

Option 2 - Task C (An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley)

New development of suicide case

Eva Smith, a young suicide, had left a suicide letter and a set of diary-like notes in her room that revealed her previous fake names. As *the Daily Post* covered last week, the police suspected that the woman had got into various sorts of trouble. As the investigation continues, the complexity of the case is beyond imagination.

As a former employee of Birling Brothers & Co., Miss Smith was discharged from her post at the end of September, 1910. 'There's nothing mysterious - or scandalous - about this business - at least not so far as I'm concerned,' stated Mr Birling, the boss of the company. 'Miss Smith was discharged due to her unsuitability for her post... [the case is] as simple as that.' Nonetheless, the inspector in charge of the case believed that was the beginning of a chain of events that led to her ultimate death.

Mr Birling's daughter, Sheila, is engaged with Mr Gerald Croft. His father, Sir George Croft, was the biggest shareholder of Croft's Limited. Although Birling Brothers & Co. has long been one of its major competitors, rumour has it the merger of the two firms will be announced soon after the couple wed. By then the firm shall seize the control of more than half of the nation's shipbuilding business.

In spite of that, the relationship between Miss Birling and Mr Croft might well be a marriage of convenience. Using the pen name Hilary Fletcher, it turns out Smith had been privately communicating with Miss Birling for half a decade, before her sudden dismissal from Birling Brothers & Co. two years ago. Inspector Lamont, who is responsible for the investigation, told *the Daily Post* that there might be a hidden connection between the incidents.

Miss Smith has jotted down details about the 'destined' first meeting between she and Miss Birling, and the growth of their friendship into lovership. She had been involved in a number of affairs with women, only to be fired multiple times regarding her sexual orientation. In avoidance of being identified as one of the unwelcome applicants on the list, she kept changing her names in advance of job interviews. The Inspector added, 'The chosen names were common names used by both sexes, such as Leslie or Alex... We believe it was to cover up any clue of her gender in the letters between her and her lovers.'

Her papers imply Mr Birling dismissed the woman when he discovered her secret relationship with his daughter. Even so she had not given up keeping in touch with Miss Birling, although all attempts were proved to be unsuccessful. In the letter Miss Smith left in her room, she said she was 'heartbroken' at the news of Miss Birling's engagement came out of the blue.

‘[Mr Birling] is a failed father... He has not only ignored Sheila’s feelings, but was trying to cage her under the name of marriage,’ Miss Smith wrote in her diary, after three days’ moaning in pain. Devastated, she then gulped a large amount of strong disinfectant. It burnt her inside out.

Miss Sutherland, one of her former colleagues in Birling Brothers & Co., mourned for Miss Smith’s death. ‘She was a cheerful girl, and always a pleasure to work with, she was... I still cannot believe such a delightful person had been burdened like this.’ Another of her co-workers, Miss Samuel, was still anxious. ‘So I was working with someone whose abominable misconduct is unspeakable,’ she noted, ‘It’s a betrayal to God.’

‘We still don’t know if Miss Smith’s accounts of her experiences in her diary and letter were reliable. Yet what has aroused my curiosity was Mr Birling’s ability to recognise Miss Smith - one of the “several hundred young women” in his company, as he described - who was discharged two years ago. Even the man himself denied the possibility of identifying such a woman at first... so I believe there is something behind this suicide,’ deduced Inspector Lamont.

In her ‘diary’ Miss Smith expressed her affection towards Miss Birling, as well as her appreciation of Miss Birling’s replies. If the notes are describing the truth, the Birlings would face a blotted copybook. The expansion plan of their firms would have been shaky at the very same time. Indeed, the couple’s engagement was a sudden one, only ten months after they first met. This added to the suspicions of the general public, that Miss Smith was fired because of her obscene relationship with Miss Birling. Everything needs Miss Birling’s confirmation, but she has yet answered to the press’ contact, or even left her doorstep.

Instead, her fiancé, Mr Gerald Croft, denied any association of Miss Birling with Hilary Fletcher or Eva Smith. ‘I have no clue why Miss Smith had to fabricate such a story to defame my fiancée; what I know is that this is a disgrace.’ He hoped the public would not speculate or make allegations without any premise or convincing evidence.

Inquired about Miss Birling’s opinion, he evasively shifted to the press’ behaviour. ‘[Reporters’ waiting at the Birlings’] has seriously troubled both of us, and our families,’ said Mr Croft. He disregarded questions from the press, and pleaded reporters to end their pestering.

The spokesman of Scotland Yard also called for respect towards the couple’s privacy, but refused to provide further information until enquiries are completed.

The Croft’s Limited and Birling Brothers & Co. issued a joint statement yesterday evening, criticising Miss Smith, ‘The Companies are shocked by Miss Smith’s sullyng the good name of an innocent young lady... It is manifest her action was to revenge against the Companies for her reasonable disemployment... Although she has, unfortunately, given up her life... [we are] not compromising upon this sort of irresponsible and hatred act.’

The market was still apprehensive about the effects of the case's future developments upon the shipbuilders. The stock prices of the corporations have plunged by 20% since yesterday afternoon. The rest of the British shipbuilders were encumbered because of that. Most companies' stock depreciated for 2 - 5% as the trading hours came to an end.

'The society has long been evading the discussion on same-sex romance,' left-wing columnist Gilbert Port commented on *the Evening Express* yesterday. 'This suicide case is only the tip of an iceberg. It is a tragic story of an able woman only to have been discriminated by the majority. She was excluded by the mainstream until - or even after - her death, solely for her love... How many incidents of similar results are there, and how many we are expecting?' Port is critical of the conservative anti-homosexuality viewpoint. He is presently lobbying Members of Parliament with other left-wing authors to accept and respect the love between same sex.

Eva Smith passed away last Monday, after swallowing a large amount of strong disinfectant. She received all possible treatments in the infirmary, but she was pronounced dead half an hour later.