downright public scandal.

What are Eric and Sheila so angry about here?

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Why does Birling think that a 'public scandal' would have been bad but what has happened in private it not a problem?

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Act 3

The final scene: The Birlings and Gerald treat what has happened as a joke while Eric and Sheila are upset. The final phone call brings the play full circle.

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?

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.

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.//

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.//

Who has changed in the play and why?

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Who has not changed and why not?

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